



# Alivardi Khan and the Maratha Invasions in Bengal (1741–1751): A Study of Political, Military and Economic Challenges

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## Abstract

The Maratha invasions of Bengal during the reign of Alivardi Khan were among the most significant events in the history of eighteenth-century eastern India. Beginning in 1741, repeated Maratha raids continued for nearly a decade and affected the political stability, economy and everyday life of Bengal. These invasions caused heavy loss of life and property, disrupted agriculture and trade, and weakened the financial position of the Nawabi government. Throughout this difficult period, Alivardi Khan made continuous efforts to defend Bengal through military campaigns, administrative measures and diplomatic negotiations. Although he was able to prevent the Marathas from establishing permanent political control over Bengal, the prolonged conflict exhausted the resources of the province and created new political and economic challenges.

This paper examines the causes of the Maratha invasions, the military and administrative response of Alivardi Khan, and their impact on the political, economic and social condition of Bengal. It also studies the views of different historians and compares evidence from Persian chronicles, contemporary records and modern historical works. The study argues that the importance of the Maratha invasions lies not only in the destruction they caused but

also in the long-term changes they brought to the Nawabi administration. These developments weakened Bengal at a crucial time and indirectly contributed to the changing political situation that later enabled the English East India Company to expand its influence in the province. By bringing together different historical sources, this paper attempts to present a balanced understanding of Alivardi Khan's role during one of the most challenging periods in the history of Nawabi Bengal.

**Keywords:** Alivardi Khan, Maratha Invasions, Bengal, Bargi Raids, Nawabi Administration, Eighteenth-Century India.



## Introduction

The eighteenth century was a period of political uncertainty and regional transformation in the Indian subcontinent. The gradual decline of Mughal authority after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 created opportunities for several provincial governors to strengthen their position and exercise greater autonomy while formally remaining loyal to the Mughal emperor. Bengal was one of the most prosperous provinces of the empire during this period. Its fertile agricultural land, flourishing textile industry and extensive commercial networks made it one of the richest regions in South Asia.<sup>1</sup> The stability that Bengal enjoyed during the early eighteenth century was largely the result of efficient administration established by Murshid Quli Khan and continued by his successors. Revenue collection was well organised, trade expanded steadily and Murshidabad emerged as one of the leading political and commercial centres of the subcontinent. At the same time, however, Bengal's growing prosperity attracted the attention of ambitious regional powers looking for wealth and political influence.<sup>2</sup>

A major turning point came in 1740 when Alivardi Khan became the Nawab of Bengal after defeating Sarfaraz Khan at the Battle of Giria. His accession did not merely represent a change of ruler; it marked the beginning of one of the most challenging periods in the history of Nawabi Bengal. Almost immediately after assuming power, Alivardi Khan had to deal with internal opposition, administrative reorganisation and the growing threat posed by the expanding Maratha Confederacy.<sup>3</sup> The Marathas had already emerged as a dominant military force in western and central India. Their campaigns were driven by both political ambition and the demand for *chauth*, which had become an important source of revenue. Bengal, because of its immense wealth and comparatively weak military frontier, became a natural target. Beginning in 1741, Maratha forces repeatedly entered Bengal, carrying out raids that continued for nearly ten years. These incursions, remembered in Bengal as the *Bargi* raids, caused widespread destruction across large parts of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Villages were burnt, agricultural production was interrupted, trade routes became insecure and thousands of people were forced to abandon their homes in search of safety.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many contemporary rulers who suffered rapid military collapse, Alivardi Khan chose to confront the Marathas through continuous campaigns, strategic movement of troops and administrative adjustments. Although he was unable to prevent repeated incursions, he successfully resisted every attempt to establish permanent Maratha rule over Bengal. His military ability and political determination have earned him an important place in the history of eighteenth-century India. At the same time, the prolonged conflict placed enormous pressure on the finances of the Nawabi government and weakened several institutions that had previously contributed to Bengal's stability.<sup>5</sup> The significance of the Maratha invasions extends beyond the history of warfare. Their impact was felt in the political administration, agrarian economy, commercial life and social conditions of Bengal. Many historians have argued that the repeated invasions exhausted the resources of the Nawabi state and reduced its capacity to respond effectively to new political challenges during the following decade. The growing influence of the English East India Company after 1757 cannot be understood fully without examining the circumstances created by these prolonged conflicts.<sup>6</sup> This paper examines the Maratha invasions during the reign of Alivardi Khan between 1741 and 1751. It analyses the political background of the invasions, the military and administrative measures adopted by the Nawab, and the economic and social consequences that followed. The study also evaluates different historical interpretations in order to understand whether the Maratha invasions should be viewed simply as a series of military raids or as a turning point that fundamentally altered the political structure of Nawabi Bengal.

