Interrogating International Relations

India's Strategic Practice and the Return of History

Jayashree Vivekanandan

WAR AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA
SERIES EDITOR: SRINATH RAGHAVAN
Interrogating
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Jayashree Vivekanandan
To my parents

for making it worth the while
‘I confess I do not believe in time. I like to fold my magic carpet, after use, in such a way as to superimpose one part of the pattern upon another. Let visitors trip.’

V. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*
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Temporal Journeys: Reorienting International Relations

Much of our intellectual preoccupations with the world around us have centred on the passage of time. In its layers of epochs, accounts and historical memory, every society has sought its identity or fought for the right to seek one. This grappling with history has essentially concerned the issue of human agency — to act purposively in a manner that renders our social and political pursuits as individuals and as a collectivity, meaningful. The arena of international politics is no different. States and empires have always asserted their right to act and sought justification of their actions in their pasts. Interpreting a state’s strategic history has thus assumed centrality within its discourse and has fired the intellectual curiosity of international relations (hereby IR) as a discipline. However, while IR has largely sought to establish a relationship of convenience with history as a discipline, IR scholars remain deeply divided on how much salience should be accorded to historical particularities within the broad folds of theory. For instance, whereas realists tend to view history as a reiteration of the timeless pursuit of power, postmodernists problematise historical progress itself. While one privileges continuity, the other celebrates the principle of difference. These contrasting theoretical positions on the status of history make for much disciplinary ambiguity and debate. This book takes its theoretical cue from such divergences on the status of history and is a journey into time as a variable in the study of IR theory.

The introduction is divided into three broad sections in which the research focus of the book is outlined and the chosen case study justified. The first section frames the book’s central argument that a historically contingent study of state behaviour makes for a more nuanced understanding as against the limited framework that culture studies within IR currently afford. The second section underscores the primacy of context
as a point of departure for the study and consciously seeks to step away from the twin dangers of essentialism and ahistoricism. Understood thus, reorienting IR would thus entail rethinking conventional understandings of culture, space and the international system as understood today. The third section outlines the study’s theoretical framework and defines the historical parameters within which it is based. The study employs the notion of grand strategy to examine the relative importance attached to the two defining strategies of conciliation and coercion employed by the Mughal empire. The success of Emperor Akbar’s grand strategy of accommodation points to the effectiveness of soft power and the resilience of ideas in a political power structure. The case study also serves to highlight the mode of state formation that was followed to build one of the most powerful and prosperous pre-modern empires to have existed in history.

The book assigns itself three key research objectives:

1. To bring a historical perspective to theorisations on Indian strategic practice and problematise a set of ahistorical assertions traceable to the colonial period.
2. To examine the role of soft power in processes of state-building and identity formation. Whereas soft power is commonly subsumed within materialist interpretations of power, it is a vital module in the process of consolidating power that, as the study demonstrates, was wielded to great effect by the Mughals.
3. To problematise several priors in IR theory including the narrow conceptualisations of power, culture and the international system, as well as to challenge the perceived redundancy of pre-modern political entities. The study questions the tendency to selectively delve into history merely to seek substantiation without permitting scope for contingency in theorisations.

Central Argument

The selection of a historical case study is principally to draw attention to the neglect of pre-modern histories, particularly of post-colonial societies such as India. Given that mainstream theories tend to be based on certain a priori assumptions, historical cases such as this fall in the interstices between disciplines. It is then hardly surprising that the discipline of IR is accused of inadequately reflecting the concerns of the vast majority of peoples in the non-Western world. This leads us to five assertions that will be argued out in the subsequent chapters.
First, there is a need to bring greater historical content into IR theory which, for a number of reasons, has restricted its engagement with history to merely extracting suitable instances to substantiate certain theoretical claims. A historical turn does not imply the selective use of history, but instead seeks to build contingency and open-endedness into theoretical assertions. A historical perspective would enable IR theorists to better explain how the sovereign state system evolved from a system of imperial orders. Historicising the international system would delineate the notion itself from its present form and allow researchers to theorise the ‘empire’.

Second, a broader conception of power is in order — one that factors in norms as a constitutive aspect rather than as a mere regulative element of power. Although realism acknowledges norms as a constituent of power, it subsumes their impact within the larger influence of material factors. The scope to assess or even acknowledge the influence that ideational factors cast on state behaviour is thus substantially circumscribed. As constructivist and postcolonialist literatures convincingly argue, the power of ideas is far more efficient and durable than materialist domination would allow scope for. In a rare inversion of trends in scholarship, studies on high politics are beginning to take the cue from new theoretical research on what till recently was labelled as being low politics. Postcolonialism for instance has literary origins, and it began by mounting a critique on the indelible mark that the colonial experience left on the condition and character of the people. What began as an attempt at grappling with the disruptive yet enduring normative legacies of colonialism that people as a collectivity inherited came to be applied to the strategic behaviour of states. Ideas and norms were seen to be not only regulating state behaviour but also constituting their very identities during the course of their mutual

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1 The transition can be explained with the help of a robust differentiation theory that looks at not only the segmentary elements of the international system (states as ‘like units’), but also at its stratificatory (empires) and functional (international political economy) features in history. This would be a more plausible explanation of the multiple transitions that are occurring in the international system today, as the segmentary architecture is challenged by both stratificatory (hegemonic orders) and functional (globalisation, transnational networks) processes. See Barry Buzan and Richard Little, ‘Waltz and World History: The Paradox of Parsimony’, International Relations, 23:3 (2009), p. 458.
Indeed, perceptions of legitimacy and normative identification with the system go a long way in explaining why the authority of a declining power outlasts change in the material balance of power.

Third, a testimony to the resilience of ideas is the number of orientalist caricatures of India that continue to impact theorisations on its strategic practice. The emphasis here is not so much on the actual evolution of strategic practice in India as on discursive power and its impact on its strategic thinking. India presents a classic case of the analytical tradition becoming the historical tradition, particularly in the case of many representations and imageries that continue to figure in cultural interpretations of India, centuries after they were first formulated. Reflexivity captures the subtle shift induced by such formulations, wherein the clichéd images assumed proportions of the very reality that they were meant to represent.

Fourth, there is an urgent need to deliver a corrective to the Eurocentric and ahistoricist tenor of IR theory. Although the growing breed of culturalists has drawn attention to the need to factor in culture in security analyses, the cultural and historical turn in IR has not always presented a welcome shift. Studies that frame culture in self-referential terms run the risk of essentialism. Often, the well-intentioned intellectual exercise of increasing the cultural content of an orthodox discipline ends up as a reiteration of simplistic cultural clichés. IR’s (re)engagement with history has begun with first few tentative steps, although in the case of India there is a complete disconnect between policy-driven IR and history.

\[2\] Studies in postcolonialism have brought into IR an entirely new vocabulary on modernity, civilisations and identity formations. The postcolonialist position on culture has evolved with the discipline itself, and in many ways is reflective of the shifts that have occurred within. From the initial phase of literary criticism of Commonwealth literature, the ambit of postcolonialism was broadened by scholars like Franz Fannon and Albert Memmi who linked the resistance to Western dominance with the recovery of the self by the native. Thus, we see the stark positioning of the self and the other within the postcolonial discourse, the influence of which was felt even within Indian historiography with the emergence of subaltern studies. Gradually, the focus shifted away from regarding the self and the other as polar opposites, to the hybridity of identity and shared experience of both the coloniser and the colonised. The oppositional stance was abandoned in favour of heterogeneity and contradictions that marked the colonial and postcolonial relationship. See Phillip Darby and A. J. Paolini, ‘Bridging International Relations and Postcolonialism’, Alternatives, 19 (1994), pp. 375–78.
Finally, this brings us to the larger issue of reorienting IR towards its fundamental role of reflection. IR, devoid of a historical orientation, is reduced to the self-limiting exercise of keeping watch on fast-changing events that makes an already narrow and isolated field further constricted. The hope for creating space for the histories of post-colonial states within IR lies in a dialogue with other disciplines and in shedding its ethnocentric and Eurocentric approach.

**Discursive Departures**

There are two reasons why this book marks a departure from the research orientation of earlier text-based writings. First, it refrains from focusing on strategic thought and instead chooses to approach strategic practice from two vantage points — the formulation and implementation of actual policies, and the discourse that has evolved around the interpretation of these policies. This may offer a more dynamic and richly textured account of any given historical epoch than would the sole reliance on select texts and documents. A textual interpretation in any case has been the subject of critical reflection by many historians since it is open to the charge of selective reading of certain chosen texts and the omission of others. This is not to say that the history of strategic practice can be a text-free intellectual enterprise; indeed, that is neither feasible nor desirable. The enunciation of policies is often recorded in written texts, as are their interpretations that add subsequent layers to constitute a canon of knowledge. However, policies often outlive the texts in which they were originally postulated and deviate off-course from many documented junctures. Relying on a blend of inscribed intentions and policy deviations to study the manner in which strategic practice unfolded in a particular historical period perhaps offers the best course of action at this point in time. Second, the paucity of military texts belonging to the Mughal period makes a text-based interpretation a difficult proposition. This compounds the already existent methodological problem of establishing a causal connection between strategic thought and strategic practice.

**Setting the Context:**

**Does Indian IR Have a History?**

It is both necessary and desirable to formulate a contingent view of strategic practice in India, as with any other country. Such an approach would be sensitive to the unique set of circumstances that shaped India’s grand strategy during a particular period in its strategic history. Although no direct parallels of policy relevance can be drawn, policy relevant assertions
are often based on historical arguments. At a theoretical plane, the study seeks to broaden the parameters of mainstream IR theory so as to enable it to better explain historical cases from the non-Western world.

The case study chosen in this regard pertains to India which, while it boasts of a long history of strategic planning, paradoxically remains understudied for its supposedly incoherent strategic approach. It will analyse the evolution of India’s strategic approach during a vital period of its history, namely the Mughal rule under Emperor Akbar from 1556 to 1605. This particular phase of medieval Indian history is significant for several reasons. The sheer scale and pace of territorial expansion under the Mughals was unmatched in Indian history, and at its peak their empire covered almost the whole of the Indian subcontinent. The fact that much of the Mughal empire did not fragment into numerous nation-states as its contemporaries like the Ottoman and Habsburg empires did, but remains largely integrated within the Indian state today is a telling testimony of the empire’s cohesiveness. The Mughal state held together a population of 100 million, which was five times that of the Ottomans in 1700. Integration and negotiated order, which are identified as indispensable attributes of a modern nation-state, were at the core of the Mughal imperial domain. The Indian state has inherited this legacy of the Mughals, be it in terms of the political significance of a composite ruling class or the centrality of debate and integration in building state capacity. Furthermore, the patronising of religious debates and the mediating of different world-views made the Mughal court an early precursor to the secular state in India. Akbar’s reign fell at the cusp of critical transitions that oversaw prolonged periods of intermittent warfare giving way to an extended period of expansion and consolidation spread over nearly three centuries.

The degree of control that the Mughals wielded over a vast and populous landmass assumes importance, more so since the society it ruled over was heavily militarised. The distribution of power in the domestic system under Akbar is theoretically the starting point of this study. The lack of monopoly over force and the fact that power distribution was roughly even throughout the system was a critical factor that predisposed the Mughals towards a strategy of accommodation. The study is informed

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by two key factors: the ideational context that tempers the influence of material power, and the historical context that determines the choice of a state’s grand strategy. However, an approach that makes room for varied influences on grand strategy does not imply a *sui generis* study from which larger implications cannot be drawn. It would be erroneous to presume that increased historical content robs theory of its ability to discern larger patterns. Indeed, theorising difference and uniqueness enriches theory itself. The study contests theories that assume generalisations and their universal applications to be coterminous, an assumption that we find to be particularly true of theorisations on India.

This study looks at the ‘internal’ politics of geography: the manner in which the inner contours of polities shaped their response strategies and how strategic thinking evolved under conditions of endemic conflict, compelling states to institutionalise practices that enhanced order and stability in the system. This aspect of geopolitics is equally, and perhaps more important, than the oft-examined ‘external’ facet in understanding the historical processes that shaped India’s strategic practice. Seen from this perspective, attempting to work backwards from the territorial consciousness that developed under the modern Indian state is fallacious, just as the exercise of extending ancient and medieval strategic traditions to the contemporary context would be unviable.

**The Rationale of the Study**

The rationale for this study may be explained in terms of three overlapping scales: the theoretical, the spatial and the temporal.

1. **The Theoretical Scale**

It is interesting to note the extent to which the criterion of periodisation has determined the academic content of IR. The focus has primarily been on the Westphalian order and the manner in which relations between sovereign states have evolved since the 17th century. Gradually, the discipline turned its orientation to the 20th century concerns with war, reconstruction, decolonisation and of course, the Cold War. Closer engagement between experts and policy makers brought a definite policy thrust to IR, and with it came an accent on topicality and relevance. In such

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a scenario, the ancient and medieval periods appeared either irrelevant to or unrepresentative of contemporary concerns within mainstream IR. There was little scholarly interest in pre-modern periods or in studying political formations distinctly different from the Westphalian sovereign system. In fact, in making the redundancy argument, realists refute the notion of periodisation, asserting that distinct periods serve little intellectual purpose precisely since history was wont to repeat itself.\(^6\)

One of the reasons for the skewed approach to history is that pre-colonial history, given its dissimilarities with the present system, does not slip into easy categorisations within IR theory. Power did not translate into absolute monopoly over force in pre-modern contexts, neither did territorial sovereignty imply mutually exclusive spaces of internal and external domains as it does today. However, pre-modern history is theoretically significant on two counts. First, it helps problematise IR’s tendency to selectively refer to historical evidence with the aim of validating claims of contemporary value. Second, a long view of history challenges the assertion often made about post-colonial countries like India that attainment of independence was the effective commencement of its diplomatic history.

2. The Spatial Scale

From the larger theoretical context, we move to the more specific spatial frame of reference that informs this study. The reasons for focusing on India are many, the most significant being the cultural slant to theorisations on its strategic behaviour that is gaining prominence. In a discipline largely dominated by empiricism and materialist interpretations, alternative readings of state behaviour do provide fresh perspectives. The problem arises when cultural approaches, in delineating a distinct set of national attributes, frame culture in essentialist rather than dynamic terms. Culture studies on India have largely followed this course. We find a series of images taken to be representative of India in literature ranging from concise histories of the country to cultural analyses of its strategic behaviour. The representations, mostly Orientalist in origin, were part of the extensive process of codification and regularisation carried out by British administrators. However, what was gained in convenience was lost in authenticity, as radical variations and overlaps in terms of religion, caste and region were reduced to certain readily identifiable heads. The underlying principle that

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informed these pursuits was the assumption that there was an essential India which, in the turbulent course of its history was forgotten and lost to the Indians, and one that had to be retrieved.

The search for India’s true essence that began with the Orientalists is a continuing refrain in contemporary literature. The Orientalist association of Indian philosophical systems with the image of an idealistic people oriented to other-worldly pursuits was reiterated by many culturalists. For instance, in strategic terms, the notion that Indians are culturally incapable of strategising gained ground. Historical consciousness, regarded as the hallmark of an evolved society was found to be conspicuously absent in India, where the progress of time did not follow the conventional Western model of linear time. The book broadly locates itself within culture studies but eschews the essentialist and ahistorical approach that many culturalists in IR tend to adopt. In attempting to offer a counter-perspective, it problematises a number of priors that constitute received knowledge from the colonial period by framing each issue within the assertion–negation loop. This not only allows us to approach culture in dynamic terms than as a pre-existent national inheritance, but it also challenges the penchant to view post-colonial histories through the colonial lens.

3. The Temporal Scale

As a contribution to IR theory and culture studies on India, the choice of a case study from the medieval period may appear unconventional and in need of justification. The historical case from medieval India is intended to highlight the salience of context, particularly in determining the role and effectiveness of power. The use or anticipated use of tangible manifestations of power (such as threats and inducements) is expressed within a certain cultural context of shared subjectivities. Actors in a particular strategic situation communicate through a commonly understood discourse (speech, language and practices, for instance) that infuse the material and the substantial with meaning and significance. Material assets, by conveying meaning through the mode in which they are communicated, become in effect the carriers of symbolism themselves. The terms of this discourse shift with time and context, thereby rendering different interpretations of both the tangible and intangible facets of power. The manner in which the intentions of actors were conveyed through a certain code of behaviour is interesting to note, especially in medieval settings where the encounter with power was experiential. It is this resilience of ideas and norms — to often outlast the power configurations commonly believed to have instituted them — which the study seeks to explore. As we shall see, not
only were practices associated with Mughal legitimacy observed by the British after the downfall of the empire, but the power of ideas continue to persist in the colonial caricatures that remain long after the overlay of colonialism ended.

There is another key reason why we have focused on medieval Indian history in the study of cultural influences on state behaviour. The medieval period has often been externalised from the intellectual exercise of piecing together India’s national identity, which was believed to have evolved from the texts, practices and predominant values of ancient India. Indian civilisation was touted by the Orientalists and nationalists for its resilience to the relentless onslaught of invasions throughout its history, from the Aryans to the British. By focusing on a case from a culturally atypical period, the study refrains from espousing the ‘pure at birth’ thesis. However, the choice to study Akbar’s moderate policies may appear natural to some, considering that his contribution to the development of a syncretic culture is often cited alongside Emperor Ashoka’s and, in a vastly different context, with Gandhi’s as well. Much has been written about Akbar’s religious tolerance and integrative policies, and this study does not intend to add new information to the existing body of literature. Instead, it sets out to examine how the vast Mughal empire based its legitimacy on a broad social base drawn from local elite support and popular cultural appeal. The longevity of the empire is a powerful reminder of how a grand strategy based on a combination of military might and normative appeal is critical to the expansion and consolidation of power. It also compels us to question our taxonomies of power, order and modes of influence. In the sections that follow, we shall examine why these categorisations need to be reworked in order to accommodate broader conceptions of sovereignty, culture and space within IR theory.

Retrieving the Empire

The field of IR abounds with theorists who claim that little has changed in power relations down history, which in all likelihood, will remain the same in the future. In the din of conformism, what is often lost are some of history’s firsts, one of which is the unparalleled, almost universal phenomenon of colonialism. This anomaly goes on to explain the paradox why empires, despite being the most enduring political system

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to have existed in most parts of the world, remain an understudied subject in IR.\textsuperscript{8} The empire as a notion can have two vital implications for IR theory. First, it allows for a more historically 'deep' and representative IR that accommodates the political experiences of the non-Western world within its theoretical ambit. Second, developing a historical view of IR would expand the notion of the international system to include differently-ordered political orders that have existed in the past. It enables political control to be conceptualised in relative terms as negotiated power. As Wight notes:

\begin{quote}
We take this state of affairs for granted […] It will however help us to understand this state of affairs better if we recall that it is by no means the rule in history. The present system in Europe has existed roughly since the Reformation and we are under the illusion that it is normal.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

He goes on to argue that 'the intellectual and moral poverty of international theory' are due to 'first, the intellectual prejudice imposed by the sovereign state, and secondly, the belief in progress'. IR displays little sensitivity to alternative modes of political organisation that existed in the history of the West and the non-Western world. The Westphalian state, with its insular limits became the ideal conceptual tool with which the social influences that the non-Western periphery exerted on the West could be shut out. A study of imperial relations would instead reveal the mutually constitutive

\textsuperscript{8} Within IR literature, the conceptualisation of empire has followed three modes. The empire was seen as a hierarchical political order operating on a large scale which did not amount to absolute territorial control. Empires that dominated the political landscape during the ancient and medieval periods fall within this category, although they did signify the concentration of social power. The 19th and 20th centuries saw the rise of colonial empires that systematised domination through developed state machinery such as improved communication and bureaucratic networks. A distinct feature of modern empires was that nation–states constituted the pivot around which they were built. The third conceptualisation of the term accommodated a broader definition that recognised rule through economic domination without formal territorial control. The political economy of empires was an aspect that was further highlighted and developed by the Marxists. See Martin Shaw, ‘Post-Imperial and Quasi-Imperial: State and Empire in the Global Era’, \textit{Millennium}, 31:2 (2002), pp. 329–30.

elements of what has so far been considered as formal interaction between the centre and the periphery during the 19th and 20th centuries.\(^{10}\)

The sharp dichotomy often assumed to exist between independent orders and empires has not gone altogether unquestioned in IR. Hedley Bull and Adam Watson’s *The Expansion of International Society* in 1984 was perhaps one of the earliest works that initiated a reorientation within IR in this regard. Michael Doyle too went on to emphasise the constitutive forces of the imperial system, particularly the periphery which according to him exerts ‘return influence’ upon the metropole.\(^{11}\) Similarly, Watson likened the international system to the ‘wavelengths of light in a rainbow’ that oscillated along a spectrum ranging from independence, hegemony, dominion to empire.\(^{12}\) The imperial subjugation of communities with a history of local autonomy tended to result in a swing towards formal overlordship and loose hegemony.\(^{13}\) The empire as a notion is integrally linked to the conceptual evolution of sovereignty and to the parallel encounters of the West with the rest of the world.\(^{14}\) As Hardt and Negri observe:

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\(^{10}\) Britain as a nascent state drew significant lessons from its experiences as an imperial power. For instance, a number of state-building projects such as documentation processes and administrative services were experimented initially in India before being modified and adopted in Britain. The imperial relationship also saw the reverse flow of experimentation, with successful British ventures such as universities being introduced in India. See Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 3–4.


\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 124.

\(^{14}\) For a number of interrelated reasons, the colonisers did not see the native populations as possessors of sovereignty. First, the moral justification of colonialism demanded that the occupation of foreign territory should not be seen as violating the sovereignty of another state, a dilemma that was easily circumvented by its very denial. Second, to the domestic audience in the West, the native population was portrayed either as primitive beings resembling apes or as barbarians accustomed to the excesses of life. In either case, the absence of sovereignty was seen as a natural outcome of indigenous conditions. This leads us to the third argument that settled the status of native territories as dependencies. The land was typically described by discoverers as *terra nullius* or territory that had remained unoccupied. The colonial ventures at amassing cartographical and sociological data about native populations were a systematic and official way of staking claim over previously
Modern sovereignty emanated from Europe, but it was born and developed in large part through Europe’s relationship with its outside, and particularly through its colonial project and the resistance of the colonized [...] rule within Europe and European rule over the world are two coextensive and complementary faces of one development.¹⁵

The colonial discourse rode roughshod over the fundamental contradiction that existed between the sovereign state system and the imperialist political system. Sovereignty came to be associated not only with the exalted right of the state to its own independence, but it was also the means through which that right was exercised over non-European societies. It thus became ‘a means of instituting the European states’ claims to imperial authority over the rest of the world’.¹⁶

Colonialism signified a disruption in the manner in which power was constituted and perceived, particularly in India which had a long political history prior to British rule. In terms of geographical orientation, British power moved inwards from the periphery to the centre, inverting the centuries-long outward Indian orientation of dynasties ruling from land-locked centres of power.¹⁷ More substantially, colonialism was perhaps the first instance of power that was not indigenised, at least officially. There is

¹⁵ Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* on slavery brings out the interlinkages between the West and the marginalised slave populations of the Caribbean. It offers an important corrective to the notion that the American and the French revolutions occurred in splendid isolation, whereas Gilroy demonstrates how they were linked to the slave revolts of the Caribbean in the 18th and 19th centuries. Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, ‘Retrieving the Imperial: Empire and International Relations’, *Millennium*, 31:1 (2002), pp. 110–13; Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 3.


a growing body of literature that suggests how closer engagement with the local populace blurred the lines of distinction between the coloniser and the colonised, despite the best efforts by the British to the contrary.\textsuperscript{18} The British however liked to believe that their distinct status as a foreign power and a superior race was an asset to be preserved.

The colonial era marked the initiation of arguably the first culture studies on India, a legacy that has been faithfully kept alive by culture specialists even today. The series of detailed colonial studies on Indian society, culture and polity under official patronage came to have significant implications for the way India’s strategic thinking was conceptualised. The carefully constructed set of stereotypes had the effect of creating an imagined analytical tradition that gradually acquired the credence of a historical tradition.\textsuperscript{19} Structuralist theories such as realism have little space for mounting a critical study of such elaborate imagined realities that took on the dimensions of a tangible reality. Postcolonialism, with its avowed intention of uncovering the subtleties of colonial power, would be conducive to the enquiries of an interested theorist. As the voice of the marginalised, this intellectual discourse does not find an easy niche in mainstream IR to occupy, primarily since meta-theories are more content to sketch the generalities of power dynamics and domination, than the specificities of marginalisation. In the next section, we look at shifts in the interpretation of culture in other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology that cause IR to be more receptive to cultural interpretations of state behaviour.

**Rethinking Culture in IR**

Few notions traditionally extraneous to IR’s research agenda have evoked as much interest and discussion as has the concept of culture. During the last four decades, culture as an explanatory variable has found increasing acceptance within political science. With Jack Snyder’s *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Nuclear Options* published in 1977, the


notion of political culture was brought within the ambit of security studies. Culture came to be initially interpreted through the humanist lens that distinguished the civilised section of society from the masses by its aspiration to progress. It was gradually replaced by the anthropological approach in the second half of the 20th century, which placed culture squarely within the existing social realm. The humanist concept of culture, tainted from its politicised application by the Germans, lost its credibility to the anthropological concept by the time the Second World War ended. In the 'nature–nurture debate', the anthropological thesis that every community had a distinct culture in terms of which social differences could be understood, steadily gained ground. The highlight of cultural anthropology was that uniqueness was no longer considered a disadvantage for a particular community, but was seen as contributing to the wider cultural landscape in which all people were essentially, and equally ‘cultured’ so to speak. Understandably, since culture was what set off one community from another, anthropologists tended to stress on its homogenous character.

Incidentally, the introduction of the anthropological concept into IR was facilitated by the realists who turned to culture to explain state behaviour during the ensuing Cold War. Adda Bozeman’s conceptualisation of culture proved particularly handy in this regard. According to Bozeman:

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21 The popular manifestation of culture in commonly understood symbols and practices finds articulation in Clifford Geertz’s definition of culture as a ‘historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life’. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 89.

22 The ‘matryoshka doll’ model was suggested as a possible analogy to explain that sub-cultures were contained within a larger distinct culture whose outward contours remained unaffected by its internal diversity. The opacity of the model, which rendered invisible what lay within, was juxtaposed with the significance of the ‘native’ in the anthropological scheme of things. Because the native was seen as embodying the culture of his community, defining one became a vexing preoccupation for the anthropologists, and the entire endeavour spawned a genre of essentialist literature in culture studies. Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 71–72, 78.
[...] each society is moved by the circumstances of its existence to develop its own approach to foreign relations. This means that diplomacy, as for that matter every other social institution, is bound to incorporate the traditions and values peculiar to the civilization in which it is practiced.  

Part of the new intellectual exercise was to sketch out the ‘national character’ of countries with the aid of which their respective behaviour could be explained and hopefully, predicted. The underlying assumption that every community was identifiable by a set of unique national characteristics yielded an essentialist notion of culture. While the anthropological version was being upheld for its nationalistic frame of reference, the cosmopolitan outlook of the humanist approach was soundly criticised for its ineffectiveness in IR. Art for its own sake could be appreciated provided it remained innocent of state manoeuvres, an assertion that effectively consigned the humanist concept of culture to the level of the individual. What mattered was the insidious use of culture by the state when it became another extension of its power.

The anthropological version of culture appears in Morgenthau’s *Politics Among Nations*, the most evident example of its application being his notion of ‘cultural imperialism’. For Morgenthau, culture that impacted upon international politics had to have local and national moorings rather than the amorphous cosmopolitan appeal the humanists argued for.

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24 Mitchell discusses landscape art as a potent tool of cultural power particularly in the colonial context. The pictorial representation of colonies (New Zealand as the site of harmonious coexistence with nature, for instance) served to naturalise and reinforce a number of colonial idioms. For more on the role of art in colonial identity formation, see W.J.T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 103.

25 The apparent contradiction in Morgenthau regarding culture draws from the dualistic understanding of concept. He is dismissive of the emancipatory potential of the humanist concept in enhancing mutual understanding among nations and considers it irrelevant. On the other hand, the anthropological concept that firmly locates culture within the national and local context permits its entanglement with the state and thus makes for potentially interesting and useful research. Beate Jahn, *The Cultural Construction of International Relations: The Invention of the State of Nature* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000), p. 8; Reeves, *Culture and International Relations*, pp. 105–7.
After experiencing a lull that followed the end of the Cold War, culture studies witnessed a revival in the 1990s, and with that the notion of strategic culture was resurrected. The materialist interpretation was gradually replaced by a culturally contingent approach to security studies, which admitted that states could indeed behave in ways that could not be entirely explained by the rational behaviour argument. Culturalists argued that beyond estimating the resources at the disposal of the state, realists had largely failed to explain how societies ‘generate’ military power. The basic tenets of strategic culture studies agree with the essentialist version of the anthropological approach. Its assertion that communities

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27 Delineating the influence of culture has proven to be conducive in certain cases, particularly regarding military organisations. Militaries emphasising homogeneity, uniformity and shared values made for appropriate instances of cultural engendering in relative isolation from the rest of the society. The societal approach takes culture to be the referent that is seen to evolve with time, and is hence mindful of the historicity of ideas that influence military behaviour at a particular point of time. The organisational approach, on the other hand, takes military institutions as the prime referent, and locates a state’s military culture between civilian decisions and military doctrine. Elizabeth Kier, Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 27. Likewise, historical culturalism attempts to interpret historical change by according primacy to cultural attributes, the presumption being that intrinsic characteristics of bounded religio-cultural spheres hold varying potentials for development. Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History?’, The National Interest, 16 (1989), p. 3; Fethi Acikel, ‘A Critique of Occidental Geist: Embedded Historical Culturalism in the Works of Hegel, Weber and Huntington’, Journal of Historical Sociology, 19:1 (2006), p. 61. This particular strand of cultural interpretation of historical progress is not a novel turn; rather, it can be traced back to Hegel. Its latest proponent is Samuel Huntington, who asserted that the post-Cold War world would increasingly witness conflicts along civilisational faultlines that geographically differentiate the domains of the major world religions. Samuel Huntington, ‘The West, Unique not Universal’, Foreign Affairs, 75:6 (1996), p. 35; Theo Farrell, ‘Culture and Military Power’, Review of International Studies, 24 (1998), p. 416; Theo Farrell, Personal Interview, King’s College, London, 10 May 2006.
as the repositories of culture are clearly defined constancies sits well with the anthropological approach. Where the field of enquiry has advanced beyond the ken of cultural anthropology is to provide conceptual rigour by moving culture out of the realm of abstraction, into the domain of specific case studies that operationalised its various aspects.\footnote{Strategic culturists are not without their share of differences over the extent to which internal diversity should be stressed and whether it was detrimental to the tenacity that culture was assumed to be endowed with. Farrell’s articulation of the internal debate on whether culture operates as cause or context is indicative of the differences within the field of enquiry. Theo Farrell, *The Norms of War: Cultural Beliefs and Modern Conflict* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2005), pp. 53–54. However, strategic approaches have certain characteristics in common, such as the rejection of universal truths in favour of the identification of national tendencies drawn from historical experience, and the tendency to stress on continuities across time rather than on change. John Glenn, Darryl A. Howlett and Stuart Poore, eds, *Neorealism versus Strategic Culture* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2004), p. 50; Reeves, *Culture and International Relations*, p. 141.}

**Rethinking Space in IR**

For most countries in the world throughout history, internal security is perhaps as much a challenge for grand strategy as external security. The strict division between the internal and the external realms in earlier times, both in Europe as elsewhere, has been deeply problematic. Pre-Westphalian Europe and Asian polities featured overlapping notions of sovereignty, such that the difference between what was considered the internal and the external was fuzzy. This is not to invalidate the difference between the two realms, but to point out that these notions have been historically contingent and to conceive of a definite division \emph{in practice} between the internal and the external realms would be fallacious. The geographical interpretation of India’s strategic history has tended to focus on the external contours of the region, and unsurprisingly, the history that showed up through that lens was one of successive defeats.

