

**POLITY AND ECONOMY OF GUJARAT
DURING
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

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SUMMARY

The eighteenth century is an immensely debated theme in Indian history regarding two major developments: the Mughal decline and its aftermath culminating eventually in the growth of British colonial rule. It is an era marked by a variegated historiography, comprising of multifarious opinions evolving over time with the focus of research shifting from the purely imperial and empire-centric perspective to a wider canvas, taking cognizance of developments at the regional level. The emphasis has shifted from viewing the Mughal disintegration and the rise of successor states and regional polities during the course of the eighteenth century in more structural terms within a larger and multidimensional perspective.

Intensive case studies have come forth with pertinent insights in relation to different regions which seek to examine and explain the transition during the first half of the eighteenth century. However, Gujarat, an important component of the Mughal Empire still remains beyond the purview of such an examination with the exception of remarkable insights on the port town of Surat. The province of Gujarat comprises of three geographical zones or sub-regions: the mainland, Saurashtra and Kutch. While the primary thrust of research has been the mainland which indeed constituted the main zone of politico-economic operations in the suba, Kathiawad and Kutch remain somewhat peripheral in the region's historiography. An examination of the region of Gujarat in face of Mughal disintegration and its aftermath is still an unexplored area and awaits attention. This study is a modest attempt at surveying the significance of developments at the level of the polity and economy in the face of breakdown of the Mughal Imperial authority and its aftermath during the course of the eighteenth century. The basic focus is an inquiry into the nature and working of power relations besides reviewing the Mughal decline from the regional standpoint.

This study is based on numerous primary and relevant secondary sources. The primary sources include the Gazetteers, Factory Records, Travelogues, Maratha

sources: Selections from the Peshwa Daftar and the Historical Selections from the Baroda State Records, besides relevant Persian Chronicles and Local Histories. Among the Persian chronicles, the foremost is the suba diwan, Ali Muhammad khan's *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, which is a comprehensive eye-witness account of the period. The Khatima or Supplement of this text is an amazing statistical account of the province. Among the local histories are two important works: Saiyyid Abbas Ali's Urdu masnavi, *Qissa-i-Ghamgin* and Diwanji Ranchodji's Persian history, *Tarikh-i-Sorath*. Besides these categories, are important Historical works like the *Rasmala*, John Bruce's Annals of the Hon'ble East India Company, Markand and Manu Mehta's The Hind Rajasthan etc.

The Mughal rule in Gujarat was established in 1573 with the conquest of the province by Akbar. This was followed by a phase of consolidation which involved the reorganization of the region within the framework of the Mughal Imperial administrative organization. Important components of the erstwhile political order which survived the transition from the Gujarat sultanate to the Mughals came to be accommodated within the new regime with the classification of *zamindars*. The view forwarded by Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanyam that the Mughal State resembled a 'patchwork quilt' rather than a 'wall to wall carpet' is well illustrated in the *suba* of Gujarat.¹ While the mainland remained within the more immediate purview of the *suba* authorities, the sub-regions (Kutch and Saurashtra) were relatively distant both in geographical and administrative terms. It may be noted that Mughal authority in these parts had to be reiterated and reinforced all the time. Revenue collection herein was invariably a military affair. This is illustrated in the nickname 'Udhai' (lit. white ant) attributed to the *suba nazim* Azam Khan 1636-42 whose entire tenure was directed towards the effective chastisement of the refractory elements: clan chieftaincies and fringe categories, both on the mainland, and more vigorously, in the peninsula by cutting of forests, establishment of *thanas* and raising

¹ Muzaffar Alam & Sanjay Subramanyam ed., *The Mughal State: 1526-1750*, Delhi, 2005, p.

of fortifications. Nonetheless, insurgency persisted and there were certain areas even on the mainland which invariably remained unwieldy and called for frequent chastisement.

Overall, the Mughal regime structured within Akbar's broad frame of Sulh-i-kul ideology was characterised by a general line of stability. A pattern of exigent foresight is discernible on the part of the reigning authorities including the provocative bigot, Aurangzeb to take cognizance of religious sentiments and pacify tempers of the crucially relevant commercial classes in the region.