## Political Background of Bengal before the Maratha Invasions

Before examining the Maratha invasions, it is necessary to understand the political condition of Bengal during the first half of the eighteenth century. The repeated attacks on Bengal were not accidental. They were closely connected with the political changes taking place in the Mughal Empire as well as the growing importance of Bengal as one of the richest provinces of India.



During the closing years of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, Bengal occupied a unique position within the Mughal Empire. Its fertile alluvial plains, favourable river system and expanding textile industry made it one of the wealthiest provinces under Mughal rule. Agricultural production remained high, while centres such as Murshidabad, Kasimbazar, Hughli and Dacca developed into important commercial towns. Merchants from different parts of India, along with English, Dutch and French trading companies, carried on extensive commercial activities in the province. The large volume of trade and efficient revenue administration made Bengal one of the principal sources of imperial income.<sup>7</sup> The foundations of this prosperity had been laid by Murshid Quli Khan, who became the first virtually independent Nawab of Bengal. His administrative reforms brought greater discipline to revenue collection and strengthened the financial position of the provincial government. The transfer of the capital from Dacca to Murshidabad gave the administration a more central position and transformed the city into an important political and economic centre. Revenue officials were placed under stricter supervision, while influential zamindars were brought under greater administrative control. Although these measures sometimes created resentment among local elites, they contributed significantly to the financial stability of Bengal during the early eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> After the death of Murshid Quli Khan in 1727, Shuja-ud-Din Muhammad Khan succeeded him as Nawab. His reign was comparatively peaceful and witnessed the continuation of many administrative practices introduced by his predecessor. Commercial activity expanded further, and European companies increased their trade in silk, cotton textiles and saltpetre. The Nawabi administration generally maintained cordial relations with these companies, whose interests at this stage remained largely commercial rather than political. The prosperity enjoyed during this period strengthened Bengal's reputation as the richest province of the Mughal Empire.<sup>9</sup> The political situation, however, became less stable after the death of Shuja-ud-Din in 1739. His son, Sarfaraz Khan, inherited the Nawabi, but his short reign was marked by increasing political rivalry within the provincial administration. Senior nobles, military commanders and influential officials competed for power, creating divisions within the government. Among these officials, Alivardi Khan, then serving as the Deputy Governor of Bihar, gradually emerged as the most capable political and military leader. His growing influence eventually brought him into conflict with Sarfaraz Khan, resulting in the Battle of Giria in April 1740.<sup>10</sup> The victory at Giria established Alivardi Khan as the new Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. Although he secured power through military success, his position during the initial years of his reign remained uncertain. He had to obtain imperial recognition from the Mughal court, secure the loyalty of provincial officers, maintain the confidence of powerful zamindars and reorganise the administration after the civil conflict. These responsibilities demanded considerable political skill at a time when the authority of the Mughal Empire itself was steadily declining.<sup>11</sup> While Alivardi Khan was consolidating his position, significant developments were taking place in western and central India. The Maratha Confederacy had expanded rapidly after the death of Aurangzeb and had become one of the strongest military powers in the subcontinent. Their policy of collecting *chauth* from prosperous provinces brought them into direct conflict with several regional states. Bengal, because of its enormous agricultural wealth, flourishing commerce and comparatively open western frontier, naturally attracted Maratha attention. Thus, the political transition within Bengal coincided with the expansionist ambitions of the Marathas, creating circumstances that soon led to one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in the history of eighteenth-century eastern India.<sup>12</sup>