Geography plays a central role in the evolution of a country’s strategic practice, and India is no exception in this regard. Indeed, the topography of the subcontinent is regarded as a key determinant in the development of its strategic outlook. The steep Himalayan ranges to the north were seen as not only providing a natural defence from invading armies, but also proved to be a barrier preventing indigenous kingdoms from expanding northward. The geographical handicap was believed to have bred a
defensive mentality among Indians who, already weakened by their internal divisions into numerous kingdoms, failed to repel invading armies. The presumption that the Indian subcontinent was at best a sum of its many disparate parts that failed to unite becomes suspect if the historical antecedents of the claim are looked into. Although there are occasional references to the geographical features of the land in ancient Indian texts, the notion of a politically composite and unified subcontinent begins to emerge with growing clarity in colonial writings. The objective here is not to issue negations but to pursue a line of enquiry that is historically informed and nuanced. Considering that political fragmentation was the norm in ancient and medieval India, the neglect of the internal geographical dimension within contemporary IR literature on the subject is somewhat surprising. Scholars have instead chosen to focus on a state’s diplomatic conduct with its contemporaries, offering little insight into the strategies that went into maintaining the internal realm. The lack of attention to the internal aspects of security reflects the tendency of Western scholarship to define security as a concept pertaining almost entirely to the external domain.

For the purpose of this study, Akbar’s relations with the rulers of other contemporary empires such as the Ottomans and the Safavids form the external aspect of his grand strategy. The criterion for selecting the case study, namely the process of state formation under the Mughals and their mode of expansion, effectively delimits the mandate of the book. Taking imperial expansion as the key reference point implies that relations with other empires are studied insofar as diplomatic relations impinged on Akbar’s efforts at building his empire. Significantly, it allows us to focus on two cases separated by their locational attributes and distinct cultural ethos that influenced their relations with the Mughal state. The instances of the Rajputs and the Deccani powers offer us valuable insights into how the potency of material power is mediated by perceptions and normative considerations. In the following section, we examine the analytical framework within which the interplay of material and ideational forces of power can be better understood. The case studies are explained and justified within this conceptual paradigm, following which the section looks at the types of sources that the book draws on.

**Framework, Case Studies, Sources**

It is but an obvious assertion that states when they strategise, must base their calculations on a coherent grand strategy that provides the political elite with an action plan on how best the objectives of the state may be
achieved. Grand strategy is the mobilisation of all state resources (including non-military assets) to achieve the security of the state in times of both war and peace.\textsuperscript{29} As the expression of a state’s perception of its political environment, grand strategy seeks to reconcile its strategic ambitions with the constraining influences of the system. The concept has been variously defined by scholars, and its shifting parameters point to the generational shifts that have occurred in IR theory over the decades. Edward Luttwak classified grand strategy as two types — the expansionist, which sought power maximisation; and the status-quoist, which sought to maintain internal dominance. He conceptualised grand strategy in terms of the dependence on force as against potential force by diplomacy (armed suasion), inducements (subsidies, gifts, honours), and by other means such as deception and propaganda.\textsuperscript{30} Liddell Hart too regarded it to be more than the sum of all material resources mobilised at the service of the state, and included:

\ldots the moral resources- for to foster the people’s willing spirit is often as important as to possess the most concrete forms of power. \ldots Moreover, fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy which should take into account and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least, of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponent’s will.\textsuperscript{31}

Geoffrey Parker similarly outlined the purpose of a state’s grand strategy as the:

integration of the state’s overall political, economic and military aims, both in peace and war, to preserve long-term interests, including the management of ends and means, diplomacy and national morale and political culture in both military and civilian spheres.\textsuperscript{32}


Released from the Cold War logic, the debate on grand strategy assumed greater theoretical depth in the endeavour to explain diverse grand strategies, both contemporary and historical. Most writings on grand strategy have typologies of means–end combination, i.e., the pursuit of a particular end predetermines the means that would be employed. Alastair Johnston argues that typologies such as Luttwak’s tend to exclude a range of strategic means that are commonly available to, and considered by, both revisionist and status-quoist powers. He disentangles ends and means and instead provides a typology based solely on strategic means. Although he whittles down his reasonably wide range of grand strategic options to three basic ideal types, Johnston argues that cross-combinations are the norm when varied strategic ends enter the scene. The typology of grand strategies reads thus:

1. Accommodationist: Primary reliance on economic incentives and balancing alliances and the pursuit of security through multilateral collaborations.
2. Defensive: Primary reliance on static defence marked by internal mobilisation of resources rather than through alliances.
3. Offensive/Expansionist: Reliance on pre-emptive and offensive use of force to completely eliminate the adversary.\(^{33}\)

Causal forces behind the grand strategy of a particular state fall under two categories — socio-cultural factors and the shift in relative power relations. The first school of thought finds grand strategy deeply embedded in social and cultural factors that have cast an enduring influence through history. Although the lines of distinction between social and cultural factors are often blurred, theorists attempt to trace the lines of influence specifically to either or both sets of factors. Macmillan, Trood and Booth see ‘strategy as the military dimension of security and strategic culture as being the military dimension of political culture’.\(^{34}\) However, such a narrow military conceptualisation becomes problematic when it comes to non-militaristic societies. The second school is distinct in this


regard, in that it attributes changes in a country’s grand strategy to shifts in domestic power relations. Scholars like Michael Swaine and Ashley Tellis argue that an established power will use force more frequently against its strategic periphery than when it is on the decline. However, neither school completely discounts the influence of other factors on the shaping of a state’s grand strategy.

The notion of grand strategy would be an appropriate theoretical tool as it would prioritise the various courses of action the Mughals employed. Through the prioritisation of its means, a grand strategic perspective would enable us to categorise the empire as offensive, defensive or accommodationist. Let us now turn to examine the grand strategy of accommodation, key elements of which are discernible in Emperor Akbar’s mode of imperial expansion in the Indian subcontinent.

**Accommodation as a Grand Strategy**

An accommodationist grand strategy rests on the assumption that a given state holds a non-zero sum view of its adversary, i.e., its security and survival does not depend on the extermination of the adversary or the destruction of its military capabilities. A distinction is made between the adversary and the conflict situation, in that an accommodationist grand strategy would seek an end to the conflict situation without necessarily spelling the annihilation of the adversary. A coercive grand strategy makes no such distinction and military campaigns seek the political destruction of the enemy.\(^{35}\) A scenario of accommodation presupposes the willingness of the adversary to participate and explore options that could be least damaging to its interests. Its compliance results from the display of superior military power by the victor, for whom a sustained primary reliance on coercion would be unviable as a long-term strategy. The strategy pursued for expansion, then, is not an offensive one but one marked by military forays and retreat, followed by bargaining and compromises as the principal means of consolidation. We see this pattern being replicated by Akbar in building his empire in 16th century India.

What did an accommodationist grand strategy of Akbar imply for the regional adversaries of the Mughals? The variable of distance intervened to produce two strategic variants namely, socialisation and coercion. Although neither strategy precluded aspects of the other, the two strategic

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\(^{35}\) Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, p. 113.
variants were distinct in terms of their respective tactics. Socialisation employed tactics such as incorporating the target elite in governance structures, intervening in their succession politics and enhancing the state’s normative appeal through court practices. It thus tended to set long-term targets and sought more durable solutions to systemic challenges. In contrast, the coercive strategy entailed the issuance of threats, military campaigns and sporadic attacks. The focus consciously was on achieving short-term targets and the search for solutions was informed by a general sense of immediacy. It tended to consume more imperial resources and proved less efficient as a strategy than socialisation.

**Socialisation as a Strategy**

Broadly, an accommodationist grand strategy entails a strategy to co-opt the adversary. The interaction may take the form of trade relations, marital alliances and diplomatic ties that mitigate the reliance on coercion in conflict resolution. Broadly identifiable with socialisation, these measures are directed at bringing about long-term behavioural changes in the target elite through sustained interaction.\(^{36}\) Socialisation may be defined as ‘the learning process by which political norms and behaviours acceptable to an ongoing political system are transmitted from generation to generation’.\(^{37}\) It seeks behavioural compliance by relying on two sets of measures — material incentives such as sanctions and inducements, and the transformation of belief systems.\(^{38}\) Whereas the first policy relies primarily on coercion based on material preponderance, the latter seeks to shape the norms and interests of the targeted political elite through co-operative measures.

The two policies are not mutually exclusive since ‘norms will be most effective when they serve and are supported by material forces’.\(^{39}\) The material matrix of inducements and coercion ensures that norms are complied with and observed, thereby contributing to their resilience within the community. Compliance is deepened through norm internalisation that inducts new members and makes compliance among existing members of the community habitual. Furthermore, moral pressure comes into

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., p. 65.


\(^{38}\) Ibid., pp. 283–86.

play when the existing norm structure is contested through tactics like shaming that are more effective than sanctions. Thus, it is not surprising that socialisation is regarded as ‘a component of power that is not reducible to the coercive capacities of the hegemonic nation’. Clearly, socialisation operates in the realm of norms and ideas, and elicits compliance by means distinct from coercive measures.

Constructivists have drawn on the findings of social psychology to argue that the internalisation of norms leads actors to behave in a non-calculative and reflexive manner. Norms influence behaviour in two different ways. They regulate the behaviour of actors through the ‘logic of consequentialism’, whereby norms are observed because of the benefits and sanctions accruing from them. The functionality and significance of etiquette as a means of projecting power was underlined by Louis XIV of France thus:

> Those people are gravely mistaken who imagine that all this is mere ceremony. The people over whom we rule, unable to see to the bottom of things, usually judge by what they see from outside, and most often it is by precedence and rank that they measure their respect and obedience.

At a more fundamental level, norms constitute the identities and interests of actors through the ‘logic of appropriateness’, which drives actors to internalise them over time irrespective of the rationality calculus. Neither mode of logic precludes the influence of the other and norms are observed for their appropriateness as well as for the benefits that come with their adherence.

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40 According to Farrell, norms influence behaviour in the following manner. Ibid., pp. 9, 10–11.

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<th>IR Approach</th>
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41 Ikenberry and Kupchan, ‘Socialization and Hegemonic Power’, p. 289.


Socialisation generates ‘diffuse support’ for the system wherein ‘regardless of what happens members will continue to be bound to it by strong ties of loyalty and affection’. The participatory and proactive nature of loyalty serves an important functional purpose. It activates voice, i.e., the ‘attempt […] to change, rather than escape from, an objectionable state of affairs […]’ and enjoins upon the actor the responsibility to prevent further deterioration. Hirschman argues that ‘loyalty is at its most functional when it looks most irrational, when loyalty means strong attachment to an organisation that does not seem to warrant such attachment […]’. His theory of loyalty approximates theorisations on the independent effects of socialisation wherein loyal allies are unwilling to desert a hegemon on the decline. In the Rajput case, not only was an effective alternative to exit lacking, but its interests had been so conditioned as to make exit seem inconceivable.

That power based on socialisation operates on dynamics different from coercion’s becomes especially evident when shifts in power balances do not get easily reflected in changes in value systems. Very often, norms set by a hegemon endure even during periods of relative decline, although the logic of balance of power should dictate otherwise. The underlying instinctive tendency of socialisation to veer towards stability is emphasised by political scientists like Rudolph who argues:


45 Hirschman limits loyalty to its participatory aspect wherein voice is activated only when signs of crisis begin to surface and thus, functions in corrective mode. However, loyalty also has a demonstrative aspect which activates voice during periods of stability. Actors exercise voice to demonstrate and reiterate their support for the hegemon, making loyalty a self-enforcing value. Voice based on loyalty does not always emerge in a state of decline — a point worth noting in the context of the frequent Rajput demonstrations of loyalty to the Mughal emperor at the peak of imperial power. However, Hirschman’s point of voice as a mode of influence holds. Albert Hirschman, Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States (Massachusetts: Massachusetts University Press, 1970), p. 78.

46 Ibid., p. 81.
The notion of replication is a cultural notion related to ideas of diffusion, a process independent of the degree of penetration achieved by an overlord’s account books, his bureaucratic formation, and his army garrisons [...]. Replication is a manner of constructing a system, of creating a common domain independent of the center’s degree of formal control.\(^{47}\)

The assertion that cultural influence creates ‘a common domain independent of […] formal control’ is a strongly contested one. Theories that uphold empiricism as a methodological value hammer out the claim on the anvil of causality, an issue we would look at in our next section.

**Socialisation and Causality: Recent Theorisations**

Any assertion that ideas and norms have a demonstrative and enduring effect on political behaviour must address the vexing issue of causality. Behaviouralists employ statistical techniques that attempt to make ideational factors conducive to observation. However, empirical models can yield unsatisfactory results, primarily because complex processes such as normative change cannot be reliably measured and quantified. Moreover, statistical models tend to establish correlations between cause and effect and extrapolate further to make causal inferences.\(^{48}\) Although models are ill-suited for the study of ideational causations, the data they present can usefully supplement alternative research paradigms that furnish a ‘causal story’.\(^{49}\) In this instance, while distance from the centre may make socialisation more or less likely, likelihood in itself does not explain the cause behind lesser or greater incidence of coercion. The cause-effect chain becomes complete only when seen in conjunction with relevant variables such as the degree of affinity between value systems of actors. Likewise, data from the military indicators would be indicative of a plausible connection between ideas and behavioural changes but do not explain how normative change occurs. These point to a greater likelihood of establishing causality and may substantiate findings based on alternative non-quantitative research paradigms.


\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 85.
It would be appropriate at this stage to trace the process through which socialisation became a catalyst of change for the Mughals. Dyed-in-the-wool realists would explain the shift in behavioural patterns in terms of a favourable power balance accruing to superior military capabilities. Mughal military superiority over their regional adversaries was evident in the combined strength of its mounted archers and its artillery. Babur’s string of chained carts protecting the artillery and the infantry in the first Battle of Panipat in 1526 was as much a military innovation as were his matchlock men and field cannon. François Bernier, a French traveller to India in the seventeenth century noted:

It cannot be denied that the cavalry in their country manoeuvre with much ease and discharged their arrows with astonishing quickness; a horseman shooting six times before a musketeer can fire twice.\(^{50}\)

Realising the potential of superior military capability in providing crucial breakthroughs, Akbar took keen interest in the development of weaponry, especially of firearms. Fazl’s belief in ‘compulsory unity’ as the ‘twin of voluntary unity’ led him to consider guns as:

[…] wonderful locks for protecting the august edifice of the state; and befitting keys for the door of conquest. With the exception of Turkey, there is perhaps no country which in its guns has more means of securing the government than this.\(^{51}\)

Yet, a realistic understanding of strategic constraints made it increasingly evident to Akbar that military superiority alone could not guarantee him durable order and stability. It was felt that while military dominance could well ensure victories, sustaining them required other means of consolidation, not the least of these being socialisation. Socialisation thus aims at a gradual shift in policy, from retaliation to reciprocity and loyalty, ensuring in the process that these legitimate norms are not violated. It, after all, is essentially an instrument of the powerful and the materially

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preponderant. The causal chain, from the offer of incentives to legitimisation, looks like this:

External inducement → policy change (co-operation through coercion) → norm change (co-operation through legitimate domination).\textsuperscript{52}

However, hegemony does not entail a unidirectional flow of influence, but is a ‘continual dialogue between the hegemonial authority and the other states.’ It thus involves:

[…], some power or authority in a system [that] is able to ‘lay down the law’ about the operation of the system, that is to determine to some extent the external relations between member states, while leaving them domestically independent.\textsuperscript{53}

The interface between hegemonic discourse and normative persuasion is critically mediated by institutions. Ideas have a sustained influence on the decision-making process ‘when they find organizational means of expression’ that channelise the flow and access of ideas in the decision-making process.\textsuperscript{54} Institutions act as channels as well as constraints on the access decision makers have to ideas, and vice versa. They define the structure of a political system, thereby affecting the entry and reach of ideas.\textsuperscript{55}

Institutions socialise actors through three progressively intense

\textsuperscript{52} Ikenberry and Kupchan list three mechanisms through which socialisation can occur: normative persuasion, external inducement and internal reconstruction. I have outlined the causal chain that is most plausible and appropriate in the Mughal case. For more on the other two mechanisms, see John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, ‘Socialization and Hegemonic Power’, International Organisation, 44:3 (1990), pp. 290–92.


\textsuperscript{55} Hegemonic institutions — 1. encase rules that enable expansion of the system, 2. are products of the hegemonic order, 3. legitimise its norms, 4. co-opt elite from peripheral areas, and 5. absorb counter-hegemonic ideas. Cox makes there observations with regard to international organisations, although they can be applied to other contexts of hegemonic orders as well. Robert Cox, ‘Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method’, in Stephen Gill, ed., Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 62.
mechanisms: strategic calculation (offer of material and social incentives), role playing (group environment as the trigger of socially appropriate manner), and normative suasion (active and complete internalisation of values). The interpretive approach shifts the focus from institutions that ‘encase’ ideas to the language that ‘define[s] the terms of political debate’. The function of a hegemonic discourse then is to ‘authorise or restrict, as well as prioritise and distribute, the ideas and beliefs that policy makers can think and in so doing partly delimit the policies they can pursue’. It makes hegemony a self-enforcing phenomenon and thus becomes a vital means of social compliance.

**Legitimacy as a Mode of Social Control**

Why do the political elite find certain ideas appealing and ‘recognise’ them as credible? What constitutes the discourse that makes the targeted elite vulnerable to the socialising efforts of the hegemon? The search for answers to these questions leads us to three reasons — coercion, self-interest or legitimacy. The realists adopt the power-based approach to explain the

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58 Ibid., p. 95.

59 The key point worth noting is that the targeted party complying for any of these reasons would only do so if it were in its ‘interest’. Interest needs to be distinguished here from self-interest. When an actor makes rational calculations to choose the appropriate means in the pursuit of his goals, he can be said to be pursuing his interests. It places no a priori limitations on the approach he can adopt in the face of prospective subjugation. Self-interest, on the other hand, involves a definitive instrumental approach towards participation. An actor would comply only if and so long as the system provides him with benefits. The system holds no value independent of the incentives it provides him, unlike one who complies with the hegemonic order because he considers it legitimate. For more on the three modes of social control, and on the distinction between ‘interest’ and ‘self interest’, see Ian Hurd, ‘Legitimacy and Authority in International Politics’, *International Organisation*, 53:2 (1999), pp. 379–409, 383–89.
formation and maintenance of regimes, whereas the explanatory variable of the neoliberals is the set of common interests that actors seek to pursue. The constructivists chose instead to stress on the dynamics of knowledge, communication and identities in regime formation. Thus, a power is likely to be regarded as legitimate if its source is generally held to be valid. An actor seeking to convert his power into authority would explain his policies in terms of ideas that bear affinity to the prevailing political milieu, thereby enhancing their acceptability among the subject political elite. Ideas need to be “packaged” […] usually in terms of existing social, institutional, and normative patterns. For instance, the British were anxious to justify their imperial rule in the late 18th century by using what Michael Mann calls ‘an Indian idiom’, since:

within the Indian context of legitimacy and legitimate rule, the succession to the Mughals was the sole justification for the Indian princes, nobles, elites and the bulk of the population to accept the British as the sovereign power.

Legitimacy may be simply seen as a matter of people’s beliefs and perceptions. The Weberian argument is that ‘power is legitimate where those involved in it believe it to be so. Legitimacy derives from people’s belief in legitimacy’. They appear convincing when they ‘fit’ with the existing established ideas, making shared belief systems itself a source of legitimacy.

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After all, legitimacy is, as Watson notes ‘the acceptance of authority, the right of a ruler to be obeyed, as distinguished from the power to coerce’. 64

The notion of legitimacy has evolved with changing political milieu, from its initial association with high birth to a more general acceptance of authority. Earlier, the right to rule was reserved solely for those who were considered as rightful heirs in the line of succession, and thus an exalted lineage came to be associated with the long-held notion of dynastic legitimacy. As dynastic orders gave way to colonial states, the dimensions of legitimacy also underwent a transformation. The 18th century saw the British ease themselves into the position of the politically weakened Mughal emperor by participating in Mughal rituals of authority. Although the balance of power had shifted decisively in favour of the British, they continued to observe the practice of publicly acknowledging the authority of the emperor since he was seen as the font of legitimacy. This was assiduously maintained by Robert Clive after the Battle of Plassey in 1758, when the title conferred by the Mughal emperor referred to Clive as the client of the nawab who was a Mughal subordinate. The political reality however suggested the apposite, since the nawab was by then a dependent of the British and the Mughal emperor was reduced to being a titular head. 65

64 Watson’s interpretation of legitimacy as being ‘determined by the attitudes of those who obey an authority’ is interesting for the leverage it allows its members. However, Watson fails to look beyond the regulative functions of institution-building at their constitutive capabilities, and to that extent adopts an instrumentalist view in explaining state behaviour. To be fair, he is less concerned with identity formation of states than with their self-regulatory behaviour, which saw co-operation as more beneficial than conflict situations. Watson, The Evolution of International Society, p. 17.

65 The subsequent years saw the British deploy the Mughal practices of ritual authority in reverse, i.e., the positions of the emperor and the Company representative were now inverted. For instance, the Governor-General began refusing any meeting with the emperor unless he was treated on equal terms, which entailed being seated in his presence. The emperor, Akbar Shah II, who had become a recipient of a stipend from the British Crown conceded in 1828 to accord equal status to the King of England. Gail Minault, ‘The Emperor’s Old Clothes: Robing and Sovereignty in Late Mughal and Early British India’, in Stewart Gordon, ed., Robes of Honour: Khil’at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 130; India Office Library Records (IOLR), Political Notes (1761–1798), Home Miscellaneous, IOR/H/609; India Office Library Records (IOLR), Registers of Letters from India (1773–1798), Home Miscellaneous, IOR/H/611.
The colonial recourse to Mughal cultural symbols continued well into the 19th century, as is seen by the use of Persian as the official language by the British until 1835. In the 20th century, the idea of popular legitimacy came to be understood as being based on the approval of a collectivity which came to characterise writings in IR literature. The sanction for an entity such as the United Nations, for instance, came from the collectivity of states that were assumed to constitute a pre-existing moral community.

**Case Study**

The Mughal empire (1526–1858), one of the most powerful and prosperous pre-modern states in world history, is counted among the greatest dynasties in Indian history along with the Maurya and the Gupta empires. At its peak, it was unsurpassed in scale among all the pre-modern empires to have existed on the Indian subcontinent. Among the six prominent Mughal emperors (from Babur to Aurangzeb), Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar initiated some of the most prominent and enduring of Mughal diplomatic policies. In instituting the chief imperial structure and defining the lines along which future consolidation of the Mughal empire was to continue, Akbar was arguably the chief architect of Mughal grand strategy. The study will take as its focus the period of Akbar’s reign, i.e., 1556–1605, and seek to identify the mode in which the Mughals operated — accommodationist, offensive or defensive. Given that the Mughals employed different strategies under different conditions, a ranking of their strategic means will be attempted here.

The taxonomy is important, for it helps us understand why the balance of power prevalent during Akbar’s reign prompted him to adopt select strategies against select regional actors. As will be explained in chapters three and four, Akbar lacked a complete and effective monopoly over force given that he ruled over a highly militarised society. Large sections of the peasant population wielded arms to sustain itself through soldiering and looting during the dry season. This four-million-strong armed

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population was available for service to the highest bidder, and the Mughal state strove to absorb the bulk of this into its army. Since recruitment was indirect, middlemen such as the zamindars occupied the dubious status of a potential rebel or ally. The futility of a military response against such diffuse sources of military power drove the Mughals to opt for non-coercive techniques. These included tactics such as giving zamindars lucrative positions within the imperial military–administrative structure. Despite this, the Mughals did not succeed in controlling the vast military labour market and the threat of sedition remained a possibility throughout. It is an interesting paradox that the Mughal empire is referred to as a ‘war state’ for its substantial resource investment in military preparedness and war. The overwhelming military superiority was a key factor in ensuring that the empire was marked by a singular absence of major battles. The very real prospect of comprehensive defeat at the hands of the Mughals led rebellious rulers to avoid battles with the imperial power altogether. A combination of intimidation and concessions was used to win over rebels who were accommodated within the Mughal political system.

A realist interpretation has limited explanatory purchase in accounting for the nature of Mughal rule and the reach it acquired under Akbar. The factor of distance greatly determined the influence of material and ideational facets of power on imperial expansion. The core areas around the imperial centre, of which the Rajput principalities were a part, came to experience accommodationist policies of Akbar, whereas the peripheral kingdoms in the Deccan were marginalised from the ambit of accommodation. If we were to go by outcomes, the core areas experienced fewer wars as means of dispute settlement with the Mughals than the periphery, which saw heightened levels of coercion mark their relations with the imperial centre. The power of socialisation yielded attractive benefits for those who were co-opted into the system, but weakened as distances increased.

Sources

The study employs both primary and secondary sources. The primary research material used can be broadly classified into three genres: court accounts, accounts of 16th and 17th century travellers to the Mughal court, and the colonial commentaries. As can be expected, much of the historical literature used here focuses on Akbar’s reign: his imperial policies, military campaigns and the ideological foundations of the Mughal empire. The body of work that the study has drawn from substantially are court accounts, many of which were written under royal patronage. These
include translated versions of Abul Fazl’s *Akbar Nama* and *Ain-i-Akbari*, as well as Badauni’s *Muntakhabut Tawarikh* which offers a counter-narrative to Fazl’s eulogistic descriptions. The study also refers to royal biographical accounts of later Mughal emperors such as Jahangir’s *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*. The purpose is not so much to see the extent to which Akbar’s legacy was sustained by later rulers, as to examine whether the considerations that defined his grand strategy remained as significant for his successors or not. The second genre of writing that the study has drawn upon is the travel accounts of emissaries and priests who visited the Mughal court in the 16th and 17th centuries. Chronicles left by the Jesuit priest Father Monserrate and French traveller François Bernier form part of this body of literature. The third genre of historical works that the study has extensively referred to include the colonial commentaries by British officials based in India up to the 19th century. Detailed accounts by William Jones and Thomas Macaulay offer insights into the perceptions of the British towards Indian social and political structures.

Secondary sources used here are essentially works in history and theory. Historical research into state–society relations in medieval India and the modes through which Mughal power came to be legitimised provide us the social context behind Akbar’s grand strategy of accommodation. Studies on the regional histories of Rajput kingdoms and the states in the Deccan advance our understanding of Mughal engagement with rival power centres. The study has also drawn extensively on research into the shifting discourse on power under the British; the ideological distancing of the state from its subjects and the new language of progress that came to define the *raison d’être* of the colonial apparatus. These insights into colonial perceptions of India’s political and social history are critical in understanding the contemporary debate on India’s strategic practice. Since this is primarily a theoretical study, references to works in theory are substantial and extensive. With the aim of developing a historically

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68 An area of research which constitutes a crucial component of this enquiry is Mughal historiography. Early analyses offered nationalist interpretations of history that portrayed the medieval period as an era of despotic Muslim rule. A gradual shift in medieval historiography was discernible when historians belonging to the Aligarh school began questioning the fundamentals of nationalist historiography. The Mughal empire was seen as a centralised administrative apparatus that was extractive and standardising in its economic policies. This approach was subsequently challenged in later writings on Mughal history that highlighted the collaborative nature of Mughal power.
nuanced understanding of India’s strategic practice, the study looks at the stance that contending schools in IR take on issues of history and culture. Additionally, writings in postcolonialism, postmodernism, anthropology and historical sociology have been particularly helpful in analysing different cultural interpretations of strategic behaviour. In terms of additional research material, maps and tables have been used for illustrative purposes.

**Book Layout**

There are four chapters to the study following the introduction. The second chapter looks at the manner in which the debate on India’s strategic practice has evolved from the colonial period to the contemporary context. It problematises a set of interrelated colonial claims on Indian history and culture that continue to resonate in contemporary IR literature on India. Much of the terms of debate are recessed within the parameters set by the colonial discourse, to which the nationalist and postcolonial writings mounted intellectual responses. The chapter examines the manner in which the Orientalist and Utilitarian literature, and later the nationalist writings, formulated, critiqued and reinterpreted representations of India.

The third chapter sets the context of the case study by examining the material and ideational factors that influenced Akbar’s formulation of his grand strategy. In particular, it examines the ancient and medieval traditions of Indian political thought and kingship that he consciously drew upon in order to indigenise his power. It locates the Mughal state within the existing socio-cultural milieu with its attendant constraints and opportunities. In surveying the various mechanisms of socialisation Akbar employed to conciliate the Rajputs, the chapter makes the case that the normative and cultural appeal of Mughal power was vital in ensuring its sustainability.

Chapter four draws upon the ideational influences on Akbar and examines the specifics of his grand strategy by means of two contrasting case studies. The first case study looks at the range of non-coercive strategic options exercised by Akbar to elicit and sustain the support of regional powers such as the Rajputs. Institutionalised processes of socialisation such as the enabling cultural environs of the Mughal court and Akbar’s inclusive imperial ideology went a long way in mitigating his reliance on force. The second case study brings out the limits of Akbar’s policy of accommodation during his dealings with the Deccan powers in the south. Commensurate levels of socialisation as we see in the Rajput
instance are absent in Mughal relations with peripheral powers, resulting in an enhanced reliance on force. This serves to highlight the functionality of norms within a hegemonic order and their impact on the strategic behaviour and interests of actors.

The conclusion sums up the key findings of the study and explores possible ways in which India’s strategic practice can be theorised. An alternate, historically contingent approach offers an entry point into the ongoing debate to make IR theory more responsive to new intellectual enquiries in other disciplines. It argues that in fostering dialogue with disciplines such as history and philosophy, IR would be more reflective of and sensitive to the principle of difference. Such a reorientation holds out much promise to radically recast the agenda of culture studies on India.
The perceived incompatibility between the fields of IR and history rests on the assumption that there exists an irreconcilable divide between the theory and the narrative. Although orientations differ, these have been exaggerated to the extent that the possibility of complimentarity appears absurd to many scholars on either side of the disciplinary divide. IR’s isolationist tendency has only served to compound the problem that affects other disciplines to a somewhat lesser extent. In many ways, the theorist’s call for interdisciplinarity ought to be the most vociferous of all, given that her claim to scholarship lies in her ability to present a comprehensive picture.

In this chapter, we locate the interface between IR and history within the Indian context, and find that cultural interpretations of India’s strategic practice do not necessarily translate into greater sensitivity towards historical specificities. The apparent engagement with history has only gone on to further reinforce orientalist caricatures that have long outlived their colonial contexts. The chapter seeks to deconstruct these stereotypes with the aid of historical and theoretical arguments. We find colonial literature speaking in many voices, with critiques and negations to its own claims often emerging from within the genre itself. We hope that problematising received wisdom would lead us to a more nuanced and historically contingent interpretation of India’s strategic practice. This exercise would afford us the opportunity to look at the manner in which IR academics have engaged with issues of historicity and contingency, and the impact such engagements (or lack thereof) have had on the state of the discipline.
IR Theory and History: Strange Bedfellows or Disciplinary Partners?

Theorists and historians cite several points of divergence over why their respective fields have failed to benefit from the other. The idiographic–nomothetic distinction is seen by many as the basic cause of disconnect between the two fields. The parsimony of theory contrasts with the richness of history. There is a marked difference in the manner in which the historian and the social scientist approach their respective subjects. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita points out that while:

[…] the social scientist is more likely to emphasise general explanations of social phenomena […] the historian is more likely to emphasise particularistic, unique features of individual episodes of social phenomena.¹

The historian is ever mindful of particularities that inform her explanation of specific episodes in history, preferring ‘explanatory tents to temples’.² On the other hand, the social scientist regards these very particularities as variables within a larger theoretical framework, and seeks to establish the correlation between them.³ Again, while the theorist endeavours to order complex phenomena into neat mono-causal explanations, the historian attempts to do the same through multi-causal accounts.

