

## 10

## Eighteenth Century Political Formations

### Lesson at a Glance

- With the decline of the Mughal Empire **new political groups** began to emerge in the sub-continent during the first half of the 18th century.
- The Mughal Empire lost its glory and started facing a variety of crises towards the closing years of the 17th century.
- Emperor Aurangzeb is held responsible for this. He 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. Nobles appointed as governors became more powerful. They began to control the offices of revenue and military administration. This created political and economic crisis.
- The attack of Nadir Shah the ruler of Iran, on Delhi in 1739 aggravated the crisis. He plundered the city of Delhi and took away immense amounts of wealth.
- Soon Ahmad Shah Abdali became active. He invaded north India five times between 1748 and 1761.
- The competition amongst different groups of nobles further weakened the empire. These were two major groups 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.
- Through the 18th century, the Mughal Empire gradually fragmented into a number of independent, regional states.
- The states of the 18th century can be divided into three **overlapping groups**.
- States that were old Mughal provinces such as **Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad**.
- States that had enjoyed considerable independence under the Mughal as *watan jagirs*,
- States under the control of Marathas, Sikhs and others like the Jats.
- **Hyderabad** state (1724-1748) was founded by Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah. He was one of the most powerful members at the court of

the Mughal Emperor Farukh Siyar. He was given the charge of the Deccan. Soon he became powerful there and declared himself the actual ruler of that region. Although he was still a servant of the Mughal emperor, he ruled independently.

- The state of **Awadh** was founded by Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan in the year 1722. He did not like the Mughal influence in the Awadh region and therefore reduced the number of office holders or *jagirdars* appointed by the Mughals. He also reduced the size of *jagirs* and appointed his own loyal servants to vacant positions.
- Murshid Quli Khan took the control of **Bengal** and began to command the revenue administration of the state. He transferred all Mughal jagirdars to Orissa in order to reduce the Mughal influence in Bengal. He ordered a major reassessment of the revenues of Bengal. Revenue was collected in cash with great strictness from all zamindars.
- The Rajput Kings, of Amber and Jodhpur were given permission by the Mughals, to enjoy considerable autonomy in their *watan jagirs*. Soon, these rulers began to extend their control over adjacent regions.
- Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur held the governorship of Gujarat and Sawai Raja Jai Singh of Amber was governor of Malwa. They also tried to extend their territories by seizing portions of imperial territories neighbouring their *watans*. Nagpur was conquered and annexed to the house of Jodhpur while Amber seized large portions of Bundi.
- In the 18th century, the Sikhs organised themselves into a number of bands called *jathas* and later on *mils*. Their combined forces were known as the grand army (*dal khalsa*).
- Guru Gobind Singh had inspired the *Khalsa* with the belief that their destiny was to rule. Their well-knit organisation enabled them to put up a successful resistance to the Mughal governors first and then to Ahmad Shah Abdali who had seized the rich province of the Punjab and the Sirhind from the Mughals. The *Khalsa* declared their sovereign rule by striking in 1765.
- The Sikh territories extended from the Indus to the Jamuna in the late 18th century but they were divided under different rulers such as Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- Shivaji carried out the **Maratha** Kingdom. He built a powerful Maratha army and challenged the Mughals in the peninsula.
- After the death of Shivaji, Peshwas took the control of the Maratha Kingdom. Poona became its capital.

- Between 1720 and 1761, the Maratha empire expanded and gradually chipped away at the authority of the Mughal Empire. Malwa and Gujarat were seized from the Mughals by the 1720s. By the 1730s the Maratha King was recognised as the overlord of the entire Deccan peninsula.
- After raiding Delhi in 1737, the frontiers of Maratha domination expanded rapidly into Rajasthan and Punjab in the north, into Bengal and Orissa in the east and into Karnataka and the Tamil and Telugu countries in the south.
- The *jats* consolidated their power during the late 17th and 18th 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.