Significantly the incorporation of Gujarat to the Mughal Empire provided it the ideal setting for economic growth. The expansion of Imperial authority in different parts of the subcontinent resulted in the territorial, administrative and economic integration of areas where Mughal rule was established. The seventeenth century was characterized by marked commercial networking in which Gujarat became the focal converging point. Coinciding with the establishment of the Mughal Empire was the rise of two other regimes: the Ottomans and the Safavids in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf regions respectively which provided stability and thus extended immense vibrancy to these areas. Resultantly, the loss of the lucrative South East Asian spice trade to the Portuguese in the sixteenth century was impressively balanced by vigorous commercial activity and networking in these parts of the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century. The presence of the other European concerns enhanced economic vibrancy in the province of Gujarat, besides serving as a counterpoise to the aggressive Portuguese. In this entire commercial network, Gujarat became the mainstay with its two principal cities: Ahmedabad and the port town of Surat, the entrepot, and their supporting hinterland. Incidentally both were important production and commercial centres. It is impressive to mention that the port at Surat was assigned the honorific epithets of *Bandar Mubarak*, the Blessed port and *Bab-al-Hajj*, Gate of Pilgrimage from where *Hajj* pilgrims sailed every year

to the Red Sea. Likewise, Ahmedabad, the commercial hub of the Empire was ascribed the epithet of *Zinat-ul-Bilad*, the Beauty of Cities.

On the whole, the integration of Gujarat to the Mughal Empire was marked by both stability and unprecedented economic growth. However, from the latter part of the seventeenth century, traces of Imperial administrative breakdown in the province began to surface. Gradually, during the course of the first half of the eighteenth century, a steady pattern of Imperial collapse and administrative breakdown is discernible which culminated eventually in the complete erosion of Imperial authority. In 1758 with the surrender of Ahmedabad to the Marathas, Mughal rule in Gujarat formally came to an end after 185 years.

It is pertinent to mention that the pattern of economic growth persisted even during the first half of the eighteenth century. This is evidenced in the enhanced revenue figures furnished in the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* Supplement. Moreover, despite the depredations, political uncertainty and turmoil, the commercial resilience of the region is quite striking. The stature of merchants at Surat during the first half of the eighteenth century is indeed awesome. Besides the powerful Chellabys, the Bohra shipping magnate Mullah Abdul Ghafur and his heir, Muhammad Ali Haye, were impressively prosperous. Despite economic growth, the crucial question is what went wrong?

A review of the Imperial collapse in the region during the course of the latter part of seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century indicates that the factors leading to the breakdown of Mughal Imperial authority in Gujarat were of external origin which however got extended to the region.

Initially Imperial preoccupation in the Deccan and rebelliousness of the various categories: Marathas, Jats, Rajputs etc. during the reign of Aurangzeb 1658-1707 became an opportunity for *suba* administrators to be more assertive and ambitious, indulging in flagrant violations besides usurping Imperial prerogatives. Gradually, with the weakening of the power and prestige of the Emperor after 1707, poor

governance, illegal exactions and various forms of administrative abuse became a rampant feature which sought to undermine the basic Imperial administrative fabric that had been an integrating force during the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century.

A crucial factor in relation to this Imperial crisis was the ascendancy of the Marathas in the Deccan, which at the outset, was independent of the Mughals. Clashes between their leader Shivaji (1630-80) and the Mughals who during this period were expanding further in the South were extended to Gujarat. Gujarat became an obvious target in situations of clashes between the Mughals and the Marathas in the Deccan on account of its prosperity and geographical contiguity to the Deccan. By the time Shivaji died in 1680, the Maratha Kingdom was placed on a firm footing. However, the Maratha polity experienced significant shifts and challenges after 1680. While there were succession disputes and factionalism in the Maratha camp, the Mughals remained persistent in the Deccan which resulted in continued clashes between both. In these uncertain circumstances, individual ambitions within the different components of Maratha polity were on an increase. A growing tendency among the Maratha *sardars* or commanders was to initiate independent action which mainly involved plundering raids in the Mughal territories, initially within the Deccan and subsequently beyond. The rapid weakening in the power and position of the Emperor after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and the conflict between different factions at the Imperial court gave the Maratha opportunities to expand. Gujarat too had to bear the brunt of their expansion.

It is significant that during the course of the first half of the eighteenth century the Marathas steadily became the focal point of power relations whose assistance was paradoxically sought both, by the Emperor and the numerous disgruntled and ambitious elements within the Mughal bureaucracy who were aspiring for autonomy and independence. From marauders, rebels and intruders, they gradually got

transformed into potential allies, collaborators and patrons in the province of Gujarat.

