

CBSE Notes Class 7 Social Science History Chapter 10 Eighteenth-Century Political Formation

The Crisis of the Empire and the Later Mughals

The Mughal Empire started facing a variety of crises towards the closing years of the seventeenth century caused by a number of factors. Emperor Aurangzeb depleted the military and financial resources of his empire by fighting a long war in the Deccan. Under his successors, the efficiency of the imperial administration broke down. Nobles appointed as governors (subadars) often controlled the offices of revenue and military administration (diwani and faujdari).

Peasant and zamindari rebellions in many parts of northern and western India added to these problems. These revolts were caused by the pressures of mounting taxes. Mughal authority had been challenged by rebellious groups in the past as well. The Mughal emperors after Aurangzeb were unable to arrest the gradual shifting of political and economic authority into the hands of provincial governors, local chieftains and other groups.

Nadir Shah, sacked and plundered the city of Delhi in 1739 and took away immense amounts of wealth. This invasion was followed by a series of plundering raids by the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali, who invaded north India five times between 1748 and 1761.

Mughal Empire was further weakened by competition amongst different groups of nobles. They were divided into two major groups, the Iranis and Turanis (nobles of Turkish descent).

Emergence of New States

Through the eighteenth century, the Mughal Empire gradually fragmented into a number of independent, regional states. The states can be divided into three overlapping groups:

1. States that were old Mughal provinces like Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad. Although extremely powerful and quite independent, the rulers of these states did not break their formal ties with the Mughal emperor.
2. States that had enjoyed considerable independence under the Mughals as watan jagirs. These included several Rajput principalities.
3. The last group included states under the control of Marathas, Sikhs and others like the Jats. These were of different sizes and had seized their independence from the Mughals after a long-drawn armed struggle.

The Old Mughal Provinces

Three states stand out very prominently. These were Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad, founded by members of the high Mughal nobility who had been governors of large provinces – Sa'adat Khan (Awadh), Murshid Quli Khan (Bengal) and Asaf Jah (Hyderabad). All three had occupied high mansabdari positions and enjoyed the trust and confidence of the emperors. Both Asaf Jah and Murshid Quli Khan held a zat rank of 7,000 each, while Sa'adat Khan's zat was 6,000.

Hyderabad

Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah was the founder of Hyderabad state (1724-1748). Initially, he was entrusted with the governorship of Awadh, but later took charge of the Deccan. During 1720-22 Asaf Jah had already gained control over its political and financial administration. He gathered power in his hands and became the actual ruler of that region.

Asaf Jah brought skilled soldiers and administrators and appointed mansabdars and granted jagirs. The Mughal emperor merely confirmed the decisions already taken by the Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah.

The state of Hyderabad was constantly engaged in a struggle against the Marathas to the west and with independent Telugu warrior chiefs (nayakas) of the plateau. His ambition to control the rich textile-producing areas of the Coromandel coast in the east were checked by the British.

Awadh

In 1722, Burhan-ul-Mulk Sa'adat Khan was appointed subadar of Awadh and founded a state. Awadh was a prosperous region, controlling the rich alluvial Ganga plain and the main trade route between north India and Bengal. He was responsible for managing the political, financial and military affairs of the province of Awadh.

Burhan-ul-Mulk tried to decrease Mughal influence in the Awadh region by reducing the number of officeholders (jagirdars) appointed by the Mughals. He also reduced the size of jagirs, and appointed his own loyal servants to vacant positions. The accounts of jagirdars were checked and the revenues of all districts were reassessed by officials appointed by the Nawab's court.

The state depended on local bankers and mahajans for loans. It sold the right to collect tax to the highest bidders. These "revenue farmers" (ijaradars) agreed to pay the state a fixed sum of money. Local bankers guaranteed the payment of this contracted amount to the state. In turn, the revenue-farmers were given considerable freedom in the assessment and collection of taxes.

Bengal

Bengal broke away from Mughal control under Murshid Quli Khan appointed as the naib, deputy to the governor of the province. Murshid Quli Khan seized all the power that went with that office. He transferred all Mughal jagirdars to Orissa and ordered a major reassessment of the revenues of Bengal. Revenue was collected in cash with great strictness from all zamindars.

