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BRITISH CONQUEST OF MARATHA

PESHWA ADMINISTRATION OVERVIEW

* **Role of the Peshwas** - Originally the finance ministers, the Peshwas eventually became the prime ministers called Sant Pratinidhi & the de facto rulers of Maratha empire. Despite their actual power, they operated under the nominal authority of the Maratha emperor, Shahu Maharaj.
* **The Maratha Mughal relationship** - Shahu Maharaj accepted the Mughal suzerainty. A pivotal moment occured in 1707, when Shahu Maharaj was released from Mughal prison. Following his release he was granted the rights to collect Chauth & Sardeshmukhi from the Deccan region by 1719.
* **Treaty of Sangola (1750)** - This historic agreement marked the moment when Shahu Maharaj, while on his deathbed, officially transferred all executive authority of the Maratha empire into the hands of the Peshwas. This move effectively shifted the centre of power away from the Bhonsle family & established the Peshwas as de facto rulers.
* **Mansabdari status** - Shahu Maharaj held a prestigious Mansabdari rank of 10,000 granted by the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar. A rank of 10,000 was exceptionally high for a non-royal commander. Historically such ranks were rarely offered; notable figures like Man

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Singh under Akbar & Mirza Raja Jai Singh who was sent to capture Shivaji Maharaj also held 10,000 rank status during their careers. Typically any rank above 5000 was reserved exclusively for royal blood, princes or those with an extremely close personal connection to the Emperor.

CENTRAL & PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION

- **Administrative roles** - Shahu Maharaj remained the titular head, while the Peshwa functioned as his subordinate within the Ashtapradhan (Council of Ministers). Initially the Peshwa held the role of Finance Minister, eventually evolving into the Prime Minister.
- **Central Administration** - The Peshwa's central office, known as the Huzur Daftar, managed the state finances through two key departments
  - **Al- Beriz Daftar** - Responsible for the overall state revenue administration, tracking income & expenditure
  - **Chalte Daftar** - Managed the Peshwa's personal accounts & expenditures for the Pune territory, led by the Shadnis
- **Provincial hierarchy** - The administration mirrored the Mughal Deccani systems, organized into the following units from largest to smallest.
  - **Suba**: Large provinces, governed by a Subedar or Sarsubedar.
  - **Sarkar**: Mid level administrative divisions
  - **Pargana**: Local district units

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- **Taraf** - The smallest administrative unit (village level).
- **Local officials** - Provincial heads were assisted by officials such as Mamlatdar & Kamavisdar who held civil & military powers & managed revenue assessment. They maintained direct contact with hereditary village landlords, including Patel, Deshmukh & Deshpande.

TAXATION SYSTEMS

- **Chauth** - It was a tribute or 'protection money' tax, set at 25% of the annual income of territories outside Maratha control. Since the Maratha military was primarily an agrarian based force, they struggled to generate enough internal agricultural revenue. Chauth served as an external source of income to support these troops. The Marathas would raid these outside territories, creating a state of fear. By paying the 25% tribute, rulers of those territories could ensure their lands would be spared from further Maratha raids.
- **Sardeshmukhi** - This was a 10% tax levied on the Deshmukhs (hereditary local landlords) within the Maratha empire. Shivaji Maharaj justified this by declaring himself the supreme landlord of the land, asserting his right to collect a share of the revenue gathered by local officials.
- **Distribution of loot** - The revenue from these taxes were distributed to maintain the administration & the military, following traditional Sultanate practices. A portion of the proceeds, often around 25% or more, was reserved for the

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Chhatrapati. The remaining revenue was divided, with roughly 66% allocated to the army to sustain military operations. Other officials such as the Pant Sachiv, also received established shares.