### ■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

#### Let's Recall

Q. 1. Match the following:

subadar	a revenue farmer
faujdar	a high noble
ijaradar	provincial governor
misl	Maratha peasant warriors
chauth	a Mughal military commander
kunbis	A band of Sikh warriors
umara	tax levied by the Marathas
Ans. subadar	provincial governor
faujdar	a Mughal military commander
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Q. 2. Fill in the blanks:

- Aurangzeb fought a protracted war in the .....
- Umara and jagirdars constituted powerful sections of the Mughal .....
- Asaf Jah founded the Hyderabad state in .....
- The founder of the Awadh state was .....

Ans. (a) Deccan (b) administration  
(c) 1724 (d) Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan

Q. 3. State whether true or false:

- Nadir Shah invaded Bengal.
- Sawai Raja Jai Singh was the ruler of Indore.
- Guru Gobind Singh was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs.
- Poona became the capital of the Marathas in the eighteenth century.

Ans. (a) False, (b) False, (c) True, (d) True.

Q. 4. What were the offices held by Sa'adat Khan?

Ans. Sa'adat Khan held the combined offices of *subadari*, *diwani* and *faujdari*. In fact, he was responsible for managing the political, financial and military affairs of the province of Awadh.

#### Let's Discuss

Q. 5. Why did the Nawab of Awadh and Bengal try to do away with the jagirdari system?

Ans. The Nawabs of Awadh and Bengal tried to do away with the jagirdari system in order to reduce the influence of the Mughals in their states.

Q. 6. How were the Sikhs organised in the eighteenth century?

Ans. During the 17th century the Sikhs got organised into a political community. This led to the regional state-building in Punjab. Guru Gobind Singh fought many battles against the Rajputs as well as Mughal rulers, both before and after the institution of the *Khalsa* in 1699. After the death of Guru Gobind Singh in 1708, the *Khalsa* revolted against the Mughal authority under the leadership of Banda Bahadur and declared their sovereign rule. Banda Bahadur was captured in 1715 and executed in 1716. In the 18th century, the Sikhs organised themselves into a number of bands called *jathas* and later on *misl*s. Their well-knit organisation enabled them to put up successful resistance to the Mughal governors first and then to Ahmad Shah Abdali. Who had seized the rich province of the Punjab and the Sarkar of Sirhind from the Mughals.

Q. 7. Why did the Marathas want to expand beyond the Deccan?

Ans. The Marathas wanted to expand beyond the Deccan in order to decrease the Mughal influence. By the 1720s, they seized Malwa and Gujarat from the Mughals and by the 1730s, the Maratha king was recognised as the overlord of the entire Deccan peninsula.

**Q. 8.** *What were the policies adopted by Asaf Jah to Strengthen his position?*

**Ans.** After being the actual ruler of the Deccan, Asaf Jah began to adopt some policies in order to strengthen his position :

(i) He brought skilled soldiers and administrators from northern India who welcomed the new opportunities in the south.

(ii) He appointed *mansabdars* and granted *jagirs*.

(iii) He ruled independently without Mughal interference. The Mughal emperor merely confirmed the decisions already taken by Asaf Jah.

**Q. 9.** *Do you think merchants and bankers today have the kind of influence they had in the eighteenth century?*

**Ans.** During the 18th century merchants were more influential than the bankers. They used to provide more loan opportunities at higher interest rates. But now, with the spread of education people prefer banks which provide loans and other financial assistance at cheaper rates. Bankers also provide subsidy on the interest rate. They have different scopes of loans for different purposes. So they are more influential today than the merchants.

**Q. 10.** *Did any of the Kingdoms mentioned in this chapter develop in your state? If so, in what ways do you think life in the state would have been different in the eighteenth century from what it is in the twenty-first century?*

**Ans.** I live in Delhi. None of the Kingdoms mentioned in the chapter developed in this region.

If any of the students live in any of the regions where the kingdoms mentioned in the chapter developed they should consult their history teacher and prepare their answer.

### Let's Do

**Q. 11.** *Find out more about the architecture and culture associated with the new courts of any of the following Awadh, Bengal or Hyderabad.*

**Ans.** For self-attempt.

**Q. 12.** *Collect popular tales about—rulers from any one of the following groups of people: the Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs or Marathas.*

**Ans.** For self-attempt.