



MODERN INDIAN HISTORY

A Comprehensive Guide for UPSC, PSCs & Other Competitive Exams

Volume - 1

Modern Indian History



INDEX

S No.	Chapter Title	Page No.
1	The Decline of the Mughal Empire	1
2	The Rise of New States	8
3	Indian states and the society in the 18th century	13
4	The Beginning of European Settlements in India	20
5	The British Conquest of India	36
6	Administrative organisation till 1857	63
7	Social and Cultural Awakening	71
8	The Revolt of 1857	93
9	Re-organisation After the Revolt of 1857	105
10	Economic Impact of British rule	113
11	Growth and Development of Education	121
12	Development of Press in India	128
13	Popular Movements Against the British Rule	134
14	Moderate Phase & the Birth of Nationalism in India (1885-1905)	149
15	The Era of Militant Nationalism (1905-1917)	161
16	The Mass Movements Gandhian Era (1917-1925)	181
17	The Struggle for Swaraj 1925-1939	196
18	The Transfer of Power (1940-1947)	223
19	Role of Working Class in Indian National Movement	245
20	Growth of Communalism in India	255
21	The Impact and Legacy of British rule in India	264
22	Governor General and Viceroys	269
23	Famous Indian Personalities	276

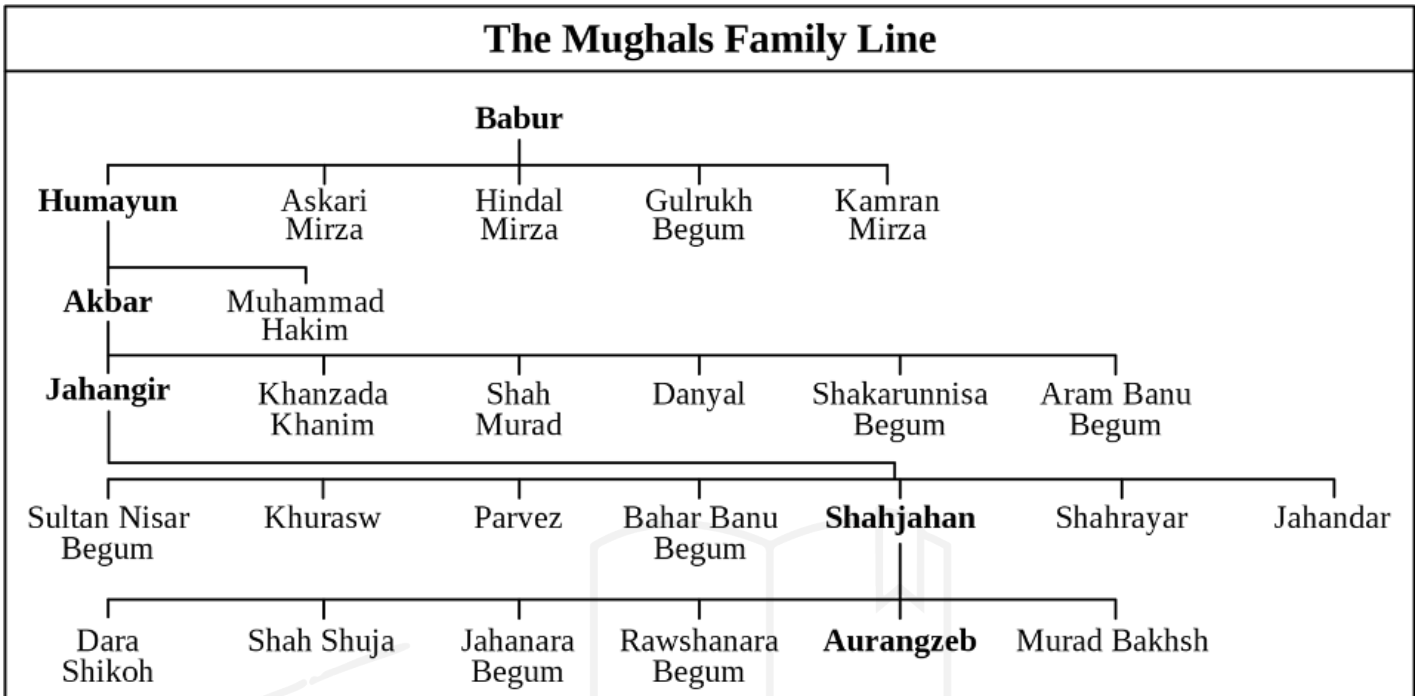
INDEX

S No.	Chapter Title	Page No.
24	Newspapers, Books and Journals	289
25	Important Committees & Commissions during British Rule	293