### Causes of the Maratha Invasions

The Maratha invasions of Bengal were the result of several political and economic developments that had taken place across the Indian subcontinent during the first half of the eighteenth century. They cannot be explained simply as acts of plunder or military aggression. The weakening of Mughal authority, the rise of the Maratha Confederacy as an important regional power and the exceptional prosperity of Bengal together created conditions that made repeated invasions almost inevitable.<sup>13</sup> One of the most important reasons behind the Maratha expansion was the decline of the Mughal Empire after the death of Aurangzeb. During the early eighteenth century, the imperial government gradually lost effective control over many of its provinces. Provincial governors became increasingly independent, while the emperor's authority was often limited to



granting formal recognition. This political fragmentation encouraged ambitious regional powers to extend their influence into areas that had previously remained under firm Mughal control. The Marathas were among the greatest beneficiaries of this changing political situation.<sup>14</sup> Another important factor was the Maratha policy of collecting *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi*. Originally developed in the Deccan, these claims gradually became instruments through which the Marathas asserted political influence over neighbouring territories. Rather than seeking immediate annexation in every region, they frequently aimed to establish financial claims that would provide a regular source of revenue. Bengal, known throughout India for its agricultural productivity and commercial wealth, appeared capable of providing enormous financial returns. The demand for *chauth* therefore became both an economic objective and a means of extending Maratha authority beyond western India.<sup>15</sup> The internal political situation in Bengal also contributed to its vulnerability. Alivardi Khan had secured the Nawabi only in 1740 after defeating Sarfaraz Khan at the Battle of Giria. Although he quickly established his authority, the change of government required administrative reorganisation and the restoration of political stability. Military resources had already been used during the struggle for succession, while several influential officials were still adjusting to the new administration. Such circumstances inevitably limited the Nawab's ability to respond immediately to external threats.<sup>16</sup> The geographical position of Bengal further encouraged Maratha incursions. The western districts of the province, particularly the regions adjoining Odisha and present-day western Bengal, provided relatively easy routes for mounted forces entering from central India. The Marathas, who were well known for their speed, mobility and cavalry tactics, took advantage of these routes to conduct sudden attacks on towns and villages before withdrawing with captured wealth and supplies. Their method of warfare differed from conventional campaigns aimed at occupying territory. Instead, repeated raids weakened the enemy's economy while reducing the cost of prolonged military engagement.<sup>17</sup> Economic considerations remained central to the entire conflict. By the middle of the eighteenth century, Bengal had become one of the principal centres of textile production and international trade. Its silk, cotton textiles, saltpetre and agricultural products attracted merchants from across Asia and Europe. The existence of prosperous commercial centres, wealthy zamindars and productive agricultural districts made the province an attractive objective for forces seeking both revenue and movable wealth. Contemporary accounts repeatedly indicate that the Maratha raids were directed not only against military targets but also against economically productive regions capable of yielding immediate financial gain.<sup>18</sup> Historians have not always agreed on the relative importance of these causes. Some have emphasised the economic motive behind the invasions, arguing that Bengal's prosperity itself became the principal attraction. Others have attached greater importance to the political decline of the Mughal Empire, maintaining that the weakening of imperial authority created opportunities for ambitious regional powers to pursue expansion without facing effective resistance. A balanced assessment suggests that both factors worked together. Bengal's wealth made it an attractive objective, but the changing political structure of eighteenth-century India made repeated incursions possible.<sup>19</sup> It is therefore difficult to interpret the Maratha invasions as isolated military expeditions. They formed part of a wider transformation in Indian politics during the eighteenth century, when regional states increasingly competed for resources, influence and legitimacy in the absence of strong imperial authority. The conflict between Alivardi Khan and the Marathas should be understood within this broader context, for it reflected not only the ambitions of one regional power but also the changing balance of power throughout the subcontinent.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Course of the Maratha Invasions (1741–1751)**

The first major Maratha incursions into Bengal began in 1741, shortly after Alivardi Khan assumed power. Although the Nawab had succeeded in establishing his authority after the Battle of Giria, his administration was still in the process of consolidation. The Marathas recognised this period of political transition as an opportunity to press their demands and extend their influence towards eastern India. Their campaigns were led primarily by Bhaskar Pandit, acting on behalf of Raghuji Bhonsle of Nagpur, whose ambitions in eastern India had grown considerably during this period.<sup>21</sup> Unlike conventional military campaigns that aimed at occupying territory, the Maratha strategy depended upon speed, mobility and surprise. Their cavalry units advanced



