



**Theme 4**

**Eighteenth Century States**

THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY



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# UNIT 18 EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## POLITIES: I

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## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this Unit, you shall be able to learn:

- how the historians have interpreted the eighteenth century variously;
- political changes in eighteenth century – the breakdown of the central power i.e. the Mughal empire and the rise of regional polities as well as the causes and consequences of this phenomenon;
- political continuities in eighteenth century – the Mughal emperor as the continued source of political legitimacy, especially for the successor states, and the continuation of Mughal conventions; and
- the impact of foreign invasions in eighteenth century.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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By the first half of the eighteenth-century drastic decay in the prestige and power of the Mughal empire occurred. The later Mughal rulers owed their throne to prominent nobles. The central administration was declining, imperial treasury was depleting, rivalries among nobles who aspired to the posts of authority and patronage were becoming intense, and centrifugal forces were asserting greater independence at the expense of the empire. There was a growth of several regional polities. From the mid-eighteenth century the East India Company became politically very active. The expansion of its political power is discussed in Unit 17. Thus, the eighteenth century, infused with elements of change and continuity, has been interpreted in various different ways.

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## 18.2 DISINTEGRATION OF MUGHAL EMPIRE AND ITS CAUSES

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There are various theories on the decline of the Mughal empire: political, socio-economic, cultural etc. Nationalist historians such as Jadunath Sarkar proposed that the intolerant policies of Aurangzeb such as the destruction of temples, the imposition of *jizya*, the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur etc. caused the rebellions of the Rajputs, Marathas, Jats and Sikhs which, in turn, led to the downfall of the empire. Sri Ram Sharma and Ishwari Prasad, too, saw these rebellions as a Hindu reaction against the religious policies of Aurangzeb. Sarkar also credits Aurangzeb's Deccan policy responsible for the weakening of the empire. Colonial historians viz. Vincent Smith, William Irvine etc. blame religious fanaticism of Aurangzeb and the weak later Mughal emperors for the downfall. Sharma in *Religious Policy of the Mughals* points out the decline of the Hindu nobles at Aurangzeb's court. But Athar Ali in *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* shows that there were more Hindu nobles at Aurangzeb's court than they were at Akbar's. Due to his Deccan campaigns there was an influx of Marathas into nobility and Rajput nobles like Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Amber and Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur enjoyed the high rank of 7000 *zat* and 7000 *sawar*.

M.N. Pearson in an article titled "Shivaji and the Decline of the Mughal Empire" shows that Shivaji's frequent attacks on Mughal territories had weakened the empire. Surat was one of the major and wealthy Mughal port cities. His sudden attack on Shaista Khan, the governor of the Deccan who narrowly escaped, also demoralized the Mughal army. However, it has been argued that Surat continued to flourish and there has been not enough evidence to indicate that the spirit of the army was crushed.

Marxist-oriented economic historians such as Irfan Habib, Athar Ali, Satish Chandra and others explained the decline in materialistic terms: *jagirdari* crisis and *mansabdari* crisis (caused fiscal crisis), high revenue demand on the peasantry that led to peasant rebellions, agrarian crisis etc. and described the eighteenth century as 'Dark Age'. Satish Chandra observes that factional dissensions among nobility crippled the proper functioning of the administrative system. During the Grand Mughals these different factions (Iranis, Turanis, Hindustani Muslims, Rajputs etc.) were instrumental in upholding and sustaining the power while in the later Mughal period the nobles aimed to turn the emperor into a puppet-ruler and exercise power on his behalf. However, Marxist interpretation of this century has been refuted by revisionist historians such as Christopher Bayly from the Cambridge School and Tapan Raychaudhuri who opine that this was a

century of growth. The works of Muzzafar Alam, Sanjay Subramanyam and others, too, highlight this perspective. Revisionist historians view the eighteenth century with no uniform development and focus on socio-economic functioning of the regional polities.

The century witnessed elements of continuity and discontinuity. The older institutions prevailed with some remodeling at regional levels. The successor states of the Mughal empire continued with Mughal administrative system and continued to see the emperor as the source of political legitimacy. Even the sultans of Mysore – Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan – owed nominal allegiance to Shah Alam-II. Tipu Sultan sought the investiture of the emperor. In the early phase of the century traditional centres of trade, for instance Surat, Calicut and Masulipatnam etc., continued to flourish. However, by the end of the century British East India Company, in terms of the volume of trade amongst the Europeans, successfully marginalized all its competitors. It was also clear that the Company was not just a trading enterprise but had evolved into one of the dominant political entities in India but when the British colonial power was established in India and Queen Victoria assumed the title of the Empress of India in 1877 the Delhi *Darbar* ceremony was chosen as the most befitting for the proclamation. The subjugated rulers and chieftains attended the *darbar* and were as eager to protect their political status as their predecessors had been under the Mughal rule. Mughal institutions such as land revenue system were also adopted.

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## 18.3 LATER MUGHAL RULERS

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During the reign of Aurangzeb ominous fissures had developed in the empire which became more obvious during the reigns of his successors. After the death of Aurangzeb, the Mughal empire could no longer command any authoritative power. We will now read about some major political changes the Mughal court was experiencing during the eighteenth century.

### 18.3.1 *Salatin*: Alienation and Alliances

*Salatin* were the men of royal blood, either the descendants of former emperors or the male relatives such as the sons or brothers of the reigning emperor. They were seen as a potent political threat. From the reign of Aurangzeb royal princes (sons and grandsons) were kept incarcerated or confined in the harem to avert any political conspiracies against the monarch. They spent their precious years of princehood away from actively participating in any military expeditions or performing administrative tasks, providing no scope for harnessing the skills necessary for ruling. By the late eighteenth century, the condition of *salatin* confined in a *salatin* quarter was highly pitiable. Major George Cunningham (1783-1838), 7<sup>th</sup> Bengal Native Infantry, in an official paper described their deplorable condition. The *salatin* perished in confinement while the nobles struggled for power, forming alliances against or in favour of the reigning emperor. Powerful nobles like the Sayyid brothers would depose the reigning ruler if he asserted authority and replace him with one of the inexperienced and alienated *salatins* and rule on behalf of a puppet-ruler. This practice clearly enabled powerful and ambitious nobles to intimidate the emperor. The nobles started to view the control over the emperor as a means to derive political power. Hence, factional politics at the royal court became exceedingly pronounced.

### 18.3.2 Court Rivalries

By the later Mughal period court rivalries became commonplace. On the one hand there were feuds between the reigning emperor and his nobles and, on the other the nobles would compete with one another to grab positions of authority, especially the offices of *Wizarat* and *Mir Bakshi*. Sydney J. Owen remarks in his work *The Fall of the Mogul Empire* that the nobles became more powerful “at the expense of the Imperial prerogative” while the emperor, in order to re-assert his imperial power, resorted to the act of ‘political treachery’. Such frequent political contestations plunged the empire into a state of utter confusion. Evidently, it promoted decadence in its administration, slackness in the army and financial crisis.

Bahadur Shah generously granted high ranks and titles to his courtiers which earlier were a means of generating the spirit of competition among nobles to deliver their duties efficiently and, thus, they were reserved for a few. Jahandar Shah promoted inexperienced and low-ranking people to high ranks, displeasing the veterans. Farrukh Siyar deposed Jahandar Shah in 1713 with the assistance of the Sayyid brothers – Abdullah Khan and Syed Husain Ali Khan (who later became the king-makers and the leaders of the Hindustani faction) – and appointed Abdullah Khan as his wazir while Husain Ali Khan became *Mir Bakshi* (head of the military administration). They dominated Mughal politics from 1713 to 1720. Farrukh Siyar began his reign with gross brutality which has been condemned by the eighteenth-century historian Seid-Ghulam-Hosseini-Khan in his work titled *Seir Mutaqherin*. But, this alliance between the emperor and the Sayyid brothers could not last long and soon they replaced him in 1719 with a puppet-ruler Rafi-ud-Darajat. But, the same year he died and was succeeded by Shah Jahan-II whose reign was also brief. Finally, in 1719 Muhammad Shah became the emperor who began to assert his imperial authority with the support of the Irani and Turani nobles – a rival faction at the court. Prominent nobles such as Chin Qilich Khan (Nizam-ul-Mulk), Itimad-ud-Daula, Saadat Khan etc. hatched a plan to kill the Sayyid brothers. Muhammad Shah had to fight a long war with the Marathas and lost Deccan and Malwa. The reign of Ahmad Shah was dominated by Udham Bai, the queen mother, and Javid Khan, the head-eunuch of the harem, who acted as the emperor’s regent. Again, court rivalries came into play. Finally, in 1754 he was blinded and deposed by the wazir Feroze Jung-III (a grandson of Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah) who allied with the Marathas. He was also responsible for the assassination of Alamgir-II. Shah Alam-II as Prince Ali Gauhar, like earlier princes, was brought up in semi-captivity in the *Salatin* quarters of the Red Fort. He was blinded and deposed but he was the only Mughal emperor who was blinded and yet regained his throne.