1

CHAPTER

The Decline of the Mughal Empire

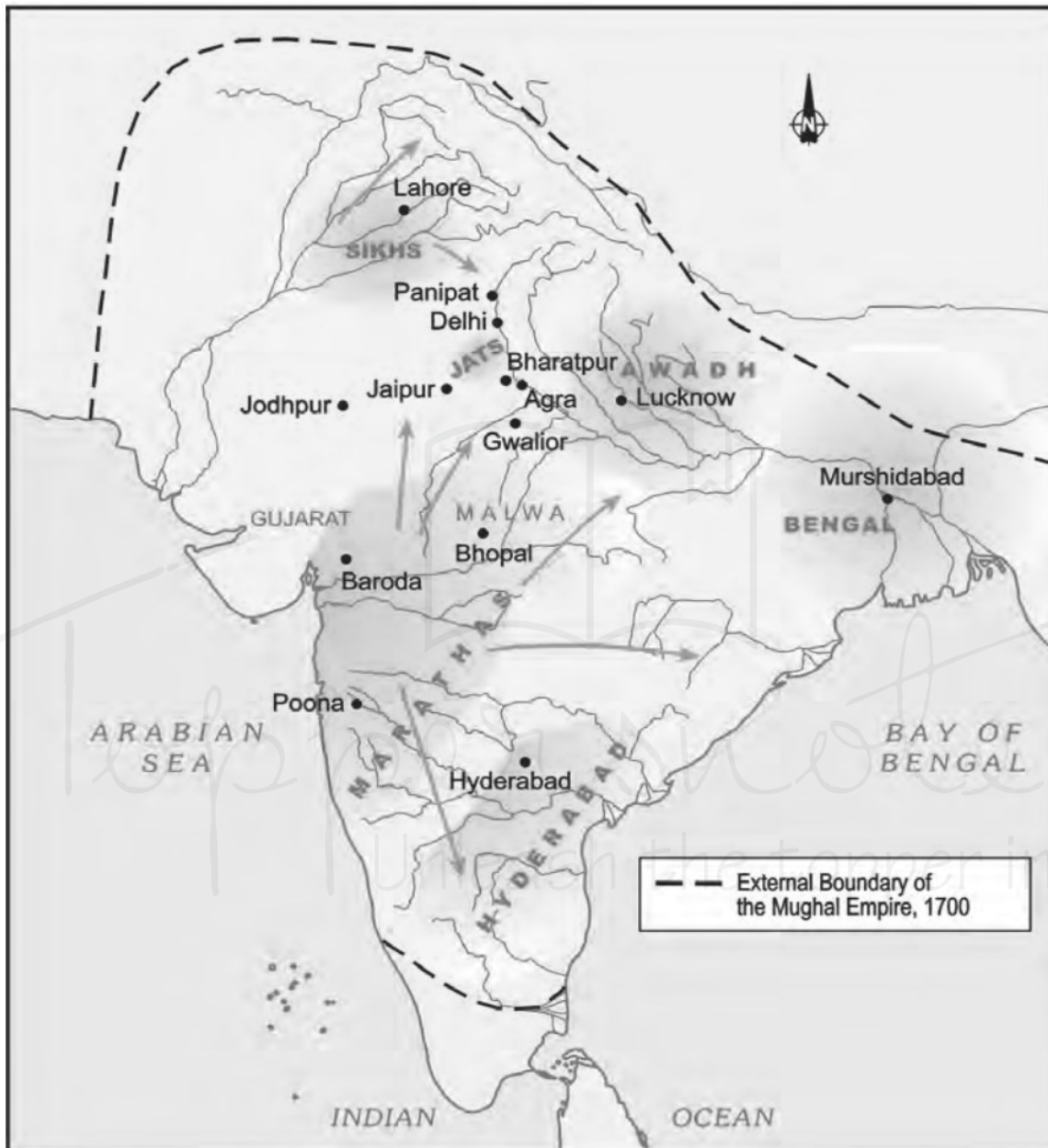
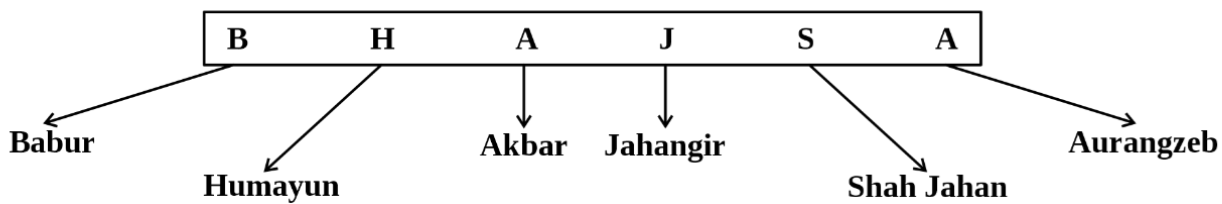


Mughal Empire that began with Babur's accession in 1526 A.D. was one of the most powerful and admired kingdoms in the world. It stretched across vast lands, had a mighty army, and was famous for its rich culture and achievements. But as the 18th century began, signs of trouble started to appear.

- The story took a turn during the reign of Aurangzeb, the last strong emperor. After his death, things began to change quickly. In just fifty years, nine emperors ruled one after another, but none could hold the empire together like before.
- The empire's heart was sick, and this illness spread to every corner. Local leaders, both Indian and foreign, started carving out their own kingdoms. Governors in places like Oudh, Bengal, and the Deccan stopped taking orders from the emperor and ruled independently.
- At the same time, Hindu rulers saw an opportunity and began asserting their freedom. Meanwhile, invaders from the northwest kept coming in, hoping to grab wealth.
- European trading companies, who had once come only to trade, started meddling in India's politics. Despite all these problems, the empire was still respected because of its glorious past under the great Mughal rulers. But the decline was slow and painful.
- The final blows came when Baji Rao I raided Delhi in 1737 and Nadir Shah invaded in 1739. These attacks exposed just how weak the empire had become. And by 1740, the mighty Mughal Empire had fallen, ending an era that had once shone so brightly.




