

7th – Eighteenth Century Political Formations



The crisis of the empire and the later Mughals:

The Mughal Empire reached the height of its success and started facing a variety of crises towards the closing years of the seventeenth century. These were caused by a number of factors. Emperor Aurangzeb had depleted the military and financial resources of his empire by fighting a long war in the Deccan.

Under his successors, the efficiency of the imperial administration broke down. It became increasingly difficult for the later Mughal emperor to keep a check on their powerful mansabdars. Nobles appointed as governors (subedars) often controlled the offices of revenue and military administration (diwani and faujdari) as well. This gave them extraordinary political, economic and military powers over vast regions of the Mughal Empire. As the governors consolidated their control over the periodic remission of revenue to the capital declined.

Already under severe pressure from all sides, the empire was further weakened by competition amongst different groups of nobles. They were divided into two major or factions, the Iranis and Turanis (nobles of Turkish descent). For a long time, the later Mughal emperors were puppets in the hands of either one or the other of these two powerful groups.

Emergence of new states:

With the decline in the authority of the Mughal emperors, the governors of large provinces, subadars, and the great zamindars consolidated their authority in different parts of the subcontinent. The states of the eighteenth century can be divided into three overlapping groups: (1) States that were old Mughal provinces like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad. Although extremely powerful and quite independent, the rulers of these states did not break their formalities with the Mughal emperor. (2) States that had enjoyed considerable independence under the Mughal as watan jagirs. These included several Rajput principalities. (3) The last group included states under the control of Marathas, Sikhs and others like jats.

The old Mughal provinces:

Amongst the states that were carved out of the old Mughal provinces in the eighteenth century, three stand out very prominently. These were Awadh, Bangal and Hyderabad. All three states were founded by members of the high Mughal nobility who had been governors of large provinces- Sa 'adat Khan (Awadh), Murshid Quli Khan (Bengal) and Asaf Jah (Hyderabad). All three had occupied high mansabdari positions and enjoyed the trust and confidence of the emperors.

Hyderabad:

Nizam- ul-Mulk Asaf Jah, the founder of Hyderabad state (1724-1748), was one of the most powerful members at the court of the Mughal Emperor Farrukh Siyar. As the Mughal governors of the Deccan provinces, during 1720-22 Asaf Jah had already gained control over its political and financial administration. Taking subsequent advantage of the turmoil in the Deccan and the competition amongst the court nobility, he gathered power in his hands and became the actual ruler of that region.

Asaf Jah brought skilled soldiers and administrators from northern India who welcomed the new opportunities in the South. He appointed and welcomed the new opportunities in the South. He appointed mansabdars and granted jagirs. Although he was still a servant of the Mughal emperor, he ruled quite independently without seeking any direction from Delhi or facing any interference.

Mysore:

Mysore was the next important power in the Deccan after Hyderabad. Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan made Mysore a powerful state. Hyder Ali became the ruler of Mysore in 1761 after overthrowing Najaraj. He was a brilliant commander and an able administrator. He gave patronage to handicrafts and encouraged trade. Tipu Sultan was Hyder Ali's son succeeded him in 1782. He was an able ruler. He introduced a new calendar. He also



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developed a new system of coinage, and weights and measures. He was a learned man who had a personal library with books on diverse subjects. He maintained foreign trade links

Awadh:

Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa 'adat Khan was appointed subadar of Awadh in 1722 and founded a state which one of the most important to emerge out of the break-up of the Mughal Empire. Awadh was a prosperous region, controlling the rich alluvial Ganga plain and the main trade route between north India and Bengal. Burhan-ul-Mulk also held the combined offices of subadari, diwani and faujdari. In other words, he was responsible for managing the political, financial and military affairs of the province of Awadh.

Bengal:

Bengal gradually broke away from Mughal control under Murshid Quli Khan who was appointed as the naib, deputy to the governor of the province. Although never a formal subadar, Murshid Quli Khan very quickly seized all the power that went with that office. Like the rulers of Hyderabad and Awadh he also commanded the revenue administration of the state. In an effort to reduce Mughal influence in Bengal he transferred all Mughal jagirdars to Orissa and ordered a major reassessment of the revenues of Bengal. Revenue was collected in cash with great strictness from all zamindars. As a result, many zamindars had to borrow money from bankers and moneylenders. Those unable to pay were forced to sell their lands to larger zamindars.

