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REVIEW ARTICLE

REVIEW OF REGIONAL POWERS IN 18TH CENTURY'S INDIA

Review of Regional Powers In 18th Century's India

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Abstract: *The collapse of central authority led to the declaration of independence by the Subahdars of several provinces. But all these states were primarily regional political entities interested in promoting their own growth. They had no political or national outlook. Some of these states like Bengal, Hyderabad and Awadh—became for all practical purposes independent owning a nominal allegiance to the Mughal Emperor. The Sikhs and the Jats made successful bids for political power. The Marathas profited more than any other people of India with the fall of the Mughal Empire. They established a mighty empire extending from the Punjab to Mysore.*

HYDERABAD

Hyderabad or the Deccan, became independent of Mughal rule under Chin Qilich Khan, better known in history as Nizam-ul-Mulk. Chin Qilich Khan was Governor of Bijapur at the time of Aurangzeb's death. Bahadur Shah removed him from the Deccan and made him Governor of Oudh in December 1707. In 1713 Farrukhsiyar appointed him Governor of the Six Subahs of the Deccan with the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk. But intrigues at the Delhi Court led to his recall from the Deccan. Nizam-ul-Mulk was transferred to Muradabad. Later on he became Governor of Malwa in 1719. In 1720 he showed his military power against the Saiyyids by defeating the two generals, Dilawar Ali Khan and Alam Ali Khan.

After the fall of the Saiyyids, Nizam-ul-Mulk made himself master of the Six Subahs of the Deccan. In February he was appointed Wazir by Emperor Muhammad Shah. But Nizam-ul-Mulk could not adjust himself with the intriguing politics of Delhi and left for the Deccan in disgust (December 1723). Under secret instruction from the Emperor, Mubarick Khan, Deputy Governor of the Deccan resisted him. Securing the support of the Marathas, Nizam-ul-Mulk defeated and killed Mubarick Khan at Shakarkheda in Berar in October 1724. "From this period may be dated Nizam-ul-Mulk's virtual independence and the foundation of the Hyderabad State." In 1725 Emperor Muhammad Shah recognised him as the viceroy of the south.

Soon afterwards, Nizam-ul-Mulk came into conflict with the Marathas. In 1728 he suffered a severe defeat at Palkhed near Bhopal in a battle with Peshwa Bajirao I. In 1737 he was summoned by Muhammad Shah to save the Mughal Empire from the Maratha menace. But he was unable to fulfil imperial expectations. He suffered defeat at Bhopal and made a humiliating peace with the Peshwa Bajirao I in January 1738. After

securing the Subahdari of Malwa from the Marathas, the Nizam gave up the territory between the Narmada and the Chambal. The Nizam again came to the protection of the Mughal Emperor during Nadir's Shah's invasion. But he could do nothing against Nadir's supreme military power. In 1741 he returned to the Deccan and suppressed the rebellion of his second son, Nasir Jang. In 1743 he established his supremacy over the principality of Arcot as also over Trichinopoly. He died on 21 May 1748 at the age of 77. He founded a dynasty which continued to rule over the Deccan for two centuries. After his death, the question of succession gave opportunities to the Marathas, the French and the English to play a vital role in the Deccan.

CARNATIC

South of the Kistna the coastal province of the Carnatic extended to the Maratha principality of Tanjore. This was a dependency of the Nizam who maintained his control until his death in 1748. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Nizam, the Nawab of the Carnatic freed himself from the tutelage of the viceroy of the Deccan and made his office hereditary. Thus, without the formal approval of his superior, the Nizam, the Nawab Saadullah Khan of Carnatic made his nephew Dost Ali, his successor. After 1740 the Nawabship of the Carnatic became a bone of contention among the rival claimants and this provided an opportunity to the ambitious Europeans to fish in the troubled waters.

BENGAL

Bengal became a virtually independent Kingdom after Aurangzeb's death in 1707 under Murshid Quli Khan. At the time of Aurangzeb's death Murshid Quli Khan was Deputy Governor of Bengal and Governor of Orissa. He became Deputy Subahdar of Bengal in

1713 and full *Subahdar* in 1717. He transferred the capital of Bengal from Dacca to Murshidabad, which was named after him.

Murshid Quli Khan established an efficient administration. His important achievement was in the field of revenue administration. He introduced *Ijara* system by which contracts were given for collection of revenue. In the second or third generation, these contractors or *Ijaradars* came to be called *Zamindars*. He thus created a landed aristocracy in Bengal whose position was confirmed by Cornwallis. For collection of revenue he divided the whole of Bengal into 13 circles, which were subdivided into 13 tracts under the supervision of *Jagirdars* and 25 areas as crown-land farmed out to contractors. To improve economic prosperity he showed favours to traders of all categories— both Indian and European. It has been observed: "During his government, the meanest peasant was secured from oppression... (He) was so impartial in his decisions, and rigid in the execution thereof that no one dared to commit oppression."