A subtle but important dimension which facilitated the Maratha ascendancy in the province was the sense of complacency, invulnerability and inwardness within the provincial Mughal bureaucracy which was probably engendered in the face of the political stability and unprecedented economic growth experienced during the first half of the seventeenth century. When the port town of Surat was besieged by Shivaji, the Imperial officials therein were simply not prepared and miserably failed to put up resistance. Even during the subsequent period, while the Imperial court at Delhi did show concern towards containing the expansion of the Marathas, the provincial administration proved more or less ineffective and later on, unwilling in containing them. An explanation to this sort of response seems to a gross error of judgement on the part of the *suba* authorities in rightly recognising the seriousness of the problem, which is in striking contrast the Europeans, particularly the English who made adequate preparations for resistance. They effectively adopted both military and diplomatic measures to deal with the Marathas. Besides the above mentioned mood of complacency, the notion of the Marathas being a 'rebel robber' and marauders, classed as *Ganims* in the popular and the Imperial perception which was obsessed with the mystique of 'Timurid' aura and grandeur was a serious misjudgement and proved to be an irreparable flaw.

It may be noted that the Mughals enjoyed political exclusiveness in view of their 'Timurid' legacy. They were the descendants of the great Timur who created a huge empire spanning major portions of Central Asia, West Asia and portions of South Asia. While the Mughal Empire was established by military conquests, their idea of Kingship and political legitimacy was defined in relation to their Timurid heritage. This idea was maintained and persisted even during the phase of Imperial crisis and factionalism at the Imperial court. It is significant that despite the weak position of the Emperor and the struggle for the *wizarat*, no faction at the Imperial court felt

strong enough to establish an alternate regime. Even during the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Mughals remained the reference point of political legitimacy. It is likely that overtime, this mystique of Timurid aura and grandeur was extended and internalized in some degree at the level of the higher Imperial bureaucracy, the urbane high ranking nobles. Perceiving the Marathas as political upstarts during the early phase of their expansion was the result of this mindset.

Besides the expansion of the Marathas in Gujarat, the weakening in the power and position of the Emperor, factional politics and struggle for the *wizarat* at the Imperial court from 1707, had far reaching implications in the province. While assignments in Gujarat were an attractive proposition, the consideration for appointment of *nazims* was in relation to factional patronage at the Imperial court. A tendency among *nazims* was to remain at the Imperial court which had become the hub of high politics, and manage the *suba* affairs by appointing their trustworthy *naibs* chosen either from within the *suba* or outside. The *nazims* assumed charge in person only in compelling situations or when they were specifically ordered to do so by the Imperial court. In these circumstances an interesting pattern of patronage began to evolve. *Naibs* were patronized by the *suba nazims*, who in turn enjoyed the support of higher patrons and their coterie at the Imperial court. In the view of this patronage, both the *naib nazims* and the *nazims* display an element of arrogance, autonomy and a disturbing notion of assurance and insulation that they were not effectively accountable for their actions. Consequences of this were the serious lapses and violations and an increasing administrative gap between the province and the Imperial authority at Delhi.

During the 1720s and 1730's four successive *suba nazims* initiated attempts towards assuming independent authority: Haidar Quli Khan (1721-22); Nizam-ul-Mulk (1723-24); Sarbuland Khan (1725-30) and Abhay Singh (1730-37). An important dimension in relation to the latter three attempts was the enlistment of support of the Marathas who were promised a definite share in the revenues of the

province, which was otherwise being claimed by their intermittent forays. By this time the Marathas (Gaekwads) were well established in South Gujarat and were steadily expanding on the mainland while the Peshwa presence was becoming increasingly pervasive from the North. However, these moves towards assuming independence proved to be a failure with timely intervention from the Imperial authority. Besides this, a more pertinent reason was the total absence of localism-crucial linkages at the level of the polity, economy or society in the *suba* which could have served as an important bulwark against the weak and distant Imperial authority. On the whole, these were frivolous attempts marked by blatant opportunism. Though the Marathas had emerged as a formidable force, their position was yet to be defined. The Gaekwads were still emerging as the rallying point and enjoyed support of the zamindars of Rajpipla and Dharampur, besides the Bhils and Kolis in South Gujarat and the *desais* in the vicinity of Baroda. Nonetheless, at this juncture the Marathas were still outsiders, indulging in forays which were marked by ravaging loot and plunder which made them very unpopular. Moreover, rivalry between the Maratha *sardars* and the Peshwa was yet to be resolved; it was settled finally in 1753. Nonetheless it is important to note that the Marathas emerged as the principal beneficiaries. From marauders and 'rebel robbers' or *ghanims*, they got transformed into allies of the 'Imperial' nobles which extended an element of legitimacy to their presence in Gujarat. Maratha claims to share in the revenues hereafter became more regular and remained unabated.

