

# CONQUEST OF AWADH

## GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The region of Awadh is defined geographically as the belt stretching from Allahabad to Lucknow. This territory served as a critical area of interest for the Company due to its strategic location relative to Bengal.

## RISE OF INDEPENDENT KINGDOM

- Court intrigues - The Mughal court was characterized by internal power struggles, notably involving the Sayyid brothers, who were eventually eliminated through factions led by Zulfiqar Khan.
- Muhammad Shah Rangila - The emperor earned the moniker "Rangila" due to his preoccupation with music, dance & personal indulgences rather than the duties of administration.
- Fear & autonomy - Fearing for their safety due to the volatile political environment at the Mughal court, powerful governors began distancing themselves to establish their own independent kingdoms.
- Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah in Hyderabad
- Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk in Awadh

This transition marks the formation of Awadh as a "Successor state" where the authority of the Mughal

emperor increasingly became nominal as regional rulers consolidated power.

## CONSOLIDATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

- Suppressing local elements - Upon taking control of Awadh, the Nawab faced the challenge of rebellious elements at the local level, specifically Zamindars & chieftains, who had grown defiant as the Mughal Empire weakened following the death of Aurangzeb. Zamindars were local land-holders who managed revenue collection. Over time, various land-holding communities had consolidated power & become obstacles to the Nawab's authority. The chieftains were more powerful local figures who held the title of "Raja" or regional kings. They maintained their own military & revenue administration, functioning almost as independent entities within the state.
- Historical Context of rebellion - These groups historically acknowledged Mughal authority under strong rulers like Akbar, but took advantage of the internal stresses & political instability of the later Mughal period to revolt.
- Consolidation - The Nawab recognized that it was impossible to manage the state from his capital Allahabad without first suppressing these rebellious forces. He adopted a firm stance, treating the

suppression of these local power centres as an essential prerequisite for effective administrative control.

- Reforming religious land grants - Saadat Khan focused on restructuring land rights to prevent the emergence of autonomous power centres that challenged his administration.
- Suyurgal & Madad-i-Maash - These were historical revenue-free land grants given by Mughal emperors to individuals like Ulema, Imams & religious scholars for subsistence. When granted to an institution rather than an individual these were known as Waqf.
- The hereditary challenge - Over time, these grantees began treating these grants as hereditary private property, similar to historical practices in ancient India where temple lands evolved into permanent holdings. Saadat Khan recognized this as a threat to state authority & fiscal control.
- Corrective measures - Following Akbar's precedent of limiting such grants, Saadat Khan introduced strict rules to curtail these practices. He limited these grants to 100 bighas per person. He enforced a policy where a portion of the allocated land had to be waste / uncultivated land (50 bighas) forcing the grantees to invest in agriculture & development.

rather than simply drawing passive revenue.

- The policy - By restricting these grants, Saadat Khan neutralized the conservative block. The religious elites & scholars, who previously held significant sway, were effectively checked, as they relied on state approval for these grants. By replacing hereditary interests with state-supervised administrative control, he ensured that landholders remained answerable to the Nawab rather than operating as independent political entities within his territory.

## MILITARY AMBITIONS & NADIR SHAH'S INVASIONS

- 1737 - Saadat Khan made demands to the Mughal court for additional territory & revenue, claiming credit for repelling an attack by Bajirao the Great on Delhi. The Mughal court, citing a lack of funds & resources, refused these demands, leaving Saadat Khan deeply dissatisfied.
- 1739 - Following the Mughal court's refusal, Nadir Shah invaded India. Saadat Khan & Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah played a critical role in exposing the internal weaknesses of the Mughal administration to Nadir Shah.
- The Betrayal & aftermath - Saadat Khan had promised Nadir Shah a bribe of 20 million rupees to invade Delhi. However, his plan backfired when he realized Nadir Shah had no intention of just looting &

leaving; instead Nadir Shah occupied Delhi & began systemic looting, pressuring the local nobility for more wealth.

- The end of Saadat Khan - Realizing that his actions had backfired & that the Persian army was turning their attention towards Awadh for further extraction, Saadat Khan committed suicide to escape the consequences of his failed political gamble.

### RULE OF SAFDARJUNG

- Safdarjung's Ascension - (1739-1748) - After the death of Saadat Khan, his son-in-law, Safdarjung negotiated with Nadir Shah. By paying a sum of 50 lakh rupees, he secured the right to rule Awadh. Unlike his predecessor, Safdarjung sought to maintain legitimacy by working within the Mughal administrative framework, seeking official permissions for appointments & revenue matters.
- The title of Wazir - (1748) - Due to his loyalty & military competence, the Mughal emperor appointed Safdarjung as the Wazir of the empire in 1748.
- Internal court rivalry - Safdarjung's growing power & independent decision-making upset other factions in the Mughal court. These rivals supported a younger figure named Imad-Ul-Mulk. This tension culminated in 1753 with the battle of

Delhi, a conflict between Safdarjung & the court factions, which ultimately weakened his position.

- Death of Safdarjung - Following these turbulent political events, Safdarjung died in 1754, marking the end of his leadership in Awadh.

### SHUJA-UD-DAULA & THE BATTLE OF PANIPAT

- Ascension of Shuja-ud-Daula (1754) - Following the death of Safdarjung in 1754, his successor Shuja-ud-Daula assumed the position of the Nawab of Awadh.

