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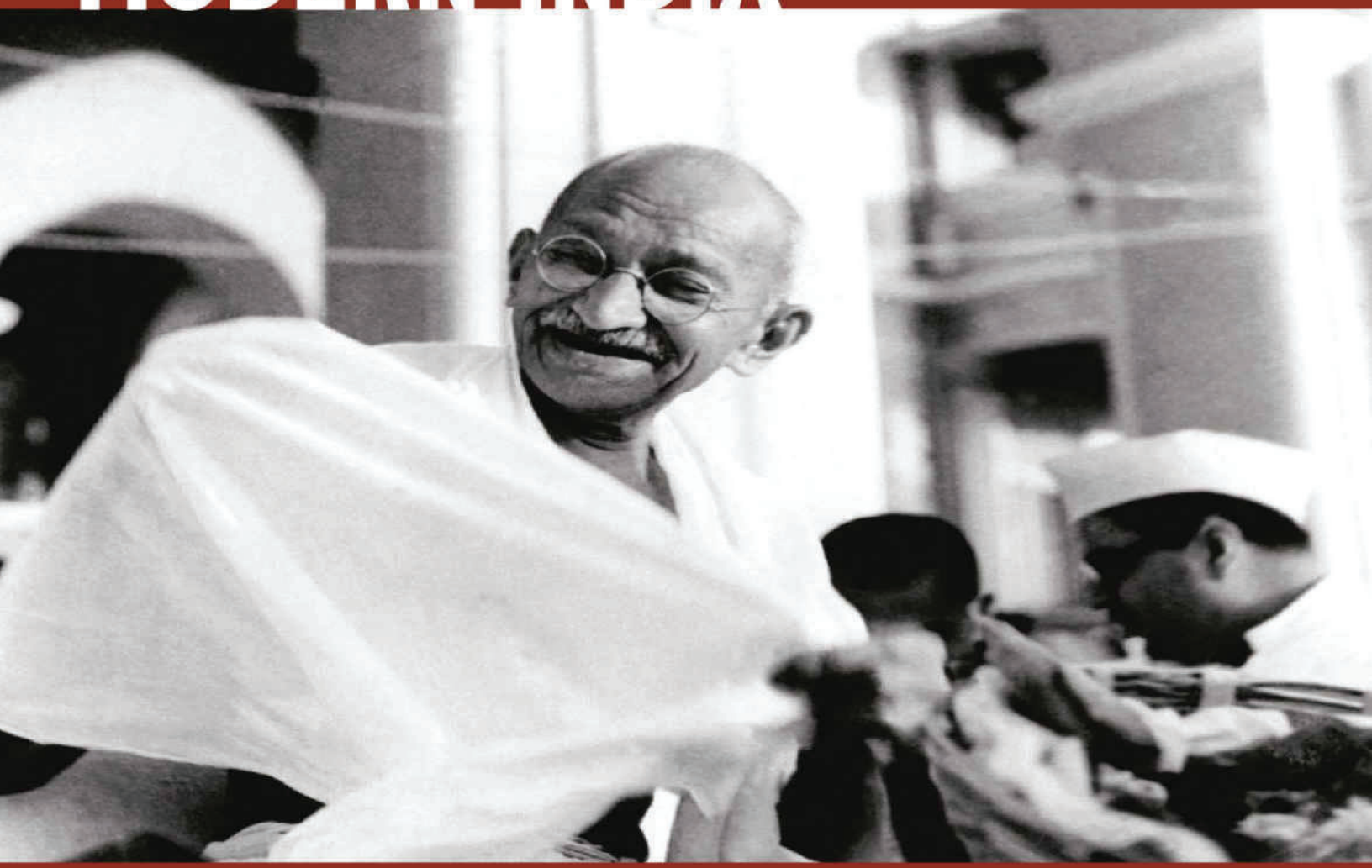
HISTORY OF MODERN INDIA



NEW EDITION

BIPAN CHANDRA

History of Modern India

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Maps

The responsibility for the correctness of internal details rests with the publisher.

The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line.

The external boundaries and coastlines of India agree with the Record/Master Copy certified by the Survey of India.

The spellings of names in these maps have been taken from various sources.

Contents

List of Maps

Preface

The book presents an overview of the history of what was known as British India. The text is largely based on my own research on nationalism and colonialism in India, and on a large number of scholarly works published in this area.

Challenging and revising old imperialist and nationalist historiographies, the book moves away from the historico-political narrative to emphasise the mutual interrelationships between history, politics, economics, sociology and other related subjects. The book attempts to study wider social forces, movements, institutions and individuals in order to understand why certain events happened and analyses the consequences of such developments within a chronological framework.

The book examines the social, economic and political conditions in India in the eighteenth century in an attempt to explain why India fell prey to the British East India Company and later to the British Crown. It goes on to detail the political, administrative and economic impact of British rule in India. The economic exploitation of India through trade and investment is emphasised as the primary *raison d'être* of British rule. The foreign policies of British India, like the wars with Nepal and Afghanistan or the conquest of Burma, also find mention in the book. The indigenous movements of various tribes and peasants across India are discussed. In the beginning, they rose and struggled in the traditional manner, resulting in major tribal and peasant uprisings throughout the country, which culminated in the revolt of 1857, though peasant and tribal uprisings continued even after. An effort has been made to juxtapose various strands of protest against British rule, so that the readers can develop their own opinion of the impact of British rule in the subcontinent.

I also examine the response of the Indian people to the emergence and growth of British rule. Realising the significance of the decline of

Indian culture and society by the eighteenth century, the Indians organised several social and religious reform movements in the nineteenth century. This awakening in the nineteenth century not only adopted Western technology, like the printing press, to protest against British exploitation, but also resulted in assimilating Indians into prevailing world standards.

The last five chapters deal with the emergence of the nationalist movement in India, through the formation of the Indian National Congress, to the attainment of Indian independence. A detailed account is provided of the different strands that emerged within the national movement, like the moderate, the extremist and the revolutionary. The emergence of the mass phase of the Indian national movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi is dealt with extensively, without ignoring the multiple strands represented by Bhagat Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Jai Prakash Narayan. Certain individuals, who were the key figures in the national movement, have been discussed thoroughly, with an aim to showcase their contribution to the cause of Indian independence. The growth of communalist forces and the opposition of the nationalist movement towards its spread is also innovatively presented.

BIPAN CHANDRA March 2009

One
The Decline of the Mughal Empire

The great Mughal Empire, the envy of its contemporaries for almost two centuries, declined and disintegrated during the first half of the eighteenth century. The Mughal emperors lost their power and glory and their empire shrank to a few square miles around Delhi. In the end, in 1803, Delhi itself was occupied by the British army and the proud Mughal emperor was reduced to the status of a mere pensioner of a foreign power. A study of the process of decline of this great Empire is most instructive. It reveals some of the defects and weaknesses of India's medieval social, economic and political structure which were responsible for the eventual subjugation of the country by the English East India Company.

The unity and stability of the Empire had been shaken up during the long and strong reign of Aurangzeb; yet, in spite of his many harmful policies, the Mughal administration was still quite efficient and the Mughal army quite strong at the time of his death in 1707. Moreover, the Mughal dynasty still commanded respect in the country.

On Aurangzeb's death, his three sons fought among themselves for the throne. The 65-year-old Bahadur Shah emerged victorious. He was learned, dignified, and able. He followed a policy of compromise and conciliation, and there was evidence of the reversal of some of the narrow-minded policies and measures adopted by Aurangzeb. He adopted a more tolerant attitude towards the Hindu chiefs and rajas. There was no destruction of temples in his reign. In the beginning, he made an attempt to gain greater control over the Rajput states of Amber and Marwar (Jodhpur) by replacing Jai Singh with his younger brother Vijai Singh at Amber and by forcing Ajit

Singh of Marwar to submit to Mughal authority. He also made an attempt to garrison the cities of Amber and Jodhpur. This attempt was, however, met with firm resistance. This may have made him recognise the folly of his actions for he soon arrived at a settlement with the two states, though the settlement was not magnanimous. Though their states were restored to the Rajas Jai Singh and Ajit Singh, their demand for high *mansabs* and the offices of *subahdars* of important provinces such as Malwa and Gujarat was not accepted. His policy towards the Maratha *sardars* (chiefs) was that of half-hearted conciliation.

While he granted them the *sardeshmukhi* of the Deccan, he failed to grant them the *chauth* and to satisfy them fully. He also did not recognise Shahu as the rightful Maratha king. He thus let Tara Bai and Shahu fight for supremacy over the Maratha kingdom. The result was that Shahu and the Maratha *sardars* remained dissatisfied and the Deccan continued to be susceptible to disorder. There could be no restoration of peace and order so long as the Maratha *sardars* fought one another as well as against the Mughal authority.