Memory-Aid




Major timeline of rulers of the Mughal empire:






Later Mughals after Aurangzeb:

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire entered a period of rapid decline under the Later Mughals. The emperors who followed were generally weak and unable to control powerful nobles, regional rulers, and rising external forces. As a result, central authority weakened, regional states emerged, and the empire gradually lost its political and military dominance in India.

Ruler	Tenure	Key Feature
<p>Bahadur Shah I</p> 	<p>(1707-1712)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The eldest surviving son of Aurangzeb, ascended the Mughal throne after the War of Succession in 1707 by defeating his brothers Azam Shah & Kam Baksh. ➤ Bahadur Shah followed a relatively tolerant religious policy and tried to reconcile with Rajputs and Marathas, but he lacked the authority to control powerful nobles & regional groups. ➤ During his reign, the Sikh rebellion led by Banda Singh Bahadur intensified in Punjab. ➤ His reign marked the beginning of the rapid decline of central Mughal power.
<p>Jahandar Shah</p> 	<p>(1712-1713)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Son of Bahadur Shah I, came to the throne after another violent war of succession among the Mughal princes. ➤ His rule lasted only about a year and was largely dominated by his powerful wazir Zulfiqar Khan. The emperor himself was known for his indulgent lifestyle and dependence on his favourite consort Lal Kunwar. ➤ While Zulfiqar Khan attempted some administrative reforms and sought compromise with the Marathas and Rajputs, the emperor's weak leadership and the growing influence of court factions undermined the administration. ➤ Eventually, Jahandar Shah was defeated and executed by his nephew Farrukhsiyar with the support of the powerful Sayyid Brothers.
<p>Farrukhsiyar</p> 	<p>(1713-1719)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ascended the throne with the help of the influential nobles known as the Sayyid Brothers, who became the real power behind the throne. ➤ During his reign, the emperor attempted to free himself from their control, leading to continuous court intrigues and political instability. ➤ One of the most significant developments of his reign was the grant of the famous Farman of 1717 to the British East India Company, which allowed the company duty-free trade in Bengal and strengthened its commercial and political influence in India. ➤ His repeated attempts to overthrow the Sayyid Brothers failed, and they eventually deposed and executed him in 1719.

<p>Muhammad Shah</p> 	<p>(1719-1748)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Often called Muhammad Shah Rangila, ruled for nearly three decades. Although his reign witnessed the flourishing of music, art, and culture at the Mughal court, political authority weakened significantly. ➤ During his rule, several provinces such as Hyderabad, Awadh, and Bengal became virtually independent under their governors. ➤ The Marathas expanded rapidly under Baji Rao I and began dominating large parts of India. ➤ The most devastating event of his reign was the invasion of India by Nadir Shah in 1739, who defeated the Mughal army at the Battle of Karnal and brutally sacked Delhi, looting immense wealth including the Peacock Throne. ➤ This invasion exposed the military weakness of the Mughal Empire and accelerated its decline
<p>Ahmad Shah Bahadur</p> 	<p>(1748-1754)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Son of Muhammad Shah, inherited an already weakened empire. He was considered an incompetent ruler who showed little interest in administration or military affairs. Real power was exercised by court nobles and factions, particularly his mother Udham Bai and influential nobles such as Safdar Jang. During his reign, the Mughal Empire faced repeated invasions from Ahmad Shah Abdali. Internal political struggles among nobles further weakened the central government, and Ahmad Shah Bahadur was eventually deposed in 1754.
<p>Alamgir II</p> 	<p>(1754-1759)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Placed on the throne by the powerful wazir Imad-ul-Mulk and remained largely a puppet ruler. Real authority remained in the hands of ambitious nobles who controlled the administration and army. ➤ During his reign, the empire faced continued political instability and repeated invasions by Ahmad Shah Abdali. ➤ The growing influence of the Marathas in northern India further reduced Mughal authority. Alamgir II was eventually assassinated in 1759 as a result of court conspiracies.

<p>Shah Jahan III</p> 	<p>(1759-1760)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Briefly installed as a puppet ruler by the powerful noble Imad-ul-Mulk during a period of intense political instability in the Mughal court. ➤ His reign lasted only about a year and he exercised virtually no real authority. ➤ The empire at this time was fragmented and dominated by competing factions, regional powers, and foreign influences. He was soon replaced by Shah Alam II.
<p>Shah Alam II</p> 	<p>(1760-1806)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ascended the throne during a period of extreme political turmoil. In the early years of his reign he struggled to establish authority and was forced to leave Delhi due to the dominance of powerful nobles and Maratha forces. ➤ He later allied with Shuja-ud-Daula against the expanding power of the British East India Company. ➤ However, they were defeated at the Battle of Buxar. After this defeat, Shah Alam II signed the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765, granting the East India Company the Diwani rights of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa. ➤ From this point onward, the Mughal emperor effectively became a pensioner of the British.
<p>Akbar Shah II</p> 	<p>(1806-1837)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ruled during a time when Mughal authority had shrunk almost entirely to the city of Delhi. The emperor had little real power and depended on the protection and support of the British East India Company. ➤ His reign was largely ceremonial, though he maintained the cultural traditions of the Mughal court. During his reign, he conferred the title “Raja” on the social reformer Rammohan Roy, who later became known for his efforts in social and religious reform in India.
<p>Bahadur Shah II</p>	<p>(1837-1857)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Popularly known as Bahadur Shah Zafar, was the last ruler of the Mughal dynasty. A distinguished Urdu poet and patron of literature, he presided over a culturally vibrant but politically powerless court in Delhi.