The difference in goals, methodology and strategies notwithstanding, it is when these are studied in absolute terms that misleading caricatures abound. Historians, for instance, do not rely entirely on narrative; indeed they cannot. When they attempt to faithfully describe and reconstruct a sequence of events, historians are in effect attempting to establish certain causal relations. Diplomatic historians very often prefer to thematise their

data rather than simply periodise it. Some of the most notable works in diplomatic history have offered new insights into the working of IR. Likewise, many IR theorists have sought to bridge the gap between IR theory and history. Long before interdisciplinary research sparked a renewed interest in history, IR scholars had sought to make their theorisations historically contingent and open-ended rather than timeless and static. E. H. Carr, a classical realist, attempted to steer clear of ahistoricism in his analysis of the interwar period. The permanence of power did not determine the course of history, and Carr regarded the state system that formed the very basis of his study as nothing but the product of circumstances. He argued that, ‘few things are permanent in history, and it would be rash to think that the territorial unit of power is one of them’. The entanglement of facts and values is further highlighted by Carr:

Somewhere between these two poles — the north pole of valueless facts and the south pole of value judgements still struggling to transform themselves into facts — lies the realm of historical truth. The historian […] is balanced between fact and interpretation, between fact and value. He cannot separate them.

The respect for history and its place in IR theory was evident in the works of scholars belonging to the British Committee such as Herbert Butterfield, Martin Wight, Hedley Bull and Adam Watson who were concerned with studying the historical origins of international politics.

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4 Among scholars who straddle the fields of IR and diplomatic history with commendable ease include Paul Kennedy and Paul Schroeder. Schroeder argues that differences between the two fields are negotiable, for which ‘the sign […] [he is] trying to post on historical terrain for political scientists is not “Keep Off-Private Property” […] but rather “Thin Ice”’. Paul Schroeder, ‘History and International Relations Theory: Not Use or Abuse, but Fit or Misfit’, *International Security*, 22:1 (1997), p. 72. Understandably, for the sure-footed political scientist comfortable with abstractions, the open-endedness of contingent explanations that the terrain of history represents could well be treacherous.


7 The British Committee for the Theory of International Politics (1954–1985) — under Butterfield and its three coordinators Wight, Watson and Bull — was an eclectic group of 50 members drawn from diverse backgrounds like historians, journalists, theologians and jurists. The realist orientation underlying
One of the objectives of the Committee was ‘to make past history continuous with present experience, and to see how far the more long-term views or surveys of the historian might affect one’s appreciation of the present day’. For the Committee, there were no perceived incongruities between historical contingency and the notion of continuity. The two concepts of international system and international society, for instance, were not perceived to be antithetical to each other, having developed alongside in history. The works of the British Committee members such as Butterfield and Wight’s Diplomatic Investigations and Bull’s Anarchical Society became the basis for further theoretical enquiries by the English School.


8 Quoted in Vigezzi, The British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, p. 53.

9 The difference between the norm-based international society and the rule-governed international system is played out in the writings of Bull and Waltz. For Bull, balance of power vitally depended on self-restraint on part of the states that desired it for its order maintenance. Waltz, on the other hand, attached no such normative significance to it, arguing instead that the balance of power was the objective outcome of the calculus of anarchy, and hence had little to do with the self-restraint of states. Albert Mathias and Lena Hilkermeier, Observing International Relations: Niklas Luhmann and World Politics (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 62; Vigezzi, The British Committee, pp. 5–10.

from it, by limiting its scope in theory to illustrations and anecdotes. A distancing itself from history was considered healthy and necessary so as to insulate IR theory from the vagaries of historical process and make it conducive to abstraction. On balance, whereas the classical realists fared better than the structural realists in working with historical contingency, they tended to be more deterministic than the English School theorists, who infused greater historical content into their theoretical studies. IR’s policy preoccupation makes it even more imperative to reclaim the discipline’s association with history. The following section takes a long view of the dynamics between the two disciplines and the prospects for further engagement.

‘Multiple Races and Many Finish Lines’\textsuperscript{12}: Towards a Non-linear View of History

For a field that has long been charged with nurturing a historically impoverished view of the world, IR theory has done little to address the lacuna. The ritual nod to interdisciplinarity notwithstanding, mainstream theories have preferred to mine history for illustrative instances to validate claims. Also, the quest for historical cases has been driven more by the need to seek similarities between previous political orders and the present state system than explain the differences. The key concept that has ensured a continuist approach within IR is that of the ‘tradition’ which stretches back to the ancient period. The notion of tradition, entailing the ‘retrospective analytical construction which produces a rationalized version of the past’ is most prevalent in political theory, spin-offs from which are evident in IR theory as well.\textsuperscript{13} For instance, the idea that ancient Greece was the

\textsuperscript{11} Intellectually, the US showed a pronounced tilt towards empiricism and the application of the scientific method — a proclivity that went on to stimulate not just the field of IR but the rest of the social sciences as well. The touting of economics as a true science prompted political science to emulate a similar pursuit of scientific rigour. These had repercussions on its specialised study of international politics, for political science was regarded as ‘the mother or stepmother of international relations’. Stanley Hoffmann, ‘An American Social Science: International Relations’, \textit{Daedalus}, 106 (1977), p. 46.


wellspring of European political thought is a relatively recent construction that unseated the earlier formulation of the Ancient Model in the early 19th century. The recasting was made possible by the privileging of the particular and the local by the Romantics over the general and the universal that Enlightenment stood for. As a result, ancient Greece came to be seen as the repository of Europe’s childhood when unhindered imagination and purity were at play. In the retrospective positioning of philosophers, IR laid claim to an exalted lineage in international politics. Thus, a formidable phalanx of thinkers ranging from Thucydides and Machiavelli to Hobbes provided for an unbroken intellectual tradition to which later writers such as Carr and Morgenthau contributed. The compulsions behind constructing a grand tradition are rooted in contemporary concerns. In ‘writing history backwards’, proponents of lineages are more interested in substantiating their own theoretical claims by pointing out its historical antecedents.

The Ancient Model projected ancient Greece as an amalgam of different cultural influences, particularly of the Egyptians and the Phoenicians who colonised the primitive tribes and introduced progressive practices such as literacy and irrigation. However, the influence of the Romantics ensured that this phase of colonisation of ancient Greece was downplayed. As a result, the Greeks were no longer seen as recipients of cultural attributes from the East but were now portrayed as the progenitors of civilisation itself. There was a sudden spurt of interest in all aspects of Greek culture: art, poetry, and particularly philosophy, which historians in the 1780s concurred, was the beginning of all philosophical thought. Martin Bernal, ‘The Image of Ancient Greece as a Tool for Colonialism and European Hegemony’, in George Clement Bond and Angela Gilliam, eds, Social Construction of the Past: Representation as Power (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 122.

Ironically, till Renaissance the notion of ‘childhood’ carried derogatory connotations of cultural superficiality, evident in Plato’s references to Egyptian priests deriding Greeks as children. In mid-18th century under the influence of the Romantics, childhood was exalted as a virtuous phase in human life to which the corrupted minds of present-day Europe could look back; and that burden of childhood fell in the lap of ancient Greece. Ibid., p. 121.


There is growing recognition within IR to be more mindful of complexity and contingency in its case studies.\textsuperscript{18} Robert Gilpin’s belief that ‘the past is not merely a prologue and that the present does not have a monopoly on the truth’ is indicative of this trend.\textsuperscript{19} Increased historical content in IR literature has however not meant that IR has rid itself of the charge of being ‘ahistorical’. This is largely on account of the continuing and often compulsive need to find similarity with the contemporary international system. The search for fixed interpretations has meant that IR theory chose to forewear openness as a path to historicity.\textsuperscript{20} Nowhere is this ‘problem of history’ more evident than in the treatment of post-colonial societies such as India within IR.

\textbf{Refracted Realities: Applying IR Theory to Indian History}

Theorising inter-state relations has had a long history in India. Indigenous writings on statecraft and diplomacy date back to ancient India when strategists such as Kautilya theorised in a political milieu of multiple independencies. The medieval period saw another exposition of India’s strategic practice with the incorporation of the Islamic theory of state — one that placed the state squarely within the ambit of a heterogeneous society. It is ironical that despite this long and sustained history of strategic thought, it was the European theorisations that went on to dominate subsequent studies on India. The anomaly can be readily explained by the existence of an elaborate colonial apparatus that provided the support structure, and indeed, the \textit{raison d’être} for European investigations. Colonialism was a mammoth phenomenon; its sheer reach and extent of domination is unparalleled in history. The territorial sweep of colonial power expanded at an exponential rate of about 83,000 square miles (2,15,000 square kilometres) annually in 1878, which spiked

\textsuperscript{18} Some of the theorists who have sought to bring greater historical depth to their studies include Barry Buzan and Richard Little, \textit{International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Adam Watson, \textit{The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis} (London: Routledge, 1992); and Stephen Hobden and John Hobson, \textit{Historical Sociology of International Relations} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).


to about 240,000 square miles (6,22,000 square kilometres) a year in 1914. At the turn of the 20th century, the British Empire was spread over one-fifth of the world’s territory, and by the time the First World War began, 85 per cent of the world’s total territory was under differing degrees of colonial control.21

Governing the new territories in turn called for a corpus of knowledge and led powers such as Britain to undertake extensive and systematic studies of the lands under their control. The mammoth imperial project was to make colonialism a truly interdisciplinary pursuit, spanning diverse fields encompassing geography, psychiatry, anthropology and history. Indologist William Jones, for instance, intended to explore during his tenure as a Company officer:

[...] the Laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans, Modern Politics and Geography of Hindustan, Best Mode of Governing Bengal, Arithmetic and Geometry, and Mixed Sciences of the Asiaticks, Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, and Anatomy of the Indians, Natural Productions of Indian Poetry, Rhetoric and Morality of Asia, Music of the Eastern Nations, Trade, Manufacture, Agriculture, and Commerce of India.22

Jones’ comment offers a glimpse of the wide sweep of research interests that he as an officer of the East India Company sought to cultivate. The studies undertaken to map, measure and interpret the natural and social systems of colonies were certainly not innocent of power considerations, a correlation A. P. Thornton makes:

Imperialism infiltrates, and invades. And it certainly inquires, for it finds out things about an area that its own inhabitants did not know. Imperialism, larger than any one territory, relates that territory to an outside world previously unknown to it. It creates new kinds of thinking, new state of mind, new needs, ultimately new kinds of people[...]. [W]e notice how the metaphors applied to it signify motion: encounter impact, clash, shock, exploitation, expansion. More romantically, we hear about the gale of the world and the winds of change.23

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Theorisations on India’s strategic practice that emerged during the colonial period need to be located within this context. Indology and its attendant variants were intrinsically linked to the colonial project and hence emerged as an organised body of knowledge covering areas ranging from religion to language.

The rationale behind selecting the colonial period as the starting point of our analysis of India’s strategic practice is complex but nonetheless significant. The colonial writings represented myriad voices within, articulating divergent perspectives on the land and the people the British ruled. Broadly, the Orientalists such as William Jones who wished to resurrect India’s cultural heritage were arrayed against the Anglicists like Thomas Macaulay who advocated the implementation of the Western education system. Epitomising the internal pulls and contradictions that marked colonial rule over India, the writings contain no single work that can be taken to be representative of British views on India, and no reference point to which a certain idea of strategic significance can be traced back. Be that as it may, the colonial influence on India’s strategic outlook is both undeniable and immense, given that a number of imageries associated with India do not predate British rule. The set of colonial writings on seemingly disparate subjects may not appear to be of immediate relevance. However, it would be erroneous to treat works of the colonial period as part of the extant literature on India since these writings were distinct in their approach and impact from previous accounts of foreign travellers. While these reflected a sense of curiosity to explore an unfamiliar land, much of the colonial literature was an exercise in power. The influence of previous accounts tended to wane over time, in contrast to colonial writers who were part of the overarching imperial project which extended its supportive apparatus to their investigative endeavours.

A study of the relevant literature must hence necessarily begin with the Orientalist discourse. Much of this received wisdom was later challenged and critiqued by Marxist and liberal nationalist historians who sought to underscore the heterogeneous character of Indian society that defied stark categorisations. However, these debates interrogating


25 Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969); Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies II* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi:
essentialist assumptions about caste, communalism and modernity have not influenced IR theorisations on India, which remain an exercise in reductionism giving a static account of India and its evolving strategic patterns. In the next section, we shall examine how notions highlighting stasis emerged within the Orientalist discourse, as well as the extent to which they persist in contemporary IR literature and in the perceptions of India’s decision-making elite.

**The Role of the Orientalists**

Some of the earliest writings that held important implications for India’s strategic practice and shaped much of the literature on the area to follow belonged to the Orientalist school. In early 19th century, the term ‘Orientalist’ was part of philology, especially with regard to Asian languages. In the 1830s, the term referred to British scholars who studied Indian cultural practices and laws and argued that these need to be observed in the governance of the country. The Orientalists displayed a high level of intellectual curiosity and engagement with the traditions, languages and literature of ancient India and offered some of the most comprehensive European accounts of India. India came to represent the uncorrupted idea of human existence that Europe had lost in its march towards modernity. This projection of the image of the ideal polity onto India, as J. J. Clarke notes, ‘was deployed as a means of treating what were seen as deep-seated ills at the heart of contemporary European culture’.


26 Thapar identifies three key trends that characterised studies into ancient Indian history spearheaded chiefly by the Orientalists, the Utilitarians and the Nationalists. For the Orientalists, who regarded the Vedic period as the epitome of a utopian state, the search for the idyllic society was spurred by domestic developments. Industrialisation was threatening to erode the cultural moorings of Europe, and the ancient Orient had achieved great cultural advances, which though forgotten had to be retrieved to show the way for the degenerate people of Europe and India. Thapar et al., *Communalism*, p. 3; Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi, eds, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I’jaz-I Arsalani (Persian Letters, 1773–1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 45.

27 Max Mueller’s adoption of the Sanskritised name Moksha Mula was symbolic of the Orientalist identification with ancient Indian culture. Thapar et al., *Communalism*, p. 3.

The Orientalists were most active from 1772 to 1830 and established the College of Fort William in Calcutta where Asian languages such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit were taught. One of its staunch supporters was Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India, who was instrumental in the creation of an Indianised civil service that was proficient in Indian languages. The establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 under Jones marked a significant step in that direction. He was proactive in instituting and running the journal of the Asiatic Society, the *Asiatick Researches*, in which many of the translated papers appeared. Jones’ interest in ancient Indian texts drove him to indulge in literary pursuits that had little bearing on his official duties. His keenness to translate certain works in Sanskrit literature stemmed from his appreciation of the language as ‘sublime and beautiful in a high degree’. The works included Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanasakuntala* and the fables of the *Hitopadesa*. Jones’ regard for Kalidasa (whom he hailed as ‘the Indian Shakespeare’) led him to bring out the ancient poet’s *Ritusamhara*, which happened to be the first-ever printed version of a Sanskrit text.

The subtext of this vast body of colonial thought was its role in providing a rationale and justification for imperial rule in India and to imbue their mission with a sense of purpose. The paternalistic concern of the British was characteristic of a power that regarded itself as being responsible for


[30] Ibid., p. 41.


[32] Macaulay clearly stated the purpose of the colonial mission in his *Minute on Education* thus, ‘We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood or colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.’ Thomas Babington Macaulay (1835), *Minute on Indian Education*, rpt Barbara Harlow and Mia Carter, eds, *Archives of Empire, vol. 1: From the East India Company to the Suez Canal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 237.
reform and upliftment in its colonies. This was evident in Lord Curzon’s assertion that the British should do well:

[...] to remember that the Almighty has placed your hand on the greatest of his ploughs [...] to drive the blade a little forward in your time, and to feel that somewhere among these millions you have left a little justice or happiness or prosperity, a sense of manliness or moral dignity, a spring of patriotism, a dawn of intellectual enlightenment, or a stirring of duty, where it did not before exist. That is enough, that is the Englishman’s justification in India.\textsuperscript{33}

Liberal thinkers employed several strategies to justify exclusionist colonial practices in India within the framework of egalitarian universalism. One of the most effective colonial strategies was that of inscrutability: the unfathomable and chaotic quality of India which frustrates the rational observer. The charge of inscrutability was no random accusation by the exasperated rationalist, but constituted the cornerstone of colonial discourse. Inscrutability places the onus on the subject that resists comprehension without incriminating the observer. The inability of the subject to represent itself in a manner that is comprehensible was the intellectual cue for the coloniser to represent the subject and recompense for its deficiency. This was of course executed while maintaining a measure of distance from the confounding details and opacity of the Indian way of life.\textsuperscript{34}

The second exclusionist strategy, that of civilisational infantilism, resorts to the reverse approach: intensified engagement with the historical and cultural specificities of India that lays bare its insufficiencies.\textsuperscript{35}


\textsuperscript{34} Uday Singh Mehta, \textit{Liberalism and Empire: India in British Liberal Thought} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{35} The simultaneity of both strategies is reconciled by the standard against which India figures in the schema of progress. The standard that informs India’s position in the civilisational hierarchy is that of specificity: as an illustrative example. India mattered for its specificity, as an instance of backwardness and not for its singularity in terms of its particularities. Detailing per se is not a concern for a liberal thinker like J. S. Mill, since he is interested in fitting India within a general framework, rather than take the schema apart with its uniqueness. The context for specificity is set by the schema of progress within which all societies are instances of one stage or the other. Therefore, historical detail matters only insofar as it validated a general law and demonstrated its historical significance. Ibid., p. 111.
We see here the deployment of culture as a tool of exclusion, which essentially divided colonies into two classes. Whereas colonies in America and Australia were ‘of similar civilization to the ruling country; capable of and ripe for representative government’, colonies like India had cultures that were dissimilar to the British, making them unfit for self-governance.\(^{36}\) India could develop, but only under the cloak of authoritarianism, and the course of action before colonial administrators was presented by what J. S. Mill called ‘a choice of despotisms’.\(^{37}\) We will return to the colonial attempt to reconcile liberalism and imperialism when we examine the framing of violence and sovereignty within the colonial discourse.

All colonial ventures of exploration, classification and categorisation of India’s social as well as natural spheres were part of the larger imperial project of knowing the subject country well in order to control it better. The British built up a repository of knowledge about the colonial people that included amassing knowledge of political practices and traditions followed by preceding rulers, and piecing together India’s civilisational history in a manner that justified colonial rule.\(^{38}\) The journal *Asiatick Researches*, of which Jones was the editor, carried out extensive surveys between 1788 and 1839 of the natural and human resources in India. It published 174 articles on the flora and fauna of India and another 172 articles on Indian history and languages. The colonial urge to institutionalise knowledge stemmed from an underlying mistrust of the native, dependence on whom, it was feared, would be to the detriment of the system. This prejudice assumed structural proportions with the organisation of knowledge that went on to progressively insulate the processes of administration from the involvement and influence of Indians.\(^{39}\)


Colonialism was not initially imbued with this sense of purpose that informed its subsequent ventures. Seeley’s remark that the colonialists appear ‘to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’ underscores the fact that colonisation till about the 19th century was not the outcome of a calculated strategy. This ad hoc nature of colonialism is brought into sharper focus when it is juxtaposed with the more organised phenomenon of imperialism, the distinction highlighting the heterogeneous ways in which power was exercised during the colonial period. As Young points out:

Colonization was pragmatic and until the nineteenth century generally developed locally in a haphazard way[...]while imperialism was typically driven by ideology from the metropolitan centre and concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power.

The post-Renaissance period saw a sea change in European historiography, with emphasis now on empirical evidence, chronological sequencing of historical events and on establishing causal relationships. The larger context to the entire intellectual venture was social evolutionism, wherein India embodied Europe’s past in the scale of evolution. These concerns were duly reflected in the British approach to the subject of Indian history.

40 Internal differences on the degree and nature of British involvement in the governance of the country belied the image of the British as a monolith in India. While the Orientalists favoured internal reform of Hinduism through the introduction of modern ideas, the Evangelicals believed in the moral upliftment of the Indians through the teaching of Christian tenets. The Orientalist approach meant that the measure of distance to be maintained in dealing with the colonial people was in the danger of being violated.


44 Much of 19th century British historiography was marked by ‘little Englandism’, wherein mainstream history was believed to be immune to colonial experiences. This trend was set against the ‘big Indianism’ of Indian historiography which projected India as possessing an inherent ability to imbibe external influences without losing its essential character. Peter van der Veer, Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 8.
In the next segment, we will examine the influence Orientalist philosophy had on the manner in which India’s strategic history was interpreted and imagined.

**The Colonial Calculus: Orientalism and the Scripting of India’s Strategic History**

British writers grasped the inherent power and appeal of ideas early, justifying colonialism more in ideational terms than in a material sense. Colonies were portrayed as steeped in ascriptive identities, and reined back from development due to their regressive traditions. The mission of colonialism, and later of modernisation was to introduce progressive, rational ideas in these traditional societies. The notion, that ideas were potential catalysts of change that could release societies from the stasis they found themselves in, was central to the Orientalist discourse. The power of representation that the British appropriated yielded a coherent and inter-related set of images about India. The tropes were based primarily on the cultural, social and historical specificities that the colonialists encountered and documented in India. The import of these detailed commentaries was considerable and extended beyond the immediate confines of the disciplines to which they originally belonged. Despite the contribution of liberal nationalist and Marxist historians to challenge the essentialist approach to Indian culture, these imageries remained the veritable lens

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45 However, colonial writings made certain distinctions among the non-Europeans. The ‘barbarous infidels’ of the East led degraded lives because of the civilisational excesses evident in the blind pursuit of power and wealth. On the other hand, the ‘savages’ of Africa and the Americas were deprived of the fruits of civilisation, and hence were primitive. Frederick Cooper, ‘Postcolonial Studies and the Study of History’, in Ania Loomba, Suvi Kaul, Matti Bunzl, Antoinette Burton and Jed Esty, eds, *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006), p. 98.

46 The concept of the civilising mission originated in France’s *mission civilisatrice*. According to Alice Conklin, ‘to be civilised was to be free from specific forms of tyranny: the tyranny of the elements over man, of disease over health, of instinct over reason, of ignorance over knowledge and of despotism over liberty.’ The rational man’s avowed love for all things civilised went on to inform the higher objectives of colonialism in lands that were seen to be wallowing in depravity and irrationality. Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilise: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 5–6.
through which IR came to view much of contemporary India’s strategic history and diplomatic practices. In the following section, we critically examine some of the most prominent tropes within the colonial discourse that came to be representative of and identifiable with India.

1. Caste and Human Agency in India

The Assertion

Indology presumed every civilisation to be reducible to a unitary essence, and the essence of Indian civilisation was seen to lie in the institution of caste. The caste system, likened to ‘the Chinese national shoe’ by a 19th century British missionary, was seen as undermining the role of indigenous political institutions. Karl Marx in 1853 offered validation to the claim that caste had condemned India to a history of political subjugation. He wrote:

A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindoo, but also between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste [...] were they not the predestined prey of conquest? [...] Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton [...].

The legitimisation of the view that ‘certain territories and people require and beseech domination’ furthered the colonial assertion of Indians as being devoid of any sense of agency. Unlike the West where the individual

47 For a quintessential Indian institution, it is ironical that the christening of caste should have foreign origins. Caste was termed as such by the Portuguese, derived as it was from the word casta. Ronald Inden, Text and Practice: Essays on South Asian History (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 168.


was an autonomous agent and the mover of history, in India the decision-making elite was said to lack the ability to shape the destiny of its people through effective strategising. Rather, as J. S. Mill argued, that ‘success in life [in the Orient] is seen or believed to be the fruit of fatality or accident and not of exertion[...]’.

Particularly to the Evangelicals like Charles Grant, reforms worked for Europeans because of their ‘manly character’, but would be ineffective in the case of the ‘effeminate’ Indians.

India was depicted as a country where political institutions symbolising the unity of the state were subsumed by a conflict-ridden civil society and hence, could not foster an atmosphere conducive to strategising. The absence of united and purposeful action was to Mill, symptomatic of social backwardness. He asserted:

In savage communities [...] we seldom see any joint operations carried on by the union of many; nor do savages find much pleasure in each other’s society. Wherever, therefore, we find human beings acting together for common purposes, in large bodies and enjoying the pleasures of social intercourse, we term them civilized.

Colonial typecasting maintained that caste as the basis of social order constricted mobility and denied people the agency to ameliorate their position in society. Moreover, faith in predestined course of events and stress on afterlife made Indians otherworldly with no concern for material betterment. Inden succinctly summarises the Orientalist position:

Indian civilization is [...] unlike the west, fundamentally a product of its environment[...]European civilization is the product of rational human action [...] [India] was from her very origin pre-conquered by caste and Hinduism and pre-condemned [...] to centuries of decline and stagnation. Her people, including their leaders, have, thus, not been true agents of their own actions, the makers of their history [...].

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The initial phase of studying the Hindu scriptures gave way to empirical research in mid-19th century that focused on the enumeration and classification of Indian population along ethnic and social identities. The categorisation of society into an overarching caste system was based on the information that such official investigations yielded. The textual understanding of caste that early European intellectuals adopted continues to find resonance in contemporary research. Predictably, the sanctity of the Brahmanical order is maintained in these scholarly reiterations. Although contemporary studies disputing the Brahmanical version have focused on the trend towards social dynamism and on caste as a vehicle of social mobility and political representation, these works have been unable to dislodge the predominant paradigm.  

THE NEGATION

On the issue of caste, the negation of its rigidity ironically preceded the assertion in some ways. For instance, early colonial accounts do not corroborate to the existence of a single, overarching caste structure that was to later become a colonial representation. The works of British ethnographers such as Buchanan Hamilton’s *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India* (1838) and Herbert Risley’s *Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891) bring out the fluidity of social stratification and its sharp regional variations. Buchanan realised that internal distinctions prevented the brahmins from appropriating the top position within a relatively fluid social hierarchy. He found ‘that in the early ages the term Brahman would not appear to have been hereditarily annexed to the sacred order’. Half a century later, Risley reiterated Buchanan’s observation:

Caste then, at least in the rigid form in which we now know it, is an institution of comparatively late origin. [...] The testimony of the whole body of Vedic literature as interpreted by modern scholars is adverse to the existence of a clear-defined hierarchy of endogamous castes [...]. Even in the Epic era the system had not hardened into its later form [...]. Brahmahood is a matter of personal qualities and aptitudes rather than of descent.

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The association of caste with race, absent in Buchanan’s observations, becomes evident in Risley’s work, when he argues that the castes were obsessed with maintaining their racial purity. For instance, although the artisans of Bengal belonged to the high status group in the ancient, pre-brahmanical social hierarchy, rigid notions of purity and sanctity were absent from their social observances, as was the primacy of birth that was to later determine positions in the caste structure.\footnote{58}

History and contemporary India today suggest discernible deviations from this unified hierarchical structure as laid out in ancient texts. The caste system, based as it is on ascriptive identities, has been constantly challenged by castes lower in the hierarchy who chose to redefine the position and role ascribed to them. The Rajputs are a classic example of a community that employed warfare as a mode of upward social mobility in the early medieval period.\footnote{59} Resistance to lowly status and its attendant disadvantages prompted the lower castes to come up with their own narratives chronicling their origin and fall in status. These multiple narratives, to which there was resistance as was bound to be, created multiple hierarchies that negated the Brahmanical order once upheld by the early Europeans. The caste hierarchy so rendered has enabled the mutation of caste identities to further political causes in modern Indian politics.\footnote{60}

\textbf{Conclusion}

This particular instance of reflexivity, which began with British research into Indian society, was a graduated exercise. Whether or not historically the inability to repulse foreign invasion lay in India’s fractious society, the British emphasis on its caste-ridden, splintered nature was aimed at

\footnote{58} Such pre-modern social hierarchies were not unique to India, and Europe saw the similar ostracisation of certain professional categories. In Germany till the 19th century, grave-diggers, executioners and tanners were branded as ‘dishonourable people’ who were not allowed to socially mingle with the rest of the population. Waligora, ‘What is Your “Caste”?’\footnote{60}, pp. 156–57. However, scholars like Ashok Rudra differentiate between the modes of social control that maintained hierarchical order in Europe and India. Whereas it was violence in the former case, it was the ‘ideology’ of \textit{dharma} in the case of India that obviated the need to resort to violence. For more on related literature, see Ainslee Embree, ‘Indian Civilization and Regional Cultures: The Two Realities’, in Paul Wallace, ed., \textit{Region and Nation in India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press and IBH, 1985), pp. 28–29.

\footnote{59} Gupta, \textit{Interrogating Caste}, p. 28.

\footnote{60} Ibid., pp. 89, 227.
ensuring that no united and cohesive revolt to its power ever arose.\(^{61}\) However, caste was to eventually become a powerful platform for political mobilisation in independent India and remains a significant force informing social organisation in modern India.

2. ‘Civilisation Drove Forward in a Mortuary Cart’\(^{62}\): The Framing of Violence and Sovereignty in Colonial India

The Assertion

Colonial practices sought to reconcile liberalism with imperialism by invoking different connotations of sovereignty. Sovereignty within the system of imperial powers was very different from the manner in which it was interpreted and applied to in the case of their colonies. Orientalism presumed that for time immemorial, India was politically fragmented into a number of warring kingdoms engaged in internecine warfare till the British gained control. The situation was rendered chaotic by the absence of an overarching authority which could have regulated relations between the smaller polities. The argument justifying British rule held the larger implication that given its fractured political history, India failed to develop a coherent tradition of strategic thinking. Indians have historically lacked, in Mill’s words, ‘the advantage of discipline, of those regular and simultaneous movements, upon which, in skilled warfare, almost everything depends.’\(^{63}\) The necessary prerequisite of a unifying political entity that was critical to strategise for the entire subcontinent simply did not exist.

To understand the colonial justification of a strife-ridden Indian society, it is necessary to trace the distinction that is often made between coercion and violence within the statist discourse. This discourse represented the history of the state as the history of progress and attached pejorative

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\(^{61}\) This intention was articulated in 1865 by the principal of the Presidency College James Kerr, in Calcutta, in no uncertain terms: ‘It may be doubted if the existence of caste is on the whole unfavourable to the permanence of our rule. It may even be considered favourable to it, provided we act with prudence and forbearance. Its spirit is opposed to national union.’ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ‘Caste in the Perception of the Raj: A Note on the Evolution of Colonial Sociology of Bengal’, Bengal Past and Present, CIV, 198–199 (1985), p. 63.


connotations to the phenomenon of violence. In a civilised society, reason came to replace violence in the negotiations among its members. Since civilisation implied a control over violence, it became coterminous with the state, which enforced restraint through its legal and coercive apparatus. Further, coercive actions of the state such as battles and wars are distinguished from incidence of raw violence that lack direction, purpose and rationale. Battles are justified in terms of the higher objective they serve to the state waging them, arguably a more peaceful and stable society. By contrast, violence is considered the hallmark of anarchy — a condition that lies outside the pale of the state, and indeed, predates it. Precisely because the state has very little to do with what falls beyond its limits, history has always recognised violence as the antithesis of civilisation and progress.64

The community governed by the state is assumed to be a homogenous entity primarily because the destabilising force of violence is externalised to an outside source. Within the community, individuals together constitute a collectivity but are incapable of fundamentally disturbing its internal balance. Any resort to violence by individuals is rendered senseless and chaotic by the eternal truth that they lack agency against the state which is the monopolist of force. The price for inclusion into the political community is paid with the power of agency which all members must surrender, and with it forsake any claims over a legitimate cause to rebel.65 Pandey succinctly summed up the colonial position on violence outside the state:

Violence is Civilization’s other, as it were. It is what Civilization and History are not. The phenomenon of violence belongs to a domain of pre-history [...].66

The state of preparedness for war was not a feature of international politics alone; it stemmed from colonial insecurities within empires and informed colonial administration within the domestic realm, so to speak. European chronicles and literature from the 19th century articulated the fears of the barbarian, who was depicted as being inherently violent and

65 Ibid., p. 47.
66 Ibid., p. 9, emphasis original.
engaging in barbaric acts that defied reason. Such a portrayal allowed the imperialists to locate the threat of aggression in the barbarian, and at the same instance justified any imperial recourse to violence that may be required to quell the danger. And with that, violence and its unfortunate consequences were ideologically externalised to the colonies, and the realm of civilisation and peace of which the European powers were a part was left intact.  