Bahadur Shah had tried to conciliate the rebellious Sikhs by making peace with Guru Gobind Singh and giving him a high *mansab* (rank). But when, after the death of the Guru, the Sikhs once again raised the banner of revolt in the Punjab under the leadership of Banda Bahadur, the emperor decided to take strong measures and himself led a campaign against the rebels, who soon controlled practically the entire territory between the Sutlej and the Jamuna, reaching the close neighbourhood of Delhi. Even though he succeeded in capturing Lohgarh, a fort built by Guru Gobind Singh north-east of Ambala at the foothills of the Himalayas, and other important Sikh strongholds, the Sikhs could not be crushed and in 1712, they recovered the fort of Lohgarh.

Bahadur Shah conciliated Chatarsal, the Bundela chief, who remained a loyal feudatory, and the Jat chief Churaman, who joined him in the campaign against Banda Bahadur.

There was further deterioration in the field of administration in Bahadur Shah's reign. The position of state finances worsened as a result of his reckless grants of jagirs and promotions. During his

reign, the remnants of the royal treasure, amounting in 1707 to some 13 crores of rupees, were exhausted.

Bahadur Shah was groping towards a solution to the problems besetting the empire. Given time, he might have revived the imperial fortunes. Unfortunately, his death in 1712 plunged the Empire once again into civil war.

A new element entered Mughal politics in this and the succeeding wars of succession. While previously the contest for power had been between royal princes, and the nobles had merely aided the aspirants to the throne, now ambitious nobles became direct contenders for power and used princes as mere pawns to capture the seats of authority. In the civil war following Bahadur Shah's death, one of his less able sons, Jahandar Shah, won because he was supported by Zulfiqar Khan, the most powerful noble of the time.

Jahandar Shah was a weak and degenerate prince who was wholly devoted to pleasure. He lacked good manners and dignity and decency. During his reign, the administration was virtually in the hands of the extremely capable and energetic Zulfiqar Khan, who had become his *wazir*. Zulfiqar Khan believed that it was necessary to establish friendly relations with the Rajput rajas and the Maratha *sardars* and to conciliate the Hindu chieftains in general in order to strengthen his own position at the Court and to save the Empire. Therefore, he rapidly reversed the policies of Aurangzeb. The hated *jizyah* was abolished. Jai Singh of Amber was given the title of Mirza Raja Sawai and appointed governor of Malwa; Ajit Singh of Marwar was awarded the title of Maharaja and appointed governor of Gujarat. Zulfiqar Khan confirmed the earlier private arrangement that his deputy in the Deccan, Daud Khan Panni, had concluded with the Maratha king Shahu in 1711. By this arrangement, the Maratha ruler was granted the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the Deccan on the condition that these collections would be made by Mughal officials and then handed over to the Maratha officials. Zulfiqar Khan also conciliated Churaman Jat and Chhatarsal Bundela. Only towards Banda and the Sikhs did he continue the old policy of suppression.

Zulfiqar Khan made an attempt to improve the finances of the Empire by checking the reckless growth of jagirs and offices. He also

tried to compel the *mansabdars* (nobles) to maintain their official quota of troops. An evil tendency encouraged by him was that of *ijarah* or revenue-farming. Instead of collecting land revenue at a fixed rate as under Todar Mal's land revenue settlement, the government began to contract with revenue farmers and middlemen to pay the government a fixed amount of money while they were left free to collect whatever they could from the peasant. This led to increased oppression of the peasant.

Many jealous nobles secretly worked against Zulfiqar Khan. Worse still, the emperor too did not give him his trust and cooperation in full measure. The emperor's ears were poisoned against Zulfiqar Khan by unscrupulous favourites. He was told that his *wazir* was becoming too powerful and ambitious and might even overthrow the emperor himself. The cowardly emperor dared not dismiss the powerful *wazir*, but he began to intrigue against him secretly. Nothing could have been more destructive of healthy administration.

Jahandar Shah's inglorious reign came to an early end in January 1713 when he was defeated at Agra by Farrukh Siyar, his nephew. Farrukh Siyar owed his victory to the Saiyid brothers, Abdullah Khan and Husain Ali Khan Baraha, who were therefore given the offices of *wazir* and *mir bakshi*, respectively. The two brothers soon acquired dominant control over the affairs of the state. Farrukh Siyar lacked the capacity to rule. He was cowardly, cruel, undependable and faithless. Moreover, he allowed himself to be influenced by worthless favourites and flatterers.

In spite of his weaknesses, Farrukh Siyar was not willing to give the Saiyid brothers a free hand but wanted to exercise personal authority. On the other hand, the Saiyid brothers were convinced that administration could be carried on properly, the decay of the Empire checked, and their own positions safeguarded only if they wielded real authority and the emperor merely reigned without ruling. Thus, there ensued a prolonged struggle for power between Emperor Farrukh Siyar and his *wazir* and *mir bakshi*. Year after year, the ungrateful emperor intrigued to overthrow the two brothers; year after year, he failed. In the end, in 1719, the Saiyid brothers deposed and killed him. In his place, they raised to the throne in quick

succession two young princes who died of consumption. The Saiyid brothers now made the 18-year-old Muhammad Shah the Emperor of India. The three successors of Farrukh Siyar were mere puppets in the hands of the Saiyids. Even their personal liberty to meet people and to move around was restricted. Thus, from 1713 until 1720, when they were overthrown, the Saiyid brothers wielded the administrative power of the state.

The Saiyid brothers adopted the policy of religious tolerance. They believed that India could be ruled harmoniously only by associating Hindu chiefs and nobles with the Muslim nobles in governing the country. Again, they sought to conciliate and use the Rajputs, the Marathas and the Jats in their struggle against Farrukh Siyar and the rival nobles. They abolished the *jizyah* immediately after Farrukh Siyar's accession to the throne. Similarly, the pilgrim tax was abolished from a number of places. They won over to their side Ajit Singh of Marwar, Jai Singh of Amber, and many other Rajput princes by giving them high positions of influence in the administration. They made an alliance with Churaman, the Jat chieftain. In the later years of their administration, they reached an agreement with King Shahu by granting him the *swarajya* (of Shivaji) and the right to collect the *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* of the six provinces of the Deccan. In return, Shahu agreed to support them in the Deccan with 15,000 mounted soldiers.

The Saiyid brothers made a vigorous effort to contain rebellions and to save the Empire from administrative disintegration. They failed in these tasks mainly because they were faced with constant political rivalry, quarrels, and conspiracies at the court. This continued friction in the ruling circles disorganised and even paralysed administration at all levels. Lawlessness and disorder spread everywhere. The financial position of the state deteriorated rapidly as zamindars and rebellious elements refused to pay land revenue, officials misappropriated state revenues, and central income declined because of the spread of revenue farming. As a result, the salaries of the officials and soldiers could not be paid regularly and the soldiers became indisciplined and even mutinous.

Even though the Saiyid brothers had tried hard to conciliate and

befriend all sections of the nobility, a powerful group of nobles headed by Nizam-ul-Mulk and his father's cousin, Muhammad Amin Khan, began to conspire against them. These nobles were jealous of the growing power of the two brothers. The deposition and murder of Farrukh Siyar frightened many of them: if the emperor could be killed, what safety was there for mere nobles? Moreover, the murder of the emperor created a wave of public revulsion against the two brothers. They were looked down upon as traitors—persons who had not been 'true to their salt' (*namak haram*). Many of the nobles of Aurangzeb's reign also disliked the Saiyid alliance with the Rajput and the Maratha chiefs and their liberal policy towards the Hindus. These nobles declared that the Saiyids were following anti-Mughal and anti-Islamic policies. They tried to rouse the fanatical sections of the Muslim nobility against the Saiyid brothers. The anti-Saiyid nobles were supported by Emperor Muhammad Shah, who wanted to free himself from the control of the two brothers. In 1720, they succeeded in treacherously assassinating Husain Ali Khan, the younger of the two brothers. Abdullah Khan tried to fight back, but was defeated near Agra. Thus ended the domination of the Mughal Empire by the Saiyid brothers, known in Indian history as 'king makers'.

