



International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Development Studies (IJHSD)

(An International Peer-Reviewed (Refereed) Journal)

Website-<https://ijhdsd.nobleinkresearch.com/1>

Email- editor@ijhdsd.nobleinkresearch.com

ISSN: 3139-8235 (Online)



From Mughal Decline to British Ascendancy: The Role of the Peshwas in Reshaping Indian Politics with Special Reference to Bajirao II

Dr. Sanjay Kumar*

Department of History

Government Degree College, Budaun, 243601, Uttar Pradesh, India

**Corresponding author - skg9956205115@gmail.com*

Received: 09 July 2026, Revised: 17 August 2026, Accepted: 04 September 2026, Available Online: 06 September, 2026

Abstract

The decline of Mughal authority during the eighteenth century transformed the political landscape of India and created opportunities for the emergence of powerful regional states. Among these, the Maratha polity, particularly under the Peshwas, emerged as a major force capable of challenging the remnants of Mughal power and influencing political developments across large parts of the subcontinent. This paper examines the role of the Peshwas in reshaping Indian politics during the transition from Mughal decline to British ascendancy, with particular attention to the reign of Bajirao II (1796–1818). It traces the expansion of Maratha influence under the Peshwas, the development of the Maratha Confederacy, and the political and institutional challenges that accompanied this expansion. Special emphasis is placed on Bajirao II's political circumstances, his relations with leading Maratha chiefs, the Treaty of Bassein of 1802, and the subsequent Anglo-Maratha conflicts. The study argues that the decline of Peshwa authority cannot be attributed solely to the policies or personality of Bajirao II. Rather, it resulted from the interaction of internal factionalism, the decentralized structure of the Maratha Confederacy, changing regional power relations, and the expanding diplomatic and military influence of the English East India Company. The paper demonstrates that while the Peshwas played a crucial role in dismantling the political dominance of the Mughal order and establishing Maratha predominance, the fragmentation of that political system ultimately facilitated British expansion. Bajirao II's reign therefore represents a critical phase in the transition from a multipolar eighteenth-century Indian political order to the emerging structure of British paramountcy.

Keywords: Mughal Decline; Maratha Confederacy; Peshwas; Bajirao II; Treaty of Bassein; Anglo-Maratha Wars; British Ascendancy; Indian Political History; East India Company; Eighteenth-Century India.

1. Introduction

The eighteenth century was a watershed period in the political transformation of the Indian subcontinent. The gradual weakening of Mughal power, particularly after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, did not lead to a vacuum of political power, but rather to a volatile political system where regional powers sought to establish, negotiate and change the map. The Mughal Empire had a lot of symbolic authority even then, but it could no longer exercise effective political and military control of distant provinces. Provincial governors, hereditary elites, military commanders and new regional states became more powerful, and a fragmented yet dynamic political order was formed for Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, the Sikh territories and Maratha polity to be the basic political manifestation of regional powers. The Marathas emerged as one of the most powerful political forces in this changing landscape and Peshwas emerged as the key players in Maratha expansion and consolidation. The growth of Maratha state from a regional power to a major subcontinental power was linked to the rise of the Peshwas as political players. The Peshwas were chief ministers of the Maratha ruler, but in the eighteenth century they gradually became the supreme power of the Maratha state. With Peshwas like Balaji Vishwanath and Bajirao I, Maratha control spread beyond the traditional geographical center of Maharashtra to Malwa, Gujarat, Bundelkhand and other parts of north and central India, and the Mughal Empire was challenged. Thus, the political power of the Mughal Empire was challenged and several major regional powers changed their political and military alliances. The Maratha rise should not be seen only as an episode of territorial expansion, but as a re-organization of political power in post-Mughal India. At the same time, the nature of Maratha power was drastically different from the Mughal imperial system. The expansion of Maratha influence was increasingly carried out in a confederated political system in which powerful families and chiefs (Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles, Gaekwads, etc.) had a lot of territorial and political power. The Peshwa in Pune had a lot of power and prestige, but the interests of the major Maratha houses were not always in accord. The combination of such massive territorial power and political decentralization was both powerful and vulnerable to the Peshwa. It gave the Marathas power across a large geographical area and made coordination of political action even more difficult. The Battle of Panipat in 1761 was a turning point for this. Although the Marathas' defeat by Ahmad Shah Abdali temporarily halted their expansion, Maratha leadership was revived under Madhavrao I later on in the 18th century in northern India, and they played a key role in the Mughal court. This was by this time when the Marathas were in the thick of the race for political power in India. However, they were challenged not only by other Indian powers but also by the English East India Company, whose commercial interests were slowly turning to territorial and political ones. So we might assess the last phase of Peshwa power, particularly under Bajirao II, in the wider context. In 1796, Bajirao II became Peshwa at a time when the Maratha Confederacy was already in a state of intense factional competition, and his political career was a period of struggle among leading Maratha chiefs, alliances, and the rise of the East India Company. The Treaty of Bassein of 1802 is one of those which is so central. Having accepted British protection and joined a subsidiary alliance, Bajirao II was determined to regain his position as Peshwa after being removed from Pune. But the agreement had far-reaching implications beyond his immediate political interests. It deepened British involvement in Maratha affairs and led to the Second Anglo-Maratha War, and also

deepened the division among Maratha powers. The defeat of the Marathas and the breakup of Peshwa rule in India was fundamental. The significance of Bajirao II's reign has to do with the historical transition it represents. His career is not one of a single ruler for the Maratha collapse or one of a continuation in the Peshwa line of succession as a result of the previous Peshwa expansion. It is the result of structural and contingent factors: the fact that the Maratha Confederacy was a localized political entity and had many different houses, the different military technologies and strategies of the Mughal and British, diplomatic intervention by the East India Company, and the Company being more and more able to exploit the divisions between Indian states. This view is why the Treaty of Bassein was the outcome of already weak political structures of the Maratha Confederacy and the cause of British power in India. So this study looks into the role of Peshwas in Indian politics as it went from Mughal decline to British power, especially Bajirao II. Instead, the paper treats the period as a contested process involving multiple Indian political actors. The rise of Peshwas changed the distribution of power, weakened the power of the Mughal state, and established the Marathas as a major force in eighteenth-century India. Yet the political apparatus through which this power was maintained also had internal contradictions that became more and more important by the end of the century.

Research Objectives

The study's primary aims are fourfold. First, it analyses the political context surrounding the declining Mughal authority and emergence of Marathas as prominent regional power. Second, it discusses changes in the Peshwa institution and shows how the Peshwas contributed to the establishment of a political system. Third, it evaluates the political situation of Bajirao II focusing on Bassein treaty and Anglo-Maratha wars. Finally, the research assesses how internal division of the Maratha Confederacy interacted with British military expansion and diplomacy resulting in the transition from Mahratha rule to the power of British Empire.