After Murshid Quli Khan's death in 1727, his son-in-law Shujaud-din Muhammad Khan (1727-39) who had been Deputy Governor of Orissa, succeeded him in the Government of Bengal and Orissa. Bihar was added to his dominion in 1733. In the early part of his regime, Shuja-ud-din was efficient, but later on the administration grew corrupt owing to his vices.

For the administration of the Bengal *Subah*, Shuja-ud-din created four divisions, each being placed under a Deputy Governor. He dealt firmly with the European trading companies in Bengal like the English, the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese and the Danish. The English described him as a "rash and powerful subahdar."

Shuja-ud-din died on 30 March 1739 and was succeeded by his son Sarfaraz Khan (1739-40). Lacking the essential qualities of a ruler, Sarfaraz was defeated and killed in the battle of Giria (10 April 1740) by one of his officers, Alivardi Khan, Deputy Governor of Bihar. Alivardi (1740-56) ascended the *masnad* and secured imperial confirmation by remitting huge sums of money to Delhi. Alivardi had some good qualities which enabled him to govern the province ably. He never forcibly realised money from the people. His attitude towards the European trading companies in Bengal was strict and impartial. But he had been denied peace during his long reign. The Maratha invaders from Nagpur and the rebellions of his Afghan General in Bihar, disturbed him very much. In 1748 Alivardi suppressed the Afghan rebellion in Bihar. In 1751 he secured peace with the Marathas by agreeing to cede Orissa and to pay Rs. 12 lakhs as *Chauth*. The river *Subarnarekha* was fixed as the boundary of the Bengal *Subah*. The Maratha rule in Orissa survived till 1802 when the East India Company conquered the province from the Bhonsle Raja. Alivardi died on 10 April 1756 and was succeeded by his grandson, Siraj-ud-Daula, a youth of twenty.

AWADH (OUDH)

The Mughal *Subah* of Awadh included not only Awadh but also extended to Banaras in the east. The founder of the Kingdom of Awadh was Sadat Khan. He rose to prominence in the imperial politics and was appointed first as Governor of Agra (1720-22) and then of Awadh. He was a successful soldier and a wise ruler. He suppressed the refractory *zamindars* and carried out a revenue settlement in 1723 which protected the interests of the *ryots*. He extended Awadh's jurisdiction over Banaras, Ghazipur, Jaunpur and Chunar. In the battle of Karnal (1739), he was taken prisoner by Nadir Shah. He committed suicide to save himself from dishonor Sadat Khan's nephew and son-in-law Safdar Jang (1739-54) became the next Governor of Awadh. He became the *Wazir* of the Emperor Ahmed Shah. His position was one of unusual difficulty. Apart from his contests with the Afghans, he had to carry on war against the Rohillas. In April 1752, Safadar Jang entered into an agreement with the Marathas against Ahmed Shah Abdali. In return the Marathas were to be paid Rs 50 lakhs, granted the *Chauth* of the Punjab, Sind and the Doab in addition to the *Subahdari* of Ajmer and Agra. The agreement, however, failed, as the Peshwa went over to Safdar Jang's enemies at Delhi. He organised an equitable system of justice and adopted a policy of impartiality in the employment of Hindus and Muslims.

After Safdar Jang's death in 1754, his son Shuja-ud-Daula (1754-75) became *Subahdar* of Awadh. Shuja-ud-Daula played an important role in the changing political drama at Delhi. In 1762 he became the *Wazir* of Emperor Shah Alam II. He entered into alliance with the Nawab of Bengal, Mir Qasim as well as with the Emperor Shah Alam II against the Company. He suffered a crushing defeat in the battle of Buxar (October 1764). By the Treaty of Allahabad (August 1765) all the territories with the exception of Kora and Allahabad were restored to him. This treaty made the Nawab of Awadh a dependent and subordinate ally of the company.

MYSORE

Mysore was ruled in the name of a nominal Hindu King by two brothers, Devraj and Nanjaraj. Nizam-ul-Mulk regarded Mysore as Mughal territory and his successors also considered that Mysore was a part of their Kingdom. The Marathas also repeatedly invaded Mysore. In the Anglo-French conflict Mysore involved itself but failed to make any political or territorial gain.

It was Haidar Ali, a military adventurer of humble origin, who made Mysore powerful. He entered the service of Nanjaraj and was appointed *faujdar* of Dindigul in 1755. Taking advantage of the prevailing anarchy in the south, Haidar overthrew his former patron in 1758 and seized the political power. The Marathas were too busy in the north. By 1761

Haidar was unchallenged ruler of the State although he did not abolish the puppet Hindu monarchy.

In the years following the battle of Panipat Haidar conquered important places such as Sira, Bidnur and Sunda. But Peshwa Madhavao I adopted an aggressive policy; Haidar Ali was defeated at Ratehalli in May 1764. A treaty was concluded by which Haidar paid 28 lakhs as tribute and restored territories between the Krishna and Tungabhadra. Again in November 1766 the Peshwa marched against Haidar. Nizam Ali joined the Peshwa in this conflict. But Nizam Ali soon after concluded an alliance with the British. The Peshwa marched alone and compelled Haidar to submit. Haidar agreed to pay a tribute of Rs 33 lakhs to the Peshwa and got back most of his territory including Sira, Chik Balapur and Kolar, but the Marathas retained Hoskote and some other places. Nizam Ali thought it proper to come to terms with Haidar.