rapidly into Bengal, attacking villages, market towns and revenue-producing districts before local forces could organise an effective response. They generally avoided prolonged sieges and instead concentrated on destroying economic resources that sustained the Nawabi administration. Crops were burnt, cattle were seized, granaries were looted and communication routes were disrupted. This method of warfare not only caused immediate destruction but also reduced the government's ability to collect land revenue in the affected regions.<sup>22</sup> The western districts of Bengal suffered the greatest damage during the early phase of the invasions. Areas such as Burdwan, Midnapore and Birbhum experienced repeated raids, forcing many cultivators to abandon their villages. Contemporary accounts describe large-scale migration of rural families towards safer areas, while several local markets remained deserted for long periods. Agricultural production declined in many places because cultivators were unable to continue farming under constant fear of attack. The disruption of village life affected both the local economy and the revenue system upon which the Nawabi government depended.<sup>23</sup> Alivardi Khan personally led several military expeditions against the invading forces. Despite his advancing age, he preferred to remain with his army rather than direct operations from the capital. His strategy was based on constant pursuit and the protection of major administrative centres rather than engaging the Marathas in reckless open battles. He understood that the strength of the Marathas lay in their fast-moving cavalry, while the Nawabi forces were comparatively slower because they depended heavily on infantry, artillery and supply lines. Consequently, many engagements ended without a decisive military victory, even though the Nawab succeeded in preventing the permanent occupation of Bengal.<sup>24</sup> One of the most significant episodes of the conflict was the death of Bhaskar Pandit. Alivardi Khan succeeded in eliminating the Maratha commander through careful planning, hoping that his death would reduce the intensity of future raids. Although this temporarily weakened the invading forces, it did not bring the conflict to an end. Fresh Maratha expeditions continued under different commanders, demonstrating that the invasions were driven by broader political and economic objectives rather than by the leadership of a single individual.<sup>25</sup> As the conflict continued year after year, both sides modified their strategies. The Marathas increasingly relied on seasonal raids designed to obtain revenue and supplies with minimum military expenditure. Alivardi Khan, on the other hand, strengthened defensive positions, improved intelligence gathering and attempted to protect important communication routes. Nevertheless, the repeated invasions imposed enormous financial costs upon the Nawabi administration. Large sums that could have been used for civil administration or economic development were diverted towards military expenditure and emergency defence.<sup>26</sup> The prolonged nature of the conflict also affected the relationship between the provincial government and local zamindars. Many zamindars were compelled to organise their own defensive arrangements, while others struggled to fulfil revenue obligations because agricultural production had declined. The authority of the Nawabi administration remained intact, but its capacity to maintain effective control over distant districts was increasingly tested by the continuous cycle of invasion and recovery.<sup>27</sup> After nearly a decade of warfare, neither side achieved complete success. The Marathas failed to establish permanent political control over Bengal, while Alivardi Khan could not entirely prevent their repeated incursions. Eventually, a negotiated settlement reduced the scale of hostilities. According to the terms generally accepted by historians, Odisha came under Maratha influence, and arrangements relating to the payment of *chauth* helped bring an end to the prolonged conflict. Although peace was gradually restored, Bengal emerged from the decade of warfare economically weakened and administratively strained. The consequences of these invasions continued to influence the province long after the fighting had ended and formed an important background to the political developments of the 1750s.<sup>28</sup>

### **Alivardi Khan's Military and Administrative Response**

The repeated Maratha invasions presented Alivardi Khan with a challenge unlike any faced by the earlier Nawabs of Bengal. The conflict was not a single military campaign but a prolonged struggle that continued for almost ten years. Throughout this period, the Nawab was required to balance military operations with the ordinary responsibilities of provincial administration. Protecting the population, maintaining revenue collection and preserving political authority became equally important objectives.<sup>29</sup> One of the most striking features of Alivardi Khan's leadership was his personal involvement in military affairs. Contemporary accounts



