

Deccan Policy of the Mughal Emperors

When Babur attacked India there were six Muslim states, viz., Khandesh, Berar, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golkunda and Bidar and one Hindu state, i.e., Vijayanagar in the South. According to Babur, the state of Vijayanagar was the strongest among them. However, Babur and Humayun could not pay any attention towards the South.

By the time Akbar interfered in politics of the Deccan, the political situation had changed there. In January 1565 A.D., the combined forces of Bijapur, Golkunda, Bidar and Ahmadnagar defeated the army of Vijayanagar in the battle at Talikota and completely ruined the power of Vijayanagar. A little later, Ahmadnagar annexed Berar and Bijapur conquered Bidar.

Thus, there remained only the state of Khandesh, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkunda. Akbar began to extend his empire towards the South and the rest of the Mughul emperors also followed his policy. The process of conquering the South was slow but the Mughuls finally succeeded during the reign of Aurangzeb. But, there had arisen a new power in the Deccan by that time.

Shivaji, the Maratha, established an independent kingdom in Maharashtra at that very time when Aurangzeb was bent upon to conquer the entire South. Aurangzeb, of course, destroyed the Maratha kingdom as well when Shambhaji, son of Shivaji, was on the Maratha throne. But, his success was short-lived. The Maratha fought back for the independence of Maharashtra and, finally, succeeded. Thus, the Deccan policy of the great Mughuls initially succeeded but, ultimately, failed.

Babur could pay no attention towards the South. During the reign of Humayun, Muhammad Shah, ruler of Khandesh supported Bahadur Shah of Gujarat against Mewar and fought against Humayun at Mandsaur and Mandu. Humayun, therefore, attacked Khandesh after his conquest of Gujarat.

Muhammad Shah begged pardon which was granted by Humayun. Thus, Babur and Humayun had no planned policy towards the Deccan. It was the beginning of the Mughul rule in India and the Afghans were challenging the authority of the Mughuls in northern India. It kept both Babur and Humayun busy in the North.

Akbar:

Akbar was the first among the Mughal emperors who planned to conquer the Deccan after completing his conquest in the North. His primary objective in conquering the Deccan was

extension of the empire. Besides, Akbar was not happy with the Portuguese who were becoming powerful on the sea-coast of India. He desired to break up their power which could be possible by conquering the Deccan.

Abul Fazl has given another reason as well. He stated that one object of Akbar in conquering the Deccan was to free the subject-people of the Deccan from the despotic rule of their local rulers and provide them peace and prosperity. However, no modern historian has given any importance to his opinion.

In 1591 A.D., Akbar sent his ambassadors to Khandesh, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golkunda and asked them to accept his sovereignty. Except Khandesh all other states refused. Later on, Ali Khan, ruler of Khandesh died fighting on behalf of the Mughals against Ahmadnagar. In 1593 A.D., the Mughals made their first attack on Ahmadnagar. Chand Bibi, an aunt of the reigning king Muzaffar of Ahmadnagar fought bravely against them.

She, however, either committed suicide or was murdered after some time. But, Ahmadnagar continued to fight and it was after many years of hard fighting that the Mughals succeeded in capturing the territories and forts of Berar, Ahmadnagar and Daulatabad. Miran Bahadur, son of Ali Khan succeeded his father to the throne of Khandesh. He refused to acknowledge the authority of the Mughals.

The Mughals, therefore, attacked Khandesh, captured the forts of Burhanpur and Asirgarh and, finally, annexed all territories of Khandesh to the Empire. Miran Bahadur was imprisoned in the fort of Gwalior and was given a pension. Akbar failed to take any action against Bijapur and Golkunda during his life-time.

Thus, Akbar annexed Khandesh, captured a part of the territory of Ahmadnagar, occupied some strong forts like Daultabad, Ahmadnagar, Burhanpur, Asirgarh etc. and, thus, not only established the power of the Mughals in the Deccan but also paved the way for the conquest of the Deccan for his successor.

Jahangir:

Jahangir continued the policy of his father towards the Deccan. He attempted to annex Ahmadnagar and force the rulers of Bijapur and Golkunda to accept his suzerainty. But, the Mughals met a serious challenge to their designs by Malik Ambar, the vazir of Ahmadnagar.