- During the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Indian rebels proclaimed him the symbolic leader of the revolt against British rule.
- However, after the rebellion was suppressed, the British captured Delhi, abolished the Mughal dynasty, and exiled Bahadur Shah Zafar to Yangon. His exile and death in 1862 marked the formal end of the Mughal Empire.

Quick Recall Facts

- **Bahadur Shah I (1707–1712):** Last emperor with some administrative ability; faced Sikh rebellion under Banda Singh Bahadur.
- **Jahandar Shah (1712–1713):** Puppet ruler dominated by Zulfiqar Khan.
- **Farrukhsiyar (1713–1719):** Issued Farman of 1717 granting trade privileges to the British East India Company.
- **Muhammad Shah (1719–1748):** During his reign Nadir Shah invaded India (1739).
- **Ahmad Shah Bahadur (1748–1754):** Weak ruler dominated by nobles.
- **Alamgir II (1754–1759):** Puppet ruler under nobles.
- **Shah Alam II (1760–1806):** Defeated at Battle of Buxar; granted Diwani rights to the Company.
- **Akbar Shah II (1806–1837):** Mughal authority limited to Delhi.
- **Bahadur Shah II (1837–1857):** Symbolic leader of Indian Rebellion of 1857.

Key Causes of Mughal Decline

The Mughal Empire, which reached its peak under rulers like Akbar and Shah Jahan, began to decline rapidly after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. The decline was caused by a combination of political instability, weak successors, economic and agrarian crises, military deterioration, and administrative breakdown. External invasions, the rise of regional powers, and the collapse of the jagirdari system further accelerated the disintegration of the Mughal Empire. Some prominent causes include:

- **Weak Successors:** The absence of a fixed succession system led to frequent wars of succession. Aurangzeb's successors were weak, while nobles exploited conflicts for personal power, creating political instability.
- **Degeneration of the Mughal Nobility:** The nobility gradually became corrupt, faction-ridden, and extravagant. Their declining discipline and loyalty weakened both administration and military effectiveness.

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- **Aurangzeb's Religious Policies:** Policies such as the reimposition of jizya and hostility toward non-Muslim groups alienated Hindus and Sikhs. This weakened earlier alliances and led to prolonged conflicts that drained the empire's resources.
 - **Demoralization of the Mughal Army:** Dependence on nobles and lack of centralized discipline reduced the army's efficiency. Internal rivalries and indiscipline made it incapable of controlling rebellions or resisting invasions.
 - **Economic Crisis:** Excessive expenditure on wars and royal projects, combined with poor financial management, weakened the economic base. Heavy taxation and declining agriculture reduced revenue and strained the state.
 - **Agrarian Crisis:** High revenue demands and exploitation by jagirdars burdened peasants. This caused migration, refusal to pay taxes, and frequent peasant revolts, weakening the rural economy.
 - **Foreign Invasions:** Invasions by Nadir Shah (1739) and Ahmad Shah Abdali exposed Mughal weakness. The sack of Delhi depleted wealth and severely damaged imperial prestige.
 - **Oversized Empire and Rise of Regional Powers:** The vast size of the empire made effective control difficult. Weak central authority allowed regional powers to assert autonomy, reducing the emperor to a symbolic figure.
 - **Aurangzeb's Deccan Policy:** Long Deccan wars against the Marathas and the annexation of Bijapur and Golconda drained resources. Instead of stabilizing the region, these campaigns strengthened the Marathas.
 - **Jagirdari Crisis:** Over-assignment of jagirs and limited resources created intense competition among nobles. This weakened revenue collection, military support, and overall administrative efficiency (as noted by Satish Chandra).

Quick Recall Facts

- **1526:** Mughal Empire founded by Babur, after the First Battle of Panipat.
- **1737:** Raid on Delhi by Baji Rao I.
- **1739:** Sack of Delhi by Nadir Shah after the Battle of Karnal.
- **1764:** Defeat of Mughal emperor at Battle of Buxar.
- **1857:** End of Mughal rule after the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