BEGINNING OF ANGLO MARATHA CONFLICT

- **Maratha ascendancy** - Following the arrival of Shahu Maharaj in 1707, the Maratha empire expanded from a regional power to a pan Indian empire. This period of growth was halted in 1761 by the Third battle of Panipat.
- **Post 1761 collapse & British interference** - The defeat at Panipat significantly weakened the central authority of the Maratha State. This internal instability created an opening for the British East India company to begin interfering in regional politics.
- **Bombay Government intervention** - The Bombay Govt adopted a pro-active policy of interventionism to capture the revenues & treasuries of the local Maratha rulers. This interference in their internal affairs eventually triggered the First Anglo Maratha War, which began in 1775.

CIVIL WAR & THE TREATY OF SURAT

- **Succession conflict** - The succession conflict within the Maratha empire deepened significantly following the death of Peshwa Madhav Rao in 1772. After his death, his uncle Raghunath Rao laid a claim to the throne, but he faced intense opposition from the influential administrator

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Nana Phadnavis.

* **Narayan Rao's accession** - After Madhav Rao died, his son Narayan Rao was appointed the next Peshwa, which further angered Raghunath Rao. Internal court politics reached a breaking point, leading to the death of Narayan Rao in 1773.

* **The Posthumous claim** - Following Narayan Rao's death, his wife was pregnant. Nana Phadnavis took the bold move of declaring the unborn child as the legal heir to the Peshwaship to prevent Raghunath Rao from taking power.

* **The treaty of Surat** - Frustrated by being sidelined, Raghunath Rao sought military assistance from the British Bombay Govt. In 1775, they signed the Treaty of Surat. Under this agreement, Raghunath Rao ceded territories like Surat, Salsette & Bassein to the British in exchange for their military support to install him as the Peshwa. This treaty marked the start of the first Anglo Maratha war.

TREATY OF PURANDAR & CONFLICT ESCALATION

* **Calcutta Council's opposition** - When news of the treaty of Surat reached the Calcutta Council, led by Warren Hastings, it was rejected. The Council did not want to intervene in the internal affairs of the Maratha empire at that time due to competing priorities & the strength of the Marathas.

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- **Treaty of Purandar** - In response to the Bombay Govt unauthorized actions, the Calcutta Council sent a military agent to the Peshwa's court to negotiate the Treaty of Purandar in 1776. Under this agreement, the British agreed to abandon Raghunath Rao's cause, provide him with a pension, & maintain peaceful relations with the Marathas.
- **Escalation & conflict** - Despite the treaty, the Bombay Govt continued its hostile stance. A new conflict was sparked when Nana Phadnavis granted certain western coastal ports to the French, which the British used as a pretext to resume military operations. This led to clashes in areas like Talegaon & Khadki.

TREATY OF WADGAON & TREATY OF SALBAI

- **The British Bengal Initiative** - After the Bombay Govt surrendered & signed the Treaty of Wadgaon, the Calcutta Council led by Warren Hastings rejected the terms. Hastings launched a two pronged military campaign: one force attacked Pune, & another attacked Gwalior to force Mahadji Scindia to withdraw his support from the Peshwas.
- **Battle of Sipri** - The attack on Gwalior led to the Battle of Sipri on February 1781, where the Scindias were defeated. This defeat forced Mahadji Scindia to mediate between the British & the Maratha leadership, specifically bringing Nana Fadnavis to the negotiating table.
- **Treaty of Salbai** - This pivotal peace treaty in 1782

significantly altered the power dynamics of the time. Both parties agreed to return the territories captured since the Treaty of Purandar. The British abandoned their support for Raghunath Rao, who was granted a pension instead. The Marathas promised not to support any other European power, isolating them from potential rival influences. A formal 20 year period of peace was establish

* Significance of the Treaty - This agreement was a major diplomatic victory for Warren Hastings. It prevented the formation of a dangerous Maratha-Mysore alliance during the Second Anglo Mysore War (1780-1784) & allowed the British to secure Maratha assistance against Tipu Sultan. This 20 year reprieve also allowed the British to consolidate power while the Maratha leadership aged, eventually setting the stage for the Second Anglo Maratha war (1803-1805)

BACKGROUND OF 2ND ANGLO MARATHA WAR

* Geopolitical context - Around 1799, as Arthur Wellesley implemented policies in India, Europe was experiencing significant turmoil. Napoleon Bonaparte was gaining power in France, becoming Emperor in 1804, & the British feared a potential French invasion of India through alliances with powers like the Marathas.

