UNIT 1 INDIAN POLITY IN THE MID-18TH CENTURY

Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to introduce you to the main political developments in the mid-18th century. Here we will present only an outline of the political map which the following units will fill in. After reading this Unit you will become familiar with the following themes:

- the decline of Mughal Empire,
- the emergence of Mughal provinces as regional power—Hyderabad, Bengal and Awadh,
- the rise of new states—Marathas, Jats, Sikhs and Afghans,
- the history of Mysore, Rajput states and Kerala as independent principalities, and
- the beginnings of a colonial empire.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Our study begins around 1740 and ends in 1773. The first Carnatic war and Nadir Shah's invasion of India were the early landmarks. The last milestone was the reorganisation of the political system during the tenure of the Warren Hastings.

The decline of the Mughal empire is the first theme. This was a long-drawn out process to which many factors contributed. Nadir Shah's invasion in 1739 and the massacre of Delhi seriously weakened an already feeble Mughal empire. Other factors including economic crisis contributed to the empire's decline. The Mughal empire did not survive but its institutions and traditions continued in the regional states and British provinces. Mughal administrative practices, especially in respect of land revenue, were adopted.

The second theme, the emergence of regional powers, was perhaps the most significant. Three groups of states can be distinguished. The successor states, Hyderabad, Awadh and Bengal were erstwhile provinces of the Mughal empire which

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broke away to become independent. The 'new states' were the creation of the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats and Afghans; in this process in some of these states, an important role was played by popular peasant movements against imperial demands. A third category was that of the independent kingdoms of Mysore, the Rajputs and Kerala which have sometimes been wrongly called 'Hindu polities'. Why did all these regional powers fail to keep the British out? Some crucial areas of weakness are indicated in this Unit.

The final theme taken up is the transition of the East India Company from a trading enterprise to a political power. We shall trace this transition and resultant conflicts in South India and Bengal.

1.2   18TH CENTURY: A DARK AGE ?

Till recently the 18th century was described as a Dark Age when chaos and anarchy ruled. The Mughal empire collapsed, regional powers failed to establish empires and stability returned only with the spread of British supremacy in the late 18th Century. It suited the British writers of the Cambridge History of India, and their Indian followers, to paint the 18th Century as black so that British rule would show up as a blessing in comparison. Historian Jadunath Sarkar's words in the *History of Bengal*, Vol. II, deserve to be quoted:

> On 23rd June 1757 the Middle ages of India ended and her modern age
> began ... in the twenty years from Plassey Warren Hastings ... all felt the
> revivifying touch of the impetus from the west.

There are obvious problems with such a view. The Mughal empire's influence was not as widespread or deep as was believed. Significant parts of India, especially in the North East and South, remained outside it, as did many social groups. Hence Mughal decline cannot serve as an adequate theme for discussing changes taking place all over India. Scholars have recently argued that the establishment of regional polities was perhaps the dominant feature of the eighteenth century, rather than the fall and rise of all-India empires. The 18th Century is presented by Satish Chandra, a leading historian of medieval India, as a distinct chronological whole, rather than split into two halves, pre-British and British.

1.3   DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The first half of the eighteenth century witnessed the decline of the Mughal empire. By 1740, when the period of our study begins, Nadir Shah had laid waste to Delhi. It was the Marathas, not the Mughals, who fought Abdali in 1761. By 1783 the Mughal emperor was a pensioner of the British.

1.3.1   Internal Weaknesses: Struggle for Power

Aurangzeb's misguided policies had weakened the stable Mughal polity. But the two main pillars on which the empire rested-the army and the administration-were still upright in 1707. Wars of succession and weak rulers plagued Delhi from 1707 to 1719. Muhammad Shah's rule from 1719 to 1748 was long enough for a revival of imperial fortunes but the complete incompetence of the emperor ruled out this possibility.

It was in his reign that Nizam-ul-Mulk resigned as **wazir** and set up the independent state of Hyderabad in 1724. Bengal, Awadh and Punjab followed the same pattern and the empire was split up into successor states. Petty chiefs interpreted this as a signal for rebellion and the Marathas began to make their bid to inherit the imperial mantle.

1.3.2   External Challenge

The Persian monarch, Nadir Shah attacked India in 1738-39. Lahore was soon

conquered and the Mughal army was defeated at Karnal on 13th February 1739. To complete the ignominy, the Mughal emperor Mohammed Shah was captured and Delhi laid waste. The well known poets Mir and Sauda lamented the devastation of Delhi. However, the impact of Nadir Shah's invasion on Delhi was not as big a setback as commonly believed. Abdali's invasions left Delhi worse off but by 1772 the city had revived. 70 crores of rupees were gathered from the official treasury and the safes of the rich nobles. The Peacock Throne and the Kohinoor diamond were the two most priced items of his loot. Nadir Shah gained strategically crucial Mughal territory to the west of the river Indus including Kabul. India was once more vulnerable to attacks from the North West.

Ahmad Shah Abdali gained prominence as Nadir Shah's commander and established his rule over Afghanistan after the death of Nadir Shah. He invaded North India many times between 1748 and 1767. The most well known was his victory over the Marathas in 1761 which is known as the third Battle of Panipat.