Muhammad Shah's long reign of nearly 30 years (1719–48) was the last chance of saving the Empire. There were no quick changes of imperial authority as in the period 1707–20. When his reign began, Mughal prestige among the people was still an important political factor. The Mughal army and particularly the Mughal artillery was still a force to reckon with. Administration in northern India had deteriorated, but had not broken down yet. The Maratha *sardars* were still confined to the south, while the Rajput rajas continued to be loyal to the Mughal dynasty. A strong and farsighted ruler supported by a nobility conscious of its peril might still have saved the situation. But Muhammad Shah was not the man of the moment. He was weak-minded and frivolous and overly fond of a life of ease and luxury. He neglected the affairs of state. Instead of giving full support to able *wazirs* such as Nizam-ul-Mulk, he fell under the evil influence of corrupt and worthless flatterers and intrigued against his

own ministers. He even shared in the bribes taken by his favourite courtiers.

Disgusted with the fickle-mindedness and suspicious nature of the emperor and the constant quarrels at the court, Nizum-ul-Mulk, the most powerful noble of the time, decided to follow his own ambition. He had become the *wazir* in 1722 and made a vigorous attempt to reform the administration. He now decided to leave the emperor and his empire to their fate and to strike out on his own. He relinquished his office in October 1724 and marched south to found the state of Hyderabad in the Deccan. “His departure was symbolic of the flight of loyality and virtue from the empire.” The physical break-up of the Mughal Empire had begun.

The other powerful and ambitious nobles now began to utilise their energies to carve out semi-independent states. Hereditary nawabs owing nominal allegiance to the emperor at Delhi rose in many parts of the country, for example in Bengal, Hyderabad, Avadh, and the Punjab. Everywhere petty zamindars, rajas and nawabs raised the banner of rebellion and independence. The Maratha *sardars* began their northern expansion and overran Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand. Then, in 1738–39, Nadir Shah descended upon the plains of northern India, and the Empire lay prostrate.

Nadir Shah had risen from shepherd boy to *Shah* (king) by saving Persia from sure decline and disintegration. In the beginning of the eighteenth century Persia, hitherto a powerful and far flung empire, was under the weak rule of the declining Safavi dynasty. It was threatened by internal rebellions and foreign attacks. In the east, the Abdali tribesmen revolted and occupied Herat, and the Ghalzai tribesmen detached the province of Qandahar. Similar revolts occurred in the north and west. In Shirvan, religious persecution of the *Sunnis* by fanatical *Shias* led to rebellion. Here, “*Sunni mullahs* were put to death, mosques were profaned and turned into stables, and religious works were destroyed.” In 1721, the Ghalzai chief of Qandahar, Mahmud, invaded Persia and occupied Isfahan, the capital. Russia under Peter the Great was determined to push southward. Peter began his invasion of Persia in July 1722 and soon forced Persia to sign away several of her provinces on the Caspian

Sea, including the town of Baku. Turkey, deprived of most of her European possessions, also hoped to make good the loss at Persia's cost. In the spring of 1723, Turkey declared war on Persia and rapidly pushed through Georgia, and then penetrated south. In June 1724, Russia and Turkey signed a treaty dividing all northern and most of western Persia between them. At this stage, in 1726, Nadir emerged as a major supporter of Tahmasp and his most brilliant commander. In 1729, he won back Herat after defeating the Abdalis and expelled the Ghalzais from Isfahan and central and southern Persia. After long and bitter warfare, he compelled Turkey to give back all conquered territory. In 1735, he signed a treaty with Russia receiving back all seized territory. The following year, he deposed the last of the Safavi rulers and made himself the Shah. In the following years, he reconquered the province of Qandahar.

Nadir Shah was attracted to India by the fabulous wealth for which it was always famous. Continual campaigns had made Persia virtually bankrupt. Money was needed desperately to maintain his mercenary army. Spoils from India could be a solution. At the same time, the visible weakness of the Mughal Empire made such spoliation possible. He entered Indian territory towards the end of 1738, without meeting any opposition. For years the defences of the north-west frontier had been neglected. The danger was not fully recognised till the enemy had occupied Lahore. Hurried preparations were then made for the defence of Delhi, but the faction-ridden nobles refused to unite even in sight of the enemy. They could not agree on a plan for defence or on the commander of the defending forces. Disunity, poor leadership, mutual jealousies and distrust could lead only to defeat. The two armies met at Karnal on 13 February 1739 and the invader inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mughal army. Emperor Muhammad Shah was taken prisoner and Nadir Shah marched on to Delhi. A terrible massacre of the citizens of the imperial capital was ordered by Nadir Shah as a reprisal against the killing of some of his soldiers. The greedy invader took possession of the royal treasury and other royal property, levied tribute on the leading nobles, and plundered the rich of Delhi. His total plunder has been estimated at 70 crores of rupees. This

enabled him to exempt his own kingdom from taxation for three years! He also carried away the famous Koh-i-nur diamond and the jewel-studded Peacock Throne of Shahjahan. He compelled Muhammad Shah to cede to him all the provinces of the Empire west of the river Indus.

Nadir Shah's invasion inflicted immense damage on the Mughal Empire. It caused an irreparable loss of prestige and exposed the hidden weakness of the Empire to the Maratha *sardars* and the foreign trading companies. The central administration was paralysed temporarily. The invasion ruined imperial finances and adversely affected the economic life of the country. The impoverished nobles began to rack-rent and oppress the peasantry even more in an effort to recover their lost fortunes. They also fought one another over rich jagirs and high offices more desperately than ever. The loss of Kabul and the areas to the west of the Indus once again opened the Empire to the threat of invasions from the north-west. A vital line of defence had disappeared.

It is surprising indeed that the Empire seemed to revive some of its strength after Nadir Shah's departure, even though the area under its effective control shrank rapidly. But the revival was deceptive and superficial. After Muhammad Shah's death in 1748, bitter struggles and even civil war broke out among unscrupulous and power hungry nobles. Furthermore, as a result of the weakening of the north-western defences, the Empire was devastated by the repeated invasions of Ahmed Shah Abdali, one of Nadir Shah's ablest generals, who had succeeded in establishing his authority over Afghanistan after his master's death. Abdali repeatedly invaded and plundered northern India right down to Delhi and Mathura between 1748 and 1767. In 1761, he defeated the Marathas in the Third Battle of Panipat and thus dealt a big blow to their ambition of controlling the Mughal emperor and thereby dominating the country. He did not, however, found a new Afghan kingdom in India. He and his successors could not even retain the Punjab, which they soon lost to the Sikh chiefs.

As a result of the invasions of Nadir Shah and Abdali and the suicidal internal feuds of the Mughal nobility, the Mughal Empire had

by 1761 ceased to exist in practice as an all-India Empire. It remained merely as the Kingdom of Delhi. Delhi itself was a scene of ‘daily riot and tumult’. The descendants of the Grand Mughals no longer participated actively in the struggle for the Empire of India; rather, the various contenders for power found it politically useful to hide behind their name. This gave the Mughal dynasty a long lease of life on the nominal throne of Delhi.

Shah Alam II, who ascended the throne in 1759, spent the initial years as an emperor wandering from place to place far away from his capital, for he lived in mortal fear of his own *wazir*. He was a man of some ability and ample courage. But the Empire was by now beyond redemption. In 1764, he joined Mir Qasim of Bengal and Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh in declaring war upon the English East India Company. Defeated by the British at the Battle of Buxar, he lived for several years at Allahabad as a pensioner of the East India Company. He left the British shelter in 1772 and returned to Delhi under the protective arm of the Marathas. The British occupied Delhi in 1803 and from that year until 1857, when the Mughal dynasty was finally extinguished, the Mughal emperors merely served as a political front for the English. In fact, the continuation of the Mughal monarchy after 1759, when it had ceased to be a military power, was due to the powerful hold that the Mughal dynasty had on the minds of the people of India as a symbol of the political unity of the country.

Causes of the Decline of the Mughal Empire

When a mighty empire like that of the Great Mughals decays and falls, it is because many factors and forces have been at work. The beginnings of the decline of the Mughal Empire are to be traced to the strong rule of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb inherited a large empire, yet he adopted a policy of extending it further to the farthest geographical limits in the south at great expense in men and materials. In reality, the existing means of communication and the economic and political structure of the country made it difficult to establish a stable centralised administration over all parts of the country. Thus Aurangzeb's objective of unifying the entire country under one central political authority was, though justifiable in theory, not easy in practice.

One of the basic failures of Aurangzeb lay in the realm of statesmanship. He was not willing to accept to the full the Maratha demand for regional autonomy, failing to grasp the fact that Shivaji and other Maratha *sardars* represented forces which could not be easily crushed. Akbar, placed in similar circumstances, had made an alliance with the Rajput princes and chiefs. Aurangzeb too would have been well-advised to win over the Maratha *sardars*. Instead, he chose to suppress them. His futile but arduous campaign against the Marathas extended over many years; it drained the resources of his empire and ruined the trade and industry of the Deccan. His absence from the north for over 25 years and his failure to subdue the Marathas led to deterioration in administration; this undermined the prestige of the Empire and its army, led to the neglect of the vital north-west frontier, and encouraged provincial and local officials to defy central authority and to dream of independence. Later, in the eighteenth century, Maratha expansion in the north weakened central authority still further.

