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## UNIT 8 STATE UNDER THE DELHI SULTANATE

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18th Century Successor  
States

### Structure

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Understanding the State
- 8.3 Textual Sources on Statecraft
- 8.4 Modern Historians on the Nature of the State
- 8.5 Summary
- 8.6 Exercises

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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The process of formation of the Delhi Sultanate started with the rise of Qutbuddin Aibak to power in 1206. However, it was only during Iltutmish's reign that the Sultanate of Delhi in real terms became free from the control of the rulers of Ghazni. Influence of Islamic thinking and tradition definitely had a bearing on the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate, but it was the need of balancing different dominant groups within the ruling elite and the local challenges which primarily governed the decision making process. Satish Chandra writes, '...the state was not a theocracy. .... because *shara* as defined by the clergy was hardly the core concern of the sultans. It was formally Islamic in character, but was based not on social equality, but on hierarchy. In practice, there was little distinction between the lives of the ordinary people, Hindu or Muslim'. (Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals*, Delhi, 1999). In the absence of any written law or constitution the state in the Delhi Sultanate functioned according to wisdom and political pragmatism of the rulers. It is important to understand that the concerns of the state at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century when it was at its formative stage were different from the concerns of the state in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when it got consolidated. So it is suggested that the state under the sultanate needs to be understood as a process rather than a monolithic structure imposed from above. In this Unit we will explain the nature of the state mainly on the basis of two contemporary authoritative texts on state craft- *Adabul Harb Was'h Shujaa't* and *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*. We have also analysed the views of modern historians on the nature of the state. All these should help you to understand the characteristics of the state under the Delhi Sultanate.

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### 8.2 UNDERSTANDING THE STATE

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To study the state under the Delhi Sultanate we need to bear in mind the means of acquiring and maintaining power at that time. While it is true that power could be wrested by a group of people, usually with superior military skills, it is not as if this was enough for the rulers to rule. Rulers felt the need to legitimise their authority through various other means. Legitimation included not just patronage of important groups of people like the nobles or religious classes [in the Delhi Sultanate, the *ulema*, i.e, theologians], architectural constructions, etc. but also by instituting various other systems of administration and control which would allow the ruling classes to demand and extract levies [in the forms of various taxes, for instance] which in turn would allow them to maintain their position of dominance. These administrative structures [which you will read about in Block 6] allowed the rulers to make their presence felt in areas that were far away from the central/political capital of the kingdom. To put it simply, these acts of legitimisation give the state a dominant position in society.

Thus, the state constituted, in real terms, of the central political authority as represented by the king/sultan, his court and courtiers and all his officials who were posted in various parts of the kingdom as a visible appearance of the central ruling power; his

architectural constructions; his currency system, and the entire administrative apparatus which created a basic framework of control through which order and discipline was maintained upon the subjects of the kingdom. It was not a unitary object which may be identified with a single person or institution; rather, it was a category of interlinked and variegated political institutions through which political rule was sought to be stabilised.

In the Delhi Sultanate, the nobility who were an important part of the state, comprised largely of slaves who had very a complex relationship of loyalty with individual rulers. Once their master-ruler died, they had no attachment with the new ruler and often revolted against him. Struggle between the sultans and the nobles for power was a common phenomenon of the Sultanate. In the beginning the Turkish nobles monopolized all powerful positions, but with the coming of the Khaljis the character of the nobility changed. In the subsequent period different sections of the Muslims, including Indian Muslims, got a berth in the nobility. The ruling class in spite of its narrow social base was sensitive to the composite character of the local society. Growth of Sufism and Bhakti movements during the rule of the Delhi Sultanate indicates the spirit of toleration prevailing within the state.

There are certain very clear components of every state; for instance, every state must have a territory to govern over, people to rule over, an army to wage wars and to protect their own territories, a basic structure of laws and administration and officers to carry out their respective duties, etc. Also, we must not confuse the 'state' with 'government'; *state* is the organisation of various segments into an organic whole aimed at controlling its territory, whereas *government* is the actions that the state takes to achieve this end. In other words, it is through *governance* that the state is able to maintain its dominant and hegemonic position over its peoples.

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### 8.3 TEXTUAL SOURCES ON STATECRAFT

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While studying state in ancient India in Block-1 you must have noticed that our main source for the Maryan state was the *Arthashastra*, a treatise on statecraft in ancient India, written by Kautilya or Chanakya, the famous minister of the Mauryan king Chandragupta. In the case of the Delhi sultanate there are few sources which deal directly with the state in the early times. This was so because the Sultanate at this time was at a nascent political stage and was grappling to become stable and strong, a process which could take many years, if not decades. Also, texts and chronicles were usually written as products of patronage for the court; in other words, a scholar would need to seek approval from the Sultan to write about the kingdom, and would in return be given remuneration in various ways. Before we proceed further, it needs to be mentioned that these textual sources are only the views of individuals and may or may not represent the prevailing realities of the times. However, since this is all that we have as evidence, it is useful to know what they say with regard to the state. Two names stand out in the Delhi Sultanate in this matter.

**Fakhr-i Mudabbir's** *Adab ul harb wa'sh Shujat* ['Customs of Kings and Maintenance of the Subjects'] is the first of these texts. It is generally believed that it was written in honour of Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish [r. 1210-1236]. This text is organised in 40 chapters of which the first 12 deal with the virtues, qualities and duties of the sultan, and of details of the qualities that he should look for in his officials. The other 28 chapters concern various aspects of war and how it should be waged.

Mudabbir's text needs to be situated in the context of the Delhi Sultanate which was, at this time, in its infancy. He is therefore eager that power remains in the hands of the ruling classes and the text reflects this concern. Also, there was the threat of the Mongols from Central Asia at this time, and all this together created a sense of insecurity amongst the court intelligentsia. Information provided by him for our study of the state is aplenty, and the two following points are illustrative of the immediate concerns which determine the contents of his text.

- He is clear in his suggestion that before attacking or invading an enemy territory, the sultan must formally invite the opponents to either accept Islam [and thus his superiority] or agree to pay *jizya*, a tax payed by non-Muslims to the Muslim rulers. (Quoted in Aziz Ahmad, 'Trends in the Political Thought of Medieval India', *Studia Islamica*, 17, p.122, 1962).
- At another point he mentions that if a Muslim city is besieged by non-Muslims then Muslim women can march to its defence without the permission of their men, and slaves [who were employed in large numbers both by the sultan and the nobility at that time] without the permission of their masters. (Quoted in Ahmad, Trends in the Political Thought of Medieval Muslim India', p.112).

Both these examples show that the 'state' and its ideologues were concerned about how to rule over a vast non-Muslim population in the subcontinent, and were trying to articulate various ways of doing so. While the first example is one which suggests peaceful negotiation, the second one is more militaristic and aggressive.

A few chapters of the book are also devoted to the theme as to how the state should govern its domains. As mentioned earlier, while the initial chapters advise the ruler on the virtues and qualities of rulers and administrative governance, the majority of the text is engaged with the idea of warfare. Considering that the text was presented to a sultan its dominant concern with warfare surely hints at the need for such advice at the time.

In explaining the duties and responsibilities of the king and his officers, Mudabbir classifies the state as either 'oppressive' [dominated by exploitation and force] or 'just' [which leads to general welfare and prosperity]. Justice has been one of the most important duties of the Islamic ruler from the earliest times, and finds mention in almost all texts relating to government. Towards this end there are strong moral exhortations for the officers in performing their duties. Therefore, it is obvious that the writer was keen that the state be seen in positive light by the subjects, and state officers must behave responsibly and fairly to ensure the stability and longevity of the state.

What is important to remember is that at this point there seems to be no definite, given structure called the 'state'; what we have [as gleaned from this and other evidence] is a process at work to attain administrative and political coherence through proper, effective functioning. Towards that end, Mudabbir's concerns are with ways in which this may be achieved and power be retained in the hands of the ruling classes.

Also, we should remind ourselves that it was perhaps for the first time in the political history of Islamic States that an Islamic ruling class found itself in a situation wherein the largest part of the subjects belonged to other religious traditions. This reality of the Indian subcontinent was a peculiar situation for which particular solutions and advice was needed. Actions based on traditional religious advice would hardly help the political state to function sensibly; what was required was an intelligently argued understanding both of political aims and of the ground realities. This is something which would manifest itself in the writings of our next author, Ziya Barani.

Barani was a counsellor in the court of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq [r. 1324-1352]. He has written a number of texts, but what concerns us here is his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* ['Precepts on Governance'] which he wrote sometime between 1352-57 A.D. This text is arranged in the form of 24 'advices' thus underlining the didactic nature of the text. It speaks of the proper ways of governance, and the text has been considered by many modern scholars as the first systematic enumeration of the art of governance in the Delhi Sultanate, and the only known text to do so.

The central point of Barani's ideas on state and governance is also justice, the proper administration of which he considers to be the main duty of the ruler. He too is concerned with the maintenance of power for the ruling classes; in fact, he is far more emphatic than Mudabbir in his ideas about the virtues and vices of the high- and low-born people respectively. Contradictions are evident in his writings as well, although he was writing at a time when the Sultanate was much better grounded in its role as the state in the subcontinent. Thus, on the one hand he speaks at length about the virtues of the Muslims and the importance of giving high-born Muslims important state offices and speaks vociferously against the employment of Hindus, and the low-born people by the state; on the other hand, his idea of justice transmutes to clemency and mercy such as in the suspension of *jizya* when crops fail, or the distribution of state charity to the needy among the non-Muslims. His idea of a good 'state' therefore is one which would take the interests of both the ruling elites and the subjects into consideration.

Unlike Mudabbir, Barani does not repose much confidence in the inherent moral qualities of people. He does acknowledge them, but urges the sultan to use force where necessary to make the presence of the state effective. However, Barani's crowning contribution is his idea of 'state laws' [*zawabit*], which is unique to him. This was articulated by Barani bearing in mind the realities of the Delhi Sultanate in which the state had to survive. Thus while the ideal Muslim ruler would be one who would uphold the faith of Islam, and punish all 'infidels', in reality this was not possible in a land where the majority of the subjects were 'non-believers'. According to Barani, through the pursuit of justice the sultan could continue to be the 'shadow of God on Earth', realising temporal rule through divine mandate; at the same time, the realities of the situation meant that the Sultan could not always follow the prescriptions suggested by religion and its code of conduct. And since the maintenance of the kingdom and political rule—in short, the 'state'—was the primary objective of the sultan, it was often required that he ruled by pragmatism rather than according to what religion demanded of him in its strictest sense. Towards that end, Barani is the first person to articulate a set of 'state laws' which would help the sultan govern more effectively, such that his authority and privilege would be maintained. These 'state laws' allowed the sultan to override the precepts of religion if and when the need arose to maintain his hold over his territory; Barani was clear in his idea that if there was ever a conflict between political pragmatism [*siyasat*] and religious demands [*sharia*], then political pragmatism would always prevail.

In discussing Barani's ideas on state and governance, Irfan Habib says that his vision of the state included a display of pomp and splendour to create an impact of the state and its might on the minds of the people; he also advocated restraint in the use of excessive violence, aware as he was that it led to a cyclical displacement of the ruling classes which in turn undermined the stability of the state.

Thus, between Mudabbir and Barani, it is clear that 'state' was not seen as a monolithic institution which could be simply superimposed by the ruling elite on the subjects of their conquered areas. On the contrary, 'state' was almost always a processual formation, articulated through multiple actions and a complex network of advise and practice, where the sultans had to take into account the ground realities of every area before deciding upon any action or policy. What was effective in one area may or may not be good for another area. Of course, there were some features which were more or less universal, such as taxation, as mentioned earlier. But the role of officials who would serve in the distant parts of the kingdom, the nature of local interests [e.g., some areas could be more connected to trading activities while others were more dependent on agriculture], the vagaries of everyday life [floods and famines], all went into determining how the 'state' would manifest and project itself. The gist of all this was the maintenance of power and effective rule, and almost any policy or method was acceptable towards that end. In this too, the 'state' in the Delhi Sultanate was very different from modern states which function on the basis of written laws and practices as enshrined in the constitutions.



**Map 1: Delhi Sultanate**

**Source:** After A.B.M. Habibullah: The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India



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## 8.4 MODERN HISTORIANS ON THE NATURE OF THE STATE

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Modern scholars have used these texts and various other sources of evidence to opine about the nature of the 'state' under the Delhi Sultanate. It has been the focus of a lot of debate especially because it is generally believed that the Delhi Sultanate laid the groundwork upon which the Mughal Empire was later able to build its might and splendour. In his *Economy and Society*, Max Weber remarked in passing that the Delhi Sultanate was a 'patrimonial state'. In explaining this concept, Jakob Rösel says that such a state is one in which the rulers are dependent upon a small number of trained and loyal state officers to exert control over the kingdom, and are involved in specialised administrative functions such as collection of taxes, control over trade and commercial activities, law and order, etc. In most other matters, it vests power in the hands of local power-groups and intermediaries at various provincial and regional levels. This idea, however, requires much investigation for which sufficient evidence may not be available at present and has therefore not been very popular in later characterisations of the Delhi Sultanate although it has been applied more successfully to the Mughal empire.

Historians like Stanley Lane-Poole, Ishwari Prasad, A.B.M. Habibullah, Muhammad Habib, K.A. Nizami, etc. and, more recently, Peter Jackson have characterised the Delhi Sultanate as a 'centralised state'. This needs to be explained. The Delhi Sultanate was established after the second battle at Tarain in 1192 A.D. One of the important reasons why the Turks were able to establish a base in the subcontinent — first in Lahore, and after 1206 A.D. in Delhi which served as the capital of their kingdom thereafter with a brief interregnum between 1324-27 A.D. — was, according to Simon Digby (*War-horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate: A Problem of Military Supplies*) because of their superior military strength and organisational capabilities. On the other side, as Romila Thapar has argued (*Early India: From the Origins to A.D. 1300*) that disunity and in-fighting among the local [especially Rajput] power-blocs, along with inferior military tactics led to the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan in 1192 A.D. The kingdom that emerged thereafter was one which showed relative stability and was able to expand and consolidate its political base in course of time. This was in large measure because they were able to harness various resources available to them — a plan that would not have been possible without a centralised, authoritarian state which controlled the various organs of the state to control its resources for its benefit. To paraphrase Hermann Kulke, these models place the state under the Delhi Sultanate at the end of a continuum of pre-modern state formations. They depict the post-1200 medieval ('Muslim') state as a polity headed by a strong ruler, equipped with an efficient and heirarchically organized central administration based on a religiously legitimated monopoly of coercion in a (more or less) clearly defined territory.

However, more recent research has shown that while it is true that political rule of the Turks survived and consolidated itself consistently, it was not a smooth process which was unchallenged. The degree to which the state was 'centralised', i.e., how far the central, political power-group of rulers and court nobles could exert actual power and control in the wider kingdom has been much debated and there is as yet no consensus about it. Such studies suggest that the state at this time was only slightly bureaucratized, and there is no agreement about the degree of political fragmentation or segmentation on the one hand, and temporally and spatially fluctuating unitary tendencies within these states on the other. Central political power was constantly being challenged by various local power groups, and the sultan at the centre spent precious time and resources trying to subjugate such forces. Opposition also came from other nobles who were posted in different parts of the empire [as *'iqtadars*; officers assigned territories in lieu of salary, the revenue returns of which

were enjoyed by the officer with surplus going to the state] and wanted to carve out their own independent principalities.

It may however be said with some surety that there was a certain degree of centralised authority at work in the empire, and even where local powers were dominant they were expected to acknowledge the court and the sultan as their superiors. This is obvious from the fact that often the sultan would need to wage wars against ‘rebellious’ groups, be they state officials who had turned against the centre, or other local powers. Also, the centre was present in various parts of the kingdom through activities viz. tax collection, building roads, architecture, mosques, giving charity to religious foundations and individuals, and so on. An important feature of the presence of the state was the constant movement of the army from one part of the sultanate to another as it expanded its domains or tried to suppress uprisings. Often, local areas had to extend hospitality — in the form of providing food and shelter — to the central armies as they passed by. It should be mentioned here that in many cases [in the Delhi Sultanate] the local areas were governed by local chiefs, and even everyday administration continued according to local custom. The central presence in local areas did not necessarily upturn all existing structures at work, and they often worked in unison. A uniform administration across the empire would occur only with the maturation of political and administrative rule under the Mughals, which would be more than 200 years later.

There have been some other writings which have tried to characterise the state from other perspectives: Stephan Conermann, for instance, has suggested a more economic [‘prebendal’] nature of the Delhi Sultanate on the basis of his study of the *Rihla* of the 14<sup>th</sup> century traveller Ibn Battuta, while also emphasising the features of ‘patrimonialism’. Other scholars have focussed on other power groups, such as the sufis, to argue that the effectiveness of the state was often hindered because of the power of the sufi spiritual masters [*pir*] who had a strong influence over the people of the surrounding areas. Importantly, in this case the religion of the local population did not come in the way of the influence of the sufis. Usually the sufis settled in areas that were a little away from the urban areas, but perhaps the most dramatic situation arose in the reign of Sultan Ala uddin Khalji [r. 1295-1316], when the sufi *pir* Shaikh Nizam ud-din Auliya set up his hospice in the capital city itself, thereby posing a very important challenge to the effectiveness of the sultan’s political rule.

It is on such occasions that it becomes clear that for the effective execution of the policies of the ‘state’, it was necessary for rulers to keep politics separate from religion and religious activities and individuals. Such examples, as also the nature of language in the various textual sources available to us [which uses a religiously-coloured vocabulary] may sometimes suggest that the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate were engaged primarily in the glorification of Islam and the subjugation of other religious groups in their territories. Such an impression is abetted by the superior and authoritative position that the theologians were said to occupy in the court and other important offices that they may have held; but a careful examination will show that offices of the greatest consequence, especially of military command, went to able and loyal warriors who never practiced religious dogmatism. The theologians were in reality one [of many] group who remained in the official bureaucracy and served the purpose of legitimising kingly rule [through their knowledge, which was always couched in religion], of dispensing justice and education in *madrasas*.

But the suggestion that religion was the touchstone of medieval politics in the subcontinent — that the Delhi Sultanate should thus be termed an ‘Islamic’ state — is not fully supported by the available evidence. They may have sometimes used religion as a means to mobilise people or to explain certain actions, but all actions were in their essence political, and the ‘state’ under the Delhi Sultanate never took any special action for the glorification of religion if there was no attendant political gain.

As mentioned earlier, the 'state' also manifested itself through a variety of other actions in the larger realm. Chief among them were acts of building, and charity. As part of the dominance of the state, as also a physical marker of its presence, the state often encouraged construction of buildings, mosques, or canals and wells, etc. These would be physical, visible reminders of the presence of the state all over the realm, as also, manifestation of the glory of the state. Finally, the state also gave charitable endowments to the needy and to the intellectuals as part of its, patronage of its subjects.

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## 8.5 SUMMARY

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In a way of summing up it may be said that the state under the Delhi Sultanate was not a unified entity which existed from the beginning to the end as a singular category. Rather, it was the coming together of various actions of the ruling classes as part of their act of effective governance. Some of its components were universal, such as taxation; others were variable, and there were still others which grew with the passage of time and according to need. Obviously, the immediate concerns of a newly emerging 'state' at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century were different from those of a more mature and confident political 'state' at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. So, while the category of 'state' may still be employed as part of studying political governance under the Delhi Sultanate, it needs to be understood as a process rather than as a composite bloc that was superimposed upon the people. The 'state' was an organic entity whose primary exercise was to ensure political dominance and effective rule, and this was possible only by addressing the ambitions of the ruling classes and the needs and demands of the ruled; towards that end, through its many actions and offices it aimed to integrate the diverse components of the kingdom into one unified, governed whole. Any action was good as long as it achieved this desired end. It must therefore be seen as a continuing process of governance which, at particular points of time, could be identified as 'state', but when seen over a larger period, would emerge as a process at work. This governmental scaffolding was, of course, organised around the central person of the ruler whose own authority was enhanced by a skilful combination of effective rule, charismatic authority complemented by religious sanction from the *ulema*, and the bureaucracy as its main structural expression.