1.3.3 Decline: Some Interpretations

Our understanding regarding the decline of the Mughal power has changed over the decades. The traditional view, presented by Irving, Sarkar etc., highlighted the personal failings of the emperors and the nobles, their immorality and indulgence in luxury. Mughal rule was portrayed by Sarkar and others as Muslim rule and Maratha, Sikh and Bundela uprisings were understood as a Hindu reaction to Islamic onslaught.

As opposed to this view point, the crisis in the Mughal economic system has been rightly stressed by Satish Chandra and Irfan Habib. Satish Chandra has pointed to the crisis in the **jagirdari** system as the basic reason for the downfall, caused by a shortage of jagirs and over abundance of jagirdars. Irfan Habib showed the agrarian system becoming more exploitative as pressure on limited resources grew. This sparked off peasant revolts which ruined imperial stability.

The New Cambridge History of India takes a completely opposite stand from Habib. Mughal decline is seen as the result of the success of the Mughal system, rather than its failure. It is argued, for example, that the zamindars whose rebellions against the Mughals spelled the end of the latter's empire, were rich not poor farmers, backed by wealthy merchants. However, this view is yet to be established with further evidence. The generally accepted view remains one of economic crisis.

1.3.4 Continuity of Mughal Traditions

In sharp contrast to the rapid territorial disintegration of the Mughal empire was the stubborn survival of the Mughal tradition of government. By 1761 the Mughal empire was an empire only in name, it could better be described as the state of Delhi. But the prestige of the emperor, the king of kings, was so considerable, that whether it was acquiring territory, a throne or an empire, the sanction of the emperor was sought. Even rebel chiefs of the Marathas and Sikhs sometimes recognised the emperor as the fount of authority. The Sikhs made offerings to the Delhi court in 1783 (despite their *gurus* having been killed by the Mughals) and the Maratha leader, Shahu, visited Aurangzeb's tomb in 1714.

The British and the Maratha fought over possession of the person of the emperor, hoping to gain legitimacy for their claims to inherit the imperial mantle. Shah Alam II was made a pensioner of the company after the battle of Buxar but he preferred the protection of the Marathas at Delhi. British occupation of Delhi in 1803 brought him once again under British protection.

Mughal administrative practice was adopted by the regional powers. It was natural for the successor states of the Mughal empire to continue with old Mughal practice. Even the states, such as the Maratha, which began as popular reactions against imperial rule, copied Mughal methods of administration. Many officers schooled in Mughal practice found employment in numerous local kingdoms.

Continuity of Institutions Vs. Change in Structure

However, we should not deduce from the continuity of institutions that the Mughal political system survived. The new polities were regional, none could achieve an all-

India scale. Some of the old institutions were reintegrated into new political systems by the regional chiefs and later by the British. The old Mughal institutions served very different functions under colonialism. Land revenue practices might be the same as earlier, but the wealth gathered was drained from India under colonialism. This distinction between form and function is blurred by imperialist historians with the intention of emphasising continuity of institutions to show that the British were no different from their predecessors.

Check Your Progess 1

1) What were the financial and territorial gains made by Nadir Shah? Write in five lines.

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2) Read the following sentences and mark right ($\sqrt{}$) or wrong ($\times$).
    i) Struggle for power between nobles at the centre was a major internal weakness for the Mughal.
    ii) The personal failings of the Mughal emperor were largely responsible for the decline of the Mughal empire.
    iii) The 'New Cambridge History of India' completely inverts the argument of economic crisis.
    iv) Continuity of institutions from Mughal to British systems proves that the British were no different from native rulers.

3) Did the Mughal traditions end with the decline of the Mughal empire? Explain in 50 words.

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1.4   THE EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL POLITIES

Along with the decline of the Mughal empire, the second major theme of the 18th Century was the emergence of regional polities. Broadly there were three kinds of states which came into prominence:

- the states which broke away from the Mughal empire,
- the new states set up by the rebels against the Mughal, and
- the independent states.

Let us look at each one of these separately.

1.4.1   Successor States

Hyderabad, Bengal and Awadh were the three cases where provincial governors under the Mughals set up independent states. The breakaway from Delhi occurred in stages — the revolt of individuals followed by that of the social groups, communities and finally regions. Zamindari revolts in the provinces against imperial demands triggered off the breakaway. Governors did not get support from the centre and tried to secure support of the local elites.

However, links with the centre were maintained and Mughal tradition continued. Awadh and Hyderabad came to the help of the Mughals when Nadir Shah invaded Delhi. Through their links with factions of nobles, the provincial chiefs were often

...the course of mutual change in polity in this context may more appropriately be characterised as transformation (to use Muzaffar Alam's term) rather than collapse. A new political order was constructed within the Mughal institutional framework.

The collapse of the all India polity did not lead to generalised economic decline. The regional picture was very varied. Punjab's economy was disrupted by foreign invasions but Awadh experienced economic growth. Safdar Jang, Nawab of Awadh, on his accession paid Rs. 3 crores to Nadir Shah. A stable polity developed in Awadh on the basis of economic prosperity while the states set up in Punjab collapsed.