The formation of a regional state in eighteenth-century Bengal, therefore, led to considerable change amongst the zamindars. The close connection between the state and bankers was evident in Bengal under the rule of Alivardi Khan (r. 1740-1756).

There were three common features amongst these states. First, though many of the larger states were established by erstwhile Mughal nobles they were highly suspicious of some of the administrative systems that they had inherited. Second, their method of tax collection differed. The practice of ijaradari spread all over India in the eighteenth century. The third common feature in all these regional states was their emerging relationship with rich bankers and merchants.

The Watan Jagirs of the Rajputs

Many Rajput kings had served under the Mughals with distinction. In exchange, they were permitted to enjoy considerable autonomy in their watan jagirs. These influential Rajput families claimed the subadari of the rich provinces of Gujarat and Malwa. Raja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur held the governorship of Gujarat and Sawai Raja Jai Singh of Amber was governor of Malwa. These offices were renewed by Emperor Jahandar Shah in 1713.

Nagaur was conquered and annexed to the house of Jodhpur, while Amber seized large portions of Bundi. Sawai Raja Jai Singh founded his new capital at Jaipur and was given the subadari of Agra in 1722. Maratha campaigns into Rajasthan from the 1740s put severe pressure on these principalities and checked their further expansion.

Seizing Independence

The Sikhs

During the seventeenth century, Sikhs helped in regional state-building in Punjab. Several battles were fought by Guru Gobind Singh against the Rajput and Mughal rulers, both before and after the institution of the Khalsa in 1699. After his death in 1708, the Khalsa rose in revolt against the Mughal authority.

In the eighteenth century, the Sikhs organized themselves into a number of bands called jathas, and later on misls. Their combined forces were known as the grand army (dal khalsa). A system called rakhi was introduced, offering protection to cultivators on the payment of a tax of 20 percent of the produce.

Guru Gobind Singh inspired the Khalsa with the belief that their destiny was to rule (raj karega khalsa). The Khalsa declared their sovereign rule by striking their own coin again in 1765. The Sikh territories in the late eighteenth century extended from the Indus to the Jamuna but they were divided under different rulers. One of them, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, reunited these groups and established his capital at Lahore in 1799.

The Marathas

The Maratha kingdom was a powerful regional kingdom. Shivaji (1627-1680) carved out a stable kingdom with the support of powerful warrior families (deshmukhs). Peasant pastoralists were the backbone of the Maratha army. After Shivaji's death, effective power in the Maratha state was wielded by a family of Chitpavan Brahmanas who served Shivaji's successors as Peshwa (or principal minister). Poona became the capital of the Maratha kingdom.

Under the Peshwas, the Marathas developed a very successful military organisation. Between 1720 and 1761, the Maratha empire expanded. Malwa and Gujarat were seized from the Mughals by the 1720s. By the 1730s, the Maratha king was recognised as the overlord of the entire Deccan peninsula. He possessed the right to levy chauth and sardeshmukhi in the entire region.

In 1739, Delhi was conquered by Marathas and it expanded rapidly: into Rajasthan and the Punjab in the north; into Bengal and Orissa in the east; and into Karnataka and the Tamil and Telugu countries in the south. Expansion brought enormous resources. These military campaigns also made other rulers

hostile towards the Marathas. As a result, they were not inclined to support the Marathas during the third battle of Panipat in 1761.

The Marathas developed an effective administrative system. Revenue demands were introduced taking local conditions into account. Agriculture was encouraged and trade revived. Maratha campaigns into Malwa in the 1720s did not challenge the growth and prosperity of the cities in the region. New trade routes emerged within the areas controlled by the Marathas. The silk produced in the Chanderi region now found a new outlet in Poona, the Maratha capital.

The Jats

The Jats consolidated their power during the late seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. Under their leader, Churaman, they acquired control over territories situated to the west of the city of Delhi, and by the 1680s they had begun dominating the region between the two imperial cities of Delhi and Agra.

The Jats were prosperous agriculturists. Under Suraj Mal, the kingdom of Bharatpur emerged as a strong state. The Bharatpur fort was built in a fairly traditional style, at Dig the Jats built an elaborate garden palace combining styles seen at Amber and Agra. Its buildings were modelled on architectural forms first associated with royalty under Shah Jahan.