Thus, in as much as the 'state' was an expression of the vested interests of the ruling classes, it was a public political institution whose primary function was to bind together its subject population into a, universally disciplined mass — a community of people acculturated to structures of power — upon which political authority and power could be imposed. 'Justice', howsoever understood and articulated by the different groups, was the central axis of the state, and the degree of its success depended upon the skill with which the rulers were able to mobilize the [mainly economic] resources at their disposal, as also various other internal and external factors which determined their effectiveness.

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## 8.6 EXERCISES

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- 1) Write a note on the features of the state under the Delhi Sultanate giving reference to Fakhr-i-Mudabir's and Ziya Barani's texts.
- 2) Analyse the views of modern scholars on the nature of state under the Delhi Sultanate.



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## UNIT 9 VIJAYANAGARA, BAHMANI AND OTHER KINGDOMS

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18th Century Successor States

### Structure

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Major Trends in the Historiography of Vijayanagara
- 9.3 Foundation of the Vijayanagara Kingdom
- 9.4 Nature of the State
- 9.5 Resources of the Realm
- 9.6 Continuity and Change
- 9.7 The Bahmani Kingdom
- 9.8 The Kingdom of Bengal
- 9.9 The Kingdom of Malwa
- 9.10 Summary
- 9.11 Exercises

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### 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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Decision of the Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq to shift the capital back to Delhi from Daulatabad in the early half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century was followed by the rise of a number of independent territorial states in different regions. Most prominent among them were the kingdom of Vijayanagara in the region to the south of the river Krishna, the Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan and the kingdoms of Bengal, Malwa, Gujarat, Jaunpur, etc. The creation of new kingdoms shows the weakening control of central political authority over the provinces and the tendency among provincial chiefs to proclaim their independent political authority in their respective areas of influence. Regarding the nature of polity and the mechanism of governance of these states we find broad similarities with the state under the Delhi sultans. However new experiments were also made by these new territorial states depending on the local needs and traditions. The major challenge before the rulers of these states was to maintain balance among various groups of nobles who were always a threat to the throne. The rulers used religious ideology to legitimise their rule. Till the emergence of the Mughal state these powers were successful in enjoying independent political authority in their respective regions. Thrust of this Unit is to familiarise you with this major trend of medieval polity during 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries giving examples from the Vijayanagara, the Bahmani, Bengal and Malwa kingdoms. Comparatively more historical researches have been conducted on Vijayanagara, so you will find more details about it as compared to other three kingdoms. Let us first start with the Vijayanagara kingdom.

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### 9.2 MAJOR TRENDS IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF VIJAYANAGARA

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In view of large number of researches about the history of the Vijayanagara state it is not possible to analyse every work and comment on it in this Unit. What is attempted here is to identify major trends in the historiography of the Vijayanagara state and we hope this will help you to understand diverse views on this state.

Sporadic writings of Mark Wilks and Colin Mackenzie inaugurated in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century an exercise which was to attract several scholars in the next century. A volume on the history of Vijayanagara appeared in the year 1900 and its author was Robert Sewell, a British official of the Madras Civil Service. The work

was entitled *A Forgotten Empire*. It has been rightly observed by Burton Stein, another historian on Vijayanagara, that Sewell's work was not for the sake of pure knowledge but for the purpose of controlling a subject people whose past was to be so constructed as to make the British rule a necessity and a virtue.

S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar's works on the Vijayanagara history and allied topics brought in a new element of nationalist ideas and the ideal of patriotism. His interest in the literary sources helped him to change the course of historical writing and he turned to the study of local magnates in distant places in the Empire. It was with the extensive works of Krishnaswami Aiyangar that the Vijayanagara history was established in academic circles.

Aiyangar's works were followed by the studies of B.A. Salatore and N. Venkatramanayya. Aiyangar and B.A. Salatore viewed the Vijayanagara history from a regional perspective focusing on Karnataka as the home of the founders of Vijayanagar kingdom whereas N. Venkatramanayya and N. K. Sasthri presented it from an Andhra perspective. Salatore presented Vijayanagara as an expression of Karnataka nationalism while N. Venkatramanayya challenged this view emphasizing the point that the Vijayanagara rulers had adopted the Kakatiya method of administration. He referred to the '*Nayankara*' system as an example of Kakatiya influence.

Working under K.A. Nilakanta Sasthri, T.V. Mahalingam studied the administrative and social aspects of the Vijayanagara history. As stated by Nilakanta Sasthri, the work of Mahalingam was meant to focus on the Tamil region especially the social and administrative studies dealing with the third dynasty. According to Burton Stein, 'Mahalingam remarkably treats the routine post classical age in south India as a vast undifferentiated period with evidence of political usages from widely disparate times and places taken as elaborations upon some single structure of power relations'.

Nilakanta Sasthri's '*A History of South India*' has a full chapter and a portion of another chapter on the Vijayanagara having maximum weightage on political history. However it has been suggested by scholars that his major contribution to the Vijayanagara history is the three-volume work entitled *Further sources of Vijayanagara History*, edited jointly with Venkataramanayya. For a long time K.A. Nilakanta Sasthri and his followers dominated the scene of Vijayanagara history in particular and history of South India in general. Their models and methods were accepted uncritically until Burton Stein wrote a very strong critique of the existing model.

Burton Stein introduced the 'Segmentary state model' which he borrowed from Southal who formulated it to explain the Alur society of South Africa. First he applied it in his studies of the Chola history and polity and then he extended it to explain the Vijayanagara power structure in his book '*Peasant State and Society*'. In the *New Cambridge History of India* series Burton Stein presented the Vijayanagara history in this conceptual frame work. Segmentary state model and its applicability in Indian situations have been questioned by several scholars, especially Herman Kulke who showed its limitations by highlighting the actual sovereignty of kings of Orissa against the ritual sovereignty propounded by the Segmentary state model.

Recently Karashima – Subbarayalu- Shanmughan team has attempted to analyse the Vijayanagara history and their method of study is based on details of Vijayanagara inscriptions in Tamilnadu. This team of scholars rejects Stein's Segmentary state model and tries to explain the Vijayanagara polity by applying the feudal model with significant variations. Introducing the results of the new study Karashima suggests that 'the strength of the state control over *nayakas* seems to have made Vijayanagara feudalism rather similar to the Tokugawa feudalism of Japan'.

Burton Stein's work has however stimulated a new interest in the study of South Indian history in general and the Vijayanagara history in particular. A number of

studies are done in various centres in India and abroad and these studies are expected to open up new vistas in the study of transitional stages in the society and polity of pre-modern South India.

### 9.3 FOUNDATION OF THE VIJAYANAGARA KINGDOM

The foundation of the Vijayanagara state towards the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century is generally attributed to a group of five brothers, namely, Bukka, Harihara, Kampana, Mudappa and Marappa. The founding figures of the kingdom are also known as the Sangamas, after their father's name. The kingdom takes its name from its capital Vijayanagara, 'the city of victory', which was built on the southern bank of the river Tungabhadra.

The emergence of the Vijayanagara state is explained as a "Hindu" resistance against the "Muhammadan" invasion. This theme of the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy was introduced by Robert Sewell who is the author of the first standard work on the history of the Vijayanagara empire. The literary sources and the epigraphical records of the early Vijayanagara period identify the invaders as the *Turushkas* or *Turkiks*, an ethnic or political identity which was replaced by the idea of Hindu-Muslim rivalry and this semantic perspective is significant in the context of imperialist historiography of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It has to be noted in this connection that as observed by some early historians, 'Muslims had been part of South Indian society for a long time before Vijayanagara was founded. Moreover, they were employed in the native military forces by the Hindu Kings such as the Hoysala king Jagadekamalla'. (Stein)

To begin with the Sangamas had control over only a small area comprising Gutty and its surroundings. According to the traditions, they could succeed in building up a vast empire with the blessings of the saint Vidyaranya. However, it has been observed by recent historians that Vidyaranya emerged as an important personage on the Vijayanagara scene only several decades after the empire had been founded. This does not minimize the importance of the role played by cultural leaders in mobilising popular support for the rulers.

In the initial years of the kingdom, the Sangamas were involved in incessant fights against not only 'Muhammadans' but also 'Hindu' rulers. They defeated Rajanarayana Sambuvaraya in 1357, won the war against the Sultan of Madurai in 1370 and thus, by about 1377, at the time of the death of Bukka I, Vijayanagara was the largest regional kingdom in the whole of south India ever to have existed. Bukka's successors continued to extend the empire to the north east by fighting the Kondavidu Reddies of the coastal Andhra and the Velamas of Warangal and even the Gajapati kings of Orissa. Their fight with the Gajapati's continued for about a century. These military operations were possible because Vijayanagara could mobilize resources which were essential for the maintenance of the army and for the project of expansion.

The Vijayanagara kingdom was ruled by four distinct lineages or dynasties. We have mentioned that the kingdom was founded by the Sangamas, sometimes called the Yadavas. Around 1485 the Sangama king Virupaksha II was murdered by his son and after this incident there was a short period of set back which came to an end when Saluva Narasimha founded the line of the Saluvas. After Saluva Narasimha's reign there was again a confusion which ended when the rulers of Tuluva line assumed power in 1505. The Tuluva period is considered to be the heyday of the Vijayanagara kingdom. The last dynasty of the Aravidu line came to power in 1542. By this time this empire had started declining. Under the Aravidus the central power had been weakened and by the late 17<sup>th</sup> century the kingdom was fragmented due to constant conflict with the neighbouring powers and crisis within the state due to the rising aspirations of the military commanders or nayaks.

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## 9.4 NATURE OF THE STATE

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Historians are divided in characterising the Vijayanagara state. T. V. Mahalingam described it as feudal and compared it with the European feudalism. He also highlighted the differences between the western and the Vijayanagara models of feudalism. Mahalingam's opinion was mainly based on his study of the *Nayankara* system. In the Vijayanagara polity, the land was conceived as belonging to the king. Hence he could distribute it to his dependants. Those who held land from the king were called *Nayakas*. These *Nayakas* ruled over the territory thus granted by the king with great autonomy. In return the *Nayakas* had twofold duties:

- 1) remitting an annual financial contribution to the imperial exchequer, and
- 2) maintaining for the king a sufficient number of troops and serving him in his wars.

The *Nayakas* often leased out their lands to tenants on terms similar to those on which they held their lands from the king. This can be described as subinfeudation which was a feature of European feudalism.

There were differences also between the two systems. In Europe the process of fealty was visible according to which the individual small land holder paid homage to the lord and received land from him as a fief in return for services rendered to him on the promises of protection by the lord. This feature is not found in the Vijayanagara Nayak system. *Nayankara* system was an administrative policy of the kings to assign territories to the *Nayakas* in return for military service and a fixed financial contribution. The element of subservience to the politically superior lord predominant in the European feudalism was lacking in the *Nayankara* system according to Mahalingam. *Nayakas* held land in the form of military fief known as *amaram* tenure. Vijayanagara kings assigned heavy responsibilities and duties to nayaks and did not protect them if they failed to perform their duties. Nuniz has stated that they were liable to be ruined and their properties taken away if they did not meet their obligations properly. In European feudalism the society as a whole was chained together by the link of land tenure whereas the *Nayankara* system linked together only a section of the population. Subinfeudation was not practiced on such a large scale in the Vijayanagar empire as in Europe.

Nilakanta Sastri described the Vijayanagara state as 'the nearest approach to a war state ever made by a Hindu Kingdom'. He was following the characterization of Mahalingam. Recently some European scholars have also described the Vijayanagara polity as military feudalism (Kulke and Rothermund). However Burton Stein has vehemently denied that this system could be called a feudal one due to the reason that some of the salient features of feudalism such as homage and vassalage are not found in the Vijayanagara system. Further he sees no tributary relationship either. Stein opines that the Portuguese writings on feudalism should be studied with caution in this respect because their use of the term feudalism must be understood in the context of their own experience and their desire to explain Indian affairs to their European readers in words which were familiar to them. Stein described the system as segmentary in which the king enjoyed a ritual sovereignty which is in contradiction with actual sovereignty. The segmentary model introduced by Stein was challenged by Herman Kulke and others showing that in many parts of India kings enjoyed actual sovereignty over their territory, giving examples of the Suryavanshi kings of Orissa. More recently Karashima, after studying the Tamil epigraphical sources of the Vijayanagara empire in Tamilnadu, has argued that "the strength of the State control over *nayakas* seems to have made 'Vijayanagara feudalism' rather similar to the Tokugawa feudalism of Japan. He adds that if we do not accept the feudal interpretation, we have to find some other logical explanation for the difference between the Chola and the Vijayanagara regimes.



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## 9.5 RESOURCES OF THE REALM

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Agriculture and commerce were the two sources of income for the Vijayanagara rulers. The dry cropping zones which constantly expanded were the agricultural and political frontiers of the Vijayanagara times as stated by Burton Stein. The new settlers from the coastal plains migrated to the interior uplands. Another section who opened up new agrarian tracts were those who subsisted on herding and dry cropping. In the forest clad uplands slash-and-burn cultivation was practiced. The nature of the terrain had much influence in determining the character of the peasantry. It is important to note that these developments in the Vijayanagara agrarian sector resulted in the transformation of the dry uplands of the peninsula from a marginal agricultural and pastoral zone into a zone capable of supporting an increasing number of people and more elaborate social and political institutions.

Trade and commerce had developed even prior to the Vijayanagara period at three levels- local exchange networks, long distance inland trade and overseas trade. Documents from Tamil country bear testimony to the increase in markets (*pettai*), fairs (*sandai*) thereby implying an increase in the local exchange networks. Karashima's study has maintained that compulsion was used to increase production of cash crops such as sugar, pepper etc. indicating linkage between local production and long distance trade, both inland and overseas. The role of coin-money was a notable feature of the trade and commerce under the Vijayanagara rulers. Travel accounts of Chau Ju-Kua, Marco Polo and Iban Battuta all document India's participation in the world trade. These travellers' accounts refer to the situation in the territories of Vijayanagara Kingdom too. They took notice of the development of interior urban centers whose consumption demands buoyed up the coastal emporia. Another stimulus for the trade and urbanization in the empire came from the Brahmanical temple complexes which functioned as pilgrim centers, military centers, political capitals and commercial centers. Contemporary epigraphical records and literary sources document that cash revenue was collected from trade and from the production of textiles, metal goods etc. "Customs collections at major trade centers were let on rent agreements or gutta from powerful state level magnates" (Stein). According to Nuniz, the Portuguese chronicler, the annual collection of customs from one of the gateways of Vijayanagara was rented for twelve thousand gold coins. It has been observed by historians that customs or tribute paid by merchants in port towns in the time of Devaraya II could have provided the means for him to pay for horses imported from Ormuz and elsewhere as well as providing a surplus to pay for the skilled horsemen to use them. Nilakanta Sastri observes that the proportion of produce claimed as revenue varied from the traditional one sixth to as much as half the gross yield. In additions to the income from agriculture and trade, the Vijayanagara state collected taxes from professionals and houses. Fee for various kinds of licenses, transit and market dues and judicial fines were other sources of income of the state. Tax farming was very common, as we have seen in the case of income from one of the gateways of the capital city. A big share of this income was spent for the upkeep of the army. Another share went for the charitable endowments. Regarding the state expenditure, the ideal was that half of the income should be set apart for military. From the remaining portion half could be spent for the palace maintenance. The rest was to be deposited in the reserve treasury. However, this ideal apart, the practice depended on current exigencies.

The number and variety of tax-terms found in the epigraphical sources of the Vijayanagara rulers clearly show that every possible source was tapped to enhance the income from revenue. There are instances of popular revolts against the high rate of taxation though they are rare. Such a resistance was staged in the year 1429 in the Vellar river valley in South Arcot. The unrest was caused by the introduction of a land measure which was very inconvenient to the cultivators. The royal authorities must have made more demands because the artisans and petty merchants also joined hands with the cultivators in revolting against the authorities. Karashima informs us

that the Vijayanagara rulers tried to adopt effective measures for better administration and that they were successful since we have epigraphical records of the sixteenth century which shed much light on the measures adopted by rulers that gave tax concessions to the common people.

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## 9.6 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

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Elements of continuity and change were an important feature of the administrative structure of this period. The scholarly debate over the elements of continuity and change in the Vijayanagara polity was actually started by Robert Sewell when he wrote that 'it is the epoch of transition from the old to the New'. Among the Indian scholars, those whose researches focused on Karnataka and Andhra (like Venkatramanayya and Saletore) have emphasised continuity and the preservation of ancient usage while those who worked on Tamil country like Nilakanta Sastri and Mahalingam have drawn attention to basic changes.

We have noted earlier the changes that were occurring in the land-use and agricultural production during the Vijayanagara rule. In the agrarian sector there was a general trend of expansion from the lower plains and river valleys to upland areas. This seems to indicate the pressure to bring more and more land under cultivation. The above mentioned movement from one geographical terrain to another terrain was followed by an increased emphasis on cash-crops and market – oriented agricultural production. The rough nature of the upland terrain necessitated the emergence of a group of cultivators with fighting spirit and therefore, the 'agrarian frontiers' of the Vijayanagara kingdom attracted the Reddis and Velamas of Andhra and the Vanniyar of Tamil country who were warlike peasantry. This process was started in the earlier epoch of history but it became widespread in this period.

Recent enquiries into the Tamil sources of the Vijayanagara rule have emphasised an increase in the number of *pettai* (markets) and *santais* (fairs) thereby pointing out the spread of 'urbanism' into newly developed areas. A crucial change in the exchange mechanism was the increased prevalence of monetisation. The sudden appearance of a new group of European traders is a development which was to have direct influence not only in trade but also in politics gradually.

The centralised character of the Vijayanagara when compared to previous states in south India has already been noted by historians. The power of authorities who were representatives of the Central government was increasing not only in the villages but in urban centres too. The urban affairs were controlled by local Governors appointed by the central administration instead of assemblies attended by members of various castes as had been the practice previously.

Martial character of the Vijayanagara state is attributed to the Islamic threat. *Nayankara* system has been shown by Burton Stein as a distinctive factor of the age 'not much in function or status but in the degree of power' enjoyed by the regional authorities or the *Nayakas* with regard to:

- 1) the magnitude of local resources commanded and redistributed.
- 2) the independence from local and social constraints,
- 3) their ability to intrude into the local society,
- 4) their persistent independence from and occasional opposition to superordinate authorities,
- 5) superior military technique including fire arms, cavalry and fortification,
- 6) conflicts between Rajas and *Nayakas* stemming from the power of the *Nayakas*. Such conflicts were not unknown in the Chola period but they became more common in this period.
- 7) Brahmanas who had a major political role as *nayaks*.

Studies of the Tamil inscriptional sources have revealed that 'structural changes' which had been taking place during Vijayanagara rule in the middle part of Tamilnadu seem to have led to a new social and political formation by the beginning of the sixteenth century as suggested by Noboru Karashima.