Malik Ambar improved the economy of Ahmadnagar, trained Maratha soldiers in guerilla warfare, fought aggressive wars against the Mughals and during the early period of the reign of Jahangir recovered the fort of Ahmadnagar and some other territory of the state of Ahmadnagar from the Mughals.

Jahangir deputed his most capable officers in the campaigns of the Deccan but no success was gained because of the mutual differences among the Mughal officers and the success of Malik Ambar in opposing them. In 1617 A.D., prince Khurram attacked Ahmadnagar and forced it to sign a treaty by which Ahmadnagar surrendered the fort of Ahmadnagar and the territory of Balaghat to the Mughals.

Jahangir gave the title of Shah Jahan to prince Khurram at that very time. But it was, in fact, no remarkable success of the Mughals. Ahmadnagar was not prepared to accept the sovereignty of the Mughals and started fighting against them again. However, peace was again signed between the two in 1621 A.D. by which Ahmadnagar surrendered a part of its territory to the Mughals and also paid rupees eighteen lakhs in cash.

Bijapur and Golkunda which had helped Ahmadnagar also paid rupees twelve lakhs and rupees twenty lakhs respectively to the Mughals. Thus, during the reign of Jahangir, Ahmadnagar was weakened and the states of Bijapur and Golkunda were pressurized.

But there was no extension of the empire and no state of the Deccan was either finished or forced to submit.

Shah Jahan:

Shah Jahan also attempted either to annex the kingdoms of the Deccan or force them to accept the suzerainty of the Emperor. He was a capable commander and understood the politics of the Deccan well. The death of Malik Ambar provided him good opportunity to put pressure on Ahmadnagar. Fateh Khan, son of Malik Ambar, who became the vazir was incapable and unscrupulous. He was not sincere to the Sultan or to the state.

Instead he was interested in pursuing his own selfish ends. He got murdered Sultan Murtaza Nizam Shah II and placed a child, Hussain Shah on the throne. But he was not loyal even to him. He opened negotiations with the Mughals and at the same time tried to befriend Bijapur. His unscrupulous diplomacy resulted in the loss of many loyal nobles like Shahji Bhonsle to him as well as the faith of Bijapur and the Mughals.

He, ultimately, surrendered Sultan Hussain Shah to the Mughals in 1633 A.D. Hussain Shah was imprisoned in the fort of Gwalior and Ahmadnagar was annexed to the Mughal empire. It meant

the end of the state of Ahmadnagar though Shahji Bhonsle continued to fight against the Mughals on behalf of another child of the ruling dynasty of Ahmadnagar, named Murtaza III. However, he surrendered that child to the Mughals in 1636 A.D. and accepted the service of Bijapur.

Qutb Shah, ruler of Golkunda died in 1626 A.D. He was succeeded by a child of eleven years of age titled Abdulla Qutb Shah. In 1636 A.D., Golkunda was forced to accept the suzerainty of the Mughals. Aurangzeb, when appointed as governor of the Deccan for the second time in 1652 A.D., again pressurised Golkunda because it had failed to pay the annual tribute to the Mughals.

Aurangzeb waited for an opportunity and he got it when Mir Jumla, one of the most prominent nobles of the Sultan, quarreled with him and sought protection from Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb captured Hyderabad and besieged the fort of Golkunda. But before he could capture it, he received orders of Shah Jahan to raise the siege.

Therefore, a treaty was signed between the two by which Golkunda accepted the suzerainty of the Mughal emperor, married one of his daughters to prince Muhammad, son of Aurangzeb, gave rupees ten lakhs as dowry and yet another rupees seventeen lakhs as war-indemnity to the Mughals. Thus, though Golkunda was weakened but its existence remained.

Sultan Ibrahim Shah was succeeded by Muhammad Adil Shah I in Bijapur. Adil Shah had no fixed plan against the onslaughts of the Mughals while his nobles were divided among themselves. The attempt of the Mughals to capture Bijapur in 1631 A.D., however, failed. The Mughals again attacked it in 1636 A.D. and forced it to accept their suzerainty.

Later on, it enjoyed immunity from the attacks of the Mughals for the next twenty years. In 1656 A.D., Adil Shah died. It was believed that he had no son but his wife, Bari Sahiba declared one child as his son and succeeded in placing him on the throne, with the name of Adil Shah II. Shah Jahan tried to take advantage of it. He charged Bijapur for different things and ordered Aurangzeb to attack it.

