

# A Brief Study of Mughals and the Marathas Clash

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## INTRODUCTION

Officially, the Mughal Empire reigned over India from about 1526 to 1856. Unofficially, however, the Mughal era ended much before 1856. Power started to transfer and the Mughal Empire started to decline in the latter half of Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707), which lasted until his death. A military leader who was both feared and admired, Aurangzeb was brutal in his never-ending quest to conquer new lands. He greatly offended his people by taxing non-Muslims and destroying Hindu temples, undoing much of the progress made towards religious tolerance under his predecessors.

The Mughal-Maratha wars, which were the pinnacle of Aurangzeb's rule and signaled the Mughal Empire's demise, will be discussed in this article. In particular, it will examine the series of occasions and forces that took place between the 1660s and the 1730s, such as Shivaji's uprising, Aurangzeb's demise, and the ascent of the Saiyid brothers that contributed to the Mughal Empire's decline. Additionally, it will illustrate how British colonization served as the Mughal Empire's death knell. If you'd like a little more information on the Making of the Mughal Empire and its earlier emperors, read on before continuing. Emperor Akbar designated Lahore, Pakistan, as the Mughal Empire's capital in 1566. He restored Lahore Fort to its present form, after which several of his successors, including Aurangzeb, made their imprint on the stunning palace and grounds.

### The Marathas Began

From 1658, when he forcibly inherited the throne by defeating his brother and locking up his father, until his demise in 1707, Aurangzeb controlled the Mughal empire. He adhered to some of the rules established by his forebears' rule, such as Akbar's policy of engaging vanquished populations in his government, but he disagreed with many of them, such as policies that promoted religious tolerance.

At the time, religion had a significant impact on Indian politics and was a key factor in the development of the Maratha Empire. Aurangzeb strongly preferred Muslim as the administration's dominant religion and insisted that it was essential to the "state's character, regardless of how the religion was interpreted or applied in a political sense." This was true even when dignity and prestige were asserted to be more significant than religion in the imperial courts. The Hindu people of the empire, who made up the large majority of the population but were still at a disadvantage because of it, came to dislike Aurangzeb since he never downplayed his religious views in any aspect of administration and because of this he gained a bad image with them.

The Mughal Empire at this time was decentralized, which meant that many of the states and even towns were run by their own nobles, who served as a middleman between the emperor and his subjects but rarely communicated directly with him. Aurangzeb was also concerned with guarding his boundaries with the Persians and Turks. The combination of these two factors gave Shivaji the ideal circumstance to overthrow the government.

### Shivaji Ji

The Mughal Empire's religiously motivated abuses infuriated Shivaji in the 1650s, and he started to revolt against it. He demolished a number of military outposts in Bijapur using guerrilla tactics and his superior military might. His plan was largely effective, and he outsmarted the opposing armies the emperor dispatched to dissuade him. Shivaji became more and more well-liked as a representation of Hindu nationalists' resistance to Muslim dominance with each victory over the Muslim oppressors.



As more warriors joined his cause, Shivaji became more daring in his raids on the wealthy Mughal towns, like Surat. However, the emperor paid more attention to him as he grew bolder. Shivaji's tenacity had embarrassed the emperor, who dispatched an army of about 15,000 soldiers to capture and imprison him. Shivaji filed a lawsuit to be given the chance to negotiate his fate, and as a result, the emperor paid for his transfer to and accommodation in Agra. In 1666, he made his escape and went back to finish his mission to liberate Hindus from Muslim domination. He persisted in his pursuit of enlarging the Maratha Empire, and in 1674 he was crowned king.

Shivaji's followers were becoming more rebellious, which led Aurangzeb to impose tighter levies and restrictions against Muslims. However, the Marathas responded with an equal amount of pressure despite the Mughals' considerable pressure. Shivaji was the first ruler in India to create a navy for further defense by the time of his death in 1680, having gathered hundreds of forts in southern India, hundreds of thousands of cavalries, and several hundred forts in his support. His passing sparked the beginning of the Mughal-Maratha Wars, commonly known as the Maratha War of Independence.

### **Mughal-Maratha War**

Between Shivaji and Aurangzeb's deaths (1680 to 1707), there was ongoing conflict between the Mughals and Marathas over the land that each claimed in the name of their respective religions. Both had sizable armies of soldiers that would maintain and reestablish dominance in the region throughout the 30-year war. The Narmada River has long served as the border between Deccan, the Marathas' stronghold, and the North, the domain of the Mughals. Sambhaji was well-positioned to go on expanding the Empire after Shivaji died, and he did it. He repeatedly led the forces to victory, and he was only overthrown when one of his men revealed his identity to Aurangzeb. In 1689, Sambhaji was put to death. Rajaram, his half-brother, assumed control for the following 11 years. He carried on his father and brother's legacy, but after nearly two decades of conflict, he approached Aurangzeb regarding a truce. The conflicts persisted as the vengeful Mughal ruler refused.