Amongst these attempts the most significant was that of Hamid Khan, who was acting at the behest of his nephew and patron, the powerful Nizam-ul-Mulk. The Nizam's personal concerns were basically concentrated in the Deccan where he wielded authority over the six Deccan provinces. It may be noted that the Nizam had always perceived the Deccan as his future personal domain of operations. As the viceroy of the Deccan (1715-17) he resisted the Maratha claims to *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* which became the reason for clashes. While an Imperial *farman*

sanctioned these claims in 1721, hostilities continued. The Maratha polity comprising of the King, the Peshwa, *Senapati* and his *Sardars* besides a large number of local chiefs was a divided lot. The Nizam's strategy for maintaining himself in the Deccan was to embroil these elements against each other or be patronizing to the different factions or individuals in the Maratha camp and maintain an overall balance. As Gujarat was contiguous to the Deccan it became a play-field for both, the Nizam and the Marathas who were keen on expanding their influence. A consequence of this was the extension of their rivalry, strategies and diplomacy in the Deccan to Gujarat. Eventually, despite the defeat of the Nizam's protégé, Hamid Khan by the forces of the new *suba nazim* Sarbuland Khan, the Nizam continued to be meddlesome and maintained some influence in the *suba*. He had been assigned *jagirs* in the *parganas* of Dholka, Bharuch, Jambusar and Amod (Maqbulabad) at the time of his appointment as the *suba nazim*. Subsequently, despite the end of his *nizamat*, these areas continued to stand in his name.

In contrast to the above cited attempts at assuming independent authority by the *suba nazims*, similar initiatives were attempted, but at lesser levels within the province, which however proved to be more worthwhile.

The loosening of Imperial control in the *suba* marked the assumption of autonomy by numerous clan chieftaincies of varying statures. Alongside these clan based polities, emerged a new category classed as *Nawabs*, off-shoots of the Mughal bureaucracy- *faujdar*s and *mutasaddis*. The three important port towns on the mainland: Bharuch, Cambay and Surat emerged as autonomous niches controlled by chiefs classed as *Nawabs*. Likewise, scions of the Babi clan assumed independent authority and styled themselves as *Nawabs* at Balasinor on the mainland, Radhanpur in North Gujarat and Junagadh in Kathiawad (Saurashtra).

An explanation of this term is essential. In the edited version of Yassin's Glossary of revenue terms, the term *nawab* connotes a noble or an *amir*.² Satish Chandra describes this term as a title of rank: viceroy or governor.³ Possibly this nomenclature was derived from the term *naib* meaning deputy.⁴ Significantly, while the position of *naib* at different levels was commonplace during the Mughal period, evidenced in the office of the *naib nazim*, *naib faujdar* etc., the term *nawab* in the eighteenth century, probably signified a *naib* or deputy of the Imperial authority. In effect the *nawab* exercised political and fiscal autonomy over the area in their charge which came to be sanctioned through an Imperial *sanad*. The *sanad* legitimizing the new authority was obtained from the Emperor through parleys and expensive gifts made to influential power brokers at the Imperial court after the assumption of a de-facto demeanour and the usurpation of effective control over the area assigned in administration. The ascendancy of the nawabs was a paradox, reflecting the dwindling Imperial fortunes on the one hand and the resilience of the Mughal State on the other.

An essential dimension associated to the establishment of these *Nawabis* was the supporting links which were located both within and outside the province. These linkages are reflective of the nature and working of power relations in the region.

The rise of the *Nawabi* regime at Bharuch and its vicissitudes is an interesting interplay of the different components within the power structure.

Mirza Abdullah Beg, the founder of the dynasty at Bharuch was a Mughal *faujdar* who had been appointed during the uncertain circumstances in 1725. He established his de-facto authority by winning over the disgruntled *Kasbati* troops recruited by Pilaji Gakewad. The Maratha chief came to enjoy control over Bharuch

² Yassin's Datur-i-Malguzari, tr and ed. Hasan Mahmud, entitled, An Eighteenth Century Agrarian Manual, Delhi, 2000, P. 284