The gradual conflation of political order and civilisation is discernible in colonial writings on India, which are replete with reiterations that a state of anarchy prevailed till the advent of British rule. In such historical accounts, the normal condition of a stable and harmonious society did not apply to pre-colonial India, which was beset by anarchical conditions of internal strife and political disorder. The numerous kings who ruled over fragmented domains continually jostled for power, rendering the country vulnerable to outside attacks. In brief, pre-colonial India was not an evolved political community that was internally stable and wracked instead by an external source of violence located in invading armies. Rather, India presented an image of intrinsic fragility — weakened by caste divisions and the senseless violence of a chaotic society. Colonial references are replete with a conflicting juxtaposition of defensiveness (as a result of a socially and politically fragmented milieu) and barbarism (a pre-civilisational social attribute). But typically in colonial representations, whereas defensiveness spawns a reactive approach, barbarism begets belligerence, with the threat quotient varying in the two instances. The two apparently contradictory streaks in the quintessential Indian mindset are squared within the colonial discourse. The irrational violence that was externalised from a civilised society was seen as being inherent to India; indeed, it was an endemic feature. Invasions thus came to be qualified as wars of conquest and not as destabilising forces of violence. Pre-colonial India was an India of pre-history, anarchy and barbarism. Into this pre-historical setting of endemic violence came the British who introduced order hitherto unknown to this country. As Kiernan notes, ‘To be bringing order out of such chaos could be regarded as justification enough for British conquest, if any were asked for; Order was from first to last the grand imperial watchword’.  

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The denial of sovereignty to the colonised was sought to be justified in differential approaches to warfare. In the imperial lexicon, if noble ends justified means, they could also delegitimise certain others. Thus, the resort to violence by barbarians was but irrational and could lay no claim to justification of any sort. By inference, codes of conduct and norms regarding warfare among the European powers were not applicable to their colonies. War-time excesses, both in terms of military technologies employed and acts of torture executed, were abhorred in the European context but entirely justified in perpetrating colonial rule.69

THE NEGATION

The colonial thesis of total chaos in the subcontinent finds little historical evidence to support it but much to question its veracity. History points to the existence of well-developed notions of order and hierarchy in ancient and medieval Indian literature. Inden points to the hierarchical structure in which warring kingdoms in early medieval India (from mid-8th century to early 13th century AD) were arranged, wherein the lower-order kings submitted to and recognised the paramountcy of the ‘king of kings’.70 Separate terminologies existed that indicated the paramount status of the king and the functionality of the hierarchical order. He is variously referred to as rajaraja (the king of kings), maharajadhiraja (the high king of great kings) and chakravartin (the overlord of the entire earth), an implicit recognition that his powers extended over the territories of the smaller rulers who accepted his overlordship. Further, supreme internal control and external sovereignty overlapped and were eventually centred in his person. Within his own territory, he was to establish social order that prescribed to the hierarchical system, while externally it was his sovereign right and duty to maintain the hierarchy of kings, at the apex of which he was positioned. The realisation of the three goals of dharma by the kings depended on the execution of rajadharma by the paramount king. If he failed to establish order in his kingdom and maintain the hierarchy of kings, the smaller kings would eventually succumb to the anarchical state of the ‘justice of fishes’ or matsyayana.71 There were several indicators of power

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69 For instance, the infamous Maxim gun and the French Coloniale bomber were specially designed to be deployed in the colonies and were regarded as exceedingly beastly for use in the European world. Salter, Barbarians and Civilization, p. 39.
70 Inden, Text and Practice, p. 129.
71 Ibid., pp. 146, 155.
along which this structure of power relations among kings was drawn. This included the scale of territorial acquisitions of the paramount king, as also his manpower (ministers and generals) and assets (arms, horses and wealth) — superior and more numerous than of the smaller kings.

The visual representation of this hierarchical order of kings was meticulously created in the grand assembly of the great king in which the other smaller kings were assigned places according to their position in the overall order. The structure of the imperial court was a manifestation of the grand cosmological order given in the Puranas. The earth was depicted as comprising six concentric islands separated by water, at the centre of which was the island of Jambudvipa and atop that was the Mount Meru. Bharatvarsha located on Meru, replicated the realms of Jambudvipa where the centre became the seat of power and prosperity. The metaphors used in the Puranas to signify the earth placed great emphasis on the notion of the centre that, by virtue of its cardinal location in the hierarchical order, contained within it the energies of the entire cosmos. Therein lies the rationale behind the imperial replication of the cosmological order, manifested even in the minutiae of architectural designing of courts and palaces. The paramount king as the embodiment of the Cosmic Man (Purusha) aspired to make his kingdom a representation of the Bharatvarsha which contained within it the order of Jambudvipa, signifying the entire earth. The analogy highlighted the paramount status of the king in terms of locating his kingdom at the centre of India, from which he presided over the entire earth.

**Conclusion**

Violence and order present interesting motifs against which the veracity of IR as a discipline can be studied. The conventional paradigm regards order as coterminous with the domestic domain, and anarchy to be the structural attribute of international politics. This dichotomous divide permits little space for the anarchical states of existence that were often

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72 The position of the kings in the hierarchy was determined by the size of their territories expressed in numerical figures of the number of villages under their control. Thus, there were eight provinces or ‘half kingdoms’ of 50,000 villages which fell within four provincial kingdoms that together made up the imperial kingdom. Ibid., pp. 143–44.

73 Krishnaraja I was one such king of kings ‘whose pair of feet were worshipped (abhivand) by the multitudes of Great Kings who had assembled to serve (him)’. Quoted in Ibid., p. 135.
witnessed in the colonies and written about. Controlling the multitudinous subject population spread over vast swathes of territory was never an easy task for the British, and their tenuous hold in certain parts of the empire influenced the imperial policy. The portrayal of India as a country sunk in anarchy provided the legitimate opening for British intervention and a justification of the colonial cause. Colonialism was said to have ushered restraint in Indian society, still external in the sense that it had to be enforced through laws and yet to be cultivated internally by its members. When peace and stability prevailed under the colonialists, history was believed to have begun for India in the true sense of the word. By introducing the lawless people to authority, colonialism brought with it the fruits of civilisation, namely the all-powerful state, the progress of which history was to henceforth record.

3. Rationality and its Absence in India

The distinction between the real and the apparent, the this-worldly and the other-worldly, and between the rational and the superstitious were themes that were constantly played out between the Occident and the Orient. The general disdain for ‘irrational’ practices in India can be discerned in the writings of François Bernier and Thomas Roe. Disapproving of the respect astrologers commanded in Mughal India, Bernier wrote, ‘The majority of Asiatics are so infatuated in favour of being guided by the signs of the heavens, that, according to their phraseology, no circumstances can happen below, which is not written above’. The Orient is thus believed to rule the realm of imagination whereas the Occident dominates the domain of reality. Sedentary amusements such as story telling and ‘languid games’

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like dice ‘corresponds with the passiveness of his [the Hindu’s] temper […] and harmonises with the Hindu tone of mind’. Macaulay makes a similar observation:

[…] the department of literature in which the eastern writers stand highest is poetry[…]But when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable.

Similarly poetry, seen as the product of the human imagination, was incompatible with history which dwelt on the happenings of reality. Mill’s positioning of poetry along the scale of human development drives home the point.

The first literature is poetry. Poetry is the language of the passions, and men feel, before they speculate[…] Before the invention of writing, men are directed also to the use of versification by the aid of which it affords to the memory […] At this first state the literature of the Hindu has always remained […].

The advocacy of the West as the font of rationality and progress thus tended to ‘primitivise’ the discourses in the East. This binary approach presents us with the paradox of colonialism, which entailed, as Gyan Prakash notes:

[…] [that] the writ of rationality and order was always overwritten by its denial in the colonies, the pieties of progress always violated irreverently in practice […] Paradoxes and ironies abounded, as did the jurisdiction of

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the gap between rhetoric and practice on the grounds of expediency and the exceptional circumstances of the colonies.\textsuperscript{81}

Max Weber was a prominent exponent of rationality as the determinant of social evolution. For him, Europe was at the apex of the scale of progress, marked off from the rest by its rationality. His concern with the emergence of modern institutions led him to locate its cause in cultural specificities of religions. Protestantism was seen as providing the enabling environment for the development of capitalist ethics and bureaucratisation in the West, whereas the inherent traits of Oriental religions impeded its growth in the East.\textsuperscript{82} According to Weber, none of the Asian religions ‘provided the motives or orientations for a rationalised ethical patterning of the creaturely world in accordance with divine commandments’.\textsuperscript{83} In \textit{The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism}, Weber argued that ‘Indian geometry has no rational proof […]. all Indian political thought was lacking [….] in the possession of rational concepts’.\textsuperscript{84}

Scientific progress came to be regarded as an area in which the prowess of rationality could be tested and demonstrated. It is then little surprise that the colonialists seeking to belittle Indian understanding of rationality targeted its science systems. Macaulay, for instance, was sceptical of the ability of Indians to make scientific progress. Indian advancements in astronomy were to him so appalling that they ‘would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school’.\textsuperscript{85} Orientalists did not differ much from Macaulay in this regard, considering the works on Indian astronomy as bereft of any credibility. Jones held that when it comes to the sciences, ‘the Asiatics, if compared with our Western nations, are mere children’.\textsuperscript{86}


\textsuperscript{82} Christianity was rational also because it conformed to the principal tenets of the natural sciences. The laws of nature were interpreted as acts of God. Peter van der Veer, \textit{Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 25–28.


\textsuperscript{85} Macaulay (1835), \textit{Minute on Indian Education}, p. 232.

It was not merely the indigenous sciences that Macaulay regarded with contempt. He was equally sceptical of the level of literary consciousness that the Indians displayed. He held in his *Minute on Education*:

I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works[...]I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.\(^{87}\)

Similarly, history comprised nothing more than exaggerated accounts of ‘kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long’, whereas geography resembled ‘seas of treacle and seas of butter’.\(^{88}\) Macaulay condemned:

wasting public money, for printing books which are of less value than the paper on which they are printed was while it was blank; for giving artificial encouragement to absurd history, absurd metaphysics, absurd physics, absurd theology; for raising up a breed of scholars who find their scholarship an encumbrance and a blemish.\(^{89}\)

He was clearly wary of patronising indigenous science systems although he realised that to withdraw official patronage would not be a politically expedient strategy.

**The Negation**

The Western notion of rationality, an intrinsic part of the Enlightenment project, rested on a series of stark dichotomies that were mutually exclusive of each other in their roles and influences. The public realm was distinct from the private, as was science from religion.\(^{90}\) Rationality was upheld on the basis of two traditions spanning different time spans, namely the

\(^{87}\) Macaulay (1835), *Minute on Indian Education*, p. 230.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., p. 232.

\(^{89}\) Macaulay (1835), *Minute on Indian Education*, p. 238.

\(^{90}\) Western suspicion of practices based on principles other than rationality stems from its own experiences within the Christian faith. Deviant practices that explained phenomena in terms of factors outside the Biblical scheme of things faced outright rejection. The dismissive attitude to belief systems in the East can thus be seen as an extension of that very orthodoxy. Goody, *The East in the West*, p. 42; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 12–13.
syllogistic reasoning of ancient Greece, and the modern rationality of the Renaissance period. The development of formal syllogism in ancient Greece has been cited as the precursor to the rationalist tradition that evolved in Europe. However, it did not make the possession of reason a characteristic peculiar to the West, and cultural variants of rationality developed in all societies. For instance, India evolved its own variants of syllogistic reasoning. The *Nyayasutra* worked out the five-part syllogism, which was further compressed into either the first three or the last three sections in Buddhist logic during 6th century CE. Above all, ancient Indian texts upheld the quality of reason, but not its aimless application. Reason had to be directed and oriented in furtherance of a particular goal, and by inference could not become an end in itself. Kautilya regarded the faculty of critical inquiry as one of the four strands of learning that a king must master.

The *Nyayasutras*, compiled between 100 BC and AD 200, engaged with the various dimensions of rationality including inference as a knowledge source, procedures to be observed during debates, and the role of perception. Vatsyayana’s commentary on the *Nyayasutras* called *Nyayabhyasa* elaborated on the notion of critical inquiry:

*Nyaya* is the examination of things with the help of methods of knowing. It is an inference supported by observation and authority. This is called a ‘critical

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91 Syllogistic reasoning or sequential reasoning as we commonly know today in the familiar format (of A=B, C=B, therefore, A=C) developed in ancient Greece due to a number of enabling factors. The literate Greek culture facilitated the formalisation of reasoned arguments, further commentaries on which were also recorded in writing, leading to an accretion of literature. Furthermore, this body of literature was sustained through an educational process that used writing as its main medium of instruction. Goody, *The East in the West*, pp. 17–18.


93 The other three branches of learning that Kautilya enumerates are: the religious compendium comprising of the three Vedas, the science of material gain and the science of political administration.
proof [...] [which] is the proof of things desired, supported by observation and authority. The discipline of critical inquiry is the one which pertains to it, and is also called the science of nyaya or the writings on nyaya.\textsuperscript{94}

Indian rationality systems have been widely written about and discussed in historical works. Not only were these structures of reasoning well-developed in ancient and medieval Indian literature, but their understanding and application was believed to be closely aligned to the achievement of certain identified goals. The potentially wide applicability of reason to a range of purposes (and yielding an array of possible outcomes) meant that the parameters of rationality were set in very broad terms. This was in contradistinction to the Western notion of rationality where the emphasis was on ensuring the accuracy of method, the application of which was to yield certain expected outcomes. It was upon this variation between goal-oriented and process-based approaches that the Orientalist criticism of indigenous rationality systems was essentially based.

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Since all societies were by some measure rational, dissemination was not of the faculty of reason per se, but of rationalising techniques that made cumulative knowledge possible. The spread of writing and information enabled other rational societies to develop particular logic systems such as formal syllogism. A spread of this kind cannot be held to have had a totalising influence that is normally associated with the dissemination of an invention. Hence, it is imperative that rationality ‘be given a more “historical”, less culturally enduring character’ than is commonly assumed.\textsuperscript{95}

\textbf{4. The Oriental Despot}

\textbf{THE ASSERTION}

The Oriental despotism model served as an important cog in the colonial governance apparatus by justifying why progressive European institutions could not be replicated in the colonies. The arbitrary and exploitative rule by a despot over a submissive society was regarded as an enduring political phenomenon in Asian societies where, as Montesquieu remarked, despotism was ‘naturally domiciled’.\textsuperscript{96} Under Oriental despotism, the

\textsuperscript{94} Quoted in Ganeri, \textit{Philosophy in Classical India}, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{95} Goody, \textit{The East in the West}, p. 47.

surplus generated from agricultural production in self-sufficient villages was appropriated by the State. The absence of private property and complex organisations of production signified that Asian polities were seen to be extractive and regressive as compared to their European contemporaries. Depictions of the Mughal state in colonial writings are consistent with the theory of Oriental despotism. Sitting at the apex of the hierarchy, the Mughal emperors distributed, recognised and redistributed property and honours at will. The obvious comparison was with Britain where honours were hereditarily bequeathed, thereby creating a social class that over time developed the clout to keep the monarchy in check. The singular absence of an alternate locus of power, coupled with the lack of any clear principle of succession made the Mughal state appear despotic to the British historians. Under an Oriental despot, the principle of primogeniture was not respected when it came to matters of succession, as it was in England. Robert Orme, in chronicling his impressions of a centralised administrative system, wrote:

The Sovereign reserved to himself the power of Life and Death [...] the Nabob [...] was called to court, kept there, or translated into another government, whenever the Ministry thought these changes necessary, and there was a time when they were so frequent, that a new Nabob left Delhi riding contrary to the usual manner with his back turned to the head of his Elephant and gave for a reason, ‘That he was looking out for his Successor’.

The emperor personified all functions of the state — be it the domain of law, justice or defence. The centring of all imperial matters in the emperor’s person meant that there existed no institutional mechanism above and independent of the despot. The will of the emperor was the law of the land, effectively signalling the absence of state institutions of the kind that could be found in Europe. For Mill, the contrast in their styles of functioning was but obvious:

98 India Office Library Records (IOLR), Clive Papers, Home Miscellaneous, IOR/H/191.
99 Cohn, Colonialism, p. 63.
100 Robert Orme, Historical Fragments of the Mogul Empire: Of the Morattoes, and of the English Concerns, In Indostan (India Office Records T 14354, 1782), p. 91.
In the more skilful governments of Europe, officers are appointed for the discharge of particular duties in the different provinces of the empire [...]. Among the less instructed and less civilized inhabitants of Asia, no other plan has ever occurred to the monarch, for the administration of his dominions, than simply to divide his authority and power into pieces or fragments, as numerous as the provinces [...]. Whatever powers the sovereign exercised over the whole kingdom, the vicegerent exercised in the province allotted to him [...]. Every one of those rulers, whether the sphere of his command was narrow or extensive, was absolute within it [...].

British rule was based on the premise that since Indians would unquestioningly obey authority, it would be in the best interests of their subjects to be ruled by benevolent despots. Given the anarchical conditions existent in India, the British thought it would be in the best interests of their subjects to rule as benevolent despots. Alexander Dow, in his introduction to Ferishta’s *History of Hindostan*, projected a similar image of India:

“The history now given to the public, presents us with a striking picture of the deplorable condition of a people subjected to arbitrary sway; and of the instability of empire itself, when it is founded neither on law, nor upon the opinions and attachments of mankind[...]. In a government like that of India, public spirit is never seen, and loyalty a thing unknown. The people permit themselves to be transferred from one tyrant to another, without murmuring [...].”

Centuries of despotic rule had supposedly rendered the Indian people incapable of enjoying the benefits of a free government. It was widely

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103 Ironically, when it came to assessing the history of Europe, a philosopher like J. S. Mill grasped the nub of contextualism very well indeed. Mill was sympathetic towards the shortfalls of European history which its progression had overcome. The same could not be said of the Orientals whose past signified a level of backwardness that was reiterated in every age. Raymond Chapman, *The Sense of the Past in Victorian Literature* (Kent: Croom Helm, 1986). He added: ‘To find fault with our ancestors for not having annual parliaments, universal suffrage, and vote by ballot, would be like quarrelling with the Greeks and Romans for not using steam navigation, when we know it is so safe and expeditious; which would be, in short, simply finding fault with the third century before Christ for not being the eighteenth century after.’ J. S. Mill (1831), *The Spirit of the Age*, ed., F. A. von Hayek (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, rpt 1942), p. 48.
agreed upon that till the reforms took effect, the British would have to rule with a firm hand and hence, the antidote to Oriental despotism lay in ‘benevolent despotism’. The balance between repressive violence employed by colonisers in furtherance of the civilising mission, and the threat of a violent backlash from their subjects to imperial policies was a precarious one. The imposition of order in this case rested ironically on the denial of sovereignty to the colony. Indeed, we see the colony as the site of contestation where the dichotomy between order and sovereignty was constantly sought to be imposed.

The Negation

The dichotomous interface between order and sovereignty was of course difficult to enforce and it yielded several local configurations in different colonial settings, one of which was despotism itself. For instance, in 19th century Africa, colonial rule was akin to, what Mahmood Mamdani terms as ‘decentralised despotism’, wherein the local administrative chief, released from all forms of social constraints such as by traditional chieftains, emerged as the local despot representing the colonial apparatus. Mamdani notes of colonialism’s bifurcated existences that ensured the interface stayed dichotomous:

This divided world is inhabited by subjects on one side and citizens on the other; […] their beliefs dismissed as pagan on this side but bear the status of religion on the other; […] their verbal communication is demeaned as vernacular chatter on this side but elevated as linguistic discourse on the other; in sum, the world of the ‘savages’ barricaded, in deed as in word, from the world of the ‘civilized’.

Besides, the Oriental despotism thesis is untenable on several counts. For one, the Mughal state did not wield absolute control over the actual administration of the empire, which was overseen and managed by the provincial administrators. The high degree of centralisation as the theory suggests in both political and economic affairs simply did not exist in Mughal India, indeed it was impossible to achieve given the sheer scale of the empire. The existence of robust institutions of finance and credit, coupled with the thriving commerce at port cities such as Surat point to

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104 Salter, *Barbarians and Civilization*, p. 35.
106 Ibid., p. 61.
two trends: the granting of significant degree of autonomy, and the extension of state support to trading ventures in cooperation with the Persian and the Uzbek rulers.\footnote{John Hobson, \textit{The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 80–81.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

We encounter the figurehead of the Oriental despot in several colonial works which allude to the arbitrary exercise of political power and the lack of countervailing forces to check royal transgressions. The intent behind simplistic and dramatic portrayals of the Mughal political structure was, of course, to explain why a suitably modified British administrative system should take its place. It is hence not surprising that several nuances in the working of the Mughal system, including the existence of efficient political and economic institutions, which did not seem to fit this schema, were mostly downplayed.

\section{5. Textualisation and Periodisation of Indian History}

\textbf{The Assertion}

The colonial period marks a distinct juncture in Indian history from whereon we witness the initiation of two key processes: nativism and textualisation. The two trends may appear contradictory (the privileging of the text over the living repositories of Indian culture) but are not, since the portrayal of the native was seen to approximate the representations enumerated in ancient texts. Orientalists such as Jones believed in the potential of the texts to lead the way back to the essence of Hindu civilisation from the present state of depravity that the natives were believed to be living in. The following section will look at how Indian history came to be periodised and textualised in a manner that was to have significant implications on the shaping of India’s national identity.

\subsection{a) Seeking the Alternative: The Colonial Search for the Real Other}

The search for India’s ‘pure’ essence in the ancient period arose, as Nietzsche puts it ‘from the belief that things are most precious and essential at the moment of birth’.\footnote{Michael Drolet, \textit{The Postmodernism Reader: Foundational Texts} (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 74.} This assumption stems from the anthropological approach to culture, in which the ‘native’ acquires central importance in its conceptualisation. In its extreme version, nativism that ‘exceptionalizes
the native and glorifies them to excess’ regards others as mere settlers, and hence attributes alien status to them. The ‘native’ in colonial literature was the quintessential Hindu who represented the resilience of ancient Indian civilisation to repeated invasions. The ceaseless reproduction of basic economic activities in a society that did not witness progressive change further contributed to its image of immutability and longevity.

The writing of Indian history in a manner that upheld the ancient Hindu civilisation as bearer of the original Indian identity had several significant implications. The Islamic empires that ruled India during the medieval period were seen as foreign impositions that suppressed and eclipsed India’s authentic culture. The dichotomising of Indian history along communal lines that constructed narratives based on the categories of the native and the foreign can clearly be traced back to the colonial discourse.

As Thapar notes:

[...] Mill’s History of British India [...] laid the foundation for a communal interpretation of Indian history and thus provided the historical justification for the two-nation theory. He was the first historian to develop the thesis of dividing Indian history into three periods which he called Hindu civilisation, Muslim civilisation and British civilisation [...]..

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109 Julie Reeves, Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 10–11. Reeves employs the notion of the tourist to not only emphasise the perceived insignificance of the settlers to the identity of the native, but also draw attention to their status as the proverbial ‘other’ against whom that very identity is constructed. Reeves notes: ‘If the native represents all that is ‘pure, unique, and enduring’ in a culture or way of life, then the tourist stands for everything that is deemed impure and/or temporary on a mass scale. Where the native appears as a permanent feature in the local landscape, the tourist can be glimpsed flying overhead or breezing past on a bus, or setting up a corner shop.’ Ibid., pp. 12–13.


111 The assertion that ancient India epitomised the Hindu age does not stand up to scrutiny since a number of emperors belonging to prominent dynasties such as the Mauryas and the Shakas were Buddhist by disposition. Furthermore, the very term Hindu did not exist in ancient India, and certainly the modern day connotations attached to the notion did not apply to the people and practices of that age. Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, Communalism and the Writing of Indian History (New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1969), p. 7.

112 Ibid., p. 4.
The purpose behind periodisation of this kind was to justify the colonial phase as marking the advent of modernity when imperial rule was more secular and progressive than the preceding periods of backwardness.

b) The Text as Tradition
The hunt for the pure essence of Indian culture led the colonialists to look beyond the native, at certain classical texts of ancient India. Orientalism systematised Hinduism through textualisation, i.e., the exercise of seeking the essence of a religion in certain sacred texts. Aided by brahmins who acted as informants, it was no surprise that the British venture of excavating India’s past threw up a sanctified version of Hinduism. Extant Brahmanical discourses stressing on the timeless quality of Indian culture provided the philosophical foundation upon which the elaborate Orientalist discourse on Indian culture came to be subsequently constructed. Brahmanism believed in the eternal relevance of knowledge derived from the Vedas (vaidik) and the Shastras (shastrik), and other bodies of knowledge extraneous to this genre were considered transient and worldly (laukik). Historical and regional contingencies mediated the interpretation of the texts, thereby giving rise to variants of Brahmanism over time. The colonial intervention effected two changes to the subsequent development of this discourse. It ensured standardisation of the Brahmanical discourse by abstracting it from its messy variants. It also drew the authority to articulate, interpret and arbitrate on the Brahmanical discourse away from its traditional loci such as palaces towards the colonial apparatus.

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113 Indeed the strife between the Vaishnavite and Saivite cults in pre-colonial India had been of such extreme proportions that both could be regarded as distinct ‘religions’ with little in common. That conflicts tended to appear between specific groups and not between distinct religions was borne out in the alliances that the early Muslim invaders struck with the natives. The collaborations were such that they did not conform to distinctions between the native and the foreign. Geoffrey Oddie, ‘Constructing “Hinduism”: The Impact of the Protestant Missionary Movement on Hindu Self-Understanding’, in Eric Frykenberg, ed., Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500 (Cambridge and London: William Eerdmans and RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 160; Romila Thapar, History and Beyond (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 27–28.

Colonial accounts portrayed Indian civilisation as having developed in relative isolation from the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{115} Ancient India was taken to be the essence of Indian culture and was privileged over its living representation. As Thapar notes:

Histories of the ‘Hindu’ religion have been largely limited to placing texts and ideas in a chronological perspective with few attempts at relating these to the social history of the time. Scholarship also tended to ignore the significance of the popular manifestation of religion in contrast to the textual [...]\textsuperscript{116}

Indeed, the colonial penchant for making a virtue out of the aloofness that the written word afforded is reflected in James Mill’s assertion:

What is worth seeing or hearing in India, can be expressed in writing. As soon as everything of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may obtain more knowledge of India in one year, in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and his ears in India.\textsuperscript{117}

The two key texts that according to the British held the key to India’s identity were Manu’s \textit{Dharmashastras} and the \textit{Bhagavad Gita}. Translated in the 18th century by Jones and Charles Wilkins respectively, the treatises were taken to be representative of Hinduism, whereas practices and belief systems which did not conform to its essential character were seen as corrupted versions. Wilkins’ translation of the \textit{Bhagavad Gita} in 1785 paved the way for the privileging of the text in a manner that was to have a profound influence on Orientalist and nationalist perceptions of Indian philosophy. Hastings’ suggestion to publish Wilkins’ translation under the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Subsumed within this image of a secluded monolith was the history of the thriving Indian merchant networks that connected coastal India to Asia and Europe from the 18th to the 20th century. Claude Markovits, \textit{The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{117} James Mill (1818), \textit{The History of British India}, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, rpt 1990), p. 7.
\end{itemize}
sponsorship of the East India Company was a bold one, especially since the text was of no direct relevance to the functioning of the Company. What began as a move to create a constituency of support back home for orientalist administration was to have an enduring impact on the textual representations of Hinduism among Indian nationalists. The notion of the Gita as a scripture representative of and befitting an ancient civilisation was upheld by the nationalists, and thereafter gained widespread political legitimacy. The role the Orientalists played was indeed central to the entire process of the systematic textualisation of Hinduism that followed.\(^\text{118}\)

**The Negation**

The communal reading of Indian history is confounded by the fact that no clear date exists as to when Islamic rule could be said to have effectively commenced in the subcontinent. Whereas the standard interpretation pegs the milestone at around the 11th century AD, historical evidence presents a vastly different picture. The advent of Muslim dynasties into India deviates from the conventional date not merely by decades but by entire centuries. While the Arabs ruled over Sind as early as in the 8th century and the Turks wrested control of part of northern India from the 11th century onwards, Muslim domination in the Deccan was to follow three centuries later.\(^\text{119}\) Contrary to the colonial assertion that religious consciousness was highly developed in India, texts dating to as late as the 6th century point to multiple layers of overlapping identities. The internal heterogeneity within Hinduism and Islam manifest itself in diverse sects, lineages and schools. This prevented the coalescing of distinct religious communities in a manner that went against the grain of colonial historical representations.\(^\text{120}\)

As regards textualisation, the search for the purified core of Hinduism was a fundamentally ahistorical enterprise that ignored the diversity of

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\(^{119}\) Thapar et al., *Communalism*, p. 9.

religious practices in India. The codification of Hindu and Islamic laws that followed provided the administrators with a standard postulation of religious codes. Over time, this emphasis on texts as setting the standards of Hinduism brought rigidity into the observation of its principles and practices. Textualisation became the solution to the vexing problem the British faced of contending interpretations of Indian laws. Jones wrote that he could 'no longer bear to be at the mercy of our pundits who deal out Hindu law as they please, and make it at reasonable rates, when they cannot find it readymade'. In a letter to Cornwallis, Jones wrote that the British should strive:

[...] to assure the Hindu and Mussulman subjects of Great Britain, that the private laws which they severally held sacred, and a violation of which they would have thought the most grievous oppression, should not be superseded by a new system, of which they could have no knowledge, and which they must have considered as imposed on them by a spirit of rigour and intolerance.

The idea of letting the texts speak for themselves was consistent with the sense of detachment that the colonialists sought to cultivate during their mission in India. Commissioning the translation of texts written by

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121 Each religion has historically had its multiple variants that signify the shifting power dynamics within. Its many vantage points rationalise the social structure to the social groups that constitute it. Gramsci explains, ‘Every religion […] is in reality a multiplicity of distinct and often contradictory religions: there is one Catholicism for the peasants, one for the petits-bourgeois and town workers, one for women, and one for intellectuals which is itself variegated and disconnected.’, Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), p. 420; Richard King, Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’ (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 104.


123 Ibid., p. 306.

Indians about how they ought to be governed was judicious governance that amounted to non-interference in their affairs. As Mia Carter notes, ‘Jones’s scholarship functioned as a double translation: a transcription of Sanskrit and Brahmanic codes into English, and a means of translating Hindu tradition into British legal discourse.’ This is not to say there were no red lines. It is clear that these were abided by only in so far as they were not ‘hurtful to authority of the government’ and were overruled if their observance harmed British interests. For the Orientalists, the emancipatory role of the colonialists meant reminding the Indians of their golden past that was forgotten. The familiar colonial concern with emancipation resurfaces in Jones’ writings when he insists, ‘I am conscious of desiring no advantage [in translating ancient texts], but the pleasure of doing general good’. For the Utilitarians on the other hand, the betterment of Indians meant the introduction of rational and superior laws and institutions of Britain.