Even Aurangzeb seems to have recognized the futility of the battle in his final years, yet he stuck to his guns. The Mughal reputation and power suffered losses with each setback. On the other hand, many people saw the Marathas as a beacon of light. When they invaded some places, like Hyderabad, they set up a "protection racket" to defend themselves from the Mughal armies and tax collectors. As a result, the Marathas gained a lot of respect from the populace for their abilities to protect them from violence and poverty, while the Mughals' reputation as villains grew. Aurangzeb continued the conflicts for many years despite having given up on winning them, and then he prepared his withdrawal. When Aurangzeb passed away in 1707, the dynamics of the battle were radically altered because all of his roughly 17 heirs were eligible to take the throne (Keay 2000, p. 359). According to legend, Aurangzeb asked that his dominion be split amongst his sons (Sunidhi). Instead of focusing on their external dangers, the Mughal aristocracy engaged in succession wars, which allowed the Marathas to successfully cross the Narmada River and seize a sizable portion of the Mughal domain.

Bahadur Shah, I defeated his brother on the same battlefield where Aurangzeb gained the crown. Shahuji, the grandson of Shivaji, who adamantly ascended to the Maratha throne, was released from prison by the new Mughal monarch, Bahadur Shah I. Soon after, Shivaji's aunt opposed him on behalf of her son, sparking a succession battle among the Marathas as well. Bahadur Shah, I started making efforts to reunite the empire in opposition to Aurangzeb's decentralized administration. But he was unsuccessful, and the Rajput and Sikh nobility revolted in an effort to gain the right to administer their lands. After only five years in office, he passed away, sparking yet another pricey contest for the crown.

### **The Saiyid Brothers' Legacy**

The ruthless duo of Saiyid Husain Ali Khan and Saiyid Hassan Ali Khan Barha were known as the Saiyid brothers. They have also been given the moniker "kingmakers" due to their powerful influence on who would succeed the current monarch. In the Mughal Empire, the two were prominent political figures. Whoever they decided to support would succeed as the new emperor, giving the two brothers more authority and influence. For instance, Farrukhsiyar (1713–1719) needed the help of several armies sent by the Saiyids because he was unable to confront his brother alone. The Saiyids tried to influence Farrukhsiyar to follow their agenda throughout his rule in an effort to gain more authority, but he resisted their efforts. Because of this, the Saiyids were able to plot his deposition and involved the Marathas in the scheme. When Farrukhsiyar refused to sign a peace treaty with the Marathas, they made arrangements for his execution.



The Saiyids then elevated two ineffective youthful emperors, who were both unable to rule for longer than six months, one after the other. However, one did consent to the Saiyid-supervised treaty that put an end to the Mughal-Maratha wars by trading off Maratha independence in their homeland for Mughal rule of the Deccan. The Saiyids then supported Muhammad Shah, who ruled as emperor from 1719 to 1748, for over 30 years. To his relief, the Saiyids were exterminated in 1720 after closely observing his rule for the first year of his tenure. However, their impact on Mughal history and the end of the Mughal-Maratha wars was significant.

### The Mughal Empire

Following the signing of the peace agreement, the Marathas received a Farman, also known as a "imperial directive," which established their status or right to autonomy over their home countries. As a result, they started to reach outward to recapture their ancestral holdings, including those of the Gaikwads to the west, the Peshwas to the south, the Scandia's to the north, and the Bondless to the east. Many nobles throughout the empire disobeyed the Saiyid brothers' policies, which were intended to bring all of the remaining states' nobles together and establish a centralized administration. This was primarily because they envied the Saiyids' seemingly endless power and desired it for themselves. In the decades that followed; the Mughal Empire was further divided into a number of successor nations while the nobility kept control of their respective territories.

Although the Empire's political influence was steadily waning, its economy was booming because the East India Trading Company had just begun to forge trade ties between the British and Mughal economies at this time. In the 1690s, these ties gradually developed, but in the 1710s, an agreement signed by Emperor Farrukhsiyar that gave them trading privileges gave them a boost. On the basis of this authority, the Company formed alliances with many states' Marathas and noblemen, the majority of whom appointed a 'banian' or 'dubash' as a go-between for the Company and the locals. Through this intermediary, each state interacted with the Company on an individual basis, segmenting the economy in the same way they had segmented the administration. Further, states sold the use of their troops both domestically and in Europe, making up a sizeable portion of the economy in terms of human capital.

This was especially true during the Anglo-French conflicts over the southern section of the continent. This ultimately led to Britain controlling India. By this time, the administration and the economies had been decentralized, rendering the Mughal emperor essentially powerless. The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, was exiled to Rangoon in 1857 following a botched effort to conduct a coup against British authorities. The Mughal Empire was officially over, and India became a British colony as a result.

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