Chapter 2

MUGHAL EMPIRE: MAJOR ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY POLITY
Mughal Empire stretched from Kashmir in the north to Jinji in the south and from the Hindukush in the west to Cittagong in the east during Aurangzeb's reign. The Mughal Empire was sustained by some of its unique administrative institutions and statesmanship of its rulers. The reconciliation with or assimilation of Indian ruling class notably Rajputs, which enable them to expand their paramountacy, was an important determinant of their success and in this the religious policy of the most of the rulers, largely based on *sulh-i-kul*
was instrumental. The Empire was divided into 16 provinces then it was further subdivided into sarkars, mahals and even tappawise for sake of administrative conveniences. The establishment of mansabdari system, jagirdari system and magnitude as well as mechanism of land revenue (surplus) extraction, which formed large part of the state earning, were some of the administrative institutions which had on one hand given rise inevitably to a composite nobility – constituted by Iranis, Turanis, Indian Shaikhzadas, Rajputs, Afghans and on the other, proved to be very effective state apparatus for centralisation of power.

For almost two hundred years the Mughal Empire held its sway in almost whole subcontinent, which was unified by a highly centralised administration. The Mughal army was dominated by cavalry which allowed it great mobility and was unbeatable in the battles fought in the open field.¹ Therefore, the Mughal officials – mansabdars had the main obligation of maintenance of cavalry contingent along with horses of standard breed.² The mansabdars were allotted jagir for land revenue realisation and maintenance of the

² Ibid.
contingent. Thus, there was a close relationship between the mansabdars and jagirdars and often both the offices were combined.

I. Major Administrative Institutions

The mansabdari system constituted the core of the Mughal army. The mansab conferred dual rank to an individual which were represented by digits where the first digit indicate the personal rank (zat) of the mansabdar and second indicate the military obligation (Sawar rank) of the official. In contrast to Turkish and Mongal army, the system was based on direct command and direct sub-ordination to the Mughal Emperor. The mansabdars were appointed by the emperor and they could hold office at the discretion of the Emperor.

The dual ranks were zat - representing personal rank and sawar representing the no. of troops, horses and equipment to be maintained. In any case the sawar rank never used to exceed the zat. But the system was made flexible, where a mansabdar was assigned additional rank - mashrut, which though increased the sawar obligation, the zat rank remained as it was. This was resorted to requisition more troopers during time of need. Similarly by

\[1\] Athar Ali, Ibid., pp. 39-40.
\[3\] ibid., p. 40.
\[4\] ibid., p. 41-42.
introducing *du-aspa, sih-aspa* regulation the Emperors were able to create requisite no. of troopers along with horses. The salary for *sawar* obligation of the *mansabdar* was fixed according to the rates fixed and was paid after the contingent was presented for the *dagh-o-chehra* (branding, entry into muster and trooper identification). The branding of horses and troopers' identification had minimised the malpractices. The payment was later on regulated by month scale. The *mansabdars* were paid in form of *jagir* allotment. Usually, the *jagirs* worth the salary was granted and on many occasion the *jama* (estimated income) was inflated to match the salary and thus actual realisation (*hasil*) always fall short of *jama* creating financial constraints in meeting military obligation. The 1/3rd 1/4th or 1/5th regulations and then month scale were introduced to overcome the problem posed by deficit *hasil*. The *mansabdari* system, therefore, provided enormous strength to the empire, and its flexibility, mobility and availability in desired strength created a formidable army especially cavalry.

However, for creating such an edifice the empire needed financial resources and the land revenue (surplus extraction) formed

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7 Ibid., pp. 42-43.  
8 Ibid., pp. 53-54.  
9 Ibid., pp. 43-49.  
10 Ibid.  
11 Ibid., cf Satish Chandra, op. cit.
the major source. The unique feature of the agrarian system of the Mughals was the mechanism of the transfer of surplus produce from peasants to state. Abul Fazl comments that “no moral limits could be set to the fiscal obligation owed by the subject to the ruler; the subject ought to be thankful even if he were made to part with all his possessions by the protector of his life and honour.” The land revenue demand did not exceed the surplus because further increase would destroy the peasants which would be certainly counterproductive.