Research Questions

The text looks into these themes:

1. What was the role of the fading Mughal authority in paving the way for Maratha power growing?
2. Ways how the Peshwas impacted the political situation in India in the 18th century?
3. Which internal political conditions caused the fall of the Maratha Confederacy before Bajirao II?
4. What were the effects of Bajirao II's choices, especially about the Treaty of Bassein, on the power dynamics between the Marathas and the British East India Company?
5. To what degree the reversal of Peshwa power was associated with the internal problems of the Marathas, as opposed to the fact of the British diplomacy and military expansion?

Methodology and Sources

This research employs qualitative historical and analytical methodology. The paper does not utilize primary sources or make extensive use of archival records, but it could include some archival materials where possible. The study depends greatly on published history, other books and scholarly works, books of history, contemporary accounts of the correspondent's day into the history as well diplomatic correspondence and treaties along with the relevant secondary

literature about the Mughal, Maratha, and colonial times. Rather than considering all the events, the paper analyzes them from a broader political perspective of the development of the political situation in the 18th and early 19th centuries in India. Special emphasis is made on the connection of political institutions, military might, diplomacy, regional rivalry and the East India Company. The paper makes distinction between structural circumstances and decisions of actors in order to ensure that such transformation of Indian politics is not attributed to the actions of individuals only.

Scope of the Study

The study is primarily conducted from the early eighteenth century to 1818 from the weakening of Mughal power and the rise of Maratha power and Peshwa rule and ends with the death of Peshwa leadership. The Peshwas' broader role in our history is the background, but we focus primarily on the later eighteenth century and the career of Bajirao II. The paper does not aim to give a complete account of every Maratha military campaign or political development. Rather, it is about those political processes that paved the way from Mughal decline to Maratha power to British rule. The central theme of the paper is that the Peshwas were not merely victims of Mughal decline but actually engaged in the reconstruction of India's political order. The Marathas' rise changed the balance of power and made the Marathas a powerful alternative to the Mughals. But political fragmentation of the Maratha Confederacy, the fact that it was still divided among the top three houses, and that it could not sustain long-term collective action were the main problems that the East India Company exploited. This was what made Bajirao II's reign more likely. His alliance with the British in the Treaty of Bassein made the divisions of the Maratha Confederacy more acute and external competition even more pronounced, and so the decline from Mughal to British power was not instantaneous but rather a slow process; it was what emerged from a long struggle between Indian and European political power that the Peshwas played, at times in a conflict that was ultimately not in their favour and sometimes against it.

2. From Mughal Decline to Maratha Ascendancy

The breakup of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century was less of a sudden period of political fragmentation. And after Aurangzeb's death the Mughal political system was weakened by succession problems, the growing autonomy of provinces, fiscal pressures, military problems and the growing independence of regional elites. The Mughal emperor still commanded a lot of symbolic power but the imperial government became increasingly unable to hold on to power in the subcontinent. The political environment was not to lose the Mughal state but to redistribute power from the provincial governors to military elites, regional dynasties and new states. The Maratha polity had already become strong in military and political terms under Shivaji and his time, but the eighteenth century saw a fundamental reorganization in Maratha power. The Peshwa became more powerful in the Maratha political system (Balaji Vishwanath and his successors), as military expansion as well as diplomacy, revenue arrangement and political negotiations enabled the Peshwas to expand their control over the whole state of Maharashtra. Their rise occurred with the Mughal Empire failing to control its provinces and the Marathas were able to become a major power in the central and northern part of India.

Expansion of Maratha Political Power

The early eighteenth century was a turbulent time for the Mughal Empire and the Marathas. The Marathas were both opponents to Mughal authority and participants in the political system that remained under the control of the Empire. The recognition that Maratha claims to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi were recognized as great because it gave the Marathas a legal and financial basis for their rise. These arrangements show that the rising Maratha power did not only subvert Mughal authority but was more and more taking over, negotiating and exercising power in the present political system. The political consolidation achieved under Peshwa Bajirao I is of particular importance. Through his military campaigns, we saw that the Maratha state had been able to project its power far beyond the Deccan. The Maratha expansion into Malwa and Bundelkhand and expansion into northern Indian politics challenged that view that political power could always be held by the Mughal court. Bajirao I's strategy was not only about territorial conquest, but also to exploit the weakening of Mughal power and establish Maratha influence over the strategically and economically important regions. His campaigns therefore formed a larger picture of the political geography of power. The Maratha advance also altered the political calculations of other regional powers. States such as Hyderabad, Mysore, Rajput kingdoms, and the emerging powers of northern India had to contend with a political environment in which Maratha military intervention increasingly became significant. The Mughal Emperor still had prestige, but political power in India was now increasingly based on alliances with regional forces. The Marathas were thus key players in the emerging multipolar political system.

Bajirao I and the Expansion of Maratha Influence

The early eighteenth century was a turbulent time for the Mughal Empire and the Marathas. The Marathas were both opponents to Mughal authority and participants in the political system that remained under the control of the Empire. The recognition that Maratha claims to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi were recognized as great because it gave the Marathas a legal and financial basis for their rise. These arrangements show that the rising Maratha power did not only subvert Mughal authority but was more and more taking over, negotiating and exercising power in the present political system. The political consolidation achieved under Peshwa Bajirao I is of particular importance. Through his military campaigns, we saw that the Maratha state had been able to project its power far beyond the Deccan. The Maratha expansion into Malwa and Bundelkhand and expansion into northern Indian politics challenged that view that political power could always be held by the Mughal court. Bajirao I's strategy was not only about territorial conquest, but also to exploit the weakening of Mughal power and establish Maratha influence over the strategically and economically important regions. His campaigns therefore formed a larger picture of the political geography of power. The Maratha advance also altered the political calculations of other regional powers. States such as Hyderabad, Mysore, Rajput kingdoms, and the emerging powers of northern India had to contend with a political environment in which Maratha military intervention increasingly became significant. The Mughal Emperor still had prestige, but political power in India was now increasingly based on alliances with regional forces. The Marathas were thus key players in the emerging multipolar political system.

The Maratha Confederacy and the Problem of Political Cohesion

The Maratha Confederacy was both a strength and a limitation of the Maratha political system. Because its structure was so flexible, it was possible for different Maratha chiefs to expand in different areas at the same time. The Peshwa could exercise a broad political influence, while powerful chiefs had a strong hold over their regions. This arrangement served us well when political power was fragmented and alliances could change fast. The confederate structure, however, also made it difficult to have a unified political strategy. The interests of the most powerful Maratha houses were often determined by territorial matters, revenue interests, personal rivalries, and competition for political power. The Peshwa's authority was not only a matter of a formal position but also alliances with those powerful groups. As a result, Maratha military power was large, but not as institutionalized as it might have been, and the Maratha military power could not have been consistently directed at a central party at the top. Maratha political expansion should not be thought of as a pillar of a centralized Maratha empire. The Peshwas had considerable power, but their authority was based on a political network of semi-autonomous chiefs and regional interests. The system would work well when strong leadership and common external challenges brought cooperation. It became far more fragile when competition was more intense.