Hyderabad

The death of Nizam-ul-Mulk in 1748 marked the closing of a glorious first chapter in the history of Hyderabad. It had started with the foundation of the state in 1724 by Nizam-ul-Mulk, a prominent noble at the time the Saiyids controlled the court at Delhi. He assisted Mohammed Shah in deposing the Saiyids and in return was given the office of **Subadar** of the Deccan.

He reorganised the administration and streamlined the revenue system. After a brief tenure as **wazir** at Delhi from 1722 to 1724, he returned to the Deccan to set up a state which was independent in practice, though he continued to declare allegiance to the Mughal emperor. The formation of a regional elite gave stability to this independence, as Karen Leonard has shown in her study of Hyderabad's political system. Reform of the revenue system, subduing of Zamindars, and tolerance towards Hindus were among his wise policies.

But his death in 1748 exposed Hyderabad to the machinations of the Marathas and later the foreign companies. The Marathas invaded the state at will and imposed **Chauth** upon the helpless inhabitants. Nizam-ul-Mulk's son, Nasir Jang and grandson, Muzaffar Jang, entered into a bloody war of succession. The French under Dupleix used this opportunity to play off one group against the other and supported Muzzaffar Jang, who gave them handsome monetary and territorial rewards.

Bengal

Independence in practice and allegiance in name to the power at Delhi marked the rule of the Nawabs of Bengal. Murshid Kuli Khan became Governor of Bengal in 1717 under Mughal aegis but his link with Delhi was limited to sending tribute. Shuja-ud-din became Nawab in 1727 and ruled till 1739 when Alivardi Khan assumed charge. In 1756 Siraj-ud-daula became the Nawab of Bengal on the death of his grandfather Alivardi Khan.

The Bengal rulers did not discriminate on religious grounds in making public appointments and Hindus reached high positions in the Civil Service and obtained lucrative zamindaris. The Nawabs were fiercely independent and maintained strict control over the foreign companies trading in their realm. Fortifications were rightly not allowed in the French and English factories at Chandernagar and Calcutta, nor did the Nawab concede to their special privileges. The sovereignty of the ruler was upheld even in the face of the threats of the British East India Company to use force to obtain its end.

However, the Nawabs suffered defeat at the hands of the British because of their weak and meagre army and their underestimation of the danger posed by the company. The British victory at Plassey in 1757 inaugurated a new phase in British relations with India.

Awadh

Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk gradually secured the independence of Awadh after his appointment as Governor in 1722. The main problem in Awadh was posed by the zamindars who not only refused to pay land revenue but behaved like autonomous chiefs with their forts and armies. Saadat Khan subdued them and introduced a new land settlement which provided protection to the peasants from the zamindars. The Jagirdari system was reformed and jagirdaris granted to the local gentry, who were also given positions in the administration and army. A "regional ruling group" emerged, consisting of Shaikhzadas, Afghans and sections of the Hindus.

The second group of regional states were the 'new states' or 'insurgent states' set up by rebels against the Mughals—the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats and Afghans. The first three began as popular movements of peasant insurgency. The leadership was not with the nobility but with 'new men', often from lower orders, e.g., Hyder Ali, Sindhias and Holkars.

Marathas

If the two main themes of the 18th century were decline of Mughal power and foundation of colonial rule, then a third theme was the rise and fall of regional states, the most significant among them being the Marathas. One all-India empire declined, a second one took its place and a third empire failed to come into being. Mughal decline spanned the first part of the century, British ascendency grew rapidly in the second half, and most of the terrain of the middle of the century was occupied by the swaying political fortunes of the Marathas.

The basic contours of the Maratha State system dominated by the Peshwas or chief ministers were evolved during the time of Balaji Vishwanath. He was a loyal official of Shahu, Shivaji's grandson, who was head of the Marathas after his release from custody in 1707. The powers of the office of the Peshwa rapidly increased during his tenure till it became the fountainhead of authority of the entire Maratha Empire.

Balaji Vishwanath died in 1720 and his son Baji Rao in 1740, the period whence our study commences. By then the Marathas were no longer a regional power but had attained the status of an expansionist empire. They had acquired control over far flung areas of the Mughal empire. The main weakness, however, was that these conquests were made at the initiative of the Maratha Chiefs who were unwilling to accept regulation by the Peshwa. These chiefs had accepted the Peshwa's authority because of the military and financial benefit that accrued from this association. Collection of **Chauth** and **Sardeshmukhi** of a certain area was assigned to the chiefs and conquest permitted. These chiefs were only too willing to go over to the other side if the Peshwa exercised control over their activities. This was the situation in Balaji Vishwanath's time.

Perhaps learning from this, Baji Rao himself led military campaigns and acquired the prosperous area of Malwa and Gujarat among others. Unfortunately he got embroiled in conflict with the other great power in the Deccan, Nizam-ul-Mulk. An alliance against the Mughals, and later the British, would have benefited both, but they chose to go in for alliances with even Mughal functioneries against each other.