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## 9.7 THE BAHMANI KINGDOM

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The basis of sovereignty was 'force'. The kingdom originated due to the revolt of the amirs of the Delhi Sultanate. The nobility played an important role in the political sphere, especially, in the process of assumption of power by the ruler and providing legitimacy to the ruler. The support of the nobility was important for the king to assume and maintain power. The Sufis and the ulema also played an important role in legitimising state power through religious and philosophical ideology. After the establishment and consolidation of Bahmani rule kingship was confined to the royal house of the Bahmanis. Sultan ascended the throne through either nomination by the entrenched king in which sometimes primogeniture was followed or through a process of selection by the ruling king, nobles and theologians. At times when a minor was declared as sultan the actual power was wielded by the nobility as regent of the king.

Source material for reconstructing the history of the Bahmani Kingdom consists of contemporary writings in the forms of historical narratives, travellers' accounts and works written immediately after the period. *Futuh – us – Salatin* by Isami is the only extant contemporary work on the history of the Bahmani Kingdom. The author attached himself to the first sultan of the dynasty and started writing his work in 1349 and completed it the next year. After a description of the Delhi Sultanate up to the time of Muhammad bin Tughlaq the author writes about the foundation of the Bahmani Kingdom and the political disturbances in the Deccan. He gives valuable information on various aspects of history of the Deccan and south India. There are some late compositions also on the Bahmani Kingdom, which were written after the decline of the dynasty. Among these *Burhan – I – Maasir* of Sayed Ali Tabataba deserves mention. The author was a contemporary of Ferishta. He was a member of the court of Nizam Shahis of Ahamadnagar. While writing about the Nizam Shahi sultans, Bahmani rule is prefixed as an introduction to it. Ferishta, whose name was Muhammad Kasim, was perhaps the best known historian of the period. He wrote *Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi* in which he has discussed Bahmani rule. *Tazkirat – ul – muluk* is another work of the period written by a merchant from Shiraz and therefore he is better known as Shirazi.

Among the travellers, the most notable person is Athanasius Nikitin who visited the capital Bidar in the days of Mahmud Gawan, the famous Prime minister of the Sultan Muhammad Shah. Nikitin was in Bidar for four years from 1470-74. He has emphasised the great contrast between the huge wealth and luxury of the nobility and the miserable poverty of the common people in the countryside.

The realm of the Bahmani kingdom comprised roughly of the Deccan and part of south India upto the Krishna river which was the northern border of the strong Vijayanagara state. The region has low lying plains as well as a dry zone of uplands. The rivers of the western Deccan do not form fertile valleys (on account of rocky terrain) in the process of flowing from west to eastern coast where they form the delta. Alluvial soil is therefore not available on their banks for cultivation. At the same time the low lying plains are watered by river systems and many places in the Krishna Godavari doab regions, had a net work of canal system even in the period under discussion.

What we have noted in the case of the Vijayanagara empire is equally applicable to the territory of the Bahmani sultans also. The general trend of an expansion of cultivation from the plains to the upland zones was also an important feature of Bahmani period. Special mention should be made about Golconda which later emerged as an important kingdom in the Deccan on the eastern Coast between the Krishna and the Godavari. Golconda was an agricultural zone where several food grains and cash crops were cultivated due to a well developed network of canals. Weaving and craft industries flourished in the region due to the encouragement and patronage extended by rulers of the region. Golconda was famous for a particular variety of fabric and also for fine steel. Swords and arrowheads were exported from Golconda



to distant places as a result of the superior steel technology of the area. Above all Golconda mines were famous for their diamonds. Thus the realm of the sultans was to some extent rich in certain resources but it also comprised of arid zones with no yield of any kind. The economic resources of the region especially the agrarian produce were not plentiful and therefore for sustaining the kingdom wars had to be waged for resource mobilisation from rich tracts. The physiography and economy of the realm is a determinant factor in shaping the political history. The regions of Deccan and the semi arid uplands of south India were not favourable for cultivation. Therefore the dynasties were not blessed with abundant fertile arable land. Almost all dynasties of the period under discussion suffered from acute shortage of resources due to several reasons including the luxury of the nobility and the need for maintaining an army for security and expansion of the territories of the kingdom. The incessant battles and massacres of the period should be understood against this background instead of explaining the conflicts among the states in terms of religious rivalries.

The Bahmani Kingdom made its appearance on the political horizon of Deccan due to the revolts towards the end of the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. The sultan became suspicious of amiran-i-sada posted in the Deccan. The sultan had ordered that the 'amirs of the hundred' to be taken to Broach under the escort of the governor of Daulatabad. The amirs were aware of the fate which earlier befell the amirs in the neighbourhood of Malwa, who were butchered. So they decided to revolt against this 'prejudiced attitude' and imprisoned the weak governor of Daulatabad and assumed power, proclaiming one among themselves the king of the Deccan under the title Nasir-ud-din Shah. An imperial army led by Muhammad himself rushed to Daulatabad and defeated the rebels and shut them up in the fort. Somehow, a few of them including the brothers of the newly appointed king managed to escape to Gulbarga under the leadership of Hasan Gangu who was also known as Zafar Khan. After three months Zafar Khan gathered an army and reached Daulatabad. Zafar Khan could easily defeat the imperial army and the new king Nasir-ud-din readily abdicated the throne in favour of Zafar Khan who proclaimed himself sultan under the title Alauddin Bahman Shah. This was the beginning of the Bahmani line of Kings. At the height of its power, the Bahmani sultans held sway over a vast territory from the river Tapti in the north and Krishna and Tungbhadra in the South from Arabian Sea in the west to Orissa in the east. The territory of the Bahmanis was encircled by hostile neighbours both in the north as well as in the south. In the south the Vijayanagara rulers were a constant threat to the Bahmanis who had an eye on the fertile Raichur Doab. The political history of the Bahmani Kingdom was actually marked by conflicts and rivalries with various powers of the region and within the Bahmani state system itself. An important rival was the Vijayanagara kingdom which was fast increasing its control over a vast territory to the south of Krishna river. The other problem was the internal fissiparous trend between two groups of Muslim nobility. These Muslim groups were the Deccanis who were the descendants of the Muslims who had been staying in India for a long time and the *Paradesis* who were foreigners who had recently arrived. The Deccanis were mainly the Sunnis whereas the *Paradesis* belonged to the Shiah sect and this aggravated their rivalry.

According to some historians, Bahmani kingdom enjoyed its glory in the period from 1461 to 1481 when Mahmud Gawan was the prime minister. Mahmud Gawan belonged to the *Paradesi* group and was the follower of the Shiah sect. Gawan conducted many successful military operations and extended the Bahmani territory. Gawan was an able administrator also and he introduced several administrative reforms including a proper survey and assessment of land. These reforms made him unpopular among the Deccani section of the nobility who held five out of eight governorships.

The hostile group conspired against the prime minister. There are stories about the connivance of the Deccani section against Gawan. Once they managed to get a blank sheet of paper with Gawan's seal affixed on it. The enemies wrote a letter, purporting to be from Mahmud Gawan, to the king of Orissa and told him that the people of the Deccan were weary of Muhammad's tyranny and urged him to invade the country.

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The sultan came to know about the letter and he immediately sent for Gawan. However, some friends advised Gawan to flee to Gujarat, but he presented himself before the Sultan who asked him about the punishment for treason against the Sovereign. Gawan replied that death was the punishment to be given for such treason. In spite of Gawan's explanations he was ordered to be beheaded and the order was executed immediately. The story continues that after realising his mistake the sultan drank himself to death before long. This was the beginning of the end of the Bahmani kingdom. It was during the lifetime of Mahmud Gawan that the Russian merchant Athanasius Nikitin visited Bidar. Nikitin records that the nobility in the kingdom enjoyed all sorts of luxury and led an extravagant life while the common people including cultivators, artisans and service groups lived in utter poverty.



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## 9.8 THE KINGDOM OF BENGAL

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Bengal being far off from Delhi on a number of occasions tried to assert its independence from the Sultanate of Delhi. Ikhtiyar-ud-din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji's invasion of Bengal at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the flight of Lakshman Sen, the ruler of the Sen dynasty in Bengal, from Nadia, the capital of the Sen rulers, marked the beginning of Muslim rule in Bengal. Starting from the reign of Iltutmish to the rule of Muhammad Tughlaq, at different points of time the rulers of Bengal tried to come out from the control of the central authority. The Delhi sultans either by direct military intervention or through negotiation were able to retain their control over the province of Bengal. During the reign of Delhi sultan Ghiyas-ud-din Tughlaq Bengal was divided into three independent administrative divisions with their capitals at Lakhnauti, Satgaon and Sonargaon in order to keep a check on the rebellious rulers of Bengal. But Muhammad Tughlaq's preoccupation in the affairs of Delhi gave opportunity to one Bengal noble Ilyas Shah to establish his control over the entire province of Bengal around 1345 A.D. and he declared himself as an independent ruler under the title of Shams-ud-din Ilyas Shah. He was successful in extending the boundary of his kingdom from Tirhut to Champaran, Gorakhpur and Banaras. Being alarmed by the growing power of Ilyas Shah on the eastern front of the Delhi Sultanate Firuz Tughlaq tried to restore the lost power of Delhi sultan over the province of Bengal. Initially Firuz was successful in his military campaign but Ilyas did not relent. Ultimately Firuz left Bengal for Delhi and friendship was established between the two rulers. It is said that Ilyas exchanged gifts with Firuz but did not make himself subordinate to the Delhi ruler. After the death of Ilyas Shah his son Sikandar Shah ascended the throne and during his time Firuz made a second attempt to recover Bengal. This time again the Delhi sultan failed in his mission. Thus the dynastic rule started by Ilyas Shah continued in Bengal for more than a century without much interference from Delhi. However taking advantage of dissension within the ruling dynasty, Raja Ganesh, a Hindu zamindar of Bhaturia and Dinajpur and an influential official of Ilyas Shahi rulers, declared himself the ruler of Bengal. References to Raja Ganesh's rule are found in *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* as well as in Ferishta's writings. A section of local Turkish nobles and Muslim theologians approached the ruler of Jaunpur to assist them in capturing the lost throne of Bengal from Raja Ganesh. Victory of the Jaunpur ruler over Ganesh was short lived as the ruler of Jaunpur got engaged in a conflict with the Delhi sultan. However Raja Ganesh could not rule over Bengal for long because of his old age and was succeeded by his son who embraced Islam. However Bengal continued to be unstable till the accession of Ala-ud-din Husain Shah to the throne of Bengal in 1493. Ala-ud-din marked the beginning of a new dynastic rule in Bengal which continued for about half a century. He extended his territory in the south-west towards Orissa and in the south-east towards Chittagaon and Arakan and invaded the Ahom kingdom of Assam and captured Kamatapur in Kuch Bihar. His successors ruled over Bengal till 1550s.

The above narrative shows that from the very beginning of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate there was always a tendency on the part of the provincial rulers of Bengal to assert their independence. In terms of financial and natural resources the province was very rich. So the Delhi sultans were keen to maintain their hold over the province. But geographical distance of Bengal from Delhi and poor communication system and humid climatic condition of the province made it difficult for the sultans of Delhi to maintain proper check over the nobles deputed in Bengal. Although Ilyas Shahi and Husain Shahi dynasties were able to establish independent political authority in Bengal but at no point they could completely ignore the imperial authority in Delhi. In matters of governance there was much resemblance between the Delhi sultanate and Bengal. Religion no doubt played an important role in legitimising the political authority but in administrative practices secular considerations were more important. Particularly during the reign of Alauddin Hussain Bengal witnessed the

emergence of Vaishnavite movement under the famous saint Chaitanya. The Vaishnava literature speaks about harmonious relations between the Hindus and the Muslims.

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## 9.9 THE KINGDOM OF MALWA

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The geographical location of Malwa was strategic since it was placed on a plateau between Narmada and Tapti rivers. It served as a link to the routes between Gujarat and north India and also north and south India. The control of Malwa was a pre-condition for establishing a large empire. The independent kingdom of Malwa was established by Dilwar Khan Guri in 1401-02. It emerged in the wake of the decline of the Delhi Sultanate in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Timur's attack in 1398 precipitated the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate. The absence of a centralized authority in the empire gave opportunity to the nobles to carve out their independent spheres of influence.

The geographical distance of the provinces from the centre and the local problems of each region showed that it was not possible to control provinces by military power alone. The independent kingdoms which emerged lent support to this view. Therefore these independent kingdoms basically reflected the local aspirations which could not have been checked by the central power on the basis of its military prowess.

Dilwar Khan Guri, the founder of the independent kingdom of Malwa was succeeded by his son Hoshang Shah. During this period the ruler of Gujarat invaded Malwa. Hoshang Shah realised that to bring stability in his kingdom he would have to seek the support of all groups and sections of society and follow a policy of accommodation towards his subjects to remain in power. He therefore relied on the advice of the sufi saint Ashraf Jahangir Samnani (who advocated the principle of *Sulah-i-kul*). Deliberations and consultations with the nobles and officers were adopted as a policy on all important matters of governance and for initiating new projects. Almost all the sultans of Malwa followed the practice of seeking advice and approval of the officers of the state before arriving at any decision. Thus the prestige of the nobles was also enhanced by involving them in matters relating to governance. It seems that though a popular assembly did not exist for deliberations but the tradition of consultation with officers through a council was a democratic procedure followed in Malwa. It was quite different from the notion of the sultan as an unapproachable being. Mahmud I undertook an expedition against sultan Muhammad Gujarati to help Rai Gangadas of Champaran. This suggests that the Sultans of Malwa helped Hindu rulers against Muslim rivals.

An attempt was made to establish a definite law of succession in Malwa. Heredity and nomination were the basic guiding principles of succession. While making nomination primogeniture was practiced. Hoshang Shah declared his eldest son as his successor in a general audience where all the important officers together with their staff were present. Mahmud I went even a step further by bestowing the title of sultan upon the prince who he had chosen to succeed him. This practice became firmly rooted in Malwa. Ghiyas Shah, Nasir Shah and Mahmud II were also given the title of sultan by their respective fathers who had selected them to succeed to the throne. There were instances when an attempt was made to violate the practice of nomination. However the principle of nomination could not be set aside and continued to be practiced with greater vigour. Shihabuddin who had been nominated as the successor by Nasir Shah rebelled and therefore Mahmud II was nominated in his place. This decision was approved by the nobles.

Ashraf Jahangir, the sufi saint, had suggested that the king should be merciful and ruthless conduct on the part of the king could lead to problems. The sultans of Malwa viz. Dilwar Khan and Hoshang Shah were aware that they exercised authority over a region where the majority of the subjects were Hindus and therefore they



were wise enough to follow a broad minded and liberal policy towards all subjects – Hindu or Muslim. The sultans assigned *jagirs* to Rajputs in Malwa and thus paved the way for strengthening the foundation of the state based on liberal and tolerant traditions.

The generous attitude of the sultans is reflected in the policy of accommodating Hindus in the administrative system. The Hindus also found a place in the advisory council of the sultan. Hindus served the sultans in various capacities viz. Naradeva Soni and Sangram Singh were treasurers, Rai Siva Das was the army commander, Punja Raja supervised the *khalsa* lands and Medini Rai was appointed as Wazir and Salivahan was his subordinate. The non-partisan attitude of the sultans can also be judged from the fact that they led campaigns against the Bahmani ruler and other Muslim rulers who were their rivals.

Religious toleration was an important feature of the state of Malwa. Several Jain temples existed viz. at Mandasore, Hoshangabad, Mandu, Dhar etc. Several religious traditions co-existed in Malwa. Many Rajput chiefs who had been subjugated by the sultans in the course of territorial conquest were given the status of tributaries who owed allegiance to the sultan and paid tribute to him. The sultans as suzerain power never failed in their duty to protect the petty chiefs from the threat of outside power. Rai of Parhar, Rai Bhanu of Baglana were offered defence against the attack of Sharqis of Jaunpur and the ruler of Khandesh. At times the sultans also intervened in the conflicts amongst the Hindu chiefs viz. Rai Bhoj of Sarguja and chiefs of Raipur and Ratanpur. The policy of favouring the Rajputs by giving them *jagirs* played an important role in strengthening the base of the state. The Rajputs in return for the generosity of the sultan towards them offered their unflinching loyalty to the state of Malwa. This faithfulness served as the linchpin of the state. Hoshang Shah was helped in his military campaigns by various Hindu Chiefs viz. Narsing Rai of Kherla, Lakhan Rao of Matangpuri, chiefs of Bundi, Dewara Hindu Rai, Maldeo Chouhan and Samai Singh. Mahmud I appointed Khem Karan the younger brother of Rana Kumbha of Mewar as *jagirdar* who helped him to deal with the Mewar problem.

The sultans of Malwa were interested in promoting the welfare of the subjects by giving encouragement to various public works or activities viz. building hospitals, protection against crime such as theft, robbery etc. They tried to boost agricultural production by keeping the revenue demand at a moderate level and protecting the cultivators in the event of crop failure or loss.

From the above account it is clear that the independent state of Malwa was based on political expediency and the sultans were aware of the need to adopt a broad-based policy by seeking the support of all subjects through various measures viz. religious toleration, accommodation of all categories in the administrative system and welfare policies.

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## 9.10 SUMMARY

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The above narrative of four important kingdoms that ruled over a period of two centuries preceding the establishment of the Mughal state throws some light on the broad features of the polity of this period. It is characterised as a polity headed by a strong ruler, supported by a hierarchically organised administrative machinery and legitimised by the authority of religion. The new territorial states for all practical purposes declared their independent authority but the relationship with the Sultanate was not necessarily completely cut off. Although one cannot completely ignore the religious dimension particularly in the case of conflict between the Vijayanagara and the Bahmani kingdoms but it was mainly for considerations like control over the Tungbhadra doab for economic resources which had a major contribution in

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precipitating conflicts between these states. Despite constant wars and dissensions amongst the ruling elites the period in no way can be portrayed as a period of political decadence, rather this period showed the remarkable strength and stability of regional polity.

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## 9.11 EXERCISES

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- 1) Write a note on the features of Vijayanagara polity.
- 2) Analyse the kingdoms of Bengal and Malwa in the context of medieval state.



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## UNIT 10 THE MUGHAL STATE

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### Structure

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Evolution of Theory of Sovereignty
- 10.3 Imperial Ideology under Akbar
- 10.4 Nature of State: Various Interpretations
- 10.5 Decline
- 10.6 Summary
- 10.7 Exercises

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### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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We have explained in earlier Units-8 and 9 the nature of polity existing under the Delhi Sultanate and in the kingdoms that emerged following the decline of the Delhi Sultanate. In the analysis of state in medieval times the major landmark is the establishment of the Mughal state by Babur in the early half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The task initiated by Babur was further carried forward by his successors, particularly Akbar. The Mughal empire lasted for over two centuries and in the process of its expansion and consolidation it left a lasting impact on the polity of the Indian subcontinent. The extraordinary longevity of the Mughal imperial structure and the control that the emperors developed to rule such a vast empire make it more important to understand the dynamics of the Mughal state. We have large number of historical works for understanding the Mughal state. Starting from the writings by early British writers till recently we come across scholarly debate among historians around whether the Mughal was a conquest state or a highly centralized bureaucratic empire or a patrimonial state or a state to be understood in terms of its fiscal management, etc. In this Unit we will first explain the basis of imperial ideology tracing it from the central Asian tradition and the innovations made by the Mughal rulers. After this you will be introduced to the various interpretations on the nature of the Mughal state and the debates regarding the decline of the Mughal empire. This should help in making your assessment of the Mughal polity.