In the beginning, Haidar looked upon the British power as hostile to him. He along with his cavalry made a sudden dash on Madras in March 1769. The English made peace in the next month providing for mutual restoration of conquest and a defensive alliance. As a realist, Haidar felt that the defensive alliance of 1769 must be the basis of his foreign policy. The Nizam was his traditional enemy and the Marathas a dangerous neighbour. But he was sadly disappointed. The English gave him no aid during the Maratha invasion of 1769-72. As he once said 'I have wasted several years of my life by the supposition that England was a great nation.' During the First Anglo-Maratha War, Haidar joined the Peshwa, the Nizam and Bhonsle in a common struggle against the English.

Haidar died in December 1782. But his son, Tipu Sultan, continued the war. The Madras Governor, Lord Macartney, who was anxious for peace, concluded the Treaty of Mangalore (March 1784) on the basis of mutual restoration of conquests and release of prisoners. Warren Hastings regarded the treaty as 'humiliating pacification.'

Mysore under Tipu continued to grow as a formidable power. He sent envoys to France and Turkey (1787) and received some vague encouragement. The new Governor-General, Lord Cornwallis, from the moment of his arrival, considered that a war with Tipu was inevitable. Tipu's attack on the Raja of Travancore, an ally of the Company, freed the Governor-General from the strict policy of neutrality laid down by Pitt's India Act of 1784. Lord Cornwallis found no difficulty in securing the alliance of the Peshwa and the Nizam. In this war (Third Anglo-Mysore War, 1790-92), the Mysore ruler was defeated. The Treaty of Seringapatam (March 1792) deprived Tipu half of his territories. After the treaty, Tipu paid a visit to the Maratha general Haripant and warned him in prophetic

words: "You must realise that your real enemy is the English. I am not at all your enemy."

Instead of being crippled by the British, Tipu showed unexpected signs of recovery. He strengthened the fortifications of Seringapatam, reorganised the army and tried to establish contact with France. Wellesley thereupon called Tipu to sever his connections with the French and enter into a subsidiary alliance with the British. Tipu was not prepared to accept these stern conditions. The war was brief but decisive. Seringapatam was taken by assault on May 4, 1799. Tipu himself was killed in action and his son surrendered. A chief of the old Hindu dynasty was made King of Mysore with Purnia, Tipu's Brahmin minister, as the *de facto* ruler. The new Mysore state entered into a subsidiary treaty (July 1799) with the British which reduced it to the position of a dependency of the Company.

Thus the English had to fight four wars with Mysore in order to reduce it to complete subjection. This task was made easy by the resources of the Company, and by the narrow policy of the Marathas and the Nizam who became the allies of the Company. Moreover, Tipu was also responsible for driving the Indian powers to the arms of the Company. His military policy was also defective. He depended too much on defensive strategy and neglected cavalry which had rendered signal service in the campaign of his father.

Tipu was a great ruler who took great pains to improve the prosperity of his dominion. The Mysore peasant was much more prosperous than the peasant in British occupied Madras. He promoted trade and commerce by maintaining links with France, Turkey, Iran, Peru and China. He made some attempts to introduce modern industries in India. He was not a religious fanatic as he made donations for the reconstruction of the Shringeri temple after the latter was looted by the Marathas in 1791.

KERALA

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Kerala was divided into a number of feudal chiefs and Rajas. Among the important states were those of Calicut under the Zamorin, Cochin, Chirakkal and Travancore. Under King Martanda Varma, Travancore leapt into prominence. Combining rare foresight and indomitable courage, the king subdued the feudatories, conquered Quilon and Elayadam and defeated the Dutch. He organized and disciplined his army on the western model and extended the boundaries of Travancore from Kanyakumari to Cochin. He undertook many irrigation works and encouraged trade and commerce.

The 18th century witnessed a remarkable revival of language and literature. Apart from Malayalam literature, Sanskrit was liberally patronised and Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, became a famous centre of culture. Rama Varma, successor of Martanda Varma, was himself a great scholar and being conversant with English language, took keen interest in European affairs.

AREAS AROUND DELHI THE RAJPUT STATES

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Mughal Empire, the principal Rajput states virtually freed themselves from central control. The late Mughal Emperors like Farrukhsiyar and Muhammad Shah had to appoint the rulers of Amber and Marwar as governors of Agra, Gujarat and Malwa.

The Rajput States were often divided among themselves and engaged in petty quarrels and civil wars. Thus Ajit Singh of Marwar was killed by his own son.