The Nizam was decisively beaten twice by Baji Rao's forces but the struggle for mastery between the two continued. When the British entered the fray the contest became a triangular one, which proved to be of great advantage to the British, who could play off one against the other.

Balaji Rao, better known as Nana Saheb, was Peshwa from 1740 to 1761. Maratha power achieved its climax during his rule. Expansion was now no longer limited to areas over which the Mughals has an uncertain hold. No part of India was spared the depredations of Maratha conquest. The South proved relatively easier to subdue. Hyderabad surrendered a large chunk of territory after its defeat in 1760 and Mysore and other states paid tribute. In the east, repeated conquests of Bengal gained them Orissa in 1751. In Central India, Malwa, Gujarat and Bundelkhand, which had been conquered by Baji Rao, were better integrated with the rest of the Maratha empire.

Struggle between Mughals, Marathas and Afghans

Mastery over North India proved more difficult to maintain after the initial easy conquest. The Mughals at Delhi came under Maratha influence but the Afghans under Abdali threw back the Marathas.

The Third Battle of Panipat, 1761

The third battle of Panipat commenced on 14th January 1761. But the conflict and its outcome were brewing since 1752 when Maratha forces overran North India and established their influence at the Delhi court. Imad-ul-Mulk was proclaimed the

Wazir of the Kingdom but for all practical purposes the Marathas were the rulers. The Marathas were not content with their acquisitions and looked greedily towards the Punjab, which was ruled by a tributary of Abdali. This was a grave mistake. Abdali had retreated from India after carrying away what he could. He left behind trusted followers in charge of certain areas, but decided to return to challenge the ambitious Maratha power.

The conflict inevitably became a multifaceted one as the major and minor north Indian powers got drawn in. Here the Afghans were at an advantage as the Marathas had acquired many enemies in the process of conquering and administering this core area of the empire. The Mughal nobles, apart from Imad-ul-Mulk, had been defeated by them in the power game. The Jat and Rajput chiefs were completely alienated by their conquests which were followed by imposition of heavy fines. The Sikhs, already frustrated in their attempt to consolidate their power by the foreign invasions, were obviously in no mood to help the Marathas to include Punjab in their empire.

The Rohilkhand chief and the Awadh Nawabs, whose area had been overrun by the Marathas, even went to the extent of joining hands with Abdali. The Maratha armies marched alone to the battlefield of Panipat to confront Abdali.

The Maratha army was no match for the Afghans though it boasted of troops trained along Western lines. 28,000 Marathas died on the battlefield, along with the commanders of the army, the Peshwa's minor son Vishwas Rao and the latter's cousin, Sadashiv Rao Bhau. The Peshwa, Balaji Baji Rao did not survive for long, after hearing the tragic news of the defeat.

Aftermath of the Third Battle of Panipat

The third battle of Panipat proved significant in the struggle for mastery over India. The Marathas' ambition of replacing the Mughals as the imperial power was checked at a strategic point by this defeat. The beneficiaries were the British rather than the Afghans. The British got a tremendous opportunity to expand their influence in Bengal and India. Once they had got these footholds there was no looking back. For a brief while after the debacle of 1761 it seemed as if the fortunes of the Marathas were reviving. Madhav Rao, who became Peshwa in 1761, was successful in subduing once again the old enemies, the Rohilas, the Rajput and Jat Chiefs in the north and Mysore and Hyderabad in the south. But the early demise of the Peshwa in 1772, at the age of 28, finally ended the dream. Factional struggle for power ensued, exposing the Maratha power to defeat at the hands of the British in the first Anglo-Maratha war. (Anglo-Maratha conflict is one of the themes of Unit 10).

Nature of the Maratha State and Movement

The rise of the Marathas was both a regional reaction against Mughal centralisation as well as a manifestation of the upward mobility of certain classes and castes. The petty rural gentry and the hereditary cultivators (mirasdars) formed the social base. Peasant castes wanted to achieve Kshatriya status while officials sought to concentrate power in their hands.

Levy was institutionalised as **chauth** and made a legitimate part of the Maratha state system. Money was raised through **chauth** to supplement the income from the poor, underdeveloped home areas of the Marathas. But reliance on plunder was an inadequacy of the Maratha system and they did not impose direct rule even when the rich areas of Carnatic, Coromandel and the Gangetic Valley came under their control.

The Marathas adopted some parts of the **Mughal** administrative system, but they concentrated attention on techniques of extracting surplus. The absence of a proper administrative hierarchy or a well-defined provincial authority prevented them from consolidating their influence at the rapid pace necessary before the Afghans and British could defeat them.

These administrative and financial weaknesses were compounded by their technological backwardness, especially in the military sphere. The new development of the time, artillery, small arms, especially the flint guns and improved firearms were not adopted.

The strategically located province of Punjab had witnessed the spread of a democratic, new religion, Sikhism, at the end of the 15th century. It was confined to the personal sphere for two centuries, but by the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru, political ambitions and militancy had transformed the adherents of this faith into a well-knit community. Guru Gobind Singh's conflict with Aurangzeb is well known, as is Banda Bahadur's rebellion against Aurangzeb's successors.

