

commanders from among the peasants of central Punjab and the non-Punjabi nobles, such as Dogra Rajputs from Jammu. This delicate balancing game functioned well until Ranjit Singh's death in 1839. Within a decade of his death independent Sikh rule disappeared from Punjab, as a struggle for power among the mighty Sikh chiefs and the royal family feuds helped the English to take over without much difficulty.

2.5. The Marathas

Like all other powers that emerged and moved against the Mughal Empire, Maratha also had a history of suppression by the empire, especially in the war of 27 years, which started with an invasion of the Maratha Empire by Mughals under Aurangzeb in 1681. The Mughal strategy consisted of steady pressure on Maharashtra's forts, beating Maratha forces in the field when they could bring them to a battle and devastating Maharashtra's countryside. It can be inferred that the brutal attitude of the Mughal troops toward the Maratha partially functioned as a basis for hostility between two groups. Furthermore, since the Marathi believed in Hinduism, the religious intolerant positions adopted by the Muslim Mughal Empire provoked the resentment of the Marathas.

When Aurangzeb died after forty years of futile warfare in the Deccan, the Marathas still remained to be subjugated. The Maratha kingdom was, however, certainly weakened and the process was further exacerbated due to the civil war between Shahu at Satara and his aunt Tara Bai at Kolhapur who had carried out an anti-Mughal struggle since 1700 in the name of her son Shivaji II. The contest with the Tarabai faction was settled later in the Treaty of Warna in 1731, which gave the state of Kolapur to Shivaji II. In 1719, by helping the Sayyid brothers establish a puppet emperor in Delhi, *peshwa* (prime minister) Balaji Viswanath secured for his master a Mughal *sanad* (imperial order) recognizing Shahu's right to *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* (one-fourth and one-tenth respectively of government revenue) in six Mughal provinces of Deccan, chauth of Malwa and Gujarat and independent status in Maharashtra.

After Maratha civil war was brought to an end, the control of the state gradually passed on from the line of Shivaji to that of the peshwas. After Balaji Vishwanath died in 1720, he was succeeded as Peshwa by his 20-year-old son Baji Rao I. By 1740, when Baji Rao died, the Marathas had won control over Malwa, Gujarat and parts of Bundelkhand. The Maratha families of Gaekwad, Holkar, Sindhia and Bhonsle came into prominence during this period. In the short period of 20 years he had changed the character of the Maratha state. From the kingdom of Maharashtra it had been transformed into an Empire expanding in the North. He, however, failed to lay firm foundations of an empire. New territories were conquered and occupied but little attention was paid to their administration. The Marathas did not try to overturn the local zamindars for the payment of yearly tributes. A civilian system of revenue administration took time to emerge in this newly conquered region and this was a feature typical of all Maratha conquests.

After the death of Baji Rao, his son Balaji Bajirao, better known as Nana Saheb (1740-61) was appointed in his place. This was indeed the peak period of Maratha glory when all parts of India had to face Maratha depredations. In face of an Afghan invasion overrunning Lahore and Multan, a treaty in 1752 brought the Mughal emperor under the protection of Marathas. The Maratha expedition to Punjab was, however, short-lived and soon a Sikh rebellion put any end to Maratha authority in this region. In any case, the Marathas by then had gained mastery over large parts of north Indian; but there was never any attempt to establish an empire. It was only in Khandesh, Malwa and Gujarat that they tried to put in place some kind of administration; their conquest elsewhere would seldom go beyond plunder and levying of chauth and sardeshmukhi. As a result it was difficult to maintain this mastery and soon an Afghan invasion under Ahmad Shah Abdali dealt a deadly blow to Maratha glory.

In the crucial Third Battle of Panipat, the Maratha forces under Sadasiv Rao Bhao were routed by Abdali and this marked the beginning of the decline of Maratha power. The peshwa died