The Mughals had borrowed some principle of land revenue administration from Sher Shah, but had greatly modified it, leading to the enforcement of dahsala (ten-year system) in 1579. In fact in the eleventh regnal year (1567) the information about the area of land cultivated and uncultivated, produce of land and the land revenue figures (taqsimat) were gathered and a new estimate of the revenue for the empire was made, which had replaced the jama-i-raqmi assessment—prevailing since Bairam Khan regency. Owing to the new assessment system, the crop rates began to be converted into cash on

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the basis of the prices prevalent in respective regions. These different prices are reflected in the rate list (dasturs) from 1562-1579 and was called the 19 year price rates for different provinces and these are in the form of maximum and minimum.

In 1579, the Revenue Administration gained enough experience about the varied fertility and produce of the land in different regions as well as the local prices etc. Therefore, on the basis of the yield, the land was grouped into dasturs (assessment circles) and the crop, the area sown, and the price of produce in every pargana during the last ten years was ascertained and the state demand was fixed accordingly - expressed in cash rate, which was based on average of the produce and prices during the last ten years. The productivity and local prices during the past ten years worked out afresh on the basis of the information and then averaged out. Henceforth, the surplus extraction was largely made in cash then in kind. This show prevalence of strong cash nexus in the economy, particularly, in rural areas. This was adopted by some of the eastern frontier states where labour rent was commuted into cash.

The state demand no longer based on a single crop rate which was then converted into a cash rates on the basis of prevailing prices,

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15 *ibid.*, see also, Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp.150-51.
but on a series of cash rate based on the crop and the area sown. The advantage of this system to the state was that as soon as the crop were sown, and the measurement (zaht) of the sown area carried out, state knew its estimated income but the risk of cultivation was largely thrown on to the shoulder of the peasant. However, this was not followed in the case of cash crops or high grade crops e.g., cotton, indigo, sugar cane, oil seeds, poppy, vegetables, which were always charged in cash fixed according to the productivity in a chosen good season. The state used to take into consideration the productivity and continuity of cultivation while fixing its demand. The land was categorised into polaj (under continuous cultivation), parauti (kept fallow for a year), chachar (largely fallow for 3 to 4 years) and banjar (cultivable waste) and the first two category were expected to pay at full rates when they were brought under cultivation and the third paid on the basis of progressive rates, with full rates becoming applicable in third year and the last category had to pay full rate only in the fifth year after commencing cultivation for encouraging its cultivation.

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., see also, “The System of Revenue Assessment in the Different Regions”, in Irfan Habib, ibid., pp. 159-71.
Besides, *Ain-i-dahsala* which was based on *zabt* (measurement) there were other forms of assessment which also prevailed in some parts of the Empire. According to Abul Fazl – the officials (amalguzar) were instructed to accept any system of assessment which the husbandman preferred.\(^{19}\) These were *kankut* (appraisal) and *batai* (crop sharing). In *kankut*, the whole land was measured by means of *jarib* or by pacing and the standing crops estimated by inspection. In case of doubt the crops were cut and estimated in three lots – the good the middleing and the inferior and a balance was worked out. The other method was *batai* – crop sharing having three categories – firstly, the *bhaoli* where the crops are reaped and stacked, and divided by agreement in the presence of the parties. The second type was *khet batai* where the field was divided after they were sown. The third type was *lang batai* where after cutting the grain it was formed in heaps and divided.\(^ {20}\)

Another system of assessment was *nasaq*, where the peasants were given an estimation of previous assessment whether based on *zabt* or *batai* or any other method and thus, annual measurements or appraisal was dispensed with. Gradually *nasaq* based on *zabt* became the standard system.\(^ {21}\)

\(^{19}\) Ibid.