The most outstanding Rajput ruler of the eighteenth century was Raja Jai Singh of Amber (1699-1743). He was a great reformer and made Jaipur a veritable museum of intellectual activities. He founded the city of Jaipur on strict architectural principle. Himself a great astronomer, he erected observatories with sophisticated instruments at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Varanasi and Mathura. He drew up a set of tables to enable people to make astronomical observations. He prompted the translation of Euclid's 'Elements of Geometry' into Sanskrit as also several works on trigonometry and Napier's work on logarithmic.

However, in the last quarter of eighteenth century, the Rajput States were subjugated by the Marathas. The British looked with regret, the weakness of the Rajput Chiefs. Pillet, a French military adventurer who had joined the service of the Jaipur Raja in 1789 branded the Rajputs as 'inconstant and faithless.' He added: "Their views are extremely petty, without ambition, without heart, without soul – so indolent that they merely vegetate, as does the Oyster within its shells."

THE JATS

The Jats, a class of peasantry, lived in the region around Delhi, Agra and Mathura. In 1669 the Jat peasantry of Mathura rebelled under Gokula and killed the imperial *faujdar* or commandant. The rebellion was crushed in the following year, but the trouble was renewed in 1681 and 1688. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, they hovered round Delhi, plundered the people and took active part in imperial politics. The Jat state of Bharatpur was set up by Churaman and Badan Singh. The Jat power reached its pinnacle and glory under Suraj Mal, who ruled from 1756 to 1763. A soldier statesman as he was, Suraj Mal extended his authority over a wide area extending

from the Ganga in the east to Chambal in the south, Agra in the west to Delhi in the north.

Suraj Mal died in 1763. His brave son, Jawahir Singh continued his father's policy and laid siege to Delhi in 1765. The Marathas found it easy to reduce the Jats, weakened as they were by the death of Jawahir Singh in July 1768.

BANGASH PATHANS AND ROHILLAS

Muhammad Khan Bangash, an Afghan adventurer, established his supremacy in and around Farrukhabad, lying between Aligarh and Kanpur, during the reigns of Farrukhsiyar and Muhammad Shah. Similarly after Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739, Ali Muhammad Khan carved out a separate principality, known as Rohilkhand at the foothills of the Himalayas. Before the third battle of Panipat (1761) Ahmed Shah Abdali gained support for his anti-Maratha campaign from the Rohilla chief, Najib-ul-daula.

THE SIKHS

The Sikh community came into prominence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These were periods of religious revival in the history of India. The founder of the Sikhs as a religious community was Guru Nanak (1469-1539). The next four Gurus – Angad, Amardas, Ramdas and Arjan Mal - were religious preachers and did not interfere in politics. The fifth Guru, Arjan Mal (1581-1606) compiled the *Adi Granth* or "The First Sacred Book".

Under Hargobind (1606-45), the sixth Guru, the evolution of the Sikhs as a military sect began. He rose against Shah Jahan. The ninth Guru was Tegh Bahadur (1664-75), the youngest son of Hargobind. He lived for some time at Patna where his son, Guru Govind Singh was born in 1666. Tegh Bahadur protested against certain measures of Aurangzeb. He was brought to Delhi and executed in 1675 by Aurangzeb's order. According to the Sikh tradition, he became a martyr for the cause of religion. His execution inspired the Sikhs with feelings of revenge against the Mughal Empire.

After the execution of Tegh Bahadur, his son Guru Govind became his successor. He was one of the most remarkable personalities in Indian History. He brought about the transformation of the Sikh community. In his autobiography *Bachitra Natak* he declared his purpose of 'spreading the faith, saving the saints and extirpating all tyrants.' He converted his disciples into a community of warriors called *Khalsa*. He introduced a new custom of baptism (*babul*) by water stirred with a dagger. He asked all Sikhs to wear long hair, dagger, comb, bangle and breeches and introduced a common surname, i.e., *Singh*. He had no faith in the caste system. He was the last Guru as he abolished the personal Guruship. He restored unity in the Sikh community. He

compiled a supplementary *Granth* titled *Dasam Padshah Ka Granth*. The Sikhs under the leadership of Guru Govind Singh became 'a compact brotherhood in faith as also a brotherhood in arms'.

Guru Govind Singh fought with the neighbouring hill princes and with the Mughals. It is said that he assisted Bahadur Shah in the war of succession following Aurangzeb's death. He went to the Deccan along with Bahadur Shah. He was murdered by a Pathan in 1708 at Nander on the banks of the Godavari.

After the assassination of Guru Govind Singh, the Sikhs found a leader in Banda (1708-16). With Banda began the Sikh war of Independence against Mughal authority.

But during the reign of Farrukhsiyar, Banda was captured after a desperate fight (December 1715). He was sent to Delhi where he was tortured to death in June 1716.

After the death of Banda, the Mughals pursued a policy of persecution against the Sikhs. But the military spirit of the Sikhs could not be crushed by repression. The Sikhs found a leader in Kapur Singh. The invasion of Nadir Shah in 1739 helped recovery of the Sikhs. But in 1752 Punjab became a part of Ahmed Shah Abdali's empire. The Sikhs began their struggle against Abdali. It has been truly said, Ahmad Shah Abdali's "career in India is very intimately a part of the Sikh struggle for independence." In 1764 the Sikhs assembled at Amritsar and proclaimed their sovereignty by striking coins. After the final retreat of Abdali from the Punjab in 1767, the Sikhs reoccupied Lahore.