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### 10.2 EVOLUTION OF THEORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

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After the decline of the Mongol empire in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Timur, a Chaghtai Turk, established a large empire covering central Asia, west Asia and parts of south Asia. The Mughals were the direct descendants of Amir Timur. The Timurids, the Ottomans in eastern Europe (Turks), the Safavids (in Persia) and later the Mughals in India, though Islamised did not consider it essential to obtain the formal sanction from the *khalifa* whose power was waning. It is interesting to note that although these powers had gradually been Islamised but their political ideals were not based on purely Islamic principles. The Timurid polity combined the attributes of the Yassa of Chingez (Mongol Traditions), Turkish traditions and the principles of *shara*. Therefore the Mughal state can be understood by a close examination of the Timurid polity and can be categorized as an admixture of Islamic, Persian and Turko Mongol practices. Timur's empire or the Chaghati Khanate was transformed from a loose structure to a close knit system which was a blend of divine precepts and Chingez Khanid decrees. The divine proclamation aspect was given priority over the mundane Chingez Khanid regulations (partitioning of tribes). The divinity related aspects imparted legitimacy to the state more than any other type of law or decree. It is argued by some scholars that the Timurids did adopt the bureaucratic system (largely based on

Persian traditions) however, their principle of shared sovereignty could lead to partition and decentralization of empire.

The Mughal state cannot be analysed without an understanding of the Turko-Mongol theory of kingship. Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty in India was related to the Mongol leader Chingez Khan and Timur the Chaghtai Islamised Turk. Therefore Babur's perception portrayed a combination of Turkish, Mongol and Islamic ideals. The Turks, Persians and Mongols regarded the ruler as holding a status which was higher than a chief. Myths relating to Chingez Khan's ancestry point to super natural aspects of his life by referring to him as son of light. The divine aspects attributed to Chingez Khan's lineage and the tremendous respect and veneration his family enjoyed had enabled the house of Chingez to retain kingship till the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, sovereignty acquired a hereditary character and was confined to the house of Chingez not on the basis of mythical traditions but real exploits and achievements which imparted an exalted status to their house. Even Timur was unable to aspire to the status of the house of Chingez and therefore he had to remain satisfied with the modest title of 'Amir' or 'Beg'.

Khan of the Mongols can be contrasted with the *khalifa* of Islamic state. The *khalifa* was basically a religious and political head of the Islamic community or states. However, the great Khan was a political and warrior leader and thereby his status as a sovereign was not bound by religious or divine factors. According to Dr. R.P. Tripathi 'He was a political sovereign pure and simple'. Though the Great Khan was an elected leader but this election was devoid of religious overtones. A characteristic aspect of Mongol polity was that the empire was split among the princes not on a territorial but a tribal premise. The areas over which the princes had power and authority were practically their autonomous domain. However, they owed symbolic allegiance to the Great Khan who ruled in their homeland in Central Asia.

The *Malfizat-I-Timuri* (Institutes, Political and Military written originally in Mongol language by the Great Timur) is an important source material for understanding the ideals of sovereignty which existed during the period of Timur. This reflects an amalgamation of Mongol and Islamic ideals. The main focus of Timur's theory of sovereignty was the understanding that the positions held in the temporal empire were in fact a representation of the empire of God. This belief had been revealed to him by his spiritual teacher. Timur was of the opinion that since there was only one God therefore the representative of God on earth could be only one. King should not be influenced by anyone. Power should not be exercised arbitrarily by the king. The nobles and the officials were to be taken into confidence and respected. But the King's resolve was the ultimate solution. The advice of the officials was not binding upon him.

Timur had imbibed Islamic ideals and therefore his conception of kingship, at least theoretically, could not be simply political and military. According to the *Malfizt-I-Timuri* through a letter (*maktub*) Mir Sayyid Sharif bestowed upon Timur a title depicting him as the champion and reformer of Islam. Here Timur's name is found with the names of Umayyid and Abbasid *khalifas*. It is also mentioned that Timur read the *khutba* in his name in the mosque in the manner of some of the earlier *khalifas*. An important change took place under the Timurids since the Mongol practice of splitting the tribes and placing them under the princes. was now replaced by territorial partition of the empire among the princes. Timur adopted this policy and this tradition was carried further by his successors.

Abu Said Mirza, the grandfather of Babur, brought about a drastic shift in Timur's position. It has already been stated that though the Timurids enjoyed absolute power in their territorial spheres but they theoretically accepted the suzerainty (though nominal) of the Great Mongol Khan. Babur's grandfather pointed out that '... the mandates will be issued in the name of the dynasty (of Timur) because I am Padshah in my own right'. This challenge to the authority of the Great Mongol Khan was a novel step resorted to by the Timurids. Abu Said Mirza adopted the humble titles of



Sultan and Mirza though he did try to break the hegemony of the Great Mongol Khan.

It seems that women were not allowed to become sovereign themselves but could influence state functioning during the minority of princes as their regents. Minority did not debar a prince from attaining the status of sovereign. Babur and Akbar were both minors when sovereign status was bestowed upon them. The nobility and the religious groups were the other categories which enjoyed tremendous respect and authority in central Asia.

Around 1507 Babur adopted the designation *padshah* (emperor). He was firmly established in Kabul. The emergence of Ottomans in eastern Europe, Safavids in Persia and Shaibanids Uzbeks (Mongol tribe) in central Asia was a major threat to the authority of the Timurids. The Ottoman Sultan adopted the title of Qaisar, Safavid of Shah and the Shaibanids called themselves Sultan. In these circumstances taking cue from his grandfather Babur adopted the title of *padshah*.

Babur's religious beliefs did not shape his political outlook which was pragmatic. Dr. R.P. Tripathi suggests 'Although he had unbounded faith in the will of God and had versified the Islamic law for the guidance of his second son, his memoirs do not show any superstitious and morbid regard either for schoolmen or the details of the law'. Patrimony, ancestry, heredity were regarded by Babur as the foundation of sovereignty. His views regarding kingship and sovereignty were spelt out in a letter he wrote to Humayun in 1529. He suggested that sovereignty was like bondage and a sovereign could not combine his work with pleasure and rest. He also indicated that advice should be sought from close associates. With regard to conflict between Humayun and Kamran although division was advocated but he was of the opinion that *padshahi* (sovereign power) should not be split. Babur mentioned that 'partnership in rule is a thing unheard of'. It was felt that partitioning of authority was not in accordance with the ideal of preservation of sovereign power and brought about problems in the functioning of the state.

The pious caliphs had carved out a special niche for themselves as heads of Islamic religious and political system. However, the Timurids had never accepted the *khalifa* as their suzerain. When Babur invaded India even the semblance of authority of the *khalifa* of Egypt had been erased. The authority of the Ottomans (who conquered Egypt, Syria, Arabia in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and got the title of Sultan of Rum (Asia Minor) from the caliph at Cairo and adopted the title of Padshah-i-Islam) could never be acceptable to the Timurids as higher.

The accession of Babur and Humayun as the eldest sons established a positive tradition for the Mughal state. The legitimacy and sanctity which the Mughal Emperors Babur and Humayun provided to the principles of heredity and especially the faith reposed in the eldest progeny provided the foundation to the principles of sovereignty as operational in the Mughal state.

The death of Babur was followed by the accession of Humayun without any conflict but the problem of dividing the empire among his brothers could not be resolved easily. The Mughals in India had not acquired a secure foothold and the principle of partition of empire was applied in these adverse circumstances. The empire had to counter resistance from several quarters and amidst the problems the issue of division of empire loomed large over the empire. After Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah, he decided to go to Badakhshan through Kabul but Kamran (Humayun's brother) did not allow him passage on the pretext that it was given to Kamran's mother by Babur. Hindal, Humayun's brother removed Babur's name from the *khutba* at Qandahar. In this situation Babur was made to realize that the principle of division of empire as an administrative procedure was fraught with many lacunae.

Humayun's personal beliefs played an important role in the formulation of an ideology which found articulation in various ways. He was interested in transcendentalism, astrology and like a devout muslim he regarded the king as the 'shadow of god on earth'. He maintained that the sun was the pivot of the physical world and the king

being comparable to the sun was the focus of the mortal (human) world. He organized the servants of the state into 12 parts and placed himself at the centre. This philosophy was derived from the Timurid legacy. Humayun also laid down novel court procedures and ceremonies which enhanced the status of the monarch. The belief that king was the shadow of god on earth was manifested in the official history of the period written by Khwand Mir. The historian refers to Humayun, his majesty the king, the shadow of god (Hazrat Padshah Zill-i-ilahi). Humayun's perception of the sovereignty implied that kingship was the 'personal property' of the king which he could confer on whomsoever he desired. Humayun's ideas of kingship also incorporated the ideal of abject submission of the nobles to the will of the *padshah*. However, in reality Humayun was not able to command total loyalty and subservience from his nobles. Although he was regarded as a 'personification of spiritual and temporal sovereignty' and the Mughals considered themselves superior to the other contemporary political powers viz. Uzbeks, Safavids, Ottomans, etc. but the Timurids did not possess a dynastic and religious ideology to enforce total submission of the populace to the crown.

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### 10.3 IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY UNDER AKBAR

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Under Akbar a framework of power and hierarchy was developed buttressed by symbolic and ritual elements. The rallying together of the nobility including the military cum civil personnel i.e. the *mansabdar-jagirdar* category, *zamindars* especially the chieftains and the *ulema* in the state machinery was brought about due to the sharp acumen of Akbar. He had to combine the task of expansion of territory with the creation of an administrative structure based on a delicate equilibrium between the different ethnic, religious and social groups which were accommodated in the imperial service as *mansabdars*. This category (military cum civil administrative elite) became the crux of the administrative system and gave adequate opportunity to the various ambitious rajas (chiefs), Muslim migrants etc. to rise in social and economic status. In Block 6 we will separately discuss the organization of nobility as reflected in the *mansabdari* and *jagirdari* system of the Mughals. The elite or nobility relied upon the Emperor for obtaining a position in the Mughal administrative system. Remuneration was accorded to those employed in Mughal administrative system for services rendered by them. The composition of the nobility was based on a variegated category comprising of various groups viz. Indo-Muslim, Persian, Brahman, Khatri, Kayastha etc. The *khanzads* (Muslim sons of the house) who were related to the Mughals by descent, family and heredity and the Rajputs proved to be the most trustworthy and reliable props of the Mughal state. The principle of authority and subordination in a hierarchical pattern was stressed which helped in sustaining the state in the midst of all kinds of challenges. This was achieved by the formulation of an imperial ideology under Akbar.

Akbar's authority was reinforced by a systematic unfolding of a dynastic ideology by Abul Fazl. This ideology combined the Timurid traditions of hereditary monarchy and ascribed spiritual status to the emperor through symbols and metaphors. The emperor could now command unflinching loyalty from his subordinates. In this respect Akbar's period represented a major shift from the earlier pattern of division of empire and of power, which hindered the process of centralization and cohesion. As mentioned earlier the Mongol appanage tradition was based on the fragmentation of tribes, which resulted in division of sovereignty and therefore decentralisation.

Abul Fazl's elucidation of the principle of sovereignty is contained in the copious *Akbarnama* which has preserved events for 47 regnal years. It has a huge appendix in the form of three volumes of *Ain-i-Akbari* which is regarded as the official manual and gazetteer. The chapter on *rawaiyi rozi* in the *Ain* discusses the theory of kingship and this allowed Akbar to weaken the hold of the religious elite over political matters. Abul Fazl's view regarding kingship is quite clearly demonstrated in this passage from *Ain* which forms a part of *Akbarnama*.

‘Kingship is the gift of god, and it is not bestowed till many thousand grand requisites have been gathered together in an individual. Race and wealth and the assembling of a mob are not enough for this great position. It is clear to the wise that a few among the holy qualities (sifat-i-qudsi) are magnanimity, lofty benevolence, wide capacity, abundant exuberance, exalted understanding, innate graciousness, natural lineage, justice, rectitude, strenuous labour, proper conduct, profound thoughtfulness, laudable overlooking and acceptance of excuses....Thanks be to god! The holy personality of Shahinshah (Akbar) is a fount of perfect qualities and a mine of holy principles.’

This document was submitted to the Emperor in 1595. It represents a masterpiece containing not only useful information but decorated with miniature paintings and calligraphy which enhance its significance. *Akbarnama* may be placed in the category of Indo-Islamic court panegyric however more elaborate than many others. This official chronicle was based on contemporary records, no longer available, and discussions with contemporary observers and those associated with the contemporary events. The details mentioned in the work contain an underlying ideology of power and validity. The eulogy is intended to illustrate covertly or overtly with hyperbolic tools the personality of Akbar as superior to ordinary men. Abul Fazl tries to demonstrate that Akbar’s authority over the populace did not emanate merely from the principles of coercive power, suppression, conquest and force but it was based on veneration which Akbar’s personality commanded.

The nature of kingship under the previous Indo-muslim rulers was centred on religious validation. The reading of the *khutba* in the name of the king and the sanction of the *khalifa* were important for the rulers to get acceptance and legitimacy to rule. But none of the kings before Akbar could lay claim to infallibility. The faultless and the impeccable qualities of the king put him above ordinary people and as a consequence close to God and the truth or the ultimate reality. Akbar was perceived as possessing indescribable brightness and glow, which could be noticed only by men who had mystical and spiritual leanings. Abul Fazl’s brother, the poet Faizi in his eulogistic quatrains (*rubaiyat*) says ‘He (Akbar) is a king on account of his wisdom, we call *zaf unun* (possessor of the sciences) and our guide on the path of religion. .... Although kings are the shadow of god on earth, he is the emanation of god’s light. How then can we call him a shadow?’

It was considered that Akbar’s mystical and spiritual accomplishments surpassed the authority and wisdom of interpreters of *sharia* (Mujtahid of the age), the sufi saint (pir) or the charismatic saviours (*mahdi*). According to J.F. Richards ‘Akbar’s assertion of the right of final judgment between the various interpretations of the sacred law resulted from his long struggle with the conservative *ulema* holding state positions in the 1560s. The final resolution of this appeared in the much discussed testimony (*mahzar*) of 1578. This document signed under duress by the chief Qazi and the *sadr* of the empire stated that the rank of the sultan is higher in the eyes of God than of a mujtahid.’

Akbar imbibed in his person lustrous power which had been bestowed upon him by the creator of the world. Thus Akbar incorporated in his personality the supernatural and complex traits which shaped his foresight and idealism, the source of his dominance and authority.

The manuscripts of *Akbarnama* are adorned with beautiful miniature paintings, the contribution of artists who had lent support to Abul Fazl in building up the pictorial image of Akbar which corresponds to his description in the text. The miniature paintings of Akbar depict him as a divine, forbearing, balanced, enlightened personality at variance with the vast, undisciplined, unmanageable masses. The techniques used by the painters do not project flamboyance or grandeur. Simple colours and dress together with definite, identifiable features (curves, lines etc.) presented Akbar as an infallible patron who guided his subordinates and subjects.

Abul Fazl in his *Akbarnama* devotes several passages explaining Akbar's lineage and ancestry. He starts with Adam, the ancestor of mankind and refers to fifty-two human generations before illumination dawned upon Akbar. He describes Akbar's forefathers as having come from heaven as 'kings, kings of kings, kingdom bestowers and king makers (who) governed the world by god-given wisdom and true insight'. Abul Fazl mentions nine Mughal (or Mongol) kings and Mughal Khan, the son of a Turk, is considered by him as the founder of the dynasty.

Abul Fazl attributes divine origin to Akbar. He gives a fascinating story of the birth of Akbar and his forefathers. A supernatural light or illumination (divine) was responsible for the birth of Akbar and his forefathers. The important Turko-Mongol rulers mentioned by Abul Fazl are Chingiz Khan and Amir Timur Gurgan of Samarkand. He does not speak highly of Chingiz Khan. However Amir Timur is regarded as the lord of conjunctions of the planets (Sahib Qiran) and the propounder of Timurid concept of sovereignty which was adopted by his descendants for legitimizing their power. His conquest of central Asian lands in Balkh, Badakhshan and Ferghana provided the spring board to his descendants from where they could extend their rule in other directions. The divine illumination '...passed through generation after generation until the shahinshah of mankind Akbar was born in 1542'.

The Timurid kings (especially Babur) established the tradition of beginning the dynastic pedigree with Amir Timur. The *tughra* (engraved iron seals with calligraphy bearing the Emperor's titles) and the symbolic gold coins of the dynasty were an expression of dynastic authority. Abul Fazl describes Babur as 'the carrier of the world illuminating light'. Humayun's failures are projected as predestined and pave the way for the impending arrival of Akbar. The exaggerations and metaphors applied by Abul Fazl were drawn from the myth of the origin of the Mongols and the illuminationist theosophy of Suhrawardi Maqtul, the Persian mystic and philosopher. Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat's *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* is an important source which Abul Fazl used for his dynastic account of the Mongols. The *Tarikh-i-Hukama* of Shamsuddin Muhammad Shahrazuri is an Arabic biography of pre-Muslim and Muslim mystics and philosophers. This account includes the biography of Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul the teacher-philosopher of Shahrazuri who had established the eastern or Ishraki school of Persian philosophy. The central theme in Ishraki school of thought is that life and reality is light created by god. Abul Fazl uses the Sufi philosophy for eulogizing the Mughal emperor. Akbar's esoteric and mystical knowledge combined both love and strictness and it found clear expression or manifestation in the doctrine of *sulh-i-kul* or peace for all. This belief is contained in the *Akbarnama* and was not merely meant as a device to bridge the chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims but it was conceived as a broad ideology of governance for the imperial power to ease the strained relations between the subjects and the rulers.

Akbar's spiritual urge led him to search for a liberal and broad religious order. His inclination towards sun worship fitted well with the dynastic ideology of the Timurids which laid stress on illuminating light. This religious aspect of sun adulation found acceptance among the official personnel, the landed aristocracy (zamindars) and other local chiefs. Generally Akbar's religious views have been explained in the context of their affinity to the Zoroastrian, Sufi, Nath yogic or Brahmanical faith. His divine faith has been regarded as an amalgamation of a myriad of beliefs and practices. To understand Akbar's religious ideas it is important to explain how Akbar deviated from the conventional Islamic tradition and gave up the public prayer mode and adopted a rational and reasoning attitude towards religious practices. Sun worship before a sacrificial fire and the chanting of Sanskrit name for sun, religious discourse with the mystics and saints of various creed and sect, restraint and self-denial in social practices were to some extent based on Hindu belief of metempsychosis. Blochmann who has translated the *Akbarnama* describes Akbar's religious propensity



as Divine faith which was able to enlist as its followers a number of nobles and courtiers. S.A.A. Rizvi disagrees with Blochmann and feels that the Divine faith served a more constructive purpose than simply creating a coterie of Emperor's favourites. It was able to mobilize the Imperial Disciples or votaries through the ideological formula of Emperor's connection with the sun and light. This methodology (ideological training) was adopted to create a loyal and sincere group of nobles who would strengthen the political foundation of the empire. Rizvi refers to four types of devotion which were meant 'to unify the new Mughal elite around the ...throne.' The four category of devotion were: the willingness to surrender one's life (*jan*), property (*mal*), religion (*dar*), and honour (*namus*) for the sake of the Emperor. Babur's nobility was bound by ethnic, hereditary, family bonds but Akbar was faced with the problem of unifying the motley group of nobles of varied ethnic background and religious persuasion. The diverse groups in the nobility had to be appeased and balanced which could be attained by tying them to the imperial ideology. Emperor was portrayed as possessing divine attributes. According to Richards 'Popular understanding of the Emperor's assertions of divinely sanctioned ancestry, illumined wisdom and spirituality clearly permeated among the populace of the court/camp and other major urban centers of the empire. Ultimately this understanding became so pervasive that a continuing memory of Akbar's powers was even absorbed into the folk culture of rural society within the various regions of the empire.'