\(^{21}\) Irfan Habib, *ibid.*, *Cambridge Economic History of India*, *ibid.*
The state had fixed its share at one-third of the average produce but in some areas i.e., Multan and Rajasthan it was one-fourth and in Kashmir where saffron cultivated it constituted one-half of the produce. But this did not include various other kinds of cess and share demanded by zamindars and the state.22

The state encouraged the cultivators to pay directly in khalisa or to the agent of jagirdar. But in reality, though the land revenue was assessed on individual peasants, the local zamindar was allowed to collect the revenue and was given a percentage of the collection. They were also allowed to collect their traditional dues.23

Expansion and improvement of cultivation was one of the principal objectives of the state and it allowed several concessions for bringing fresh areas under cultivation. The state also used to provide taqavi (agricultural loans) to peasants and also allowed several remission from time to time as per the requirement.24 For the practical purpose the land revenue administration continued till last. Several features of land revenue administration was adopted in some parts of Ahom State and Koch-Behar besides other features.

22 Ibid., c.f., Satish Chandra, op. cit., p. 152.


24 Ibid., Irfan Habib, op. cit.
Revenue assignment (jagirdari) was another very important Mughal administrative institution, which had sustained the empire for a very long time. The Emperor transferred his right to the land revenue over large portion of empire to his subjects within defined territorial limit. The areas which was assigned known as jagir and the assignees were known as jagirdars.\(^{25}\) Generally, the jagirdars used to be mansabdars and usually, the mansabdars received their personal salary as well as sawar salary in form of jagirs.\(^{26}\) The jagirdar could collect the land revenue as well as other cesses and petty taxes.\(^{27}\) The jagirs were regularly transferred after some time. As the jagir was granted in lieu of salary, the net revenue yield from it should be equivalent to the salary. Therefore, jama (estimated income) was prepared for each unit territory – the village and particularly of pargana. The jama should also be very close to hasil (actual collection).\(^{28}\) In contrast of the other part of empire, where jama was worked out according to zabt system, in Bengal the jama was fixed according to the estimate of previous regimes and it was a fixed annual claim.\(^{29}\) Although the empire had authorised the jagirdars to


\(^{26}\) Though a few mansabdars were paid in cash.

\(^{27}\) Irfan Habib, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-01.


assess in some cases and collect the revenue but he had to strictly follow the imperial regulations. Moreover, the jagir was transferred on regular interval, the jagirdars faced problem due to unfamiliarity with the new jagir and he could be posted in different areas other than the area where his jagir located, therefore, they appoint their agents (gumashtas) to collect the land revenue. The principal agent happened to be 'amil', who combined several responsibilities.\textsuperscript{30} Generally, the jagirdars used to take some amount from the amil as advance and sometimes this tempted some person to obtain agentship by offering more amount as advance. It had given rise to revenue farming (ijara) as it was simpler for the jagirdar to delegate the right of land revenue collection to a person on payment of desired money.\textsuperscript{31} This had brought oppression to the peasants. However, unrestricted exploitation of the peasant was not possible due to the presence of local elements like qanungo, chaudhuris or zamindars which constituted an important part in surplus extraction. They used to be permanent and hereditary and were expected to maintain accounts and other records. For their service in revenue collection they were given a commission. Besides, the qanungo had to put his signature on patta

\textsuperscript{30} Irfan Habib, \textit{ibid.}, p. 327.
(assessment) and qabuliyat along with chauduri and muqaddamas.\textsuperscript{32}

Obviously the imperial authority expected the qanungo to ensure that the regulations were strictly followed by the jagirdar and he should act as the friend of peasants\textsuperscript{33} He should report any wrongful exaction from the peasants. But qanungos also tend to indulge in embezzlement by making fictitious account in collaboration with amils or at times the become mediator between zamindars and amil to garner amount (benefits) for himself.\textsuperscript{34} However, the jagirdar's agent used to countercheck their exaction because they had to maximise their hasil.