Aurangzeb's conflict with some of the Rajput states also had serious consequences. Alliance with the Rajput rajas with the consequent military support was one of the main pillars of Mughal strength in the past. Aurangzeb himself had in the beginning adhered to the Rajput alliance by raising Jaswant Singh of Marwar

and Jai Singh of Amber to the highest of ranks. But his short-sighted attempt later to reduce the strength of the Rajput rajas and to re-extend imperial sway over their lands led to the withdrawal of their loyalty from the Mughal throne. Wars with the Rajput rajas further weakened the empire and encouraged separation.

The strength of Aurangzeb's administration was challenged at its very nerve centre around Delhi by the Satnami, Jat and Sikh uprisings. Even though the number of people involved in these uprisings was not large, they were significant because they were popular in character—peasants formed their backbone. All of them were to a considerable extent the result of the oppression of the Mughal revenue officials over the peasantry. They showed that the peasantry was deeply dissatisfied with feudal oppression by zamindars, nobles and the state.

Aurangzeb's religious orthodoxy and his policy towards the Hindu rulers seriously damaged the stability of the Mughal Empire. The Mughal state in the days of Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan was basically a secular state. Its stability was essentially founded on the policy of non-interference with the religious beliefs and customs of the people, fostering of friendly relations between Hindus and Muslims, opening the doors of the highest offices of the state to nobles and chiefs belonging to different regions and professing different religions. The Mughal alliance with the Rajput rajas was a visible manifestation of this policy. Aurangzeb made an attempt to reverse this policy by imposing the *jizyah*, destroying several Hindu temples in the north, and placing certain restrictions on the Hindus. In this way, he tended to alienate the Hindus, split Mughal society and, in particular, widened the gulf between the Hindu and the Muslim upper classes. But the role played by Aurangzeb's religious policy in causing the decay of Mughal power should not be over-stressed. This policy was followed only in the latter part of his reign. It was speedily abandoned by his successors. As we have seen earlier, the *jizyah* was abolished within a few years of Aurangzeb's death. Amicable relations with the Rajput and other Hindu nobles and chiefs were soon restored, and some of them, such as Ajit Singh Rathor and Sawai Jai Singh, rose to high offices under the later

Mughals. Relations with King Shahu and the Maratha *sardars* were also developed along political rather than religious lines. It should also be kept in mind that the Rajput, Jat, Maratha and Sikh chieftains of the eighteenth century did not behave as champions of the Hindus. Power and plunder were more important considerations to them than religious solidarity. They were often as ruthless in fighting and looting the Hindus as the Muslims were. In fact, neither the Hindus nor the Muslims formed a homogeneous community at that time. The upper classes of both religious groups formed the ruling class, while the peasants and artisans, Hindu or Muslim, formed the underprivileged majority of society. Sometimes the Hindu and Muslim nobles and chiefs used religion as a weapon of propaganda to achieve their political aims. But even more often, they formed mutual alliances against fellow co-religionists for gaining power, territory, or money. Moreover, both the Hindu and Muslim nobles, zamindars and chiefs ruthlessly oppressed and exploited the common people, irrespective of their religion. The Hindu peasantry of Maharashtra or Rajputana paid as high an amount in land revenue as did the Hindu or Muslim peasantry in Agra or Bengal or Avadh. Moreover, cordial cultural and social relations prevailed between the Hindu and Muslim upper classes of India.

If Aurangzeb left the Empire with many problems unsolved, the situation was further worsened by the ruinous wars of succession which followed his death. In the absence of any fixed rule of succession, the Mughal dynasty was always plagued after the death of a king by a civil war between the princes. These wars of succession became extremely fierce and destructive during the eighteenth century. They resulted in great loss of life and property. Thousands of trained soldiers and hundreds of capable military commanders and efficient and tried officials were killed. Moreover, these civil wars loosened the administrative fabric of the Empire. The nobility, the backbone of the Empire, was transformed into warring factions. Many of the local chiefs and officials utilised the conditions of uncertainty and political chaos at the centre to consolidate their own position, to acquire greater autonomy, and to make their offices hereditary.

The weaknesses of Aurangzeb's reign and the evils of the wars of succession might still have been overcome if able, farsighted, and energetic rulers had appeared on the throne. Unfortunately, after Bahadur Shah's brief reign came a long reign of utterly worthless, weak-willed and luxury-loving kings. After all, in an autocratic, monarchical system of government the character and personality of the ruler do play a crucial role. At the same time, this single factor need not be given too much importance. Aurangzeb was neither weak nor degenerate. He possessed great ability and capacity for work. He was free of the vices common among kings and lived a simple and austere life. He undermined the great empire of his forefathers not because he lacked character or ability, but because he lacked political, social and economic insight. It was not his personality but his policies that were out of joint.

Apart from the personalities of the Great Mughals, the strength of the Mughal Empire lay in the organisation and character of its nobility. The weakness of the king could have been successfully overcome and covered up by an alert, efficient, and loyal nobility. But the character of the nobility had also deteriorated. Many nobles lived extravagantly and beyond their means. Many of them became ease-loving and fond of excessive luxury. Even when they went out to fight, they surrounded themselves with comforts and frequently took their families with them. They were often poorly educated. Many of them even neglected the art of fighting. Earlier, many able persons from the lower classes had been able to rise to the ranks of nobility, thus infusing fresh blood into it. Later, the existing families of nobles began to monopolise all offices, barring the way to fresh entrants. Not all the nobles, however, had become weak and inefficient. A large number of energetic and able officials and brave and brilliant military commanders came into prominence during the eighteenth century, but most of them did not benefit the Empire because they used their talents to promote their own interests and to fight each other rather than serve the state and society.

In fact, contrary to popular belief, the major weakness of the Mughal nobility during the eighteenth century lay not in the decline in the average ability of the nobles or their moral decay, but in their

selfishness and lack of devotion to the state and this, in turn, gave birth to corruption in administration and mutual bickering. In order to increase their power, prestige, and income, the nobles formed groups and factions against each other and even against the king. In their struggle for power, they took recourse to force, fraud, and treachery. Their mutual quarrels exhausted the empire, affected its cohesion, led to its dismemberment, and, in the end, made it an easy prey to foreign conquerors. And the most guilty in this respect were precisely those nobles who were active and able. It is they who shattered the unity of the Empire by carving out their own private principalities. Thus, the decadence of the later Mughal nobility lay not so much in private vice as in a lack of public virtue and political foresight and in its devotion to the short-sighted pursuit of power. But these characteristics were not the monopoly of the Mughal nobility at the centre. They were found in equal measure among the rising Maratha chiefs, the Rajput rajas, Jat, Sikh, and the Bundela chiefs, the new rulers of autonomous provinces, and the other innumerable adventurers who rose to fame and power during the troubled eighteenth century.

One of the major causes of the growing selfishness and cliquishness of the nobles was the paucity of jagirs and the reduced income of the existing jagirs at a time when the number of nobles and their expenditure was going up. So there ensued intense mutual rivalry among them for possession of the existing jagirs. The heart of the matter perhaps was that no arrangement could have been made that would satisfy all the nobles, for there were just not enough offices and jagirs for all. The paucity of jagirs had some other consequences. The nobles tried to get the maximum income from their jagirs at the cost of the peasantry. They tried to transform their existing jagirs and offices into hereditary ones. To balance their own budgets, they tended to appropriate *khalisah* (crown) lands, thus intensifying the financial crisis of the central government. They invariably reduced their expenditure by not maintaining their full quota of troops and thus weakened the armed strength of the Empire.

A basic cause of the downfall of the Mughal Empire was that it

could no longer satisfy the minimum needs of its population. The condition of the Indian peasant gradually worsened during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While at no time perhaps was his lot happy, in the eighteenth century his life was “poor, nasty, miserable and uncertain”. The burden of land revenue went on increasing from Akbar’s time. Moreover, constant transfer of nobles from their jagirs also led to great evil. They tried to extract as much from a jagir as possible in the short period of their tenure as jagirdars. They made heavy demands on the peasants and cruelly oppressed them, often in violation of official regulations. After the death of Aurangzeb, the practice of *ijarah* or farming the land revenue to the highest bidder, who was permitted to raise what he could from the peasantry, became more common both on jagir and *khalisah* (crown) lands. This led to the rise of a new class of revenue farmers and talukdars, whose extortions from the peasantry often knew no bounds.

