

**REGIONAL POWERS DURING MUGHAL PERIOD****THE MARATHAS (1649-1748) :**

The tale of the Marathas' rise to power and their eventual fall contains all the elements of a thriller—adventured intrigue and romanticism. Maratha chieftains were originally in the service of the Bijapur Sultans in the western Deccan; an area that was under siege by the Mughals. The first major threat to Mughal imperial power came from a confederacy known as the Marathas. Located in the mountainous regions of the Deccan, the Marathas were mainly drawn from the lowest caste of society, but they became a powerfully militant community under their ruler. King Shivaji, who died in 1680. Under his leadership, the Marathas managed to carve out their own kingdom. In 1646, Aurangzeb, the last great conqueror of the Mughal rulers, defeated the Marathas and annexed their territories, but the Marathas never put down their arms. They could never be defeated by the Mughals because they adopted guerrilla warfare tactics and took to hiding and living in the forests. They continued to rule over their territory, even though it was under the control of the Mughals, as a separate state within a state. By 1740, the Marathas controlled more territory than the Mughals. In the late eighteenth century, the kingdom of Mysore and the Maratha confederacy were the major obstacles in the British attempt to control the economy of India. The East India Company, originally started as a trading company, had become an official arm of the British Empire. Its objective was to control the economy of India and, if necessary, control the administration of its territories. It turned to the Mughal Empire for its administrative model. However, the very resistant to the British imperialism.

The British, under General Wellesley, defeated Maratha chieftains. Scindia and Holkar, but the Marath chieftains continued to rebel all throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century. The Mission of Marathas can be summarised as an ambition to liberate India from the Muslim rule. Shivaji was the most powerful among the Maratha rulers. He conquered the forts of Torna, Rajgarh Purandhar, etc. and became an independent ruler.

**Causes of Mughal Downfall: 1**

The Mughal Empire attained the farthest expansion under the rule of Aurangzeb. However, it fell with a dramatic suddenness within a few decades after his death. The Mughal Empire faced its decline because of a combination of factors. The religious policy adopted by Aurangzeb led to disunity among the people. Although the policy did weaken the empire, the prominent cause of the decline was the lack of worthy and efficient successors to Aurangzeb. The character of the Mughal kings had worsened over time. The coming rulers were weak and lacked the character, inspiration and commitment to rule the empire efficiently. They became ease loving and cowardly. They totally forgot their state duties and were unable to stop the fall. The absence of any definite law of succession was another important factor. The war of succession with his brother Dara Shikoh not only led to bitterness, bloodshed and loss of money and prestige of the empire over a period of time, but to its eventual fall. The degeneration of the rulers has also led to the moral degeneration of the nobility.



**Causes of Mughal Downfall: II**

Another important reason for the decline was the deplorable financial position of the Mughals. The war of successions revolts and lavish lifestyles had depleted the once large treasury, and had led to financial crisis. During, the reign of Aurangzeb, the Mughal Empire had expanded to the maximum size. This vast area had become impossible: for one ruler to control and govern from one centre. It was during the later Mughals that Deccan, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa declared their independence. The expeditions of Nadir Shah, and repeated attacks of Ahmad Shah Abdali, led to further weakening of the empire. The already weakened empire faced further invasions by the British and the French, which were the last nail in the already drowning boat of the empire. The British and the French, who had come as traders, took full advantage of the weakening empire and soon became masters of the whole of India.

**Causes of Mughal Downfall: III****Jagirdari crisis**

The Jagirdari system had worked with tolerable efficiency till the middle of Aurangzeb's rule. However, during, the last years of his reign, because of the rising pressure of the Deccan wars and the financial resources of the empire and disruption of administration, the complicated machinery under "which Jagirs were assigned began to lose its capability. For political expediency, Aurangzeb had to give mansabs to a large number of Deccani nobles. This created a crisis of Jagir land. Aurangzeb had to confess to this problem through his famous saying-'Yak anar sad bimar'. Because of this crisis, the Jagirdars began to extract revenue from the peasantry to the maximum, because they knew

that the Jagir given to them could be for very short : period of time. The flight of the peasants from land was the first symptom of this growing crisis which later on spilled into violence and desperate armed uprisings, e.g., Jat, Satnami, Sikh, Maratha and other revolts in northern India against the Mughal Empire.