Panipat and the Reconstruction of Maratha Power

The Third Battle of Panipat in 1761 proved to be a severe setback for Maratha ambitions in North India and the Maratha political power lost a great deal of its military and political strength at a time when Maratha power was weak outside the Deccan. It also showed the limitations of carrying out extensive military operations in turbulent northern landscapes as well. But Panipat did not destroy Maratha power forever. Peshwa Madhavrao I was instrumental in the rebuilding of Maratha political strength after he took power. His administration solidified the Maratha state and generated new military and political activity again. In the later eighteenth century, Maratha power was back in northern India and Maratha chiefs were more in control of their territory. The recovery after Panipat is of great importance that shows how the Maratha political system is still strong in the face of defeat. At the same time, the post-Panipat reconstruction consolidated the confederate character of Maratha politics. The big chiefs were increasingly autonomous and held political power. The Peshwa was still the principal political power in the Maratha system, but it was a powerful source of authority that depended on difficult negotiations with powerful subordinates or allies. This created a paradox at the heart of Maratha power: territorial expansion increased the political power of chiefdoms but might have also weakened the power of the Peshwa to make strategic decisions together.

Marathas and the Changing Balance of Power in India

By the late eighteenth century, the political order that developed after the Mughal decline was even more multipolar. No single Indian power had uncontested power in the subcontinent. The Mughal emperor continued to be a source of political legitimacy, but practical power was mostly shared between the various states and military institutions. The Marathas were the most powerful actors in this system, but they were up against Mysore, Hyderabad, Sikhs, regional states, and increasingly the English East India Company. The East India Company was different

from many of its Indian competitors in one significant respect. Although it began as a commercial enterprise, its military and political capacity grew considerably in the eighteenth century. The Company's victories in Bengal and the increasing territorial revenues gave it the financial resources for sustained expansion of its military effort. Its political strategy also intensified warfare with diplomacy, treaty-making, alliances, and intervention in disputes between Indian rulers, and this was becoming a new political reality in which military power was very much a function of financial capacity, diplomatic strategy, and institutional organization. The Marathas were thus amongst the most powerful political formations in India in the last decades of the eighteenth century, but they did so in a competitive environment. So the transition from Mughal rule to Maratha rise was incomplete and contested. The Peshwas had done quite well in turning the weakening of the Mughal power into a chance of expansion for Maratha power, but not in the form of a single centralized government that would have served as a permanent replacement for Mughal rule. Instead, they helped set in motion a new political order based on competing regional centers of power and negotiated power. By the time Bajirao II became Peshwa in 1796, the fundamental problem was not how to expand Maratha power and control. It was how to hold political cohesion among increasingly powerful Maratha chiefs in the face of the East India Company. The political system created over the past decades contained both the reasons for Maratha strength and vulnerability. Bajirao II inherited this complex political system when the balance of power in India was beginning to shift decisively.

3. The Peshwa State and the Transformation of Indian Politics

As a result, the Peshwas took over the political system of the Maratha polity and the political system as a whole in eighteenth-century India. And the Peshwa office became the seat of political decision making in the Maratha kingdom. This wasn't just a transition of power from the Chhatrapati to the Peshwa; it was a change of political system which was becoming more and more dependent on military leadership and revenue collection, diplomacy and territorial administration. So the Peshwa power was to come to power and to it was to a large extent the origin of a new political structure in which political leadership was centralized in Pune and the Maratha chiefs had much more freedom and power in the Maratha region. And the Peshwas were the ones who were the most influential in the combination of military expansion and revenue extraction and political negotiation. Maratha influence was not only in terms of direct territorial administration. Given the rights to collect chauth and sardeshmukhi, tribute arrangements, military protection and political alliances, the Marathas were able to have authority in areas that were not necessarily part of a single central administrative system. This model allowed the Peshwas to spread Maratha power over a wide area (and, of course, to be able to cut down on administrative costs associated with direct governance).

Political Authority and the Maratha Confederacy

The expansion of Peshwa power led to the establishment of a confederate political system. The major Maratha houses managed to acquire vast territories and military power but they were not as powerful as government from the capital and the emperor. The Scindias managed to have a huge area in northern India particularly around Gwalior and the Mughal court, Holkars were influential in Malwa, Bhonsles had their base at Nagpur, and the Gaekwads were established in Gujarat. The Maratha houses were linked to the larger Maratha political system but their

relationship with the Peshwa was not that of provincial governors and an emperor. A Peshwa was still the supreme political authority in terms of Maratha political issues, but each chief had the freedom to administer his or her territories and to pursue his political aims. It was beneficial to the Marathas when they were expanding and they were able to respond in a flexible way to regional developments. But the same system of government meant problems of coordination were always to follow. The interests of the Peshwa and the major Maratha chiefs did not always agree. Friction over territory, revenue, political appointments and influence at Pune could lead to rival alliances. As long as there was a strong Peshwa in charge of these relationships, the confederacy could become a good political system. But when central leadership weakened, the independence of the major houses may become a source of fragmentation.

Diplomacy as an Instrument of Maratha Power

Branch expansion alone cannot explain the rise of the Peshwas. Diplomacy was just as important for establishing Maratha influence. The Peshwas operated in a political climate in which alliances were fluid and political legitimacy was negotiated as well as not imposed. Cooperation with regional rulers, intervention in succession disputes, recognition of political claims, and revenue rights agreements gave the Marathas the opportunity for them to grow without having to rely on long-standing warfare as a primary source of power. The Maratha relationship with the declining Mughal Empire is a good example of such an effect. The Mughal emperor was no less powerful as a symbol (that is, as the power of imperial rule was diminished) for Maratha leaders to challenge Mughal power and to seek approval from the Mughal political system. The Maratha influence in northern India proved that political legitimacy and practical power were not always the same. And that combination of military pressure and political negotiation was what led to the formation of a competitive political order. Regional powers increasingly viewed the Marathas as a major force that could influence the outcome of wars. The Peshwas thus became powerful brokers in the political struggle of eighteenth-century India, and extended their influence beyond the regions that were Maratha controlled.

Military Expansion and the Geography of Power

The military structure of the Marathas was especially well suited to the fractured political landscape of eighteenth-century India. With its flexibility, its mobility, its fast campaigns, its decentralized command and the ability to work from miles away, the Maratha armies could challenge large but less flexible armies. The Marathas had the military system under good commanders who were able to intervene in the affairs of northern and central India so many times. But the expansion of the army imposed financial and administrative hurdles, and keeping forces deployed to distant places meant reliable revenue flows and political collaboration. It was thus not easy for the Peshwa to have direct control over military commanders and revenue arrangements as the Maratha areas grew in size and as the Maratha empires grew. This is why the Maratha rise did not result in the replacement of the Mughal Empire in a single country but rather in the centralized Maratha Empire. The Peshwas had an extensive sphere of power, but political mechanisms for that power were also fragmented. And so power was not centralized but uneven, and centralized authority came from regional elites.