**Conclusion**

Nativism and textualisation as intellectual exercises were significant dimensions of the Orientalist discourse on India. Much of the information collated about the land and its people were viewed through these lenses, and categorised and interpreted accordingly. This systematisation of vast

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125 The colonial privileging of the Brahmanical order did not translate into official patronage to Sanskrit. Indeed, the fate of the language during the colonial period was determined by two apparently contradictory measures which in different ways furthered the imaginary construct of Sanskrit as the repository of traditionalism. Sanskrit was suppressed within the colonial educational system by what Spivak called was an act of ‘planned epistemic violence’. Simultaneous to this relegation was the colonial privileging of the brahmanical order with regard to ‘the performative use of Sanskrit’. In both cases, the colonisers reserved the right to determine and authenticate the exercise of what they deemed to be ‘tradition’. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 229–30; Harlow and Carter, eds, *Archives of Empire, vol. 1: From the East India Company to the Suez Canal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 249.


and diverse bodies of knowledge into texts was not only meant to help the British administer and arbitrate better, but also to serve as a reminder to Indians of their forgotten past. The early articulations of the notion of an unassailable Indian culture and the privileging of certain texts as representative of its essence are traceable to these colonial writings.

6. Colonialism and Other Worldly Matters: The Strategic Import of Indian Spiritualism

**The Assertion**

With the colonial privileging of the Brahmanical interpretation, Hinduism came to be increasingly associated with spiritualism and idealism as against the assumed rationalist and materialist approach of the West. At the epistemological level, there were clear differences between the two traditions. Whereas the Hindu tradition believes that knowledge can be acquired by ‘transcending immediate experience’, Western philosophy relies on observation and inference for its attainment.\(^{128}\) ‘The idealistic realm of possibilities (what could have been) clashed with the rational domain of actual events (what has happened). We encounter a similar stark positioning of the two realms in Hegel’s writings. For Hegel, the Western man existed in the ‘sphere of Understanding’, in which reality was ‘an external, fixed objectivity’ independent of his existence. In contrast, the Indian living in ‘the state of dreaming’ was unable to make the distinction and chose to repose objective things with divinity instead. Consequently, ‘Things are as much stripped of rationality, of finite consistent stability of cause and effect, as man is of the steadfastness of free individuality, of personality, and freedom’.\(^{129}\) Oriental religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism were associated with enigma, magic and fantasy, lacking the level of complexity achieved by the Occident. Eastern religions stifled individualism, whereas the Protestant West allowed for its free expression and its transformation into reality.\(^{130}\) The dominance over the realm of reality was a superior feat


as it could be controlled and thereby, the power of human agency could be demonstrated.

**The Negation**

There existed a strong strand of materialism within Hindu philosophy that did not find any significant mention in Orientalist accounts on indigenous belief systems. As against the ritualistic representation favoured by Brahmanism, the order of Pancharatra Vaishnavism, which thrived for almost a millennium in north India till the 13th century, was firmly grounded in a realist philosophy. Pancharatra Vaishnavism’s emphasis on human agency and on the commission of acts as the prime determinant of an individual’s worth is noteworthy. It did not make a stark differentiation between good and evil since it considered both as integral to human nature. The Pancharatras regarded evil and its causes to be part of the world that we live in. Evil was not perceived as an absolute entity external to the self, but was seen in relative terms as a ‘lower self’ that had to be conquered. Thus, the Pancharatra philosophy was not geared toward the attainment of an idyllic state of ‘pure’ existence since there never was one.

A more radical strand was the lokayata philosophy denoting ‘that which is prevalent among people’ and ‘that which is essentially this-worldly’. Lokayata was the ancient Indian philosophy of materialism that predated the advent of such concepts of spiritualism as God and Soul. In the fragments of the Lokayatikas that remain, the evolved line of argument that mounted the strongest attack on the Vedanta philosophy of idealism is evident. The texts argue that neither do humans suffer the consequences of acts committed in their previous births, nor are there any enlightened states of existence after death towards which life should be directed.

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132 All the complexities in social life are seen in terms of three forces that pervade the entire world. The inert forces of good (*sattva*) and bad (*tamas*) rely on the intervention of the third force, that of ‘restless energy’ (*rajas*) to translate into active forces of luminosity (*tejas*) or evil (*tamas*). Inden, *Text and Practice*, pp. 216, 218.

133 Ibid., pp. 220–21.


be oriented. What mattered was only that which could be perceived by
the senses, and therein lay the explanation to all phenomena and human
action.\textsuperscript{136} Clearly, the assumption of a collectivity that abhorred violence
and embraced spirituality at all costs does not hold water in the case of
India. As Thapar observes:

[...] Indian culture did not have a monopoly on spiritual content. The
same characteristics as are associated with Indian spirituality can be found
in many other ancient cultures and are frequently recognisable in traditional
societies. Not surprisingly, the ancient Indians never saw themselves as more spiritual than their neighbours in adjoining or in far-away
lands. Nor did visitors from other equally significant cultures, such as the
Greeks, the Chinese and the Arabs notice any markedly distinctive spiritual
characteristics.\textsuperscript{137}

The colonial claim that Indians were culturally attuned to spirituality
is also negated by the existence of rich literature that is materialist in
orientation, Kalidasa’s works being a classic instance. In Indian philosophy,
the ‘fullness of life must precede the surpassing of life’, evident in the
taxonomy of four aims namely dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity),
kama (pleasure) and moksha (salvation) that provided a balance between
the material and the spiritual motivations, and of which the last alone quali-
fied for the purely spiritual.\textsuperscript{138} Hindu theorisations on kingship enumerate four strategies that the king is to wield for effective control — sama (consensus), bheda (dissensus), dama (material gratification) and danda (punishment through coercion). As Inden notes:

The concept of danda is of central importance to the Hindu theory of political community, for danda, the ‘rod of force’, coercion, or, punishment was the central element, that is, the particular form of power that distinguished the kingly role from other roles.\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{136} Inden, \textit{Text and Practice}, p. 224; C. Kunhan Raja (1963), ‘Vedic-Carvaka

\textsuperscript{137} Thapar et al., \textit{Communalism}, p. 12.


That the term *danda* was used to refer, both to the power to punish and to the king’s army, goes on to underline the coercive powers that were at the disposal of the ruler. Thapar maintains that a ‘[…] distinction has to be maintained between non-violence as a philosophical concept and the practice of non-violence. There is very little evidence to suggest that in practice violence was avoided’.\(^{140}\) Interestingly, non-violence or *ahimsa* was first upheld as a central tenet of religious discourse by Buddhism and Jainism.\(^{141}\)

That the Indians were attuned to strategic matters concerning their security is amply demonstrated by Tipu Sultan’s concerted efforts to militarily upgrade his army. Mysore state under Tipu embarked on the process of military modernisation in the 18th century to counter the challenge of the East India Company. Tipu took keen interest in modernising his army along European lines and for that he hired the support of European blacksmiths to manufacture muskets and guns for him. Eventually, his efforts yielded a limited military revolution in Mysore that sought to attain self-sufficiency in terms of armaments for his army.\(^{142}\) Despite certain limitations such as his failure to regularise training in Western technology, Tipu managed to blunt the British military advantage in the production and deployment of small arms.\(^{143}\)

**Conclusion**

Historical evidence thus points to the existence of a pronounced and developed strand of materialist philosophy in India. Its neglect within colonial literature led to the conflation of Indian philosophy with spiritualism and idealism, an association that is yet to be seriously challenged within the genre of IR literature on India.

\(^{140}\) Thapar et al., *Communalism*, p. 13.

\(^{141}\) Romila Thapar, ‘Imagined Religious Communities’, p. 344.


7. The Hand of Destiny: Cyclical Time as a Barrier to Strategising

**The Assertion**

Orientalism threw up certain other images of India from which sweeping extrapolations about the absence of historical progress and the incoherence of India’s strategic approach were made. For instance, the Indian notion of time was believed to be wholly cyclic rather than linear. Whereas linear time of the Judaeo-Christian tradition was believed to have a beginning and an end and allowed for the progress of history through the occurrence of non-recurring events, it was argued that cyclic time saw no such progression since events repeated themselves with unceasing regularity. The notion that the course of history was rendered meaningful by its progression towards this ultimate objective determined the concept of linear time in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Christianity inherited the Judaic understanding that humanity was collectively progressing towards a particular *telos*, the Day of Judgement.

The Hindu conception of cyclical time, on the other hand, made any such linear progression appear impossible. This conception of the Indian sense of time was extended to further argue that since time has no beginning or end, Indians have no past, present or future, i.e., they have no sense of *history*. Jones’ work on ancient Indian texts had led him to

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144 Judaism’s notion of the omnipotent God as the creator of the entire human race facilitated the formulation of universal history. The Western tradition drew on two key ideas from the Judaeo-Christian philosophy — the idea of ‘creation out of nothing and the conception of a linear temporal order.’ The philosophy provided the ‘unique point of origin’, a particular temporal juncture from which linear time could be said to have begun. In contrast to the above philosophy, Indian tradition did not uphold the idea of a ‘no pre-existing cause’ behind creation. Jitendra Nath Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought: An Essay on the Nature of Indian Philosophical Thinking* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 18–19.

145 Thapar rejects the view that linear and cyclic times are polar opposites, arguing instead that both can co-exist, as they did in ancient India. The progress of linear time is suggested in the sequential ordering of two major events alluded to in the texts, namely the great flood which Manu survived to become the progenitor of the Suryavamsa and Candravamsa clans, and the epic war in the *Mahabharata* in which these families eventually perish. The *Visnu Purana* offers genealogical details of the Suryavamsa and Candravamsa families, which later aspirants of power claimed to have descended from. Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 163–67.
remark in resignation, ‘We are lost in an inextricable labyrinth of imaginary astronomical cycles, Yugas, Mahayugas, Calpas, and Menwantaras’. Mill believed that in order to civilise Indians, it was necessary to ‘push them into history’, an opinion that was aptly echoed by Arthur MacDonnell in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* in which he wrote ‘early India wrote no history because it never made any’. Jones further lamented, ‘so clouded are the old history and chronology of India with fables and allegories’ that an authentic account of the country’s history was impossible. Moreover, it was believed that human intervention could do little to alter the course of the immense cycles of time that were destined to recur. Such caricatures reified the image of the Indian sans any agency to control, plan and strategise.

The inference flowing from such a theorisation was that in a static society like India, there were no developments that could be regarded as historical change. Put differently, there were no junctures in history against which the progression of time, indeed change could be measured. Thus the assertion that Indian history was an endless tract of stasis and stagnation dispensed with the need to historically justify colonial rule. However, resistance to contentions such as these was still expressed within the colonial narrative. For instance, although the Indian national movement mounted a political and intellectual challenge, as Dirks says, it ‘accepted the intellectual premises of modernity on which colonial

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149 Indian calendars distinguished between current and elapsed years, whereas the West did not recognise the latter as a viable temporal category. A reason for the perceived irrationality of Indian time-keeping was the complexities in the Indian calendar system. Solar calendars contain variations that factor in the location of the observer and the position of the sun. However, valid calculations of time could be made on the basis of existing tables, taking into account such contingencies. E. G. Richards, *Mapping Time: The Calendar and Its History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 176–77.

150 Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, p. 158.
domination was based’.\textsuperscript{151} Gandhi, for instance, regarded the eternal and unchanging nature of Indian society as a virtue, for it demonstrated that it had stood the test of time. Stasis was to Gandhi the proof that India had attained its civilisational zenith, beyond which change was needless, indeed undesirable. Gandhi countered thus:

> It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilized, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change.\textsuperscript{152}

Gandhi’s view of change can be better understood against the leitmotif of spiritual transcendence. He regarded change as understood in the West to be nothing but the ceaseless aspiration to accumulate more without attaining spiritual betterment.

**THE NEGATION**

While Gandhi denied the association of Indian history with change, historians sought to negate the charge of stasis by pointing to historical evidence from ancient India. That societies were differently organised in different periods of time was itself an indication that major changes were occurring in Indian history.\textsuperscript{153} Urbanisation in the Indus was later followed by the formation of chiefdoms (mahajanapadas) which were eventually taken over by extensive empires such as the Mauryan empire. An indicator that Indians were cognisant of the passage of time is their well developed calendar system. As early as the 6th century BC, Indians had acquired the knowledge of calendars from Mesopotamia. The Vedas, believed to have been composed around 1500 BC, contained a 12-month calendar of 30 days each. Thus, very early in history, Indians had learnt to live by linear time. As many as 20 calendars were followed in the country at the beginning of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{154}

Furthermore, knowledge in India has historically been preserved and sustained through oral traditions. There have been textual representations


\textsuperscript{153} Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, p. 162.

\textsuperscript{154} Richards, *Mapping Time*, pp. 172–73.
of knowledge in Indian history, but these have largely chronicled developments, legends and local histories that had a long and dominant oral tradition. The introduction of literacy as the formal means of systematising and transmitting knowledge meant the structuring of such knowledge into texts, although orality continued alongside for long. Reliance on one means of preserving the past did not signal the redundancy of the other but a gradual shift was perceptible. The Orientalist search for manuscripts suggested a latent bias towards privileging texts as the sole source of history. Oral traditions as a mode of preserving the past were not seen as a mark of a historically conscious society.

The apparent absence of historical works can be partly explained by the fact that the domains of literary and historical writings often overlapped. The literary method of recording history was a well developed genre in India, and offers us valuable insights into the social context and perceptions of political power. A classic example would be the epic Ramayana, regarded not only as the first literary work in Sanskrit (adikavya) but also as a text in history (itihasa). The itihasa–purana tradition, referring to ‘that which was believed to have happened in the past’, contained the very same elements of historical thinking the British claimed Indians lacked. The tradition, employing both the cyclic and linear notions of time, was in evidence in a variety of sources. Within large time cycles or yugas, the lineages of ruling families were arranged in linear progression as ‘fragmentary arcs’. Subsequent texts moved over from using generations as marking the progress of time, to regnal years that recorded the durations.

155 However, there was a bifurcation of the oral tradition in India where on the one hand, the priestly class ensured the scrupulous conservation of the Vedic hymns and on the other, wandering bards narrated informal compositions that were later collated in a written format as the epics, i.e. the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The eventual codification of the hymns into the Vedas did not mark the end of its oral transference, as the continued emphasis was on the precise pronunciation of the hymn, failing which the entire recitation was deemed futile. For instance, the guru-shishya parampara, erected on the relationship between the teacher and the pupil, was originally an oral tradition that came to be increasingly mediated by written texts. Thapar, Cultural Pasts, pp. 196–99.

156 Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Dean Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800 (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), p. 3.

of royal dynasties. Edicts of Ashoka in the 3rd century BC record regnal years and important events as occurring at specific points in time. As Thapar notes:

Time as a cycle does not eliminate the past and the future, since the cycle terminates in destruction and a new cycle follows. The inordinate length of the cosmological time cycle is to underline the idea of timelessness [...]. Only later does a different, generationally measured time, under human control come into historical reckoning. Implicit in this is also a distinction between the history of the universe viewed in an infinity of time and the history of man which was subject to exact measurement.\(^{158}\)

From the 7th century AD, biographical accounts of rulers became the means of recording events, *Harsacarita* by Banabhatta being a case in point. These biographical accounts traced dynasties of rulers, suggesting a sense of linear time.\(^{159}\) From the 10th century onwards, *vamsavalis* that traced the ancestry of ruling families, detailing the region concerned through records and inscriptions, became the popular mode of preserving the line of succession. However, the *itihasa–purana* tradition which survived the invasion of the Afghans and the Mughals came to an end with the advent of the British who brought with them new approaches to historiography.\(^{160}\)

**Conclusion**

The notion of cyclic Indian time was thus central to the colonial discourse for its potency. The lack of historical progression implied stagnation that was regarded as typical of traditional societies. The inevitable recurrence of massive time cycles made human intervention in changing the course of events appear to be a futile exercise. As Peter van der Veer notes, ‘History is a sign of the nation–state, of modernity as much as the denial of history is a sign of the colony, of tradition.’\(^{161}\) The denial of agency to Indians implied the denial of the power to strategise and to act. India’s strategic history in every sense was believed to have effectively commenced with the purposeful thrust of colonialism. In the next section, we will examine the key strategic traditions that informed much of strategic history in ancient

\(^{158}\) Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, p. 737.


\(^{161}\) Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 4.
India. The purpose here will be to explore theorisations on warfare and diplomacy in the *dharmashastra* and *arthashastra* traditions, in which we find detailed expositions on the ethics of war and kingship.

**Warfare and Diplomacy in Ancient India**

An essential aspect towards understanding the nature of India’s strategic practice is the approach ancient India adopted towards warfare and diplomacy. A disclaimer at this juncture is necessary that the attempt here is not to trace the ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ theorisations on statecraft before the ‘disruptions’ caused by invasions during the medieval period followed. As with any other country, these invasions brought with them diverse ways of thinking about war and peace, thereby contributing to the evolution of strategic thinking in the subcontinent. However, this is not to discount the importance of theorisations that existed in ancient India. As Adam Watson asserts, ‘No system of diverse states and peoples developed a greater sophistication in ancient times than that of India.’

Although many of the ideas prevalent then may be lost in contemporary times, they would serve as a useful beginning towards theorising about strategic practice in India. This may necessarily involve referring to ancient Sanskrit texts that are popularly regarded as Hindu scriptures, and the genre is often termed the Hindu tradition of warfare.

Ethics of war in ancient India came to be shaped by a parallel engagement with the traditions of heroism and prudence. The near simultaneous interest in contrasting types is evident in the growth of both the *dharmashastra* and the *arthashastra* literatures. Whereas the former stressed on the ethical behaviour expected of a king, the latter served as injunctions to the ruler regarding the conduct of statecraft. The dichotomy between the two traditions is reflected in the contrasting genres of literature that contained these ideas. The tradition stressing on *dharma* (righteousness) was chiefly located in epic literature, as against the genre of writing emphasising prudence which found expression in the literature on statecraft. Unlike the Christian tradition which was specifically engaged with the just war theory, the *dharmashastra* tradition believed that the ethics on warfare were informed by the duties of the ruler, and as such were part

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of the larger scheme of rajadharma (duties of the king). The enlightened ruler, who was aware of the ethical dimensions of violence, was endowed with divine attributes that enabled him to wield his power to wage war with discretion. The king in India was seen as an extension of God and as such was bestowed with the attributes of the divine cosmos. His authority was distinct from that of his European counterpart whose right to rule was a conferment by God. The rationale behind vesting warfare with the significance of kingship duties rests on the concept of karmayoga (path of selfless action). Karmayoga elevates the status of warfare to the level of a sacrifice expected of a virtuous ruler. The Mahabharata saw war as a sacrificial act (yuddhayagna), aspects of which were comparable to those of a conventional sacrifice. The constraints on the power of the king were in some senses unique to the Indian notion of kingship itself.

Notwithstanding the duality of power in terms of the temporal and the religious domains in the Christian and Muslim world, both realms were located within the same social sphere. In contrast, the Indian worldview restricted the authority of the king by postulating the sphere of renunciation over which he had little control but which legitimised his divine status in the temporal realm. The brahmin, by renouncing the social sphere stood independent of it, because of which his sphere lay beyond the grasp of the king. The contradiction between the circumscribed powers of the king and the stricture that he was to have the final word on matters of dharma can be explained in terms of the amorphous nature of dharma

164 Manu articulated the divine authority of the king, ‘For when this world was without a king and people ran about in all directions out of fear, The Lord emitted a king in order to guard his entire (realm), taking lasting elements from Indra, the Wind, Yama, the Sun, Fire, Varuna, the Moon, and (Kubera) the Lord of Wealth. Because a king is made from particles of these lords of the gods, therefore he surpasses all living beings in brilliant energy, and, like the Sun, he burns eyes and hearts, and no one on earth is able even to look at him’. Cited in ibid., p. 116.
165 Ibid., p. 115.
166 Before the asvamedha yagna (a Vedic ritual sacrifice) commences, the king and the brahmin ritually exchange their qualities. The king temporarily forsakes his royalty to the brahmin who in turn bequeaths him with his power of brahminhood. The symbolic alternation enables the king to withdraw to a life in the wilderness befitting an ascetic, while the brahmin assumes charge of the temporal sphere. J. C. Heesterman, ‘The Conundrum of the King’s Authority’, in J. F. Richards, ed., Kingship and Authority in South Asia (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 33–34.
itself. Howsoever great its appeal, the application and observance of dharma required the institutionalised support of an organisational apparatus, which the king alone could provide.\textsuperscript{167}

As opposed to the dharmashastra literature which supported divine kingship, the arthashastra tradition upheld the theory of contractual kingship. The tradition stresses on resorting to war in order to attain state objectives such as security. According to Kautilya, ‘Artha is the source of the livelihood of human beings, in other words, the earth inhabited by men. The science which is the means of the attainment and protection of that earth is the Arthashastra.’\textsuperscript{168} A template of 12 kings makes up Kautilya’s mandala theory arrayed along alternating zones of alliance and hostility. The reference point within this template is the prospective conqueror (vijigisu) around whom Kautilya constructs his network of fluid political relationships. The existence of 12 kings is not a necessary precondition for the mandala logic to work, but instead they personify the entire range of relationships that are likely to emerge with the conqueror’s attempts at expansion.\textsuperscript{169} The classical Indian texts mention the king as merely one of the 72 elements that comprise the ‘circle of kings’. The notable point was that the dynamics in Kautilya’s schema of states was not dissimilar to the contemporary international system, in that an isolated state was inconceivable to him. In such a scenario, ‘the welfare of a state depends on [adopting a policy of] non-intervention or overt action. A policy which helps in the undisturbed enjoyment of the results of past activities is defined as non-intervention’.\textsuperscript{170}

Ancient India presented a classic example of the moves that states made to escape the anarchy of multiple political independencies existent during that time. Watson notes how the Mauryan empire was ‘a patchwork quilt of independent and dependent communities’ held together by the collective awareness ‘that the welfare and expansion, and indeed the survival, of a state depended on its relations with its neighbours. In this inescapable net, rules and institutions developed, shaped by the Hindu cultural tradition’. He hails the Arthashastra for being a ‘major theoretical

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., pp. 18–22.
\item\textsuperscript{168} Kautilya, Arthashastra, trans. R. Shamasasty (Mysore: The Wesleyan Mission Press, 1923).
\item\textsuperscript{170} Kautilya, Arthashastra, ed., L. N. Rangarajan (New Delhi: Penguin, 1992).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
analysis of international relations as an integral part of the problems of statecraft’, a fusion unparalleled in any extant literature. Kautilya’s distinction between the mediatory king (madhyama) and the neutral king (udasina) is a sign of political sophistication, which:

[…] may be the first instance in a text of the concept of neutrality, and of the steps which a conqueror or someone resisting conquest should adopt towards a neutral state. No such distinctions between a mediatory and a neutral power are to be found in the writings of the near east or Greece; and the European system rarely got beyond allies, enemies and neutrals.

Since kingship in the Arthashastra was not concerned with divinity, the power to wage war was released from the logic of dharma and the attendant duties expected of the virtuous king. Watson points out that for Kautilya:

[…] the end of power was not the service of the gods or an ideology, but the happiness of the state. He believed […] that a multitude of independencies was not the most desirable state of affairs, and that on the contrary greater happiness could be attained by establishing a benevolent imperial rule. It is curious that from the Arthashastra to the American Declaration of Independence (which opposes imperial rule) no other text puts the pursuit of happiness quite so high.

Consequently, war was not a sacrificial act validated by honourable intentions and just means, but was one of the many courses available to the king to achieve other ends. Other than expansion by conquest, Kautilya also envisaged settlement on unoccupied territory (sunyanivesa) as a mode of spreading the imperial frontiers. Although unoccupied territory was in principle the domain of the king, facilitating the formation of villages on virgin lands was postulated as a significant state activity. The realist

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171 Watson, The Evolution of International Society, p. 79.
172 The mediatory king was one whose territory lay close to both the conqueror and his immediate enemy, and who was non-committal but powerful enough to determine the balance of power within the circle of states. The territory of the neutral king lay beyond this primary set of kings, but who was also sufficiently powerful to either resist or assist the conqueror, his enemy and the mediatory king. Ibid., p. 80.
173 Ibid., p. 83.
tenor in Kautilya is also evident in his emphasis on expediency which often entailed winning the support and confidence of conquered people. He counselled the granting of considerable degrees of local autonomy and to leave local power structures in conquered areas undisturbed to facilitate a peaceful transition. Peace and even neutrality in war was to be preferred as it entailed the most judicious and efficient use of state resources. That said, even in peacetime, every state should be prepared for war and for which no means were to be spared.

The *arthashastra* tradition refers to a rich body of literature comprising texts such as Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, Kamandaki’s *Nitisara* and the *Barhaspatya Sutra* that stress on the centrality of the outcome, thereby making the use of ethical and unethical means justifiable. The *Ramayana*’s 6,000 references to military action potentially qualify it as yet another treatise of the *arthashastra* tradition. The taxonomy of military strategies of conciliation, bribery, sowing dissension and coercion in the *Ramayana* coincide with the broader classification arrived at by Kautilya. The decline in the use of military strategies, prudence in war, and the dominance of the notion of chivalry extolling death in war, are regarded by some researchers as the causes behind the inability of Hindus to effectively oppose the invading Muslim armies. Yet, the tradition of prudence was not altogether overshadowed by the *dharmashatra* literature in the Middle Ages. Somadeva Suri, a Jain teacher, upheld prudence over heroism in his work, *Yashastilaka*. The notion of treacherous warfare (*kutayuddha*), which is denounced in the *dharmashastra* literature as unethical is advocated by Somadeva, and is indeed one of the underlying principles of the *arthashastra* theory.

In the continuum of kingship, that at one end attributes independent divine qualities to the king such as in ancient Egypt, and on the other regards him as a worldly instrument of the divine force as in ancient China and medieval Europe, the position of the Hindu king falls somewhere in the middle. While he was to submit to the writ of dharma, he presided over his kingdom as its supreme power. His kingdom was seen as a microcosm of the grand cosmic order. It was believed that the Cosmic Man who generates the universe, and into whom all its elements must return to be regenerated in cyclic alternation, also created the king with portions taken from the eight deities of the cosmos. Constituted with the radiance and power of

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175 Brekke, ‘Between Prudence and Heroism’, p. 118.
176 Ibid., p. 135.
the cosmos, the divinity of the Hindu king is inherent in his person and not bestowed by divine right as in medieval European philosophy. The centrality of the Cosmic Man within the cosmos is replicated in the king who is the font of power, order and creation within his kingdom. The claims of Hindu kings over a universal dominion drew from this conception of the kingdom as containing within it all the elements of the entire earth.  

However, the status and authority of the king within his kingdom differ in the Hindu and Islamic traditions. While the Hindu tradition vested the king with the divinity drawn from the gods, this replication of the cosmic power in the king is absent in Islamic thought. The latter chooses instead to remind the king of his instrumental status in the scheme of things. Peter Hardy observes of the Islamic tradition, ‘It is not by reason of his being, but by reason of his behaviour, that the sultan becomes the means whereby subjects enjoy welfare. The real agent is god.’Thus, by inference the authority of the king under Islam is vested in him by God whose divine attributes cannot be replicated in any of his creations, and hence no mortal can aspire to reflect His powers in this temporal world.

**Being is Believing: The Reiteration of the Colonial Imagery in Contemporary IR Scholarship**

Patterns in strategic practice of a country emerge with theorisations, and as is mostly the case, theorisations are prone to varying interpretations. Although India is no exception to this norm, its case presents us with an interesting interface between theory and history. The colonial scholarship proved to be critical in moulding the Indian self-image. Many of the assumptions and images of India that were arrived at centuries ago persist and continue to be reinforced in contemporary writings, as we shall see subsequently. Within the field of IR, particularly in writings that attempted to give a cultural slant to India’s influence, the constructed colonial images have been by and large accepted uncritically. It is evident in the literature pertaining to the area that the historical and cultural context itself has been ‘objectified’ to simply ‘substitute specific cultural contexts for universals’.

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The popular cultural images of India as the exotic land of bygone glories and of a fractious society caught in a time warp can be traced to the Western colonial imagination and to the nationalist writings it spurred in response. The 19th and 20th centuries saw a continued intellectual preoccupation of Indian nationalists with India’s past. Certain facets were singled out to authenticate and justify the national cause, as seen by the manner in which Gandhi employed the concept of *ahimsa* with telling effect. Similarly, the Gita’s permissive use of violence for a just cause was interpreted by the nationalists to justify the use of force in the national movement. Although the exigencies of time prompted a growing preoccupation with Indian history, it still entailed a selective reading so as to project the image of a composite national culture. The Bengal Renaissance during the 19th century was a response to the call for cleansing Hinduism of its superstitious practices and irrationalism. The purpose was to ‘purify’ Hinduism to the extent that it could be integrated with Western notions of rationality, monotheism and empiricism. Underlying the concerted effort on part of the intellectuals to glorify India’s past was the aim of making Indian civilisation comparable to the West’s. The challenge of making the two compatible continued to confound some of the best minds of the day. Nehru notes:

I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place elsewhere, at home nowhere […] They are both part of me, and, though they help me in both the East and the West, they also create in me a feeling


__182__ Certain derogatory images of the West existed alongside that spawned two distinct strands of Asian consciousness, namely the ‘national-political’ and the ‘transcendental-cultural’. Whereas the former was driven by nationalist sentiments, the latter mounted a cultural attack on the West. Cultural Asianists like Tagore saw the East as spiritually superior to the West, which was marked by a mechanical and technical approach to progress. Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 81–86.

of spiritual loneliness [...] I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also, sometimes, I have an exile’s feeling.\textsuperscript{184}

Nonetheless Nehru regarded the recourse to past glory, particularly the notion of spiritual greatness as ‘a foolish and dangerous pastime’, since the willing withdrawal of the Indians from worldly concerns absolved the colonialists of the responsibility to explain their intervention.\textsuperscript{185}

\textbf{History Broad-brushed}

The search for timeless essences and continuing traditions did not end with decolonisation. The growing profile of the US led to a spurt in area studies programmes as it sought to institutionalise its endeavour to know more about the world, especially the Third World. In its effort to expand its links, the dilemma before the US was to ensure that the indigenous political elite simultaneously straddled the spheres of tradition and modernity. The Comparative Civilisations Project from 1951 to 1961 grappled with this challenge of how civilisations holding on to age-old traditions could modernise. The University of Chicago was the first to emerge as the seat of Indian studies in the US.\textsuperscript{186} The Committee for Comparative Study of New Nations, set up under the chairmanship of Edward Shils in 1959, recommended that the imperative of modernisation would have to override the concern for tradition. Yet, the indigenous elite would maintain the exalted status of ‘sacred centres’ with which the masses would identify during the uncertain times of transition. Milton Singer, who was closely involved with the Chicago Project, argued that India’s ‘sacred centre’ was its ancient ‘Sanskritic tradition’. The Chicago Project was basically driven by the same concerns that occupied the minds of the Orientalists — to uncover an underlying tradition that would draw divergent cultural strands into one composite Indian culture. Roosa notes that in this manner:

[...] the Chicago anthropologists encouraged the continuation of the Hindu tradition. They reinstated the Orientalist definition of Indian civilization as Hindu civilization and excluded all inconsistencies and historical changes.


\textsuperscript{185} Jawaharlal Nehru, \textit{The Discovery of India} (1946) (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund and Oxford University Press, rpt 1982), p. 81.

