

Durrani empire, popular protests, 1747–1823

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The Durrani empire emerged in 1747 as fundamentally a military confederation of Pashtun ethnic groups in the Central Asian region of modern-day Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan. While not a centralized state, at its peak of expansion the Durrani empire covered an area of 780,000 square miles (2,000,000 square kilometers). The empire stretched from Afghanistan across Pakistan to within 60 miles of Delhi. As a privileged ethnicity, the Pashtun dominated the royal court, bureaucracy, and army and gained most of the perquisites of the confederation. As the Durrani empire expanded its military reach, non-Pashtun nationalities were overpowered and suppressed by the Pashtun. Those who were not members of the dominant Pashtun were subjected to higher taxation and forced into compulsory military duty, while the local land and water resources of many were expropriated by the colonial empire. Swelling tensions between newcomers and the indigenous non-Pashtun population sparked open clashes and revolts against the colonial empire.

The massive Baluches Rebellion of 1758 in the region is a notable example of uprisings during the Durrani empire. Due to the overwhelming military and economic power of the empire, the insurrection was crushed, with military forces laying siege to the Baluch center of Kalat for 40 days before the protests were quelled and an agreement was achieved between the warring parties that was highly favorable to the Pashtun.

So too, in the 1780s, Southern Turkestan was a highly explosive part of the Durrani empire. Home to the autonomous Tajik, Turkmen, and Uzbek, the region became a center of resistance to Durrani military, political, and economic hegemony. The emir of Bukhara challenged the Durrani empire for control over the region and rallied local partisans living in communities in Central Asia to defy efforts to comply with

the demands of the Pashtun. This resistance continued through 1789, when the Durrani ruler Timur Shah succeeded in suppressing the rebellion and establishing control in Southern Turkestan.

However, while the Durrani leaders, known as shahs, were continuously striving to control and restrain the non-Pashtun, these efforts were complicated by internecine conflict among the Pashtun, as various regions sought autonomy from the empire, especially when they perceived the central power to be overly domineering. Support for the Durrani empire was only achieved when regional Pashtun perceived the central government as a beneficial source of economic and military protection. However, when the Durrani sought local tribute, some sought regional autonomy. Some of the largest uprisings occurred in 1801 when the Ghilzai rebelled against Shah Mahmud. The uprisings were a first sign of growing ethnic separatism which, accompanied by non-Pashtun movements, undermined the Durrani empire and led to its disintegration in 1823.

SEE ALSO: Afghanistan, 1978 Revolution and Islamic Civil War; Afghanistan, Resistance to 19th-Century British Invasion; Bacha-i Sakkao's Movement; Bin Laden, Osama (b. 1957) and al-Qaeda; Taliban, 1996–2007

References and Suggested Readings

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