Internal Rivalries and the Limits of Peshwa Authority

The growing power of Maratha Chiefs made the relationship between Pune and the regionally centered Maratha power structures even more complex. The Peshwa had to find a balance between competing interests. Personal rivalries could quickly mushroom into a wider political conflict, particularly when succession or territorial control were involved. Because the confederacy was structured in such a way that powerful Chiefs had to maintain their own military and financial bases, the problem was not only individual ambition. Their ability to raise armies, collect revenues, and negotiate political agreements was an enormous bargaining power. As a result, the Peshwa could not always demand obedience as within an imperial hierarchy in the very centralized way. That structural limitation became even more relevant in the later eighteenth century. After Madhavrao I died in 1772, the Maratha political system went through periods of chaos and succession disputes and factional squabbles. The weakening of central authority attracted the big houses to take a step back and work for themselves. Though the Maratha Confederacy still had considerable military power, it was more and more dependent on temporary alliances and the personal authority of the individual leaders. The military might of the Marathas was not always cohesive, but the resources were not necessarily working under a single command structure. This distinction was even more important when the English East India Company became an enormous territorial power.

The East India Company and a New Political Challenge

What the English East India Company presented was a qualitatively different challenge to the Maratha political system. The Company became more and more influential over the next century as it moved away from being just a business and developed territorial revenues, military capabilities, and political power. It was successful in Bengal following the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the expansion of Company power and gave it a financial basis for continued military and diplomatic activity. In its business strategy, the Company would use treaties and subsidiary alliances to influence Indian states, but they would not annex their territories as quickly as they had been able. This was especially important in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when the Company had to prevent any single Indian power from becoming strong enough to challenge British interests. For the Marathas, it was a strategic dilemma. Their political system had been built around competition with other Indian powers, with generally similar interests and methods in common. The Company, however, had commercial resources, territorial taxation, military organization, diplomatic intelligence, and long-term strategic thinking. British power could exploit the divisions in the Maratha Confederacy, and also build up its own material resources.

The Peshwas at the Threshold of British Ascendancy

By the late eighteenth century Peshwas were in a paradoxical position: They were at the center of one of the most powerful political organisations in India's political system, but they were being challenged for control of the whole Maratha Confederacy. The Maratha Chiefs had strong independent resources and the East India Company was more and more able to intervene in conflicts between them. So the political environment inherited by Bajirao II in 1796 was then affected by two simultaneous developments. Internally the Maratha Confederacy was

becoming more and more competitive among its leading houses, and a lack of collective political discipline was being felt in the community. The Peshwa, therefore, faced a totally different political situation than the Peshwas of previous Peshwas such as Bajirao I. According to Bajirao I, Maratha expansion was the primary force determining the balance of power in the way that was to be played out. Bajirao II inherited a system in which the preservation of Maratha political unity was as much more important as the expansion of territory. So his decisions can be evaluated in terms of the confederate system, the ambitions of the major Maratha Chiefs and the Company's increasing strategic power. The transformation that the Peshwas brought about was, therefore, very much in danger. They had played an important role in establishing one of the most influential political formations in eighteenth-century India and were instrumental in dispelling the practical power of Mughal authority. At the same time, the decentralized political structure in which Maratha power was exercised limited the development of a stable centralized state. This struggle between vast power yet little cohesion was one of the major problems of Maratha politics by the time Bajirao II took office. It was in this context that his political career started and the Peshwa state and the British power became the decisive factor.

4. Bajirao II and the Changing Political Landscape

The accession of Bajirao II as Peshwa occurred in 1796 and signified the commencement of the last stage of Peshwa power. His reign coincided with times when the Maratha Confederacy was a strong political and military force, but had already lost some of its internal cohesion. The power of the Peshwa had increasingly come down to negotiations with the powerful Maratha chiefs, while the English East India Company was consolidating its power through military means and diplomacy. Thus, Bajirao II did not inherit a declining power, but a politically disintegrating system with a substantial potential that still had to coordinate.

Bajirao II's political position was largely shaped by the conditions surrounding his accession. The death of Sawai Madhavrao in 1795 resulted in a succession crisis and brought Bajirao II to power in the environment of fierce rivalry between influential Maratha factions. Thus his authority was challenged from the very outset. Unlike the previous Peshwas, who enjoyed a considerable authority over the political system of the Marathas, Bajirao II faced an environment where the leading confederate chiefs had great military and territorial resources at their command.

Political Rivalries within the Maratha Confederacy

The main issue facing Bajirao II was the relationship between the Peshwa and the major Maratha houses. The Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles, and Gaekwads had developed into powerful political entities whose interests could not always be served by the Pune authority. The Scindia family had particularly powerful influence on the Peshwa's court in the last years of the eighteenth century. So the political struggle at Pune was more than a personal dispute between the leaders. It was an institutional problem of the Maratha Confederacy: the Peshwa had no mechanism to coordinate the independent military and financial resources of the major chiefs. The Peshwa was the formal head of the confederacy, but his power was dependent on political alliances. Thus he relied on factionalism much more in order to keep Bajirao II in power. As a result, he had to deal with powerful Maratha leaders with whom he sometimes fought for his

own positions. Daulat Rao Scindia, as a rival of the Holkars, became particularly important. The defeat of the Scindia forces by Yashwantrao Holkar in 1802 and Holkar's advance towards Pune drastically altered the political position of Bajirao II. Now faced with the loss of his capital and the imminent threat to his authority, the Peshwa sought external support.

The Treaty of Bassein, 1802

The Treaty of Bassein, signed on 31 December 1802, marked a turning point in the history of the Maratha Confederacy and Peshwa - East India Company relations. Bajirao II accepted British protection and agreed to organize a subsidiary force. The Company promised to restore him to Peshwa. The treaty was, on the ground, an easy political decision for Bajirao II. He had lost his dominance in Maratha society, he lost Pune, and he lost power to Holkar. In the event, Britain even gave him the opportunity to regain the power to have his office. But the short-term political advantage had come at the cost of a profound loss of the Peshwa's strategic independence. The importance of the Treaty of Bassein is that of balancing immediate political survival against long-term sovereignty. Bajirao II sought to use British power against his Maratha rivals, and so the agreement laid out the Company as a formal basis for more direct involvement in Maratha affairs. The treaty altered the balance of power as it brought the Peshwa - the nominal head of the Maratha Confederacy - into a political relationship with the Company which was very different from the old lines of alliance of Indian powers. The treaty also had consequences for the other major Maratha chiefs. Scindia and Bhonsle saw the growing British influence over the Peshwa as a threat to their political independence. They did not see the treaty as a good political settlement of the Maratha political order, but as a further expansion of British power. Such tensions were at the heart of the Second Anglo-Maratha War.

The Second Anglo-Maratha War and the Expansion of British Influence

The Second Anglo-Maratha War showed the consequences of the division of the country caused by the Treaty of Bassein. British forces faced the armies of the major Maratha powers - Scindia and the Bhonsle ruler of Nagpur. The war produced significant British military victories and strengthened Company power in many strategically important territories. The war also showed clearly the difference in political strategy of the Marathas and the Company. The major Maratha kings continued to act in their individual political and territorial interests, while the Company went back to a cooperative strategy of diplomacy, military operations, and territorial acquisition. The imbalance is not just a matter of battlefield strength. It is rooted in the differences in political organization, financial resources, strategic coordination, and ability to sustain long-term military campaigns. But the Second Anglo-Maratha War should not be seen as a sign that the Marathas had been politically irrelevant. The British had never lessened their ability to resist them so much, and the conflict showed that the large military resources that were available to the Maratha powers of the day weren't all concentrated in the same place.