Thus, during the later Mughal period the nobles became so domineering that it was they who often exercised the authoritative power on behalf of the reigning emperor. They became king-makers and blinded or assassinated the king if he would assert his authority. A number of later Mughal emperors were blinded because this would disqualify them from ever ascending the Mughal throne. The dominance of one faction at the court arose jealousy and discontentment among the other factions, resulting into a series of court intrigues and counter intrigues. Powerful and discontented governors, as a result of it, aspired to strengthen their base in their respective provinces and acknowledged Mughal authority in name only. Let us now look at the emergence of some powerful regional kingdoms during the eighteenth century.

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## 18.4 REGIONAL KINGDOMS

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As the Mughal empire was crumbling, many regional states ensued. Some were the semi-autonomous states founded by some prominent Mughal nobles who were appointed provincial governors to the respective *subahs* (provinces) either to send them away from the imperial court and lessen their effective control over the emperor or the politically ambitious nobles frustrated with court politics would themselves depart from the Mughal *darbar* and focus on building up their power in their respective provinces. Apart from these successor states there were autonomous states which had been resisting Mughal authority and the most important and powerful of them was the Maratha Confederacy. Gradually, Sikhism was militarized in order to defend its followers against Mughal domination. The Afghan kingdom of Rohilkhand was founded by Ali Muhammad Khan during the reign of Muhammad Shah. He ousted the Mughal governors of Moradabad and Bareilly and secured his control over most of Rohilkhand. By 1744 he conquered most of the *terai* region of Kumaon. The envious nawab of Awadh Safdar Jang had him imprisoned at Delhi in 1746 for six months. After that he was appointed as the governor of Sirhind. He fought with Ahmad Shah Durrani against the Mughals and this enabled him to recover all his lost territories. The Rohila chiefs continued to be a menace for the Mughals. Ghulam Qadir, the son of Zabita Khan (a Rohilla chieftain), captured Delhi temporarily in 1788. There were a number of small regional states too which arose. For instance, in 1730 in the Malwa plateau in central India the twin Maratha princely states named Dewas, sharing the same capital town, were founded by two Maratha brothers Tukoji Rao and Kiwaji Rao. In 1778 a European mercenary Walter Reinhardt Sombre received Sardhana in *jagir* from Najaf Khan (Mughal *wazir*) which became his state and it was ruled by his widow Begum Samru after his death.

The south, too, was divided into several principalities. The Sultanate of Mysore was founded by Haider Ali by usurping the power of the Wodeyar ruler Chik Krishnaraj in 1761. The kingdom of Travancore came into prominence during the rule of Martanda Verma in 1729. Carnatic Sultanate was another important state which was formerly part of the Deccan *subah* of the Mughals. As the Nizam of Hyderabad succeeded in carving out a semi-autonomous state of Hyderabad, the Deputy Governor of the Carnatic also made his position hereditary. We will read more about them in the next Unit. However, none of these regional states, autonomous or semi-autonomous, could replace the Mughals and provide a central authority like the Mughals did earlier. This situation was also very conducive for commercial companies in India like the East India Company to make use of. The eighteenth-century India experienced the aforementioned significant political developments.

### 18.4.1 Ambitious Mughal Governors and Successor States

As the Mughal central authority weakened the provincial governors became more assertive. The erstwhile Mughal states acknowledged the over-lordship of the Mughal emperor but only in a symbolic sense, such as the minting of coins, recital of the *khutba*, sending *peshkash* etc. were done in his name. In all real matters the provincial governors became the *defacto* head, nominating their successors, assigning *mansabs*, waging wars etc. But, they modelled their states after the Mughal administrative practice. Lucknow emerged as the haven of the Mughal culture. You will now understand this transformation through some significant cases.

### 18.4.1.1 Bengal and the *Nawabs*

Murshid Quli Khan was appointed as the Mughal *subedar* or *nazim* (provincial governor) of the *subah* of Bengal in 1717 by the reigning Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar. During the time of Aurangzeb, he was the *diwan* (revenue collector) of the province but now he was in-charge of both the offices of *nazim* and *diwan* concurrently. In 1719 he became the governor of Odisha too. This gave this able and ambitious Mughal governor an opportunity to consolidate his position in Bengal and establish an independent state. He shifted the capital of Bengal from Decca to Murshidabad. Muhammad Shah granted his successor Shuja-ud-Din the governorship of Bihar in 1733. His son and successor Sarfaraz Khan was killed in a battle in 1740 by Alivardi Khan who was the Deputy Governor of Bihar and had turned rebellious. The Mughal emperor received two crores of rupees from Alivardi Khan and, thus, he turned a blind eye to this. Muhammad Shah sent him a *farman*, legitimizing the rule of the usurper. Soon Alivardi Khan became the *defacto* ruler of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha, though the myth of Mughal authority over Bengal endured.

### 18.4.1.2 Awadh and the *Nawab-Wazirs*

Awadh became virtually autonomous in 1722 under Saadat Khan. He was also known as *Burhan-ul-Mulk*. This title was awarded to him by Muhammad Shah for his support against the Sayyid brothers in 1720. In addition to that he was appointed as governor of Akbarabad. Thereafter, in 1722 he was granted the governorship of Awadh. He gradually assumed authority in Awadh and, thus, laid down the foundation of the semi-autonomous state of Awadh and became its first *nawab*. When Delhi was attacked by Nadir Shah he marched to the imperial city. There is a great deal of debate over who invited Nadir Shah to the Mughal imperial city to invade – Saadat Khan who lured the Persian Shah to collect 20 crores from Delhi or Nizam-ul-Mulk, who, as per some historians, sought to take revenge at the cost of the prestige of the empire owing to the ill-treatment of the Nizam by Muhammad Shah at his court. The anonymous writer of the *Risala-i-Muhammad shah-wa khan-i-Dauran* and the author of the *Jauhar-i-Samsam* and other historians such as James Fraser held both these ambitious Mughal nobles responsible for the mishap. When the Persian Shah was approaching in this critical situation, too, the nobles were busy negotiating with the emperor over the grant of titles and ranks. Muhammad Shah appointed Nizam-ul-Mulk as *Mir Bakshi*. The envious Saadat Khan who coveted the office invited Nadir Shah to invade Delhi. But, on witnessing the atrocities of the Shah of Persia, Saadat Khan, who was also threatened by Nadir Shah with corporal punishment if the treasures were not revealed to him, committed suicide.

Saadat Khan's nephew Safdar Jung succeeded Saadat Khan as the next *nawab* of Awadh. After the death of Muhammad Shah Ahmad Shah appointed Safdar Jung as his *wazir* in 1748. Since then he and his successors came to be known as *Nawab-Wazirs*. As the *wazir* Safdar Jung usurped all powers. On that account Ahmad Shah was forced to take the help of the Marathas to expel him from Delhi. He was dismissed from the office of *wazir* and he returned to Awadh in 1753, reinforcing his position there.





Safdarjung's Tomb, New Delhi. Source: Dr. Richa Singh

### 18.4.1.3 Hyderabad and the Nizam

Hyderabad was established in 1724 under Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah who was a Turani. When Farrukhsiyar ascended the throne, he appointed Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah as the governor of the Deccan. The dominance of the Sayyid brothers at the Mughal court became cause for concern for the emperor as well as the Turani nobles. A conspiracy was hatched and the governorship of the Deccan was transferred to one of the Sayyid brothers – Husain Ali Khan. When Husain Ali Khan marched to the Deccan on his way he was obstructed by the deputy governor of the Deccan Daud Khan as per the plan. But, the latter was killed and the Sayyid brothers with the help of the Marathas deposed the emperor while the Nizam was downgraded to the governorship of Malwa.