It has been pointed out by scholars that Akbar's administrative and political initiatives were closely linked to his personal traits or characteristics. Akbar's public image was shaped by the contemporary 16<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers, nobles at court, agents of *mansabdars* sent to court, agents of rajas or merchant houses and secret agents of the regional kingdoms. His approachable and open personality did not deter the possibility of the creation of the halo of unbridled power. After 1580 when Abul Fazl became a close associate of Akbar the unrestrained power of Akbar was justified through an ideology which was a blend of dynastic traditions and religious beliefs hinged on philosophical principles. Akbar's decision to establish his capital at Fatehpur Sikri and the large scale construction activity undertaken in his period was also a manifestation of his desire to assert his power. The shift of the center of power from Delhi (under Humayun) to Agra meant that Akbar did not wish to inherit the previous stronghold of imperial power but desired assertion of a new dynastic authority by building a new capital. The palace fortresses built by Akbar at Agra, Allahabad, Lahore, Ajmer and the new capital (Sikri) were manifestations of a new political order and statement. The choice of Sikri was also related to Akbar's close association with the Sufi mystic Shaikh Salim Chisti. Akbar's capital had the mosque and tomb (*dargah*) of the sufi saint the twin symbols of Indian Islam with mystical overtones. Akbar's despotism were reflected in the audience chamber (*Diwan-i-khas*) meant for limited court audience and (*Diwan-i-Aam*) Hall of Public audience and the pillar and platform in the hall of public audience. Mysticism was also a means to impart an aura of greatness to the Emperor, which further helped in legitimizing imperial authority. His close relations with Chishtiyya sufi order enhanced his charisma in political life. Akbar's esoteric proclivities were an asset in his ideological debates with the obscurantist *ulema*. These debates were a pre-requisite to make the state broad-based. As J.F. Richards points out 'Thus by 1590 when Abul Fazl began a systematic affirmation of Akbar's claim to universal authority in the Akbarnama, he included an anecdote which indirectly stated Akbar's superiority over even the most famed Chistiyya saint'.

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#### 10.4 NATURE OF STATE: VARIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

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Historians have given different interpretations for explaining the nature of the Mughal state. The theory of sovereignty or kingship has been discussed which is indispensable for an understanding of the Mughal state. A voluminous collection of historical works is available on the Mughal state. W.H. Moreland's study of the agrarian

system of the Mughals represents a major contribution towards the study of the Mughal empire. The most important school of historical analysis in so far as the Mughal state is concerned is the Aligarh school. Historians belonging to this school have tried to evaluate the state mainly in the context of its economic organization. According to the scholars belonging to the Aligarh school the main features which characterized the Mughal state were its monetary (silver rupiya, gold muhr, copper dam and paisa) and fiscal system, the Mughal ranking system (*mansabdari*) and system of revenue assignments (*jagirs*). The flourishing overseas trade is also considered as a hallmark of the Mughal period especially the development of ports such as Surat, Thatta, Goa, Hughli, Balasore and Masulipatnam by historians like J.F.Richards. According to T. Ray Chaudhury 'the uncomplicated desire of a small ruling class for more and more material resources explains most of the Mughal state's actions; in the case of the Mughals, he asserts 'their' economism was simple, straight forward and almost palpable...there was no containing it until it collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions'. A logical inference which can be drawn from the above mentioned interpretations is that the state obtained the surplus from the agrarian economy as land revenue which constituted a definite part of the produce and the revenue demand varied from 1/3 to 1/2 or more of the produce. The essence of the perspective of the historians like Habib, Raychaudhuri and Richards is that during the period of Akbar (1556-1605) a cohesive and uniform or standardized agrarian system came into existence and this view was largely drawn from the earlier work of the British administrator historian W.H. Moreland. However, Habib's postulates are at variance with Moreland's because of following:

- 1) The first is apparently the use of Marxist tools of analysis.
- 2) The second is greater use of Persian sources, Moreland's application of theory of Oriental Despotism was replaced by class antagonism, struggle and exploitation postulate.

Irfan Habib regards the "Zabt system" (method of revenue assessment based on measurement) which got its final shape in 1580 as the epitome of the unified administrative system under the Mughals. He points out 'In 1574-75 Akbar took a series of important measures, which involved among other things, a new attempt to work out revenue rates. Information on yields, prices and the area cultivated was collected for each locality for a period of 10 years; 1570-71 to 1579-80. On the basis of detailed information the revenue rates were now fixed directly in cash for each crop. The provinces of Lahore, Multan, Ajmer, Delhi, Agra, Malwa, Allahabad and Awadh were divided into revenue circles, each with a separate schedule of cash revenue rates (*dastur-ul-amals*) for various crops...(These) sanctioned cash rates were to be applied year after year with such revision only as might be decreed by the administration in these rates from time to time'. On the basis of the sources of the period it was suggested by these historians that the *zabt* system was operational through the agency of a military cum bureaucratic system in the entire region from the Indus to Ghagra and state demand fluctuated between one third and half of the yield. A re-examination of the important contemporary sources on which the argument is based brings forth certain lacunae in the interpretation of the sources used by the historians. *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl contains revenue related information in a concise form. A detailed survey of field is not given. Therefore, on close scrutiny it appears that the system was not applied to all the territories uniformly. Scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam point out that towards the close of Akbar's reign many *subas* have no data on *arazi* (measured) land therefore in about 1600 about one third of land revenue collection under the Mughals was done by methods other than *zabt*. The *subas* where *zabt* was implemented were Allahabad, Awadh, Agra, Delhi, Lahore and Multan. In 1600 in Malwa and Gujarat *zabt* was not adopted in totality or even on a large scale and was seldom practiced. In Ajmer too a large portion of land was with the chieftains who must have adopted methods other than measurement for revenue fixation. It appears from the above discussion that the analysis of the Mughal state as one based on uniform and unified administrative apparatus on the

basis of the compendium of revenue data of *Ain* is now being questioned by scholars. The studies on population, urbanization and external trade are all based on the interpretation of the concise data given in the *Ain* and therefore they too are being scrutinized afresh by scholars. The postulates of the Aligarh school are as follows :

- They lay stress on the period from Akbar to Aurangzeb (1556-1707). Akbar and Aurangzeb's reigns are given more importance and *Ain-i-Akbari* is regarded as the most reliable source. It is suggested that the Mughal institutions were established by Akbar, they continued to function under his successors but developed cracks in Aurangzeb's period. The pre-Akbar period and the post-Aurangzeb period are neglected in their historical writings.
- The state is regarded as an extremely centralized and bureaucratized system. This characterization is explained on the basis of the uniform revenue, *mansabdari/Jagirdari* and coinage system etc.
- State is portrayed as an 'insatiable leviathan' which levied taxes and appropriated revenue from the peasantry.
- The parasitic elite of the empire to a large extent consumed the surplus and did not use it for productive purpose by adopting scientific techniques.
- Ideology is regarded as insignificant for analysis of historical texts and attitude of various social groups especially the elite.
- Trade is considered relevant only in the context of providing imports for elite use. The flow of precious metals (bullion) through trade is regarded as a cause which brought about the price revolution or inflation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century which had a negative impact on the economy.
- 18<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as a period of anarchy and decline especially by Athar Ali and Irfan Habib. They feel that *jagirdari* crisis in Aurangzeb's reign led to peasant rebellions and anarchy in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and inflation aggravated the crisis.

The Central Asian Legacy of the Mughals is not given sufficient emphasis in Mughal historiography. The majority of writings on the Mughal state mainly lay stress on two reigns: Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707). The period of Babur and Humayun is not paid due attention in historical literature. However, some historians like S. Nurul Hasan, Simon Digby, Ahsan Raza Khan, Mohibbul Hasan and I. H. Siddiqi have tried to deal with the institutional structures of Afghan rulers (Lodis and Surs) and early Mughals (Babur and Humayun). The phase (of Mughal rule) preceding Akbar's reign represents a not so well researched period of history just as the period after 1707 had earlier been regarded in history as a dark period. Historians regard the *mansab* and *jagir* system as the "steel frame" of the Mughal state and therefore the importance given to Akbar as one who initiated the system and to Aurangzeb who impaired it is quite logical.

Studies on Mughal institutions have failed to focus on the continuities which existed between the structures laid down by the Afghans and the Mughals. If such a comparison is drawn it would be possible to delineate the similarities and contrast between the Afghan and the Mughal system. It is interesting to note that the Lodi Afghans believed in the concept of distribution of power and sharing of sovereignty. Bahlul Lodi in pursuance of the tribal ideas of egalitarianism treated his nobles or aristocracy as equals. However under Sikandar Lodi the loosely knit conglomeration of tribal chiefs was made subordinate to the authority of the king without antagonizing the nobles. This practice was pursued with greater rigor by Ibrahim Lodi who crushed the power of the nobles and tried to establish indivisible sovereignty, which would not disturb the unity of the empire. The social and tribal traditions based on fragmentation of authority and egalitarian clan and kin ties also initially influenced Afghan polity. However, these had to be set aside for establishing a strong state. The analysis of Afghan fiscal system by Moreland, Nurul Hasan and I.A. Khan suggests that the pioneering efforts in the sphere of fiscal and land revenue administration



were the contribution of Afghan rulers particularly Sher Shah. Reference to *rupiya* as a coin is initially found in Sher Shah's period (1538-45) and the *rai* (schedule of crop rates) prepared by Sher Shah was the harbinger of the Mughal revenue reforms. An important contemporary source material for Sher Shah's period is Abbas Khan Sarwani's *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* written in Akbar's reign. The territories where *zabt* system prevailed in 1600 were those which had been in the possession of the Afghan leader Sher Shah and the newly annexed territories of Gujarat, Bengal, Berar and Khandesh continued with their separate revenue system. Another important contribution of Sher Shah was in the sphere of construction of roads. Sarwani points out '(Sher Shah) built road sarais (rest houses) which commenced from the fort that he had constructed in the Punjab and it ran upto the town of Sonargaon which lay situated on the edge of the Bay of Bengal (*dariya i-shor*). He built another road that ran from the city of Agra to Burhanpur on the borders of the Deccan. He made another road which ran from the city of Agra to Jodhpur and Chittor. He then built still another road with Sarais which ran from the city of Lahore to Multan. In all he built 1700 sarais on the roads which lay in various regions and in every sarai he built apartments for both Hindu and Muslims.' The sarais served as commercial centers and the road construction activity of Sher Shah played an important role in integrating the economy of Bengal with other parts in north India. The Afghans state under Sher Shah was created due to the availability of 'military labour market' in the 16<sup>th</sup> century India. Loose confederacies comprising of ethnic identities such as Rajput and Afghans were bound together in a complicated network of alliances which were necessary for rulers like Sher Shah and Humayun for state formation. The basis of Sher Shah's power was the peasant retainer who formed an important part of the armed contingents. Discipline, proper recruitment, branding of horses, regular pay and loyalty were the pillars of military power under Sher Shah. The seizure of power by Sher Shah is attributed to his army organization (consisting of various ethnic groups viz. Rajputs, *zamindars* and Afghans) and the subsequent consolidation of power under him was on account of the organization of the revenue resources of the territories under his control which provided a regular source of revenue for sustaining the empire. On the ideological level he kept himself at a distance from *ulema* and believed in heterodox eclecticism. Sher Shah's kingship was not based on horizontal alliances with Afghan chiefs and other groups but on a vertical hierarchical relationship between king and the loyal retainers. Treasures he had acquired as soldier/commander or otherwise also helped him in his political ambition.

Analysing the ideology of the Mughal empire J.F. Richards has pointed out two basic features:

- 1) Illuminationist theory (*Farr-i-izadi*) and the *Tauhid-i-ilahi* (kind of royal cult). These formed the crux of the Mughal theory of kingship and sovereignty.
- 2) This notion of sovereignty made it possible to deviate from the orthodox *shariat* principles and also to counter the orthodox *ulema*.

Kingship continued to be divinely ordained under Jahangir and Shahjahan. Sir Thomas Roe the emissary from the king of England to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir says that the latter 'Falling upon his father's concept, hath dared to enter farther in, and to professe himselfe for the Mayne of his religion to be a greater Prophett than Mahomett; and hath formed to himself a new law, mingled of all...'. Mirza Nathan, a *khanzada* (Persian noble) served as an imperial *mansabdar* in Jahangir's time and made use of terminology like *pir-o-murshid* (sufi saint of virtue) and *qibla* (The western part of the mosque in front of which prayer is offered). The western part of mosque in front of which prayer is offered for Jahangir. This shows that the king's image was placed equal to that of a sufi saint.

In Shah Jahan and Jahangir's period there was a shift in ideology and the 'divine faith' received a setback. Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, a Naqshbandi sufi saint, tried to promote Islamic revivalism in Jahangir's period. He believed that *Shariat* principles should be strictly followed. The Naqshbandi, Shattari, Chisti and other sufi sects



were resorting to Islamic revivalism and orthodoxy in the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan. Sufi ideology was permeated with orthodoxy and it tried to influence politics by enlisting nobles as disciples and encouraging Islamic revivalism.

Growth of fiscal system and expansion of trade was an important characteristic of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. An important development which took place in this period was the growth of the agency of bankers to remit revenue from the provinces to the centre and the integration into the economic system of the trade related and monetary aspects. The 17<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by the involvement of the nobility and the rulers in commerce and trade. Scholars like Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam are of the opinion that 'Shahjahan's trade was part of an implicit bullionist orientation in Mughal state policy in the period'. As the Dutch Company employee Gerard Pelgrom writes in 1655, 'Were the king not to constrain his subjects to go through with the said passage with force there would be few or perhaps even no traders to be found who would willingly risk their goods therewards, all merchants being made by his majesty by a certain order to send a specified number of packs (of textiles) perforce to Mokha, even though the king very well knows that the owners will thereby gain but little interest, trying by these means to keep his view on increasing the textiles that one made in Gujarat and Hindustan (where most of his subjects live) and by the same means to bring a considerable sum of Spanish reels and ducats into his realm, as he otherwise has no gold or silver mines, on account of which it is also deemed necessary that the Moors continue in this trade, for otherwise the artisans will be impoverished'. In the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan fiscal dispatches were conducted through the medium of bankers and *hundis* (bills of exchange). These were used for financial transfers although cash transfer (coin and bullion) by the imperial agents and armed bearers also continued to be practiced.

Many *dasturul amals* or the revenue documents which were used by historians as source material and evidence of the centralized character of the Mughal state are dated to the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It needs to be emphasized that Shahjahan's and Aurangzeb's reigns are also noted for the efforts on the part of the imperial authority to bring more and more land under *khalisa*. Several changes were introduced in the time of Shahjahan in the sphere of *mansabdari*. We have already referred to the systemic postulate propounded by the Aligarh scholars who feel that the administrative system (agrarian structure, *mansab, jagirdari*) was initiated and made impeccable by Akbar but this has been questioned by other scholars. It seems that these administrative arrangements developed and grew in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and reflected to some extent a continuation of the earlier institutional arrangements and ceaselessly evolved into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore it is important to stress the evolutionary aspect with regard to the development of administrative structures. No single ruler can be credited for perfecting these institutions.

Expansion of agriculture by cutting the forests is an important development of Shah Jahan's period as given in the *Haqiqat-i-suba-Bihar*: 'from the time of Shah Jahan it was customary that wood cutter and ploughmen (*tabrdaran wa tishadaran wa qalbaha*) used to accompany the troops so that forests might be cleared and land cultivated. Ploughs used to be donated by the government at the rate of one *anna* per *bigha* in the first year. Chaudharis were appointed to keep the *riaya* happy with their considerate behaviour and to populate the country.....There was a general order that whosoever cleared a forest and brought land under cultivation such land would be his zamindari'. Thus the period between middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century was notable for the growth of trade, fiscal system and agricultural expansion.

The increasing compilation of *dastur ul amals* in Shah Jahan's and Aurangzeb's period reflect the greater stress on formalism and emphasis on procedure and propriety with focus on measurement (by inspection and survey). The *Akhbarat* (news letters of the imperial court) were used as a medium to ensure the smooth communication between the centre and the provinces. Aurangzeb's official position is reflected in the

corpus of royal letters, orders and communication to his officials. The bulky corpus of views of Arabic legal experts contained in the *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri* and the *farmans* issued to Muhammad Hashim and Rasikdas (Mughal officials) were a clear indication of Aurangzeb's efforts to delineate a definite legal procedure (based on Hanafite law) for the provinces or territories under the Mughals. The 'canonization' efforts of Aurangzeb might have contributed to the insurrections and revolts but the crisis which took a definite shape in the period of Aurangzeb was also a consequence of the problems confronting the economic and bureaucratic system and also reflected the desire of the local and the regional elements for a greater share in political power and greater autonomy (self determination). The nature of Mughal religio-legal scheme has to be analysed and the role of the *Qazi* and the other judicial officials in the settlement of religious and other types of discord have to be studied. *Sharia* served as a reference point (to some extent especially in judicial matters) in governance but it continued to be interpreted in accordance with the political needs.

R. P. Tripathi suggests that the Afghan polity and the Timurid polity were basically decentralized. The Mongol features inherent in the Timurid polity especially the decrees of Chingez Khan laid stress on division of sovereignty through division of tribes which encouraged creation of an appanage system. This did not allow the emergence of a bureaucratic system and a strong ruler which were the essential prerequisites of centralization. It is argued by scholars like I. A. Khan that Humayun had to contend with the power of the nobility and his brothers but Akbar was able to avoid this obstacle and adopted the practices of the Turkish rulers of 13-14<sup>th</sup> centuries and was able to establish a strong absolutist state. D. Strusand also accepts this view. However on the basis of recent evidence (Jean Aubin's work on Timur) it is suggested that the Timurid polity was transformed from a not so cohesive system to a tightly knit despotism. This is deduced on the basis of the belief that Timur based his empire on the combination of divine sanction and Chingez Khanid traditions. More emphasis was placed on divine aspect which gave legitimacy to despotism. Strusand contends that the Persian bureaucratic traditions were adopted by the Timurids which further disproves the decentralized contention of scholars. Sanjay Subrahmanyam suggests that it is important to study Mirza Hakim's (Akbar's half brother) position and the threat posed to Akbar by him. This would enable us to understand that succession always posed a problem, whether in Humayun or Akbar's case or in the time of Aurangzeb and after his death. Partition and appanaging was an issue in succession and the idea of 'linear succession' could not always be easily implemented. Scholars feel that partition and appanage formation tradition counters the centralization perspective.

Some scholars feel that the institutions which were established under Akbar, paved the way for centralization. However it is important to note that the *jagir* or *mansab* had their origin in the earlier periods (similar to the *wajah* of Lodis, *tuyul* of Babur and Humayun) and they represented an evolutionary institutional system and were not the creation of Akbar's genius. M. Hodgsons' 'gun powder empires' proposition lays emphasis on the role of fire arms in the establishment of centralized empires like Mughal. Strusand regards the Mughal state as an admixture of Islamic (at the center) and Hindu (at the periphery) ideals. This view is quite close to Burton Stein's segmentary state theory. It is suggested that though it was centralized in Akbar's period, but in the post Akbar period, several factors viz. (crisis in *jagir* system) contributed to decentralization.

Stephen Blake analyses the Mughal state as a patrimonial bureaucratic empire. This concept is borrowed from Weber and applied to the Mughal state. This postulate is based on the premise that in small states, the ruler governed as if it was his patrimony or household realm. With the expansion of territory and emergence of large states a bureaucracy has to be recruited for effective governance. This was the basis of patrimonial bureaucratic empire.