During the years of struggle against the Mughals and Afghans, the Sikhs evolved a peculiar constitution of their own. They formed bands called *misls* (from the Persian *misl* meaning 'like' or equal) under a *misaldar*. The *misls* grew large in number and divided most of the Punjab between them. They undertook to defend the people on payment of protection tax called *rakhi*. Twelve of these military fraternities came into existence with a total fighting force of about 70,000 horses; of the twelve *misls*, the Bhangis were the most powerful. They held Lahore, Amritsar and most of Western Punjab. The different confederacies often fought with one another, their only outward link was the biennial meeting of the Sardars or *Sarbat Khalsa* held at Amritsar. It was left to Ranjit Singh, the head of the *Sukerchakia misl*, to ensure unity among the factious elements to establish the Sikh monarchy.

RANJIT SINGH

At the end of the eighteenth century, Ranjit Singh rose into prominence. He joined the Afghan Zaman Shah in

1798 and seized Lahore in 1799. The Afghan King conferred on him the title of Raja with possession of Lahore. In 1802 he captured Amritsar. He soon threw off the Afghan yoke and gradually brought under his authority all the Sikh *misls* west of Sutlej. When the British forbade Ranjit Singh in 1809 to cross the Sutlej and took the Sikh states east of the river under their protection, he kept quiet and had to conclude a treaty of perpetual friendship with the English at Amritsar on April 25, 1809.

Checked in the east, Ranjit Singh sought expansion in other directions. He acquired Kangra and occupied Attock, the key to the frontier. He captured Multan in 1818 and in the following year Kashmir. In 1833 Ladakh was taken by Ranjit Singh and in 1834 Peshawar.

Ranjit Singh was in every way as remarkable a man as his two famous contemporaries, Napoleon Bonaparte of France and Mohammad Ali of Egypt. He defended the Northwestern frontiers of Hindustan against the Afghans, brought the Kashmiris and the Pathans under his subjection and extended his spheres of influence from the borders of China and Afghanistan in the north to Sind in the south. He set up a strong and efficient civil administration and converted the Sikh army into an engine of terrible efficiency. 'He lived the life of a soldier and like a soldier drank hard.' After his death in 1839, the Sikh state was torn by internal dissension. The English lost no opportunity to move in and conquered it.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MARATHA POWER

The eighteenth century is rightly regarded as the age of the Maratha supremacy. After Aurangzeb's death various forces were at work which transformed Shivaji's kingdom into a confederacy headed by a hereditary minister, the Peshwa. Shivaji's grandson, Shahu who had been captured by the Mughals, was released in 1707. As expected by the Mughals, Shahu's release divided the Marathas into two rival camps. Tarabai, who had been the *de facto* ruler since Rajaram's death refused to recognise Shahu's right to succession. The consequence was a long civil war in which Shahu became successful mainly with the help of a Chitpavan Brahmin from Konkan, Balaji Vishwanath. While Shahu, representing the elder branch of Shivaji's family, reigned at Satara, Rajaram's descendants, representing the younger branch, ruled at Kolhapur.

BALAJI VISHWANATH (1713-20)

In recognition of the services rendered by Balaji Vishwanath, Shahu appointed him as the Peshwa or Prime Minister in November 1713. By reason of his personal qualities, Balaji Vishwanath made the office

of the Peshwa as the supreme while Raja Shahu became a mere figurehead.

The first Peshwa's most important achievement was the conclusion of a treaty (Treaty of Lonavala) in 1714 with Kanhoji Angria, the most powerful naval chief on the west coast. In 1718 Balaji secured from Saiyid Husain Ali the right to collect *Chauth* (one fourth of land revenue) and *Sardeshmukhi* (one tenth of land revenue) in the six Mughal *Subahs* of the Deccan (Aurangabad, Berar, Khandesh, Bidar, Golconda and Bijapur which included the whole of Karnatak). Shahu's authority was not only recognised over Shivaji's *Swarajya* but also over newly conquered territories in Khandesh, Berar, Gondwana and Karnatak. In return, Shahu recognised the suzerainty of the Mughal Emperor. He also agreed to pay to the Emperor an annual tribute of 10 lakhs and to maintain a contingent of 15,000 horses for imperial service. In 1720 Emperor Muhammad Shah confirmed the arrangement made by Saiyid Hussain Ali. To the Maratha chieftains Balaji gave away distinct areas for collection of *Chauth* and *Sardeshmukhi*. Thus was laid the foundation of the Maratha Confederacy. This was in essence the revival of the *jagir* system which Balaji found as best suited to bring peace from anarchy and disorder.

Balaji Vishwanath died in April 1720. He has been truly called 'the second founder of the Maratha State.' He preserved the unity of the State and secured from the Mughal Emperor a political instrument which constituted 'the Magna Carta of the Maratha dominion.'