- Strategic Alliances & the Third Battle of Panipat  
Although Shuja-ud-Daula had historically positive relations with the Marathas who occasionally exempted him from Chauth (taxes) - he grew suspicious of their long term intentions. Strategically believing that a weakened Maratha presence would restore the power of the Mughal emperor & consequently his own standing as Wazir, he made the pivotal decision to support Ahmad Shah Abdali in the 1761 Third Battle of Panipat.

- Supremacy in India (1761-1764) - With the defeat of the Marathas in 1761, Shuja-ud-Daula was re-appointed as the Wazir of the Mughal empire. For a brief period of 3 years, until 1764, he was recognised as one of the most powerful political

entitles in India, maintaining his allegiance to the Mughal throne.

## AFTERMATH OF THE BATTLE OF BUXAR

- Consequences of the Battle of Buxar - Following the Battle of Buxar, Shuja-ud-Daula was compelled to accept stringent conditions, including a cash indemnity of 50 lakh rupees & the transfer of the Kora territory to the Mughal emperor.
- British Military presence - A critical blow to Awadh's sovereignty was the requirement to maintain a British military contingent within the capital, Allahabad. By stationing 6,000 to 10,000 British troops in the heart of his kingdom, Shuja-ud-Daula effectively lost his independence; the presence of this force discouraged any internal rebellion or external resistance.
- Resignation to British Dominance - Recognizing the military superiority of the British, Shuja-ud-Daula accepted his position. Consequently, between 1765 & 1775, he adopted a stance of relative passivity, realizing that open conflict against the British was no longer a viable path to retaining power.

## REIGN OF ASAF-UD-DAULA

- Capital shift - Similar to the strategy employed

by Mir Qasim in Bengal, Asaf-Ud-Daula shifted his capital from Allahabad to Lucknow. This move was intended to assert greater control & reorganize his administration.

- Architectural legacy - While in Lucknow, he oversaw the construction of iconic structures such as the Rumi Darwaza & the Imambara. He also made efforts to promote the local textile industry.
- Loss of virtual independence - Despite these developmental efforts, the British influence had become deeply entrenched. By this time, a British Resident was stationed at the court & British troops were permanently positioned for the 'protection' of the Nawab.
- The power shift - These structural changes meant that the British & their Resident effectively became the most powerful political faction at the court. Indian rulers were forced to comply with their directives. Failing to do so risked being replaced or losing their position entirely. Consequently, many rulers chose to focus on a luxurious lifestyle rather than resisting the encroaching colonial power.

## SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE

- Replacement of the Nawab (late 1790s) - The Nawab following Asaf-Ud-Daula, known as Wazir

Ali, led a lifestyle that caused significant distress to both his subjects & the British administration. Consequently, the British decided to replace him with a more compliant ruler, Saadat Ali Khan.

• The Subsidiary alliance - Under Saadat Ali Khan, Awadh formally signed the Subsidiary Alliance in 1801. This agreement effectively stripped the state of its military & political sovereignty. The 5 key provisions of the Alliance are -

- Military replacement - The State's indigenous army was disbanded & replaced by British East India Company troops.
- Financial burden - The Nawab was required to pay an annual cash sum to cover the cost of these British troops. When Awadh could not afford these payments, the British seized half the territory to extract revenue.
- British Resident - An official agent stationed at the court to manage military affairs & oversee the administration.
- Foreign relations ban - The ruler was prohibited from having relations with any foreign or indigenous power without British permission.
- Employment Restrictions - The Nawab was forbidden from hiring any European individuals in his court. These terms served as a "death bell" for the

sovereignty of Indian rulers, as signing the alliance meant handing over control of their kingdom to the British.

## ANNEXATION OF AWADH

- The Doctrine of Lapse - By 1856, Lord Dalhousie officially annexed Awadh using the Doctrine of Lapse. While this doctrine was famously associated with states lacking a legitimate heir like Thanur, Satara or Sambalpur, Awadh was unique because its annexation was justified under the pretext of "mal-administration".
- The Context of Paramountcy - Dalhousie argued that after a ruler's death, the right to determine the successor rested with the British crown. In the case of Awadh, despite the state being governed by Wajid Ali Shah, the British cited extreme corruption & the inability of the ruler to effectively handle the administration to claim control.
- The Aftermath - Following the annexation, Wajid Ali Shah suffered a heart attack due to the shock of losing his kingdom. His young son Bajis Qadr, was subsequently supported by the Nawab's wife, Begum Hazrat Mahal, during the revolt of 1857.
- Moral Critique - The annexation was widely considered morally & ethically wrong by historians.

This is because the rulers of Awadh, starting from Shuja-ud-Daula, had remained consistently loyal to the British East India company and never engaged in anti-British intrigue, making the forced takeover a controversial move by the company.

### BUFFER STATE ANALYSIS

- ✱ Loss of "buffer state" status - Historically, Awadh served as a buffer state for the British against external threats, shielding Bengal. Its location, bordered by natural barriers like the Vindhya range & the Son river, made it strategically essential. However, by 1856, the Maratha threat had effectively collapsed, rendering the need for a buffer state obsolete in the eyes of the British.
- ✱ Economic interests - The Nawabs, beginning with Saadat Khan Burhan-ul-Mulk, had turned Lucknow & Allahabad into thriving textile & cotton market hubs. The British were keenly interested in capturing these lucrative markets for their own economic exploitation. Once the strategic necessity of the state faded, the British moved to annex it to secure full control over these wealthy commercial centres.