**Map 4: The Mughal Empire in 1601**

**Source :** An Atlas of the Mughal Empire, Irfan Habib

Contemporary Europeans like Dutch merchant Francisco Pelsaert (1595-1630) and French physician Francois Bernier (1620-1688) refer to the Mughal state in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as having its own limitations. Bernier refers to the 'agrarian crisis' due to the problems in the *jagirdari* system. This view was adopted by W. H. Moreland and later M. Athar Ali and Irfan Habib. The non-existence of private property in land in this period is mentioned by Bernier. He divided the Mughal state vertically into two parts: the overarching super structures headed by the Mughal tyrant and the other part dominated by the native princes placed below the absolute Mughal sovereign. Recently scholars like Chetan Singh have tried to assess the Mughal state in the context of the various regions embodied in it. The study of regions enables us to understand their dynamics separately and helps us to understand the Mughal state not as a monolithic entity but as a variegated whole comprising of several regions which had their own peculiarities.

It would be reasonable to assume that the centralized perspective of the historians needs to be reassessed in the light of researches which have brought forth new ideas and perspectives on the basis of fresh evidence.

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## 10.5 DECLINE

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The decline of the Mughal empire meant the crumbling of the edifice of the state. Therefore, an analysis of the decline or weakening of the empire would inevitably mean scrutinizing the degeneration which had crept into the main pillars of the state system i.e. the agrarian and *mansab-jagir* system. This would help us to understand better how the state system functioned and what were its strengths and weaknesses. A number of eminent historians have tried to understand the process of Mughal decline through their works. These works - Satish Chandra's *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court*, Irfan Habib's *Agrarian System of the Mughal Empire*, M. Athar Ali's *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* and N. A. Siddiqi's *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals* offer a single explanation of this crisis which has been summed up by P. Hardy as follows:

'From these works it is possible to draw a diagram of tensions between monarch (padshah), military or service noble (mansabdar), landholder (zamindar) and peasant (raiyyat) which when maintained in equilibrium were creative of order and stability but which if allowed to pull free were creative of disorder and impotence. Such a free pull occurred when the Marathas as zamindars forcibly jerked against the bit of Mughal control and resisted domestication with the Mughal system. The efforts of the Mughals to muster the resources in revenue and men to overcome the Marathas led to strains within the nobility and insupportable pressures upon both zamindar and peasant who if they did not revolt actively at least resisted the Mughal revenue collector passively. A combination of over lavish appointments by the emperor and the military success of the Marathas created a shortage of assignments (jagirs) of areas of land productive of income for the nobles. Thus resources wherewith to support the military contingents which were the condition of receiving appointments were rendered inadequate. Consequently the number and effectiveness of the Mughal forces fell off and the Mughal military machine (which was essentially an instrument for the internal military occupation of India) became progressively incapable of controlling the autochthonous military and rural aristocracy (the zamindars of various degrees) of the subcontinent'.

M.N. Pearson points out that the link between the Emperor and the imperial *mansabdar* (whom he regards as constituting the empire) was based on the victories attained in wars. The bond of fidelity was not related to ethnicity or religion. He characterizes the empire as a war state which rested on the basic principles of conquest and annexation. The attachment between the Emperor and the imperial officers was personal which led the latter to believe, in Pearson's words, 'it was not their empire that was failing it was Aurangzeb's'.



J.F. Richards is of the opinion that due to the extension of *khalisa* the land to be assigned in *jagir* decreased. However he feels that this problem could have been overcome by consolidating the southern frontier of the empire. He also argues that Aurangzeb did not provide backing to or promote the Hindu warrior aristocracy in the Deccan (Maratha, Gond, Bedar or Telegu chiefs). Earlier traditional interpretations of decline gave a central place to Aurangzeb's policies (bigotry) which were regarded as a reversal of Akbar's endeavours. Peter Hardy summarises the arguments of Richards and Pearson as follows: 'the progressive inability of the dynasty to assure its agents a competence if not wealth to control the terms of service by those agents and to control the manner in which the elite extracted the resources of the empire from the producer so that in the end the dynasty was unable to withstand the Marathas, Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali'. Hardy suggests that this problem could have been countered and solved by adopting the model of "Weberian bureaucracy" which entailed the principles of direct administration and cash payments. The other factors responsible for weakening the military cum administrative edifice was the difference between estimated revenue (*jama*) and revenue actually collected (*hasil*) and therefore the inability of the mansabdars to sustain and support the requisite armed contingents. (The *mansabdars* were supposed to maintain the specified troops on the basis of the estimates of revenue (*jama*). However in actual practice the *hasil* or actual realisation was much less.) The economic and administrative crisis posited by the Aligarh school is acceptable to Pearson and Richards also. This postulate is based on inferences arrived at after a detailed study of the writings of contemporary writers viz. Abul Fazl, Mamuri, Bhim Sen and Khafi Khan.

Bernier's *Travels in the Mogul Empire* throws light on Shivaji and the Maratha problem Manucci in his *Storia do Mogor*, (translated by William Irvine, Vol II,) portrays the picture of political chaos in Mughal times caused by *zamindar* rebellions and the connivance of the Mughal officials in the acts of defiance by local magnates; Mamuri and Khafi Khan refer to decrease in *paibaqi* lands (lands to be assigned in *jagir*); Bhim Sen narrates the Deccani campaigns and refers to the 'failure to keep up the sanctioned strength of their contingents.'

The issue of disintegration of Mughal state as an effect of decreased *hasil* and the consequent reduced contingents has to be reassessed in the light of fresh look at the history of military techniques. It is felt that the Mughals lagged behind the Persians with regard to innovations in military technology and the lightly equipped armed and dressed Maratha cavalry proved formidable for the heavy Mughal cavalry. Certain other insights into the local price situation and an analysis of Aurangzeb's personality would help in deducing a more acceptable and convincing approach for characterizing the decay of the Mughal state.

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## 10.6 SUMMARY

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From the above analysis we can summarize that the Tuko-Mongol origin of the Timurid dynasty had influenced the Mughal idea of empire and concept of kingship. Babur's ideas of sovereignty and kingship had direct linkage with the principles of the tribal Mongol tradition and the Islamic tradition in which he was brought up. Akbar made innovation in the Mughal theory of sovereignty by introducing a rational element. M.Athar Ali explains that this rational concept demanded obedience in fulfilment of a mutual, contractual duty and helped 'to justify the sovereign's absolute claims over the individual subject. The strength of this theory lies in its secular character on alleged social needs'. The Mughal emperor was the supreme authority within the empire commanding absolute loyalty of all his subjects. To counterbalance the threat from the heterogeneous nobility to the imperial authority the Mughals developed a novel mechanism of checks and balances. In the conflict among the nobles over sharing of power and agrarian surplus the Mughal emperor ensured his position as a superior arbiter.

### State in Medieval Times

In analysing the nature of the Mughal state some historians have classified it as a highly centralized bureaucratic empire. The Aligarh historians have stressed on the systemic perspective and the fiscal/resource management of the Mughal empire in order to explain the nature and crisis of the empire. Irfan Habib has used the term 'medieval Indian system', a system characterised by the growing tendency of a highly centralized bureaucratic state apparatus to appropriate the surplus and exploit the peasantry. While scholars like Blake and Pearson have described the Mughal authority as essentially personal and patriarchal than despotic. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam focus on the persistence of differences from region to region rather than the centrally imposed uniformity as suggested by some historians. Chetan Singh is also of the opinion of a regionalization of the administrative functionaries of the Mughal state. Decline of the Mughal empire was not a sudden collapse of the imperial administrative apparatus, nor an individual ruler could be held responsible for the crisis, but the crisis in imperial structure because of economic and political reasons resulted in a shift of political and military power from the centre to regions. Emergence of successor and other states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the indication of this declining trend of the imperial polity.

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### 10.7 EXERCISES

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- 1) Analyse the important features of the Mughal theory of sovereignty.
- 2) Explain the nature of the Mughal state giving references to the views of different historians.

**Structure**

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 18<sup>th</sup> Century Debate
- 11.3 Bengal
- 11.4 Hyderabad
- 11.5 Awadh
- 11.6 Summary
- 11.7 Exercises

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**11.1 INTRODUCTION**

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The 18<sup>th</sup> century has been a subject of historical debate among scholars. It represents a phase of transition between medieval and modern periods. The decline of Mughal power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by the rise of autonomous states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Earlier the historians regarded this period as crisis torn but recent researches have tried to study 18<sup>th</sup> century states as separate entities possessing elements of dynamism and growth.

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**11.2 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY DEBATE**

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It is important to study the 18<sup>th</sup> century debate among scholars for understanding the nature of successor states which emerged in this period. 18<sup>th</sup> century has been largely analysed in the context of the Mughal empire. However, recent writings focus on 18<sup>th</sup> century as an epoch in which certain trends emerged which were not wholly governed by the presence of Mughal empire. Therefore, an attempt is being made to study 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period in which many positive features existed thus demolishing the 'bleak-century' postulate. This phase represents a transitional era between the medieval and modern period. The earliest interpretation of 18<sup>th</sup> century is contained in Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar's *History of Bengal Vol. II* and *The Fall of Mughal Empire Volum IV* in which the 18<sup>th</sup> century was categorized into pre-British period and the British period. He subscribes to the dark age postulate of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Historians like Athar Ali refers to the rise of successor states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but feel that these should be analysed within the frame work of Mughal decline. Hermann Goetz in his lecture on the crisis of Indian Civilization in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century laid emphasis on the cultural development in India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This was a marked departure from the 'overall decay' theory of 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, deviating from these approaches recently historians have tried to analyse the successor states and emergence of new states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. These comprised of Awadh, Hyderabad, Bengal, Mysore, Marathas, Sikhs etc. These polities are analysed as preparing the ground for the metamorphosis from the Mughal imperial system to the British system. The 18<sup>th</sup> century polities should also be seen in the context of continuity with the Mughal political system and also changes introduced to suit the new political situation. Thus the 18<sup>th</sup> century reflected the political transformation from Mughal decline to British colonialism but the socio economic forces at the local level continued to operate as before but the local groups shifted their political allegiance. With the decline of Mughal empire the virtually independent zamindars performed the task of collection of revenue and the local rulers used these resources for sustaining court and armies. This income also penetrated into towns and urban centers which thrived continually. Several types of political formations emerged in this period ranging from successor states to zamindaris which later got absorbed into the category of Princely states under the British.

However, the early British writers of Indian history (Elliot, Haig etc.) painted the 18<sup>th</sup> century in dismal colour since they wished to demonstrate that their predecessors were incompetent. The contemporary Persian works also portrayed the period as anarchic. The Persian writers were patronized by the nobles and with the decline of the Mughal empire their position was adversely affected. The contemporary historians were either lower officials or 'prebendaries'. However, some of them like Ghulam Husain Tabatabai in Bengal who wrote *Siyar ul Mutakhhirin* or Shah Nawab Khan in Hyderabad who authored *Maasir ul Umara* or Ghulam Husain Salim of Bengal the writer of *Riyaz us Salatin* documented for the purpose of instructing the British officials and laboured under British auspices. This was a part of the broader project of recording colonial knowledge. The erosion of the traditional power and the adversity and the reversals which the older regime suffered were mirrored in these works. Recently scholars like M. Alam suggest that the 18<sup>th</sup> century was caught between the grandeur of the Mughals and the indignity of colonial rule.

The author of *Maasir ul Umara* writes: "That Nadir Shah's invasion resulted in a setback to the prosperity of Delhi, but in a short while it returned to normal and in fact in every thing it is now better and shows progress...its industries and manufacturers are flourishing." The Urdu *Shahr Ashobs* (Ruined cities) of the contemporary poets Mir and Sauda have been analysed by Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam. The poets lament the destruction of Delhi and Agra and the degeneration of the ethics and principles. The *Ashob-I-Zamana* of Jafar Zatalli written in 18<sup>th</sup> century refers to the decay of a pattern of life and setback to a group of people (umara) who gave protection to creative classes (poets, writers) and gains of the 'lower' categories (weavers, butchers etc.) from the changed social milieu. It seems that the British historians of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were not guided by any bias or prejudice towards the Muslim rulers of the previous regime. Col. A. Dow and Col. Kirkpatrick the historians cum officials (in Lucknow and Hyderabad) of 18<sup>th</sup> century represent the above mentioned category. Dow in his *History of Hindustan* refers to company rule as mercantile misrule and desired the reverting back to Mughal practices. Dow's glorification of Akbar made Warren Hastings to order the publication of Francis Gladwin's pioneering English translation of *Ain-i-Akbari* or the institutes of Akbar. Kirkpatrick believed that Mughal rule was based on a variegated set of laws and customary traditions which found favour with Lord Cornwallis too. The concept of Mughal maladministration was propounded by British officials of mid 19<sup>th</sup> century viz. Sir Henry Miers Elliott in his *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Mohammadan India*. This view point was carried further by British as well as Indian historians like Sir Wolseley Haig, Sir Jadurath Sarkar and Dr. R. C. Majumdar.

Sir Jadunath Sarkar propounded a dark age postulate of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which has been refuted and challenged by scholars like Athar Ali, Satish Chandra and Muzaffar Alam. It is based on an untenable premise focusing on degeneration which eroded the political organization which was a consequence of incompetent kings and nobles and their extravagant lifestyles. The 20<sup>th</sup> century ideology of polity also influenced the perceptions of writers of this period who regarded a centralist system as imparting stability as opposed to the regional or local assertion of authority and power which brought about destabilization.

Athar Ali's fresh interpretation of Mughal decline in an article in the *Modern Asian Studies*, provided new insights into the understanding of the problem of degeneration of Mughal empire and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The focal point shifted from the study of personalities held responsible for the catastrophe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the analysis and evaluation of the administrative structures of Mughal empire. He tried to understand the decay of Mughal power in the wider context of socio-economic and political vibrance in North western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and regarded the decline as a form of cultural degeneration.



Satish Chandra is skeptical regarding economic deterioration in the *riyasats* or successor states, which emerged in the form of political formations from the erstwhile Mughal system and were later integrated into the British colonial system. He refers to them as possessing a vibrant political ethos. Muzaffar Alam's work suggests "that in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Indo-Gangetic *subas* of the North, from Allahabad to Lucknow and Multan to be precise, experienced multivariate manifestations of crisis rather than a positive linearity of decline." He regards Awadh as being a picture of progressive activities with scope for emergence of a regional political system but in the Punjab suba he finds few indications, which testify to modifications in the Mughal system in the sphere of polity and economic growth.

Athar Ali adopts J. N. Sarkar's periodization paradigm with regard to establishment of British colonialism and places it at the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Barun De in his presidential address to the Indian History Congress in 1989 tries to unentangle the complicated web of historical perceptions regarding 18<sup>th</sup> century. He points out "Prof. Athar Ali identifies transition with the collapse of Mughal empire and then with the apparent chronological gap in which transitional regimes intervened (with) the rise of British power." Athar Ali puts the 18<sup>th</sup> century polities in the middle phase of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Satish Chandra studies the 18<sup>th</sup> century in totality placed between the indigenous and exogenous imperialism represented by Mughal and British respectively. Therefore, the 18<sup>th</sup> century regimes are studied in the context of their continuity with earlier regime and the changes subsequently introduced and their final subordination by the British system.

Sarkar's understanding of 18<sup>th</sup> century is clearly reflected in the following paragraphs from *History of Bengal* (Dacca University) *Vol II*: "On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1757, the middle ages of India ended and her modern age began. When Clive struck at the Nawab, Mughal civilization had become a spent bullet. Its potency for good, its very life was gone. The country's administration had become hopelessly dishonest and inefficient and the mass of the people had been reduced to the deepest poverty, ignorance and moral degradation by a small selfish, proud and unworthy ruling class. Imbecile lechers filled the throne.... the army was rotten and honeycombed with treason. The purity of domestic life was threatened by the debauchery fashionable in the Court and the aristocracy.... Religion had become the handmaid of vice and folly.

On such a hopelessly decadent society, the rational progressive spirit of Empire struck with resistless force. First of all an honest and efficient administration had to be imposed on the country and directed by the English if only for the sake of the internal peace on which their trade depended and the revenue by which the necessary defense force could be maintained.... In the space of less than one generation in the twenty years from Plassey to Warren Hastings (1757-1776) the land began to recover from the blight of man's handiwork and political life, all felt the revivifying touch of the new impetus from the west. The dry bones of a stationary oriental society began to stir, at first faintly under the wand of a heaven sent magician."

Satish Chandra produced his magnum opus '*Parties and Politics at the Mughal court 1707-1739*' in 1959. According to him the end of Aurangzeb's reign represented the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century and this late medieval period was marked by transition brought about by the break down of the Mughal imperial system. He analysed the disruption of the socio-political system as follows: "social problems which no mere devices for expanding cultivation could solve .... What was really required was the rapid expansion of industry and trade based on the introduction of new technology and the removal of old barriers hindering that expansion.... the existing social order encompassed trade and industry in too narrow a sphere. Hence a basic improvement in the situation was beyond the competence of any one king."

In a number of articles published in the next twenty years, Satish Chandra laid stress on the inability of the ruling class to find new avenues when the tripolar relationship between the center, the zamindars and the Khudkasht (resident cultivator who cultivates with his plough and bullock) was under stress. In 1982 the earlier view held by Satish Chandra which regarded the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a dead end was modified by him. He was now receptive to the idea of the Western Scholars (Sociologists and Indologists) that the 18<sup>th</sup> century was teeming with opportunities and though the old system was tottering but the possibility of growth existed for worthy people.

Another important work was written by Irfan Habib titled *'The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707'*. Habib refers to the Maratha "plundering and warfare" activities which he thought were responsible for ravaging the countryside and causing ruination of the peasantry. He cited Aurangzeb's letters as evidence of the Maratha pillaging in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: "there is no province or district where the infidels have not raised a tumult and since they are not chastised they have established themselves everywhere. Most of the country has been rendered desolate and if any place is inhabited the peasants have probably come to terms with the 'robbers' ashqiya, official Mughal name for the Marathas. According to Habib "... the Mughal empire had been its own gravedigger." The crisis in the agrarian economy was reflected in the peasant rebellions which took place frequently and led to the collapse of the imperial system. Habib is of the opinion that the political forces which emerged subsequently on the debris of Mughal empire represented "reckless rapine, anarchy and foreign conquest." The state's appropriation of the agricultural surplus was based on oppressive practices since those who subsisted on peasant's produce continued to increase the demand and a large part was utilized by the parasitic ruling class in urban areas for extravagant purposes but there was no corresponding increase in the agrarian production which resulted in agrarian distress.

Satish Chandra and I. Habib characterized the Mughal ruling elite as possessing a narrow class disposition. They feel that it was not broad-based. The absolutist character of the state is reflected in the authority of the racially and hierarchically organized ruling class. Barun De opines that "...medieval imperialism.... of the Mughals in South Asia .... was more sterile like the despotism of Bourbons....finally replaced by an equally authoritarian and absolutist colonial imperialism." Therefore 18<sup>th</sup> century was a period of transition anterior to the modern period. Periodisation presents a complex problem. Should 1707 marking Aurangzeb's death be regarded as the beginning of modern period? Or should the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century be merely regarded as a period of transformation till the beginnings of the British colonialism in 1757?

