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## UNIT 10 ANGLO-MARATHA AND MYSORE WARS

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### 10.0 OBJECTIVES

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This Unit introduces you to the expansion of the British rule in Mysore and the Maratha state. After reading this Unit you will be able to:

- understand the nature of struggle for power in Mysore and Maratha state,
- learn about the process of subjugation of Mysore and the Maratha state to the British imperial system, and
- identify the factors responsible for the failure of the Indian states against the British.

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### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Block I you have read about the emergence of Mysore and the Maratha state system following the disintegration of the Mughal empire in the course of the eighteenth century. The same period also witnessed the gradual penetration of the European colonial powers into the Indian sub-continent. This resulted in growing struggle between two forces, the Indian regional states and the colonial power, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century India for possession of political supremacy. In this Unit we will try to make a critical appraisal of the struggle between the British and Mysore and the Maratha state.

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### 10.2 STRUGGLE FOR SUPREMACY : INDIAN STATES AND THE BRITISH

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In eighteenth century India we find the development of an intricate power struggle between various groups of powers. It was not only a struggle between the colonial power and the Indian states but also there was struggle among the Indian powers themselves to establish political supremacy. Here we focus on the issues that involved these different powers into a fierce struggle.

The most common cause for conflict among the Indian powers was the urge for territorial expansion. The traditional approach to explain this expansionist policy in terms of personal desire of the rulers or their insatiable thirst for territory or their religious zeal seems an oversimplification of the whole historical context. Territorial acquisition was mainly a response to the need for further resources. When internally a limit had already been reached to extract fresh revenue, the main way of tapping new resources was the acquisition of fresh territories. A prominent example: the Marathas relied mostly on the *Chauth* and the *Sardeshmukhi*, collected from their

spheres of influence. This need for territorial expansion for the enlargement of their resources brought the different neighbouring states into conflict with each other.

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Besides this, in the case of Mysore we find that the peculiar situation of Mysore posed a great threat to the Marathas, the Nawab of Carnatic and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The rise of Mysore was viewed with great alarm by the neighbouring states. Each of these states was in the process of consolidation and expansion of its territorial boundary. In this process the emergence of Mysore naturally caused uneasiness to its neighbours. The Marathas and the Nizam formed an alliance against Mysore and also co-operated with the British to curb the power of Mysore. But the Nizam was equally apprehensive of the Maratha expansion in the South, and therefore co-operated with the British against the Marathas. Each one was trying to establish its supremacy over the other. Thus a major feature of the contemporary political developments was that the Indian states were engaged in fighting with each other to pursue their aggressive expansionist policy. This mutual dissension and enmity among the 'country powers' ultimately helped the British to intervene effectively in their internal polity.

The reasons for British intervention in Mysore and the Maratha states were primarily commercial. Haidar and Tipu's control over the rich trade of the Malabar coast was seen as a threat to the British trade in pepper and cardamom. Mysore was also a threat to the British control over Madras. In case of Western India the sudden growth in Company's cotton trade after 1784 to China from Gujarat through Bombay motivated the British authorities to play a more interventionist role in the region. The British authorities wanted to remove the intervention of the Marathas from the way of their lucrative trade. Moreover, the development in infantry and gunnery in both these states caused great uneasiness for the Company's army. Some other development also accounted for a more interventionist role by the British authorities in these two states. Particularly the French alliance with the Mysore rulers was seen as a threat to the British dominance in this region. The British home government was in need of finance for the growing expenditure for Napoleonic wars in Europe and the attitude of the Company merchants, in favour of direct political intervention to protect their commercial interest, favoured a more aggressive expansionist polity in this region. The argument put forward by the British colonialists in support of their military actions in India, was that "...most contemporary Indian rulers were tyrannical usurpers of previous dynasties and rights, and could therefore be dispensed with at will so that (this ancient, and highly cultivated people) could be restored to the full enjoyment of their religious and civil rights." For example, in case of Mysore it was argued that the basic objective of British policy was to restore the Hindu Wodeyar house which was overthrown by Haidar Ali. The development of this kind of argument was born out not only of obvious politico-economic factors but also was rooted in the shared perception of a group of western thinkers and administrators who wanted to legitimise their political action.