Bajirao II and the Politics of Survival

The political life of Bajirao II shows this Peshwa system's ever more difficult choices in the political context. His dependence on British support is not the only symptom of the Maratha political system's weakness. Had the Peshwa not been able to have full power over the chiefdoms without debate, the political context in the Treaty of Bassein would have been very

different. British intervention only deepened the divisions already existing within the confederacy. What is the difference between internal fragmentation and external intervention and how Bajirao II's role was one of this kind? It would have been inaccurate to write him as the man who "invited" British rule in India. British expansion had already been going on for decades before the Treaty of Bassein and the Company had already built up substantial territorial and military power. At the same time, the treaty's effects would not be discounted from Bajirao II's political calculus. If he had made the decision, the Company had an opportunity to intervene directly in the internal political affairs of the Maratha Confederacy. His initial aim was to retain the Peshwa office, but the method he used to accomplish it weakened the independence of the office. British military assistance brought him back to Pune and he had to depend on it more than the Company. The Peshwa was now a political authority whose survival was in the hands of the British and not in the hands of the Maratha Confederacy.

The Third Anglo-Maratha War and the End of Peshwa Rule

The temporary arrangement between Bajirao II and the Company did not last long in terms of political stability. But the friction was only exacerbated as British interference increasingly curtailed the political independence of the Marathas. The final rupture occurred during the Third Anglo-Maratha War of 1817–1818. Bajirao II and others in the Maratha community protested British supremacy but the Marathas were unable to establish a coherent resistance. The Peshwa armies were defeated and Peshwa political power was dissolved in 1818. Bajirao II surrendered to the British and he lived under British rule at Bithoor. The chief office that had been at the center of Maratha political power was abolished and the Company's control of most of the remaining Maratha territories was consolidated. The end of Peshwa rule was more than a loss of one political office. It was the collapse of a political system that had played a central role in the evolution of post-Mughal India. The Marathas had made use of the diminishing Mughal power to establish a large sphere of influence and by 1818 the divisions in that system had provided the Company with a chance to develop an entirely different kind of power.

Reassessing Bajirao II

On the one hand Bajirao II is in a gray area in history of the Maratha Confederacy. But he was the last Peshwa in history and history should not be confused with the chronological connection to the latter. His political choices had been restricted by decades of rebellion. The independence of the big Maratha houses, succession disputes, factional politics and the absence of a central command structure preceded his power. His reliance on British military help and acceptance of the Treaty of Bassein changed the relationship between Peshwa and the Company. The treaty did not create British power in itself but it accelerated a process of British power becoming more and more embedded in Maratha politics. His later refusal to cooperate with the British shows that his political career is not in a sense a union with the Company but it is a series of ways to evolve and become free when the Peshwa's power was under siege. Bajirao II should thus be understood as an actor and a product of the political situation of his time. His reign is where the structural weaknesses of the Maratha political order and the strategic growth of British power merged. So much more the significance of Bajirao II is that he is not just a Peshwa. His political career offers a window into the larger road from Maratha ascendancy to British dominance. The Treaty of Bassein, the Anglo-Maratha wars and Peshwa power were

all the evidence that British power was not only a result of military supremacy but was also a product of diplomacy, political power, Indian factionalism and institutional weaknesses in the existing regional order.

5. From Maratha Dominance to British Ascendancy

A transition from Maratha supremacy to British control was not a sudden event, but one that came as an inevitable consequence of the decline of a single political dynasty. The transition was a result of a long-term evolution in India in which the weakening of Mughal power, the rise of Maratha power, the fragmentation of the Maratha Confederacy, and the rise of the English East India Company were all part of the dynamics. The Peshwas were at the forefront of such an evolution. They had grown up as a major player in the redistribution of power following the weakening of Mughal authority, and the political structure of Maratha power was eventually more and more at the mercy of internal rivalry and external influences. So the Peshwa era is a key moment in the transition from Indian to British rule. The Peshwas succeeded in expanding Maratha power over a large part of the subcontinent without establishing a very central political system. Their success challenged the power of the Mughal Empire and also showed that power in eighteenth-century India could be organized around regional and confederate structures instead of one centralized authority. But the absence of strong institutional mechanisms to coordinate the major Maratha houses limited the Confederacy's ability to respond collectively to the increasingly organized and expansionist East India Company.

The Decline of Maratha Political Cohesion

The biggest weakness of the late Maratha political system was not an absence of military resources but coordination of those resources and political ambitions. At the end of the eighteenth century the major Maratha houses had a lot of land, revenues, armies, and political ambitions. Their autonomy was a source of strength when different Maratha leaders could manage them all at once, but it became a liability when the British expansion had to be given a unified response. The Peshwa's authority was also becoming more dependent on personal relationships and political negotiation. And rather than a mechanism that could automatically take over the resources of the entire Confederacy, the Peshwa was stuck in constant negotiations with powerful chiefs. It was particularly clear in the political crisis of Bajirao II, when Scindia and Holkar fought a fight to see if rivalry in the Maratha system was more immediate and politically significant than an external power. But the fragmentation should not be seen as a sign that the Maratha Confederacy has been sidelined as a political force. Its components were still powerful in the end. The problem was that the Confederacy could not translate the strength of each of its members into a collective force. British strategy increasingly exploited this gap between the military resources of the Marathas and their political cohesion.

British Diplomacy and the Politics of Intervention

In the course of all this British power took place through diplomacy so that it could be consolidated in India, through treaties, subsidiary alliances, political guarantees and involvement in succession and factional wars. These were the methods through which the Company could have an impact on Indian states before directly incorporating them. The Treaty

of Bassein was of particular importance for the Peshwa because it put him in a position of dependence with the Company. The Peshwa was not merely another regional ruler to join an alliance but the nominal leader of the Maratha Confederacy. The British in the Peshwa case therefore provided the Company with a new political role in the Marathas' internal problems. So the treaty had broader effects than just the immediate restoration of Bajirao II. It changed the political calculations of all the other Maratha heads and was one of the reasons for the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Maratha War. And British diplomacy had essentially turned an internal Maratha fight into a global one and the Company's power in politics and military situation was now in the center of it. This is a very important feature of British expansion. The Company did not always defeat Indian powers through direct conquest at the start of a conflict. Often it entered into political disputes as an ally and used the resulting position to impose broader strategic conditions. So the political fragmentation of Indian states became a resource which the Company could exploit.