The system put in operation an effective means of checks and balance.

Irfan Habib rightly says,

"Akbar undoubtedly built upon the foundation of the administration created by the surs, but his own contribution to the creation of a centralised apparatus through which an absolute monarchy could function."\textsuperscript{35}

The empire remained strong due to these innovative administrative institutions and policies. It did not face any crisis or serious threat except minor revolt of some nobles in 1580. The war of succession could never threatened the empire and even Rajputs' revolt in 1679-80 due to Aurangzeb's policies remained short lived

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Irfan Habib, ibid., p. 333.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} ibid., p. 365.
\end{itemize}
and they returned to old allegiance.\textsuperscript{36} Equally remarkable aspect of empire was that the \textit{jagir} did not form any permanent rights to the land except being revenue assignment – assessed in terms of money which was well suited for an economy where cash nexus existed. Similarly the commercial activity could prosper best under an imperial system with its uniform methods of tax collection and administration and its control of the routes.\textsuperscript{37}

The Mughal administration appears to be a three tier system – ruler, \textit{zamindar} and peasant. The role played by the class of \textit{zamindar} was extremely crucial in the every sphere of life. The current meaning of \textit{zamindar} means a land lord, but it appears to have different meaning in Mughal period but had pivotal position in the Mughal India. They were present in pre-Mughal period but it became complex during Mughal period.

The word \textit{zamindar} derived from Persian but its use had originated in India only. It was used as synonym of \textit{marzbari} or as holder of \textit{iqta} or controller of a territory.\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Zamindar} existed everywhere in Mughal Empire whether in directly ruled territory or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} \textit{Ibid.}, c.f., M Athar Ali, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 95-135.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Irfan Habib, \textit{ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Irfan Habib, \textit{Agrarian System, ibid.}, p. 169.
\end{itemize}
tributary territory.\textsuperscript{39} Abul Fazl often used the word *bhumi* having same connotation as of *zamindar*\textsuperscript{40} and in 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the term like *ta'alluqdar* was used for *zamindar*. According to Anand Ram Mukhlis, an official, writing in 1745,

\begin{quote}
"*zamindar*, etymologically (*darasl*) means a person who is a master of land (*sahib-i-zamin*), but now signifies a person who is the *malik* of the land of a village or township and carries on cultivation".\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

Thus, the *zamindari* right possessed over a village and not exclusively in a particular land. The *zamindari* right was, situated in the rural area but it was certainly above the peasantry. But there were several villages where we find absence of this right and therefore, these were designated as *raiyati* (peasant hold).\textsuperscript{42}

There is a little evidence to suggest that *zamindars* possessed the right to dispose of land cultivated by peasant. In fact, due to availability of land in abundance, rarely led the *zamindars* to seek eviction of the peasants, who would like to keep the peasant in his area rather than losing them. Thus, the *zamindar* often bind the cultivator with land by a *muchalka* (bond).\textsuperscript{43} The *zamindari* rights had emerged either due to settlement of village by a person who brought

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 170, confusion arose due to misrepresentation of *Ain* table by its translator Blochmann.  
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 172.  
\textsuperscript{41} Cited in *Agrarian System*, ibid., p. 173.  
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p. 174.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 178-79.
\end{flushright}
the virgin land under cultivation by follower peasant or it might had emerged due to the subversion of peasant right by a person of superior status of imposing their control over the village. There seems to be a pattern by which this rights must have emerged like settlements was generally made by a caste or clan and the establishment of such dominion later converted into zamindari rights. It is obvious from Ain-i-Akbari's account which provides information about twelve subas, where it mentions about the casts of zamindar or bumis and for each pargana it mentions usually one caste, sometimes two or three and rarely various casts. Thus, there were territories over which normally same caste had zamindari rights. Thus the emergence of zamindari right over different territory was a historical process rather than systematic and in fact such rights in pre-Mughal period were also present when these were designated as rajas, rais thakurs and lesser one's were designated as chaudhuris, khots, muqaddams.