³ Satish Chandra, Medieval India, II, Delhi, 1999, p. 533

⁴ This term is described by Steingass as "A guard of soldiers; -nuab (pl. of naib) Vicegerents, deputies, lieutenants, governors; (in P. also sing.) a vicegerent, &c.; a nabob, Altesse Highness (as title, m.c.), F. Steingass, A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary, Delhi, 1973 (Reprint), p. 1458

by virtue of an agreement with Hamid Khan (the Nizam's protégé and naib nazim) to share revenues of Gujarat in return for his assistance in his reinstatement at Ahmedabad. Clashes between both were thus inevitable and persisted during subsequent years. These were eventually resolved with the intervention of Nizam-ul-Mulk. Technically, Bharuch constituted a portion of the Nizam's *jagirs* which had been assigned to him with other areas when he had been appointed the *suba nazim* in 1723. The reasons underlying the intervention and mediation of the Nizam were basically an extension of his influence in the Deccan. It was imperative for him to have allies and protégés in Gujarat to undermine the Peshwa, his arch rival in the Deccan. The Gaekwads were the rivals of the Peshwa in Gujarat which made the Nizam patronize them. On the other hand uncertainties in the province pushed Abdullah Beg to seek support of the Nizam which was willingly extended with the conferment of the title of Nek Alam Khan (I) and a *sanad* for the office of the *faujdar*. Thus, both the conflicting forces were neutralized. Further with the Nizam's mediation it was agreed that the revenues of Bharuch were to be shared by both his protégés at Bharuch. The patronage of the Nizam thus facilitated Nek Alam Khan I to consolidate and legitimize his de-facto authority besides according a sound fiscal base to the fledging lineage. Nek Alam I was succeeded by his son, Mirza Beg in 1739 who continued to enjoy the Nizam's patronage with the title of Nek Alam II and a *sanad* confirming him to the office of the *faujdar* and the *parganas* held by him.

The *Nawabi* authority at Bharuch came to be established in the face of succession dissensions after the death of Nek Alam II in 1754 when he was succeeded by his brother Khair Talab Khan despite his son Hamid Khan. To worsen matters, a wife or mistress of Abdullah Beg, raised a minor to the *gaddi* and assumed authority in his name. Hamid Khan was thus compelled to launch an offensive to establish his authority.

In this offensive his supporting links, besides his kin, were the Arab commanders and the *Koli zamindar* Ran Mal of Miyagam which was located about 12 Kurohs from Bharuch. A recurring feature during this period was the recruitment of mercenary militia whose salaries frequently went into arrears which caused them to shift their loyalties to an alternate or opposite side. This proved to be seriously disruptive and had far reaching implications. Hamid Khan enlisted the support of the Arab *Jamadars* who were restless due to non-payment of salaries on promises of settling their dues. Significantly, these commanders were affiliated to the Idrussi Saiyyids, who were highly venerated by the people and who had a huge following amongst these Arab *jamadars*. To reinforce his supporting links, Hamid Khan appealed to the chief of this order, Saiyad Abdullah, to induce the Arabs to side with him. Ideology was indeed an important dimension of power relations during this period.

Besides the Kolis, the Arab *jamadars* and their ideological patrons, another important category was the local economically prominent Hindu families, who were traditionally associated with the complicated task of revenue collection, such as that of Bhaidas, the *desai*. After victory in the offensive, the final seal to the establishment of Hamid Khan as the *Nawab* were the *sanads* which importantly were obtained from both the power centres, Delhi and Hyderabad. This was despite the Maratha occupation of Ahmedabad in 1753 and the death of the Nizam in 1748.

The professionalism of Bhaidas *desai* is indeed impressive. Despite the basic incongruence of the two apex authorities at Bharuch, the *Nawab* and the Gaekwad, their revenue matters were smoothly managed by the *desai* without any flaw or clash. This arrangement also persisted over the next generation. Lalludas, Bhaidas's son managed the financial and diplomatic affairs for both his patrons, the *Nawab* and the Gaekwad. However, when the English influence was expanding in this area, which eventually marked the English occupation of Bharuch in 1772, Lallubhai, the trusted diwan of the *Nawab* shifted his loyalties to the English and worked in

conjunction with them. In contrast, the fugitive *Nawab* was chivalrously provided shelter by the *Koli zamindar* of Dehwan Zalim Jalia.

The establishment of the *Nawabi* regime at Bharuch is a fine illustration of an intricate hierarchically arranged power network which Hamid Khan effectively mobilized to his advantage.