The Military Dimension of British Ascendancy

British supremacy was also supported by immense military and financial advantages. The Company acquired a great deal of territorial revenue, in particular in eastern India, and made it easy to sustain large standing forces. Its armies were beginning to benefit from European-style organization, standardized training, artillery and logistics. These advantages did not make British forces invincible but they allowed the Company to keep going at large military campaigns for years. The Marathas had a pretty good military presence but were divided into a number of political centers. Different chiefs had their own forces and strategic priorities. The lack of one coherent command structure was becoming a bigger problem when faced with an opponent who was able to concentrate his forces against individual Maratha powers. That is the case in the Anglo-Maratha conflict and British forces were able to exploit the divergences in leadership between Maratha leaders and reached different political deals. Military victories were thus reinforced by diplomatic agreements that prevented Maratha powers from presenting a united front. The Marathas' defeat should not be interpreted as a matter of technological superiority or battlefield incompetence. It was the manifestation of a larger imbalance in military organization, financial resources, strategic coordination, diplomatic flexibility and political cohesion.

Bajirao II and the Treaty of Bassein: Reassessing Responsibility

The role played by Bajirao II is crucial because the Treaty of Bassein has often been seen as a decisive moment in the collapse of Maratha independence. That treaty had much historical significance is no doubt the reason that the Company had such a good connection with the Peshwa and hence a good rationale for British military intervention in Maratha affairs. But to blame the subsequent collapse of the Maratha Confederacy entirely on Bajirao II is to oversimplify the history. The treaty was in itself one of the consequences of the Peshwa's uncertain political position. By this time Bajirao II had lost control over Pune to Yashwantrao Holkar. His application for British assistance was a reflection of the very limited ability of Bajirao II to gain his position through the current Maratha politics. In fact the treaty should be viewed at two levels. At the immediate level it was a political action taken by Bajirao II to retain power. The British entered the Maratha world with the internal balance of power so

deteriorated as to make outside assistance attractive to one of the main actors. That distinction is important to note. Bajirao II made a decision that had consequences, but he did not make his decision in a political vacuum as he was bound up with the consequences of his choices and was forced to do so by circumstances that had developed before his accession. What makes Bajirao II so important today is not so much for the exoneration as for the characterization of him as the architect of Maratha decline.

The Third Anglo-Maratha War and the Final Defeat

The final clash between the Peshwa and the Company resulted from the growing conflict between nominal Maratha sovereignty and increasing British leadership. With the Company taking over the political world around the Peshwa, it became increasingly difficult to achieve meaningful independence. Bajirao II eventually tried to come to the challenge of British rule, and the Third Anglo-Maratha War occurred in 1817–1818. The war illustrated the transformation of the political balance since the times of the Peshwa. The Marathas still had big military power, but they were unable to coordinate resistance. British forces, on the other hand, had many years of experience in Indian warfare and had a lot of money and military force behind them. The defeat of Peshwa forces resulted in the Peshwa power being abolished in 1818. The abolishing of Peshwa power was a big political watershed. The Company had ripped the Maratha political power system of authority away from Maratha governance for most of the eighteenth century. The Company had effectively dismantled the central institution through which Maratha political power had been organized for most of the eighteenth century.

From a Multipolar Order to British Paramountcy

So the transition from Mughal decline to British rise is to say a transition from one form of political plurality to another more hierarchical kind of system. The eighteenth century was marked by the erosion of centralised Mughal control and the emergence of a few local powers. The Marathas were most successful among them in projecting power over all of India. Their expansion helped to undermine the Mughal political system. However, the British gradually turned this multipolar world into one ruled by the Company. Unlike the Marathas whose power was spread among a confederacy of local leaders, the Company developed a system for coordinating military and political decisions across its territories. The combination of direct territorial control and indirect influence over neighboring states enabled it to establish a kind of paramountcy even if it failed to eliminate every Indian ruling family, as is now apparent. This change shows that British power was partly due to the political structures that had developed during the post-Mughal period. It was already in a political environment in which regional competition and alliances were changing and sovereignty was contested. British expansion did not create this; it took advantage of it and reorganized it. The Peshwas are therefore in an interesting position in this historical transition. They were the main forces that took the effective political monopoly out of the Mughal Empire but the decentralized system through which they exercised power was hard to hold up against the Company's more centralized strategic organization. So their political success and their eventual failure were closely related.

Historical Significance of the Peshwa Transition

The Peshwas' story shows that political decline does not only mean the collapse of one dynasty and the rise of another. Between Mughal decline and British power, political power, revenue systems, and diplomatic relations were restructured and the Peshwas were active players in this process. Their rise showed how an indigenous political entity could stand up to a growing colonial power that had military force and financial and diplomatic resources and would take power in the subcontinent. The final phase of this contradiction is the reign of Bajirao II. His efforts to retain the Peshwa title ultimately led to its weakening when British assistance was indispensable for his political survival. British intervention increased with the Treaty of Bassein and the Anglo-Maratha wars were gradually diminishing Maratha power. But reasons for this were more than just Bajirao II and extended over the long-term fragmentation of political authority within the Confederacy. The transition from Maratha dominance to British power was a product of interaction not of simply succession. The British did not enter into an empty political space left by Mughal decline; they entered a competitive environment in which the Marathas had already become a dominant force. British victory resulted from their ability to exploit the weaknesses of that political order while building superior mechanisms of military, financial, and diplomatic coordination.

6. Discussion: The Peshwas, Bajirao II, and the Reshaping of Indian Politics

The political history of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century India cannot be summarised through a simple narrative of Mughal decline and British conquest. Between these two developments was a long-term political rivalry in which indigenous powers were in a contest to determine the distribution of power. The Peshwas were among the most important players in this. The rise of the Marathas in this period transformed them from a weak regional power to a powerful power in northern and central India and their decline eventually led to the rise of the East India Company as the dominant political power. The Peshwas' history is one of indigenous state formation and one of the most important stages in the British rise to power. It is worth stating that the Peshwas are not just external actors of the post-Mughal political order and the Peshwas in this study are active actors of the post-Mughal world. They were not only an outcome of Mughal weakness. In military campaigns and revenue arrangements, diplomatic negotiations and political interference, the Peshwas were consciously expanding Maratha power and they achieved it. They proved that political power in eighteenth-century India did not remain in the hands of the Mughal emperor as it had been in the past and the political authority of the government of the country became in the hands of the local power sector and the symbolic authority of the emperor.

The Peshwas as Agents of Political Transformation

One of the Peshwas' greatest achievements was changing the geography of power politics. Under their leadership, Maratha influence became more widespread from the Deccan to Malwa, Gujarat, Bundelkhand, and northern India. The Marathas would become more and more involved in the Mughal court and regional states' politics. This development totally altered the balance of power. The Peshwa system proved that political authority could be

exercised in forms other than territorial administration as well. Revenue claims, tribute, military protection, political alliances, and settlement agreements enabled the Marathas to have influence over land in regions that were not contained in one single state. This flexibility was one of the sources of Maratha power in particular. But this model also had its flaws. The increasing Maratha influence strengthened the major regional leaders in it. The Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles, and Gaekwads all built their own territorial and military bases and became more autonomous political actors. Thus, the very process that increased Maratha power also complicated the consolidation of Peshwa authority.

Was the Maratha Confederacy an Empire?