When Muhammad Shah became the emperor, he conspired against the Sayyid brothers and secretly formed an alliance with the Nizam. Nizam-ul-Mulk captured Asirgarh and Burhanpur and strengthened his army. In 1720 in a battle at Husainpur he defeated and killed the newly appointed Deputy *Subehdar* of the Deccan who was the nephew of Husain Ali. Yusuf Husain Khan in his work *The First Nizam; the Life and Times of Nizamul Mulk Asaf Jah* remarks, “This victory established the undisputed supremacy of Nizamul Mulk in the whole of the Deccan.” Soon the Sayyid brothers were also eliminated from the Mughal court politics and the Nizam’s uncle Muhammad Amin Khan was appointed as *wazir* by Muhammad Shah. During his *wizarat*, too, the *wazir* was more powerful than the emperor. But, it enabled the Nizam to completely focus on his affairs in the Deccan, free from worries of intervention from Delhi. After the death of his uncle in 1721 Nizam-ul-Mulk became the next *wazir*. In addition to the office of *wazir* and the governorship of the Deccan he was also granted the governorship of Malwa and Gujarat. However, owing to factional strife at the court Muhammad Shah had him transferred to Awadh to keep him away from the court. To protest, Nizam-ul-Mulk resigned from the *wizarat* and went to the Deccan. Mubariz Khan, the newly appointed governor of the Deccan, was instructed to stop Nizam-ul-Mulk. The Nizam defeated Mubraiz Khan in the Battle of Shakar Kheda in 1724. Left with no choice, Muhammad Shah appointed him as the viceroy of the Deccan and honoured him with the title of *Asaf Jah*. But, the frequent Maratha raids compelled the Nizam to divert their attention to North India by suggesting the Peshwa to invade it. Baji Rao-I

invaded Delhi and Bhopal in 1737. Finally, the sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah in 1739 paralyzed Muhammad Shah and the imperial court. The Nizam was able to further consolidate his power in the Deccan.

### 18.4.2 Rajputs: Internal Dissensions

Aurangzeb after the war of succession came into power in 1658 by his military skills and shrewdness and by posing as a defender of Islam in order to please the orthodox theologians. His religious policy became a channel through which he was able to conciliate the *ulema*. By appeasing them, through their influence he hoped to obtain support of all sections of the Muslims. Muhammad Saqi Mustaid Khan in *Ma'asir-i-Alamgiri* informs that Aurangzeb in 1670 issued orders to the *subedars* (provincial governors) to destroy the Hindu temples. Accordingly, Keshav Rai temple at Mathura was demolished, compelling the priests at Vrindavan to take refuge at Nathdwara in the Mewar kingdom which was then ruled by Maharana Raj Singh-I. Nathdwara developed into a popular centre of northern Vaishnavism. In 1679 the Aurangzeb reimposed *jizya*. As per Manucci, by 1679 the Mughal imperial treasury had started to exhaust. Imposing *jizya* meant replenishing the treasury as well as pacifying the *ulema*. Since the Rajput nobles at Mughal court were more concerned with personal gain and acquiring *tika* from the reigning Mughal emperor in order to legitimize their rule in their respective *watan jagirs*, therefore, Aurangzeb did not face any challenges from them at the imperial *darbar* in implementing such discriminatory policies. He faced opposition from those who opposed Mughal hegemony and were attempting to establish their authority. Thus, Shivaji championed himself as the liberator of the Hindus from the shackles of the Muslim domination in order to appeal to the Hindu sentiments. The rebellious Maharana Raj Singh-I of Mewar, too, provided asylum to the Hindu priests.

However, the Mughals did not just face the Mewar hostility. After the death of Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur in 1678 Aurangzeb had to deal with the Rathod struggle led by Durgadas. Since it was the Mughal emperor's prerogative to assign *watan jagir* to a Rajput chief in full or in part, therefore, he granted the *tika* of Jodhpur to Inder Singh, the grandson of Rao Amar Singh, and not to Ajit Singh, the posthumous son of Jaswant Singh. This inaugurated a civil strife in Marwar. The supporters of Ajit Singh started the Rathod rebellion which ended when Bahadur Shah accepted Ajit Singh as the ruler of Jodhpur in 1710. During Farrukh Siyar's period Ajit Singh's governorship was transferred from Gujarat (granted by Bahadur Shah) to Thatta (an impoverished province). He formed an alliance with the Sayyid brothers and the emperor was deposed. Thus, the Rajputs, too, played a part in later Mughal court politics and were in constant negotiations either with the emperor or the powerful nobles at the court in order to acquire important positions.

Since the imperial government during the period of the Later Mughals failed to retain command over the fissiparous tendencies, Raja Jai Singh-II of Amber also desired to carve out an independent kingdom. He defeated the Jats in 1717 and founded Jaipur on the land acquired from the Jats. He became a formidable Rajput ruler. However, it was the Marathas who became influential in Rajputana due to internal dissension among Rajputs. They collected tributes from Rajput states. The Battle of Pattan in 1790 fought between the Maratha Confederacy and the allied forces of Jaipur and Jodhpur enabled the Marathas to capture Ajmer and Malwa and establish their control in the Rajputana.

However, the internal conflicts among the Marathas prevented them to establish a long-lasting dominance.

### 18.4.3 Maratha Confederacy and the Peshwas

The eighteenth century also witnessed the dominance and, later, the fall of the Maratha Confederacy. Aurangzeb considered Shivaji who founded the Maratha empire as a “petty *bhumia*” (landlord) when the latter came to attend the imperial *darbar* (court) at Agra in 1666. Aurangzeb’s misjudgment and mistreatment caused Shivaji to estrange from Aurangzeb. The Marathas, after the death of Shivaji, under the leadership of his son Raja Ram and, after him, his widowed wife Tara Bai as regent for her minor son Shivaji-II continued to offer resistance. Aurangzeb’s successor Bahadur Shah (1707-1712) released Shahu with a motive to weaken the Marathas by inciting a civil war. Shahu emerged victorious. Balaji Vishwanath became the first Peshwa. After his death his son Baji Rao-I (1720-40) strengthened the Maratha Confederacy. He defeated the Nizam of Hyderabad Asaf Jah at the Battle of Palkhed (1728) and forced him to accept the claims of Shahu to *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the six Mughal provinces, recognize Shahu as the sole Maratha ruler and stop supporting the claims of the rival court of Shambhaji at Kolhapur.

The power structure of the Maratha Confederacy experienced three important phases:

- i) In the first phase the Confederates and their kinship were fully under the control of the central authority at Poona or under the Chhatrapati, primarily functioning under the Maratha administration. The Peshwa adopted the expansionist policy in different parts of India.
- ii) In this phase the Shindes, Holkars, Bhonsles and Gaekwads became equally powerful and resourceful in financial and military matters.
- iii) By the final stage the aforesaid four Confederates became more dominant than the Peshwa at Poona. There were frequent overt violations of the orders of the Peshwa, thereby challenging and corroding the sustenance of the central authority.

Kinship politics and family conflicts played a pivotal role in shaping Maratha history, especially after the third Battle of Panipat. Prior to the battle the Peshwa played a dominant role in Maratha politics, even though there were cases of the Confederates forming political alliances with regional powers (the Rajputs, Rohillas, Afghans etc.) which were not in accordance with the diplomatic policies of the Peshwa. The Peshwa did not do much to check such deviations. This encouraged the confederates to form alliances independently.

The mid-eighteenth century was a period of many successful Maratha military campaigns and expansion when Balaji Rao (1740-1761) was the Peshwa. Bengal was repeatedly invaded and plundered from 1741-1751. The treaty of 1751 between the Bhonsles of Nagpur and Alivardi Khan, the nawab of Bengal, assigned revenue of southern Odisha to the Marathas. They were to receive 12 lakhs annually as *chauth* in order to stop the invasions. They also subdued the Jats and Rohillas and occupied Malwa, Gujarat, Bundelkhand and parts of western India. In 1788 when Ghulam Qadir, an Afghan Rohilla leader, occupied Delhi – the seat of the Mughal power – and tortured and blinded the Mughal emperor Shah Alam-II, Mahadji Sindhia, who was appointed as

*Vakil-ul-Mutlaq* (Regent of Mughal Affairs) in 1784, came to his rescue and restored him to the Mughal throne. Thence, the Sindhis rose to become the most dominant Maratha Confederate. Also, Mahadji modernized his army with the help of French General DeBoigne on European lines. However, the confederates failed to gain any long-term political allies in the north as they were entangled in the kinship conflicts. The house of the Peshwa, too, was grappling with kinship rivalry, Narayan Rao's murder and other marginal issues in the Deccan. This disturbed the equilibrium of power and prevented the sustenance of the political structure of the Maratha confederacy. Eventually, the confederacy was weakened, providing opportunities for the British East India Company to control India.