The mughals ruthlessly suppressed the revolt as Punjab was strategically crucial. The Sikhs, unlike other rebels, were not willing to compromise with the Mughals. They refused to have any link with the centre and insisted on being fully independent rulers. There were internal weaknesses too. The position of the leaders of the movement, the **Khatris,** declined as trade and urban centres withered under the combined impact of the foreign invasions and the Marathas. The movement had drawn in the lower castes with the prospect of upward mobility, but this invited the opposition of the upper castes and classes.

For a quarter century after the suppression of Banda Bahadur's rebellion in 1715, the Sikhs were quiescent. But adversity for the Mughal empire proved to be a beneficial opportunity for the Sikhs. The invasion of Nadir Shah and Abdali exposed north India and what they could not plunder and take away, was looted by the Sikhs. On the basis of this booty and taking advantage of the breakdown of imperial control of Punjab, the Sikhs rapidly established their control once Abdali and his followers returned home.

There followed a period when 12 **Misls** or confederacies constituted the province. Recent scholarship has debunked the view that the Sikh political system was theocratic and placed it alongside secular polities elsewhere in the country. Punjab's rise to prominence had to wait till the end of the century for Ranjit Singh.

Jats

The **Jats** were an agriculturist Caste inhabiting the Delhi-Agra belt. In the latter half of the 17th century their revolts against Mughal domination shook the stability of the core area of the Mughal empire. As Mughal power declined, Jat power grew and a peasant revolt was transformed into an uprising that proved destructive of all other groups in the region, including the Rajput Zamindars. Despite originating as a peasant rebellion, the Jat state remained feudal, with Zamindars holding both administrative and revenue powers and revenue demands under Suraj Mal were higher than under the Mughals.

Churaman and Badan Singh founded the Jat state at Bharatpur but it was Suraj Mal who consolidated Jat power during his rule from 1756 to 1763. Expansion of the state brought its boundaries to the Ganga in the east, the Chambal in the south, Delhi in the north and Agra in the west. In addition he possessed great administrative ability, especially in the fields of revenue and civil affairs. However, his rule was short lived and his death in 1763 also marked the demise of the Jat state.

Farukhabad and Rohilkhand

The states of Rohilkhand and the kingdom of the Bangash Pathans were a fall-out of the Afghan migration from the 17th century. Large scale immigration of Afghans into India took place in mid-18th century because of political and economic disruption in Afghanistan. Ali Muhammad Khan took advantage of the collapse of authority in north India following Nadir Shah's invasion, to set up a petty kingdom, Rohilkhand. This was the area of the Himalayan foothills located between Kumaon in the north and the Ganga in the south. The Rohilas, as the inhabitants of Rohilkhand were known, suffered heavily at the hands of the other powers in the area, the Jats and the Awadh rulers and later the Marathas and the British. Mohammad Khan Bangash, an Afghan, had set up an independent kingdom to the east of Delhi in the area around Farrukhabad.

The Afghani use of artillery, especially the flint gun, ended the domination of cavalry since the early medieval ages discovered the stirrup.

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Politically the role of the Afghans was negative. Not only did they accentuate the

decline of the Mughals but they helped Abdali to subdue Awadh, which could have checked British expansion.

1.4.3   Independent Kingdoms

There was a third type of state which was neither the result of a breakaway from or rebellion against Delhi. Mysore, the Rajput states and Kerala fall in this category.

Mysore

The mid-18th century witnessed the emergence of Mysore as a significant power in South India. Haidar Ali laid the foundations of Mysore's power, which were consolidated by his able son, Tipu Sultan. Though Haidar Ali was only a junior officer, of common parentage, in the Mysore army, he gradually rose to be a brilliant commander. His most remarkable achievement was his realisation that only a modern army could be the basis of a powerful state. Consequently he inducted French experts to set up an arsenal and train the troops along western lines. Soon after he was able to overthrow the real power behind the Mysore throne, the minister Nunjaraj in 1761.

The boundaries of the Mysore state extended to include the rich coastal areas of Canara and Malabar. An expansionist at heart, Haidar naturally clashed with other powers in the region, the Marathas, Hyderabad and the new entrants in the game, the British. In 1769 he inflicted a heavy defeat on British forces very close to Madras. With his death in 1782, his son Tipu became Sultan and extended his father's policies further. However, Tipu's rule falls outside the scope of this Unit.

Rajputs

The Rajput rulers did not lag behind in consolidating their position by taking advantage of the disintegration of the Mughal empire. None were large enough to contend with the Marathas or the British for the position of paramount power. Their method was to slowly loosen their ties with Delhi and function as independent states in practice. They participated in the struggle for power at the court of Delhi and gained lucrative and influential governorships from the Mughal emperors.

Rajput policy continued to be fractured in the post Mughal period. All the states followed a policy of constant expansion absorbing weak neighbours whenever possible. This took place within the State too, with one faction ousting the other in a continuously played game of one-up-manship at the court of the Mughals. The most well-known **Rajput ruler, Jai Singh of Amber**, ruled Jaipur from 1699 to 1743.