The Maratha Confederacy needs to be taken into account. To call it a centralized empire is to ignore the significant autonomy enjoyed by the aristocracy and independent states in it (and in our opinion the lack of independence is a huge understatement). The Peshwa was the central political power; the powerful chiefs were in control of their territories and military resources. The unity of the Maratha Confederacy was dependent on negotiation, personal relationships, common interests and the ability of the Peshwa to balance competing parties. And this structure worked well in expansion times: The military and political aims of different Maratha leaders could be pursued in different regions and the Confederacy could occupy a wide geographic space. But when there was a joint external threat to the Marathas, it was a weakness for them to have the same flexibility. The central question at the time was not whether the Marathas had enough military power. They clearly did. The problem was whether that strength could be turned into sustained collective political action. By the time of Bajirao II, the answer was more and more negative.

Bajirao II: Cause or Consequence of Maratha Decline?

Bajirao II in historical interpretation should be taken with care. In the last years of the Peshwa's reign he was at the end of Peshwa power, and his acceptance of the Treaty of Bassein had a terrible impact. But it would be a mistake to judge him as the cause of Maratha decline purely by the political problems he experienced. The political problems of Bajirao II were not his alone but had to do with the central Maratha chiefs' independence, factional rivalry, succession disputes and the fight for control of the Peshwa that had already developed over the decades. Bajirao II entered this political world at a time when the Peshwa's legal and institutional authority was already weakening in this world. Yet his decision-making was important. The Treaty of Bassein was a watershed moment in which the Maratha Confederacy's internal crisis had turned into the opportunity for direct British intervention. Bajirao II chose British support because it was the best course of action that could have his political vulnerability addressed instantly. But the same decision also undercut the independence he fought for in the end to preserve it. Bajirao II can therefore be considered an actor as well as a product of structural weakness. He made choices that accelerated the decline of Peshwa sovereignty but those choices were conditioned by a political system in which his ability to act independently had already been severely constrained.

Treaty of Bassein as a Turning Point

The Treaty of Bassein deserves special mention for its impact on the political landscape beyond the restoration of Bajirao II to Pune. As the Peshwa was placed under British protection, it also changed the relationship between the Company and Maratha politics. British diplomacy also exposed the internal wars that were being fought. The Company did not have to defeat the entire Maratha Confederacy before getting in its business. Instead, it could enter through the political vulnerability of one of its most important institutions. Once in the Maratha political system, the British influence could grow through military pressure and subsequent agreements that would grow and grow. The treaty thus illustrates the interrelationship of internal fragmentation and external expansion. British influence was effective partly because Maratha political actors were divided. But British intervention deepened those divisions by changing the balance between the most powerful Maratha houses. In this sense, the Treaty of Bassein should be viewed as a catalyst for and not as a mere diplomatic event in an already unstable political milieu.

Why Did British Power Prevail?

The ultimate British victory over the Marathas is not a single factor. It was necessary to have good military organization, good political intelligence and good diplomacy, good institutions and good institutional continuity. The Company was able to use the money it had amassed over the years to finance its expanding territories. It developed a very sophisticated diplomatic system in which it could talk to individual Indian rulers and exploit rival political parties' divergences. The Marathas were strong military forces and had great territorial resources. Their defeat is not simply a matter of military inferiority: the real difference was the ability to coordinate political and military resources in a coherent long-term strategy for the long run. The Company's coordination of political and military resources and the Company's ability to balance war and diplomacy was one of the most important. Military victories could be consolidated through treaties and treaties could also facilitate further political involvement in the longer term to be made in the future. This led to a whole process of expansion. Every successful action improved the financial and strategic position of the Company and made any future interventions easier. The Maratha Confederacy, on the other hand, had a hard time converting short-term alliances into long-term cooperation. At one time, leaders of rival chiefs could unite against one another and fight one another at another. Such political flexibility was advantageous in the eighteenth-century regional context but problematic in the context of an expanding colonial power.

From Indigenous Political Competition to Colonial Paramountcy

The transition to British supremacy can be described as a transformation in the nature of political competition. Previous contests between Indian powers were over territory, revenue, succession, prestige, and regional influence. The Company's growth meant a new political actor whose commercial interests had become a permanent territorial and imperial project. The Company did not emerge from the existing Indian politics. It was dependent heavily on Indian allies, soldiers, bankers, administrators, political intermediaries, and existing revenue collection systems. So British power did not simply extend itself to the passive Indian society.

It arose from the relationships with existing political institutions and conflicts. This view also challenges the notion of a simple historical transition from “Mughal rule” to “British rule.” The eighteenth century was one of political experimentation and competition. The Marathas, Mysore, Hyderabad, Sikh powers, regional states, and the Company all participated in this dynamic world. The Peshwas were the most successful in attacking the remnants of Mughal rule, but they were ultimately unable to stop another political group from taking advantage of the broken order.

Broader Historical Implications

The Peshwa experience makes it clear to differentiate between territorial expansion and political consolidation. The Marathas were able to spread more and more across the region, but not more centralized political power. This confederated leadership system allowed them to spread so quickly and the political center was always dependent on regional elites. That is why the Peshwas’ decline is in no way indicative of the Maratha political power and on the contrary the British saw it as a great strategic problem. The Anglo-Maratha wars were one of the most important wars in the Company’s expansion across India. The need to defeat or neutralize the Marathas shows the extent to which their political and military significance is. The British victory was not the replacement of a weak regional power by a stronger one; it was the result of a long struggle between different types of political organization. The Marathas were built on a confederate system based on powerful regional houses, but the Company increasingly had an even more centralized system of military and financial decision making. The result was to see how the latter had become more and more attractive in the face of continuous rivalry. For the Peshwas is the contrast of the two sides of India becoming politically involved. They were instrumental in weakening the practical power of the Mughal Empire and in making the Marathas a powerful political force. At the same time the decentralized nature of the Maratha Confederacy prevented the establishment of a coherent political power to resist the Company in the long run. Bajirao II’s reign brought those contradictions to their forefront. His reliance on British help was because he was already politically vulnerable at the time and the Treaty of Bassein made the expansion of British power even more obvious. His opposition to the Treaty of Bassein only showed that his political aims can’t be boiled down to a simple cooperation with the British in the end. Rather, his career is a reflection of what it is like for a ruler in a government of a leader who tries to maintain power in a fragmented political system under siege by an ever-growing external force. It is also a lesson that the British power in British ascendancy is not only that of Indian political disunity and British institutionalization. The Peshwas didn’t simply “make way” for British rule, and British rule didn’t just come from military conquest. The transition was a product of indigenous political competition, regional state formation, diplomatic alliances, military conflict, financial resources and changing notions of sovereignty. So the Mughal transition from independence to British rule should be understood as a contested political transition in which the Peshwas were at the center. The rise of the Peshwas was one of the most important challenges to the post-Mughal order; their collapse signalled the end of the Maratha political independence. So Bajirao II’s career is the intersection of the two and its development is a key part of our understanding of how the political possibilities of eighteenth-century India became as much British as possible.

