

Marathas and Afghans

Rise of the Marathas

The Marathas grew powerful in the Deccan during Aurangzeb's wars. Their leader, Shivaji, used guerrilla tactics against the large Mughal armies. After Aurangzeb's death, the weakened Mughal Empire could not stop their expansion. The Marathas soon captured Mughal lands in central and western India and even began to threaten Delhi. By the 18th century, they had become one of the strongest forces in Indian politics.

Impact of Marathas on the Mughal Empire

The rise of the Marathas created serious problems for the Mughals. They disrupted trade routes, weakened revenue collection, and kept the Mughal army busy in constant fighting. The treasury was drained, while nobles and soldiers became disloyal. The Marathas even raided near Delhi, showing how weak the Mughals had become. This constant pressure directly accelerated the decline of the empire.

Rise of the Afghans under Ahmed Shah Abdali

In the mid-18th century, the Afghans rose under Ahmed Shah Abdali, founder of the Durrani Empire. Between 1748 and 1767, he invaded India several times. He took advantage of the weak Mughal state, captured Punjab, and plundered northern Indian cities. His main aim was to spread Afghan influence in the region. The Mughals were too powerless to resist and became spectators in their own empire.

The Third Battle of Panipat (1761)

The conflict between the Marathas and the Afghans reached its peak in the Third Battle of Panipat (1761). Ahmed Shah Abdali, with his Afghan forces and allies, faced a large Maratha army. The battle was one of the bloodiest in Indian history. Abdali's victory stopped Maratha expansion in northern India for a time. However, the Afghans could not maintain long-term control, and both sides were weakened. This opened the way for the British East India Company to expand its power.

Link with Pakistan Studies

The role of the Marathas and Afghans is important in Pakistan Studies. Maratha raids weakened Mughal authority, while Abdali's victory at Panipat delayed Maratha control over Muslim-majority areas like Punjab. This temporarily protected Muslim influence in the northwest. At the same time, the collapse of Mughal power allowed regional Muslim states such as Bengal, Hyderabad, and Awadh to emerge. However, it also gave the British a chance to expand, shaping the political struggles of Indian Muslims that later led to the Pakistan Movement.