All these factors led to stagnation and deterioration in agriculture and the impoverishment of the peasant. Peasant discontent increased and came to the surface. There are some instances of peasants leaving the land to avoid paying taxes. Peasant discontent also found an outlet in a series of uprisings (the Satnamis, the Jats, the Sikhs, etc.), which eroded the stability and strength of the Empire. Many ruined peasants formed roving bands of robbers and adventurers, often under the leadership of the zamindars, and thus undermined law and order and the efficiency of the Mughal administration.

As a matter of fact, agriculture was no longer producing enough surplus to meet the needs of the Empire, of constant warfare, and of the increased luxury of the ruling classes. If the Empire was to survive and regain its strength and if the people were to go forward, trade and industry alone could provide the additional economic resources. But it was precisely in trade and industry that stagnation was most evident. No doubt the establishment of a large empire encouraged trade and industry in many ways and India’s industrial production increased to a marked extent. Both in the quality of its products and their quantity, Indian industry was quite advanced by

contemporary world standards. But unlike in Europe at this time, Indian industry did not make any new advances in science and technology. Similarly, the growth of trade was hampered by bad communications and by the self-sufficient nature of village economy. Moreover, emphasis on land as a source of wealth and government revenue led to the neglect of overseas trade and the navy. Perhaps not even the best of kings and nobles could have changed this situation. In the absence of scientific and technological development and a social, economic, and political revolution, India lagged behind Europe economically and politically and succumbed to its pressure.

An important socio-political cause of the downfall of the Mughal Empire was the absence of the spirit of political nationalism among the people. This was because India at the time lacked the elements which constitute a modern nation. The people of India did not feel that they were all Indians, nor were they conscious of oneness or of having common interests, even though elements of cultural unity had existed in the country for centuries. Therefore, there did not exist the ideal of living and dying for one's nation. Instead, people were loyal to persons, tribes, castes, and religious sects.

In fact, no group or class in the country was deeply interested in maintaining the unity of the country or the Empire. Such unity as did exist was imposed from above by strong rulers. The peasants' loyalty was confined to their village and caste. Moreover, they took little interest in the politics of the Empire, nor did they identify its interests with their own. They realised that they had little stake in it and that even its defence from external aggression was not their concern. The zamindars tended to rebel against any central authority which showed signs of weakness. They were opposed to a strong, centralised state that curbed their power and autonomy.

The nobles had been earlier imbued with an exalted notion of loyalty to their dynasty. But this was mainly based on the high offices and privileges they obtained in return. With the decline of the dynasty, the nobles placed their self-interest and ambition above loyalty to the state and attacked the very unity of the Empire by carving out autonomous principalities. Even those who rebelled against the Empire, for example, the Marathas, the Jats, and the

Rajputs, were interested in consolidating their regional, tribal, or personal power and had no notion of fighting for a nation called India or for its unity. The reality was that the existing character of the Indian economy, social relations, caste structure, and political institutions was such that the time was not yet ripe for the unification of Indian society or for its emergence as a nation.

The Mughal Empire might have continued to exist for a long time if its administration and armed power had not broken down, mostly as a result of the factors discussed above. There was rapid decline in the administrative efficiency of the Empire during the eighteenth century. Administration was neglected and law and order broke down in many parts of the country. Unruly zamindars openly defied central authority. Even the royal camp and Mughal armies on the march were often plundered by hostile elements. Corruption and bribery, indiscipline and inefficiency, disobedience and disloyalty prevailed on a large scale among officials at all levels. The central government was often on the verge of bankruptcy. The old accumulated wealth was exhausted, while the existing sources of income were narrowed. Many provinces failed to remit provincial revenues to the centre. The area of the *khalisah* lands was gradually reduced as emperors tried to placate friendly nobles by granting jagirs out of these lands. The rebellious zamindars regularly withheld revenue. Efforts to increase income by oppressing the peasantry produced popular reaction.

Ultimately, the military strength of the Empire was affected. During the eighteenth century, the Mughal army lacked discipline and fighting morale. Lack of finance made it difficult to maintain a large army. Its soldiers and officers were not paid for months, and, since they were mere mercenaries, they were constantly disaffected and often verged on a mutiny. Again, the noblemen-cum-commanders did not maintain their full quota of military contingents because of their own financial troubles. Moreover, the civil wars resulted in the death of many brilliant commanders and brave and experienced soldiers. Thus, the army, the ultimate sanction of an empire and the pride of the Great Mughals, was so weakened that it could no longer curb the ambitious chiefs and nobles or defend the Empire from foreign aggression.

The final blow to the Mughal Empire was given by a series of foreign invasions. Attacks by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, which were themselves the consequences of the weakness of the Empire, drained it of its wealth, ruined its trade and industry in the north, and almost destroyed its military power. Finally, the emergence of the British challenge took away the last hope of the revival of the crisis-ridden Empire. In this last fact lies the most important consequence of the decline of the Mughal Empire. None of the Indian powers rose to claim the heritage of the Great Mughals for they were strong enough to destroy the Empire, but not strong enough to unite it or to create anything new in its place. They could not create a new social order which could stand up to the new enemy from the West. All of them represented the same moribund social system as headed by the Mughals and all of them suffered from the weaknesses which had destroyed the mighty Mughal Empire. On the other hand, the Europeans knocking at the gates of India had the benefit of coming from societies which had evolved a superior economic system and which were more advanced in science and technology. The tragedy of the decline of the Mughal Empire was that its mantle fell on a foreign power which dissolved, in its own interests, the centuries-old socio-economic and political structure of the country and replaced it with a colonial structure. But some good was destined to come out of this evil. The stagnation of Indian society was broken and new forces of change emerged. This process, because it grew out of a colonial contact, inevitably brought with it extreme misery and national degradation, not to mention economic, political, and cultural backwardness. But it was precisely these new forces of change that were to provide the dynamism of modern India.

Two
Indian States and Society in the Eighteenth Century

Decay of the Mughal Empire

With the gradual weakening and decline of the Mughal Empire, local and regional political and economic forces began to arise and assert themselves and politics began to undergo major changes from the late seventeenth century onwards. During the eighteenth century, from the debris of the Mughal Empire and its political system rose a large number of independent and semi-independent powers such as the Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore and Maratha kingdoms. It is these powers which the British had to overcome in their attempt at supremacy in India.

Some of these states, such as Bengal, Awadh and Hyderabad, may be characterised as 'succession states'. They arose as a result of the assertion of autonomy by governors of Mughal provinces with the decay of the central power. Others, such as the Maratha, Afghan, Jat and Punjab states, were the product of rebellions by local chieftains, zamindars and peasants against Mughal authority. Not only did the politics in the two types of states or zones differ to some extent from each other, but there were also differences among all of them because of local conditions. Yet, not surprisingly, the overall political and administrative framework was very similar in nearly all of them. There was, of course, also a third zone comprising of areas on the south-west and south-east coasts and of north-eastern India, where Mughal influence had not penetrated to any degree.

The rulers of all the eighteenth-century states tried to legitimise their position by acknowledging the nominal supremacy of the Mughal emperor and by seeking his approval as his representatives.

Moreover, nearly all of them adopted the methods and spirit of Mughal administration. The first group of states (succession states) inherited functioning Mughal administrative structures and institutions; others tried to adopt and adapt in varying degrees this structure and institutions, including the Mughal revenue system.

The rulers of these states established law and order and viable economic and administrative structures. They curbed, with varying degrees of success, the lower local officials and petty chiefs and zamindars who constantly fought with higher authorities for control over the surplus produce of the peasant, and who sometimes succeeded in establishing local centres of power and patronage. They also conciliated and accommodated these local chiefs and zamindars who desired peace and law and order. In general, there was in most of the states decentralisation of political authority, with chiefs, jagirdars and zamindars gaining in economic and political power. The politics of these states were invariably non-communal or secular, the motivations of their rulers being similar in economic and political terms. These rulers did not discriminate on religious grounds in public appointments, civil or military; nor did the rebels against their authority pay much attention to the religion of the rulers. There is, therefore, little warrant for the belief that the decline and break-up of the Mughal Empire was followed by ‘anarchy’ or breakdown of law and order in different parts of India. In fact, whatever anarchy in administration and economy existed in the eighteenth century usually followed British wars of conquest and British intervention in the internal affairs of the Indian states.