Athar Ali is known for his writings on administrative history of Mughal India. He too like I. Habib and S. Chandra lays emphasis on economic factors which caused the weakening of the Mughal state edifice and paved the way for the establishment of colonial rule. The Mughal imperial structure is considered by Athar Ali as analogous to a pan-Indian structure though peripheral (marginal) areas such as Kerala, Dakshin Kanara, Madura Nayakdom in Southern Tamil Nadu, North East fell outside the pale of Mughal hegemony. They were later absorbed into the colonial state. 1700 onwards impediments and obstacles (peasant revolts, parasitical urban populace) hindered economic growth, which was considerably stifled. Therefore for many scholars (Athar Ali, I. Habib) the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century was crisis torn. The reasoning offered by these historians was in contrast to the exaggerated account of J. N. Sarkar depicting 18<sup>th</sup> century as a dark age.

Athar Ali mentions three categories of state formations in 18<sup>th</sup> century India:

- 1) Successor states like Hyderabad, Awadh and Bengal which were part of the Mughal empire and emerged due to the disintegration of Mughal empire. Their administrative structure was a continuation of the Mughal model.

- 2) The Maratha confederacy, Jats, Sikhs and Afghans rose to power as a consequence of the crisis which had weakened the Mughal imperial structure.
- 3) South Indian state of Mysore under Hyder Ali Khan and Tipu Sultan.

Athar Ali describes the distinction between the successor states and other states especially Maratha thus “while they might use certain Mughal administrative institutions for their own purposes their model of government was by and large antithetical to the empire and could not be reconciled with it.” Though the Aligarh school regards the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period of crisis on account of Mughal decline and emergence of colonialism but this argument is replete with many loopholes. The focus of Mughal empire as representing pan-Indian aspirations and neglect of the peripheral polities is unwarranted. The centralization aspect of Mughal Empire is equated with stability and growth to the extent that the regional polities, which emerged with the decline of Mughal empire are regarded as anarchical. This proposition of the Aligarh school has been challenged in many writings recently (Cohn, Wink etc.)

In the 1983 Calcutta Deushkar Lectures Satish Chandra was able to discover possibilities for economic growth in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He refers to the elasticity and adaptability especially in the sphere of cloth production, long distance trade, *dadni* (term of agreement for providing means for production to artisans), cash crop, insurance, banking and other categories of rural fiscal mechanisms which led to the emergence of *sahukari* class to a position of economic and social prominence. He referred to the categorization (of rural society into two groups – the *riyasati* or privileged and the *raiya* or others) The *riyasati* class was the rural aristocracy comprising of the upper strata, the customary holders (*malik*) of village lands (*khud kashta*) and those who held official positions at the village level. These constituted the core of the rural gentry (elite) and they played an important role in the new state structures which emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Satish Chandra suggests that “there were greater possibilities for upward social mobility for the rural privileged sector than in the earlier period but within the broad framework of feudal society”. He finally infers that “the 18<sup>th</sup> century was thus pregnant with possibilities.... The old mould was cracking and there was a possibility of growth in various areas. Everywhere capable, ambitious people were pushing forward. What was lacking was direction.”

Bernard S. Cohn in his important article, in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, titled “Political systems in 18<sup>th</sup> century India: the Banaras Region” deviates from the earlier position of scholars who analyse the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the context of the crisis which developed in the Mughal administrative and economic system. He attempted to study the political system which developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century especially the micro system i.e. the Banaras zamindari as an autonomous domain under the *Nawab* of Awadh which was finally subordinated to the control of British East India Company. Cohn did not contest the proposition of the pan-Indian imperial structure which developed cracks. His originality lay in the attempt to find resilience in the political configurations and the process of building up of power and dominance in the society of that period. He followed the systems approach. According to this approach political structures comprise of not only the centralized states, which lie at the pinnacle of the graded and hierarchical system, but also consist of clan dominated villages, bands, groups, associations etc. at the local and community level. The latter too played an important role in the policymaking and implementation. Cohn argued that political control in pre-modern times was organized along vertical lines (hierarchical). The dominance of the hierarchically superior powers was sustained through antagonism among the different categories in society. Although state power was legitimized through traditions, rituals etc. but it could be maintained only through rivalry and balance among the various groups in society. On this premise Cohn was able to formulate four types of political systems in pre-modern India: 1. Imperial 2. Secondary 3. Regional 4. local. The Mughal power represented the imperial category

with an all embracing umbrella system. Successor states which emerged as a consequence of the decline of Mughal power are regarded as secondary states. Regional category comprises of petty rulers who owe allegiance to the superior (imperial) power and who are often engaged in internecine conflict among themselves. The local category were the kin-based groups, local leaders, chiefs or adventurers who were accountable to the secondary level power.

Cohn studied the micro-level polity of the Mughal successor state, Awadh especially, the Banaras Raja's position vis a vis the Nawab of Awadh and the Rajput *biradaris* at the *taluka* and *tappa* level were analysed. Earlier the political changes which took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century have been explained as a transition from one empire to another or in the context of agrarian or economic crisis. However, Cohn's system approach and the conflict and consensus paradigm inherent in it offer a different explanation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century state formation. Herman Goetz (*The Crisis of Indian Civilization in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and early 19<sup>th</sup> Century*) was the first scholar to deduce positive features in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and he felt that the 18<sup>th</sup> century ought to be studied as separate entity and though it was a period of decline in the political and moral sphere but this period was marked by an aesthetic sensitivity and contributed to the growth of cultural development in India.

Satish Chandra refers to the decline of empires in Asia when the nations states got strengthened in western Europe and modern science and technology gave rise to Industrial Revolution. These ideas had been explored by Marshall Hodgson and Athar Ali earlier. Satish Chandra emphasizes that the political decline manifested itself in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He points out that in most of the areas there was no sharp fall in agricultural production, land revenue demand did not decrease, agricultural distress was much less as compared to British rule. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the weakening of the power of the regional and local elites in the face of British challenge the economy was marked by destabilization as a consequence of British policies. It is a significant point referred to by Satish Chandra that in the *Riyasati* politics a negative feature emerged in the form of the emergence of large *zamindars* or *talluqdaris* which tried to thrive on the labour of small landholders and *khudkashta* peasants. In this sense the Mughal tripolar balance between the *jagirdar*, *zamindar* and the peasants was replaced by a more exploitative system.

An important point which has been raised by scholars is that the polities which emerged as successors to Mughals or as an outcome of challenge to the Mughal imperial power could not survive for long. It is necessary to analyse the state systems of these polities to understand why they were not able to withstand the British onslaught. Another pertinent issue is the fact that most of the historians till 1970 perceived the 18<sup>th</sup> century as merely an interregnum or a period of transition which marked the fall of Mughals and the rise of British. The 18<sup>th</sup> century has not been studied in terms of changes in the economy and society of the polities of the different regions or localities. However, even the studies which have been undertaken from this perspective by Cohn, etc. are not able to rid themselves of the imperial paradigm.

One of the earliest interpretation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a dark age propounded by historians like Jadunath Sarkar has been seriously questioned by later scholars. Instead of attributing Mughal decline to personalities of rulers, scholars like Irfan Habib, Athar Ali and Satish Chandra try to analyse it in the context of the crisis in the Mughal administrative system. However all these historians perceived the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period of crisis though J. N. Sarkar exaggerated it to the extent of analyzing it as a dark age. J. N. Sarkar emphasizes on personalities of rulers and characterizes the period as crisis torn, whereas Irfan Habib, Athar Ali and S. Chandra lay emphasis on the economic crisis. Herman Goetz was the first scholar who saw positive traits in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He analysed it as a period of cultural achievements. Recently S. Chandra and various other historians (C.A. Bayly, Frank Perlin, Andre Wink etc.) have tried to assess the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a period which was replete with opportunities



for growth. Some scholars like Muzaffar Alam, Chetan Singh and others have tried to study various regions of Mughal Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and point out that new political alignments developed as a result of the decline of Mughal power which did not necessarily in all regions imply chaos. On the basis of the evidence from the various regions analysed by scholars the nature of 18<sup>th</sup> century is recently being reassessed.

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### 11.3 BENGAL

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The death of Aurangzeb in 1707 was marked by the decay of Mughal Empire especially the central power in Delhi. This was followed by the emergence of successor states which represented the *subas* of Mughal Empire. Let us examine whether the provinces were undergoing a phase of decay or decline.

It has been argued that in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Mughal administration was extremely compact and cohesive. The *mansabdars* appointed by the center and posted in the provinces constituted the upper layer of administrative official hierarchy. Their position was transferable and the central government had absolute control over the provincial administration especially through the various officials (*viz. subedar* and *diwan*) posted there who served as a curb on each other's power. Bengal however was a unique province because the *zamindars* as land holders at the local level enjoyed tremendous power and performed the function of revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. In the administrative hierarchy the provincial officials supervised the *zamindar* and other landholders and peasants. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the *zamindaris* in Bengal were not large and therefore it was easier for the imperial government to manage them.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century with the weakening of the central government the provincial government in Bengal also underwent transformation. The power of the *mansabdars* in Bengal weakened and the size of imperial contingents was reduced. The *mansabdars* found it difficult to send remittances to Delhi due to the declining military capabilities. Now a new phenomenon emerged in the form of an alliance between the representatives of Mughal power in the province (*Subedar, Diwan*) and the *zamindars*. This collaboration later incorporated the commercial and the financial groups in Bengal. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Aurangzeb was confronted with the Maratha problem. He needed to mobilize resources for meeting the Maratha challenge. Irfan Habib in his *Agrarian System of Mughal India* points out that in comparison to the 1580 the revenue demand did not increase much in Bengal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, although in other provinces of northern India the increase was higher as compared to Bengal. Due to devaluation of silver coinage (influx of metal due to European traders) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century agricultural prices soared but correspondingly the *jama* did not increase in Bengal.

Bengal in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was quite prosperous. Evidence shows that on account of extension of cultivation, growth of trade and influx of silver the province of Bengal was economically quite stable. We have pointed out that inspite of economic prosperity the revenue demand in Bengal did not increase. The evidence of the administrative document (*Risala-i-Ziraat*, written in about 1760) informs us that the revenue demand had continued to be the same since Akbar's period and it had not been subject to revision on the basis of actual measurement. The officials responsible for revenue collection i.e. the *mansabdars* who possessed *jagirs*, the *zamindars* and other intermediate groups (collectors) remitted the revenue to the center in accordance with the official rate of demand whereas the actual collection was much higher. Therefore the *mansabdars*, *zamindars* etc. were amassing huge amounts at the cost of the centre. Hardpressed for funds to finance wars against the Marathas Aurangzeb decided to streamline the revenue administration in Bengal since its *jama* was low and it remitted only a small sum to the central treasury. Therefore in 1700 he sent

Murshid Quli Khan from the Deccan to Bengal as *Diwan*. He had earlier demonstrated his skill in revenue administration in the Deccan. In Bengal he proved to be an adept revenue administrator who was initially appointed as *Diwan* but later combined the office of *Diwan* and *Nazim*. His revenue reforms prepared the ground for increase in *jama* (estimated revenue) and *hasil* (revenue collected) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Bengal.

Murshid Quli Khan was successful in raising the revenue collection in Bengal. The increase in *jama* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was about 22.5 % as compared to the figures of revenue demand in 1580. This increase was however not very high if we compare it with the increase in the other provinces of north India in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The increase in *hasil* between 1700-1722 was about 20% as compared to rise of 22.5% in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The upward swing in revenue collections was accompanied by transformation of the revenue administration in Bengal and the establishment of new political alignments in Bengal due to the growth of trade and banking. In this period the sum total of *zamindaris* decreased but there was increase in large *zamindaris*. Money lenders and bankers emerged as important groups and they provided finances to the *zamindars* who served as the revenue appropriating agency at the local level for the *Nazim*.

The revenue reforms introduced by Murshid Quli entailed increasing the revenue demand and collection through measurement and thereby abiding with the Emperor's order for increased remittances to Delhi. This was also meant to act as a check on the *jagirdars*, *zamindars* and others who were depriving the center/government of revenue. The important steps taken by Murshid Quli Khan for achieving his aim of increasing revenue collection were: the *jagirs* of the *mansabdars* in Bengal were shifted to Orissa and consequently those lands in Bengal were placed under *Khalisa* (they yielded more revenue than the lands of Orissa) and thus the revenue collection went directly into the state coffers. The *Nazim* tried to tighten his hold over the *zamindars* by enquiring into their collections and ensuring that they paid revenue in accordance with state demand. By bringing *jagir* land under *khalisa* he was able to ensure that revenue assessment was proper and officials were sent to inquire into the revenue yielding capacity through actual field investigation.

Although surveys and investigations were conducted by the *Nazim* through his officials to get information about the revenue paid by the *zamindars* but it seems that these could not have been done at the village level as mentioned in the contemporary evidence (chronicles) and the efforts of the provincial government were directed to make the *zamindars* and the lower intermediate landholders accountable for proper revenue assessment and collection. *Zamindari sanads* (documents relating to revenue records) refer to assessment only upto *zamindari* level and not village level. Thus, the *Nazim's* policies were aimed to control the *zamindar* and the lower intermediate land holders and affected the peasants only indirectly. In such a situation a *zamindar* who was not able to pay the state demand was deprived of his holding and it was either taken over by the government or money lender or given to a capable and loyal *zamindar* who would be able to fulfill the government's demand.

Certain *zamindars* were encouraged to create big *zamindaris* by bringing other *zamindaris* under their control and also due to grant of lands to them by the *Nazim*. Rajshahi developed as a big *zamindari* between 1700-1727. Dinajpur, Nadia and Burdwan also emerged as large *zamindaris* in this period. By 1727 half of the revenue collected for the province was provided by 15 large *zamindaris* which existed in this period. The policies of the *Nazim* eliminated the *zamindars* who were not able to pay their dues in time. The *zamindars* who made prompt remittances to the government, were rewarded for their performance. *Zamindars* along with the bankers and money lenders had emerged as a powerful group within the province both economically and politically.

The *Risala-i-ziraat* refers to the *mahajans* who gave money to the *zamindars* as loan for making revenue payments to the *Nazim*. In many cases the *zamindars* got into the debt cycle especially since the *Nazim* was stern and strict in dealing with defaulters (*zamindars*). The banking house of Jagat Seth benefited immensely due to the revenue policies of the *Nazim*. They were able to establish a big and powerful banking house and became the custodians of the fiscal transactions of the provincial government by the 1730s due to the support of the *Nazim*. They provided loans to *zamindars* who were defaulters in payment of revenue and on these loans they charged interest and thus made huge profits. They also provided surety on behalf of the big *zamindars* to the government that the revenues would be paid in time irrespective of the actual collection and financial situation. A hierarchically stratified landholding system existed with big *zamindars* at the top and smaller at the bottom. Similarly in the case of moneylenders, there were small moneylenders catering to small *zamindars* and bigger ones catering to bigger *zamindars*.

In the period when Murshid Quli served as the *Nazim* in Bengal the power of the central government (Mughal) continued to weaken further and this gave opportunity to him to exercise greater autonomy in provincial matters. He tried to strengthen his position by appointing to official position those who were his relatives and who were loyal to him and removing antagonistic *mansabdars*. The big *zamindars* were his supporters since they had been permitted to enlarge their *zamindaris* and the government did not investigate into their activities as long as they adhered to the schedule in paying their dues. The category of moneylenders and bankers too profited and they had the official backing in this context.

Murshid Quli was able to establish a firm foothold in Bengal. He was interested in handing over the *Nizamat* which he had created to someone in his family. This was the first manifestation of the autonomy gained by Bengal since the centre had little real role to play in the important provincial appointments henceforth.

During the period of Shujauddin (son-in-law of Murshid), the successor of Murshid Quli the bond between the centre and the province was further undermined. Although he did not possess his father-in-law's acumen, but he was an efficient administrator and imperial revenues continued to be transmitted to Delhi in his period. The fact that Bengal now relied mainly on its own resources (mobilizing troops) for maintenance of law and order meant that he had to seek the support of *zamindars*, bankers and local militia in Bengal. The military support from the center could not be sought (due to the decline of *jagirs* and removal of *mansabdars*) in the context of independent policies pursued by the *Nazim*. Shujauddin initiated measures to win the loyalty of *zamindars* and bankers. The *zamindars* who had been defaulters earlier and had been punished by Murshid Quli were pardoned and an advisory council was established which had as its member Jagat Seth Fateh Chand. Shujauddin tried to secure his position by sending huge amounts to Delhi.

Thus in the 1730s the provincial administration in Bengal was carried out through the cooperation between *Nazim*, *zamindars* and bankers. This was not in accordance with the Mughal system. Thus it seems that the administrative link between the centre and province had been loosened and it was on the verge of being cut. Under Shujauddin taxes (*abwabs*) were imposed on the basis of the prevailing *jama* as a fixed percentage. It seems that a comprehensive assessment below the *zamindari* level (pargana level) was not carried out. During Murshid Quli's period surveys of *zamindaris* had been conducted to get information about the productivity and efforts were made to arrive at assessment, which was based on field investigations. In Shujauddin's period this policy was given up and therefore we find that revenue records of the period after Murshid Quli till 1757 were fewer and less comprehensive.

The emergence of big *zamindars* in Murshid Quli's time enabled the provincial government to increase the *jama* and *hasil*. In the subsequent period (Shujauddin's)

these *zamindaris* posed a problem. Murshid Quli being a stern administrator was able to control the big *zamindars* but his successor was not able to put a check on the growing power of the big *zamindars*. The imposition of *abwabs* further aggravated the problem as it led to peasant distress. The *zamindars* however continued to benefit. In the 1730s the banker and the *zamindar* category emerged powerful vis a vis *Nazim*. In 1739 the *Nazim* Sarfaraz Khan was removed due to the connivance of the Jagat Seth and the *zamindars* who installed a military commander Alivardi Khan as *Nazim*. Thus the coup of 1739 marks a new phase in the history of the province of Bengal. It shows the complete alienation of the province from the centre which was now virtually being controlled by *zamindars*, bankers and the ambitious military men. Alivardi was raised to the position of *Nazim* on the pretext that Sarfaraz was inefficient and Alivardi would provide better governance to the province.

Thus in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as a province of Mughal empire, Bengal was able to move on the path of autonomy. But independent Bengal did not witness a crisis in administration but a transformation of the Mughal pattern and many new features were introduced in its political system, which have been discussed at length in the Unit on administrative and institutional structures in Block 6.

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## 11.4 HYDERABAD

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As a Mughal province of the Deccan, Hyderabad in the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed frequent transfers of the officials which were at times a consequence of the political activities at the Delhi court. Rivalries and hostilities at the imperial court had the impact on the appointments and postings of officials at Hyderabad. The emergence of Marathas in the western Deccan as a major contender for power further aggravated the problem. In this situation Nizam-ul-mulk Asaf Jah I strengthened his power in the Deccan and gained autonomy for the province in 1724. His initial appointment as *Subedar* took place in 1713. He was summoned to Delhi by the Mughal Emperor many times between 1719 to 1737. In 1719 he was called upon to confront the Marathas, in 1722 he was made *Wazir* of the Empire and in 1737 he was deputed to fight the Marathas and was again made *Wazir*. He came back to the Deccan as *Subahdar* in 1719 and in 1724 by forcing the Emperor to grant him the governorship. The year 1724, was a landmark since he was able to establish his superiority over the entrenched Mughal *subedar*. By 1740 the position of the *Nizam* was secure in the Deccan. He made appointments and also removed officials without reference to the imperial court. This was a sign of independence acquired by Hyderabad under the *Nizam*.