PESHWAR BAJIRAO I (1720-40)

Balaji Vishwanath was succeeded by his eldest son, Bajirao I as the Peshwa in April 1720. He was not only an able soldier but also a wise statesman. He formulated a new policy of Maratha imperialism which was to spread beyond the Narmada. He summed up his policy in the following words: 'Let us strike at the trunk of the withering tree (Mughal Empire) and the branches will fall off themselves. Thus should the Maratha flag fly from the Krishna to the Indus.'

BAJIRAO I AND NIZAM-UL-MULK

While advocating a forward policy in the North, Bajirao was fully aware of Maratha interests in the South. The Nizam posed a serious challenge to the very existence of the Marathas in the South. In 1727 Nizam-ul-Mulk in alliance with Sambhaji of Kolhapur invaded Maharashtra. But in February 1728 Bajirao defeated Nizam-ul-Mulk at Palkhad (about 20 miles west of Daulatabad) and forced him to surrender. The Nizam recognised the rights of the Marathas to collect *Chauth* and *Sardeshmukhi* from the six *Subahs* of the Deccan and surrendered several forts.

Two years later the Nizam entered into intrigues with the Peshwa's rival, Senapati Triambakrao Dabhade.

Bajirao defeated and killed Dabhade in a battle near Dabhoi in April 1731. The Nizam reached an agreement with the Peshwa in December 1732, by which the former was to be left at liberty to pursue his ambitions in the South, while the Peshwa obtained a free hand in the North.

Ignoring the compromise of 1732, the Nizam came to the rescue of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah to save the empire from the Maratha invasions. But the Nizam was completely defeated at Bhopal in 1737 and was compelled to sign a humiliating treaty (January 1738). He granted the Peshwa the province of Malwa along with the sovereignty of the territory between the Narmada and Jamuna besides 50 lakhs for expenses from the imperial treasury. The victory at Bhopal established the supremacy of the Maratha arms in Hindustan.

BAJIRAO I AND NORTH INDIA

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Mughal Empire, Bajirao I adopted the policy of northward expansion bringing Malwa, Bundelkhand and Gujarat under Maratha control. Bajirao led several expeditions into the Ganges-Jumna Doab and the Delhi region. In March 1737 he arrived in the vicinity of Delhi. But the Peshwa disappeared as quickly as he had appeared before the capital. Impressed by his bold adventure, the Rajput chiefs sought the friendship of the Marathas.

SOUTH INDIA

Bajirao also expanded Maratha power in the Mysore region and led two expeditions to Karnatak during 1725-27. On the west coast, the Peshwa's brother, Chimnaji Appa captured Bassein from the hands of the Portuguese in 1739.

ESTIMATE

Bajirao met a premature death in 1740 at the age of fortytwo. His Peshwaship was engaged in continuous fighting both against domestic and foreign enemies. He put down the rebellious chiefs like Senapati Dabhade and defeated the Nizam at Palkhed in 1728. He brought the Mughal provinces of Gujarat, Malwa and Bundelkhand under Maratha control and demonstrated his strength by making a sudden appearance in Delhi in 1737. The victory at Bhopal (1738) established Maratha superiority at the Mughal Court. It was his forward policy which brought the provinces from Punjab to Bengal under Maratha influence by 1760. He transformed Shahu's small kingdom into a big and powerful political unit. In this respect he was the second founder of the Maratha State. But he made no attempt to check the dangerous feudal tendency which in the end proved ruinous to the Maratha Kingdom.

PESHWA BALAJI BAJIRAO (1740-61)

Bajirao I left three sons, the eldest of whom, commonly known as Nana Sahib and Balaji Bajirao, succeeded him as the Peshwa. The Peshwaship of Bajirao saw the zenith of the expansion of Maratha power in India. It also witnessed the appearance of new powers in the political scene, namely the Afghans, the Sikhs, the French and the English.

Shahu died in 1749 and was succeeded by Ram Raja. In 1750 Ram Raja executed a document known as the Sangola Agreement. It defined the claims and spheres of different ministers and *Sardars* and transferred the supreme power from the Chhatrapati to the Peshwa. Henceforth the Peshwa became the *de facto* ruler of the Maratha State, the Raja being pushed to the background.

BALAJI BAJIRAO AND SOUTH INDIA

Balaji Bajirao took keen interest in the expansion of Maratha power in south India. His Peshwaship also coincided with the Anglo-French struggle in South India. In 1751-52 the Peshwa-Nizam rivalry assumed a new dimension when Nizam Salabat Jang secured the protection of the French General, Bussy. The Peshwa tried in vain to win the support of the British at Madras and Bombay. Despite the lack of British assistance, the Marathas succeeded in securing from Salabat Jang (Treaty of Bhalki, November 1752) the cession of entire western half of Berar, Nasik, Trimbak and all other important forts in that region passed into Maratha hands.