The watan jagirs of the Rajputs:

Many Rajput kings, particularly those belonging to Amber and Jodhpur, had served under the Mughals with distinction. In exchange, they were permitted to enjoy considerable autonomy in their watan jagirs. In the eighteenth century, these rulers now attempted to extend their control over adjacent regions. Ajit Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur, was also involved in the factional politics at the Mughal court.

Seizing independence:

The Sikhs:

The organization of the Sikhs into a political community during the seventeenth century helped in regional state-building in the Punjab. Several battles were fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Rajput and Mughal rulers, both before and after the institution of the Khalsa in 1699. After his death in 1708, the Khalsa rose in revolt against the Mughal authority under Banda Bahadur's leadership, declared their sovereign rule by striking coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and established their own administration between the Sutlej and the Jamuna. Banda Bahadur was captured in 1715 and executed in 1716.

The Marathas:

The Maratha kingdom was another powerful regional kingdom to arise out of a sustained opposition to Mughal rule. Shivaji (1627-1680) carved out a stable kingdom with the support of powerful warrior families (Deshmukhs). Groups of highly mobile, peasant-pastoralists (kumbhis) provided the backbone of the Maratha army. Shivaji used these forces to challenge the Mughals in the peninsula. After Shivaji's death, effective power in the Maratha state was wielded by a family of Chitpawan Brahmanas who served Shivaji's successors as Peshwa (or principal minister). Poona became the capital of the Maratha kingdom.

Balaji Vishwanath (1713-1720CE)

Balaji was an expert in administration and revenue collection. He got back from the Mughals the territories ruled by Shivaji and the right to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi from the Mughal territories in the Deccan. Balaji was the first of a line of seven Peshwas. The Peshwas soon became the real rulers of the Maratha kingdom.

Baji Rao I (1720-1740 CE)





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The second Peshwa, Baji Rao I, was determined to take Maratha glory to greater heights. Under him the Marathas took control of Gujarat, raided Bengal, and overran Malwa army near Delhi in 1737 CE. They also defeated the Nizam of Hyderabad. Asaf Jah was forced to enter into a treaty with the Marathas. Baji Rao, however, did not occupy the throne.

Balaji Baji Rao (1740-1760 CE)

The eldest son of Baji Rao I, Balaji Baji Rao, succeeded his father. In 1750 CE he made Pune his capital. Balaji Baji Rao captured Delhi in 1753 CE and Punjab in 1758 CE. The Marathas clashed with Abdali in the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 CE. Neither the Sikhs nor the Rajput kingdoms helped the Marathas. The Marathas were routed; they never recovered fully from this defeat.

The Satnamis

The Satnamis, a Hindu sect from the same region as the Jats, rebelled against the oppressive policies of the Mughals. The Satnamis were mostly goldsmiths, tanners and sweepers, who aimed at overthrowing Aurangzeb and establishing a just rule. In 1704 CE, the Satnamis revolted for the last time under their leader, Chauraman. But they were defeated by the Mughals, with a heavy loss of lives on their side. since they shaved their heads they were also called the 'mundiyas' (bald headed).

The Jats:

Like the other states the Jats consolidated their power during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Under their leader, Churaman, they acquired control over territories situated to the west of the city of Delhi, and by the 1680s they had begun dominating the region between the two imperial cities of Delhi and Agra. For a while they became the virtual custodians of the city of Agra.

The jats were prosperous agriculturists, and towns like Panipat and Ballabgarh became important trading centers in the areas dominated by them. Under Suraj Mal the Kingdom of Bharatpur emerged as a strong state. When Nadir Shah sacked Delhi in 1739, many of the city's notables took refuge there. His son Jwahir Shah had 30,000 troops of his own and hired another 20,000 Maratha and 15,000 Sikh troops to fight the Mughal.