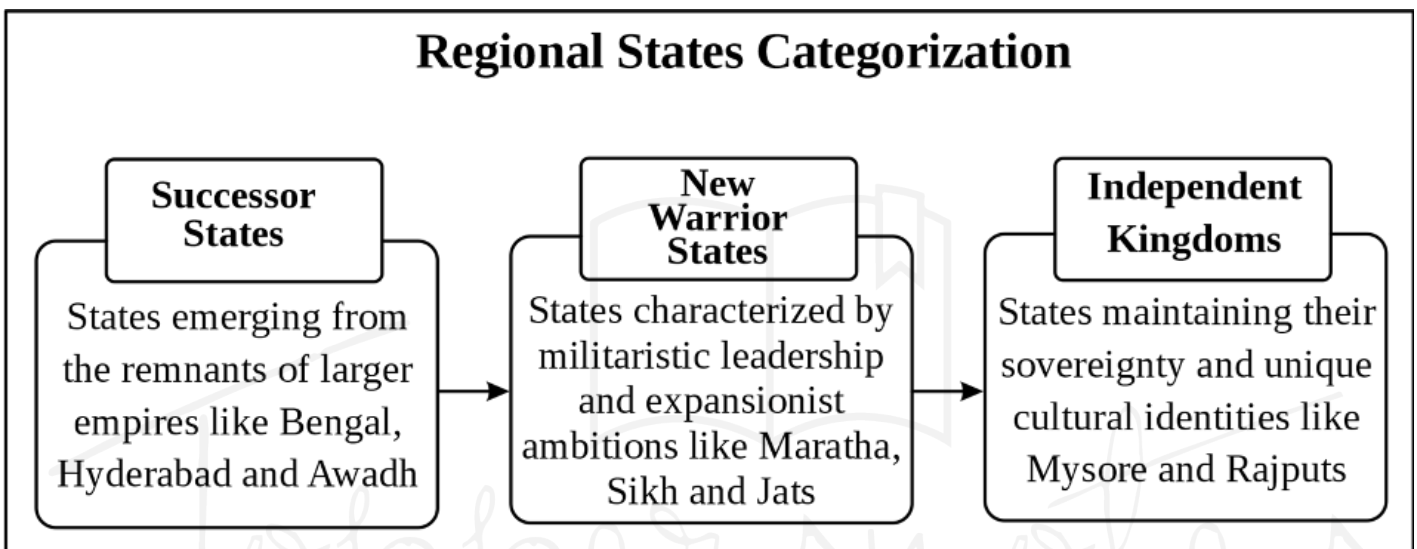
The decline of the Mughal empire began with Aurangzeb's rigid policies and was worsened by weak successors and internal conflicts. Regional powers rose as central authority collapsed, while invasions by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali exposed the empire's fragility. By the mid-18th century, the empire had fragmented, paving the way for British expansion in India.

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CHAPTER

The Rise of New States

The death of Aurangzeb triggered the decline of the Mughal empire in India and with this decline, the central authority weakened, leading to the rise of several independent and semi-independent regional powers across India. These new states emerged as ambitious local rulers, former Mughal governors and powerful nobles asserted autonomy, filling the political vacuum. This period marked a transition from imperial unity to regional fragmentation, laying the groundwork for new political identities and conflicts.



Successor States

These were those mughal provinces that turned into states after breaking away from the empire. Though they did not challenge the sovereignty of the mughal ruler, the establishment of virtually independent and hereditary authority by their governors.

Bengal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Bengal progressively broke away from Mughal power under Murshid Quli Khan, who was designated as the naib, or deputy to the Governor.➤ In 1727, he was succeeded by his son Shujaud-din & in 1740, Shujaud-din's successor Sarfaraz Khan, killed by Alivardi Khan➤ Alivardi Khan assumed power and made himself independent of the Mughal emperor by giving yearly tribute.➤ From 1756 to 1757 CE, the successor of Alivardi Khan, Siraj-ud-daulah fought against the English EIC over the trading rights & his defeat at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 paved way for the subjugation of Bengal as well as India by the British.
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Hyderabad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Founder of Hyderabad, Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah, was appointed by the mughal emperor Farrukh Siyar. ➤ He reigned completely independently, with no intervention or guidance from Delhi. ➤ Disgusted with the Mughal emperor who had appointed Mubariz Khan, as a full-fledged viceroy of the Deccan, decided to fight Mubariz Khan in the Battle of Shakar-Kheda (1724) and succeeded. ➤ In 1725, he became the viceroy and conferred the title of Asaf-Jah and assumed the control of Deccan.
Awadh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Founder: Saadat Khan (Burhan-ul-Mulk). ➤ Awadh was a flourishing region that ruled over the fertile alluvial ganga plain and the main commerce route connecting north Indian and Bengal. ➤ Maintained a well-paid, armed and well-trained army. He attempted to reduce Mughal power in the Awadh region by lowering the number of Mughal-appointed Jagirdars. ➤ His successors, Safdar Jung and Asaf ud Daulah gave a long-term administrative stability to the Awadh province. ➤ Faizabad and Lucknow emerged as centres of cultural excellence in the spheres of arts, literature, and crafts. Regional architecture reflected in Imambargahs. ➤ Dance form Kathak was the outcome of the cultural synthesis. ➤ Saadat Khan committed suicide due to pressure from Nadir Shah. He was succeeded by Safdar Jung as the Nawab of Awadh.

New Warrior States

These new warrior states were those which were characterized by militaristic leadership and expansionist ambitions like the Marathas and the Sikhs.