#### 18.4.4 Bharatpur and the Jats

Under Aurangzeb the Mughal empire achieved its maximum geographical extent. However, this increased the burden on the imperial treasury. So, the tax was increased which, in turn, overburdened the peasants and intensified peasant revolts. The Jat revolts can also be viewed in this context. Jats were an agricultural community in the region between Agra and Delhi. These revolts received the leadership of Jat *zamindars*. Gokla, the *zamindar* of Tilpat and later, Rajarama, the *zamindar* of Sinsini led the uprisings against the Mughal authority but these were repulsed. Rajarama's nephew Churaman defeated the Mughals in 1704 and captured Sinsini. He established the Jat state of Bharatpur. During the reign of Bahadur Shah, he received a *mansab* from the emperor for his support in the war of succession after the death of Aurangzeb. Subsequently, he sided with the Mughals. The period of Suraj Mal (1756-63) was crucial for the Jats. He fortified Bharatpur and plundered Delhi in 1753 and captured Agra in 1761. Although the Jat state was established with the active support of the peasants, *zamindars* continued to hold both administrative and revenue powers and sometimes the land revenue paid by the peasants was higher than it was under the Mughal system. After the death of Suraj Mal in 1763 the Jat state lost its prominence.

#### 18.4.5 Sikhs

By the early seventeenth century significant changes were evident in the Mughal-Sikh relationship. The memoirs of Jahangir – *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* – mentions that the emperor felt antagonized by Guru Arjan Dev's act of blessing the rebelled Mughal prince Khusrau challenging his imperial authority. Consequently, in 1605 he was executed. His son and successor Guru Hargobind Singh took to militarization for self-defense, leading to a series of battles between the Sikhs and the Mughals. During Aurangzeb's period long sieges and wars in the south had drained the imperial exchequer. Thus, peasants were burdened with increased land revenue tax. This broke out into frequent peasant rebellions. The ninth *Guru* – Guru Tegh Bahadur – encouraged the peasants at Karnal to take up arms and refuse any tax payment. Therefore, Aurangzeb had him decapitated in 1675. The next *Guru* – Guru Gobind Singh – instituted the *khalsa panth* (military order). He declared Anandpur as a sovereign state and appropriated Mughal symbols of royalty such as wearing a *jigha* or *kalgi* (bejeweled plume) fixed to the turban, calling himself Sacha/Sachcha Padshah etc. This signaled his political ambitions to Aurangzeb and the local hill chieftains. The rising power of the Guru troubled the *rajahs* of the Shivalik hills and they sought the help of Aurangzeb. The Guru lost all four of his sons in this struggle. After the death of the last Guru in 1708 Banda Bahadur continued the fight till his execution in Delhi in 1716.

By the middle of the eighteenth-century Sikhism metamorphosized itself from a peaceful sect into a militarized one. Thereafter, decentralization, owing to the absence of central authority, was setting in. By 1745 the Sikhs formed 25 *Jathas* (an armed body), each consisting of 100 Sikhs. Slowly, it increased to 65. To bring order and unity *Dal Khalsa* was introduced in 1748 and under it 12 *Jathas* were organized which later came to be called the *Misls*. Each *Misl* exercised its authority independently in different regions of the Punjab from 1767 to 1799. The leaders of the *Misls* sometimes collaborated with the Mughals, the Marathas etc. For instance, during the first invasion of Ahmad Shah Abdali in 1748 Baba Ala Singh of Phulkia *Misl* helped the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah for which he received a *khilat* from the emperor. In 1761 he also helped the Marathas against the Afghan invasion. By the end of the century Ranjit Singh of Sukarchakia *Misl* founded the first Sikh empire. But, after his demise the territories of Dalip Singh were brought under the British dominion.



Fig. 1

**Fig. 1: Guru Tegh Bahadur in Dhaka. Painted by Ahsaan, the royal painter of the Mughal governor of Bengal in 1668 – Shaista Khan – who was also the father-in-law of Aurangzeb.**

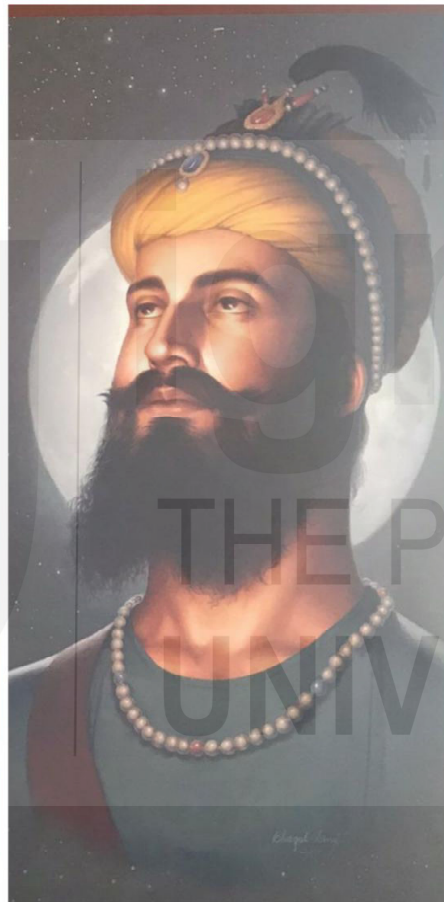


Fig. 2

**Fig. 2: Guru Gobind Singh, Sikh Gurdwara Sahib, San Jose, California, USA**

**Image source for both the figures: Kevin O'Mahony, Santa Clara, California, USA**

## 18.5 RAVAGES OF FOREIGN INVASIONS

Amidst such state of affairs, the decaying Mughal empire fell prey to foreign invasions which became responsible for causing further economic distress. The invasion of Nadir Shah exposed the hollowness of the Mughal empire whereas the frequent invasions of Ahmad Shah showed the eagerness of regional kingdoms to rise and expand at any cost and, so, we find that some local chieftains supported the invaders to gain some political advantages for themselves.

### 18.5.1 Nadir Shah

Nadir Shah (1736-1747), the founder of the Afsharid dynasty of Persia, invaded the Mughal empire and sacked the entire Mughal capital Shahjahanabad during the reign of Muhammad Shah in 1739 after defeating the Mughal emperor in the Battle of Karnal. The Persian Shah carried away potent symbols of royal authority: *takht-i-taus* (the Peacock Throne embedded with precious stones), *Koh-i-nur* (the celebrated diamond) etc. Prominent nobles such as Nizam-ul-Mulk, Qamaruddin Khan, Burhan-ul-Mulk and others were compelled to pay crores of rupees along with precious stones, gems and elephants. Apart from *umara* (nobles) and *mansabdars* the wealthy inhabitants of the city were also forced to pay *peshkash*. Those who could not choose to commit suicide or else they were tortured pitilessly. Nadir Shah from the Shahi Sunehri Masjid in Chandni Chowk ordered the massacre of the people in the imperial city. Ranga Pillai, an interpreter to the French East India Company, in his private diary records the ravages of Nadir Shah and its devastating impact on the merchant class and that approximately 100,00 to 150,000 inhabitants lost their lives. However, the total number of deaths differs in different contemporary sources. Another important consequence of Nadir Shah's invasion was the annexation of the provinces to the west of the Indus viz., Afghanistan, Kashmir, Sindh and Multan to Persia. As per James Fraser the Persian Shah exacted wealth amounting to 70 crores. The *Iqbalnama* informs that the wealth plundered from the city was so immense that Nadir Shah had remitted the revenue of three years to the people of Persia. It also enabled him to maintain a huge army so as to undertake further military expeditions in Turan, Daghistan, Rum etc. But, on the other hand, it paralyzed the Mughal empire and the empire could never recover from it, which is clearly evident from the lamentations in the writings of Urdu poets such as Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda and Mir Taqi Mir. The Persian invasion exposed the shortcomings of the empire to the Marathas and other regional powers.

### 18.5.2 Ahmad Shah Abdali

After the death of Muhammad Shah his son Ahmad Shah, as the successor of the Mughal empire, had to face the frequent Afghan invasions. Ahmad Shah Abdali of Afghanistan (1747-1772) was the chief of the Afghan mercenaries of Nadir Shah. After founding the Durrani empire he attempted to expand his territories. He invaded India nine times between 1747 and 1769. One of the outcomes of these invasions was that in 1752 Ahmad Shah, the Mughal emperor, had to cede Punjab and Multan to him. During the reign of Alamgir-II the Durrani ruler stripped Punjab, devastated Delhi and other cities including the holy city of Mathura. But, the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 was the disastrous of all. This was strategically a huge loss for the Marathas from which they never fully recovered. While Abdali gained support from Najib-ud-Daulah (a Rohilla chieftain), *nawab* Shuja-ud-Daulah of Awadh and Baloachi allies, the Marathas, on the other hand, could not win over the support of any local potentates in the north diplomatically. Suraj Mal and Rajput states opted not to participate in the battle because of the Maratha raids in the Jat territory and their interference in internal affairs of the Rajput states and levying of heavy taxes and fines. After the battle Ahmad Shah Abdali appointed Najib-ud-Daulah as Shah Alam II's *wazir*. The emperor left Delhi and the throne was vacant until he returned in 1772 when the Rohillas were ousted from Delhi by Mahadji Scindhia. Thus, foreign invasions impacted political developments in a significant way. This provided the opportunity for some regional

states to rise and opened the doors for the British East India Company to expand its domination.