Kerala

The three states of Cochin, Travancore and Calicut together comprised the present state of Kerala. The territories of a large number of chiefs and **rajas** had been incorporated into these states by 1763. But the expansion of Mysore proved destructive for the stability of Kerala. Haidar Ali invaded Kerala in 1766 and annexed Malabar and Calicut.

Travancore, the southern most state and by far the most prominent one, was spared. Travancore had gained in importance after 1729 when its King, Martanda Verma, expanded his dominions with the help of a strong and modern army trained in Western lines and well equipped with modern weapons. The Dutch were ousted from Kerala and the feudal chiefs suppressed. His vision extended beyond expansion to development of his state and provision was made for irrigation and transport and communication. His successor Rama Verma, a man of great creativity and learning, including Western knowledge, was responsible for making Trivandrum, the capital, a centre of scholarship and art.

1.4.4   Weaknesses of Regional Polities

These states were strong enough to destroy Mughal power but none was able to replace it by a stable polity at an all-India level. According to one view, this was because of some inherent weaknesses in these regional polities. Though some of them tried to modernise, notably Mysore, on the whole they were backward in science and technology. These states could not reverse the general economic stagnation which had

plagued the Mughal economy. The Jagirdari crisis intensified as income from agriculture declined and the number of contenders for a share of the surplus multiplied. Trade, internal and foreign, continued without disruption and even prospered but the rest of the economy stagnated.

The above analysis of weaknesses has been questioned by historians recently. Some representative examples will illustrate a different trend. Satish Chandra argues that it is wrong to talk of generalised economic decline and social stagnation. The resilience of the economy was in sharp contrast to the ease with which the polity collapsed. For example, Bengal withstood the ravages of early colonial rule very well. Bengal's economy stabilised after the 1770s and export of cotton piece goods went up to $2\frac{1}{2}$ million in the 1790s from 400,000 in the 1750s.

The social structure did not stagnate, it changed and low castes moved upwards and "new men" pushing forward was a common feature all over India.

Muzaffar Alam presents a regionally varied picture, with some areas (Awadh) experiencing economic prosperity and other areas stagnation (Punjab). Polities remained regional because there emerged no state system indigenously with enough surplus for an all-India system comparable to the Mughal empire.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What were the stages in the breakaway of Mughal Provinces from the centre? Answer it in about 50 words.

2) List the major territories acquired by the Marathas from 1740 to 1761.

3) What were the major states set up by rebels against the Mughals?

4) Write ten lines on the weakness of regional polities.

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1.5 THE RISE OF BRITISH POWER

The third and the most crucial feature of the 18th century polity was the rise and expansion of the British power in India. It opened a new phase in the history of India. In this section you will become familiar with how the British came to India and subsequently expanded their influence.

1.5.1 From Trading Company to Political Power

The mid-18th century saw the transformation of the English East India Company from a trading enterprises to a political power. From its establishment on 31 December 1600 to 1744, the English East India Company slowly expanded its trade and influence in India. The Portuguese and Dutch were eased out by a strategy combining war and manoeuvres at the Mughal court. By the 18th century the main foreign power remaining in the fray was the French East India Company, a comparatively late entrant in the race.

The beginning of the empire is usually traced to 1757 when the British defeated the Bengal Nawab at Plassey. The ground for the victory of 1757 was laid in South India where British military might and diplomatic strategy were successfully tested out in the conflict with the French Company. This conflict, popularly known as the Carnatic Wars, spanned a quarter century from 1744 to 1763. Unit 9 will take this up in detail.

The English East India Company had remained a commercial body for one and a half centuries. Why did it acquire its political ambitions at this time?

As we shall see in Block 2, the expansion of European production and trade and the emergence of aggressive nation states in Europe lay behind the expansion of the European companies in India from the 1730s. In India, the decline of Mughal authority obviously provided a great opportunity for expansion of influence.

The company's need for more revenue from taxation inclined it towards establishing an empire. The company needed money to maintain its trade and pay its troops and so acquisition of territory seemed the best method of meeting this requirement. The company's interest in conquering Bengal was two-fold-protection of its trade and control over Bengal's revenue. The intention was to remit the surplus revenue of Bengal as tribute through the channel of investment in Bengal goods. The value of Bengal goods exported rose from 4,00,000 in 1765 to one million towards the end of the 1770's.

1.5.2 Anglo-French Struggle in South India

Hyderabad had become independent of central authority under Nizam-ul-Mulk but after his death in 1748 it entered into a period of grave instability, as did the Carnatic. Disputes over succession offered the foreign companies a chance for intervention.

First Carnatic War
The First Carnatic War was provoked by the outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1742 between the two countries. By 1745 the war spread to India where French and English East India Companies were rivals in trade and political influence. The English attack of French ships near Pondicherry was duly matched by the French occupation of Madras. At this juncture the Nawab of Carnatic responded to an English appeal to protect Madras and his armies were defeated by the small French army at St. Thomas near Madras. With the end of the war in Europe, the hostilities in India ceased, but only temporarily. The issue of supremacy had not been decisively settled and from 1748 onwards a situation of conflict once again emerged.