7. Conclusion

This situation led to the Peshwas and the Maratha Confederacy being considered the key characters in the politics of 18th century India. While Peshwas gained strength during the decline of the Mughal Empire and established their zones of influence at the same time, their contribution to the growth of Maratha power was very significant: through wars and military campaigns, collecting taxes, and exercising its influence over the affairs of other states, the Peshwas transformed Maratha power from a regional force into a political power in Central and Northern India. However, the rise of the Peshwas did not go unnoticed by the Mughals and challenged the authority of the Mughal Empire, thus making the political processes in the country more and more multipolar despite the political fragmentation of the region since the power was often divided among different regional players. However, the political success the Peshwas achieved could be seen as a paradox, as the Maratha influence was derived from the significant economic and military power of powerful regional noble families, who were interested in regional affairs but limited the power of Peshwas at the same time.

The example of Bajirao II proves to be the most representative of this situation. The Peshwa position was being taken during a period in which factional battles and particularism of the big Maratha chiefs were weakening the political center of the power. Therefore, the accession and political efforts of Bajirao II cannot be viewed in isolation from institutional developments that occurred in the last few decades. His requests for assistance from the British are, in fact, a consequence of the Maratha political system being weak as a whole. Nevertheless, the Treaty of Bassein in 1802 made a difference. Bajirao II was using the British protection to obtain a political position, especially after he had to leave Pune. Thus, the treaty was a means for solving the immediate political crisis, but factually it represents greater British influence in the Maratha politics from the historical point of view. The alliance between the Peshwa and the East India Company changed the conflict within the Maratha society into the international struggle for power inside the Indian subcontinent.

The Maratha Empire still maintained impressive military capabilities proving that their collapse was not merely due to military incapacity. However, they were now riddled with issues of political fragmentation and inter-coordination among numerous Maratha states. On the contrary, the East India Company was built on a military foundation as well as a network of alliances, funds, and intelligence that helped to exploit the inequalities among various Indian states. Thus, British domination was achieved due to military capabilities and political wisdom rather than battle. The defeat of Bajirao II and the dissolving of the Peshwa powers in 1818 marked the closing of the great period of the Maratha political history, but it would be unreasonable to say that the Peshwa had experienced absolute political failure. They definitely changed the political map of India by posing a challenge to the Mughal administration and achieving regional domination.

The history of Bajirao II is, therefore, much more complicated than just being a story of failure. He did not simply cause the fall of Maratha power, nor was he the victim of chance. While his actions in the political field, including the signing of the Treaty of Bassein, mattered greatly, the British played an even more crucial role of being the faster interveners. It has to be noted that the decision-making was done in the context of existing conditions in India before Bajirao II gained administrative power. The career of Bajirao II can, thus, be seen as the interplay of

personal agency and structural constraints. The Peshawas were vital to the process of political fragmentation that made the old Mughal empire weaker and thus contributed to the expansion of Maratha power. However, Maratha power had a regional nature which made it vulnerable to colonization. Both had political roles and were part of a political world that had contradictions, and the contradictions of that world benefited British expansion. Their story proves that British domination did not just set in after the decline of the Mughal Empire. It shows that the Indians were engaged in a political process with their own goals in mind and took care of their future. The actions of Bajirao II are at the center of these developments and the conflict between the Maratha Confederacy and the East India Company. The downfall of the Peshwa in 1818 did not mean the end of a ruler but the end of a political system that changed the political picture of India after the Mughals. Thus, the transition from the fall of the Mughal Empire to British domination is the transition from one type of political order to another political order. The Peshwas played one of the key roles in weakening the Mughal Empire and in establishing Maratha rule in India, while the British turned this set of authority into more hierarchical colonial order.

The significance of Bajirao II in the study of political decisions in the context of a thoroughly divided indigenous system is stated because it proves that political decisions go beyond the immediate fight, resulting in a consequence that may have more far-reaching implications. His reign represents a moment when the final transformation of the Indian politics of the 18th century and the British rule is observed in the beginning of the 19th century.

References

I've standardised the entries into APA 7 style, corrected author-name formatting, and added missing publication details where they can be stated reliably. One important correction: "Jadunath Sarkar, J." should be "Sarkar, J." in APA ordering.

References

1. Bayly, C. A. (1988). *Indian society and the making of the British Empire*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Choksey, R. D. (1951). *A history of British diplomacy at the court of the Peshwas, 1786–1818*. University of Poona.
3. Cooper, R. G. S. (2003). *The Anglo-Maratha campaigns and the contest for India: The struggle for control of the South Asian military economy*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Datta, K. K. (1970). *A social history of the Indian people, 1707–1857*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
5. Duff, J. G. (1826). *A history of the Mahrattas* (Vols. 1–3). Printed for Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green.
6. Elphinstone, M. (1884). *The rise of the British power in the East*. John Murray.
7. Gordon, S. (1993). *The Marathas 1600–1818*. Cambridge University Press.
8. Gupta, P. C. (1964). *Baji Rao II and the East India Company, 1796–1818*. Allied Publishers.
9. Joshi, P. M. (Ed.). (1968). *The history of the Marathas*. Government of Maharashtra.
10. Kulkarni, A. R. (1990). *Maharashtra in the age of Shivaji*. Deshmukh Prakashan.

11. Kulkarni, A. R. (2006). *Maratha historiography*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors.
12. Kulkarni, U. S. (2017). *The era of Bajirao: The making of the Maratha Empire*. Mula Mutha Publishers.
13. Kulkarni, U. S. (2021). *The Maratha century*. Mula Mutha Publishers.
14. Majumdar, R. C. (Ed.). (1974). *History and culture of the Indian people: The Maratha supremacy* (Vol. 7). Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
15. Marshall, P. J. (1987). *Bengal: The British bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740–1828*. Cambridge University Press.
16. Mehta, J. L. (2005). *Advanced study in the history of modern India, 1707–1813*. Sterling Publishers.
17. Naravane, M. S. (2006). *Battles of the Honourable East India Company: Making of the Raj*. A. P. H. Publishing Corporation.
18. Panikkar, K. M. (1953). *A survey of Indian history*. Asia Publishing House.
19. Puri, B. N. (1966). *History of the Marathas*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
20. Ranade, M. G. (1900). *Rise of the Maratha power*. Punalekar & Co.
21. Sarkar, J. (Ed.). (1951). *English records of Maratha history: The Treaty of Bassein and the Anglo-Maratha War in the Deccan, 1802–1804* (Vol. 10). Government Central Press.
22. Sarkar, J. (1946). *Shivaji and his times*. M. C. Sarkar & Sons.
23. Sen, S. N. (1925). *Administrative system of the Marathas*. K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
24. Sen, S. N. (1928). *Military system of the Marathas*. K. L. Mukhopadhyay.
25. Sinh, R. (1951). *The Treaty of Bassein and the Anglo-Maratha War in the Deccan, 1802–1804*. Sri Gouranga Press.
26. Stein, B. (1998). *A history of India*. Blackwell Publishers.
27. Vaidya, S. G. (1976). *Peshwa Bajirao II and the downfall of the Maratha power*. Pragati Prakashan.
28. Wink, A. (1990). *Land and sovereignty in India: Agrarian society and politics under the eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya*. Cambridge University Press.