The Mughal zamindars could be classified into three categories - (i) autonomous chieftains, (b) the intermediary zamindars and (c) primary zamindars and this division was not exclusive and within the

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44 Ibid., p. 197
The autonomous chieftains largely Rajput chiefs were hereditary ruler Rajputs of the territory and under Delhi sultanate they had to accept overlordship of the sultans and agreed to pay tribute and military service. But these chieftain were rebellious. Mughal ruler Akbar continued with the system and demanded the acceptance of overlordship, payment of tribute and military service, but he introduced some innovations to keep them in check. Akbar not only established links with them but absorbed them into administrative institutions at various levels but they owed their position to the sweet will of the Emperor. The Mughals also established their paramountcy where succession of chieftains depended on the approval and recognition of the Emperor. Though the law of primogeniture was followed in some cases like the eldest son of Man Singh, Maha Singh was not allowed to succeed similarly nomination of younger son was rejected. The Emperor demanded the personal attendance in court and often obtained military service from them, which was systematized by incorporating them into mansabdari system. Although, these chieftains retained their territory

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48 Ibid., pp. 286-87.
as *watan jagir* and thus as *jagirdars* they were subjected to imperial revenue regulation.\(^{49}\)

The second category of *zamindars* were designated as intermediary by S Nurul Hassan. It was not at all a homogenous class, and primarily they collected the revenue from the primary *zamindars* and paid it to the imperial treasury. Thus, they formed the backbone of the administration and for their work they used to get share in between 2.5 and 10 percent of the collection.\(^{50}\) They were expected to prepare details of revenue assessment, assist in revenue collection, promote cultivation, assistance in maintenance of law and order and provide required number of contingent but usually they were always found in struggle with the imperial authorities to enhance their right and often become recalcitrant.

The last category was comprised of primary *zamindars* and were the holders of proprietary rights and this class also included the peasant proprietor as well, who also carried on cultivation themselves or with the help of hired labour. The rights held by the primary *zamindars* were hereditary and alienable,\(^{51}\) and various sale deeds testified the alienation of this rights.\(^{52}\)


\(^{50}\) *Ibid.*, pp. 192-93.


The zamindars were allowed to maintain armed retainers and according to Ain-i-Akbari "The troops of zamindars exceed forty-four lakhs" and there were 384,558 cavalry, 4277057 infantry, 1863 elephants, 4260 guns and 4500 boats. Besides, the zamindars were permitted to build a qilacha (small fort) for protecting his zamindari possession and imperial authorities protected their this right by ordering restoration of qilacha. But these small fort became troublesome for the Mughals when instead of protecting their (zamindari) rights over peasants, they started defying the imperial authorities, resulting in actions against these small fort and large no. of incidents of struggle in between qilacha and garhi are found in extant records.

The zamindars were an exploiting class and claimed a share in the surplus produce of the peasantry, though the claim varied place to place. Secondly they represented virtual despotic power at local level and had very deep roots in the land for many generation.

In the 17th century taalluqdar also come into use to designate the zamindari and in 18th century, a talluqdar could be a kind of revenue farmer, when he contracted for payment of revenue not only for his...
zamindari but also for others zamindari and secondly he could also be small zamindar.\textsuperscript{57}

As per the policy the revenue assessment was made directly on the peasant even when zamindar was collecting and remitting the revenue and whenever the authorities imposed direct assessment and collection from the peasants, bypassing the zamindar then the zamindars were provided compensation or malikana.\textsuperscript{58}

The zamindars were most important agency by which the Mughals used to realise the land revenue as well as these zamindars being local and hereditary always checked over exploitation of the peasants by the transferable jagirdars. But they could function well and adhered to rules and regulation till a strong authority keep watch on them. They were extremely rebellious that on slightest pretext they tended to rebel and refuse to pay the revenue. Such incidents from Agra, Mathura region were abound.