indicate that he rarely remained in Murshidabad when the Marathas entered Bengal. Instead, he frequently accompanied his army, supervised military movements and personally directed important campaigns. Although he was no longer a young man, he preferred active leadership in the field, believing that the presence of the Nawab encouraged his officers and strengthened the morale of the troops.<sup>30</sup> Alivardi Khan understood that the conventional methods of warfare used by the Nawabi army were not always effective against the fast-moving Maratha cavalry. The Marathas depended upon speed, surprise and mobility, often avoiding prolonged engagements. Their objective was to inflict economic damage rather than occupy territory permanently. Recognising this difference, the Nawab gradually adapted his military strategy. Instead of pursuing decisive battles at every opportunity, he concentrated on protecting important towns, securing supply routes and preventing the invaders from establishing permanent bases within Bengal.<sup>31</sup> Military success alone, however, could not solve the problem. Every campaign required men, supplies and money, placing increasing pressure on the provincial treasury. The Nawab therefore paid close attention to administrative organisation. Revenue officials were instructed to maintain regular collections wherever possible, while local officers were expected to cooperate with military commanders in protecting productive districts. In several regions, administrative priorities shifted from expansion to preservation. The government attempted to minimise disruption rather than restore complete normality immediately after each raid.<sup>32</sup> The role of local zamindars also became increasingly important during this period. Many of them organised defensive arrangements within their estates, supplied provisions to government forces or assisted in maintaining communication between districts. Their cooperation was essential because the provincial administration alone could not respond rapidly to attacks occurring simultaneously in different parts of Bengal. At the same time, the Nawab remained cautious of allowing local chiefs to become excessively independent, recognising that political stability depended upon maintaining the authority of the central administration.<sup>33</sup> One of the major difficulties faced by Alivardi Khan was the continuous financial burden created by the conflict. Repeated military mobilisation required substantial expenditure on soldiers, transport, artillery and supplies. At the same time, the very districts that provided the largest share of land revenue were often those most severely affected by Maratha raids. This created a difficult situation in which military expenditure increased while government income declined. The administration was therefore forced to operate under constant financial pressure for much of the decade.<sup>34</sup> Historians have expressed different opinions regarding the effectiveness of Alivardi Khan's policies. Some regard him as one of the most capable provincial rulers of eighteenth-century India, arguing that few contemporary governors could have defended Bengal as successfully under similar circumstances. They point out that despite repeated invasions, the Marathas failed to establish permanent rule in the province, and the administrative structure of the Nawabi state continued to function. Others suggest that the defensive nature of his strategy reflected the limitations imposed by available resources rather than deliberate military choice. They argue that although Bengal remained politically independent, the prolonged conflict gradually weakened the province's economic and military strength.<sup>35</sup> A balanced assessment indicates that both interpretations contain elements of truth. Alivardi Khan demonstrated considerable political judgement, military determination and administrative skill during one of the most difficult periods in Bengal's history. Yet it is equally clear that even an able ruler could not entirely overcome the structural problems created by continuous warfare. The repeated Maratha incursions exhausted resources, disrupted administration and forced the Nawabi government to devote increasing attention to immediate military concerns. Consequently, by the end of the conflict, Bengal remained politically intact but considerably less resilient than it had been at the beginning of Alivardi Khan's reign.<sup>36</sup>

### **Economic Consequences of the Maratha Invasions**

The economic consequences of the Maratha invasions were far more serious than the immediate destruction caused by military operations. Although the raids did not result in the permanent occupation of Bengal, they affected almost every important source of revenue that sustained the Nawabi administration. Agriculture, trade, transport and revenue collection all suffered during the prolonged conflict, leaving long-lasting effects on the economy of the province.<sup>37</sup> Agriculture formed the foundation of Bengal's prosperity during the eighteenth century. The fertile plains of the province produced abundant rice, sugarcane, oilseeds and other crops that not