**Shivaji Bhonsle (1627-1630)**

Shivaji was a resolute and ferocious fighter and is regarded as the founder of the Maratha nation. He took advantage of the deteriorating condition of the Mughal rule and established his own principality near Pune, which was later made the Maratha capital. Using guerrilla technique, he was able to sustain and expand his army. He soon had money, arms and horses. Shivaji conducted a series of successful campaigns in the 1660s against the Mughals. In 1674, he adopted the title of Chhatrapati, 'Lord of the Universe'. An elaborate coronation was held, signalling his resolve to challenge the Mughals. It also showed his resolution of re-establishing a Hindu kingdom in Maharashtra. Shivaji's war cries were swaraj and goraksha. Aurangzeb persistently chased Shivaji's successors between 1681 and 1705, but finally he had to retreat to the north as his treasury was becoming depleted. He also realised that thousands of lives had been lost either on the battlefield or because of natural calamities. In 1717, a Mughal envoy entered into a treaty with the Marathas authenticating their claim to rule in the Deccan. In return they acknowledged the fictional Mughal sovereignty. The Marathas soon annexed Malwa from Mughal control and thereafter moved into Orissa and Bengal. Later South India also came under their control. Acknowledging their political might, the Mughal emperor invited them to function as auxiliaries in the internal affairs of the empire. They were also invited to help the Mughals in

driving the Afghans out of Punjab. Though the Marathas had great military prowess and leadership, they were not efficient enough to administer the state or to bring socio-economic reform. Following a policy of plunders and indiscriminate raids, they annoyed the peasant class. They were respected for stirring the Maharashtrian pride rather than for attracting loyalty to an all-India confederacy. They were left alone prior to the attacks of Afghan forces led by **Ahmad Shah Abdali**. Abdali defeated them on the battlefield at Panipat, in 1761. The defeat hastened the break-up of their loosely knit confederacy into five independent states and put out the hope of Maratha rule in India.



#### Influence of Poet-Saints on Maratha Unity

Because of the credit of loosening the social and religious barriers, the poet saints of Maharashtra brought the Maratha people closer together. The movement dates back to the days of Jnanadeva (d. 1296), the herald of a puritan and religious revival. The rational explanations of society and firm faith in the basic quality of men of all classes permeated the entire country. The centre of the Bhakti movement was Pandharpur. There came the poet-saints of Maharashtra to worship at the shrine of Vithoba. The Bhakti cult reached its peak point with the greatest Maratha saint **Tukarama** (b. 1608). Another powerful influence was Ramadasa who stressed the urgency and importance of Swaraj for the Maratha people. So, Maharashtra achieved a new religion, simpler, more rational, and more, appealing in a language which people could understand. The Marathas found themselves drawn together with a common tradition, common language, common literature, common religion and common race. These factors were responsible for a new political upheaval; the Marathas

aspired to become a nation, and Shivaji fulfilled the urge.

#### **Zenith of Maratha Power**

The Marathas became powerful after the departure of Nadir Shah, under the leadership of the Peshwas-Balaji Vishwanath, Bajirao I and Balaji. They conquered the Deccan kingdoms and aspired to bring Delhi and Punjab under their control. They entered into an alliance with the Delhi court against Najib-ud-daulah. With the Delhi and in 1758 conquered Puniab by defecting Timar Shah (Abdali's son). The Third Battle of Panipat, fought between Ahmed Shah Abdali and the marathas in 1761, ended the Maratha power.

#### **THE SIKHS**

The Afghan defeat of the Maratha armies accelerated the breakaway of Punjab from Delhi and helped in founding the Sikh overlordship in the north-west. Rooted in the bhakt movement that developed in the second century BC, but gaining popularity across North India during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Sikh religion applied to the hard-working peasants. The Sikh Khalsa (army of the pure) rose up against the economic and political repressions in Punjab towards the end of Aurangzeb's rule. Guerrilla fighters took advantage of the political instability created by the Persian and Afghan onslaught against Delhi, enriching themselves and expanding territorial control. By the 1770s, Sikh hegemony extended from the Indus in the west to the Yamuna in the east from Multan in the south to Jammu in the north. But the Sikhs, like the Marathas, were a loose, disunited and quarrelsome conglomerate of 12 kin-groups.

#### **Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708)**

The most militarily efficient of the Sikh Gurus was the tenth Guru Gobind Singh. He was also the last Guru. During the reign of Aurangzeb, who fanatically tried to subdue non-Muslim practices, the Sikhs, were ill-treated viciously. Responding to the situation, Gobind Singh transformed the Sikhs into warriors. The Mughals and the Muslim historians considered Gobind Singh no more than a warlord having no religious credentials. He was a powerful military general who had a vision of transforming the Sikh society into a warrior society. It was an absolute necessity for a community that was surrounded by a hostile empire. Gobind Singh created the fourth doctrine, the last and most important one of Sikhism, the doctrine of Khalsa or the 'brotherhood' of Sikhs. The Khalsa offers the community a profound sense of unity based on symbolic acts. The most important is an initiation rite which is very similar to the Christian baptism. The believer drinks sweetened water stirred with a dagger. Following the ceremony, the initiate is given a name of Singh or lion. This name identifies each initiator as part of the community. Each Sikh male wears symbolic clothing and accoutrements to make manifest his membership in the community; these include uncut hair and a steel dagger. There is no doubt that the formation of Khalsa is the most important event in the history of the Sikhs. It completely unified the community and converted it into a force to reckon with. Following the creation of the Khalsa, the political and military might of the Sikhs increased greatly. During the initial period of 1800, the Sikhs were able to establish an independent kingdom. This kingdom they retained until the British annexed it in the 1850s. The Sikh military brotherhood was the most powerful combat unit that the British depended on against the Mughal Empire in its final days. Gobind Singh announced himself to

be the last Guru. After his death, religious authority has rested in the scriptures known as Guru Granth Sahib. Akbar considered the Sikhs a religious community which deserved royal support. Jahangir believed they were a rising political unit that may threaten his empire. Aurangzeb thought that the Sikhs were dangerous heretics who had to be routed out at any cost. The successors of Aurangzeb regarded the Sikhs, a major military force tearing the Mughal Empire apart.