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## 18.6 SUMMARY

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In this Unit, we learned how the Mughal empire went from authority to obscurity, giving way to the growth of regional states. The succession of incompetent Mughal emperors, the rise of powerful nobles such as the Sayyid brothers, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Saadat Khan etc., the division of the Mughal nobility into a number of factions and each contesting to dictate the emperor, the ramification of factionalism on the formulation and the execution of imperial policies, the court conspiracies and counter-conspiracies, political assassinations, the growing centrifugal tendency of the local potentates, the territorial expansion and assertion of authority by the states which resisted Mughal political power were all preparing the ground for the collapse of the Mughal empire. In such an atmosphere of struggle for power there were frequent foreign invasions in the north-west region. By the end of the eighteenth century these all proved to be contributing factors towards the expansion of the East India Company in India. In the next Unit you will learn how this commercial enterprise gained a foothold in eighteenth century India.

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## 18.7 GLOSSARY

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- Jizya** : A tax imposed by a Muslim ruler on non-Muslim subjects as a fee for providing protection to them.
- Khilat** : *Khilat* was a robe of honour. The granting of *khilat* by the Mughal emperor was seen as a mark of imperial favour.
- Peshkash** : *Peshkash* was an annual tribute offered to the Mughal emperor by the subordinated rulers and chieftains. It was part of the Mughal gift-giving ceremony to reinforce the elements of dominance and subjugation.
- Padshah** : The Mughal emperors were called *Padshah* while the Sikhs called their gurus as *Sacha/Sachcha Padshah* (True King), implying that the reigning Mughal emperor was a false ruler.
- Tika** : One of the ways through which Mughal paramountcy was maintained in Rajput states was by granting of *tika* (drawing a mark on the forehead) which from Akbar's reign became the Mughal emperor's prerogative. This meant that it was the Mughal emperor who chose the successor in a Rajput state under Mughal authority by granting him *tika*, thereby controlling the transition of power from one Rajput ruler to the next in their states.
- Ulema** : (Singular, *alim*) Muslim scholars specializing in *Sharia* (Islamic canonical law) and theology.

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## 18.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) How were the court rivalries at Mughal court and the condition of *salatin* during the later Mughal period interrelated?

- 2) Do you think that regional polities such as the Maratha Confederacy and the Rajputana during the eighteenth century failed to consolidate themselves under one strong and durable central authority? Substantiate your answer with reasons.
- 3) Explain the metamorphosis of Sikhism from a peaceful sect to a militarized one, emphasizing on the political relations between the Sikh *gurus* and the Mughal emperors.
- 4) Why do you think were there frequent foreign invasions during the eighteenth-century India and in what ways did it alter the politics of the eighteenth-century India?

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# UNIT 19 EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## POLITICS: II<sup>1</sup>

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### Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Anglo-French Rivalry
- 19.3 The British and the Regional States
  - 19.3.1 Bengal
  - 19.3.2 Awadh
  - 19.3.3 Mysore
  - 19.3.4 Marathas
- 19.4 Robert Clive and Richard Wellesley: Formation of the Company Raj
- 19.5 From India to China: Opium and Tea
- 19.6 Summary
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## 19.0 OBJECTIVES

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The present Unit will help you understand the following:

- the effective transition of the British East India Company from a commercial enclave to a dominant politico-military power in the mid-eighteenth century;
- the role of different British policies such as the dual government, the ring fence policy and the subsidiary alliance in the struggle for British supremacy in the eighteenth-century India; and
- how the exigencies of war prioritized military development of the East India Company.

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## 19.1 INTRODUCTION

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The East India Company came into existence in 1600 and with a royal charter by Elizabeth I it was granted monopoly to trade in Asia. But, with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the establishment of the supremacy of the Parliament over the Crown the earlier charter granted to the company was questioned and seen as an infringement of *Magna Carta*. There were other companies which were vying for wider opportunities in trading activities in Asia. Consequently, another company called the New Company or the English East India Company (as distinct from the old company: the London East India Company) established in 1698, received a permission from the British Parliament

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Richa Singh, Ph.D., Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

to trade in Asia. However, eventually the Parliament realized that this might hinder English trade in the long run. Therefore, in 1709 the two companies were merged together. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the East India Company started to focus its activities in India, establishing its foothold at Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. In 1639 Francis Day obtained the site of Madras from the ruler of Chandragiri where the Company built Fort St. George. In 1658 the president of the fort became responsible for all settlements that the Company had in Eastern India (Bengal, Bihar and Orissa) and the Coromandel Coast. The seven islands of Bombay were granted to Charles II of England through the Marriage Treaty or the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty in 1661 as dowry. He was married to Catherine of Braganza, the daughter of John IV of Portugal. In 1668 Bombay was given to the East India Company for an annual rent of 10 pounds. Bombay replaced Surat in 1687 as the headquarters of all English settlements on the west coast of India. In 1690 Job Charnok established a factory at Sutanuti and in 1698 the Company obtained the *zamindari* of three villages viz. Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindpur which later developed into the city of Calcutta. In 1696 the factory at Sutanuti was fortified and in 1700 it was named Fort William and Sir Charles Eyre became its first President or Governor and all settlements of the Company in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa were brought under the Bengal Presidency. The governors of these three presidencies were governing almost independently with their own small armies in order to defend the Company's factories (fortified trading posts) from other European competitors. Simultaneously, through the eighteenth century the fragmented polity of the Mughal empire promoted the rise of several regional states. The Company capitalized on the opportunities that the eighteenth-century politics offered to it. In this Unit, we will look at the attempts of the Company to outdo its European rivals, particularly the French *Compagnie des Indes* (which was formed by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in 1664 during the reign of King Louis-XIV to challenge Dutch and English dominance of the East India trade) in the Indian subcontinent and its involvement with local political powers to safeguard its commercial interests and how in this process it was transformed into a political power during the eighteenth century.

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## 19.2 ANGLO-FRENCH RIVALRY

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At first the sole concern of the European Companies in India as commercial bodies was to gain and sustain a commercial monopoly. Hence, they would clash with one another. They acquired a piece of land either by paying an annual rent as tenants to the local regional rulers or by buying land or sometimes they received land as gift. In all such cases they were under the rule of the native ruler in whose domain their factories were built. Since their commerce brought wealth to the states where they were located, therefore, they were tolerated but high taxes and transit duties were imposed on them. The East India Company abstained from entering into alliance with the local rulers or siding with any of them in their struggles with one another unlike the French. Benoit Dumas, the Governor-General of the French settlements in India maintained a friendly relationship with the *Nawab* of Carnatic: Dost Ali. It helped him to gain the permission from the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah through the mediation of Dost Ali to coin money at Pondicherry which was a major development in the expansion of French commerce in India. On the other hand, after the English East India Company had suffered utter humiliation in the seventeenth century when Aurangzeb had virtually

destroyed it in the Anglo-Mughal War (1688-1690)<sup>2</sup> which is mentioned in a Scottish merchant Alexander Hamilton's *New Account of the East Indies*, the Company deterred from pursuing any aggressive policy since then, as it started to view it as risky. Later, the Company did purchase and fortify Fort St. David but with a purpose to escape in case Madras was attacked by a superior force. It had no intention to gain extensive territorial possession in India.

The first signs of change in this approach of the Company were visible when political warfare in Europe embroiled the European Companies in India. In 1746 a war broke out between the British East India Company and its commercial adversary, the French *Compagnie des Indes* in India which was an extension of the Anglo-French War in Europe due to the Austrian War of Succession after the death of Charles-VI in 1740 in which France allied with Prussia against Britain and Austria. Robert Montgomery Martin in *The British Colonies: Their History, Extent, Condition and Resources* writes that this war of succession was a ruse to exploit "the actual end desired by either party being the attainment of complete mastery in all points, whether as regarded political ascendancy in Europe, transatlantic dominion, trading monopolies, or maritime power". Joseph Francois Dupleix, the French Governor-General of Pondicherry, grabbed the opportunity and captured the British stronghold Madras in 1746 in response to the capturing of some French ships by the British. But, Dupleix refused to surrender it to Anwar-ud-din: the *Nawab* of Carnatic. Before capturing Madras he utilized the French Company's friendly alliance with the *nawab* and convinced him that Madras would be conceded to him after its conquest since Anwaruddin desired no confrontations between the trading companies in his territory. The refusal caused the Battle of St. Thomas (Thome), also called the Battle of Adyar, which as an important battle in the First Carnatic War in which the *nawab* was defeated. The defeat of the *Nawab* of Carnatic was crucial. Just like the invasion of Nadir Shah exposed the decaying condition of the Mughal empire to the regional states of India, the success of the French Company in the First Carnatic War helped the European Companies to discover the weakness of the native armies of the newly independent or semi-independent states against European discipline and the importance of taking a keen interest in regional politics. The Anglo-French rivalry in India can be divided into three phases, corresponding to the First (1746-48), Second (1749-54) and Third (1756-63) Carnatic Wars. In the first phase both the Companies, through the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 (which ended the Austrian War of Succession), were placed in the same position as they were before the war. Madras was restored to the British in exchange for the French fortress Louisbourg in North America which was captured by British forces. The war clearly exhibited the French superiority in India.