only supported the local population but also generated substantial land revenue for the government. Repeated Maratha incursions disturbed this system. Cultivators abandoned their villages to escape violence, many fields remained uncultivated for successive seasons and irrigation works in some areas were neglected. The decline in agricultural production naturally reduced the amount of revenue collected by the state.<sup>38</sup> The raids also affected the commercial life of Bengal. Important trading centres experienced repeated disruption as merchants found it increasingly difficult to transport goods safely from one region to another. Caravans travelling through western Bengal often faced the risk of attack, while local markets remained closed during periods of military activity. Commercial uncertainty discouraged investment and affected both Indian merchants and European trading companies operating in the province. Although overseas trade did not come to a complete halt, its smooth functioning was interrupted by the general instability prevailing in the countryside.<sup>39</sup> Murshidabad, the capital of the Nawabi government, continued to function as the principal administrative and commercial centre of Bengal. However, the prosperity of the city depended upon regular revenue inflows from different districts. As agricultural production declined and local administration came under increasing pressure, the financial resources available to the provincial government became less secure. The Nawab was compelled to spend large sums on military campaigns, transport, supplies and the maintenance of troops at precisely the time when government income was becoming uncertain.<sup>40</sup> The textile industry, one of Bengal's greatest economic strengths, also experienced indirect consequences. Although weaving centres in eastern Bengal were not always directly attacked, the disruption of transport networks, uncertainty in the countryside and decline in rural purchasing power affected production and distribution. European companies continued to purchase textiles, but they increasingly operated in an environment where political instability influenced commercial decisions. This gradual shift strengthened the bargaining position of foreign trading companies, which possessed greater financial resources and organisational flexibility than many local merchants.<sup>41</sup> An equally important consequence was the growing financial burden placed upon the Nawabi administration. Continuous mobilisation of troops required regular expenditure on salaries, artillery, provisions, transport animals and military supplies. Emergency military requirements often took priority over developmental expenditure. Resources that might otherwise have been used to strengthen civil administration, improve infrastructure or encourage agricultural recovery were diverted towards the immediate demands of defence. Over time, this weakened the financial resilience of the provincial government.<sup>42</sup> Several historians have argued that the economic damage caused by the Maratha invasions should not be measured only in terms of physical destruction. The greater loss lay in the gradual weakening of confidence within the provincial economy. Merchants became cautious, cultivators faced uncertainty, revenue officials struggled to maintain collections and local administrators devoted increasing attention to crisis management instead of long-term governance. In this sense, the invasions affected not merely the wealth of Bengal but also the efficiency of its economic institutions.<sup>43</sup> It would be an exaggeration to claim that the Maratha invasions alone caused the decline of the Bengal economy. The province remained economically significant even after the end of the conflict. Nevertheless, the repeated raids undoubtedly reduced the financial strength of the Nawabi state and limited its ability to respond to new political challenges. When Bengal entered another period of conflict during the 1750s, particularly in its relations with the English East India Company, it did so with an economy that had already endured years of military disruption and administrative strain.<sup>44</sup>

### **Social Consequences of the Maratha Invasions**

The impact of the Maratha invasions was not confined to the political administration or the economy of Bengal. The repeated raids also produced significant social changes that affected ordinary people throughout the province. While rulers and military commanders were engaged in defending the state, the greatest burden of the conflict was borne by cultivators, artisans, traders and village communities. Their experiences reveal another dimension of the Maratha invasions that is often overshadowed by discussions of military campaigns and political events.<sup>45</sup> One of the most immediate consequences of the invasions was the large-scale displacement of population. Whenever news of an approaching Maratha force reached a district, many villagers abandoned their homes and sought shelter in forests, river islands or fortified settlements. In several areas,