### The Sikh Gurus

Most of the Sikh Rituals and customs were established by the first four Gurus. It was the fourth Sikh Guru Ram Das (1574-1581) who founded the city of Amritsar. It became the most important place of Sikh pilgrimage. Even today it is the most important place for Sikhs. The central Sikh temple, the Golden Temple, is located there. However, the fifth Guru Arjan Dev is regarded as the most important Sikh Guru. He assembled the verses of the first four Gurus including Guru Nanak. He assembled their verses in an anthology known as Adi Granth. It became the revered scriptures of the Sikh community. He was the first Sikh Guru to stand against the Mughals. When Prince Khusrau revolted against his father, Jahangir, he requested Arjan Dev for his help. Jahangir did not like the steady growth of the Sikh community and increasing influence of Arjan Dev in the region. Therefore, he arrested him in 1606. He was tortured to death. The death of the Guru at the hands of the Mughals forced the Sikhs to convert themselves into a warrior community. Arjan Dev was succeeded by Guru Hargobind (1606-1644). He built the Sikh community into a military might. He raised martyrdom to an ideal of the religion; this was not just dying for the religion, but being killed

fighting for the community. The Sikh community began to resist the Mughal authority and a number of battles were fought between them.

### **Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)**

Ranjit Singh was an individual with modern vision and leadership. He achieved supremacy over the other kin-groups and established his kingdom in which Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims lived together in comparative equality and increasing prosperity. He was the son of Mahan Singh, a head of Sukherchakiamisle (a small Jagir or regency of Punjab). Punjab was divided into twelve such jagirs at that time. Ranjit Singh lost sight in one eye after he was afflicted with small pox at an early age. He lost his father when he was 12 and since then he well as the Muslim rulers. However, they did not have any political significance till the later half of the seventeenth century. Some of the ambitious Jat Zammdars of the Aura region tried to establish an independent principality it brought them into direct conflict with the Mughals the Rajputs and the Afghans. The prominent Jat uprisings during the seventeenth century were conducted under the leadership of Gokla in 1669 and the under the leadership of Rajarama and Rama Chera, the Zamindars of Sinsani and Soghar in 1685. The Mughal governor Hasan Ali Khan subdued the Gokla uprising and the Sinsani uprising was subdued by Raja Bishan Singh Kachwaha of Amber. Churaman (1720) a nephew of Rajarama, defeated the Mughals in 1704 and captured Sinsani. However, later he surrendered before Bahadur Shah and received an imperial mark (mansab) from him. He rendered his services to Bahadur Shah in campaign against Banda Bahadur. After the defeat of Bahadur Shah in 1912, he increased his force in the

region. He was defeated in 1716 when Farrukhsiyar gave the responsibility to Jai Singh Sawai of Amber to lead a campaign against the Jats. Badan Singh (1722-1756), a nephew of Churaman, styled himself as a feudatory of Jai Singh adopting the humble title of Thakur. He is considered as the real founder of the Jat state of Bharatpur, Deeg and Kumher.

Suraj Mal (1756-1765) The Jat kingdom attained its zenith under Suraj Mal, the adopted son and successor of Badan Singh, who had gradually relegated to him the direction of state affairs. Suraj Mal and remarkable talents for war and diplomacy, and successfully welded the scattered Jat zamindars near Agra into a powerful state. Though internally it remained a tribal confederacy, and no new principles of administration were enunciated, the rise of a Jat state had a definite impact on the state system of north India, and affected land holding and social developments over a large area, especially under the reign of Suraj Mai. The diplomatic relations with the Ahmed Shah Abdali, Rohilla Afgans- and Marathas during 1757 to 1760 kept Suraj Malrelinquishing many of his interests in the Doab region, at least for the time being. After the defeat of the Marathas and subsequent withdrawal of Ahmed Shah Abdali from the region, Suraj Mai regained control with the help of unscathed army and load of treasures. Then, he started his expeditions over Agra, Mewar, Delhi into the districts of Gurgaon and Rohtak, thoroughly stripping the forts of their Valuables. He over an Sikandrabad and Ballabgarh. These expansionist activities brought him to a clash with Najibuddaulah, the vice-regent of Delhi. In 1763, Suraj Mal was ambushed by the Pathans near Delhi on the banks of river Hindan and shot dead.

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