None of these states, however, succeeded in arresting the economic crisis which had set in during the seventeenth century. All of them remained basically rent-extracting states. The zamindars and jagirdars, whose number and political strength constantly increased, continued to fight over the income from agriculture, while the condition of the peasantry continued to deteriorate. While these states prevented any breakdown of internal trade and even tried to promote foreign trade, they did nothing to modernise the basic industrial and commercial structure of their states. This largely explains their failure to consolidate themselves or to ward off

external attack.

Hyderabad and the Carnatic

The state of Hyderabad was founded by Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah in 1724. He was one of the leading nobles of the post-Aurangzeb era. He played a leading role in the overthrow of the Saiyid brothers and was rewarded with the viceroyalty of the Deccan. From 1720 to 1722, he consolidated his hold over the Deccan by suppressing all opposition to his viceroyalty and organising the administration on efficient lines. From 1722 to 1724, he was the *wazir* of the Empire. But he soon became disgusted with that office as the Emperor, Muhammad Shah, frustrated all his attempts at reforming the administration. So he decided to go back to the Deccan where he could safely maintain his supremacy. Here, he laid the foundations of Hyderabad State which he ruled with a strong hand. He never openly declared his independence from the central government, but in practice he acted like an independent ruler. He waged wars, concluded peace, conferred titles, and gave jagirs and offices without reference to Delhi. He followed a tolerant policy towards the Hindus. For example, a Hindu, Puran Chand, was his Dewan. He consolidated his power by establishing an orderly administration in the Deccan on the basis of the jagirdari system along the Mughal pattern. He forced the big, turbulent zamindars to respect his authority and kept the powerful Marathas out of his dominions. He also made an attempt to rid the revenue system of its corruption. But after his death in 1748, Hyderabad fell prey to the same disruptive forces as were operating in Delhi.

The Carnatic was one of the *subahs* of the Mughal Deccan and as such came under the Nizam of Hyderabad's authority. But just as in practice the Nizam had become independent of Delhi, so also the Deputy Governor of the Carnatic, known as the Nawab of Carnatic, had freed himself of the control of the Viceroy of the Deccan and made his office hereditary. Thus, Nawab Saadutullah Khan of Carnatic had made his nephew, Dost Ali, his successor without the approval of his superior, the Nizam. Later, after 1740, the affairs of the Carnatic deteriorated because of the repeated struggles for its nawabship, and this provided an opportunity to European trading

companies to directly interfere in Indian politics.

Bengal

Taking advantage of the growing weakness of the central authority, two men of exceptional ability, Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan, made Bengal virtually independent. Even though Murshid Quli Khan was made Governor of Bengal as late as 1717, he had been its effective ruler since 1700, when he was appointed its Dewan. He soon freed himself from central control, though he regularly sent a large tribute to the emperor. He established peace by freeing Bengal of internal and external danger. Bengal was now also relatively free of major uprisings by zamindars. The only three major uprisings during his rule were, first, by Sitaram Ray, Udai Narayan and Ghulam Muhammad, and then by Shujat Khan, and finally by Najat Khan. After defeating them, Murshid Quli Khan gave their zamindaris to his favourite, Ramjivan. Murshid Quli Khan died in 1727, and his son-in-law Shuja-ud-din ruled Bengal till 1739. In that year, Alivardi Khan deposed and killed Shuja-ud-din's son, Sarfaraz Khan, and made himself the Nawab.

These three Nawabs gave Bengal a long period of peace and orderly administration and promoted its trade and industry. Murshid Quli Khan effected economies in the administration and reorganised the finances of Bengal by transferring large parts of jagir lands into *khalisah* lands by carrying out a fresh revenue settlement, and by introducing the system of revenue-farming. He recruited revenue farmers and officials from local zamindars and merchant-bankers. He also granted agricultural loans *(taccavi)* to the poor cultivators to relieve their distress, as well as to enable them to pay land revenue in time. He was thus able to increase the resources of the Bengal government. But the system of revenue-farming led to increased economic pressure on the zamindars and peasants. Moreover, even though he demanded only the standard revenue and forbade illegal cesses, he collected the revenue from the zamindars and peasants with utmost cruelty. Another result of his reforms was that many of the older zamindars were driven out, and their place taken by upstart revenue-farmers.

Murshid Quli Khan and the succeeding Nawabs gave equal

opportunities for employment to Hindus and Muslims. They filled the highest civil posts and many of the military posts with Bengalis, mostly Hindus. In choosing revenue farmers, Murshid Quli Khan gave preference to local zamindars and *mahajans* (money-lenders), who were mainly Hindus. He thus laid the foundations of a new landed aristocracy in Bengal.

All three Nawabs recognised that the expansion of trade benefited the people and the government, and therefore encouraged all merchants, Indian and foreign. They provided for the safety of roads and rivers from thieves and robbers by establishing regular *thanas* and *chowkies*. They checked private trade by officials. They prevented abuses in the customs administration. At the same time, they made it a point to maintain strict control over foreign trading companies and their servants and prevented them from abusing their privileges. They compelled the servants of the English East India Company to obey the laws of the land and to pay the same customs duties as were being paid by other merchants. Alivardi Khan did not permit the English and the French to fortify their factories in Calcutta and Chandernagore. The Bengal Nawabs proved, however, to be short-sighted and negligent in one respect. They did not firmly put down the increasing tendency of the English East India Company after 1707 to use military force, or to threaten its use, to get its demands accepted. They had the power to deal with the Company's threats, but continued to believe that a mere trading company could not threaten their power. They failed to see that the English Company was no mere company of traders, but the representative of the most aggressive and expansionist colonialism of the time. Their ignorance of, and lack of contact with, the rest of the world was to cost the state dearly. Otherwise, they would have known of the devastation caused by the Western trading companies in Africa, South-East Asia, and Latin America.

The Nawabs of Bengal neglected to build a strong army and paid a heavy price for it. For example, the army of Murshid Quli Khan consisted of only 2000 cavalry and 4000 infantry. Alivardi Khan was constantly troubled by the repeated invasions of the Marathas and, in the end, had to cede a large part of Orissa to them. And when, in

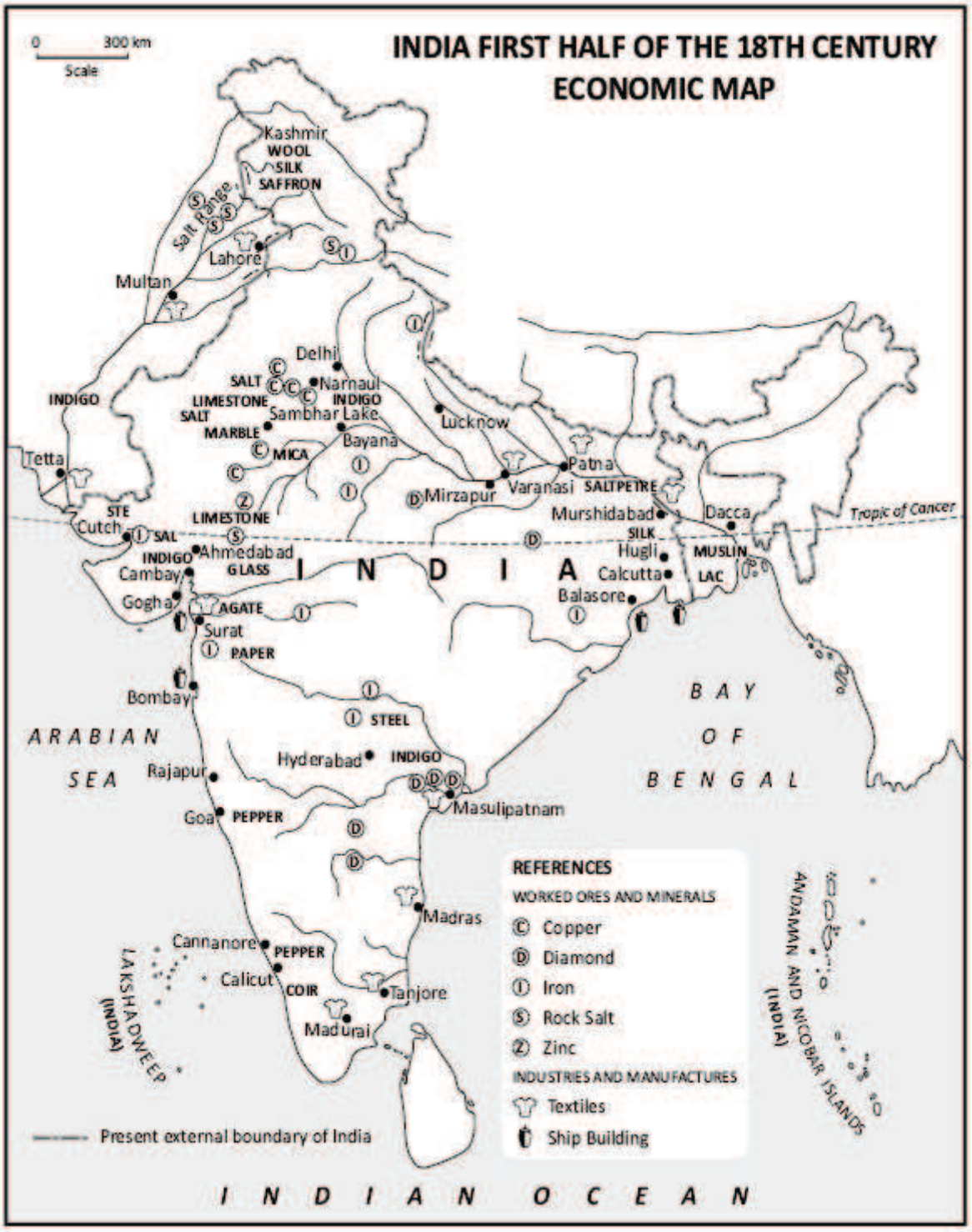
1756–67, the English East India Company declared war on Siraj- ud-Daulah, the successor of Alivardi, the absence of a strong army contributed much to the victory of the foreigner. The Bengal Nawabs also failed to check the growing corruption among their officials. Even judicial officials, the *qazis* and *muftis*, were given to taking bribes. The foreign companies took full advantage of this weakness to undermine official rules and regulations and policies.