\textsuperscript{186} Roosa, ‘Orientalism, Political Economy and the Canonisation of Indian Civilisation’, pp. 152–53.
The ‘Indian’ conceived as the singular timeless essence was accorded great respect, while vast reality incompatible with their model of ‘Hindu mind’ was dismissed from consideration.\textsuperscript{187}

Eternity and ceaselessness as recurrent metaphors of Indian civilisation are also evident in William McNeill’s \textit{The Rise of the West} in which he asserts that India’s cultural identity centred on caste, crystallised in the ancient period. He notes:

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[…] Indian civilization in the fifth century BC was a living growing thing with a long history ahead of it. Yet the directions of growth and some of its limits had been defined by the time Buddha died. The master institution of caste and the major outlines of the religious worldview which were to govern all subsequent Indian history down to the present had emerged. Indian civilization, in short, had achieved its distinctiveness.\textsuperscript{188}
\end{quote}

Contemporary literature continues to be largely informed by societalism that tends to reduce political, economic and religious phenomena to social processes, and upon which much of Orientalist writings were based.\textsuperscript{189} Stephen Rosen, in his attempt to study the influence of domestic social structures on the military effectiveness of states, selected caste as the institution having an enduring influence on Indian military power from the ancient period to the modern era. He contends that caste divisions were duly reflected in Indian armies down ages, and were the cause for their weak military prowess. Projecting caste as an ‘objective’ criterion, Rosen’s is an excessively deterministic view of Indian strategic practice. He asserts, ‘Though other social divisions [religious, regional and linguistic] may be overlaid on the system of caste relations, they do not have the same profound impact on day-to-day life […]’ to the extent that religious divisions have become ‘caste-ified’.\textsuperscript{190} In the same vein, John Hall argues that the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p. 154.
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The caste system provides the overarching template within which the entire history of India can be explained. Introducing India as ‘The Land of the Brahmans’ in his book *Powers and Liberties: The Causes and Consequences of the Rise of the West*, Hall asserts that Brahmanism ‘blocked the emergence of powerful polities’ in India, because of which ‘India did not have a political history’.

Yet another contemporary reflection of Orientalist caricatures is provided by Barbara Crosette who argues:

> the [Indian] tendency toward moral relativism and a concurrent Hindu disinclination to take a rigorous individual stand on issues can lead to an unnecessary lack of self-confidence at national level for a country of this size[…]. Wild allegations and abstractions are hurdled around and sanctimonious speeches made, but concrete proposals or rational analyses rarely follow.

George Tanham’s essay on Indian strategic thought is arguably the most comprehensive contemporary reflection of Orientalist images of India and their strategic significance. Tanham’s attempt at providing a cultural interpretation ends up privileging Hinduism and its caste system as the appropriate representations of Indian culture. While their faith in *dharma*, *karma* and transmigration leads Indians to nurture ‘a passive, almost fatalistic acceptance of life’, the caste system as the ‘bedrock’ of Indian society further ‘tends to foster a conservative and non-innovative mind-set […].’

Their belief in the pre-ordained repetition of cycles makes for Hall, the absence of political traditions accounted for long periods of statelessness and chaos in India. Blaut notes that while Hall regards the lack of a strong state in India as a sign of political weakness, the absence of absolute imperialism in Europe’s history becomes a laudable trait. Cited in James Blaut, *Eight Eurocentric Historians* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2000), p. 133–34, emphasis original.


future ‘less subject to human manipulation than it does to a Westerner’. He further adds:

Rational analysis, so vital to Western societies, has less influence in Indian society as so many other factors play important or dominant roles. The acceptance of life as a mystery and the inability to manipulate events impedes preparation for the future in all areas of life, including the strategic.¹⁹⁵

The import such an assumption carries for strategic affairs is worth noting as Indians are depicted as being culturally and historically incapable of planning and strategising. Tanham states:

[...] the Hindu concept of time or rather the lack of a sense of time — Indians view life as an eternal present, with neither history nor future — discourages planning [...] Hindus consider life a mystery, largely unknowable and not entirely under man's control. In this view, fate, intuition, tradition and emotions play important roles, but how, how much, and when is never clearly known. Man's control over his life is thus limited in Hindu eyes, and he cannot forecast or plan with any confidence.¹⁹⁶

The caricature of a defensive India lacking coherence in strategic thought is reinforced by the contrasting Western case, 'which assume(s) a faith in logic and human progress, the efficacy of individual efforts, a sense of history and continuity, and a future to be shaped and worked for'.¹⁹⁷ Tanham argues that the defensive approach, an enduring feature of India's strategic culture, is duly reflected in its foreign policy in the modern era, as it was in the earlier periods. Reinforcing set representations on India, he concludes that ‘the forces of culture and history and the attitude and policies of the independent Indian government have worked against the concept of strategic thinking and planning’.¹⁹⁸ What is both interesting and disturbing is that in the anthology of Indian commentaries on Tanham's essays, most of these cultural caricatures of India go unchallenged.¹⁹⁹ For instance, while scholars take issue with Tanham on the tenacity and

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 43.
¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 73.
¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 43.
¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 75.
orientation of India’s strategic thinking, the familiar motifs of caste and a society caught in a time warp largely remain unquestioned.200

Studies seeking to refute claims of a defensive India also succumb to the tendency of delineating identifiable attributes that have survived the ravages of history, in this case of an essentially realist approach. A culturally militaristic Indian outlook is located in certain key ancient texts such as the Arthashastra, Manusmriti and the Vedas. Bharat Karnad for instance, contests the caricature of Indians as a culturally defensive people who shirk the use of force, and argues that the texts offer the ruler a gradient of options culminating in war. For Karnad, Indian strategic thinking is characterised by pragmatism that can be traced to the ancient period. History, he asserts, has reiterated the innate Indian proclivity to be calculative and to strategise. However, in tracing its progress down millennia, Karnad reduces the medieval era to being ‘the Muslim interregnum’ that bridged the ancient and the colonial periods. The contribution of medieval rulers was restricted to changes at the tactical and strategic level, whereas the already established grand strategic framework remained intact.201

It is not the medieval period alone that appears to some scholars as an interregnum in India’s strategic affairs. The colonial period is pictured by others as adding to the refraction of the realist tradition. Andrew Latham contends that the realpolitik thinking introduced by the British further

200 Tanham employs another stereotype to drive home the point that Indians are not programmed to strategise. He argues that the unchanging agricultural cycles inhibited planning which ultimately influenced the mind-set of the Indian political elite. He asserts, ‘Like most rural people, Indian farmers have no tradition or understanding of long-range planning[…]. The peasant psyche remains important, however, as many of today’s leaders come from the rural areas of India.’ Tanham, ‘Indian Strategic Thought’, p. 81.

201 Orientalism fostered the notion of the effeminate Hindu subjugated by the aggressive Muslim invader, giving rise to the perception that the medieval period contributed little to the evolution of strategic thinking in India. A sophisticated presentation of this idea can be found in Jaswant Singh’s Defending India. Singh argues that despite ‘an accommodative and forgiving Hindu milieu[…]Islamic conquest of just parts of India needed many centuries of strife. Despite the earlier Delhi Sultanates, the Vijayanagar Empire flowered in the south’. Termed as ‘achievements’ during the medieval period, Singh’s pitting of Hindu rulers against their Islamic counterparts is apparent. Jaswant Singh, Defending India (Bangalore: Macmillan, 1999), p. 14; Bharat Karnad, Nuclear Weapons and Indian Security: The Realist Foundations of Strategy (London: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 23–24.
underscored the realist streak in the ‘Kautilyan tradition’. This led the Indians to conceptualise security in ‘essentially unilateral terms’, as opposed to the Western notion of ‘mutual’ security during the Cold War. In India’s case, both traditions emphasised the supremacy of the dominant power to which smaller states were expected to submit. The colonial preoccupation with security as the defence of ‘natural’ frontiers of the subcontinent is reflected in the Indian concern with all security issues that fall within South Asia. Despite assertions that the Indian security culture cannot be ‘traced back to some “authentic” pre-colonial tradition’, Latham sets out to explore the ‘[e]ffects of Hindu Norms on Foreign Policy Style’. Not surprisingly, the familiar Tanhamian interpretation of Indian culture is adopted, emphasising as it does on its hierarchical understanding of international power relations stemming from the ubiquitous caste system. Furthermore, the Hindu concepts of karma and fate supposedly allow Indians to accept ‘inconsistencies and contradictions’ that trouble the Westerners.

It is evident that scholarship on the issue of India’s strategic practice can be arranged along a spectrum. On one extremity of the continuum are scholars who argue that internal disunity and cultural attributes prevented Indians from developing a tradition of strategic thinking of any kind. At the centre of the spectrum would be academics claiming to approach the issue of culture in more dynamic terms, but who still dabble in the exercise of identifying cultural markers. Holding the other end of the continuum would be those who contend that Indian strategists showed a decided preference for the realist approach. However, if there is one thing that this panoramic view of positions reveals, it is their shared penchant to regard history and culture as a seamless whole from which validations of contemporary positions can be sought. The tendency to collapse the past into the present remains deeply problematic. This perhaps explains the incongruity as to why IR scholarship on India has progressed little despite the burgeoning literature on culture studies.

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203 Latham goes to the extent of asserting that the Kautilyan tradition prevents Indian decision-makers from exploring shared interests with Pakistan that could become the basis for initiating Confidence Building Measures. Ibid., pp. 146, 150.

204 Ibid., p. 147.
Conclusion

The Indian discourse on strategic thinking and practice presents us with a classic case of reflexivity, wherein the images that the colonialists drew up about the country were accepted as authentic representations of reality. Far from rectifying the skewed images, contemporary scholarship on India has tended to largely reinforce these caricatures. The spirit of critical enquiry has been altogether absent within IR for two important reasons. First, IR scholarship in India is motivated by a definite policy orientation that demands attention be paid to issues of immediate concern. The transient nature of issues has made historical enquiry within IR an unattractive academic pursuit. Second, the near-total lack of dialogue between the fields of IR and history, with the implicit assumption that the two have very little to learn from each other, has further pushed the call for interdisciplinary studies to the margins. So long as IR remains constricted within its isolated field of enquiry, issues of identity and self-perception of post-colonial societies like India shall remain unaddressed.

A constructive dialogue with other disciplines alone offers the hope for correcting the Eurocentric bias within IR theory and for expunging long-held orientalist caricatures from popular perception. The advantages of adopting an interdisciplinary approach are many, and one of the areas where its beneficial effects would be felt the most is that of strategic history, which remains an understudied aspect of international politics. In Chapter 3, we will examine the key material and ideational factors that shaped the grand strategy of one of most prosperous and populous empires of world history — the Mughal empire.
3

The Making of Mughal Grand Strategy: Material and Ideational Influences

This chapter sets out to explain the evolution of India’s strategic practice during a particular historical period. The significant material and ideational influences that went into the making of Akbar’s grand strategy are discussed here in three broad segments. Section one looks at the manner in which material influences such as the distance factor and the vast military potential of Indian society shaped the orientation of Mughal grand strategy. The subsequent section traces the ideational factors that determined the tenor of Akbar’s policies towards the indigenous elite. The central argument here is that while Akbar innovated with his policies, to a great extent he drew from existing ancient and medieval traditions of kingship. The final segment outlines the parameters of Akbar’s accommodationist grand strategy, particularly the key instruments of socialisation through which it was implemented.

Akbar’s pursuit of certain policies was not altogether novel, but he had to devise a long-term strategy to effectively counter the endemic violence that characterised medieval Indian society. The grand strategy he was to choose was that of accommodation, which combined both assimilative and manipulative policies to control his adversaries and draw them within the imperial fold. This implied a progressively lesser reliance on coercion in the pursuit of political goals. The use of force became a political statement of Mughal military might within the system and it continued to define Mughal relations with the powers at the margins of the empire. The interplay of force and conciliation and of military superiority and participatory tactics contributed to the making of an empire at a scale that was unprecedented in the history of medieval India.

Material Factors

Distance as a Variable in Indian History

In the medieval ages, distance constituted a defining variable that played a determining influence on the expansion of imperialism. Distance, as
Braudel termed it, was ‘public enemy number one’ for its role in checking
the spread of 16th century imperialism.\(^1\) The dynamics of power set in
motion by distance are inherent in the very characterisation of imper-
ilism. Sample, for instance, a standard definition of imperialism that
factors in the intervention of distance thus:

Imperialism is characterized by the exercise of power either through direct
conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effect-
vively amounts to a similar form of domination: both involve the practice
of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies. Typically, it is
the deliberate product of a political machine that rules from the centre,
and extends its control to the furthest reaches of the peripheries [...].\(^2\)

In ancient Indian thought, the notion of distance as a factor separating
distinct political realms did not exist as there were no distinct dominions
within which space could be definitively measured. Kautilya, for example,
did not make a stark demarcation between the internal and external
realms of a state. Instead, what was central to his calculation was the
proximity of the enemy, evident from his assertion that ‘the janapada
[kingdom] is shared with the enemy’. Given that the domain of the king
is not clearly demarcated, the strategies Kautilya suggested were thus the
same for dealing with both internal sedition and external invasion. Since
the enemy existed both within and beyond a king’s domain, strategists
like Kautilya and Manu did not advise the use of force as the primary state
instrument. Indeed, coercion was less favoured than sedition in terms of
potency and effectiveness in countering enemies. The reason behind force
being attributed less significance lay in the nebulous nature of sovereignty.
As André Wink notes:

The conquest which is desired by the conqueror-to-be is not primarily a
matter of military action, but of expansion of his sovereignty or svavisaya
by effecting alliances with ‘those who are likely to be won over’ under the
enemy’s sovereignty or paravisaya.\(^3\)

Blurred boundaries in ancient India did not however mean a lack of
geographical consciousness. Ancient texts like the Vishnudharmottara

\(^1\) Quoted in Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (London: Yale
\(^2\) Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford:
Blackwell, 2001), p. 27.
\(^3\) André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under
Eighteenth Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
Purana refer to a particular group of kings called the samanta who ruled at the outer reaches of the kingdom. By their peripheral location and the lower numerical strength attached to it by the kingdom, the samantas were always in a position of relative disadvantage in comparison to the seat of power at the centre. Further, notions such as ‘the conqueror of the earth’ or ‘the universal emperor’ also indicated awareness of geographical scale. In such a conceptualisation, the conquest of the entire earth itself was deemed theoretically possible, since the circle of kings held the scope for expanding the network of power relations far beyond the immediacies of a king’s boundaries.

The distance factor impacted the nature of relations that the Mughals forged with local elites and determined the degree of accommodation the Mughals were prepared to make. Northern and north-western territories were strategically important regions within Akbar’s calculus of expansion. Across historical periods, the North Indian Plain has remained the predominant seat of political power both in terms of frequency and longevity, and from where empires have fanned out in all directions. The modern period saw a geopolitical shift in the subcontinent, wherein instead of fanning outwards from a particular locus of power, power began to gradually move further inland. Prior to the British, no coastal state had risen to become a pan-Indian power. Certain regional patterns of power distribution begin to emerge that testify to the centrality of location and distance in India’s strategic practice. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that the north-eastern and southern regions not only failed to produce a power of pan-Indian status, but also threw up few supra-regional powers. Their geographical location on the peripheries of the Indian landmass accounts for their strategic disadvantage in terms of power distribution.

The Mughals, on the other hand, had a locational advantage which, according to Joseph Schwartzberg, allowed them to attain:

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6 Schwartzberg defines pan-Indian states as those which stretch over at least four out of the five analytic regions he divides the subcontinent into (north-west, north-centre, north-east, west and south). Supra-regional powers are those that extend over at least two analytic regions. Joseph Schwartzberg, ed., *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 254.

7 Schwartzberg’s data tabulation on the duration of pan-Indian and supra-regional powers in the major regions reveals the dominance of the North-Centre region as the seat of power across historical periods (from 560 BC to 1976 AD),
[...] a greater degree of territorial control within the Indian subcontinent than had any previous power. Moreover, they maintained their status as a pan-Indian power for nearly one and a half centuries, slightly longer than either the Mauryas or the Guptas.\(^8\)

Although the incidence of pan-Indian powers declined in the medieval ages as compared to the ancient period, the last four centuries had seen the consolidation of power under a single political power beginning with the Mughals. Increased agricultural productivity coupled with better communication systems and enhanced military capabilities made it possible to establish a pan-Indian state under the Mughals and the British, without necessarily spelling the end for smaller regional entities. Thus, we see the co-existence of the pan-Indian power with lesser powers, a situation that was difficult to envisage a few centuries earlier when supremacy meant the extermination of all competing power centres.\(^9\) The strategic implication of such a political environment was that the highly centralised system of administration prevalent in the ancient period gave way to a more diffused mode of governance among pan-Indian medieval rulers such as the Mughals. The existence of several competing power centres worked to curtail their power potential, and thus necessitated a mediated approach to administration. Akbar’s policy of accommodation can be seen as an attempt to negotiate an acceptable arrangement with rival supra-regional powers that he could ill-afford to ignore. Any such compromise was to be necessarily based on the distinct military cultures that had evolved in medieval India.

Three zones of distinct military cultures can be discerned, set apart by their respective weaponry and codes of conduct.\(^10\) The Rajput zone girdled Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and the Himalayan foothills, where the Rajput clans were militarily armed with cavalry equipment suitable for warfare in the open battlefield. Interestingly, Gordon opens his brief note on the Rajput zone by clubbing the Mughals and the Rajputs together. He writes:

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 260.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 259.
\(^10\) Stewart Gordon, Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).
Over the course of more than 150 years — from the early sixteenth century to the mid seventeenth century — the Mughals and certain armed indigenous cavalry groups figured out how to integrate [...]. Both the Mughals and the indigenous participants were changed by the process. By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this Rajput ethos had taken on a life of its own and was a widely-used blueprint for military entrepreneurship.  

This conjunction is not entirely inappropriate given that the war-making techniques of the Mughals and the Rajputs overlapped considerably. Both relied on heavily armed mounted archers with the open field considered the ideal theatre of war. The Mughal mode of warfare signalled a break from the traditional method of war-making which relied on the elephant charge. However, the edge in the battlefield did not necessarily translate into superiority in all departments of warfare. For instance, compared to field manoeuvres, laying siege on fortresses proved to be an arduous exercise. Since the military demands of the Delhi Sultanate were not very different from those of the succeeding Mughals, the modalities of service with the Rajputs had been evolving much before Akbar came to power. Elaborating further on the military compatibility of the two groups, Gordon writes:

Mughals and Rajputs shared the centrality of the horse, the sword, and the bow and arrow. They had both opted for heavy cavalry [...] and preferred plains battles. Neither put much emphasis on artillery [...] or infantry. 

The second zone evolved in the Deccan around Bijapur and Ahmadnagar sultanates that largely straddled the present day states of Karnataka and Maharashtra in India, referred by the generic term Maratha. The Marathas, who served the Deccan rulers, populated the ranks of their army with lightly armed infantry and cavalry which was also armed with light equipment. It is interesting that despite a long association between the Marathas and the Deccan sultanates, the Marathas unlike the Rajputs did not believe in establishing personal ties through marital alliances with the rulers they served. The Marathas remained more closely associated with their land than the Rajputs, which meant that their military service followed the agricultural cycle, entailing a seasonal cessation of such activity. The third zone comprised the region surrounding the Vijayanagara empire south of the Tungabhadra river. The military strength

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11 Ibid., p. 182.
12 Ibid., pp. 189–90.
13 Ibid., p. 204.
of the Nayakas, who were feudatories of the empire, was traditionally derived from its swelling ranks of infantrymen, light cavalry and a sizeable section of elephants.

Compatibility levels between military cultures explain to a great extent the success of Akbar’s Rajput strategy. It also accounts for his reluctance to tamper with the winning stratagem, resulting in the inability of the Mughal state to reinvent its discourse while attempting to co-opt new powers. Gordon observed of the Mughal strategy of assimilation:

The Mughals had only one model for the integration of indigenous military talent. That was the Rajput. It had been mutually developed in the North
over several generations before the Mughals crossed the Tapti. By and large, it was a successful amalgamation of prior Rajput ideas and Mughal core values.\textsuperscript{14}

The strategy's success can be gauged from the fact that any attempt at including outside powers was met with internal resistance. The Rajputs, for instance, fought the assimilation of outsiders like the Marathas over material benefits. Although the Mughals did gradually employ a large number of Marathas, they failed to realise that there was 'a huge difference between hiring Marathas and somehow converting them into loyal soldiers, willing to take high risks and die for the Empire'. That the Maratha troops were enlisted as ‘Deccani Rajputs’ by the Mughals is indicative of the extent to which Mughal association with the Rajputs had come to influence their perception of the Deccan powers.\textsuperscript{15}

The cause behind the Mughal inability to sustain diverse imperial relationships lay in the lines of influence that radiated outwards and weakened with distance. Rather than operate within neat boundaries that cut off systemic influences, socialisation worked within loosely defined realms.\textsuperscript{16} Burton Stein draws attention to the discrepancy in political and ritual power between the centre and the periphery. Although the ruler controlled both ritual and political power at the centre, the latter tended to diminish with distance. Consequently, actual political control was exercised by the subject elite in the peripheries, whereas 'ritual supremacy [...] was] legitimately conceded to a single centre'.\textsuperscript{17}

Just as distance as a barrier cannot explain differing coercion levels, likewise socialisation alone cannot explain why some actors are excluded while others are not. Proximity to the centre certainly does increase the likelihood of a particular outcome, here, lowered coercion levels in the concerned relationships.\textsuperscript{18} However, it does not in itself ensure their internalisation and ideational compatibility becomes a key factor in the calculus of power. The degree of proximity to the imperial capital, which

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 205.
\textsuperscript{18} Gary Goertz, Contexts of International Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17.
shifted from Delhi to Agra and then to Fatehpur Sikri under Akbar, influenced the level of socialisation the regional powers experienced. The more peripheral the powers were to the imperial centre, the lower was the level of socialisation and, consequently, the higher the probability of the use of coercion in the subsequent imperial dealings with it. By contrast, a ‘core’ area had higher chances of being inducted into the political system and was subject to co-optive, rather than coercive imperial policies. The advantage that proximity to the imperial centre gave to regional powers like the Rajputs was further enhanced by the fact that they shared complimentary belief systems and military ethos with the Mughals which facilitated the strategic discourse between them. Both found co-operation based on shared values to mean higher pay-offs than what competition was likely to promise. The Mughals saw a useful ally in the warrior Rajput who had traditionally served under a political superior in return for rewards. The Rajputs met the Mughal need for a loyal cavalry force that could conquer new terrain for them.\(^{19}\) The Rajputs proved to be a cog, a valuable one, in the gradual progression of the Mughal juggernaut. Ruling from the seat of power and enjoying the proximity to certain strategically important powers were not the only considerations that mattered to the Mughals. A key factor that Akbar had to work into his calculus was not as spatially bound as the ruling clans of Rajputana. The military labour market was a pervasive yet diffused feature of medieval Indian society, representing a level of militarisation too significant to be ignored by Akbar. The manner in which he set about checking the threat it posed to his power is the focus of our next section.

**The Military Labour Market**

Militarisation was a common feature of medieval societies, but the sheer scale and density of the armed medieval Indian society made it a phenomenon in itself. Fazl notes that ‘the zamindars of the country furnish more than four million, four hundred thousand men’.\(^{20}\) At more than 3 per cent of the total population, which stood at roughly 135 million in 1600, the Indian society was a highly militarised one. Given that the Ain estimates do not cover the whole of the Indian subcontinent, the share

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could be close to 4 per cent. A more accurate estimate would be the share of the armed population drawn from the total active male population which constituted the main resource base for military personnel. Dirk Kolff estimates the military labour force to be roughly 10 per cent of the active

Moreland estimates India’s population in 1600 to be 100 million, and that of Akbar’s empire at 60 million. Shireen Moosvi computes the total population at the beginning of the 17th century as being in the range of 136–150 million, including the section of urban population that Moreland fails to include. Shireen Moosvi, The
male population.\footnote{22} No contemporary European society presented such high levels of militarisation. In 1600, military force was a mere 0.4 per cent of the total population in France, 2.5 per cent in Spain and 0.7 per cent in England and Wales.\footnote{23} This vast reservoir of military manpower in the subcontinent constituted the military labour market chiefly because the participants competed with one another to be employed by the highest bidder. On the supply side, the military labour market comprised two categories of potential recruits — immigrants and highly mobile tribal groups; and the relatively sedentary landed zamindars heading large groups of armed peasantry and other local elements.\footnote{24} Ascriptive identities of race and caste held limited currency in the military labour market and did not significantly define the alliances that were arrived at or the deals that were struck. Instead, notions of honourable service (naukari) and loyalty to one’s patron (namak) came to epitomise the functioning of the labour market. Recruitment into regional armies was indirect and brokered through middlemen such as zamindars.\footnote{25}

How does the military labour market become a point of reference for Mughal grand strategy? The issue of the labour market is instructive for the strategies that the Mughals adopted to cope with its formidable proportions, especially since it influenced the effectiveness of the Mughal bid to dominate the existing power networks. It is evident that the large masses of armed peasantry and war bands posed a serious challenge to Mughal power.\footnote{26} An indicator of this was the nature of opposition Akbar faced at Chittor in 1567. Resistance came not just from the Rajputs who...
numbered 8,000 but also from the 40,000-strong peasant army. With violence being an endemic feature of medieval Indian society, the Mughals clearly lacked monopoly over force. As Kolff notes:

it is clear that Indian agrarian society was to a large extent an armed society, skilled in the use of arms […]. Moreover, the countryside was studded with little forts […]. In such a society, no government, however powerful, could even begin to think of achieving a monopoly on the use of arms. In some respects, the millions of armed men, cultivators and otherwise, that government was supposed to rule over, were its rivals rather than its subjects.

The fairly even distribution of retaliatory power prevented the Mughals from resorting to coercion against their adversaries. Particular regional kingdoms could be vanquished by the sheer dint of military superiority, but the source of military power from which these powers drew their might continued to thrive. Thus, the preponderance of the military labour market made any solution based on coercion unviable. Attempts at forced migration and deportation of thousands to Central Asia as slave trade failed to make any drastic impact on the military labour market. Military density in areas such as Agra and Ajmer continued to remain high in the 17th century. Moreover, the armed peasantry which formed a sizeable chunk of the military labour market constituted the revenue base of the empire. Under these circumstances, the policy of accommodation presented itself as the only cost-effective course of action open to Akbar. The Mughal state continued the practice of employing large numbers from the military labour market followed by the Delhi Sultanate under the Lodi Afghans. The Sultanate recruited hordes of immigrants who had travelled to the subcontinent in search of employment from Central Asia and Afghanistan. Although the armed peasantry was not directly recruited in the Mughal army, it tended to populate the provincial armies and local war bands. Zamindars proved to be a vital link in the chain to harness the military potential of the countryside as they were the primary recruiters of the military labour drawn locally. Enrolment brought about a number of internal realignments within peasant communities which became increasingly conscious of their clan identity. Soldiers of peasant origin such as the Barha Sayyids, who enrolled for service under Akbar

27 Kolff, Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy, p. 10.
28 Ibid., p. 7.
29 Ibid., p. 15; Gommans, Mughal Warfare, p. 75.
and were gradually assimilated into the military system, came to guard their lineage more zealously than before. The Rajputs began to lay stress on their genealogical background as a means of limiting the scope of royal favours to certain family-groups. Lineage histories of Rajput clans began to crystallise in Rajasthan from the 16th century onwards. Certain clans such as the Ujjainiyas adapted to the contingencies of time (such as the Mughal emphasis on ascertaining the genealogies of their nobles) and succeeded in making the transition from open-status groups to closed kin bodies.30

The preponderance of the military labour market underlines the need to locate the Mughal state and its military power within the social context. Given that the state exercised limited power over the sources of potential threats, it is not surprising that intelligence gathering was traditionally accorded high priority within Indian political thought. For rulers of large empires, surveillance was a mode of gaining better control over their land and subjects. Information mostly travelled through informal channels facilitated by the movement of soldiers, merchants and pilgrims. Apart from its practical benefits, surveillance also carried symbolic significance since it projected the power of the king. It helped promote the notion that the ‘universal king’ was omnipresent, aware of all major and minor happenings within his realm, and effectively used it to offset his lack of actual control on local affairs.31 The Mughal emperor sought to project himself as the symbolic centre of omnipresence to which all aspects associated with sovereignty gravitated and drew their meaning from — his subjects, the land he ruled, the apparatus of the empire, and of course the information network. But the empire was more than the sum of its parts; its outward functionality was based on certain core values that were intrinsic to the Mughal ethos. In the next section, we will examine the normative influences that shaped the value system of the Mughals, and ultimately their grand strategy.

**Ideational Influences**

The Mughal grand strategy presents us with an intriguing paradox: a state committed to accommodation turns unyielding and inflexible when it encounters a certain set of actors outside the existing calculus

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30 Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, p. 73.
of power. The repeated Mughal offer of incentives and its interest in playing up ideational affinities that the Rajputs were familiar with, were conspicuously absent in Mughal dealings with the Deccan kingdoms. As we have already seen, a strategy is not predetermined or programmed to proceed along a set trajectory. The reformulation of a set strategy would be a compromise position between what is appropriate (given the response of the subject elite) and what is feasible (given the logistical constraints on policy application). The distance separating the Mughal power centre from Deccani states imposed limitations on the implementation of its policies. The material constraints on co-operation were further compounded by a basic incompatibility between their military ethos and belief systems. This resulted in an assertion of Mughal hegemony through primarily coercive means of establishing control in the Deccan.

Despite the military campaigns that came to dominate the Mughal approach to the rulers in the Deccan, the policy however did not run counter to the basic tenor of an accommodationist grand strategy. Fundamentally, a coercive strategy is consistent with the basic assumption of accommodation — that the subjugation and not the annihilation of the enemy is to be the basis of expansion. Accommodation as a grand strategy could throw up distinct strategies, yielding results that varied drastically in their coercion content. Akbar's objective was to establish an empire without exterminating the existing power structure, one that was duly reflected in both his strategies of socialisation and coercion. The Mughal approach to power acquisition as a non-zero sum enterprise was in essence reflected in its dealings with the Deccani powers, just as it was in its relations with the Rajputs. To begin with, Akbar initially employed similar co-operative measures that he had adopted with the Rajputs — a combined strategy of incentives and sanctions. Although these involved impressive displays of material preponderance, the strategy was carefully crafted so as not to aim at the total annihilation of the Deccan states. However, the proximity of the Rajputs to the imperial centre meant that coercive subjugation was followed by a combined strategy of material incentives and assimilative practices. Rajput princes were not only offered high offices, but were also made participants in governance. They were required to be present at the Mughal court, which took keen interest in Rajput affairs including the politics of succession. The mobile imperial capital travelled and camped within an annual radius of action of roughly 1,200 km from Delhi, touching many power centres around the political centre and resuming contact with local rulers in the process.\(^\text{32}\)

These practices, over and above material incentives, were routinely missing in Mughal dealings with the powers lying at the margins of the empire. The sustained normative engagement that usually follows initial offers of material incentives and consolidates the goodwill these generate was altogether absent, given that the relationship was based entirely on the exercise of coercive power without any transformation of belief systems. That made the margins relatively sensitive to shifts in power balance within the system as the discontented rulers had little incentive in supporting a power that was incapable of offering the same level of material benefits to them as before. In relative terms, the peripheries were less likely to see the value system of a hegemon ‘outlast’ periods of its decline than the core areas.

The sense of otheration was not restricted to peripheral powers alone but was experienced by social groups which found themselves excluded from the Mughal hegemonic discourse. The Mughal discourse resorted to a variety of exclusionary tactics through which communities such as the Meos of Mewat were portrayed as a threat and disturbance. The Meos were among the local ruling groups that had been ousted from the networks of power when the Rajputs organised their territories into regional states. The hostile posturing of the Meos and the Mughal state had its roots in the latter’s centralising and extractive tendencies. For instance, Mughal chroniclers employed different strategies of representation to construe Mewati resistance as a rebellion to be quelled for the benefit of peace and order. The resistance of the Meos to such subversive tactics were projected as attempts by rebels (mufsid) at fomenting disorder (fasad). The Meos were also referred to as dissenters (zortalabi) to state authority.\(^{33}\) Local narratives emphasised attempts by the state to monopolise visible symbols of power. For instance, the Mughal administration forbade the Meos from retaining their horses since these could be deployed to challenge the state apparatus. Similarly, the state appropriated the right to play the drum (dhol) which was a veritable sign of power in much of western India. By doing so, the Mughal state sought to deny the Meos, in both practical and symbolic terms, the ability to wield power as understood in local discourses.\(^ {34}\)

A nuanced understanding of hegemonic power thus helps us to differentiate the material module from the ideational element, a vital aspect of which in the Mughal case was the akhlaq genre of writing. The akhlaq literature was essentially a set of medieval Persian treatises that propounded

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., pp. 189–90.
moral and ethical codes of conduct, and included a number of notions that were non-Islamic in origin and content. In the following section, we shall examine how the akhlaq literature fostered a moderate and accommodative intellectual climate in Mughal India, and came to constitute the normative underpinnings of Akbar’s grand strategy.