In the second half of 17\textsuperscript{th} century, there was a series of rebellions by the agrarian community mostly led by the zamindars produced agrarian crisis which went on to afflict other organs of the state. Zamindars appears to be present in every part of India, whether Mughal or non-Mughal territory and were known by different names.

\begin{addendum}
\item \textsuperscript{57} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{58} ibid., p. 214.
\end{addendum}
They usually collaborated with strong state but become instant rebel once the state shown slightest weakness. There were series of *zamindari* rebellions in the 17th and the 18th century, making the Mughal state hostage of their design.

II

**Mughal State in 18th Century**

Although stability of the empire was shaken during the reign of Aurangzeb due to several reasons but the Mughal state remained efficient and strong till the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. Aurangzeb’s demise ensued the war of succession and Bahadurshah enthroned at the age of 65 years. He had abolished some of obnoxious policies and adopted a relatively tolerant attitude towards Rajputs. He made futile attempt to control Amber and Marwar by recognising Jai Singh’s younger brother Vijai Singh as *raja* and forced Ajit Singh to submit to the Mughal authority. He was quick to recognise political incompatibility and restored the *status quo* though he did not granted high *mansab* to the two rajas.

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59 Here we intend to have discussion on the political development in the 18th century Mughal State. The crisis and decline of the State is being discussed in chapter 3.

60 Satish Chandra, *op. cit.*, pp. 458-60.
He did not recognise Shahu as Maratha king, however, he conceded Maratha's right of Sardeshmukhi of the Deccan but by not allowing chauth he could not keep Marathas in good humour, who remained a problem in the Deccan.

Bahadar Shah had made peace with Guru Govind Singh which did not last long as after death of Guru, Banda Bahadur rebelled in Panjab. Bahadur Shah remained entangled in the conflict which could not be crushed in spite of initial success of capture of fort of Lohgarh. Sikh rebellion, thus, created a volatile condition in one of most fertile region of the state. He also made peace with Chhatarsal, the Bundela chief who had strong presence in central India.61

But the state finances suffered further due to reckless grants of promotion in mansab and jagir. Bahadur Shah made positive effort to find remedies for the besetting ills but he did not get much time as he died in 1712, plunging the state once again in civil war, in contrast to earlier war of succession this time the nobles became power broker by using different princes as pawn. The nobles' power politics and court intrigue led to enthroning and dethroning of the kings.62

In the civil war Jahandar Shah emerged victorious largely due to the help of powerful noble - Zulfiqar Khan, who virtually started

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running the administration. Zulfiqar Khan made reconciliation with Rajputs and Marathas. He entitled Jai Singh as Mirza Raja Sawai and Ajit Sigh was bestowed with a title of Maharaja and made governor of Gujarat a long cherish wish of Ajit Singh. He also allowed chauth and sardeshmukhi of Deccan to Marathas, though these were collected by the Mughal officials and then transferred to Marathas. Similarly, Churaman Jat and Chhatarsal Bundela were also pacified.63

He made efforts but failed to improve the financial condition by checking growth of jagir and offices and instead he had greatly encouraged the revenue farming (ijaradari) in complete disregard to revenue regulation which proved to be detrimental to the empire.64

Given the constant court intrigue and suspicious nature and inefficiency Jahandar Shah could not hold on throne for long and was defeated in 1713 by Farrukhsiyar, who owed his victory to Saiyid brothers – Abdullah Khan and Hussain Ali Khan. They became wazir and mir-bakshi respectively. There was a tacit power struggle between Farrukhsiyar and Saiyid brothers. The emperor was being afraid of them and could not dismiss them from the office but indulged in intrigue which led the brothers to depose him in 1719 and they enthroned two young princes who died of consumption. Then they