The Second Carnatic War

The second war was the outcome of the diplomatic efforts of Dupleix, the French Governor-General in India. Disputes over claims to the throne arose both in Hyderabad and in the Carnatic. Dupleix was quick to extend support to Chandra Sahib in the Carnatic and Muzaffar Jang in Hyderabad, with the intention of obtaining handsome rewards from them. This early preparation was useful as the French and their allies defeated their opponents in 1749. The French gained territorially and monetarily. Significant gains were the Northern Sarkars, Masulipatnam and some villages around Pondicherry. Political influences was secured at the Nizam's court by the appointment of an agent at the court.

The English avenged their defeat in 1750. Robert Clive master minded the occupation of Arcot with only 200 English and 300 Indian soldier. Chandra Sahib had no option but to rush to the defence of his capital, lifting the siege of Trichonopoly and releasing Muhammad Ali in consequence. This was what Clive had hoped would happen.

The French effort to strike back was frustrated by the lack of support given by the French government. They had incurred heavy losses in America and India and preferred a humiliating peace to an expensive conflict. Thus the very nature of the company, it's being almost a department of the state, proved disastrous for it. The French state was not only corrupt and decadent, it failed to keep in line with current developments and visions into the future. Dupleix was recalled after negotiations with the English company in 1754. The French challenge was virtually over.

Third Carnatic War

A third war broke out in 1756 with the commencement of war in Europe. Count de Lally sailed to India to aid the French army but his ships were sent back and the French troops were defeated in Carnatic. The French position at the court and territory in Hyderabad state were taken over by the English. The battle of Wandiwash in 1760 marked the elimination of French influence in India.

Peace like war, was once again linked with Europe. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 reduced the French company to a pure trading body without any political privileges.

The conflict between the English and French companies was a crucial stage in the consolidation of British power in India. At the end of 20 years the superiority of the British over the French was clearly proved. The lessons learnt in the Carnatic were well applied in other parts of the country.

1.5.3 Conquest of Bengal : Plassey to Buxar

Bengal was the first province where the British eastablished political control. The Nawab, Siraj-ud-daula, was defeated at the battle of Plassey in 1757. The grant of the Zamindari of 24 Parganas by Mir Jafar in 1757 and then of the Burdwan, Midnapore and Chittagoh in 1760 by Mir Kasim gave the Company's servants the opportunity to oppress the officials of the Nawab and the peasants. Trading privileges were similarly misused. Mir Kasim followed Siraj-ud-daula's example and refused to accept these attacks on his sovereignity. He joined battle with the British at Buxar in 1764 along with the Nawab of Awadh and the Mughal emperor. The company won an easy victory. Unit 8 will deal with developments from Plassey to Buxar in detail. Here our concern is with the changes in the political system.

Dual Government

The treaty of Bengal in 1765 inaugurated the Dual Government of Bengal. Clive became Governor of Bengal and Company the virtual ruler. The Nawab was the ruler merely in name as his army had been disbanded. The administration was handed over to a Deputy Subadar, who would function on behalf of the Nawab, but would be nominated by the company. The company had direct control over collection of revenues through the Deputy diwan. As the offices of diwan and subadar were held by the same person, the company's control was total.

Moreover, the great advantage was that responsibility continued to be with the Nawab. The blame for the extortions and oppression by the company's servants fell on the Nawab. It is estimated that 5.7 million were taken away from Bengal in the years 1766 to 1768 alone. Senior British officials including Clive admitted that

Company's rule was unjust and corrupt and meant untold misery for the people of Bengal.

1.5.4 Reorganisation of the Political System

The administrative abuses were so great that the company ended the dual government in 1772. The company was essentially a trading corporation, ill equipped to administer territory. Changes were necessary in the constitution to enable it to wield political power and for the British Government to regulate the functioning of the company. This was effected by the Regulating Act of 1773. Unit 23 discusses the Act at length.

Introduction of Western Institutions

The significance of the Regulating Act for our discussion lies in its introduction of the British mode of governance. British style institutions were introduced. The Governor-General and his council were to run the administration of Bengal and supervise that of Bombay and Madras. The Supreme Court of justice was set up at Calcutta to administer justice according to British percepts. The nucleus of an administrative apparatus already existed within the company, as it had an army, collected taxes and imparted justice. Initially the old system was only extended, but by the turn of the century, British principles had permeated deep.

One such principle was the separation of the judiciary from the executive. Civil courts set up and presided over by judges, proved popular, 200,000 cases per year being the average in the early nineteenth century. The police system took shape under Carnwallis.