The *Nizam* maintained merely a pretension of allegiance to the Mughal emperor. Karen Leonard points out “Nizam-ul-mulk conducted war, made treaties and conferred titles and *mansab* appointments himself.” The *mansabdars* appointed by the *Nizam* were known as ‘Asafia’ *mansabdars* to maintain the distinction with the ‘Padshahi’ *mansabdars* appointed by the Mughal Emperor. In this period the symbols of imperial authority which illustrated the subordination of the province to the Mughal Emperor were replaced. The ‘Padshahi Diwan’ whose function was to confirm the land grants and supervise the revenue assessment and collection ceased to exist. Certain practices which served as the basis of link and bond between the centre and the province and which also emphasized the subordination of the province to the centre were discontinued. Gestures such as gifts to Mughal Emperor, festivities related to regnal year and ceremonies observed when *farmans* were received were practiced comparatively to a lesser degree. Although for practical purposes the *Nizam* had emerged as an independent ruler but he continued to rely on the outward manifestations of owing nominal or symbolic allegiance to Mughal power through mentioning the Emperor’s name in the *Khutbah*, inscribing his name on the coins, and procuring his orders (*farmans*) for imparting legitimacy to the appointments.



The second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the shift of the capital from Aurangabad to Hyderabad. Here the establishment of a court and an administrative system which was based on certain novel features laid the foundation of a new phase in Hyderabad's political history. Between 1762-1803 Nizam Ali Khan became the ruler. In this period, a political structure emerged which was no longer a replica of the Mughal pattern.

Karen Leonard refers to the patron-client paradigm in analyzing the nature of Hyderabad state. An important feature of the system which emerged in Hyderabad was the participation of *vakils* or intermediaries who were basically middlemen employed by local nobility and outsiders (other local powers). All these categories were woven into the system through a complicated network.

The *Nizam* and the nobles in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, on the strength of the revenues from the *jagirs* could support a large administrative, military and household apparatus. The nobles gave employment in their personal capacity in the form of administrative appointments or made cash payments for services rendered. They could also procure positions for their clients in the *Nizam's* estate. The Noble's position was reflected through the patronage extended by him to various clients, relatives, employees, artisans, poets, etc. These patron-client ties were not based on clan considerations but rested on individual relationships. The *vakils* or intermediaries played an important role in the Hyderabad political system. The nobility maintained its ties with the *Nizam* through the *vakils* who performed the role of diplomatic agents of the noble and all kinds of exchanges and transactions (official, personal, ceremonial) were conducted through them.

The *vakils* sometimes played the role of patrons when they found employment for others in their master's establishment. The *vakils* of political powers also performed the role of diplomats in the *Nizam's* court on behalf of their masters (viz. Peshwa, Nawab of Arcot etc.). These *vakils* managed the estates of their employers in Hyderabad and were able to employ men for assisting them. Although they were deputed by outsiders but they were able to win over the confidence of the *Nizam* who assigned *jagirs* to them and sometimes they shifted their loyalties to the *Nizam* along with their clients.

The court at Hyderabad was initially dominated by the Mughal *vakils* but towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century *vakils* of the *Peshwa*, the Maratha chiefs (Scindia, Holkar) and of the *Nawab* of Arcot were able to secure an important position at the court. The dominions of the *Nizam* were being ruled by many local hereditary chiefs who gave annual tribute to the *Nizam*. There were roughly eight important *samasthans* or Hindu royal houses who had their own courts and they performed the role of patrons in the same manner as the *Nizam* and the nobles at Hyderabad. These local rulers were based mainly in Telingana (including Raichur), however, the exception was Sholapur in Marathwara. They hailed from the Telegu peasant castes. The territories ruled by these chiefs had been granted to them by the powers viz. Bahmani, Vijayanagara, Mughal etc. as a reward for their military services. The tributary relations of these local chiefs were an important feature of the political system in this period. These local landholders turned local chiefs ruled over their hereditary territories and maintained formal, tributary relations with the suzerain power which bestowed titles and honours upon them thus providing legitimacy to them.

The bankers, moneylenders and military commanders (generally mercenaries) also took part in the political activities of this period. The latter performed the role of military personnel and military commanders in wars. The bankers and moneylenders were responsible for the financial transactions. This group comprised of several communities viz. the Komati (Telegu), Marwaris, Agarwals, Jains etc. who had come from North India as merchants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The nobles and the *Nizam* depended on these financial groups in times of monetary emergency.

The army of the *Nizam* was not organized on the basis of central command. The troops were placed under the command of nobles who were paid by the *Nizam* in cash for maintaining the troops. These contingents were made available to the *Nizam* whenever required. The commanders of the troops belonged to the community from which the troops hailed. However, European military commanders were also employed by the *Nizam* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The troops placed under the European military adventurers were recruited from Deccani Hindu martial castes and they were organized in accordance with European standards.

The categories comprising of the nobles, *vakils*, military and financial groups played an important role in the political set up in Hyderabad. The nobles exercised power on account of their military capability and diplomatic acumen. The external *vakils* also played an important role as agents of other local powers and they together with the local *vakils* also performed the function of patrons. The civil administration was not centralized. Power was dispersed since the administrative offices were largely hereditary which accounted for the fragmented nature of the polity. The most important feature of the administrative system was the emergence of specialized hereditary offices related to record keeping. They played an important part in Hyderabad state under the *Nizam*. The administrative system though derived from the Mughal pattern was strikingly different in many ways. The most noticeable difference was with regard to the maintenance of financial records and land revenue administration. The *Nizam* as *subedar* of the Deccan was the supreme authority in the state. The next important officer was the *diwan* appointed by the *Nizam*. His function was to look after the administration of revenue, to conduct diplomatic relations and to appoint *talukdars* (revenue contractors). Another important functionary in the administrative hierarchy was the *daftardar* (record keeper). This office was hereditary and though the *diwan* was the head of the matters related to revenue administration but in Hyderabad real power of supervision of finances was vested with the *daftardar*. The two offices: *Daftar-i-diwan* and *Daftar-i-mal* were created in Hyderabad around 1760. The officers were responsible for record keeping in various areas and their jurisdiction was divided region wise viz. Marathwara region, Telingana region etc. The task of record keeping entailed the work of maintaining statistics related to income and expenditure. They performed the role of registering the revenue assignments viz. *jagir*, *inam* and grant of *mansab* rank. The important appointment orders viz. those of *talukdar* were formally issued by this office. Though the officers associated with these offices were subordinate to the *diwan* but in practice they subverted the power and position of the *diwan*.

In the Mughal revenue administrative system there existed a hierarchy of officials who were responsible for collection and assessment of revenue who were placed at various levels arranged vertically viz. centre, province and local. In Hyderabad the Mughal system was replaced by a system in which contractors were responsible for revenue administration. These autonomous contractors were called *talukdars* and they entered into an agreement with the *diwan* for assessing and collecting revenue for a particular area. They were given a fixed sum for their services and the surplus collected by them was also retained by them. Their transactions with the government were conducted through the office of *daftardar* who determined the revenue demand, issued their appointment orders as *talukdars* and also fixed their jurisdiction. The *talukdars* also maintained their personal records.

Under the Mughals revenue farming was deliberately avoided since it was not considered a proper method of revenue collection though it came to be extensively practiced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In Hyderabad direct control of the centre over the *parganas* and villages could not be established. The *talukdars* were not subordinate to the centre and functioned according to the terms of the contract. At the *pargana* level the hereditary intermediaries (*deshmukhs*, *deshpandes*) negotiated with the *talukdars* as representatives of the local village officials.

The *mansab* and *jagir* system in Hyderabad also differed from the Mughal pattern. The composition of the nobility in Hyderabad was also at variance from the organisation of the nobility under the Mughals. In Hyderabad *mansabs* (ranks) represented merely a ceremonial and military honour whereas in the Mughal system the *zat mansab* determined status of the noble. In Hyderabad the category of noble was characterized as possessing hereditary *jagirs*. However, the most important feature of the nobility was its hereditary character (especially of the jobs) i.e. administrative or military positions held and the personal relations with the *Nizam*.

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## 11.5 AWADH

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As a province of the Mughal empire Awadh's place was strategic since it linked the eastern provinces to the centre (route from Delhi via Lucknow to Patna and Hugli). A large number of *mansabdars* and other nobles belonged to Awadh. In the case of Awadh it is important to study how the governors tried to enhance their power in the province and the process by which they emerged autonomous and established autonomous rule. The problems related to various groups such as the *zamindars*, *madad-i-mash* grantees and the *jagirdars/mansabdars* could be resolved by the governor by adopting measures which at times encroached on the imperial power and the position of the nobles at the court and those serving outside Awadh.

It is important to study the emergence of autonomous states in the context of the alienation of various social groups and categories of the regions from the centre. This may have facilitated decline of the central power but this did not imply a corresponding decline of the economy and polity of the region. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the province of Awadh witnessed economic prosperity. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the imperial power was weakened and the *zamindars* and the peasants defied the imperial authority and resisted them. This compelled the governor to seek greater powers for the proper functioning of provincial administration.

Through an analysis of the Persian sources we find reference to *zamindar* or rural resistance, which was a consequence of their desire to obtain a share in power and authority. They tried to organize armed resistance against the central power by mustering their clan and kin support. The rebellions were mainly planned and executed by the big and strong *zamindars*. These insurrections could be quelled by the Mughal officials through playing one group against the other or appeasement of these powerful local groups. At times these uprisings were not directly aimed at the imperial power but sought to enhance the power of the local groups through acts of defiance. However they did succeed in weakening the central power. In this situation, the bond which existed between the emperor and the local groups and provincial officials began to weaken. The nobles and officials at the provincial level relied less on the Emperor and more on the nobles at the court for dealing with the problems at the provincial level. This paved the way for the emergence of the new *subedari* in Awadh. To deal with the local situation several measures were adopted such as creation of loyal *zamindars* and *jagir-i-mahal-i-watan*. The practice of *jagir-i-mahal-i-watan* undermined the imperial power since they were a deviation from the classical Mughal *jagir* system. The power of the provincial officials was strengthened and the foundation of the autonomous state was laid.

Under Sadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk nawabi rule got firmly rooted in Awadh. Several changes were made in the *faujdar* and *jagir* administration and the widespread practice of *ijaradari* enabled the *subedar* to establish autonomous rule in Awadh. The *amils* as agents in *jagirs* were placed directly under governor. *Amils* were responsible for administration of *jagirs* under the supervision of governor. By 1722 the *faujdar*s were placed under the governor and their appointments were made by governor and he was responsible to the governor as his deputy in the *sarkar* and *chakla*.

It has been pointed out that due to the political stability and harmony under the Mughals economic growth got a boost. Trade was instrumental in linking the towns and markets in various regions of the empire. Economic prosperity proved advantageous for the *zamindars* and merchants. As a powerful local group the *zamindars* had managed to find a place in the Mughal system but their aspirations continued to rise since they wished to have a greater share in political power. However, they could not pose a major threat because they constituted a narrow group based on kin and clan interests. The *madad-i-mash* holders as a privileged group came into conflict with the *zamindars*. They became rich enough to acquire *zamindaris* and *ijaras* and also lent money to *zamindars*. The *jagirdars*' power was enhanced by conversion of their *jagirs* into permanent possessions. In 1719 Giridhar Bahadur the governor of Allahabad rebelled against the centre. The defacto Sayyid brothers were forced to give him the *subedari* of Awadh along with the *diwani* and *faujdari*. The chief characteristics of new *subedari* were: extended period, total control over administration and military spheres etc.

The failure of the local groups to unite against the Mughals enabled the provincial governor to mobilize those groups to his own advantage and emerge as an autonomous power in the region. The independent region of Awadh continued to pay allegiance to Mughal Emperor for a long period of time. The Mughal institutions continued but were transformed to suit the local purpose. In Awadh the new *subedari* emerged on the basis of new alignment with the *zamindars* and *jagirdars*. During the Nawabi period the office of the governor was confined to the family of the Nawab and it was called the *suba-i-mulki* (home province) of the governor. The symbolic link with the imperial power was not broken and the *subedars* maintained their connections with the nobles at the court.

A pertinent point to be noted is that inspite of autonomous ambitions the provincial governor continued to pay allegiance to the Mughal imperial power. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century though the central power was weakened but the realignment with the groups in the region was made possible within the Mughal institutional system. Though the central power was waning but it was not possible for regions to break their ties totally with the centre. The regions were linked to each other and depended on each other for trade and money transactions. Decentralisation did not imply that the political powers which emerged as autonomous in the regions were in a position to command the loyalty and support which the Mughals enjoyed. They needed the sanction of the Mughal imperial power for legitimizing their authority.

The Mughal authority symbolized prestige and power and though it could not prevent the regions from asserting their independence but it still inspired awe in the minds of the people. Thus the attempts by the governors posted in the province to acquire positions at the court reflected their aspirations to validate their position in the province by having access at the centre. Once the provincial governor had subdued and won over the local elements he tried to consolidate his regional power base by obtaining a position at the court.

Thus the periphery tried to maintain its links with the centre for furthering its regional aspirations. But the Mughal prestige was unchallenged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the autonomous regions had to seek the allegiance of Mughals for legitimacy.

The problems related to the disintegration of Mughal empire were manifested in the *zamindar* rebellions and for countering them, the provincial officials sought greater authority which the emperor perceived as a threat to the central structure. Thus the balance between the emperor, nobles and local groups was disturbed. Since the reign of Farukhsiyar the provincial governor had tried to arrogate greater power by ensuring an extended tenure, bringing provincial finance under his purview, etc. In 1716 the governor opposed the conferment of military and executive powers on the provincial *diwan* by the imperial power. In this period the powerful nobles themselves took



decisions regarding the administrative affairs. Giridhar Bahadur was appointed *subedar* of Awadh in 1719, a position he had himself asked for. The emperor was dependent on the nobles for support. He permitted the governors to exercise greater powers in order to keep them away from the centre. At the court he generally sought the support of the faction which was comparatively less ambitious to maintain his power. Farukhsiyar initially depended on Sayyid brothers (nobles) but later the relations between the two became strained and gave rise to factional politics at the court.

The provincial governor's attempt to get wider power also suited the interests of the other categories of ruling groups in the province. The weakened centre was not in a position to provide guidance or security to the province. Thus the provincial authorities themselves tried to resolve their problems by forging alliances with the local groups. The central power itself was ridden with factional politics at the court and this percolated down to the provinces and brought about instability and confusion.

The governor emerged as powerful and the classical Mughal system of checks and balances received a set back. The politics at the court (nobles vs. emperor) also permeated into the provinces and the provincial appointments were affected.

An important feature of administration in Awadh in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the transformation of offices into hereditary positions. The *qazis* as holders of *madad-i-mash*, which was granted to them in lieu of their services, tended to treat them as hereditary. The *jagirs* also got metamorphosed into hereditary domains of *zamindar* and non-*zamindar mansabdars*.

The imperial power found it difficult to control the provincial administration when the local officials defied the agents of *jagirdars* or *amils* in *khalisa*. The *waqianavis* were ineffective and did not get the support of the *jagirdars* for obtaining information.

An important feature of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the boom in economy. Trade and artisanal production received impetus. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the central and southern districts of Awadh were connected with the towns in the provinces of Allahabad and Agra. This area recorded remarkable agricultural growth due to favourable physiography. This got reflected in the high *jama* (revenue demand) from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this situation the powerful *zamindars* allied with the peasant groups and tried to strengthen their position by encroaching upon the adjoining territories. This brought them into conflict with centre, other *zamindars* or the provincial authority. Against the background of economic growth, which benefited the *zamindars*, the latter were better equipped to challenge Mughal imperial power.

The Mughal system was poised on the delicate equilibrium between the local groups and the emperor, his nobles and *mansabdars*. The local groups led by *zamindars* could never emerge supreme because they were organized on caste and community basis and had a parochial character. Sometimes the *zamindars* allied with the Mughals against their own king groups. Mansa Ram, a Bhumihaar *zamindar* of Gangapur, forged an alliance with the Mughals against the Rajputs and established the Banaras Raj. To further their aspirations the mutinous *zamindars* were hostile to the symbols of imperial power like *qazi*, *kotwal* trade and urban centres.

The provincial authority thus had to contend with the power of the *zamindars* and the *madad-i-mash* grantees. To meet the challenge the governor tried to augment his power. Thus the governor tried to combine the powers of *diwan* and *faujdar*, which brought him into conflict with the other officials posted in the province who acted as a check on the power of the governor. In this way the Mughal model of equilibrium among various groups was disturbed. The governor's desire for extended tenure also emanated from the need to re-organise the political alignments in the region. Burhan-ul-mulk was transferred through imperial order to Malwa. He however defied the imperial directive and laid the foundation of Nawabi rule in Awadh. His sister's son

Safdar Jang succeeded him in Awadh. The governor's political and administrative initiatives were based on securing his position in the province and at times were in conflict with the position of the imperial power in Delhi. Though the position of governor was independent of the centre yet the aura of imperial centre and emperor still persisted and the imperial symbols were not totally abandoned. In 1739 during Nadir Shah's invasion Burhan-ul-mulk came to the aid of the Emperor. However, at times the governor defied the imperial *farman*.

The functioning of the *jagir* administration also created problems for the governor. The *jagirs* in Awadh were assigned to nobles posted either at the court or in other provinces. The agents of the *jagirdars* along with the other rural and urban groups posed a challenge to the governor. The emergence of *jagir-i-mahal-i-watan* (See Block 6, Unit 22) and the practice of giving *faujdari* rights to *jagirdar* also served as a threat to the governor therefore, further changes were introduced in *jagir* administration.

The formal links with the Emperor helped the governor to legitimise and further strengthen his position and also to obtain favours from the Emperor. Burhan-ul-mulk and Safdar Jang kept themselves informed and aware of the court politics.

The nobles who held *jagirs* in Awadh tried to interfere in the provincial administration through the medium of their agents in *jagirs*. Therefore, Burhan-ul-mulk introduced changes in the working of the *jagir* administration. *Jagirs* in the region were a manifestation of imperial authority and symbolized the *jagirdars'* power. The agents of *jagirdars* often tried to subvert the power of the governor. The reduction of the *jagirs* and converting them into *khalisa* would have incurred the wrath of nobility therefore under Burhan-ul-mulk the agents responsible for revenue collection were made directly subordinate to the governor rather than to the *jagirdars*. Thus he could ensure proper revenue collection through local service groups. The interference of *jagirdars* was reduced and payments were made to them by the officials under the control of governor. The big *jagirs* of nobles outside Awadh were also reduced. The *jagirs* in Awadh were now mainly held by the officials and military men of the governor.

Various local groups (*shaikhzadas* and Afghans) were inducted into the provincial administration and the army by the governor. The *shaikhzadas*, Afghans and Hindus constituted the local ruling groups in Awadh. The *madad-i-mash* holders were also appeased by conversion of their grants into *zamindaris*.

The conciliatory move with regard to the *zamindars* (esp. Baiswara) through the *taahhud* (a contractual system which permitted the *zamindars* to collect revenue and pay a fixed sum to the government in lieu of military, administrative powers) arrangement led to the emergence of *talluqdaris* in 18<sup>th</sup> century Awadh. The decline of *faujdari* is attributed to the combining of governorship with *faujdari* rights and the appointment of local men as *naib* and *nazim* or the governor's subordinates entrusted with executive and financial authority.

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## 11.6 SUMMARY

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This Unit critically examines the 18<sup>th</sup> century debate regarding the political formations which emerged as a result of the decline of Mughal power. Historians have categorized these states to three distinct groups: successor states, states which emerged as a result of rebellion against Mughals and new states. In this Unit we have tried to explain the nature of successor states, which emerged autonomous from the position of *subas* or provinces of the Mughals. This account enables us to enumerate the continuities with the Mughal system and also the changes introduced in the autonomous states.

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## 11.7 EXERCISES

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18th Century Successor  
States

- 1) Write a critical note on 18<sup>th</sup> century debate.
- 2) Discuss the nature of the autonomous state of Hyderabad under the Nizams.



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