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63 Ibid.
enthroned Muhammed Shah. Till 1720 Saiyid brothers exercised enormous control so as the emperors were reduced to mere puppet. The Saiyid brothers encouraged policy of religious toleration and conciliated Rajputs, and Marathas and had tried to contain rebellion to save empire from disintegration but the mutual mistrust and zamindars as well as other rebellious elements refused to pay land revenue and then the misappropriation of state income made the state's condition further critical. The court intrigue led to assassination of Hussain Ali Khan in 1720 and the Abdullah Khan was defeated shortly afterwards closing an epoch of king makers.65

Muhammad Shah had a long reign (1719-48) but he could no salvage the empire from brink of disintegration. He did not put his confidence in his efficient wazirs like Nizam-ul-Mulk and was much favourably disposed towards flatters and corrupt nobles. Nizam-ul-Mulk got frustrated in his attempt to reform the administration due to uncooperative attitude of the Emperor and constant rivalries among the ruling class – leading him to establish an independent state in 1724 in the Deccan. During this period there was growing tendency of assertion of independence of Bengal, Hyderabad, Awadh, Panjab and even petty zamindar declared themselves independent. Marathas started extending their influence in north. The situation further

compounded due to Nadir Shah invasion and plundered in 1739 which has exposed the Mughal authority. Nadir Shah invasion was a great setback to the Mughal empire, however, the empire appears to revive some strength but its area of influence was greatly restricted.66

Muhammad Shah died in 1748 and there ensued bitter civil war, which pushed the empire to point of no return. With the attack of Ahmad Shah Abdali - the remaining prestige, too, vanished. In real sense the empire ceased to exits after 1748-49.

III. Emergence of Bengal Nazimate

Geographically the suba Bengal of Mughal Empire was consisted of modern day regions of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Bangladesh and a little part of Assam. It was one of the prosperous state of the Empire owing to its fertile land, artisanal skill, financial and communication network and trade and commerce. During crisis period in Aurangzeb’s reign revenue from Bengal was eagerly awaited.

Murshid Quli Khan was appointed diwan of Bengal by Aurangzeb, with the sole intention of reorganising the revenue administration, and to send regular remittance to the emperor. He performed his work dextrously and he sent about Rs. 10 million

rupees in his first year of *diwanship*. The pleased emperor allowed him full freedom. He transferred the capital of *Suba* from Dacca to Maksudabad — latter named as Murshidabad. In 1717 he was also appointed as *subedar*, thus, for the first time he combined both the extremely important offices.

After Aurangzeb's death the emperors were entangled in intrigues so much that regular deputation of imperial officials to Bengal stopped from 1713 forever — allowing Murshid Quli Khan unhindered power.

The administrative structure of Bengal was slightly different from the other parts of Empire because most of the land in Bengal was controlled at the local level by indigenous landholders called *zamindars*. As collector of revenue and keeper of peace, these *zamindars* played a very important role. The provincial government indirectly controlled the lesser landholder and peasants by controlling the *zamindars*.67

There were several intermediary land holders in between *zamindars* and the peasant and through them revenue used to reach to *zamindar*. This prevailed till the arrival of Murshid Quli Khan. He, with the sole intention of increasing the revenue collection, tightened his control over the *zamindar* to minimise the misappropriation of

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surplus by the zamindar and intermediaries. Firstly, he transferred the *jagir* land of *mansabdars* from fertile land of Bengal to less fertile areas of Orissa and assumed the old *jagir* area under his direct control (*khalisa*).\(^{68}\) Secondly, he strictly realised land revenue from the *zamindars* and the defaulters were imprisoned and at times were tortured also and thirdly, he got accurate assessment of the revenue of each *mahal*.\(^{69}\) *Zamindars* had to pay either enhanced rate of revenue or lose the *zamindari* which resulted in the end of petty *zamindars* and large *zamindaries* survived e.g., Rajshahi, Burdhwan, Nadia, Dinajpur consolidated their position as *zamindari*. When Mushid Quli Khan died in 1727 about 15 large *zamindaries* were paying about half of the revenue.\(^{70}\)

On the other hand, money lending and banking got an impetus during his time and perhaps house of Jagat Seth also acquired prominence during this time.\(^{71}\) He had also secured the trading routes from robbers and established *thanas* (*chowkis*) in different parts.\(^{72}\)

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\(^{68}\) Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Delhi, 1995, p. 16.