Marathas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Marathas emerged as one of the most powerful regional forces in India during the decline of the Mughal Empire. ➤ Under the leadership of the Peshwas, they succeeded in uprooting Mughal authority from regions such as Malwa and Gujarat, establishing their own political dominance ➤ Maratha soldiers were well known for their expertise in guerrilla warfare, which allowed them to challenge larger armies effectively. ➤ The social and cultural unity of the Marathas was strengthened by the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra, led by saints such as Tukaram, Samarth Ramdas, Eknath, and Vaman Pandit.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Political unity was further consolidated by Shahji Bhonsle and his son Shivaji, who laid the foundations of the Maratha state. ➤ Although the Marathas suffered a major setback in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761) against Ahmad Shah Abdali, they quickly recovered and later posed a strong challenge to the expanding power of the English East India Company.
Sikhs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Sikh community gradually evolved into a powerful political and military force in north-western India. The transformation began when Guru Gobind Singh organized the Sikhs into a militant community through the creation of the Khalsa. ➤ Later, the Sikhs were united under Banda Singh Bahadur, who led early resistance against Mughal authority but was eventually defeated and executed. ➤ Following the invasions of Nader Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Sikhs reorganized themselves into twelve misls (confederacies). ➤ These misls were eventually unified by Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Sukerchakia Misl, who established a powerful Sikh kingdom in Punjab. ➤ He extended his control from the Sutlej River to the Jhelum River, capturing Lahore in 1799 and Amritsar in 1802. ➤ The Treaty of Amritsar recognized British control over the territories south of the Sutlej. Later, he was compelled by the British to sign the Tripartite Treaty. ➤ After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839, internal conflicts weakened the kingdom, allowing the British to eventually take control of Punjab.
Jats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The Jats were primarily an agricultural and pastoral community inhabiting the regions around Delhi, Mathura, and Agra. ➤ Their resistance against Mughal authority began during the reign of Jahangir and intensified due to the oppressive policies of Aurangzeb. ➤ Leaders such as Churaman and Badan Singh played an important role in establishing the Jat state of Bharatpur. ➤ Under the rule of Maharaja Suraj Mal, the Jat kingdom reached its peak and extended from the Ganges River in the east to the Chambal River in the south, covering regions such as Agra, Mathura, Meerut, and Aligarh. ➤ However, after the death of Suraj Mal in 1763, the Jat state gradually declined and fragmented into smaller territories controlled by local zamindars.

Independent States

These were those states who tried to maintain their sovereignty and unique cultural identities. These included Mysore, Rajput states and Travancore.

Rajputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Rajputs were important allies of the Mughal empire and provided great support to them, in controlling the peripheral areas.➤ Mughal-Rajput relations deteriorated, due to Aurangzeb's interference in the succession dispute of Marwar.➤ Tried to re-establish their independence in the early 18th century.➤ Ajit Singh of Marwar formed an alliance with Jai Singh II of Amer and noble Durgadas Rathore, compelling the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah I to march against them in 1708.➤ But the alliance was broken and the situation was saved for the Mughals.➤ Most of the larger Rajput states were constantly involved in conflicts.➤ At their peak, Rajput rulers controlled territories stretching from south of Delhi to the western coast of India.
Mysore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Initially ruled by the Wodeyars, various powers were interested in this territory, turning the area into a constant battlefield.➤ In the end the Mysore state was brought under the active authority of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan who ruled the state but not without trouble. A series of 4 Anglo-Mysore wars marks their reign (1767-1799).➤ Despite their resistance, Mysore ultimately came under British rule and control through the Subsidiary alliance clause.
Travancore	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The Kingdom of Travancore was founded by Martanda Varma, who made Travancore his capital and expanded the state from Kanyakumari to Cochin.➤ He reorganized and strengthened the army on western military lines, enabling Travancore to emerge as a powerful regional state in Southern India.➤ After his reign the throne passed to Rama Varma, under whom the Kingdom continued to maintain its political stability and regional importance.

Quick Recall Facts

- **Bengal:** Murshid Quli Khan (Mughal deputy governor). The Battle of Plassey (1757) led to British control of Bengal.
- **Hyderabad:** Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I. Became independent after victory in Battle of Shakar Kheda (1724).
- **Awadh:** Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk.
- **Marathas:** Shivaji. Major defeat in Third Battle of Panipat (1761) against Ahmad Shah Abdali.
- **Sikhs:** Militarisation under Guru Gobind Singh through Khalsa. Treaty of Amritsar (1809) recognized British control south of Sutlej.
- **Jats:** Leaders, Churaman, Badan Singh. Decline after Suraj Mal's death (1763).
- **Rajputs:** Leaders Ajit Singh of Marwar, Jai Singh II, Durgadas Rathore. Relations worsened due to Aurangzeb's interference
- **Mysore:** Originally by Wodeyars. Later dominated by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. Four Anglo-Mysore Wars (1767–1799) with the British.
- **Travancore:** Founder: Marthanda Varma. The territory expanded from Kanyakumari to Cochin.

After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the decline of the Mughal Empire led to the rise of several regional powers such as Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, the Maratha Empire, and the Sikh kingdom in Punjab. While these states strengthened regional identities and governance, their rivalries and lack of unity weakened overall political stability. This fragmentation eventually enabled the English East India Company to expand its influence and establish British dominance in India.