* The Maratha situation - Following the defeat of Mysore in the 4th Anglo Mysore war, the British viewed the Marathas as the next major threat. The Marathas had

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previously engaged in diplomacy with French figures like Louis XVI around 1782-1783. However the Maratha leadership suffered major losses; key figures like Mahadji Shinde died in 1794 & Nana Fadnavis passed away in 1800, leaving the Maratha empire vulnerable & fragmented.

- **Internal struggles** - With the passing of strong leaders, internal instability plagued the Marathas. In 1796, Bajirao II became the Peshwa. His reign saw increased infighting specifically involving the Holkar family, who held a deep seated rivalry with the Peshwas & Shindes stemming from Third battle of Panipat.
- **The conflict** - The Peshwa, Bajirao II, took action against the Holkars by killing a member of their family. Seeking revenge, Jaswant Rao Holkar launched an attack on Pune defeating the combined forces of the Peshwa & the Shindes.
- **British intervention** - Fleeing his capital, Bajirao II sought refuge in Bassein, where he ultimately turned to the British for support. This desperation led to the signing of the Treaty of Bassein in 1802, which effectively marked the start of British interference in Maratha internal affairs & the beginning of the Second Anglo Maratha war.

TREATY OF SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE

Under the leadership of Richard Wellesley, this system was designed to effectively neutralize Indian rulers.

- **Military presence** - East India company troops were stationed in the ruler's capital & key towns, ostensibly

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for protection but essentially to maintain control.

- **Financial burden** - The ruler was required to cover the costs of these troops, either through cash payments or by ceding territory.
- **British oversight** - A British resident was stationed at the ruler's court to monitor internal politics & influence decisions.

STRATEGIC IMPACT -

- **The false Sense of Security**
- **Misaligned properties** - Many Indian rulers believed they were gaining the protection of the East India Company's superior military forces. They saw it as a cost-effective way to secure their domains, assuming they could simply replace their own soldiers with these elite British troops.
- **The hidden risk** - Rulers failed to realize that by inviting these foreign forces into their capitals, they were essentially losing control over their own sovereignty.
- **The mechanism of control**
- **Loss of independent command** - Even though the Indian rulers paid for the upkeep of these troops, the army remained under the British command structure. They would never follow orders that went against British interests, effectively rendering the local ruler a puppet.
- **Strategic disarmament** - This system allowed the British to dictate internal & external policies. The rulers essentially disarmed themselves by disbanding their own local, loyal

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military structures in favour of this foreign security force.

* **Diplomatic isolation**-
- **End of independent Foreign policy** - By signing the treaty, rulers were strictly forbidden from engaging in independent diplomacy. They could no longer hire European experts or form alliances with other Indian rulers without explicit British permission.
- **The role of the resident** - A British resident was placed within each court. This official's primary role was to monitor internal politics, identify rival factions, & use the threat of instability to ensure the ruler remained compliant. If the ruler resisted, the British could leverage these internal rivalries to replace them with a more submissive figure.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUBSIDIARY ALLIANCE

* **Expansion of the Alliance**-
- **Progressive implementation** - The British systematically imposed this treaty on key regional powers: Hyderabad (1798), Mysore (1799) & Awadh (1801).
- **Strategic footprint** - This policy allowed the British to station troops in major cities, creating the foundation for future cantonment towns throughout India, which served as both administrative centers & hubs for British military control.