Aurangzeb besieged the fort of Bijapur but before he could capture it, he received order of Shah Jahan to raise the siege. A treaty was, therefore, signed between the two in 1657 A.D. by which Bijapur accepted the suzerainty of the Mughal emperor and agreed to pay rupees one and a half crores to the Mughals. The forts of Bidar and Kalyani also remained with the Mughals.

Aurangzeb also forced Shivaji to agree for peace with the Mughals. Thus, the Deccan policy of the Mughals during the reign of Shah Jahan remained quite successful. The state of Ahmadnagar was completely annexed to the Mughal empire and Bijapur and Golkunda were forced to accept the suzerainty of the Emperor, surrender part of their territories and some important forts and pay annual tribute and war-indemnity.

Probably, even Bijapur and Golkunda could be annexed if Shah Jahan himself would not have stopped Aurangzeb from attempting so. Shah Jahan understood well the politics of the Deccan. Probably, he felt that the annexation of these two states would complicate matters for the Mughals.

Therefore, he felt satisfied by making them weak and acceptance of his sovereignty by them. It has also been expressed that prince Dara Shikoh and princess Jahan Ara did not want the elimination of these states because it would have enhanced the power and prestige of Aurangzeb. The illness of Shah Jahan and the possibility of a war of succession among his sons was, probably, another reason of the safety of these states at that time.

Aurangzeb:

Aurangzeb's policy towards the Deccan had political as well as economic and religious purposes. The extension of the empire was one purpose of Aurangzeb. Probably, it is believed that extinction of the states of Bijapur and Golkunda was a prior necessity for the destruction of the power of the Marathas in the Deccan.

Besides this political motive, he desired to annex these states because their rulers were Shias. Besides, the states of the Deccan were wealthy. Aurangzeb was tempted to conquer them with a view to possess their wealth. Therefore, Aurangzeb was not satisfied simply by acceptance of his suzerainty by them but he desired to annex them to the Mughal empire.

Aurangzeb remained busy in the North for the first twenty-five years of his rule. Therefore, the responsibility of looking after the affairs of the Deccan was left to his different nobles. Bijapur had failed to fulfil the terms of the treaty of 1657 A.D. Therefore, Raja Jai Singh was deputed to attack it in 1665-66 A.D. But, Jai Singh failed to get the submission of Bijapur.

The situation, however, changed when Adil Shah II died in 1672 A.D. and was succeeded by his four-year son, Sikandar Adil Shah. The Sultan, being a minor, failed to keep his nobles under his control. The nobles were divided into two groups, viz., the foreigners and the Indian Muslims.

Both these groups tried to capture the power of the throne which resulted in maladministration of the state.

The Mughals took advantage of it and attacked Bijapur in 1676 A.D. but with no result. The Mughals failed to get any success in the coming years also till Aurangzeb himself reached the Deccan. Aurangzeb pursued his son, Akbar, and reached the Deccan in 1682 A.D. with a view to destroy all states of the South.

He first deputed his son, Azam against Bijapur. Azam besieged the fort and Aurangzeb also reached there in person in July 1686 A.D. The fort surrendered in September 1686 A.D. Sikandar Adil Shah was granted a pension and Bijapur was annexed to the Mughal empire.

Golkunda was ruled by Abul Hasan Qutb Shah at that time. He was a Shia, had handed over his administration to two Brahmana ministers, Madanna and Akanna and had expressed his displeasure at the occupation of Bijapur by the Mughals. Aurangzeb was dissatisfied with all that. He deputed prince Shah Alam to attack Golkunda.

Abul Hasan left Hyderabad and sought shelter in the fort of Golkunda. Abul Hasan pleaded for a treaty with the prince and he agreed. But Aurangzeb was not prepared for any treaty. He besieged the fort of Golkunda in 1687 A.D. and captured it by recourse to a stratagem. Sultan Abul Hasan was imprisoned in the fort of Daulatabad and was given a pension for his life. Golkunda was annexed to the Mughal empire.