As was seen above, the expansionist policy of different Indian states and their drive for political supremacy led to conflict and confusion in Indian polity. This provided a good ground for the British intervention in the Indian political arena in order to extend their area of control and to maximise their profit. In the following section we will briefly discuss the wars between the British, Mysore and the Maratha state to show how the British outwitted the 'country powers' by playing one against the other.

### 10.3 MYSORE WARS

Haidar Ali and Tipu Sultan fought four wars against the British before the final surrender of Mysore to the British authority. The basic cause of these wars remained the same, viz. the object of the British to undermine the independent authority of the Mysore rulers. The Marathas, the Nawab of Carnatic and the Nizam of Hyderabad from time to time aligned with the British to subdue the Mysore ruler. The Nizam and the Marathas entered into an alliance with the British against Haidar Ali and the Marathas attacked Mysore in 1766. But Haidar Ali skilfully

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Thus he launched an attack against the British and reached upto the gates of Madras. He forced the Madras council to sign peace on his terms in 1769. This was a defensive alliance and both the powers agreed to help the other in case of an attack by a third party.

The British had no intention to stick to this alliance. When the Marathas invaded Haidar's territories in 1771, the British did not come to his help. So now it was the question of time and pretext for a second round of war between the British and the Mysore state. The British capture of Mahe, a French settlement within Haidar's jurisdiction provided the immediate pretext for the second Mysore war. The British neutralised Haidar by winning over the Marathas and the Nizam and defeated Haidar Ali at Porto Novo in 1781. The Mysore troops continued occasional skirmishes but Haidar died of cancer in 1782 during the course of the second Anglo-Mysore war.

Tipu, son and successor of Haidar, continued the war against the British. However, lack of resources, uncertainty of the Maratha attitude, the presence of French fleet on the Coromandel coast and some other considerations changed the attitude of the Madras government and they desired peace. Tipu was also not in favour of continuation of war with the British at this stage because immediately after accession he needed time first to strengthen his own administration. Thus, the war with the British ended with the Treaty of Mangalore in 1784.



4. Tipu's last effort to save Seringapatam

This was not a permanent solution to the question of political supremacy in the Deccan. It was a temporary respite before a final showdown. Renewal of war was inevitable. Lord Cornwallis who became the Governor-General of India in 1786, through diplomatic manoeuvres brought the Marathas and the Nizam to the British side. Tipu's attack on Travancore, an ally of the British, made the war with the British again inevitable. The war started in 1790 and it continued for two years. Tipu suffered serious set back in this third Mysore war and showed initiative for peace. The treaty of Seringapatam was signed in 1792 and Tipu had to surrender half of his territory to the British and their allies. Tipu was not ready to surrender to the British. But the third Mysore war depleted his strength and undermined his authority in the Deccan.



The arrival of Lord Wellesley as Governor-General of India in 1798 gave fresh vigour to the British expansionist policy. Wellesley desired to make Mysore an ally of his grand 'subsidiary alliance' system. But Tipu had no intention of surrendering his independent authority to the British imperial system. The Governor-General sent the British forces against Mysore ruler who was defeated in a brief but fierce war in 1799. Tipu died in the course of war in the same year.

Seringapatam was plundered and half of Tipu's dominions were divided between the British and their ally, the Nizam. The rule of Tipu's dynasty came to an end and the Wodeyars from whom Haidar Ali had seized power were restored to the Mysore kingdom. Mysore virtually became a dependency of the English.



5. The assault and taking of Seringapatam

**Check Your Progress 1**

1) Explain in 100 words the reasons for conflict between the Indian state and the British.