**The Akhlaq Literature: The Ideational Basis for Accommodation**

The consciousness that Muslim subjects remained in minority in medieval India while the Muslim political elite ruled over a population predominantly Hindu, spawned two parallel traditions in Indo-Islamic thought. On the one hand, it led to the growth of the orthodox strain that was acutely conscious of the vulnerable position of the Indian Muslims in the early periods. On the other hand, it yielded the liberal tradition that was committed to devising means of establishing communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims.\(^35\) The central issue that occupied the advocates of both dispositions was the extent to which the powers and duties of the ruler were to be circumscribed by the strictures of the Sharia. An attendant concern was the status of non-Muslims within an Islamic state in terms of their duties and prerogatives.\(^36\) The classical interpretation saw the king as primarily the ruler and representative of Muslim subjects. The reformist tradition accorded a more enabling role to religion in political affairs, and called upon it ‘to illustrate, and in support of, the universal human ideals’. Ordinarily, the status of Hindus was that of ‘non-Arab idolaters’ who were to abide by the strictures enumerated for infidels in the Sharia. However, political realities tempered this theoretical position which caused Muslim rulers to variously implement the Sharia regulations. A continuum ranging from staunch orthodoxy to a conciliatory approach to Hindu subjects in the medieval era is discernible.\(^37\)

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\(^{37}\) Al-Biruni (973–1050) offered the initial scholarly perspective on Hinduism and its believers. He believed the association of Hinduism with idolatry to be
The early medieval period is also marked by a growing Muslim interest in the indigenous belief systems. For instance, astrological calculations figuring in Indo-Persian writings from the 13th century indicate an area of convergence that began to emerge between the Hindu and Islamic traditions. Medieval historian Hasan Nizami’s metaphorical use of zodiacal signs and constellations to stress on the uncertain political climate preceding Iltutmish’s assumption of power (hailed by some theologians as the ‘bright star’ of the Caliphate) could be seen as contributing to a longer tradition dating back to Al-Biruni in the 11th century. Al-Biruni’s enumeration of the astrological systems prevalent in India and Firdausi’s Shah Nama which emphasised the efficacy of astrological predictions indicates an increasing awareness of indigenous astronomical and astrological systems.38

The texts as part of the akhlaq literature relied on religious arguments to gain credibility, while attempting at the same time to redefine the norms governing kingship and political norms. They presented an essentially non-Islamic political discourse in Islamic terms, drawing on the established and widely recognised grammar of religion (din) and the Sharia. But the arguments that the religious rhetoric was used in support of, and the conclusions that were arrived at, were vastly different from the central tenets of the classical tradition followed in Islamic law books. For instance, the Akhlaq-i Humayuni despite affirming the importance accorded to religion in the Sharia, effectively challenges the narrow role ascribed by it to the king as a Muslim ruler concerned primarily with the interests of the Muslim community.39 Alam observes that the objective of the treatises was:

to provide cures for ‘character defects’ […] and thus prepare healthy individuals to develop a stable social order […] The akhlaq literature, thus represents some of the best examples of appropriation in the medieval Muslim intellectual world, of otherwise non-Islamic (and strictly jurisdically, in some instances, even anti-Islamic) ideas.40

misplaced, arguing instead that enlightened sections of both communities attained religious consciousness without resorting to idol worship. Those who did could belong to any religious faith and came to depend on constructed representations of the divine due to their lack of education. Friedmann, ‘Islamic Thought’, pp. 52–54.

40 Ibid., p. 67.
Interrogating International Relations

In *akhlaq* literature, the check on the monarchy was not extraneous to the ruler but inherent to the very nature of his duties. An abiding concern with justice that informed the position and duties of the king was an effective means of constraining his powers. The lofty principles of peace and justice were invoked to mould kingship into a responsive and unifying institution. The literature propounded a rational view of justice, according to which its latent virtues were revealed to human understanding through reason. This assertion of *akhlaqi* norms was significant for they ceased to draw their relevance and sustenance from any religious interpretation but were upheld for their intrinsic value. Justice was understood in *akhlaq* literature to imply a dynamic state of harmonious balance in society among contending groups. The entire apparatus of the state and its resources were to be devoted in the pursuit of this secular conception of justice. Likewise, the early Muslim rulers conformed to the norms of righteous behaviour expected of victors which were enumerated in ancient Sanskrit texts. For instance, the notion of *dharmavijaya* stating that the vanquished ruler should be reinstated in his kingdom upon his defeat was generally observed by victorious Muslim kings. Upon eliciting formal submission and a consent to pay the stipulated tribute, the Muslim rulers left the domain of the defeated king largely undisturbed.\(^41\) It led Burton Stein to characterise the medieval Indian state as ‘custodial’ since it did not ‘arrogate to itself and attempt to monopolise the coercive functions and authority of other, essentially non-political institutions in society’.\(^42\)

Deviations from the conventional opinion drew upon the Persian and Greek political discourses, and among the texts that propounded an alternative theory of political norms was Khwaja Nasir al-Din Tusi’s *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* composed in 1235. The influence of Greek thought was evident in Tusi’s conceptualisation of the ruler as the philosopher king whose duty was to oversee the development of all individuals, irrespective of their social identity. The *Akhlaq-i Humayuni*, compiled by Ikhtiyar-al-Husaini during Babur’s reign, similarly asserts that ‘[t]he perfection of man [...] is impossible to achieve without a peaceful social organisation, where everyone could earn his living by co-operation and helping each other’. The text recognises the need to locate individuals within their larger social environment. Despite its Quranic citations, the *Akhlaq-i Humayuni* does not remain limited within the confines of a narrow religious debate, and instead makes a determined pitch for universalism when it comes to justice and peace.\(^43\) Al-Husaini further adds:

\(^41\) Hardy, ‘Growth of Authority’, p. 230.
\(^42\) Stein, ‘The State and the Agrarian Order in Medieval South India’, p. 76.
\(^43\) Alam, ‘*AkhlAQi* Norms and Mughal Governance’, p. 77.
The affairs of living thus must be administered through cooperation [...] which in turn depends on justice [...]. If [justice] disappears each will then follow his own desire. Therefore there has to be an institute [...] and a balancing agency [...] to ensure the cooperation. Sharia, the protectors of which have been the prophets [...] serves this purpose. But Sharia cannot work without it being administered by a just king, whose principal duty is to bring the people in control with affection and favours.  

The *Akhlaq-i Humayuni*, much in the genre of *akhlaq* literature, sought to ensure the acceptability of ideas that lay outside the narrow juridical interpretation of the Sharia by skilfully cloaking it in religious rhetoric. The treatise was held in high regard by Akbar who not only listened to the injunctions and theorisations given in Tusi’s *Akhlaq* on Fazl’s advice, but also ordered his officials to read it regularly. The philosophy of *Akhlaq-i Humayuni* was deeply engrained in the Mughal approach to politics. As Alam notes:

> The influence of Ikhtiyar al-Husaini’s *Akhlaq* is unmistakable on their [Mughals’] religious and political views as well as their actual politics. Babur’s descendants in India sought stability, as al-Husaini had desired, by harmonizing their political actions with the *akhlaqi* norms of governance [...]  

The affinity between Fazl’s opinion and *akhlaqi* ethics on the role of reason and the position of the ruler is therefore not surprising. The Mughals were attentive to the concerns of the diverse social groups that made up their empire, and one of the initiatives Akbar took in this regard was to patronise the official translation of ancient Indian texts. Fazl notes that Akbar’s objective in commissioning translations of Sanskrit works into Persian was to smoothen out differences between the two communities through reasoned argument and debate. Jahangir notes in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* that Akbar was:

> [...] always associated with the learned of, every creed and religion, especially with Pandits and the learned of India, and although he was illiterate, so much became clear to him through constant intercourse with the learned and wise [...] that his deficiency was not thought of.  

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44 Quoted in ibid., p. 78.  
45 Ibid., p. 84.  
The *akhlaqi* emphasis on reason as the path to justice is amply evident in Fazl’s argument that the translations encouraged people to ‘refrain from hostility […] seek truth, find out each other’s virtues and vices and endeavour to correct themselves’. By patronising translations of Hindu texts, Akbar and his successors were also according importance and recognition to the pre-Islamic phase of Indian history to which these texts belonged. In a sense, the official project ‘secularised’ the reading of history by expanding its ambit further back in time than an Islamic reading would render. Friedmann observes that:

[…] it is clear that Akbar’s policies created an atmosphere in which the belief in the exclusive truth of Islam was substantially undermined. The willingness of Akbar to admit Hindu sages into his presence and to listen to their religious discourses implied that their views were worthy of consideration […]. The classical conviction that Islam is the only true religion […] lost its axiomatic nature, and the way was opened for the development of conciliatory attitudes towards Hinduism.\(^{50}\)

Akbar’s personal interest in comparative religion also led him to invite a mission of Jesuit priests from Goa in order to know more about Christianity. The mission, which arrived at the Mughal court in 1580, actively engaged in the religious debates that the emperor took keen interest in. The detailed chronicles of Father Monserrate suggest that the priests were allowed to preach and proselytise, although they returned to Goa upon the announcement of the *Din-i-Ilahi* by Akbar in 1582.

Akbar’s eagerness to engage religious leaders in debates can be read in a different light. Patronising court discussions on diverse issues was one

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\(^{47}\) Badauni offers a counter-narrative to Fazl’s portrayal of a liberal and tolerant Mughal regime. Badauni’s *Muntakhabat Tawarikh*, compiled before his death in 1615, should be read in the context of his general disapproval of Akbar’s eclecticism that amounted to an undermining of Islamic practices in favour of more moderate policies. Badauni (1898), *Muntakhabat Tawarikh*, trans. George Ranking, vol. 1 (Patna: Academica Asiatica, rpt 1973); quoted in Alam, ‘*Akhlaqi* Norms and Mughal Governance’, p. 85.

\(^{48}\) However, the early years of Akbar’s reign saw a general sense of intolerance towards the Hindus, a position that he rejected in favour of a more liberal approach in the 1570s, given his growing inclination towards Sufi doctrines. Iqtidar Alam Khan, ‘Akbar’s Personality Traits and World Outlook: A Critical Appraisal’, *Social Scientist*, 20: 9/10 (1992), p. 20.

\(^{49}\) Alam, ‘*Akhlaqi* Norms and Mughal Governance’, p. 85.

\(^{50}\) Friedmann, ‘Islamic Thought’, p. 55.
of the many sources of information that Indian kings tapped, grounded as they were in social networks. Engagement with socio-religious groups as a means to gaining information is particularly notable during Akbar’s reign when his extensive interaction with Hindu pundits yielded detailed and meticulous descriptions of kingship, rituals and cosmology under Hinduism. The official channel was supplemented by what Bayly calls the ‘patrimonial knowledge’ of specific regions which rulers gained from chiefs. Kings also sought access to ‘affective knowledge’ through ‘participation in communities of belief and marriage, through religious affiliation and association with holy men, seers, astrologers and physicians’. The king’s personal participation in these exercises was in keeping with his image as the upholder of order in society, although communities were left to arbitrate on moral issues. These self-regulating social mechanisms probably explain why active state intervention in carrying out religious persecutions and controlling heretical practices that occurred in early modern Europe and Shia Iran did not take place in India. Fazl’s writings reflect a sympathetic attitude towards the phenomenon of idolatry in Hinduism, asserting that idols were merely ‘aids to fix the mind and keep the thoughts from wandering’. Significantly, for Fazl the zealot Mahmud of Ghazni was misguided by ‘fanatical bigots representing India as a country of unbelievers at war with Islam’.

One of the key texts within akhlaq literature to be commissioned by the Mughals was Akhlaq-i Jahangiri by Nur ud-Din Qazi, for whom the principle of justice was the overriding concern in matters of governance. The liberal tradition’s most committed proponent Mughal prince Dara Shukoh (1615–1659) considered Hinduism and Islam to be complementary and compatible. Dara argued that complementarities emerge from the religious principle of monotheism that is upheld in all the holy books, including the Bible, the Quran and the Vedas. Of all the holy books, religious truth was to him most well-enunciated and explicit in the Upanishads and for that very reason was to serve as a template to better understand the Quran. Dara’s thesis of grasping the essence of the Quran with the aid of a Hindu scripture was a radical notion that challenged the self-referential nature of Islam.

It was this potential for complementarities and mutual learning between the two traditions that the akhlaq literature sought to explore.

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52 Quoted in Friedmann, ‘Islamic Thought’, p. 56.
53 Ibid.
What is noteworthy about this genre is that it couched radical notions in politically and religiously acceptable terms that made the pursuit of universal principles like justice and peace a commendable exercise. The Mughals unreservedly drew upon this tradition of liberal writings, which not only offered the king practical injunctions in matters of statecraft, but crucially moulded the Mughal disposition towards accommodation and conciliation. However, beyond the ideational dimensions of Mughal grand strategy, there were more visible manifestations of Mughal intent, and one of them was its proclivity to wage limited wars.

**Power in Restraint: The Mughal Policy of Limited Wars**

Mughal military history is marked by a singular absence of major battles. But for the two battles of Panipat in 1526 and 1556, and the battle of Khanwa in 1527, no wars of comparable proportions occurred during the period of Mughal expansion. Historians have attributed this phenomenon to the display of Mughal military superiority in the few battles that occurred in the early period and the subsequent unwillingness of adversaries to take on the Mughals in open battle. This perception enabled the Mughals to project power greater than the actual military capability they deployed, evident from the Mewar king’s reluctance to engage Akbar when he entered Chittor with a small force.

However, Mughal military superiority and the absence of battles accruing thereof is not patently accommodationist. A state’s aggressive pursuit of power can be characterised by a coercive grand strategy but still be marked by an absence of major battles. However, the distinctive characteristic of accommodation is the calibrated use of violence in conflict situations. Limited wars are characterised by restrictions along spatial and temporal dimensions, as well as by goal orientation. Limited wars operate within a grid of restricted ends and means. They pursue a prioritised set of limited political goals and thus, not all setbacks are seen as carrying equally high stakes. This discriminating potential of limited war acts as a powerful check on the further escalation of conflict. Furthermore, a strategy that blends both elements of coercion as well as conciliation serves to further restrict the scale of violence in limited war scenarios. This raises the issue of the efficacy and legitimacy of the use of force against an adversary under accommodation. Although accommodation does not proscribe the

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use of force in forwarding political goals, its use against an adversary is usually cloaked in language that is deemed politically acceptable. Johnston contends that a state facing an adverse situation may justify coercive action as a resort to ‘force under unavoidable circumstances’. The adversary’s aggressive disposition is portrayed as leaving the state with little option but to employ force. The blame for pushing the conflict to the brink of war is the enemy’s and hence, any state action in response is seen as legitimate and righteous. Contending that a zero-sum view of the adversary underlies the notion of righteous war, Johnston notes, ‘The enemy is irredeemably an enemy who cannot be won over but must be destroyed. The concept of the enemy itself connotes unrighteousness’. Johnston contends that the notion of righteous war with its view of irreconcilable conflict is causally linked to a hard-nosed parabellum paradigm. Righteous action must necessarily aim at annihilating the enemy and hence leaves no scope for accommodation.

Such a conclusion is a problematic one, especially in the Mughal case where an accommodationist strategy invoked the issue of righteousness in certain instances. For instance, the Chittor siege of 1567 is described by Fazl as a campaign against ‘the rebellious ones’, but not as against the kuffar (the non-believers). The king was projected as the epitome of righteousness, and the adversary by opposing him, was immoral and unrighteous in his pursuit of power. Fazl notes, ‘in conquering countries and cities, his [Akbar’s] first thought is to enquire into and sympathise with the condition of the oppressed’. This justificatory stance was not confined to Fazl but extended in general to Mughal historiography itself. Rebellion against imperial authority was accounted for within the rhetoric of accommodation. Indeed, challenge to the emperor was not termed a rebellion against his power but was depicted as attempts to claim greater space within the imperial order. Chroniclers such as Fazl, Nizam al-din Ahmad and Badauni interpreted the resort to violence against the

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56 Ibid., p. 68.
57 Ibid., p. 72.
59 Ibid., p. 536.
60 When it comes to explaining acts of violence committed by non-Muslims, Mughal historians make certain differentiations. Hindu rulers challenging the authority of the Mughal emperor risked being branded a rebel, particularly to the
Mughal state either in terms of moves to gain more power or as a manifestation of human foibles in individuals. Violence of this nature, Hardy observes, was:

seen as a bid for greater consideration within the Mughal system, or as an attempt to persuade the Mughal ruler to alter course, rather than as an attempt to replace him [...]. Abu'l Fazl is as a writer unlikely to depict men as wishing to leave permanently the 'good home' that the Akbar he portrays provided for his subjects.61

If the vocabulary used to describe such challenges is anything to go by, then the description does not suggest sedition or rebellion as historians from the Sultanate period were prone to employ.

The corrective mode chosen was not always a violent one. Moreover, where coercion was employed, the aim was not to annihilate the enemy but to intimidate it into submission. While the act was a political signal meant to convey the true might of Mughal power, it afforded room for reconciliation, should the adversary chose to submit. All along, the rhetoric of righteousness was not abandoned but was instead used to project a non-zero sum approach to the adversary. The use of violence by an adversary was seen as stemming from its own sense of insecurity. Righteous war needs to be disassociated from a zero-sum approach, given that it is as much an instrument of an accommodationist state policy as of a coercive one. The next section will examine the key dimensions of Mughal grand strategy that informed imperial relations with other regional powers.

**The Parameters of Mughal Grand Strategy**

Cultural replication and ritual sovereignty were vital processes of state formation in Asian polities, which extended beyond the state's formal institutions. The Western notion of state monopoly of force needs to be problematised, since historically Asian polities were akin to intercontinental empires, unlike Europe's nation–states. Susanne Rudolph suggests an alternative framework of a custodial state ruling over the various mechanisms of a 'self-regulating' society such as castes, regions and religious communities. Rudolph’s model is instructive not only for the Islamic order. On the other hand, the refusal of Hindu zamindars to pay tax was simply seen as resistance by disobedient elements, from which larger religious implications were not drawn. Hardy, ‘Force and Violence in Indo-Persian Writing’, p. 190.

61 Ibid., pp. 188–89.
comparative frames within which she locates Asian polities such as the Mughal empire, but also for drawing attention to the cultural contexts within which Indian empires learnt to operate. Emperors in the medieval period were mindful of existing indigenous notions of kingship, and sought to suitably replicate the image of the king in their own domains. The Hindu doctrine of kingship regarded authority as an attribute inherent to the king, and yet it existed in a passive state since the king’s temporal domain was balanced by the transcendent authority of the brahmin. Subordinate kings, in recognising the divinity of the superior king, were expected to submit to his power. In turn, the superior king would accept their tribute and leave their domains undisturbed. This notion of kingship held significant implications for the structuring of the empire itself which relied less on direct penetrative conquest than on ensuring submission.

Indeed, the evolution of conventions and tenets that regulated interstate relations outside Europe is an area that has remained understudied. For instance, Asian states in the 16th and 17th centuries observed and enforced mutually agreed norms and conventions within their respective territories. This rudimentary form of international law, which covered not only natives and subjects but also foreigners and their possessions, could be seen in operation in Mughal India as well.  

A notable absence in interstate diplomacy was the notion of ‘extra-territoriality’, under which claims of sovereignty on foreign soil could be entertained. Despite the prominent presence of Indian trading communities in Persia, there is no evidence suggesting any attempt at carving out autonomous groups that claimed differential treatment. Neither did the Mughal state seek to enforce its domestic laws outside its domain on the basis of extra-territoriality, nor did it entertain similar claims made by foreigners on its own soil. In both cases, the law of the land prevailed.

Diplomatic practices among Asian states were distinct from their European counterparts in two aspects. First, embassies with permanent residences in other sovereign states were never sent. Instead, temporary

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62 Significantly, third parties were extended immunity in case a ban affected trade between two states. Thus, we see English trade with Persia that operated from Surat continuing unhindered in the 1640s, despite the fact that a ban prohibiting further trade with Persia was imposed on Indian merchants. Athar Ali, *Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society, and Culture* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 309.

63 Ibid., p. 310.

64 Ali, *Mughal India*. 
missions to other courts to meet certain objectives were despatched, and were either recalled or dismantled once their function had been served. In such cases, the gifts that the emissary presented carried great importance as their monetary value indicated the significance of the mission itself. Second, the practice of signing common agreements and formal treaties did not exist among Islamic states. Mutual agreement on a certain issue took the form of an exchange of letters to that effect. If a particular proposal or offer put forward by a sovereign was accepted in another court, then the agreement was deemed as finalised between the two states. For the agreement to become functional, each side was expected to observe it by making suitable arrangements. For instance, the tepid Mughal response to Thomas Roe’s offer of a ‘solemn treaty’ between Jahangir and James I was in keeping with the diplomatic practices of that time since the Mughals, like the Safavids and the Uzbeks, did not attach the level of significance to the notion of a treaty that the Europeans did.65

The Insignia of Power: The Mughal Instruments of Socialisation

Mughal power rested firmly on the notion of ritual sovereignty that was high on symbolic content, and stressed on the centrality of the ruler in maintaining order and stability within the imperial system.66 Enculturation in the Mughal court was induced and reinforced through a number of means, ranging from symbolic measures to those that enabled Akbar to extend and exercise control over political matters outside the court.

The Mansabdari System

Akbar sought to counter the challenge of the vast military potential of the military labour market by devising a unique institution — the mansabdari system that went on to constitute the basic administrative structure of the Mughals. Introduced in 1573–1574, the mansabdari system became the means through which chieftains, clan leaders and aristocrats who

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65 Ibid., p. 313.

66 Susanne Rudolph defines ritual sovereignty as the ‘[…] cultural activities, symbols, and processes that in the absence of instrumental mechanisms nevertheless create a domain, a realm. Ritual sovereignty has ceremonial, aesthetic, and architectonic aspects as well as historically grounded, genealogically perpetuated element […]. These are processes and signs by which a universal monarch is gradually elevated into a species distinct from the more accessible chiefs and kings of tribal confederacies and lineage states’. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, ‘Presidential Address: State Formation in Asia- Prolegomenon to a Comparative Study’, The Journal of Asian Studies, 46: 4 (1987), p. 740.
commanded considerable status and power were inducted into the nobility. The mansab or the rank, which determined the position of the official (mansabdar) in the hierarchy, enjoined upon the mansabdar the responsibility to maintain a required number of mounted retainers for the Mughal army. The system was modified to differentiate between the mansabdar’s personal rank (zat) and the troopers he was expected to maintain (sawar). Since the mansabdar had to maintain troops at his own expense, his income was calculated on the basis of both, his zat and sawar ranks. Although the mansabdari system was an elaborately structured military–administrative system, there existed no functional chain of command. It entailed that every mansabdar was to report only to the emperor rather than to another official of a higher mansab or rank.

While the mansabdari system ensured that the nobles structured their clans and retainers as per imperial stipulations, the Mughal emperor had other means of wielding control over them as well. The frequent and extended periods of attendance at the court by the nobles enabled the emperor to actively intervene in the personal matters of his officials. Elias notes that personal attendance at the court also served the nobles well as it was a means through which the nobles maintained their elite status. In order to sustain their high status:

> they remained dependent on the king because it was only by going to court and living within court society that they could preserve the distance from everything else on which […] their social existence and their personal identity depended.\(^{67}\)

The revenue assignment system put in place by the Mughals was by no means novel as it had been implemented by the Delhi Sultanate and other regional kingdoms in the past. Under the system, individuals as part of the centralised order of revenue collection could not stake a hereditary claim to their position or over the lands under their control. The increasing control that the nobility had begun to assert through hereditary claims under the Tughlaqs and the Lodis was done away with by Akbar, under whom the occupancy of a position ended with the demise of the noble. Nobles were also periodically transferred within the empire to prevent any territorial consolidation of power.\(^{68}\)

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\(^{68}\) In the early years of Akbar’s rule, the *jagir* or the revenue assignment of a noble often fell within the territories under his military–administrative charge, which was always larger than the area earmarked as his revenue assignment. After 1561,
There were a number of new elements introduced by Akbar that marked off the Mughal period from the Sultanate period. The earlier system of ad hoc appointment and promotions was abandoned in favour of a more structured format. The hierarchisation of political sovereignty with the emperor at the top was executed and regularised through the mansabdari system. The Mughal princes were given ranks that placed them in subordination to the emperor, as against the traditional system of collective sovereignty in which they were co-claimants to the throne.  

Akbar also succeeded in disengaging the royalty from the Muslim nobility when it came to crucial matters of survival and succession. Akbar’s initiative to create a composite nobility was not dissimilar to measures taken by preceding rulers; it had been already achieved by the Khiljis (on the basis of race) and the Tughlaqs (on the basis of religion). Yet, the religious element remained a crucial input in Akbar’s theory of sovereignty. In 1579, Akbar sought to assume the role of a religious leader through the mahzar. However, in order to be acceptable to all his subjects, it was necessary for Akbar to make the transition from being a religious leader to a spiritual guide. The Mughals under Akbar emphasised the absolute sovereignty of the emperor while at the same time extolling the famed ancestry drawn from Timur and Chengiz Khan. The inclusive identity was not only secular; it also shifted the focus away from Islam, from which Akbar had initially derived his legitimacy, to himself as the source of Divine Light. The royal imperative to make the monarchy appear intrinsically distinct from the rest of the society was articulated by King Louis XIV of France:

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*jagirs* were increasingly fragmented and located in distant locations spread across several *parganas*. This fragmentation was reinforced by a parallel move to delink administrative jurisdiction from *jagirs*. Together, these measures were meant to prevent the rise of potential seats of rebellion to the authority of the emperor.  


70 Akbar envisaged himself as the spiritual guide to a chosen few who were deemed to be his followers. Contrary to popular belief, Akbar did not conceive of Din-i Ilahi as a religion that sought followers among the masses and failed. Far from attempting to popularise the new belief system, acceptance into the select circle of disciples was a matter of privilege. Athar Ali, ‘Akbar and Islam (1581–1605)’, in Milton Israel and N. K. Wagle, eds, *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Professor Aziz Ahmad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), pp. 126–27.
As it is important to the public to be governed only by a single one, it also matters to it that the person performing this function should be so elevated above the others, that no-one can be confused or compared with him; and one cannot, without doing harm to the whole body of the state, deprive its head of the least mark of superiority distinguishing it from the limbs.\textsuperscript{71}

The \textit{mansabdari} system was devised to draw into the fold of the Mughal army the maximum possible number of military recruits. Technically, it was open to all those who could bring in recruits. Since the Mughal nobility was not sustained primarily on the heredity principle and also allowed for a certain degree of merit, the system ensured optimal absorption of warlords and recruits. Moreover, it allowed Akbar to tap various recruitment networks for which a closed nobility system would have been ill-suited.\textsuperscript{72} A system of rewards was put in place and higher maintenance grants were offered as incentives to warlords who enlisted superior horse breeds.\textsuperscript{73} Every effort was made by Akbar to draw in warlords to fill the swelling ranks of the Mughal army. Coercive options would have been viable if the number of potential recruits had not been so large in number and if direct recruitment was possible. Since neither was the case, any effective degree of control of the military labour market would only have been possible through the willing co-operation of the warlords. This entailed a system of rewards and incentives — a typical mode of accommodation. A direct correlation between Akbar’s lack of monopoly over force and the strategy he employed to counter this systemic problem thus emerges. As Nurul Hasan argues:

\begin{quote}
Akbar was the first emperor who realized the importance of forging powerful links between the empire and the chieftains by absorbing many of them in the imperial hierarchy and the administrative machinery. This policy was continued by his successors […]\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

However, since recruitment was indirect, channelled as it was through middlemen such as the \textit{zamindars} and tribal warlords, the Mughal grasp over Indian military power remained tenuous throughout. Had the Mughals gradually monopolised the military labour market, stricter regulations and

\textsuperscript{71} Elias, \textit{The Court Society}, pp. 117–18.
\textsuperscript{72} Goomans, \textit{Mughal Warfare}, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{73} Moosvi, \textit{The Economy of the Mughal Empire}, pp. 235–36.
control could have been possible. Instead, the number of mansabdars and the perks accorded to them increased under Akbar’s successors, and enabled them to expand the empire to newer frontiers. Gommans rightly refers to the mansabdari system as ‘an important instrument in the expansion of the [Mughal] empire’.  

To expand and consolidate the empire, Akbar co-opted the middlemen of the military labour market into the ruling class, thereby indirectly recruiting hundreds of their retainers into the Mughal army. Fazl’s observation sums up the co-optive strategy that Akbar adopted in dealing with the latent power of the militarised society:

[…] if that which is numerous be not pervaded by a principle of harmony, the dust of disturbance will not settle down and the troubles of lawlessness will not cease to rise.  

The lack of monopoly over force led Akbar to adopt various manipulative strategies including the periodic transfer of mansabdars and the assignment of distant jagirs to prevent them from developing local power bases. Akbar’s wariness of the potential challenge from the imperial officials is echoed in Fazl’s observation that:

Whenever a large body is gathered together of one mind and speech, (and) show(s) much push and energy, it is proper to disperse them […] Even if no improper act of aggression be seen or suspected, such dispersion is the material of union.

This cannon, which Fazl considered to be ‘constant with the religion of sovereignty’, came to inform Akbar’s strategy of assimilation and was institutionalised in the mansabdari system.

The Mobile Imperial Capital

Circulation was a pre-colonial social phenomenon in India, entailing the movement of people, goods, ideas, information and skills across vast distances. This constant flow furthering the purposes of trade, administration and religion, to name a few, was dynamic and transformative in nature. Not only did circulation often transform the norms and

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75 Gommans, Mughal Warfare, p. 89.
the people who acted as their carriers, but it also moulded society through such exchanges in the long run.\textsuperscript{78} The perambulatory practices of pre-modern rulers have to be seen within this social context of movement and circulation. The imperial urge to stay mobile for purposes of administration rested on this pre-existing elaborate network of itinerant merchants, priests and information agents.

Mobility was a signal feature of Mughal rule and emperors spent a good part of their reign travelling the length and breadth of their expanding empires. Although Babur used to travel around and lead military campaigns, it was Akbar who made it an imperial policy to stay mobile, and that too in imperial grandeur. Akbar’s camp was the veritable capital of the empire where every aspect of the administration — the imperial household, the residence of the nobility, the treasury, stables — was replicated so that the affairs of the empire could be conducted on the move.\textsuperscript{79} As Stephen Blake observes:

> Of the strategies used by patrimonial-bureaucratic emperors to control their officials, travel was the one most heavily relied upon by Mughal rulers. Moving across the countryside to renew the personal tie between leader and distant subordinate was an important activity in the reigns of most emperors [...] Even when trips of one year or less are excluded, rulers of the Mughal state spent nearly 40 percent of their time during this approximately two hundred-year period on tour.\textsuperscript{80}

The tendency to stay mobile is evident from the fact that the Mughals shifted their central capital more times than perhaps any other dynastic ruler in India. Writing on the importance of royal perambulations, Aurangzeb argued that ‘[…] the ruler of a kingdom should not spare himself from moving about’.\textsuperscript{81} Given below are figures for the years that the Mughal emperors spent in travel, which when read in terms of the percentage share of total number of regnal years, the emphasis they placed on imperial perambulations becomes evident.