The conquests of Bijapur and Golkunda did not complete the conquest of the Deccan by Aurangzeb. The newly-risen power of the Marathas under Shivaji was yet a powerful challenge to him. Shivaji had established an independent kingdom in Maharashtra. In order to achieve it he had to fight both against Bijapur and the Mughals.

Shivaji first came into conflict with the Mughals in 1656 A.D. when he attacked Ahmadnagar and Junar. But Aurangzeb forced him to agree for peace in 1657 A.D. When Aurangzeb became the emperor, he deputed Sayista Khan to suppress Shivaji. But Sayista Khan failed. Shivaji succeeded in making a surprise night-attack on him when he was resting at Poona and he fled away. Aurangzeb recalled him and deputed Raja Jai Singh to attack Shivaji.

Jai Singh forced Shivaji to sign the treaty of Purandar by which he surrendered 3/4th of his territory and forts. Shivaji visited Agra in 1666 A.D. where he was virtually imprisoned. However, he managed to escape from Agra.

He started fighting against the Mughals in 1670 A.D. In 1674 A.D., he held his coronation and made Raigarh his capital. Shivaji died in 1680 A.D. but prior to his death he had succeeded in establishing quite an extensive kingdom in the South. He was succeeded by his son, Shambhuji.

Prince Akbar, son of Aurangzeb found shelter with him. But Shambhuji was an incapable ruler. Aurangzeb reached the Deccan in 1682 A.D. and succeeded in capturing Shambhuji in 1689 A.D. Shambhuji was killed and entire Maharashtra was occupied by Aurangzeb. It completed the conquest of the South by Aurangzeb. But his success remained short-lived.

The Marathas rose as one force against the Mughals to liberate their motherland. The Maratha war of independence was first led by Raja Ram and then by his widow, Tara Bai. Both Raja Ram and Tara Bai proved equal to their task. Raja Ram proved a capable organiser while Tara Bai proved herself quite diplomatic.

After the death of her husband, she declared her minor son as the ruler of the Marathas and fought against the Mughals. A Muslim historian, Khafi Khan, wrote about her- “It was the result of her efforts that the Marathas started attacking not only the Subas of the Deccan but also the distant Mughal provinces and Aurangzeb failed to subdue the Marathas even till the end of his reign.”

This war continued till the death of Aurangzeb. Different Maratha chiefs organised their armies, used guerilla-warfare against the Mughals, attacked the Mughal territory even outside Maharashtra and persisted in their efforts till they succeeded in snatching away Maharashtra from the hands of the Mughals. Aurangzeb failed in subduing the Marathas and died in the Deccan fully realising his failure against the Marathas. Thus, the Deccan policy of Aurangzeb ultimately failed.

The Deccan policy of the Mughals reached perfection of its success during the rule of Aurangzeb. But it was a temporary success. Aurangzeb failed to consolidate his success. The Marathas rose against him and brought about the collapse of his Deccan policy. The failure of the Deccan policy of Aurangzeb resulted in the disintegration of the Mughal empire.

The conquest of the South by Aurangzeb extended the boundary of the Mughal empire so extensively that it became impossible to administer it from one place. Indian history had proved it several times that the attempt to annex the South by the rulers of the North failed every time.

The story was repeated during the reign of Aurangzeb. In his attempt to conquer the South and keeping it under his direct rule, Aurangzeb neglected even the North which was the source of strength of his empire.

While Aurangzeb and his best officers could not make themselves free from the wars in the Deccan, the North was left to the care of his junior and less capable officers. Therefore, the hold of the Mughals over northern India also became loose. The continuous warfare in the Deccan also ruined the economy of the empire.

All this resulted in the failure of Aurangzeb and contributed to the decline of the Mughal empire. The Deccan policy of Aurangzeb was misguided and impractical. The annexation of Bijapur and Golkunda by Aurangzeb was also misguided. It resulted in direct conflict of Aurangzeb with the Marathas which became primarily responsible for the failure of his Deccan policy though Dr J.N. Sarkar has expressed a contrary opinion.

He has opined that the weak states of the Deccan neither could function as a protective wall between the Mughals and the Marathas nor could become a fruitful ally of the Mughals. Therefore, confrontation between the Mughals and the Marathas was inevitable. During the rule of later Mughals, the Deccan was lost to the empire. There the Marathas gained ascendancy.