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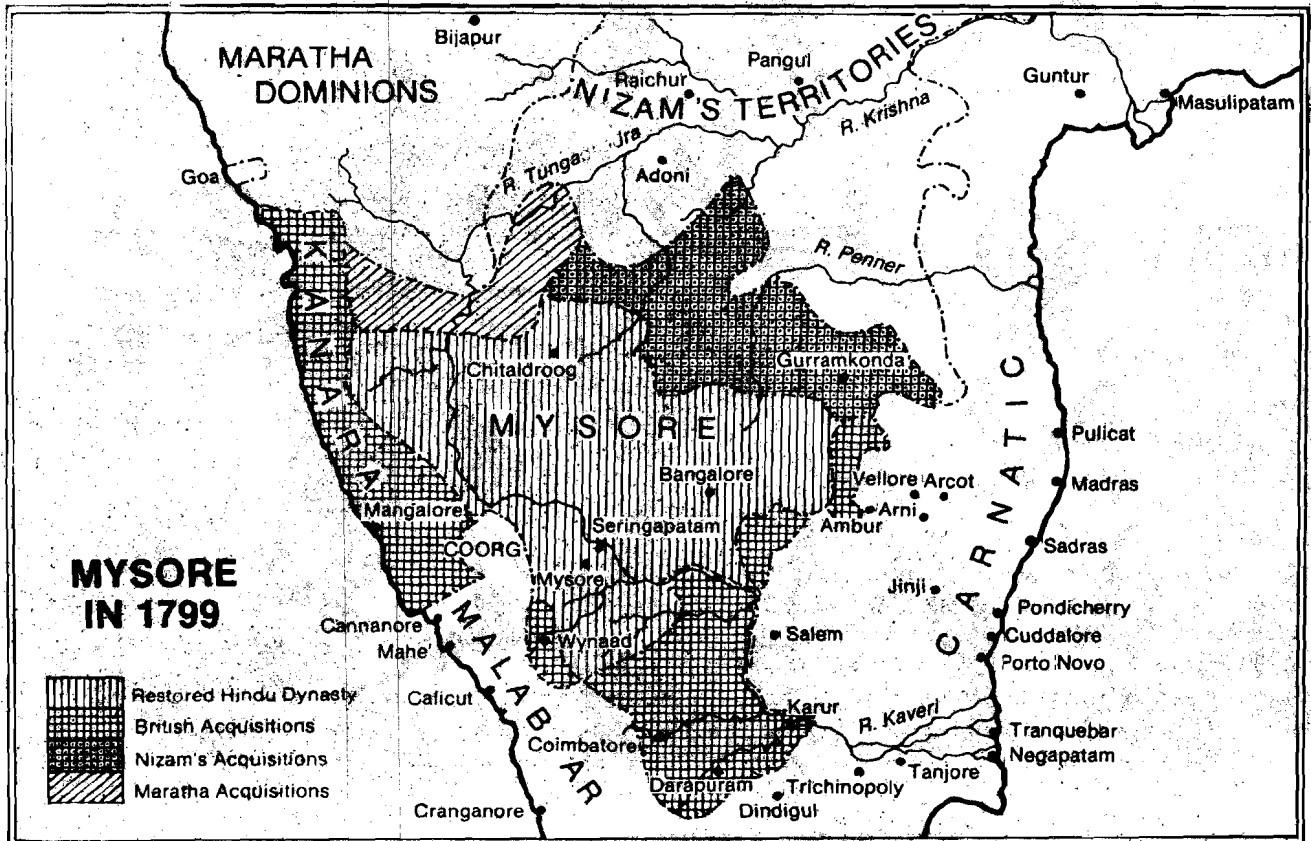
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- 2) Read the following sentences and mark the correct one.
- i) There was rivalry among various Indian states because:
    - a) the rulers had different religious beliefs.
    - b) the rulers did not belong to the same caste.
    - c) the rulers pursued the policy of territorial expansion.
  - ii) 'Subsidiary Alliance' system was introduced in India by:
    - a) Lord Cornwallis.
    - b) Lord Wellesley.
    - c) Lord Hastings.
  - iii) After the death of Tipu Sultan in 1799, the British:
    - a) Restored Mysore to Tipu's successors.
    - b) Annexed Mysore to the British territory.
    - c) A small Mysore kingdom was formed out of Tipu's territory and was given to the Wodeyars.