Reliance on Indians to man the services continued, but on different terms. Both the Nawab and his subordinates lost power as the company became the supreme authority. The powerful state apparatus created was intended to enforce obedience of the subjects. Continuities with earlier practice existed but the change in the way people were ruled was fundamental.
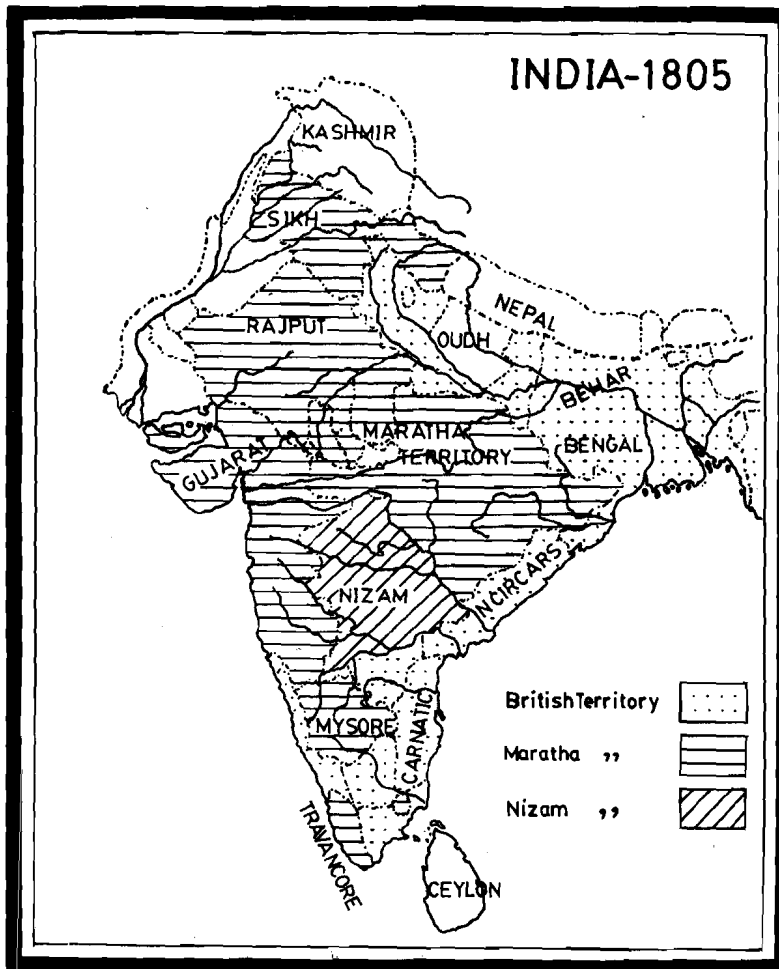
Map 1

Change was not immediately visible. Revenue collection procedures were derived from varied traditional and Mughal practices. But the establishment of control of the British Government over the Company's administration and policies marked the replacement of the indigenous political system by an imperial system subservient to the interests of Britain.

Check Your Progress 3

1) Why did the East India Company adopt an expansionist policy after the 1720's. Write your answer in 50 words.

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2) Write five lines on the Dual Government and its advantages for the British.

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1.6 LET US SUM UP

The 18th century is no longer accepted as a classic dark age when anarchy ruled. Mughal decline was not the predominant feature of the century. The growth of regional powers was an equally significant development of the mid-18th century. The rise of British power, which began in the mid-18th century was the third major development.

Continuity of traditions from Mughal to regional and British polities was remarkable. But the differences between these three polities were equally striking. The same institutions performed very different functions when integrated into a new political system. The regional powers that emerged were of three types—the successor states, the new states and the independent kingdoms. The first group proved to be stable polities. The Marathas, the main contender for the status of an all-India empire came from the second group of 'new states'. But a combination of unfortunately timed external challenges and internal weaknesses dashed their dreams. The states set up by the Sikhs, Jats and Afghans were fairly short-lived.

The regional powers were not able to take the place of the Mughals. Though some states were very prosperous, and some achieved considerable military powers, none could achieve resources and power to maintain an all-India polity. Modernisation attempts were limited. Backward regional states easily succumbed to the superior British system.

The struggle with the French for supremacy marked the first phase of the rise of the British power. The conquest of Bengal was the second and decisive step. The British initially ruled through indigenous institutions but introduced constitutional changes from 1773 onwards. The main orientation of British rule was to the metropolitan economy, though the colonial institutions were a mixture of Mughal and British modes. British power in India was integrated into Britain's world-wide imperial system.

1.7 KEY WORDS

Chauth: A levy consisting of one fourth of land revenue, collected by Maratha chiefs from the areas assigned to them by the Peshwa. In return the chiefs were expected to protect these areas from external aggression.

Jagirdari System: A system of giving land to Mughal Mansabdar or officer in lieu of cash payment. The grantees were expected to collect the land revenue of these areas to pay their armed retainers and themselves. They also commanded administrative authority over the areas called *Jagirs*.

1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1
1) See Sub-sec. 1.3.2.
2) i) √   ii) ×   iii) √   iv) ×
3) See. Sub-sec. 1.3.4.

Check Your Progress 2
1) See Sub-sec. 1.4.1.
2) See Sub-sec. 1.4.2.
3) See Sub-sec. 1.4.2.
4) In your answer you should briefly refer to factors like backward social structure, continuity of Jagirdari crisis, inferior economic system and a failure to evolve a stable alternative all-India Polity. You should also discuss the various view points expressed. See Sub-sec. 1.4.4.

Check Your Progress 3
1) Your answer should include the need for more revenue by the British, along with other increasing economic requirements of the British state. See Sub-sec. 1.5.1.
2) See Sub-sec. 1.5.3.