* **Impact on the Marathas**
- **Treaty of Bassein** - Facing internal defeat, Peshwa Bajirao II

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sought British assistance, signing the Subsidiary Alliance Treaty. The terms included

- Ceding the Surat territory & other surrounding regions worth 2·6 million to the company.
- The Peshwa abandoning the demand for Chauth from the Nizam of Hyderabad, who was already under British protection
- Complete surrender of foreign policy & the requirement to keep a British Resident in his court.
- **British justification** - The British argued that previous treaties signed with Mahadji Shinde & Nana Fadnavis had expired, as the 20 year term of the Treaty of Salbai had concluded. This legalistic manauver allowed them to bypass past commitments & intervene directly in Maratha affairs, infuriating the Bhosle's & Shinde's & triggering Second Anglo Maratha war.

BATTLE OF ASSAYE & LASWARI

- **United Opposition** - Despite internal tensions, the Scindia & Bhonsle families united to challenge the British. However, they faced significant defeats in the Battle of Assaye & the Battle of Laswari in 1803.
- **The role of Arthur Wellesley** - These battles were strategically significant as they were led by Arthur Wellesley. His experience in India during these campaigns, including his earlier involvement in the siege of Seringapatam in 1799, helped shape the military tactics he would later use against Napoleon Bonaparte at the Battle of Waterloo.

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- **Holkar's struggle** - After the defeat of Scindia & Bhosle forces, Yeshwant Rao Holkar emerged as the remaining major challenger. Having been the target of Peshwa Bajirao II's political maneuvering which led to the Treaty of Bassein Holkar sought support from other powers to continue the resistance.
- **Diplomatic limitations** - In 1804, Holkar attempted to gain the support of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. However, Ranjit Singh refused to assist, citing a strategic boundary along the Sutlej river, noting that the area south of it was outside his sphere of influence & he preferred not to interfere in that conflict.

IMPACT ON MARATHA POWER & EUROPEAN CONTEXT

- **Diplomatic shifts & European conflicts** - By 1805, the situation in Europe was rapidly changing. In 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte had declared himself the French emperor, prompting Britain to recall both Arthur & Richard Wellesley back to Europe for the impending conflict.
- **The Treaty of Rajpur Ghat** - Following the military engagements, the British forced the subsidiary alliance treaty onto the various Maratha entities, including the Scindias, Bhonsles, Gaekwads & the Peshwa. Holkars signed the peace Treaty of Rajpur Ghat in 1805, which effectively maintained the status quo as it existed prior to war.
- **Core damage to the Maratha state** - The wars inflicted deep, structural damage on the Maratha empire. This

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decline was rooted in the policies of Bajirao I, who created semi-independent Maratha families. Over time, these administrative divisions fostered internal rivalry & a hereditary based feudal problem, which significantly contributed to their military & political fragmentation starting from the Third battle of Panipat.

- Loss of prestige - The internal squabbles & subsequent defeats severely eroded the Maratha political standing in India, turning a power that was once a primary contender for the Mughal throne into a weakened state within a span of just 40 to 50 yrs.

THIRD ANGLO MARATHA WAR

- Free Trade & the Charter Act of 1813 - By 1813, the economic landscape shifted towards free trade. The Charter Act of 1813 abolished the East India Company's trade monopoly except for tea & trade with China, allowing other European companies to enter India. This necessitated greater market expansion & a focus on maintaining security to protect trade routes.
- The Pindari problem - The Pindaris were irregular armed groups that operated in Central India, the region between Sutlej & Chambal valley. As the British implemented the Subsidiary Alliance, regional rulers were forced to disband their armies, leaving thousands of soldiers unemployed. With no other skills, many turned to looting & plunder.