entire villages remained deserted for weeks or even months. Families were separated, agricultural activities were interrupted and normal village life came to a standstill. Such movements were not isolated incidents but became a recurring feature of life in many parts of western Bengal during the decade of conflict.<sup>46</sup> The destruction of crops and the loss of cattle created serious difficulties for rural households. Since agriculture formed the principal source of livelihood, repeated interruptions in cultivation affected food security as well as income. Many cultivators found it difficult to pay land revenue, while village artisans who depended upon the rural economy also experienced declining demand for their goods and services. The effects of the invasions therefore extended beyond the battlefield and influenced the entire structure of village society.<sup>47</sup> Urban centres were comparatively better protected, yet they were not entirely free from the consequences of the conflict. Merchants often postponed commercial activities because of uncertainty in the countryside, and transport between districts became increasingly difficult. Markets that depended upon regular supplies from rural areas experienced fluctuations in prices and availability of essential commodities. Although Murshidabad continued to function as the political capital, even the administration of the city was affected by the continuous need to organise military defence and emergency expenditure.<sup>48</sup> An important feature of the Maratha invasions was the psychological impact they left upon the people of Bengal. Contemporary Persian accounts describe an atmosphere of fear that spread across the countryside whenever reports of Maratha movements were received. This memory survived long after the conflict had ended. In Bengal, the word *Bargi* gradually became associated with fear and sudden destruction, and references to the invasions found a lasting place in local traditions and folk songs. The well-known Bengali rhyme about the *Bargis* is not merely a literary composition but also reflects the deep impression left by these events on popular memory.<sup>49</sup> The prolonged conflict also altered the relationship between the provincial administration and local society. Zamindars, village headmen and local officials were often expected to organise defensive arrangements, protect food supplies and maintain communication with government authorities. In some regions this strengthened cooperation between local elites and the Nawabi administration, while in others the inability to provide effective protection weakened public confidence in government authority. These varied local experiences remind us that the social consequences of the invasions were not uniform across the province.<sup>50</sup> It is equally important to recognise that Bengal society did not simply collapse under the pressure of repeated invasions. Agricultural production gradually recovered in many districts after periods of destruction, trade resumed once security improved and local institutions adapted to changing circumstances. This resilience explains why Bengal continued to remain one of the most economically productive regions of India even after the end of the Maratha conflict. Nevertheless, the years between 1741 and 1751 left lasting social scars that shaped the experiences of an entire generation and influenced the political environment inherited by Alivardi Khan's successors.<sup>51</sup> The social history of the Maratha invasions therefore deserves attention alongside their military and political significance. The conflict was not only a contest between two regional powers but also a human experience that affected everyday life across Bengal. Understanding these social consequences provides a more complete picture of Alivardi Khan's reign and helps explain why the memory of the *Bargi* raids continued to occupy a prominent place in the historical consciousness of Bengal long after the fighting had ceased.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

The Maratha invasions of Bengal during the reign of Alivardi Khan were among the most important developments in the political history of eighteenth-century eastern India. Although the invasions are often remembered for the destruction they caused, their significance extends far beyond military conflict. They affected the political administration, weakened the provincial economy, disrupted agricultural production, disturbed commercial activities and influenced the everyday lives of people across large parts of Bengal. The repeated incursions placed the Nawabi government under constant pressure and forced it to devote much of its energy and financial resources to defence rather than administrative development.<sup>53</sup> Alivardi Khan's response to these challenges demonstrated considerable political judgement and military determination. Despite repeated attacks over nearly a decade, he prevented the Marathas from establishing permanent political control over Bengal. His leadership helped preserve the territorial integrity of the Nawabi state at a time when many



regional governments were facing similar pressures. His military campaigns, administrative measures and efforts to maintain political stability reflected both his personal abilities and his understanding of the changing political conditions of eighteenth-century India.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, this study has shown that military success did not remove the long-term consequences of the conflict. The continuous warfare exhausted the financial resources of the province, disrupted the revenue system and reduced the administrative flexibility of the Nawabi government. Even after peace was gradually restored, Bengal carried the burden of years of economic loss and institutional strain. These developments did not by themselves lead to the decline of the Nawabi state, but they undoubtedly weakened its capacity to respond to new political challenges during the following decade.<sup>55</sup> The paper also suggests that the Maratha invasions should be understood within the wider transformation of Indian politics after the decline of Mughal authority. They were not isolated episodes of plunder but part of a broader struggle among emerging regional powers competing for revenue, influence and legitimacy. Seen from this perspective, the conflict between Alivardi Khan and the Marathas reflects the changing balance of power in eighteenth-century India rather than a purely regional dispute.<sup>56</sup> The evidence examined in this study indicates that Alivardi Khan deserves recognition not only as a military commander but also as a ruler who attempted to preserve the political stability of Bengal during one of the most difficult periods in its history. Nevertheless, the prolonged nature of the conflict altered the administrative and economic foundations of the Nawabi state in ways that continued to shape Bengal's political future. The rise of the English East India Company after 1757 must therefore be viewed against the background of a province that had already experienced years of military conflict, financial pressure and administrative adjustment.<sup>57</sup> Finally, this study demonstrates that the history of the Maratha invasions cannot be understood solely through battles and political events. Contemporary Persian chronicles, Company records and modern historical scholarship together reveal a more complex picture in which warfare, governance, economy and society were closely connected. Future research may further explore regional experiences within Bengal, local administrative responses and unpublished archival material to deepen our understanding of this important phase in the history of Nawabi Bengal.<sup>58</sup>

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