During the second phase we observe both the Companies interloping into regional politics. After the Battle of Adyar the French influence in the Carnatic declined. This benefited the English. Therefore, the French started plotting to depose the *Nawab* with the former *Nawab* Dost Ali's son-in-law and the claimant to the Carnatic rulership Chanda Sahib. Likewise, in 1748 Nizam-ul-Mulk died and a war of succession broke out between Nasir Jang (Nizam-ul-Mulk's son and successor) and Muzaffar Jang

<sup>2</sup>The Anglo-Mughal War is also known as Child's War, named after Sir Josiah Child, the Governor of Bombay and President of Surat. He commanded the Company in the war. After the Company surrendered Aurangzeb had Child expelled from India. This was the first war fought between the English East India Company and an Indian political power.

(Nizam-ul-Mulk's grandson). The former was supported by the British while the latter, by the French. The alliance of Muzaffar Jung, Chanda Sahib and the French was formed and they marched to the Carnatic against Anwar-ud-din. The battle was fought at Ambur in 1749 and the *nawab* lost his life while fighting. Arcot, the capital of the Carnatic, was captured. Chanda Sahib became the *Nawab* of the Carnatic. Also, Nasir Jung died soon and Muzaffar Jung became the next Nizam of Hyderabad. But, he was assassinated three months later. The French placed one of the late Nizam's son Salabat Jung. Charles Joseph Patissien de Bussy acquired a dominant position in the affairs of Hyderabad with the revenues of the Northern *Sarkars* so as to maintain his army. His presence in Hyderabad was no less than the presence of king-makers at the Mughal court. The British, on the other hand, after the death of *Nawab* Anwar-ud-din, attempted to place the late *nawab*'s son Muhammad Ali as the successor of Anwar-ud-din. Robert Clive laid a siege on Arcot in 1751 with around 500 men for 50 days. The French surrendered in 1752 and Chanda Sahib was killed. In 1754 Dupleix was replaced by Charles-Robert Godeheu. The Second Carnatic War came to an end with the Treaty of Pondicherry and Muhammad Ali was recognized as the *Nawab* of the Carnatic.

Thus, in the second phase now it was not just the French but also the British who interfered in the political affairs of the regional states viz. the Carnatic, Hyderabad and also Tanjore. The British East India Company introduced military reforms too in the Company army. So far you have read that in the struggle for supremacy among the European Companies in the south the approach and strategy of the British East India Company underwent significant changes. Like the French the British also began to meddle into regional politics, forged alliances and waged wars but these wars were not between the British and a regional state directly. The British, on the pretext of aiding one of the political contestants of a state, would get involved into regional affairs of the state. But, after the Second Carnatic War they became more ambitious. The defeat of the *Nawab* of Bengal Siraj-ud-daula is a case in point about which we will read in detail soon. The British success in Bengal provided the Company with surplus funds to finance its wars.

Like the First Carnatic War the third one was the result of a war in Europe; in this case it was the Seven Years War (1756-63) between Britain and France. Count de Lally was sent to India and his attempts to exact 56 lakh rupees from the ruler of Tanjore, to capture Madras and his decision to recall Bussy from Hyderabad weakened French position in India. The French naval fleet was defeated thrice by the British fleet and they to leave the Indian Ocean. Finally, at the Battle of Wandiwash in 1760 the French received a final blow and were defeated by the British army under the command of Eyre Coote. The third period ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Pondicherry, along with some other French settlements, were restored to the French. With the conclusion of the last phase the French aspirations in India ended and the British supremacy in trade in India was established.

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### 19.3 THE BRITISH AND THE REGIONAL STATES

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We read in the previous Unit – Unit 16 – that during the eighteenth century the downfall of the Mughal empire led to the rise of multiple autonomous or semi-autonomous states and these states were not only contesting each other in the struggle for power

but their internal strife prevented them to establish a strong centralized empire for long. The East India Company utilized the disunity that existed among them, taking advantage of local conflicts and, thereby, consolidating its power. With every conflict resolved the influence of the British increased and in 1757 the conquest of Bengal marked a turning point in the history of British India. It opened the door for further expansion and consolidation of their control over India in the next hundred years.

### 19.3.1 Bengal

The Seven Years' War in Europe impacted the events in Bengal. The Company fortified Calcutta without the approval of Siraj-ud-daulah, the *Nawab* of Bengal who succeeded Alivardi Khan in 1756. Like his predecessor the *nawab* had forbidden the European Companies to fortify their factories in his territory. Also, in 1717 Farrukh Siyar had issued a *farman* granting the English Company the right to trade duty-free in Bengal. But, the Company issued *dastak* – duty-free trade permit – to English private traders to trade customs-free in Bengal. Its abuse was resented by the *nawab* since it had been incurring a great loss to the state treasury. Besides, the British also interfered in the internal politics of the province by supporting the claim of Ghasiti Begum (daughter of Alivardi Khan) to the throne. Enraged Siraj-ud-Daulah responded by expelling them out of the Calcutta which was an English settlement in Bengal. The Company counterattacked and recovered Calcutta by bribing Manik Chand, the *nawab*'s officer in-charge of Calcutta. Then, the British captured a French settlement Chandernagore and Lord Clive defeated Siraj-ud-Daulah in the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Utilizing factionalism at the Bengal court, Clive overthrew Siraj-ud-Daulah by luring the *Nawab*'s military general Mir Jafar to his side. Siraj-ud-Daulah had also alienated the merchant class of Bengal called the *Jagat Seths* (Mehtab Rai, Swarup Chand, Rai Durlabh, to name a few among them), a wealthy banker, money lender and a merchant Jain family of Bengal. Mehtab Rai was the most influential of all. Siraj-ud-Daulah demanded a tribute of 30 million rupees from him which he refused. This made the *nawab* mistreat him. Sayyid Ghulam Husain Tabatabai in *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin* writes that the *Jagat Seths*, instead, offered money to the British to overthrow Siraj. It was the *Jagat Seths* who financed his grandfather Alivardi to usurp the throne from *Nawab* Sarfaraz Khan and to secure a formal recognition from the Mughal emperor by bribing the latter profusely. To quote Sudeep Chakravarti in *Plassey: The Battle that Changed the Course of Indian History*, “For Several decades, the Seths displayed a particular knack to back the winning horse.”, “Even create the winning horse” and “Without them the English would never have carried out what they have.” In any case, the *Jagat Seths* viewed the collaboration with the Company as profitable because the Indian *dadani* merchants supplied textiles from the interior to the Company and private traders for the advance money called *dadan*.

Siraj was succeeded by Mir Jafar who was nothing but a puppet-ruler. The Company became the *de-facto* ruler. This was the first time that the British fought against a local ruler of India directly. William Dalrymple in his work *The Anarchy* writes that the Battle of Plassey was a “victory that owed as much to treachery, forged contracts, bankers and bribes as it did to military prowess”. The victory gave way to colonial subjugation. Now, the Company turned its attention towards the French in the south and completely squashed their influence in India. Meanwhile, Mir Jafar was replaced with Mir Qasim in 1760 as the former failed to fulfill the constant demand of the

Company for more revenues. The new *nawab* attempted to bring reforms but the Company's abuse of *dastak* was severely hampering his endeavours. This led to a battle in 1763 and the *nawab* fled to Awadh. A combined army of the *Nawabs* of Bengal and Awadh and the Mughal emperor Shah Alam-II fought the Battle of Buxar in 1764 against the Company forces commanded by Major Hector Munro in which the latter emerged victorious. This was the first decisive military success of the Company. It enabled the Company to eventually take over the subcontinent. The 1765 Treaty of Allahabad granted the Company the *diwani* rights of Bengal. It enabled the Company to collect land revenue from the entire province of Bengal. The *nawab* was still the Nizam but the independence of the Nizamat was a myth. The *nawab* was incapable of taking any independent military or political action. Thus, Robert Clive through the treaty introduced the system of dual government in Bengal which lasted from 1765 to 1772. Bengal's wealth was speedily looted. The East India Company treasury secured about £ 2.5 million (£ 262.5 million today) from the subjugated *nawabs*, part of which was later spent on rebuilding Powis Castle in Wales.