The issues and pattern relating to rise of the *Nawabi* regime at Cambay were a little different than Bharuch. At the very outset the English presence at Cambay was prominent as this port town served as a clearing house for trade between Ahmedabad and Surat. Further, the fortunes of Cambay were closely linked to developments at Ahmedabad. The progenitors of the *Nawabs* of Cambay enjoyed illustrious Persian connections. Momin Khan I descended from the princely line of Amir Nejam Sani, a member of the celebrated Cabinet of seven ministers at the court of Shah Ismail Safavi of Persia. Further, the members of this lineage held the offices both of the *faujdar*s and the *suba nazim*. Momin Khan I enjoyed the high office of the *subedar* (1737-43). He was conferred the high titles and a *mansab* of 6000 *zat* and 6000 *sawar*. In the wake of Imperial collapse, when ambitions were rampant in the province, Momin Khan I, the governor of Cambay, had definite ideas of carving out a personal domain for himself. In 1737 he was appointed the *suba nazim*. Like his predecessors he had to battle his way to assume office. In this situation he found it exigent to seek the support of the Marathas. A pact was made with the Gaekwad chief whereby he agreed to equally share the revenues of the entire *suba* with the exception of the city of Ahmedabad, its *pargana haveli* and the town and port of Cambay which he perceived as his very personal niche. This was the first step towards the establishment of independent authority at Cambay. Despite numerous pressures: finances, depredations of fringe categories, the Marathas and the English, Momin Khan managed to maintain his position by adopting a policy varying between firmness, leniency and compromise in dealing with English and the Marathas depending on the exigency of the situation.

When Momin Khan I died in 1743, firm foundations were laid for the future *Nawabi* regime. The dynastic principle was operative and was maintained. Significantly, though the Mughal Imperial authority had weakened miserably, *sanads* were sought from the Imperial court. Legitimacy to wield authority devolved from the Mughals. The title of Momin Khan continued to be retained by successive *Nawabs* even in the late nineteenth century, a symbol and link to their strong position during the Mughal era.

In 1758 when Ahmedabad was finally surrendered to the Marathas, Momin Khan II, the last Imperial *nazim* and the hereditary governor of Cambay established himself as the *Nawab* (1758-83). He had to confront the more challenging task of sustaining the *Nawabi*. He was faced with numerous challenges. Two prominent forces at Cambay were the Marathas and the English whose pervasiveness is illustrated in the growth of pro-English and pro-Maratha factions at the *Nawab's* court. Further, the local commercial classes were also drawn towards the new forces. In the face of depredations and uncertainties when the local Muslim merchants (Arabs and Persians) were contemplating moving to safer areas, the *banias* chose to stay at Cambay possibly feeling reassured by the English presence and patronage.

In view of the nature of the presence of the new forces and absence of a powerful patron like the Nizam-ul-Mulk in the case of Bharuch, the power networks were more complex and pervasive at Cambay. On the whole, throughout the tenure of *Nawab* Momin Khan, we find him focusing his energies in consolidating his authority despite pressures from the English and the Marathas, besides financial problems and the pressure of mercenary militia and depredations of fringe elements. A significant aspect to note was that he was able to withstand the impact of these pressures by balancing between different lobbies and factions and yet exercising firm authority unsparingly. In 1758 he got his *peshkar* murdered. A more imaginative act was the murder of his brother-in-law Rashid Beg in 1768, the husband of his wife's Sister Khutbi Khanum. Incidentally he was highly enamoured

by her and came under her complete influence which added a new and important dimension to factionalism at the *darbar*.

The combined effects of the *Nawab*'s policies of oppressive exactions, the Maratha ravages and predatory activities of the fringe elements was the migration of merchants and craftsmen which overtime marked the economic decline of this port town though the *Nawabi* survived as a native state under the British.

In the establishment of the *Nawabi* regime at Surat, the role of the merchant community and their concerns was crucially central. The logical explanation to this was that the port town constituted the economic standpoint of the Mughal Empire, besides being the entrepot for overseas trade. The circumstances leading to the rise of the *Nawab* at Surat was a popular revolution marked by convergence of diverse forces wherein the only common factor was opportunism and ambition in the face of the erosion of Imperial authority. Basically, this was an expression of the changing reality wherein commercial concerns assumed an overriding character which sought to subvert the Imperial authority represented by the *mutasaddi* at Surat. This much sought after office in earlier times was reduced to a hopelessly vulnerable stature in the wake of Maratha domination of the Surat district and the blatant abuse of the Imperial *farman* of 1716 by the English.

After the death of Rustom Ali in 1725, his son Sohrab Khan assumed charge as *mutasaddi* at Surat. Absence of adequate and consistent revenue inflow made him resort to wholesome extortion from the merchants, both the indigenous and the foreign.

