

Lesson 15

Understanding Eighteenth Century India

Summary

The decline of the Mughal empire gave rise to the emergence of a number of independent kingdoms in different parts of the country. Simultaneously the English East India Company steered its way to a position of political dominance whose policies affected the economic situation. In this lesson we will read about it as well as analyze the social and cultural scenario of the 18th century in India.

Decline of the Mughal Empire

Death of Aurangzeb the weakened mughal authority

Kingdoms which were subjugated by the Mughals also claimed their independence.

Jahandar Shah , Farrukh Siyar, Muhammad Shah were frivolous in nature

THE RISE OF REGIONAL POLITIES AND STATES

- The gradual weakening of the central authority set in motion new types of provincial kingdoms.
- Nobles with ability and strength sought to build a regional base for themselves.
- The *wazir* Chin Qilich Khan himself, showed the path. Having failed to reform the administration, he relinquished his office in 1723 and in October 1724 marched south to establish the state of Hyderabad in the Deccan.
- Seizing upon the disintegration of the empire, the Marathas now began their northward expansion and overran Malwa, Gujarat, and Bundelkhand.
- Then, in 1738–39, Nadir Shah, who had established himself as the ruler of Iran, invaded India.

The Maratha Power

Marathas was the new dominating force in the region

The reason for the Maratha warrior clan was of the Bhonsles, Sivaji Bhonsle, emerged as the most powerful figure in the southern politics

Balaji Visvanath helped Sahu in his rise to power.

The Maratha Confederacy

- This period saw the development of sophisticated networks of trade, banking, and finance in the territories under their control.
- Bala ji Visvanath took some care to cultivate the Angria clan, which controlled a fleet of vessels based in Kolaba and other centres of the west coast.
- These ships posed a threat not only to the new English settlement of Bombay, but to the Portuguese at Goa, Bassein, and Daman.
- On the other hand, there also emerged a far larger domain of activity away from the original heartland of the Marathas.
- Of these chiefs, the most important were the Gaikwads (Gaekwars), the Sindhias, and the Holkars. Also, there were branches of the

THE NAWABS OF BENGAL

- **Ali Vardi Khan deposed the family of Murshid Quli Khan and made himself the Nawab in 1739.**
- **In 1756–1757, the successor of Ali Vardi Khan, Siraj- ud - Daulah had to fight the English East India Company over the trading rights.**
- **His defeat in the battle of Plassey in June 1757 paved the way for subjugation of Bengal as well as India.**

THE NAWABS OF AWADH

• Saadat Khan Burhan ul Mulk saw the emergence in the suba of Awadh

• Lucknow became the cultural rival of Delhi in the spheres of arts, literature and crafts.

THE SIKHS OF PUNJAB

- The Mughal force suppressed the Sikhs under Banda Bahadur.
 - But this did not put an end to Sikh resistance to Mughal authority.
 - In the 1720s and 1730s, Amritsar emerged as a centre of Sikh activity, mainly because of its pre-eminence as a pilgrimage centre.
 - Marathas also played a role of significance on this occasion. Eventually, by the mid- 1760s.
 - Under Ahmad Shah's successor, Timur Shah (ruled 1772–93), some
 - Some Sikh groups also started consolidating themselves as political force.
 - These activities discouraged the attempts by the Mughal governors of Lahore Suba to set up an independent power base for themselves in the region.
- of the territories and towns that had been taken by the Sikhs (such as Multan) were recovered.

JAIPUR AND OTHER RAJPUTANA STATES

• Jaipur was a Rajput principality controlled by the *Kachwaha* clan

Suraj Mal the Jat ruler of Bharatpur adopted a modified form of Mughal revenue administration in his territories

18th century was thus marked by an economic depression,

POLITICS IN SOUTH INDIA

- In the south, several states bid to consolidate their power by the use of access to sea and ports.
- Travancore in Kerala under Martanda Varma and Rama Varma, and Mysore under Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan.
- Tussle between the Marathas, the Nizam, and the Arcot (or Karnatak) Nawab.

THE ECONOMY IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY INDIA

- Period of political turmoil in India
- The attacks of Nadir Shah, Ahmad Shah Abdali, and Rohillas put the city in a state of regular destruction.
- There was a process of economic reorientation that accompanied the political decentralization of the era
- Expansion- Bengal, Jaipur, and Hyderabad, for example.
- Cities like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta rose to prominence.
- Peasants were forced to cultivate certain cash crops like indigo and opium.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

There was no uniformity in the social patterns

Division into multi layered identities on the basis of religion, region, tribe, language, class and caste

Balaji Visvanath helped Sahu in his rise to power.

Basic social unit was the family based on patriarchal patterns

Condition of women was not good

THE CULTURAL MILIEU

- The cultural life of the period also has often been denigrated.
- Development of a distinct style of painting in Thanjavur
- New developments in the fields of architecture and painting.
- The principality of Kangra fostered an important new school of painting, devoted largely to Vaishnava themes.
- The cultural assimilation was outcome of mutual influence and respect.

DEBATE AND PROBLEMS IN UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORY OF EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

- Engagement of historians of Mughal India as well those interested in colonial studies.
- Beginning of the colonial rule that characterized the second half of the eighteenth century.
- The fall of Mughal Empire initiated the fall of socio- economic structure as well and secondly, whether the arrival of colonialism was a fundamental break or not?
- Because of the complex nature of the 18th century Indian polity and economy there are divergent views among historians about the nature of these developments.

Evaluate Yourself

- Q. List the causes of the decline of the Mughal Empire.
- Q. Mention of the feature of the society during the 18th century.
- Q. Identify the issues involved in understanding the eighteenth century.