After Bussy's recall to Pondicherry in 1758, Salabat Jang handed over full power to his brother Nizam Ali. In February 1760 the Marathas under the command of Sadashivrao Bhau completely defeated the Nizam's forces at Udgir. Nizam Ali concluded peace by surrendering territory worth 60 lakhs including the historic cities of Ahmadnagar, Daulatabad, Burhanpur and Bijapur.

BALAJI BAJIRAO AND NORTH INDIA

Between 1740 and 1748 Balaji led four expeditions to the North. In 1743 Shahu assigned the *Subahs* of Bengal, Orissa, Oudh and parts of Bihar to Raghuji Bhosle. In 1751

Alivardi made peace with Raghuji promising cession of the province of Orissa and the payment of 12 lakhs per year as the *Chauth* of Bengal and Bihar. Later on Orissa came under Bhosle's control. After some warfare, Jaipur and Jodhpur made peace with the Marathas (February 1755) ceding Ajmer and promising an indemnity of 56 lakhs.

In April 1752 the Marathas entered into an agreement with the Emperor Ahmad Shah through the officers of his *Wazir*, Safdar Jang. The Emperor granted the

Marathas the *Chauth* of the Punjab, Sind and the Doab in addition to the Subadari of Ajmer and Agra. In exchange, the Marathas were to protect the Emperor against external enemies and disloyal subjects.

In 1756 Abdali was invited to invade India by Najib-ud-Daula, the most powerful Rohilla chieftain and Emperor Alamgir II. He reached Delhi, sacked the city and did not even spare the holy places like Mathura and Vrindavan. He left Delhi in early 1757 leaving Imad-ul-Mulk as the *Wazir* and Najib-ud-Daula as his deputy.

After Abdali's departure the Marathas reappeared, drove away Najib-ud-Daula and entered into an alliance with Imad-ul-Mulk (June 1757). Raghunathrao occupied Delhi (December 1757). Then he drove out Timur Shah, Abdali's son, took Lahore and occupied the whole of the Punjab. Leaving Adina Beg Khan in charge of the Punjab, Raghunathrao returned to Pune by the middle of 1758.

Adina Beg died in October 1758. At the head of a strong contingent, Tukoji Holkar carried Maratha arms beyond Attock to Peshawar. A strong Maratha force under Dattaji Sindhia arrived to strengthen Maratha position in the Punjab. Abdali came a few months later and occupied Lahore. On his way to Delhi, Abdali defeated Dattaji Sindhia near Thaneswar (December, 1759) and killed him in the battle at Barari Ghat (10 miles north of Delhi) in January 1760.

Hearing the disasters that had befallen Maratha arms in the north, the Peshwa sent his finest army under Sadashivrao Bhau and Visvasrao Bhau and captured Delhi in August 1760. But owing to lack of provisions, Bhau moved to Kunjpura in October in order to cut off Abdali's communications. Meanwhile Abdali came to Sonapat and cut off Bhau's communications with Delhi and the Deccan. At the end of October 1760, Bhau fell back on Panipat.

Minor skirmishes began from November 1760. Day by day, the Maratha army suffered owing to acute food crisis and lack of communication. As Bhau observed; 'The cup is now full to the brim and cannot hold another drop'. Therefore, on 14 January 1761 a desperate battle was fought at Panipat in which unnumbered Marathas were killed. 'It was not only a defeat, but a catastrophe for the Maratha cause'. Among the slain were Sadashivrao Bhau and Viswasrao, the eldest son of the Peshwa. The Peshwa died of grief within six months.

ITS IMPACT

The battle of Panipat must be regarded an important watershed in the history of India. The immediate loss

to the Marathas was considerable. The Sikhs lost no time in occupying the Punjab. The Rajputs came forward boldly to recover lost ground. The Nizam resumed the offensive again. In the south, Mysore under Haidar Ali developed into an aggressive neighbour. Apart from the territorial losses, the unity of the Maratha Empire was considerably weakened. The Peshwa lost his dominant position in the Maratha confederacy and subordinate members like Sindhia, Holkar, Bhosle and Gaikwad became virtually independent. Though recovery was not long in coming under Peshwa Madhavrao 1, but Maratha imperialism in the north was largely the creation of Sindhia and Holkar.

Indirectly the third battle of Panipat 'decided the fate of India'. The defeat of the Marathas gave the rising British power the opportunity it needed to consolidate its authority in India. "If Plassey had sown the seeds of British supremacy in India, Panipat afforded time for their maturing and striking roots."

The third battle of Panipat dealt a cruel blow to Maratha supremacy in the north. Madhavrao who became Peshwa at the age of 17 in 1761 gradually surmounted all difficulties. Under his leadership the Marathas successively defeated Haidar Ali and recovered the Maratha prestige in Hindustan by crossing the Chambal in 1769. The Marathas also restored the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II, who had been living in exile at Allahabad, on the throne of Delhi (January 6, 1772).