\(^{70}\) James Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-200.


\(^{72}\) Salimullah, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
On the whole Murshid Quli Khan established a strong independent state. Although the erstwhile Mughal institutions prevailed but he not only reformed it up to large extent but also infused adherence to the ruler and regulations strictly and saved Bengal from the impending crisis, which had already afflicted to the core of the Empire, for quite some time.\(^{73}\)

Murshid Quli Khan was succeeded by Shujauddin Khan (1727-39). Though his rule witnessed peace, prosperity and regard for justice, but he was not paying attention to the details of governance. He constituted a council comprised of Haji Ahmed, diwan Alamchand and Jagat Seth, which became responsible for administration.\(^{74}\) Haji Ahmed and Alivardi Khan having no earlier experience in Bengal were appointed to higher post and gradually Alivardi Khan became so powerful that he usurped the nazimate, after death of Shujauddin and brief period of his successor Sarfaraz.

Alivardi Khan's (1740-56) reign is treated as glorious period of Bengal nazimate.\(^{75}\) In 1740, the Bengal nazimate formally separated from the Mughal Empire and it is treated as successor state because it

\(^{73}\)Riyaz-us Salatin, op. cit., p. 257.


had not only inherited Mughal institutions but also founded by the breakaway Mughal nobles. In the initial years he was more preoccupied in averting Maratha attacks, from whom, he finally purchased peace. Finally, he paid attention to administration and had rebuilt towns and made efforts to improve the agriculture. Ghulam Hussain Khan and Karam Ali described a period of peace, prosperity and particularly the cultivators felt secured in his reign.\textsuperscript{76} He was succeeded by Sirajuddaullah who was defeated in the battle of Plassey (1757) after brief period of rule.

During Nazimatee the revenue was collected under two heads: (i) standard assessment (jama), (ii) abwabs (imposts) and Shajauddin and Alivardi Khan increased the impost by Rs. 19.14 lakhs and Rs. 22.25 lakhs respectively. According to Sushil Choudhury, these abwab were heavy but did not impoverish the Bengal economy. He further cited John Shore in his support,

> these imposition might not have been then felt to be burdensome, and it may be that, due to the growth of commerce and increased imports of specie, the resource of the country were at that period adequate to the measure of exactions.\textsuperscript{77}

State also used to provide agricultural loan (taccavi). The political stability enable Bengal Nazimatee to maximise production

\textsuperscript{77} Sushil Chaudhury, op. cit., p. 21.
and land revenue collection, development of trade and commerce, expansion of markets – that it had attracted merchants from the all over the world. Grose writes about Bengal in 1756-57 that

The foreign and domestic trade of Bengal are very considerable, as may appear from the great number of Persian, s Abyssinians, Arabs, Chinese, Gujaratis, Malabarians....and merchants from all parts of Asia who resort there.78

In fact, it was described as Junat ul-bilad (Paradise of Provinces) and Paradise of India.79 Besides having extremely good maritime trade, the Asian merchants in Bengal had also maintained overland trade, which remained alive till early 18th century.

This chapter has discussed described (i) the major institutions of the Mughal Empire, which had sustained the empire till 1707 remarkably, (ii) the political developments in the 18th century and the emergence of Bengal Nazimate and Bengal under Nazim has been briefly described.

As it is obvious from the above discussion that the institution were vital in the proper functioning of the state and once these went through crisis, the empire too plunged into the crisis. The next chapter intends to deal with crisis in Mughal state and Bengal nazimate and this subsequent decline. Several features of these

78 Ibid., p. 22.
79 Riyaz us Salatin, op. cit., p. 4.
administrative institutions were adopted by the eastern frontier (of Bengal) State formations. The chapters below have analysed these interactions and subsequent crisis in these state formations.