### 19.3.2 Awadh

The Company's first official interaction with Awadh was seen after the Battle of Buxar. Clive restored Awadh to Shuja-ud-din with the exception of Kora and Allahabad which were ceded to Shah Alam-II through the Treaty of Allahabad. The treaty compelled the *nawab* to pay Rs. five million and to allow the Company to carry on a duty-free trade in Awadh. This caused a heavy loss of tariffs. A British resident was posted in the court of Awadh as per the treaty. Also, the defence of Awadh became the Company's responsibility and in lieu of that the *nawab* had to pay the cost of the necessary troops. Warren Hastings returned Allahabad and Kora to Shuja in return for cash payments through the Treaty of Banaras in 1773. The British looked upon Awadh as a buffer-state against the Afghan and Maratha invasions. By the Second Treaty of Banaras (1775), also called the Treaty of Faizabad, the new *Nawab* of Awadh after the death of Shuja was forced to pay a larger subsidy for the maintenance of British troops and to cede Banaras to the Company. The treaty became a factor for the revolt of Raja Chaith Singh of Banaras in 1781. Further, after the death of *Nawab* Asaf-ud-daulah in 1797 his adopted son Wazir Ali Khan succeeded him. John Shore, the Governor-General of Bengal from 1793 to 1798, replaced the reigning *nawab* with his uncle Saadat Ali Khan-II. A treaty was signed. This time the financial demand was increased to Rs. 76 lakhs annually. Finally, in 1801 Richard Wellesley, the fifth Governor-General of India from 1798 to 1805, imposed the Subsidiary Alliance on Awadh when the *nawab* failed to pay the increased subsidy. The Company acquired the fertile lands of the *doab*, Rohilkhand and Gorakhpur. Thus, Awadh was reduced to being the British protectorate and lost its independence in the matters of defence and external policy.

### 19.3.3 Mysore

In the second half of the eighteenth-century, Mysore, under the leadership of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, emerged as a formidable state. It enjoyed control on the Malabar trade. Mysore had good relations with the French. With the aid of the French, Haider Ali had reformed his army and established an arms factory at Dindigul. The British saw the rising political power of Mysore as a security threat to their position in Madras and the Carnatic. The Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad were equally eager to crush Mysore. Haider Ali also had territorial disputes with the *Nawab* of the Carnatic. The

Company had signed a treaty with the Nizam in 1766 by which the Company would help the Nizam against Haider Ali in lieu of Northern Circars. However, Haider lured the Nizam and the Marathas to his side, attacked Madras and forced the Company to sign the Treaty of Madras in 1769 which concluded the first Anglo-Mysore War (1767-69). But, the British, violating the terms of the treaty, refused to help Haider against the Marathas in 1771. With the beginning of the American War of Independence (1775-1783) in which France supported the American colonists and the fact that Haider granted an important port Mahe to the French, the British realized the urgency to deal with Mysore. The British seized Mahe in 1779. Consequently, Haider in alliance with the Marathas and the Nizam attacked them in 1780 and this marked the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84). But, his allies defected to the British. Haider died during the war. He was succeeded by his son Tipu Sultan. The war ended with the Treaty of Mangalore. The third war began when Tipu attacked Travancore in 1790. The Company in favour of Travancore attacked Tipu. The war ended in 1792 with the Treaty of Seringapatam (now Srirangapatna). Tipu was compelled to cede almost half of his territory to the British. His two sons were taken as hostages till the payment of over three crores of rupees as war reparations. In the fourth Anglo-Mysore War Tipu Sultan died while fighting in the battle of Seringapatam in 1799. The Company and its allies divided his vast territory among themselves. The Company gave the southern portion of Tipu's territory to Krishnaraja Wodeyar-III, the infant heir of the Wodeyar dynasty, as the Company feared the further expansion of the Marathas and the Nizam. The British effectively ensured that the Wodeyars remained dependent and loyal to the British. The treaty signed with Mysore imposed a heavy tribute upon its ruler. Lord Wellesley imposed subsidiary alliance on Mysore.

#### 19.3.4 Marathas

In 1772 the fourth Peshwa Madhav Rao died. His younger brother Narayan Rao succeeded him with Raghunath Rao Bhatt or Raghoba, his uncle, as his mentor. But, within eight months he had Narayan Rao killed. This led to a conflict over the office of the Peshwa between the supporters of Raghunath Rao and the posthumous son of Narayan Rao. Raghunath Rao appealed to the British governor of Bombay for help who, after the success of the British in the Carnatic and Bengal, was looking for an opportunity to prove his military skills. Hence, the Treaty of Surat was signed between the two in 1775 and the first Anglo-Maratha War started which ended in 1782 with the Treaty of Salbai restoring each other's territories. But, this war became the occasion by which the British interfered in the affairs of the Marathas and within a few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the British vanquished Maratha power. Through the Treaty of Bassein in 1802 Peshwa Baji Rao-II was compelled to accept the Subsidiary Alliance. After the third Anglo-Maratha War (1817-1818) Warren Hastings abolished the office of the Peshwa and his territories comprising of Poona and its districts were acquired by the Bombay Presidency.

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### 19.4 ROBERT CLIVE AND RICHARD WELLESLEY: FORMATION OF THE COMPANY RAJ

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Robert Clive has often been attributed for establishing the British East India Company rule in Bengal. The two significant battles – Buxar and Plassey – which he fought, no doubt, helped the Company in recasting itself from a mere commercial enterprise to

one of the political contenders in the 18<sup>th</sup> century India. He opened the floodgates for the Company to eventually conquer the rest of the Indian subcontinent. The British success in Bengal gave them confidence that they could defeat the local rulers. The tale of Clive's dramatic rise to power is also the tale of the profound transformation of the Company. After the conquest of Bengal, he became the first British Governor of the Bengal Presidency and served twice as Governor of Bengal (1758-60 and 1764-67). However, his methods of conquest whilst he was in India were questioned and criticized in British Parliament and he was dubbed as a corrupt 'nabob'. Later, after he committed suicide the fortune he left at that time was worth about 500,000 pounds. His rule in Bengal was heavily based on loot and plunder.

One of the consequences of the Battle of Buxar was the introduction of a dual government in Bengal by Clive in 1765 which lasted till 1772. Under this system the administration was divided into *nizamat* and *diwani*. As you learnt before, the Company through the Treaty of Allahabad was granted the *diwani* of the province by the reigning Mughal emperor Shah Alam-II. The *nawab* was responsible for the civil administration but in reality, he had been deprived of all powers as the Company's agent Muhammad Reza Khan as the regent of the *nawab* managed his duties. This system enabled the Company to wield power without assuming any responsibility except for the collection of state revenues. The Company would appropriate the surplus after meeting some specified liabilities. In 1765-66 the *nawab* would receive 36 lakhs of rupees per annum for looking after the civil administration of the province. This was reduced by 12 lakhs after 1766. Owing to the lack of enough funds the civil administration of Bengal began to deteriorate.

The early misuse of state power by the Company received political criticism in Britain itself. Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* writes that the Company was "altogether unfit to govern its territorial possessions." Bengal, as the richest province of India, became the Company's major source of enormous revenue and just in a few years of British conquest of Bengal i.e. in 1769-70 the province witnessed a dreadful famine and one-third of the population of the region died. No relief measures were provided by the state. Instead, the East India Company raised the taxes on agricultural produce. They destroyed some of the food crops to grow the much more profitable indigo and opium. Some junior servants began to profiteer from the sale of rice and grain which were sold out of the province at grossly inflated prices. Consequently, the Bengal economy collapsed. This adversely affected the Company. Till now it controlled fifty percent of the British exports but now it abruptly found itself bankrupt owing to the over exploitation of Bengal at such a fast rate. The British government had to bail it out and in return the Company was partly nationalized. Its powers were progressively restricted.

Through the Regulating Act of 1773 the British Government took the first step to control and regulate the company. Now, the Company's Court of Directors had to report the British Government on its revenue, civil and military affairs in India. The Act also prohibited the Company's servants from indulging in any private trade or accepting gifts or bribes from the local people. Afterwards, Pitt's India Act of 1784 created a system of dual government by clearly separating the commercial and political affairs of the Company. The former was to be managed by the Court of Directors whereas a government-appointed Board of Control (a newly created governing body) was to look into the political matters and administer the civil and military government or revenues



of the British possessions in India. This was really momentous because the Act declared the Company's territories in India as the British possessions in India. The British Parliament continued to exert its control over the Company by extending its charter for only 20 years at a time and chipping away its commercial rights and monopolies. Finally, by the Government of India Act of 1858 all its Indian possessions and armed forces were confiscated by the British Crown. In 1874 the Act of Parliament dissolved the East India Company formally, ending the Company rule in India.