The premature death of Peshwa Madhavrao in November 1772 was a misfortune for the Maratha power. It immediately resulted in internal dispute and paved the way for foreign intervention. Madhavrao was succeeded by his weak and incompetent brother, Narayanrao. But within nine months of his accession, Narayanrao was murdered at the instigation of his uncle, Raghunathrao (August 1773). After years of impatient waiting, Raghunathrao now became the Peshwa. But the birth of Narayanrao's posthumous son, Savai Madhavrao, destroyed the last hope of Raghunathrao remaining as Peshwa. Out of frustration, Raghunathrao went over to the British which resulted in the First Anglo-Maratha War.

The Treaty of Salbai (May 1782) put an end to the Maratha war. The treaty left Mahadji Sindhia, through whom it was negotiated, in a much stronger position. Appointed as viceregent (*Wakil-i-Mutlaq*) of the Mughal Emperor in 1784, he successively defeated the Sikhs, Rohillas, Rajputs and other enemies of the Mughals. After dominating the north Indian scene like a colossus, Mahadji Sindhia died in 1794. The sudden death of the young Peshwa Madhavrao (October 1795) plunged the Maratha Empire into a state of utter confusion. After endless intrigue, Bajirao II, son of Raghunathrao, secured the Peshwaship in December 1796. He fell out with Nana Phadnis and had him arrested. Restored to office in 1798, Nana died in

1800. 'With Nana had departed all the wisdom and moderation of the Maratha Government'.

Internal dissension led the Peshwa Bajirao II to conclude a subsidiary treaty (Treaty of Bassein in December 1802) with the Company. It was a masterstroke of Wellesley's diplomacy as the Peshwa acknowledged British paramountcy. By clever diplomacy the British divided the Maratha Chiefs and overpowered them in separate battles during the second Maratha War (1803-5) and the third Maratha War (1816-18). With Bajirao's surrender to the British on June 2, 1818, the Maratha Empire came to an end.

CAUSES OF THE DOWNFALL OF THE MARATHA EMPIRE

The Maratha Empire which the genius and military ability of Shivaji had brought into existence collapsed in 1818. The causes of Maratha downfall lay in inherent defect in the character of the Maratha State. As Sir Jadunath Sarkar observes: "There was no attempt at well thought out organised communal improvement, spread of education, or unification of the people, either under Shivaji or under the Peshwa. The cohesion of the peoples of the Maratha State was no organic, but artificial, accidental and therefore precarious." Shivaji's death was followed by the revival of feudalism and political confusion. The Maratha *Jagirdars* forgot national interests and the last Peshwa, unable to control Sindhia-Holkar rivalry, placed himself under the protection of the Company.

The Maratha State failed to develop a sound economic policy as well as a good administrative system. Trade and industry did not flourish. A contemporary British Resident, Palmer wrote on April 6, 1795: 'The Maratha State is but ill-qualified for permanent conquest or civil administration.'

The military organisation of the Marathas was ill-organised and ill-equipped. Except Sindhia and Holkar, who employed Europeans to train their battalions, the Marathas largely relied on the old and orthodox method of warfare. The vast military engine of the Marathas had been strained by the various wars with Haidar, Tipu, the Nizam and the British.

The Maratha artillery was defective and the supply of ammunition was of poor quality. The Marathas did not pay sufficient attention to their infantry. The Marathas also neglected their cavalry. Two competent military critics like Sir Thomas Munro and Sir John Fortescue agree that the defeat of Assaye was due to the degeneration of the Maratha cavalry. In point of strength there could be no comparison between the indisciplined rabble that compose a Maratha army and the well-disciplined battalion of the British.

The renowned scholar Khare has written an elaborate introduction to N. C. Kelkar's work, *The*

Marathas and the English which appeared in 1918 for commemorating the centenary of the extinction of the Maratha rule. According to Khare, the causes of the downfall of the Marathas were as follows :

1. The Marathas possessed no national sentiment.
2. Internal jealousy and selfish treachery triumphed over public interest.
3. While individually they were clever, and brave, they totally lacked the corporate spirit so essential for national independence.
4. That the scientific spirit of enquiry and improvement was entirely absent among them.
5. That they neglected to develop artillery as the main support of defence.
6. That the pernicious system of allotting lands in lieu of pay for military service proved ruinous.
7. That after the death of Peshwa Madhavrao I no capable leader appeared in Maharashtra.
8. That the Marathas as a race sadly lack the virtue of discipline and methodical arrangement, and lastly,
9. That the British were past masters in the art of diplomacy in which the Marathas could stand no comparison with them.

The destiny of a nation is to a large extent influenced by dominant personalities. The Maratha Empire passed through a series of crises from 1794 onwards. The death of Mahadji Sindhia and of the excellent soldier, Haripant Phadke, in 1794, weakened the Empire on the diplomatic and military fronts. The death of the Peshwa, Savai Madhavrao in 1795, encouraged the forces of disintegration. After the death of Nana Phadnis in 1800, no capable leader was left to stem the tide of decay. The Maratha chiefs, particularly those of later times, were no match when confronted with superior British diplomacy and British arms.