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- **Need for trade security** - The Pindaris operated across Central India. Because the British did not have a strong presence in this "no man's" land, the Pindaris used it as a base to launch raids into Maharashtra, Bengal & the Punjab region. These raids became a critical issue for the British after the Charter Act of 1813 ended the East India Company's trade monopoly. As other European companies arrived, the British needed to establish safe trade routes & provide security, which was constantly threatened by Pindari attacks. Consequently, the British initiated military suppression of the Pindaris beginning in 1813-14 with operations intensifying by 1816-1817.
- **Maratha involvement** - The Pindaris ultimately acted as a catalyst for the Third Anglo-Maratha war because they found sympathy & active support from independent Maratha entities, specifically the Holkars. This connection between the Marathas & the Pindaris served as the final trigger for the British to move against the remaining Maratha powers.

DEFEAT OF THE MARATHA CONFEDERACY

- **Conflict backgrounds trigger -**
- **Maratha disillusionment** - The Maratha elite having intellectual awareness, realized they had been deceived by the Subsidiary Alliance & that the treaties were fundamentally unfair.
- **The trigger** - As the British began suppressing the

Pindaris, who were supported by Holkar, Bajirao II staged a revolt in Pune by attacking the British resident & declaring the alliance void.

- **Allied movements** - Appa Sahib of Nagpur & the Holkar state also prepared for war, while the Scindia & Gaekwad factions largely remained neutral.
- **Military defeat & treaties** - The Maratha forces, lacking effective leadership from individuals like Bajirao II & the regent Tulsi Bai, were defeated by the British in 3 key battles :- Khirki - Peshwas were defeated, Sitabaldi - Bhosle family of Nagpur was defeated, Mahidpur - Holkars were defeated. Following these military losses, 3 primary treaties were imposed.
- **Treaty of Pune** - This treaty reduced the territory of the Peshwa, specifically stripping them of lands north of the Narmada & south of the Tungabhadra rivers.
- **Treaty of Gwalior** - Signed between the British & Daulat Rao Scindia, it ensured Scindia would remain neutral & offer no support to the Pindaris.
- **Treaty of Mandasor** - Signed with the Holkar state, this treaty included a secret provision that the Holkars would not intervene if the British moved to abolish the office of the Peshwa entirely.
- **Dissolution of the Maratha Confederacy**
- **Social context** - The Holkar state's cooperation in the abolition of the Peshwa office was partly rooted in long standing caste-based politics & grievances dating back to the Third

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Battle of Panipat.

- **Final collapse** - By 1818, the Maratha confederacy was officially dissolved. Bajirao II was pensioned off to Bithoor near Kanpur.
- **British expansion** - The territories captured from the Peshwas between the Narmada & Tungabhadra were merged to form the Bombay province, marking the end of Maratha power on the Indian political map.

CAUSES OF THE MARATHA DEFEAT

- **Inherent structural flaws** - The Marathas lacked a cohesive vision for a pan-Indian empire. Leaders often focused on personal or factional gains rather than building a unified state, failing to implement necessary political, economic or social reforms.
- **Strategic errors** - The Third Battle of Panipat was a major turning point. This engagement was a strategic mistake that could have been avoided through better negotiation or tactical retreats, which were previously successful in Maratha warfare.
- **Internal rivalries** - Following 1761, deep seated mutual rivalries developed among Maratha military commanders which the British exploited to their advantage.
- **British Dynamism vs. Decadent system** - The British possessed a more advanced forward looking political system influenced by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. They utilized Chanakyan methods of statecraft, prioritizing the achievement

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of ends regardless of the means such as through Subsidiary Alliance.

- **Lack of sound administration** - The Marathas failed to evolve their administrative & revenue systems. While they copied Mughal style structures, their reliance on Chauth & Sardeshmukhi alienated local populations & entities, preventing them from fostering loyalty in conquered territories
- **Leadership deficiencies** - By the time of Anglo Maratha wars, the calibre of leadership was deemed inefficient & incapable of handling the sophisticated European political maneuvering of the era.
- **Technological & Intellectual edge** - The British combined modern military physical weaponery like cannons, bayonets with intellectual tools like the Subsidiary Alliance creating a "progressive" outlook that the traditional Maratha leadership could not counter.