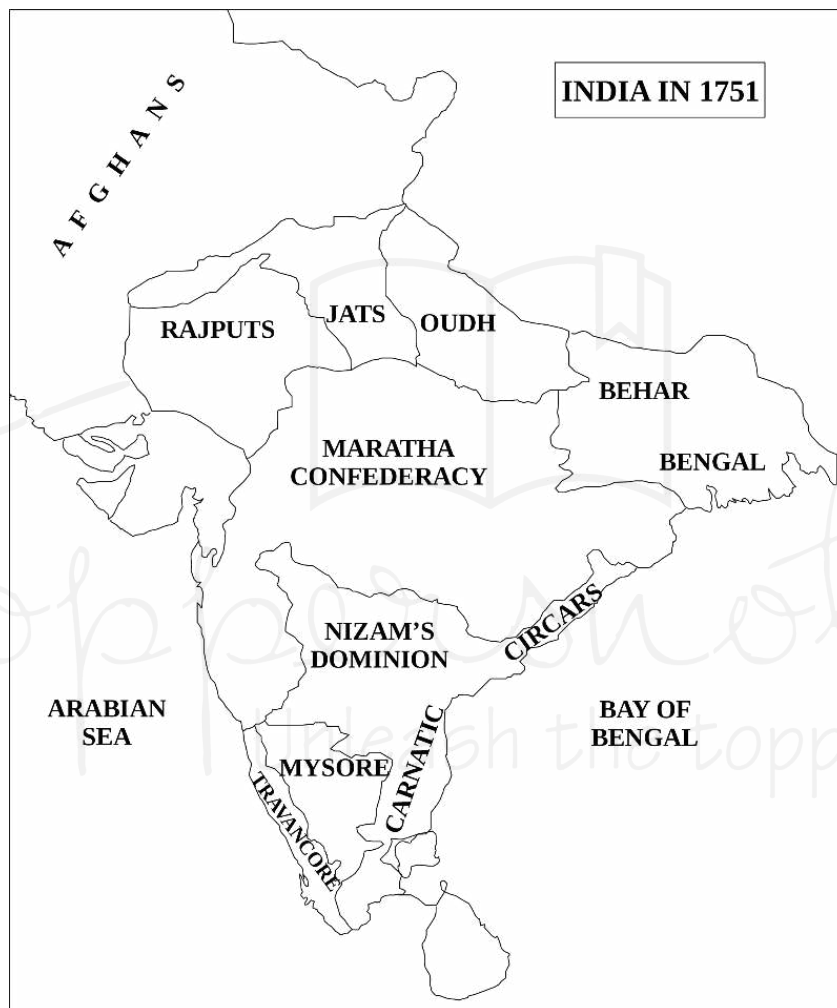
Unleash the topper in you

3

CHAPTER

Indian states and the society in the 18th century

The eighteenth century in India was marked by the decline of the Mughal Empire and the simultaneous rise of numerous regional and successor states. This phase did not represent complete political collapse but rather a reorganization of power at the regional level. While these states succeeded in establishing political stability and administrative continuity, they failed to bring about economic and structural transformation, which ultimately made them vulnerable to colonial expansion.



General Features of 18th Century States

The weakening of central authority led to the emergence of regional powers that attempted to replicate Mughal administrative structures while asserting autonomy.

- A large number of independent and semi-independent states such as Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, and the Marathas emerged.
- These states arose either through assertion of autonomy by Mughal governors or through rebellion against Mughal authority.

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- Most rulers-maintained law and order and administrative stability, ensuring continuity in governance.
 - Administrative systems were largely based on Mughal models, especially in revenue collection and military organization.
 - Continuous conflict existed between zamindars, jagirdars, and local chiefs over control of agrarian surplus.
 - Politics of these states was largely non-communal, with appointments based on ability rather than religion.
 - Despite political stability, these states could not prevent economic decline and agrarian distress.
 - Increasing pressure on land revenue worsened the condition of peasants and intensified rural inequality.
 - Internal trade was maintained and sometimes encouraged, but lack of industrial modernization remained a major weakness.

Hyderabad

Hyderabad represents a classic example of a Mughal province transforming into an autonomous state while retaining nominal allegiance to the empire.

- Hyderabad was founded in 1724 by Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah, a powerful Mughal noble, who consolidated control over the Deccan by suppressing opposition and organizing efficient administration.
- Though he did not formally declare independence, Hyderabad functioned as an independent state in practice.
- The Nizam exercised full authority in matters of war, diplomacy, appointments, and revenue administration.
- Administration followed the Mughal jagirdari system, ensuring continuity with past practices.
- Religious tolerance was maintained, with Hindus occupying important administrative positions.
- Strong measures taken to control zamindars & limit Maratha influence in Deccan.
- After his death in 1748, Hyderabad weakened due to internal conflicts and factionalism.

Carnatic

The Carnatic illustrates the further fragmentation of authority within the Deccan.

- Carnatic, initially under Hyderabad, became virtually independent under its Nawabs.
- Succession became hereditary without approval from the Nizam, indicating decline of central authority.
- Frequent succession disputes and political instability weakened the region.
- This instability provided opportunities for European trading companies to intervene in Indian politics.

Kerala

Kerala in the eighteenth century witnessed both political consolidation and cultural revival under strong regional rulers.

- Initially divided among several small states such as Calicut, Cochin, Travancore, and Chirakkal.
- Travancore emerged as the most powerful state under Martanda Varma.
- He consolidated power by defeating feudal chiefs and centralizing authority.
- Military reforms included adoption of European-style army organization and modern weapons.
- Territorial expansion extended Travancore from Kanyakumari to Cochin.
- Development of infrastructure such as roads, canals, and irrigation systems supported economic growth.
- Foreign trade was actively promoted, strengthening the economy.
- By the mid-eighteenth century, major states absorbed smaller principalities, leading to political consolidation.
- Haidar Ali's invasion in 1766 brought northern Kerala under Mysore's control.
- The region also experienced a significant cultural and intellectual revival as the growth of Malayalam literature and patronage of arts by local rulers. Trivandrum became an important center of Sanskrit learning. Also, rulers like Rama Varma promoted scholarship and were influenced by global developments.