Awadh

The founder of the autonomous kingdom of Awadh was Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk, who was appointed Governor of Awadh in 1722. He was an extremely bold, energetic, iron-willed, and intelligent person. At the time of his appointment, many rebellious zamindars had raised their heads everywhere in the province. They refused to pay the land tax, organised their own private armies, erected forts, and defied the Imperial Government. For years, Saadat Khan had to wage war upon them. He succeeded in suppressing lawlessness and disciplining the big zamindars, and thus increasing the financial resources of his government. He won over the chieftains and zamindars through various concessions. Moreover, most of the defeated zamindars were also not displaced. They were usually confirmed in their estates after they had submitted and agreed to pay their dues (land revenue) regularly.

Saadat Khan also carried out a fresh revenue settlement in 1723. He is said to have improved the lot of the peasant by levying equitable land revenue and by protecting him from oppression by the big zamindars.

Like the Bengal Nawabs, he too did not discriminate between Hindus and Muslims. Many of his commanders and high officials were Hindus, and he curbed refractory zamindars, chiefs, and nobles, irrespective of their religion. His troops were well-paid, well-armed, and well-trained. His administration was efficient. He, too, continued the jagir system. Before his death in 1739, he had become virtually independent and had made the province a hereditary possession. He was succeeded by his nephew Safdar Jang, who was simultaneously appointed the *wazir* of the Empire in 1748 and granted in addition the province of Allahabad.



Safdar Jang brought a long period of peace to the people of Awadh and Allahabad before his death in 1754. He suppressed rebellious zamindars, won over others and made an alliance with the Maratha *sardars* so that his dominion was saved from their incursions. He

was able to win the loyalty of Rajput chieftains, *shaikhzadas*. He carried on warfare against the Rohelas and the Bangash Pathans. In his war against the Bangash Pathans in 1750–51, he secured Maratha military help by paying a daily allowance of Rs 25,000 and Jat support by paying Rs 15,000 a day. Later, he entered into an agreement with the Peshwa, by which the Peshwa was to help the Mughal Empire against Ahmad Shah Abdali and to protect it from such internal rebels as the Indian Pathans and the Rajput rajas. In return, the Peshwa was to be paid Rs 50 lakh, granted the *chauth* of the Punjab, Sindh, and several districts of northern India, and made the Governor of Ajmer and Agra. The agreement failed, however, as the Peshwa went over to Safdar Jang's enemies at Delhi, who promised him the governorship of Awadh and Allahabad.

Safdar Jang also organised an equitable system of justice. He too adopted a policy of impartiality in the employment of Hindus and Muslims. The highest post in his government was held by a Hindu, Maharaja Nawab Rai.

The prolonged period of peace and economic prosperity of the nobles under the government of the Nawabs resulted in time in the growth of a distinct Lucknow culture around the Awadh court. Lucknow, for long an important city of Awadh and the seat of the Awadh Nawabs after 1775, soon rivalled Delhi in its patronage of the arts and literature. It also developed as an important centre of handicrafts. Crafts and culture also percolated to towns under the patronage of local chieftains and zamindars.

Safdar Jang maintained a very high standard of personal morality. All his life he was devoted to his only wife. As a matter of fact, all the founders of the three autonomous kingdoms of Hyderabad, Bengal and Awadh, namely Nizam-ul-Mulk, Murshid Quli Khan and Alivardi Khan, and Saadat Khan and Safdar Jang, were men of high personal morality. Nearly all of them led austere and simple lives. Their lives give lie to the belief that all the leading nobles of the eighteenth century led extravagant and luxurious lives. It was only in their public and political dealings that they resorted to fraud, intrigue and treachery.

Mysore

Next to Hyderabad, the most important power that emerged in south India was Mysore under Haidar Ali. The kingdom of Mysore had preserved its precarious independence ever since the end of the Vijayanagar Empire and had been only nominally a part of the Mughal Empire. Early in the eighteenth century two ministers, Nanjaraj (the Sarvadhikari) and Devraj (the Dulwai), had seized power in Mysore, reducing the king, Chikka Krishna Raj, to a mere puppet. Haidar Ali, born in 1721 in an obscure family, started his career as a petty officer in the Mysore army. Though uneducated, he possessed a keen intellect and was a man of great energy, daring and determination. He was also a brilliant commander and a shrewd diplomat.

Haidar Ali soon found his opportunity in the wars which involved Mysore for more than twenty years. Cleverly using the opportunities that came his way, he gradually rose in the Mysore army. He soon recognised the advantages of Western military training and applied it to the troops under his own command. He established a modern arsenal in Dindigal in 1755 with the help of French experts. In 1761, he overthrew Nanjaraj and established his authority over the Mysore state. He extended full control over the rebellious *poligars* (warrior chieftains and zamindars) and conquered the territories of Bidnur, Sunda, Sera, Canara and Malabar. A major reason for his occupation of Malabar was the desire for access to the Indian Ocean. Though illiterate, he was an efficient administrator. He was responsible for introducing the Mughal administrative and revenue system in his dominions. He took over Mysore when it was a weak and divided state and soon made it one of the leading Indian powers. He practised religious tolerance and his first Dewan and many other officials were Hindus.

Almost from the beginning of the establishment of his power, he was engaged in wars with the Maratha *sardars*, the Nizam, and the British. In 1769, he repeatedly defeated the British forces and reached the walls of Madras. He died in 1782 in the course of the second Anglo-Mysore War and was succeeded by his son Tipu.

Sultan Tipu, who ruled Mysore till his death at the hands of the British in 1799, was a man of complex character. He was, for one, an innovator. His desire to change with the times was symbolised in the introduction of a new calendar, a new system of coinage, and new scales of weights and measures. His personal library contained books on such diverse subjects as religion, history, military science, medicine, and mathematics. He showed a keen interest in the French Revolution. He planted a 'Tree of Liberty' at Srirangapatam and he became a member of a Jacobin Club. His organisational capacity is borne out by the fact that in those days of general indiscipline among Indian armies, his troops remained disciplined and loyal to him to the last. He tried to do away with the custom of giving jagirs, and thus increase state income. He also made an attempt to reduce the hereditary possessions of the *poligars* and to eliminate the intermediaries between the state and the cultivator. However, his land revenue was as high as that of other contemporary rulers—it ranged up to one-third of the gross produce. But he checked the collection of illegal cesses, and he was liberal in granting remissions.

His infantry was armed with muskets and bayonets in the European fashion which were, however, manufactured in Mysore. He also made an effort to build a modern navy after 1796. For this purpose, he established two dockyards, the models of the ships being supplied by the Sultan himself. In personal life, he was free from vices and kept himself free from luxury. He was recklessly brave and, as a commander, brilliant. He was fond of saying that it was "better to live a day as a lion than a lifetime as a sheep". He died fighting at the gates of Srirangapatam in pursuance of this belief. He was, however, hasty in action and unstable in nature.

As a statesman he, more than any other eighteenth-century Indian ruler, recognised to the full extent the threat that the English posed to south India as well as to other Indian powers. He stood forth as the steadfast foe of the rising English power. The English, in turn, looked upon him as their most dangerous enemy in India.