6. Map-1 Mysore in 1799

## 10.4 MARATHA WARS

In case of the Marathas the first British intervention was at the time of dispute over succession to the Peshwaship after the death of Narayan Rao. Raghunath Rao or Raghoba wanted to get the Peshwaship which a strong party at Poona led by Nana Fadnavis opposed. Having failed in his bid to capture power, Raghunath Rao appealed to the British for help. This was the immediate background of the First Maratha war (1775-82). Mahadaji Sindia who had an eye on the leadership of the Maratha confederacy, did not want confrontation with the British which the British also did not want at this stage. As a result the Treaty of Salbai was signed in 1782 which Nana Fadnavis ratified after a year. The British possession of Salsette was confirmed and Madhav Rao Narayan was recognised as the rightful Peshwa.

The peace thus established with the British continued for the coming 20 years. This gave the British needed time to concentrate on other fronts specially against Mysore. The Maratha state was in a very bad shape during these years. The Maratha chiefs



were trying to curb their independent principalities, Gaikwad at Baroda, Bhonsle at Nagpur, Holkar at Indore and Sindia at Gwalior. There was also dissension regarding the succession to the Peshwaship and Nana Fadnavis was in complete control of the Maratha affairs at the centre. During this time Lord Wellesley in order to establish complete control of the British over the Marathas invited them to enter into the 'Subsidiary Alliance' system. The Marathas rejected this British gesture of 'friendship', actually a ploy for their subjugation.

The death of Nana Fadnavis at this juncture gave the British an added advantage. Jaswant Rao Holkar, a powerful Maratha chief, defeated the combined armies of Sindia and the Peshwa at Poona in 1800 and captured the city. The Peshwa approached Wellesley for help. This provided Wellesley an ideal opportunity to intervene in the Maratha affairs. Thus the Second Maratha War started (1803-05). The Peshwa, Baji Rao II, accepted the subsidiary alliance and signed the Treaty of Bassein in 1802. The Peshwa lost his independent authority in handling relations with other powers without the British consent and had to pay a large annual subsidy. An attempt was made by Sindia and Bhonsle to save Maratha independence. But they could not stand before the well prepared and organised British force. The British army defeated the forces of Bhonsle and Sindia and at the end both of them concluded separate treaties with the English. Yashwant Rao Holkar who so far remained aloof in the British attacks against Sindia and Bhonsle made an attempt in 1804 to form a coalition of Indian rulers to fight against the British. But he was not successful in his venture. The recall of Lord Wellesley from India brought temporary peace in the region.

There was however not much development in the internal affairs of the Maratha confederacy. The strength and resources were greatly exhausted by now. Disorder and weakness prevailed in all the principalities of the Maratha chiefs. However, Peshwa Baji Rao II made a last bid to rally together the Maratha chiefs against the British in course of the third Maratha War (1817-1819). The British were not ready to allow the Peshwa to exert his authority again on the Maratha confederacies. The battles that followed decisively undermined the power and prestige of the Peshwa.

The Maratha confederacy was dissolved and the Peshwaship was abolished. The British took complete control of the Peshwa Baji Rao's dominions and he became a British retainer. Dominions of Bhonsle north of Narmada were also annexed by the British while he was allowed to keep the rest as a subsidiary prince. Holkar likewise ceded some territory to the British and became a subordinate chief. Pratap Singh, a lineal descendant of Shivaji, was made ruler of a small principality, Satara, which was formed out of Peshwa's dominions.