The Rajput States

The Rajput states regained autonomy during Mughal decline but remained politically fragmented and internally weak.

- Major states like Amber and Marwar asserted independence while maintaining nominal ties with the Mughals.
- Rajput rulers held important Mughal governorships, increasing their political influence.
- States were marked by internal conflicts, succession disputes, and factionalism.
- Political instability often included intrigue, treachery, and even assassinations.
- Continuous warfare among Rajput states prevented collective unity.
- Sawai Jai Singh stands out as a notable exception in terms of governance and intellectual contribution. He was the founder of Jaipur, a scientifically planned city with advanced urban design. Attempted social reforms such as reducing extravagant marriage expenses.

NCERT Essentials

A description of Raja Jai Singh in a Persian account of 1732:

Raja Jai Singh was at the height of his power. He was the governor of Agra for 12 years and of Malwa for 5 or 6 years. He possessed a large army, artillery and great wealth. His sway extended from Delfit to the banks of the Narmada.

The Jats

The rise of the Jats reflects the transformation of agrarian revolts into regional political power.

- Jats were primarily an agrarian community concentrated around Delhi, Agra, and Mathura.
- Early revolts were directed against oppressive Mughal officials and zamindars.
- Over time, these uprisings evolved into organized political movements.
- Jat forces engaged in plunder and opportunistic politics, often ignoring religious divisions.
- They became active participants in Mughal court politics, frequently shifting alliances.
- The establishment of Bharatpur marked the consolidation of Jat power. Churaman laid the foundation of the Jat state. Suraj Mal expanded and strengthened the state significantly. After his death, internal divisions led to the decline and fragmentation of the state.

The Bangash Pathans and Rohillas

These states represent the rise of Afghan military adventurers in north India during Mughal decline.

- Muhammad Khan Bangash established control over the Farrukhabad region.
- His power grew due to weakening Mughal authority.
- Ali Muhammad Khan founded the Rohilla state of Rohilkhand.
- Rohilkhand extended between the Ganga plains and Himalayan foothills.
- These states frequently engaged in conflicts with neighboring powers like Awadh, Delhi, and the Jats.
- Their politics reflected militarization and instability characteristic of the period.

The Sikhs

The rise of Sikh power under Ranjit Singh represents one of the most successful examples of state formation in the eighteenth century.

- Ranjit Singh unified various Sikh misls and established a powerful kingdom in Punjab.
- He captured key territories such as Lahore, Amritsar, Kashmir, Multan, and Peshawar.
- Administration retained elements of the Mughal revenue system, ensuring continuity.
- A modern army was developed with European training, discipline, and technology.
- The army was inclusive, comprising soldiers from different regions and religions.
- Military modernization included artillery, foundries, and advanced weaponry.
- His governance combined pragmatism with inclusivity. He followed a policy of religious tolerance and secular administration. Appointed capable officials irrespective of religion. Also, maintained diplomatic caution in dealing with the British.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Conditions in 18th Century India

The eighteenth century in India was a period of transition and contradiction, marked by political instability but also continuity in socio-economic structures. While regional states emerged after the decline of the Mughal Empire, the economy, society, and culture displayed both resilience and stagnation

Economic Conditions

The Indian economy in the eighteenth century reflected a dual character, where immense wealth coexisted with widespread poverty.

- Extreme inequality existed between the luxurious life of nobles and the subsistence-level existence of peasants.
- The ruling classes enjoyed prosperity, while peasants bore the burden of heavy taxation and exploitation.
- Despite these inequalities, the condition of the masses was relatively better than during the later colonial period.
- The economy retained structural stability but lacked innovation and modernization.

Agriculture

Agriculture remained the backbone of the Indian economy but suffered from stagnation and exploitation.

- Indian agriculture was technically backward and stagnant.
- Peasants produced surplus but received inadequate returns for their labour.
- Heavy extraction of revenue by state, zamindars, jagirdars, and revenue farmers burdened the peasantry.
- Agrarian exploitation was common across all regimes including Mughal, Maratha, and Sikh states.
- Villages were largely self-sufficient units, producing most of their own requirements.
- Poor communication and transport systems limited agricultural commercialization.

Trade and Commerce

India maintained an active trade network with both Asian and European regions, reflecting its strong artisanal base.

- India imported luxury and specialized goods such as silk, tea, spices, metals, and precious items from regions like Persia, Arabia, China, Tibet, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- Major imports included raw silk, wool, porcelain, gold, ivory, and metals.
- India's most significant export was cotton textiles, which were globally renowned for quality.
- Other exports included silk, indigo, saltpetre, opium, spices, grains, and precious stones.
- India maintained a favorable balance of trade, leading to inflow of gold and silver.
- The economy showed self-sufficiency in handicrafts and agriculture, reducing dependence on imports.

Urbanization

Urban centers evolved significantly due to political and commercial changes.

- The level of urbanization in 1800 was higher compared to the previous century.
- The decline of Mughal capitals like Delhi and Agra was balanced by the rise of regional capitals such as Lucknow, Hyderabad, and Seringapatam.
- Growth of trade led to the emergence of merchant-capitalists and banking networks.