An important dimension at Surat in the early eighteenth century was the towering presence of the merchant prince Muhammad Ali, the heir of the shipping magnate Mulla Abdul Ghafur. In the late 1720s he initiated two attempts to carve out an independent niche in the wake of political uncertainties. His first venture in 1728 at Piram Island on the Kathiawad coast, proved to be unsuccessful besides being an expensive venture though he remained undeterred. This was followed by

similar moves at the village of Athwa on the outskirts of Surat. The *mutasaddi* raised objections to his pretensions which became the cause of his expulsion and the substitution of Teg Beg Khan (brother of the *qiledar* Beglar Beg Khan) to this office in his place which was arranged by the merchant prince with appropriate *sanads*. Hostilities between the two sides were neutralized at the intervention and persuasion of the larger merchant community. Shortly after, Sohrab Khan was once again reinstated to the office of the *mutasaddi*. While the *mutasaddi* was hopelessly dependent on the merchant community for finances either in the form of borrowings or extortions, vested interests in the town were desirous of pliable officials. Sohrab Khan's position was indeed precarious. He was left with little choice but to be a mute spectator to Muhammad Ali's pretensions at Athwa. After a point, when his patron ceased to sanction further loans, he resorted to blatant extortion which made him very unpopular. Muhammad Ali rallied support from different quarters and organized a popular insurrection which marked the end of Sohrab Khan's tenure and the establishment of Teg Beg Khan as the *Nawab* at Surat in 1732.

The supporters of Muhammad Ali included the larger merchant community, prominent amongst which were the Chellabys who incidentally were supported by the Siddis, besides the English and the Dutch and their local associates; the Marathas who joined in with a contingent of 10,000 troops; the *qiledar* Beglar Beg Khan; the mercenary militia, and most interesting of all, the local religious leader Syed Ali (whom the *Mirat* author describes as the source of mischief and disturbance). This sort of convergence of diverse components in the region's power relations is reflective of the changing realities. The smooth interplay between the political and economic concerns in the seventeenth century was no longer visible. The Imperial authority had out-lived the system which was so assiduously created during the preceding phase in the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century. New forces and concerns were surfacing and coming to the forefront which necessitated

timely structural shifts at the level of the Mughal State which, however, were not forthcoming.

It was in these circumstances that Tegh Beg Khan was established as the *Nawab* (1732-46). Though he had been elevated to this position with the support of the larger interests of the merchant community, he managed to conduct himself in an assertive manner. Firstly, seeking an opportune moment he confronted his principal patron Muhammad Ali, got him murdered and confiscated his wealth which perhaps helped him in consolidating his position. Next, around 1735 an agreement was made with the Maratha leader Damaji II to share revenues of the Surat district with him that was maintained till the 1780s. Besides these measures, Tegh Beg Khan also introduced new levies. The combined effect of all these measures was the extension of fiscal stability to the new regime which facilitated the *Nawab* to be assertive unlike his predecessors. The most important move made by him was the evasion of the stipulated payment of Rupees three lacs as *tankha* to the *Siddis*, the Mughal admirals. Incidentally, the English too were aspiring for this position. They adopted a double edged policy. While they were allies of the *Siddis* at Bombay as a counterpoise to the expanding Marathas along the Konkan coasts, they sought to dismiss them at Surat in view of their own formidable power at Sea.

On the whole the *Nawab's* assertive demeanor and measures were not to the liking of the local commercial community which rallied around the more patronizing English and the Dutch. This resulted in the growth of lobbies and factions. Eventually, this factionalism and succession disputes paved the way for the English occupation of Surat in 1759.

In comparison to the rise of *Nawabis* at the port towns on the mainland, the pattern discernible in relation to the Babi *Nawabis* is different in view of their antecedents and the nature of region where their authority was established.

The Babi clan enjoyed the advantage of a longstanding presence in the province spanning more than two generations. The progenitor of this clan, Sher Khan I

arrived in Gujarat in the mid seventeenth century and thereafter members of this clan appear numerous in the *suba* administration as: *naib faujdars*, *faujdars* etc. and even the high office of *suba nazim*. For nearly a decade (1743-53), Jawan Mard Khan Babi managed the *suba* administration as the *nazim* till Ahmedabad was surrendered to the Marathas.