Though not free from contemporary economic backwardness, Mysore flourished economically under Haidar Ali and Tipu, especially

when seen in contrast to its immediate past or with the rest of the country. When the British occupied Mysore after defeating and killing Tipu in 1799, they were surprised to find that the Mysore peasant was much more prosperous than the peasant in British- occupied Madras. Sir John Shore, Governor-General from 1793 to 1798, wrote later that “the peasantry of his dominions are protected and their labour encouraged and rewarded”. Another British observer wrote of Tipu’s Mysore as “well cultivated, populous with industrious inhabitants, cities newly founded and commerce extending”. Tipu also seems to have grasped the importance of modern trade and industry. In fact, alone among the Indian rulers, he understood the importance of economic strength as the foundation of military strength. He made some attempts to introduce modern industries in India by importing foreign workmen as experts and by extending state support to many industries. He sent emissaries to France, Turkey, Iran and Pegu Myanmar to develop foreign trade. He also traded with China. He even tried to set up a trading company on the pattern of European companies and thus sought to imitate their commercial practices. He tried to promote trade with Russia and Arabia by setting up state trading institutions in the port towns.

Some British historians have described Tipu as a religious fanatic. But this is not borne out by facts. Though he was orthodox in his religious views, he was in fact tolerant and enlightened in his approach towards other religions. He gave money for the construction of the image of goddess Sarda in the Shringeri Temple after the latter was looted by Maratha horsemen in 1791. He regularly gave gifts to this temple as well as to several other temples. The famous temple of Sri Ranganath was situated barely 100 yards from his palace. But while he treated the vast majority of his Hindu and Christian subjects with consideration and tolerance, he was harsh on those Hindus and Christians who might directly or indirectly aid the British against Mysore.

Kerala

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Kerala was divided up among a large number of feudal chiefs and rajas. The four most important states were those of Calicut, under the Zamorin, Chirakkal, Cochin and Travancore. The kingdom of Travancore rose to prominence after 1729 under King Martanda Varma, one of the leading statesmen of the eighteenth century. He combined rare foresight and strong determination with courage and daring. He subdued the feudatories, conquered Quilon and Elayadam, and defeated the Dutch, thus ending their political power in Kerala. He organised a strong army on the Western model with the help of European officers and armed it with modern weapons. He also constructed a modern arsenal. Martanda Varma used his new army to expand northwards and the boundaries of Travancore soon extended from Kanyakumari to Cochin. He undertook many irrigation works, built roads and canals for communication, and gave active encouragement to foreign trade.

By 1763, all the petty principalities of Kerala had been absorbed or subordinated by the three big states of Cochin, Travancore and Calicut. Haidar Ali began his invasion of Kerala in 1766 and in the end annexed northern Kerala up to Cochin, including the territories of the Zamorin of Calicut.

The eighteenth century saw a remarkable revival in Malayalam literature. This was due in part to the rajas and chiefs of Kerala, who were great patrons of literature. Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, became, in the second half of the eighteenth century, a famous centre of Sanskrit scholarship. Rama Varma, successor of Martanda Varma, was himself a poet, scholar, musician, renowned actor, and a man of great culture. He conversed fluently in English, took a keen interest in European affairs, and regularly read newspapers and journals published in London, Calcutta and Madras.

Areas around Delhi

The Rajput States

The principal Rajput states took advantage of the growing weakness of Mughal power to virtually free themselves from central control while at the same time increasing their influence in the rest of the Empire. In the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah, the rulers of Amber and Marwar were appointed governors of important Mughal provinces such as Agra, Gujarat and Malwa.

The Rajputana states continued to be as divided as before. The bigger among them expanded at the cost of their weaker neighbours, Rajput and non-Rajput. Most of the larger Rajput states were constantly involved in petty quarrels and civil wars. The internal politics of these states were often characterised by the same type of corruption, intrigue, and treachery as prevailed at the Mughal court. Thus, Ajit Singh of Marwar was killed by his own son.

The most outstanding Rajput ruler of the eighteenth century was Raja Sawai Jai Singh of Amber (1681–1743). He was a distinguished statesman, law-maker, and reformer. But most of all, he shone as a man of science in an age when Indians were oblivious of scientific progress. He founded the city of Jaipur and made it a great seat of science and art. Jaipur was built upon strictly scientific principles and according to a regular plan. Its broad streets are intersected at right angles.

Jai Singh was, above everything else, a great astronomer. He erected observatories with accurate and advanced instruments, some of them of his own invention, at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura. His astronomical observations were remarkably accurate. He drew up a set of tables, entitled Zij Muhammadshahi, to enable people to make astronomical observations. He had Euclid's "Elements of Geometry" translated into Sanskrit, as well as several works on trigonometry, and Napier's work on the construction and use of logarithms.

Jai Singh was also a social reformer. He tried to enforce a law to reduce the lavish expenditure which the Rajputs had to incur on their

daughters' weddings. This had given rise to the evil practice of female infanticide. This remarkable prince ruled Jaipur for nearly 44 years, from 1699 to 1743.

The Jats

The Jats, a caste of agriculturists, lived in the region around Delhi, Agra and Mathura. Jat peasants around Mathura revolted under the leadership of their Jat zamindars in 1669, and then again in 1688. These revolts were crushed, but the area remained disturbed. After the death of Aurangzeb, they created disturbances all around Delhi. Though originally a peasant uprising, the Jat revolt, led by zamindars, soon became predatory. They took active part in the Court intrigues at Delhi, often changing sides to suit their own advantage. The Jat state of Bharatpur was set up by Churaman and Badan Singh. Jat power reached its highest glory under Suraj Mal, who ruled from 1756 to 1763 and who was an extremely able administrator and soldier and a very wise statesman. He extended his authority over a large area which extended from the Ganga in the east to the Chambal in the south, the Subah of Agra in the west to the Subah of Delhi in the north. His state included, among others, the districts of Agra, Mathura, Meerut and Aligarh. He tried to lay the foundations of an enduring state by adopting the Mughal revenue system. A contemporary historian has described him as follows:

> Though he wore the dress of a farmer and could speak only his own Braj dialect, he was the Plato of the Jat tribe. In prudence and skill, and ability to manage the revenue and civil affairs he had no equal among the grandees of Hindustan except Asaf Jah Bahadur.

After his death in 1763, the Jat state declined and was split up among petty zamindars, most of whom lived by plunder.

Bangash Pathans and Rohelas

Muhammad Khan Bangash, an Afghan adventurer, established his control over the territory around Farrukhabad, between what are now Aligarh and Kanpur, during the reigns of Farrukh Siyar and Muhammad Shah. Similarly, during the breakdown of administration following Nadir Shah's invasion, Ali Muhammad Khan carved out a separate principality, known as Rohilkhand, at the foothills of the Himalayas between the Ganga in the south and the Kumaon hills in the north, with its capital at first at Aolan in Bareilly and later at Rampur. The Rohelas clashed constantly with Awadh, Delhi and the Jats.

The Sikhs

Founded at the end of the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak, the Sikh religion spread among the Jat peasantry and other lower castes of the Punjab. The transformation of the Sikhs into a militant, fighting community was begun by Guru Hargobind (1606–45). It was, however, under the leadership of Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth and last Guru of the Sikhs, that they became a political and military force. From 1699 onwards, Guru Gobind Singh waged constant war against the armies of Aurangzeb and the hill rajas.

After Guru Gobind Singh's death, the institution of Gurushipcame to an end and the leadership of the Sikhs passed to his trusted disciple Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda Singh Bahadur rallied together the peasants and the lower castes of the Punjab from Delhi to Lahore, and carried on a vigorous though unequal struggle against the Mughal army for eight years. He was captured in 1715 and put to death. There were several reasons for his failure. The Mughal centre was still strong. The upper classes and castes of Punjab joined forces against Banda Singh Bahadur for his championship of the lower castes and rural poor.

The invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali and the consequent dislocation of Punjab administration gave the Sikhs an opportunity to rise once again. They soon began to fill the political vacuum. Between 1765 and 1800, they brought the Punjab and Jammu under their control. The Sikhs were organised into 12 *misls* or confederacies which operated in different parts of the province. These *misls* fully cooperated with one another. They were originally based on the principle of equality, with all members having an equal voice in deciding the affairs of a *misl* and in electing its chief and other officers. Gradually, the democratic and plebian character of the *misls* disappeared, and powerful feudal chiefs and zamindars dominated them.

The Punjab under Ranjit Singh

At the end of the eighteenth century, Ranjit Singh, chief of the Sukerchakia *misl*, rose to prominence. A strong and courageous