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## 10.5 INDIAN STATE: REASONS FOR FAILURE

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There were differences in nature, organisation and functioning of Mysore and the Maratha states (see Units 4, 3). However, we find certain common weaknesses in both the states which were in fact characteristic of eighteenth century Indian polity. These weaknesses made the Indian states vulnerable to imperialist aggression.

The major weakness in eighteenth century Indian polity was the constant intrigue and warfare among the various states. The frequent warfares and growing rivalry among the 'country powers' weakened the internal stability of the state and made it an easy prey to imperialist intervention. As we have seen in the case of Mysore and the Marathas that disputes between these two states helped the British to use one against the other to establish British hegemony over both the states.

Second important factor was the lack of co-ordination and growing factionalism in the administration. Administration based on personal favour and loyalty and along the line of caste and other social divisions gave birth to different factions and interest groups in administration who were opposed to each other. This proved fatal in a situation when there was possibility of attack from outside. In the case of the Marathas, since 1780s there was significant change in the Maratha polity. The Maratha chiefs in different regions like Sindia, Bhonsle, Gaikwad, Holkar were

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trying to establish their independent authority with nominal allegiance to the Peshwa. This development of local centres of power certainly weakened the central Maratha authority. Another problem was succession which in most of the cases was challenged by different groups. All these caused political instability which the British fully exploited in their favour.

Failure of resource mobilisation was another important factor for the failure of the Indian states. The Maratha state was primarily dependent on resources from outside like *chauth* and *Sardeshmuki* because internally they were not in position to tap new resources. Though Mysore was comparatively better managed under Haidar and Tipu, the Mysore ruler was not much successful in tapping the resources from the countryside. The lack of resources was a major constraint for the Indian states to fight against the British who were already in control of one of the most productive part of the country, Bengal, and had the backing of their home Government.

There are attempts by many historians to explain the failure of the Indian states in terms of incapacity of individual ruler and the lack of proper military organisation. It has been said that "Mysore was too dependent on Hindu warriors and on Tamil, Brahmin administrators" and in such a situation Tipu's policy of making Mysore an 'Islamic state' ultimately backfired. (C.A. Bayly: *The New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. II.1) This kind of argument appears to be misrepresentation of the situation. As we have already seen that the reasons for the failure of the Indian states were something else, not the religious or caste differences of the rulers and the ruled. Too much emphasis on the incapacity of Indian military organisation is also not acceptable, specially when we find that the Mysore rulers tried to modernise the army on European model. The Marathas also developed European style infantry and artillery wings.

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## 10.6 LET US SUM UP

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We have discussed in this Unit the process of conquest and consolidation of the British rule in Mysore and the Maratha state. It was primarily the commercial interests of the British which brought them in this region. Then the existing rivalry among the local powers and the volatile political situation in the region provided a favourable ground for political intervention by the British. It took many years to get complete control over the region and the British fought a number of wars to subdue the local rulers. Internal weaknesses of the Indian states decided the final outcome of this struggle for power. The defeat of Mysore and the Marathas proved fatal for the Indian powers and laid the foundation of British rule in India.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read the following statements and mark right (✓) or wrong (×)
  - i) The treaty of Salbai confirmed the British possession of Salsette.
  - ii) The Peshwa did not accept the 'Subsidiary Alliance' system.
  - iii) The various Maratha chiefs were trying to establish their independent authority.
  - iv) The Indian states failed mainly because of their internal weaknesses.
- 2) How do you explain the success of the British against the Indian states? Give your answer in 100 words.

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## 10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should focus on the commercial interest of the British, urge for territorial expansion and political supremacy etc. See Sec. 10.2.
- 2) i) c ii) b iii) c

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i)  ii)  iii)  iv)
- 2) Your answer should refer to the lack of co-ordination among the Indian rulers, administrative weakness of the Indian states, lack of resource mobilization, etc. See Sec. 10.5.

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See Sec.