The most important among the Babi *Nawabis* was that of Junagadh in Kathiawad which was founded by Sher Khan Babi. He held the office of the *naib* faujdar of the Sorath *sarkar* since 1737 which familiarized him with the intricacies of the region. In the late 1740s, when Ahmedabad, which had become the centre of bitter factional politics, dissensions and intrigues, both Jawan Mard Khan and Sher Khan played an active role. At one point Sher Khan, however, chose to quit the capital and established his independent authority at Junagadh in 1748. He assumed the title of Bahadur Khan and styled himself as the *Nawab*

At this stage, major small and big administrative units of the former Mughal *sarkar* Sorath, had disintegrated and become autonomous. Further, the *mulkgiri* expeditions of the Marathas were becoming more pervasive. The major challenge which the Nawab, Bahadur Khan faced was the consolidation of his authority in these precarious conditions.

The sub-region of Kathiawad was constituted of numerous formidable clan chieftaincies, many of which predated the Mughals. Authority in these parts had to be reiterated and reinforced all the time with military chastisement. Military primacy was a crucial aspect for wielding political authority in this region. In the initial stages when Bahadur Khan was trying to consolidate his authority, financial resource was the most challenging problem. This inadequacy prevented him from maintaining a regular army. The *Nawab* was forced to depend on the mercenary militia. In the saga of military campaigns described in the *Tarikh-i-Sorath*, a recurring feature is the *Kasbatis* and the Arab *jamadars* or commanders. A frequent situation in relation to this militia was the non-payment of salaries, as stated above,

which obviously became the cause of disaffection and rebellions. Often these dues were settled after much negotiation involving the sale of areas to adjoining expanding powers. For instance, Dhoraji and Upleta, two divisions located towards the North of Junagadh were sold to the Jadeja Thakore Kumbhoji of Gondal. Interestingly, some consolidation of the *Nawabi* was facilitated with the plundering raids and forays of the mercenary troops in neighbouring areas for sustenance. Thus variable tributes came to be appropriated. Gradually these raids became a regular affair which made the variable tribute an annual feature.

An impressive factor which facilitated the consolidation of the new regime was Amarji, a Nagar Brahman who was appointed as the *diwan* by the *Nawab* Mahabat Khan in 1759. Hereafter, the fortunes of the Junagadh *Nawabi* were defined by the abilities of Amarji. He adopted an astute policy in his dealings with insurgents who were subdued with stern firmness but condoned subsequently. Amarji appropriately realised that political power was not a monolith but a network of linkages wherein even fringe categories needed space. It is essential to make a note that the *diwan* at Junagadh was not directly concerned with the routine revenue affairs. His primary function was military campaigns for exacting tribute, chastising refractory elements and expanding the authority of the new regime through warfare and diplomacy.

Despite succession dissensions and initial disaffection within the militia, under the able leadership of *diwan* Amarji, firm foundations of the *nawabi* regime were laid. Junagadh gradually assumed a pre-eminent position in the peninsula which became a cause of concern for other emerging chieftaincies. To weaken the *Nawabi*, they instigated the *Nawab* Mahabat Khan and after him Hamid Khan against the intentions of his *diwan*. In their scheme, a weak Junagadh was most desirable. Pre-eminence, would mean an imbalance in the larger power relations in the peninsula, though ironically each individual chief was aspiring for this very position. Important amongst the instigators were the rulers of Gondal, Porbandar, Chatrasa and the

Nawab of Bantwa and their allies in these operations were the Marathas. Despite intrigues the *Nawabi* survived and persisted as a Native State.

In contrast to Junagadh the establishment of the Babi *Nawabi* at Balsinor and Radhanpur were basically a transformation of the Mughal *jagirs* into *Nawabis* wherein the reigning chiefs assumed the title of *Nawab*. After the decline of Imperial authority, Jawan Mard Khan withdrew to his *jagir* at Radhanpur. Balasinor held by Sardar Muhammad Khan, the son of Sher Khan Babi, was occupied by the Maratha in 1758. Interestingly the *Nawab* was reinstated at Balasinor with the support of the locals, prominent among who were the Kolis.

The presence of this fringe category, the Kolis in multifarious roles throughout the eighteenth century is important. In the region's power relations they numerously figure as an undefined and incongruent component often styled as *zamindars*. Though they appear to be located at the lower rungs in the hierarchy of the region's power relations, their role in relation to the establishment and vicissitudes of the *Nawabi* regimes is impressively important. The last chapter carries an elaborate discussion on the kolis in the region. An attempt has been made to examine their antecedents and persistent presence in the province despite the travails of time.