So far you have read that the British policy of dual government in Bengal ruined the richest province of the 18<sup>th</sup> century India. The other significant strategy of the Company was the Ring Fence Policy (1765-1813). Warren Hastings through the implementation of the Ring Fence Policy created buffer zones by defending the Company's neighbouring regional states so as to secure its territorial borders. The Subsidiary Alliance was an extension to the Ring Fence Policy which was employed by Richard Wellesley. It was introduced by Dupleix. In 1798 Hyderabad became the first state to become a subsidiary state of the Company. Afterwards, Awadh and the Marathas were forced to accept this system too. C. A. Bayly opines that the inflexible demands of the Subsidiary Alliance promoted circumstances that then gave way to British conquests of indirectly-ruled regional states as a remedy to a problem created by the British, to begin with. The state, agreeing to this policy, was considered to be under the protection of the Company. The ruler had to pay tribute, called 'subsidy' in lieu for military protection and, so, the state was to keep and maintain the British force and was to pay for the expenditure incurred. In this way the Company was able to maintain a large standing army at a local ruler's expense and the ruler had to dissolve his own armed forces. The state's foreign policy was transferred to the Company. The ruler could not declare war or form alliances with any other states without consulting the Company. A British resident was posted at the ruler's court to keep an eye on the internal affairs of the state. All other Europeans were to be expelled from the state except the British.

One of the reasons why the East India Company compelled the rulers of the regional states to expel other Europeans from their respective states was because by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the local potentates were attempting to empower themselves to defend and expand their power and for this purpose they were modernizing their armed forces by recruiting European mercenaries who were skilled in artillery, strategic warfare and organizing the army. They were primarily concerned with military affairs and would not indulge in the factional politics of the courts. The Marathas had employed the largest number of European mercenaries. Benoit de Boigne from the Dutch of Savoy rose to command a Maratha army. He was succeeded by Perron. The Nizam of Hyderabad had a very popular French force commanded by Francois de Raymond. Some soldiers of fortune were even able to carve out small independent kingdoms. Irishman George Thomas rose from the lowest ranks of Irish society to a ruler of a small kingdom founded by him in modern districts viz. Rohtak and Hisar in Haryana. Many deserters from the European companies in India joined the armies of Indian rulers. The Sultanate of Mysore had employed a number of deserters from the English military service in its army and one important reason for their desertion was the allurements of higher salary, perks and early promotions. That is why it was important for the English Company to put a check on this. The Subsidiary Alliance was instrumental not only in stopping the local potentates from modernizing their armies but accepting and maintaining the army of the Company at their own cost and forcing them to disband their own armies.

Besides, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century the English Company was also attempting to manage its army. Before its territorial conquests the Company, as a corporate entity, was primarily concerned with protecting its assets in the form of trading posts or factories. For this reason, it maintained a small army of mercenaries. The Carnatic Wars led to changes within the evolution of the civil-military establishment of the Company in the Madras Presidency. In 1748 Major Stringer Lawrence was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of Fort William. One hundred and fifty British troops led by Major Stringer Lawrence arrived in Madras to defend the fort and reform the Company troops. He had already fought in Spain and in the Jacobite Rebellion and, thus, he had sufficient knowledge of military affairs. As an experienced commander he equipped, trained and disciplined the Company troops on the lines of the British troops. The Company army was commanded by European officers but most of the troops were Indian soldiers and were known as sepoys. The Major is regarded as the father of the Indian Army. It was in this new army that Robert Clive as a young soldier started his career in the Company as a clerk. Clive also introduced some military reforms after the success of the Battle of Arcot. He established regular Indian battalions and armed them on European lines. There was a rapid expansion of the Madras and Bengal armies as an outcome of military confrontations with the French and several regional states. As per scholarly estimates, between 1749 and 1778 the army of the Company in all three presidencies grew from only about 3000 to around 67,000 men and the vast majority of soldiers were sepoys in infantry battalions. The European infantry battalions also rose in number. The Subsidiary Alliance relieved the Company from the expenses on its armed forces. Also, it aided the Company to have control over internal as well as external affairs of the state and this way it was able to establish its supremacy.

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## 19.5 FROM INDIA TO CHINA: OPIUM AND TEA

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The acquisition of territories in India and the control over the revenue of these conquered territories enabled the English East India Company to support both its political and commercial aspirations, not just in India alone but in other parts of the world too. Therefore, when by the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century a change in Company's trading patterns was crystallizing the Company was able to devise a strategy that exploited the resources of the regions it controlled in India and use it for its further expansions. The 1600s and 1700s witnessed the Company principally concentrating on the trade of textiles as Indian cotton textiles were in vogue in Britain so much so that it threatened to destroy the British textile industry. The British Government even passed a law called the Calico Act in 1720, forbidding its people to use Indian chintz. The Industrial Revolution enabled Britain to manufacture garments in its own factories in bulk at cheaper rates. Also, there was an increase in the demand for Chinese tea in Europe. However, the Chinese Qing government was only interested to trade their products for silver. This was not financially lucrative for the Company. But, the Company was successful in compelling China to shift from silver to opium as the chief trade-medium. Opium became one of British India's most important exports to China during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Since there was an increasing demand for opium in South-east Asia and China, it was initially procured from Malwa in Central India and, later, the traders started to buy opium from the market in Patna as well. Captain Archibald Hamilton observes that Patna in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was "frequented by Europeans, where the English and Dutch

have factories. It produces so much opium that it serves all the countries in India with that commodity.” The British East India Company eventually took over the opium trade from Portugal and the Dutch East India Company and established its monopoly. With the conquest of Bengal, the English Company began to cultivate opium in Bengal, permitting private British traders to sell opium to Chinese smugglers to sell it illegally in China. This, in turn, adversely affected the Chinese trade surplus. But, opium was strictly prohibited in England owing to its harmful effects as emphasized by Lin Zexy, the Imperial Commissioner to Canton, in his official letter to Queen Victoria. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the Company waged two wars on China, purely to secure the right to sell opium there. The success of the world’s first Drug Wars proved to be extremely beneficial to the Company. Through the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 Hong Kong was ceded to the British after the first Opium War. The Company used the profits from the narcotic cultivated in India and sold to China to buy tea, silk and porcelain from China for the European market where these luxury goods were much in demand. The British opium policy is considered to be “the most curious chapters in the annals of European expansion” by David Edward Owen. The opium trade was pivotal in the growth of industrial capitalism reinforcing British imperialism.



Hand-painted Indian chintz, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries (taken from G. P. Baker’s book *Calico Painting and Printing in the East Indies in the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 1921). Source: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. Image Courtesy: Dr. Richa Singh.

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## 19.6 SUMMARY

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To summarize, antagonism over colonial interests, the extension of wars in Europe in India and the French approach in the Carnatic Wars emboldened the English East India Company to interfere into Indian politics. The Carnatic Wars also established

British dominance among European trading companies in India. On the other hand, with the conquest of Bengal the Company's role changed profoundly. It was no longer just a trading company but also a political unit. Bengal became a bridgehead for further territorial expansion of the Company. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Company had a private army twice the size of the British army and it acquired more firepower than any Asian state. Political conquest in India also enabled the Company to expand its commercial activities in China and to finance its narcotic wars. As the political power of the Company Raj was wrested by the British Raj, India became the jewel in the British crown and, thus, began the saga of direct British rule in India.

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## 19.7 GLOSSARY

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- Chintz** : The word 'chintz' comes from the Hindi word *chint* which means variegated. Its origin can be traced back to India. It was either hand-painted or block-printed cotton fabric with natural dyes, using a blend of mordant and resist dye techniques. It gained its popularity in Europe during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Dadani System** : The term *dadani* is derived from the Persian verb *dadan* (دادن) meaning to give, deliver or advance. This was a system prevalent during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in which Indian and European merchants, who were called *dadandar*, made advance payment (*dadan*) while the artisans or merchants who received this payment were called *dadani*.
- Sepoy** : The term 'sepoy' is the anglicised form of the Persian word *sipahi* (سپاهی) meaning soldier or horseman. In the British Indian army sepoy constituted the native infantry.

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## 19.8 EXERCISES

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- 1) Discuss how commercial rivalries between the English East India Company and French East India Company encouraged the former to engage in local politics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Indian regional states.
- 2) What was the role of British policies of the dual government in Bengal and the Subsidiary Alliance in different regional states of India in establishing the authority of the East India Company?
- 3) How is the territorial conquest of India by the East India Company crucial in understanding the development of opium trade between British India and China in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?

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