The purposes for staying mobile were many, ranging from pilgrimages to organising and conducting hunts. But what did the mobile imperial capital in all its splendour signify for Akbar’s grand strategy? First, it proved to be a strategic break from the earlier political tradition of a permanent capital. Even though Fatehpur Sikri was built to Akbar’s specifications, it did not become as effective a seat of political power as the mobile capital. Till the time of Humayun, a city was the seat of sovereign power, which

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Note: The radius of action of the Mughal camp, which is calculated on the assumption that it travelled nine months annually with an average speed of about 8 km, is demarcated at around 1,200 km from Delhi.
could be effectively undermined if it fell to invaders. This strategic threat was a real and continuous one, and had spelt the downfall of a number of preceding rulers. By making the mobile capital the seat of political power, Akbar effectively deterritorialised Mughal sovereignty. The mobile Mughal imperial camp released sovereignty from its association with a rigid understanding of territory, a dimension that Richards stresses upon:

For two and a half centuries, Delhi had been the unassailable redoubt, the refuge for Indian Muslims and the seat of the Sultans of Hindustan. By moving[...] to Agra, and later to [...] Fatehpur Sikri [...] Akbar reduced existing associations of legitimate rulership with Delhi. Neither Akbar nor a possible rebel could henceforth claim the imperial throne by virtue of possession of the citadels, the palaces, or the active support of the volatile population of the old imperial city.  

Second, the mobile capital was the face of the Mughal empire, the visible manifestation of Mughal power and grandeur. By adopting a broader and more dynamic definition of sovereign power, Akbar enhanced the Mughal ability to effectively project power within a wider radius than what a permanent capital would have enabled.

The British embarked upon numerous tours and perambulations within their domain in what appears to be a conscious attempt at adapting certain elements of the Mughal court culture to the colonial context. The dimensions of these tours were structurally and ritually similar to those undertaken by the Mughals. The British emphasis on the mobility of its district officers was intended to enhance the credibility of the empire in the eyes of the local population. These local administrators were to be the benign face of the colonial state, and were thus empowered with the overall responsibility of all administrative matters pertaining to the district. Touring the area under the official's charge was not only actively encouraged, but was also seen as a service obligation. The objective was to appear accessible without mingling with the locals. They had to maintain a balance between being attentive to the grievances of the local people, and maintaining a necessary distance from them.  

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We do not come upon the articulation of a functional relationship of this kind within the Mughal discourse; of partaking in the social realm only insofar as the governance of the realm required. We witness instead a determined attempt at developing a close association between the emperor and his domain. The position of the emperor in fact bore strong affinity with notions of kingship enumerated in medieval Hindu philosophy. The relationship among the constituents of the political community namely the king, the land and its people is clearly enumerated in medieval Hindu texts. Among the three, primacy is accorded to the king who is symbolically seen as the husband of the earth and a father figure to his subjects. Whereas the hierarchic relationship between the ruler and the people is so defined in all political communities, the unequivocal subordination of both the land and its people to the supremacy of the king finds its most clear articulation in the Hindu political system. Rituals provided the medium through which the unity of the three elements of the political community were fused and centred in the person of the king. Streusand observes:

The arrangement of the persons attending the darbar represented the society in microcosm, and, through Abu al-Fazl’s imagery, the world, just as the Hindu king’s audience hall did[...]. [T]he rituals and underlying assumptions made the Mughals appear more like Hindu kings, or what Hindus expected kings to be like, than their Muslim predecessors in the subcontinent had.84

As the visible manifestation of royal authority, rituals were the means through which the king was believed to partake in the affairs of his domain, namely ensuring order and stability. Sudipta Sen reminds us:

In a part of the world still without the blessings of print-capitalism, with sacred and literary manuscripts delegated to the province of the calligrapher, the draftsman, the scribe, and the painter, the image of the empire was perhaps much less reified and more experiential. Thus the very presentation of the Mughal cavalry, the peripatetic royal camp with its huge train, the layout and hierarchy of the imperial darbar (court), and entreaty and supplication face-to-face with the emperor (nazār) were aspects of relating empirically to the realm [...]85

84 Streusand, The Formation of the Mughal Empire, pp. 135–36.
Akbar’s resurrection of the Hindu notion of the king as the font of divinity followed the initial Mughal refusal to acknowledge the Caliphate in 1526. The role of the ruler in maintaining order is emphasised by Fazl as well in the Akbar Nama. The emperor signified the wielder of force and in that capacity he was expected to extend his protection to existing notions of justice and harmony. The general import of the text was that force was valued as a means to achieve a higher objective rather than as an end in itself. Even Barani, who advocated a strong Muslim ruler at the helm of affairs, gave primacy to the maintenance of order over that of establishing an Islamic state. The centring of force in the person of the emperor is the abiding theme of Fazl’s commentary. A visible manifestation of the emperor’s coercive powers is the ‘large number of troops [that] accompany him [Akbar], in whatever direction an expedition may go’. The temporal functions of the emperor are his alone, inalienable and cardinal to the scheme of things. In making a case for Akbar’s role as the upholder of acceptable ethics, Fazl’s position approached that of the medieval Hindu theologians who regarded the king as the protector of the domain of norms and beliefs.

The Imperial Court Culture

An elaborate set of rituals and court practices went into the creation of a syncretic court culture that conditioned the beliefs and behaviour of nobles in the imperial court. The dynastic ideology of Akbar was critical in providing the unifying rationale of his power as it sought to portray him as the bearer of Divine Light. Fazl regarded royalty to be ‘a light from God […]. Without a mediator it appears as a holy form to the holders of power and at the sight of it everyone bends the forehead of praise to the ground of submission’. Akbar’s assertion of paramountcy had dynastic precedents which further strengthened his claim to legitimacy. Babur, for instance, had assumed the designation as the Padshah (emperor) of Kabul thereby signalling a shift from the Timurid notion of collective

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86 Fazl (1927), The Ain-i Akbari, vol. 1, p. 49.
88 Fazl (1927), The Ain-i Akbari, vol. 1, p. 3.
sovereignty. Babur’s position as the sole sovereign meant that the status of other Timurid princes was reduced to that of subordinates from being co-claimants to power.  

The notion that sovereignty rested with the emperor rather than with a distinguished collectivity was further developed under Akbar. As the descendent of God, Akbar’s knowledge and intrinsic worth was portrayed in self-referential rather than relative terms, and was independent of the positions and interpretations put forward by the religious community. Fazl calls it ‘Farr-i Izidi’ (the Divine Light), which is ‘communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of anyone’. The emperor so blessed by God becomes the embodiment of perfection and rules with ‘paternal love towards the subjects’. Just as obeying the emperor amounted to worshipping the Divine for the subjects, administering his people was for the emperor akin to performing the duties of an enlightened patriarch. Fazl emphasises, ‘If a king possesses a cultivated mind, his position as the spiritual leader of the nation will be in harmony with his temporal office; and the performance of each of his political duties will be equivalent to an adoration of God.’ In keeping with the Divine Light theory that believed glory to be divinely bestowed on the emperor, Akbar began to publicly worship the sun. By hailing the emperor as ‘the origin of stability’, the Divine Light theory privileged Akbar over other claimants to power. Akbar also introduced the convention of jharoka darshan, which was based on the Hindu practice of beholding the monarch at a public viewing window. An essentially religious ceremony that was gradually absorbed within Hindu kingship, the jharoka darshan entailed the offering of prayers for the king’s wellbeing and receiving his blessings in return. Interestingly, not much is known about the extent to which this practice was followed by Hindu kings, whereas its observance by the Mughals is well-chronicled. The ritual of the emperor appearing in public at his centrally-located royal palace was intended to enhance his accessibility to his subjects. Jharoka darshan was introduced during Akbar’s reign and his successors continued to observe the ceremony till Aurangzeb banned it for its ostensibly Hindu association.
The position of the emperor at the apex of the socio-political order was thus central to the balance in society itself, a point that Fazl states in unambiguous terms.

If royalty did not exist, the storm of strife would never subside, nor selfish ambition disappear. Mankind being under the burden of lawlessness and lust would sink into the pit of destruction, the world, this great market place would lose its prosperity and the whole earth become a barren waste.94

Akbar's dynastic ideology, the cornerstone of his grand strategy, marked a radical shift from the appanage system of governance that entailed the bestowal of lands and titles to close members of the royal family. The system that tended to create multiple power centres in the empire had hindered the process of imperial expansion under Babur and Humayun. The Mughal emperor under Akbar came to be the sole sanctioning authority of appointments and promotions within the nobility. The nobles were expected to offer their service to him in any of the three modes — personal attendance at the royal court as an expression of submission, participation in war and military campaigns, and the more formal mode of appointments to administrative and military positions.95

Irrespective of the nature of service rendered to the emperor, the trait constantly emphasised upon and rewarded was that of overriding loyalty to the ruler. The constant emphasis on cardinality as a feature of the royal position found reflection even in the location of the king's private chambers. For instance, Louis XIV of France ensured that his sleeping quarters were located at the centre of the first floor of the palace from where he could enjoy a panoramic view of his lands.

The king was, as it were, lord of the house throughout the land, and lord of the land even in his most seemingly private chambers [...]. It [the bedroom] reveals vividly how indissolubly the ruler's character as lord of the house merged with his function as king.96

Elias' surmise about the French king was to a great extent true of the Mughal emperor as well. The architectural design of Akbar's palace

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96 Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 82.
in Fatehpur Sikri brings out the organic link between the private life and the public image of the emperor. The emperor's private chamber, his audience hall and the balcony meant for jharoka darshan were all aligned in a manner that highlighted his role as father-figure and as the font of justice. The centrality of his position was further reflected in the structure of the court, during travel and otherwise, and in its elaborate rituals of initiation, arbitration and deliberation. Paying obeisance at the Mughal court was a significant expression of the emperor’s cardinality, and the Ain lays down minute details of the different types of salutations. The komish, for instance ‘signifies that the saluter has placed his head (which is the seat of the senses and mind) into the hand of humility, giving it to the royal assembly as a present, and has made himself in obedience ready for any service that may be required of him’. The taslim is another mode of salutation that entails touching the head and ‘signifies that he is ready to give himself as an offering’. These courtly etiquettes went on to reiterate the indispensable position of the emperor within the imperial order. Every symbolic act he engaged in was vested with enormous significance, one of which was the bestowal of royal robes.

**Robes of Honour**

The bestowing of garments by the emperor was a common practice throughout large swathes of Eurasia, although the practice came to acquire prominence within Islamic kingship. The bestowal of an article of clothing by the Caliph held special significance as it was believed to bear an element of his intrinsic luminosity (baraka). The ceremony became popular among kings who wished to confer robes of honour in their own right, recognising the authority of the caliph all the same. The practice, introduced in India by the Ghaznavids and the Ghurids, assumed special significance under the Mughals who regarded it as a veritable political tool and vested it with greater nuances in terms of making gradations.

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97 Asher, ‘Sub-Imperial Palaces’, p. 283.
98 Fazl quoted in Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’, p. 169.
100 The act of bestowal in Islamic polities dates back to 700 AD. Although the distribution of such royal symbols was not the prerogative of any particular society, the practice tended to be adopted by courts that came into contact with Muslim states. For instance, the Rajputs had adopted the ritual from the Sultanate court with which it had had a long military association. Stewart Gordon, ‘Robes of Honour: A “Transactional” Kingly Ceremony’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33:3 (1996), pp. 225, 232.
Robes of honour were veritable symbols of power that were bestowed in appreciation of an accomplishment or as a means of subordination. The Mughals frequently bestowed their kin and nobles with honours although a shift is discernible in terms of the purpose and frequency of such bestowals. The *Tuzuk-i Baburi* chronicles Babur’s fondness for the ceremony through which a wide array of individuals from kinsmen and religious leaders were honoured. From the honouring of princes on special occasions during the time of Babur, the practice of distributing robes of honour encompassed a broader set of meanings under subsequent Mughal emperors. Not only were robes given more frequently and extensively than before, but they were also bequeathed to nobles on occasions other than of special significance such as on regular events of the year. The robes of honour gradually entered court etiquette from Akbar’s reign. These robes were a means through which the emperor defined the relationship of the recipient with the court. Formal induction into imperial service commenced with the acceptance of the written contract detailing terms of service (*farman*) by the noble upon donning the robe that he had been bestowed by the emperor. While the article in question acquired value by the very act of bestowal, the significance of the custom lay in the observance of certain highly structured practices of its acceptance by the concerned noble in court. The emphasis on the rituals associated with the ceremony ensured that the political elite internalised the court culture of which this rite was an integral part.

The robe was at once personal and public in its significance to the recipient. Its bestowal in a public ceremony at the court was an initiation into the elite realm of the emperor. It was in recognition of a noble’s abilities and demanded total submission to the emperor above all other loyalties. The acceptance of the robe in public gaze signified a pledge by the recipient to abide by the will of the emperor. Apart from the robe being an explicit symbol of recognition and initiation, it also carried a compelling personal meaning for the beneficiary. The robe of honour was

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102 Ibid., p. 36.

103 The emperor also received articles offered to him as a mark of submission or tribute. Under Akbar, the practice of receiving and preserving the presents was further systematised to include their classification according to their monetary value and quality.
seen as an extension of the emperor’s person and continued to hold that significance once it was bequeathed. Thus, the act of bestowal allowed the recipient to partake in the personal realm, glory and charisma of the emperor. According to Gordon:

The ceremony established a direct, personal link between sovereign and recipient. At best, the recipient was reminded of this link every time he wore the outfit, whether at court or on assignment far from the capital. He was also reminded that it was through the largesse of the king that he belonged to the elite world that donned high-value, courtly textiles. Others, seeing the recipient, were also reminded that loyalty to the giver might bring such rewards to them.

Thomas Roe, who was bestowed a robe of honour by Jahangir, gauged the significance attached to the garment when he observed that ‘it is here reputed the highest of fauour to giue a garment warne by the Prince, or beeing New, once layd on his shoulder’.

The significance of the ceremony within the Mughal court culture is evident from the fact that the emperors zealously guarded their symbols of authority so that they were to be identified solely with them. For instance, Jahangir passed a stricture forbidding his regional officers from using certain honours that were to remain his prerogative. They were not supposed to preside over proceedings from a throne that was more than half the height of a person, nor were they to receive the formal bow (taslim). The significance of the honour was grounded in local contexts, and thus was always reflective of and specific to the cultural milieu of the time. It is hence not surprising that courts in different regions in different

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104 Gordon arranges the varied symbols of honour along a continuum, ranging from the very personal and indispensable objects of royal prerogative to the more common objects that were regularly endowed on nobles. Apart from the minting of coins and reading the khutbah (Friday prayers) in the name of the emperor, the Ain lists certain symbols of kingship that formed an inalienable part of the emperor, such as the throne, the umbrella (chatr), the flag (jhanda) and the drum (naqara), among others. Articles such as jewelled weapons, robes and horses formed the other end of the continuum that were frequently given as gifts to nobles. Gordon, ‘Robes of Honour’, pp. 240–41.

105 Ibid., p. 241.


periods distributed a wide variety of honours (such as horses, weapons and slaves), and the robes also had great variation in terms of their texture and complexity of design.

Apart from the complex nuances that were attached to the observance of court etiquettes, nomenclature was another indication of the status and power. It was a significant index of sovereignty and power, and gradations in the use of titles were carefully observed and maintained. The world view of the Mughals reveals that they made certain distinctions between what they considered as their internal and external realms. For the Mughals, states located within the Indian subcontinent were vassals and hence subordinate in status to the Mughal state. In keeping with that perception, the Mughals refused to recognise titles claiming sovereign status that kings of smaller kingdoms appended to their name. Although the designation of ‘Raja’ was permissible as it was an honorary title bestowed on Mughal nobles, the title of ‘Shah’ was not, and hence we see Adil Shah of Bijapur being referred to as Adil Khan. In sharp contrast, the Mughals regarded contemporary sovereign rulers like the Ottomans and the Safavids as their equals and this was evident in the observance of their royal titles proclaiming them as such.108

It is evident that symbolic power assumed centrality in court proceedings where ‘each act received a prestige-character symbolising the distribution of power at the time’. Elias refers to every such act of etiquette as a ‘prestige-fetish’ that ‘served as an indicator of the position of an individual within the balance of power between the courtiers, a balance controlled by the king and very precarious’.109 The process through which variation in symbolic acts became representative of actual change in the relative positions of the nobility is perceptible. Since every act (such as one aiding the king into his robe) was an expression of privilege and power for both the king and the concerned courtier, any subtle change in the symbolic function was indicative of a corresponding shift in rank at the court society. It is no surprise then that every noble was extremely alert to even the slight alterations in acts of etiquette.110

Outside the pale of court culture within which the honour bestowed through the robe could be fully comprehended, the article and the rite lost their symbolic significance. The worth supposed to be attached to an object so blessed by the emperor was not grasped by members of the political elite

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108 Ali, Mughal India, p. 311.
109 Elias, The Court Society, pp. 84–85.
110 Ibid., p. 88.
unfamiliar with the grammar and language of symbols and norms. The limits of such endeavours is articulated by Gordon who notes:

All of the local powers who submitted were required to learn court etiquette and put on robes of honour. When Mirza Nathan [the Mughal commander] got to the outer edges of Assam, the robe of honour had less and less authority. He tried to recruit Gharos into his army, gave them robes of honour; nevertheless, no amount of robes of honour or other Mughal transactional objects could make the hill rajas loyal.\textsuperscript{111}

The British grasped the symbolism attached to the bestowal of robes during their dealings with the Mughals. Although they continued the practice of presenting \textit{khelat} (clothes, ornaments and insignia of symbolic value) to Indians who professed their loyalty to them and accepted \textit{naz\textsuperscript{a}r} (gold coins) and \textit{peshkash} (objects of worth such as jewels and horses) from them, they came to regard these rituals as contractual transactions. We have already seen the symbolism, solemnity and significance that was associated with the Mughal ceremonies of bestowing robes to nobles and receiving gifts from them and visiting emissaries. This gravitas was missing in the British adaptation of the ritual as they began estimating accurate valuations of the offerings made to them, against which the worth of the \textit{khelat} to be presented in return was precisely calculated.\textsuperscript{112} By the late 18th century, in an attempt to curb the growing private acquisitions of Company officials, the British Parliament defined the rituals of gift giving and receiving as practices of corruption and bribery. Furthermore, presents so received by Indians from the Mughal court used to be initially preserved as part of family inheritance and legacy. The British, on the other hand, did not extend the significance of the ceremonial act to the gift itself, and hence did not believe in the preservation of the presents it received. Hence, we witness that in the early 19th century, presents were usually either recycled by being gifted to other Indians or were auctioned off to generate finances for buying new presents.\textsuperscript{113} The lower ranking British officials continued to offer \textit{naz\textsuperscript{a}r} and accept robes of honour from the emperor well into the 19th century, when the practice was finally discontinued in 1843.\textsuperscript{114} With the calculation of the monetary estimate of the \textit{naz\textsuperscript{a}r} that

\textsuperscript{111} Gordon, ‘Robes of Honour’, p. 235.
\textsuperscript{112} Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. 172.
\textsuperscript{114} In return and as a concession to the emperor’s protests, the Governor-General Lord Ellenborough offered to increase his allowance as per the value of the offerings made in the past.
the Company was authorised to disburse, the position of the emperor shifted from being a sanctioning authority to that of a sovereign equal, and finally to that of a dependent. We thus discern a gradual shift in the 19th century from gift-giving to the presentation of banners bearing the insignia of British authority and symbols representing the origins, lineage and association with Mughal and British rule. The bestowal of these banners was in the British scheme of things an unequivocal means of asserting the supremacy of the British Queen, and with that the erstwhile Mughal ‘ritual of incorporation’ became ‘a ritual marking subordination’.115

**Imperial Discipleship**

Another pillar of Akbar’s socialisation was imperial discipleship wherein commitment to the emperor was deemed to be above all other loyalties. Loyalty to the emperor provided the polyglot elite with a ‘secular’ focal point and enabled the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nobility to reconcile their primordial identities. Elias explains:

> The individual’s identification with the social stratum or group in the wider dominion from which he comes, whether with village, town or tribe, with professional or estates group, grows weaker or disappears. It is replaced by a new identification with the charismatic central group in the foreground. In the feelings of its members it takes on the function of social homeland.116

Once again, Akbar’s policy marked a shift from the political ideology that had provided the rationale behind Babur’s strategy of elite formation. Under Babur, shared ancestry and ethnic background primarily formed the basis for entry into the nobility, making the political system exclusive in nature. Akbar’s policy to introduce indigenous elements into his nobility was, however, not altogether an innovative measure. Babur had admitted a number of Indian nobles who participated in major military expeditions after the battle of Panipat in 1526. Similarly, Humayun’s advice to Akbar that ‘this qaum (Rajputs) should be reared up because they do not have contumacy and disobedience but only obedience and service’ reflected Mughal proclivity towards accommodation.117 Humayun inducted a number of local elements in the nobility and even entered into a marital alliance with a local chief. However, the reigns of both Babur and Humayun were plagued by factionalism, and clan politics dominated the Mughal

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115 Cohn, ‘Representing Authority in Victorian India’, pp. 172, 191.
nobility under both the emperors. A large number of nobles were drawn from the Chaghtai clans of Central Asia which viewed political rule as the function of a confederacy rather than the prerogative of a single ruler. Moreover, the strategy under Babur and Humayun was limited primarily to balancing the various factions within the nobility. Their reigns were too brief and unstable to ensure the socialisation of the political elite in any significant manner.

A necessary corollary of Akbar’s policy of accommodation was to develop an inclusive political system in place of a closed and exclusive one. Over several decades, the Mughals developed a code of behaviour that became the basis for a cohesive class of nobles who came to be known for their personal allegiance and service to the emperor. The code was personified in the khanazads who were nobles attached to the Mughal household through familial and hereditary ties. The nobles were to build on an established lineage of loyal service to the ruler through their valour, commitment and ready willingness for sacrifice. Not only did the institution of khanazadi entail a constant reiteration and demonstration of these qualities as a sign of personal subordination to the emperor, but it also implied imbibing the etiquettes and behavioural attributes associated with the Mughal court culture. Khanazadi represents yet another institution of enculturation through which the Mughals ensured that aristocrats were groomed in the accepted mode of behaviour. Elias explains the process through which social perceptions, articulated in elaborate court rituals, reinforced identities of the nobles and the appropriate conduct expected of them.

The practice of etiquette is [...] an exhibition of court society to itself. Each participant, above all the king, has his prestige and his relative power position confirmed by others. Social opinion, which constitutes the prestige of the individual, is expressed by reciprocal behaviour within a communal action according to certain rules [...]. Without confirmation of one’s prestige through behaviour, this prestige is nothing.\(^\text{118}\)

The noteworthy aspect of khanazads was that their personal loyalty and submission was emphasised to such an extent that they came to derive their identity from the Mughal emperor, their master and patron. The khanazadi system was an offshoot of Akbar’s dynastic ideology that stressed his divine origins, thereby elevating him to the status of the venerable master, worthy of service and respect. Imperial discipleship was also based on the

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notion of the Islamic military slave who personally attended to his master. There were several aspects of the khanazadi system that bore a strong affinity to military slavery, such as the emperor’s prerogative to determine the fate of the disciple’s property upon his death. In what was a common practice under the Mughals, the emperor seized the property of deceased nobles of which only a portion was often left to their lawful successors. The projection of the emperor’s rightful claim was not limited to the estates of his khanazads, but also extended to their heirs. Emperors often complied with requests by khanazads to name their sons who eventually went on to join the royal service.\footnote{Richards, ‘Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers’, pp. 263–65.} Since the khanazadi tradition was grounded in notions of imperial service and martial ethos, it is not surprising that the master–servant relationship was one of the most stable institutions of the Mughal era.

Emphasis on loyalty to the emperor, who was seen as presiding over his realm with paternal care, led scholars like Blake to conclude that the Mughal state was a classic example of a patrimonial–bureaucratic empire that added complexity and scale to the much smaller model of the patrimonial state which Weber had propounded. Blake modifies the Weberian model of the patrimonial state to explain the complex network of personal ties that the emperor developed to sustain the Mughal state. The patrimonial states entail:

\footnote{Blake, ‘The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals’, p. 79.}

He further adds that patrimonial states emerge when:

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Richards, ‘Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers’, pp. 263–65.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
The Mughal state characteristically demanded personal attributes such as loyalty and familial ties from officials, along with the technical qualifications and competence required for their positions. It could be argued that Indian empires have historically shown a proclivity towards the patrimonial–bureaucratic form of state organisation. The Mauryan empire and centuries later the Delhi Sultanate followed certain aspects of the model that Akbar further refined in the 16th century. The line of distinction between the personal and the political was blurred by the overlapping of the domains of the court and the household. The Mughals came to uphold the principle of paramountcy in their dealings with the chieftains, in that they reserved the right to select the successor to the deceased chieftain, thereby intervening in succession disputes. Rightful heirs could no longer claim their hereditary right to succeed unless the emperor so approved. Officials were brought into the royal household which formed the locus and hub of power and activity even within the structure of the mobile capital. The *Ain* enumerates in detail the frequency of postings and visits of officials at the court. Apart from their monthly and annual trips and on the event of a promotion or a transfer, they were also required to attend court proceedings, ceremonies and special occasions.

It was expected that the process of political participation would be self-sustaining by increasing the stakes of the participants in the system through continued engagement. The rationale was that it evinced the participants to seek the maximisation of interests within the system rather than opt out of it altogether. However, with the induction of Deccani nobles into the royal service in late 17th century, the composition of the nobility underwent a significant change. The new officers did not belong to the *khanazadi* tradition but had joined the system for tactical benefits. The reallocation of resources led to enduring rivalries between the *khanazads* and the newly recruited Deccani nobles.

**Conclusion**

The Mughal grand strategy drew upon a rich tradition of liberal secular thought that came to inform the imperial policies of Akbar. Although he initiated a number of modes of power projection using both subtle and ostentatious means of asserting his authority, Akbar’s policies were couched

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122 Ibid., p. 82.
123 Hasan, ‘Zamindars under the Mughals’, p. 287.
within a social milieu that emphasised co-existence and social acceptance of difference. The universalist tenor of the liberal tradition provided the appropriate justification for Akbar to move away from particularistic and religious notions of legitimacy, towards a more secular and personalised interpretation of his authority. Juxtaposing the Mughal empire with its contemporaries would help further in highlighting its unique ideational foundations. It might also help explain the conundrum about why the powerful Habsburg and Ottoman empires disintegrated into multiple states, whereas the contours of the Mughal empire are still largely recognisable in the modern Indian state.\footnote{Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘A Tale of Three Empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a Comparative Context’, \textit{Common Knowledge}, 12: 1 (2006), p. 75.} The Habsburg empire’s preference for homogeneity in institutional practices, coupled with its markedly colonial policy of encouraging settler colonies and resource exploitation, made it an imperial entity that relented little to the plurality of its colonies. The Ottoman empire was distinctly different in this regard for its willingness to compromise and collaborate with local power structures. So were the Mughals, whose policy of creating an integrated ruling class consisting of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds but united in their loyalty to the emperor, became one of the chief factors behind the empire’s resilience. The Mughal empire was, as Subrahmanyam points out, a successful state-building exercise executed on a massive scale, a fact that did not escape the attention of the British. As we shall see in the Chapter 4, Akbar succeeded in synthesising the imperial aims with the aspirations of the Rajput elite by appealing to their normative understanding of loyalty and service. The strategy, however, failed to take off in the case of the Deccan powers, impeded due to the vast distances that separated the two loci of power.
Strategies of Conciliation and Coercion: Two Case Studies

Akbar's strategies of conciliation and coercion contributed in no small measure to the stability of the Mughal state. We have already examined the material constraints and the normative traditions which determined his choice of grand strategy and the modes through which it was executed. This chapter traces the evolution of Akbar's twin strategies of conciliation and coercion, and is accordingly organised around two chief sections. The first segment unbundles the notion of Mughal hegemony in the context of Akbar's evolving relations with the Rajput ruling elite. It will also explore the persistence of hegemonic ideas through institutions and their subsequent internalisation by the Rajput elite through the process of co-optation. In the second section, we will look at a contrasting case study from the Deccan to demonstrate the coercive strand within accommodation that focused on eliciting cooperation on the basis of material considerations at the cost of enhancing the normative appeal of the Mughal state.

Mughal Conciliatory Strategy

The Mughal stratagem of accommodation was in keeping with the diffused networks of power that operated outside the realm of direct Mughal state control. By locating the state within the existing social milieu, the compulsions and imperatives behind the adoption of an accommodative approach become clear. A long view of history would reveal that the endemic problem of militarisation and violence had plagued empires in the past as well. This explains their reluctance to seek a lasting solution based on coercion, and their marked preference to broker arrangements that are accommodative of all the interests involved. Wink regards the
forging of such alliances as an operative aspect of the Indian notion of sovereignty.\(^1\) He writes:

> In India, as in all Islamic states, sovereignty was primarily a matter of allegiances; the state organized itself around conflict and remained essentially open-ended instead of becoming territorially circumscribed.\(^2\)

Dirk Kolff makes a similar observation on the persistence of alliances in medieval India:

> One is struck by the omnipresence of the alliance theme in sixteenth-century India. Politics in this period was largely synonymous with the making and unmaking of alliances. These alliances had little of the nature of sacred treaties and seem to have been regarded very much like service contracts, temporary agreements of an auxiliary character. Negotiation, alliance and as a corollary-brokerage were the elements that largely made up medieval Indian political-military behaviour.\(^3\)

The Mughal grand strategy of accommodation was distinct for its coherence and integrated approach towards eliciting the support of diverse social groups. Socialisation was a crucial component of Mughal hegemony, and in the Rajput case, performed the systemic function of order maintenance by mitigating its reliance on the use of force. Increased participation and identification with the goals of the Mughal empire drew the Rajputs into a complex web of shared values and interests that made Mughal rule over the area effective and efficient. The complimentary belief systems of the

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\(^1\) André Wink attributes this phenomenon to the Islamic concept of *fitna* implying a blend of coercion and conciliation that entailed measures such as giving gifts and intervening in local conflicts. The purpose of *fitna* is to sow dissent in the enemy camp that would strengthen the ruler’s relative position without involving an overt use of force. According to Wink, ‘Objectively *fitna* implies no more than the forging of alliances; it is thus- unlike state expansion in modern Europe- not primarily determined by the use of military power.’ André Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under Eighteenth Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 26. Sovereignty then was not merely ‘territorially circumscribed’ but was operational through a network of alliances.

\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 27–28.

Mughals and the Rajputs coupled with the strategic location of the region facilitated the growth of a composite culture. Rajasthan, for instance, with its proximity to the centre was to see constant assertions and reminders of Akbar’s sovereignty, while the Deccani states fell beyond the pale of Akbar’s power projection efforts. Akbar’s interest in developing close ties with the Rajputs owed itself in no small measure to the strategic location of Rajasthan. Situated close to the ports of Gujarat, Rajasthan was the gateway to the prosperity of Malwa. So critical was its perceived value that any power that controlled this region was strategically secure in north India. Given Rajasthan’s location, every ambitious ruler with expansionist intentions sought to establish long-term relationships with the Rajputs, and thus to a great extent, Akbar’s efforts in that direction had a clear strategic intent. The ensuing process of enculturation brought lasting dividends for the Mughals in terms of loyalty and service of the Rajputs. And since enculturation tended to follow a decisive phase of conquest and subjugation, the ability of the Mughals to project their power assumed even greater significance.

The Walking Republic\(^4\): The Mughal Imperial Camp as a Mode of Power Projection

A striking aspect of the Mughal state was its ability to project power over great distances and towards this end, the emperor devised ingenious means to stay mobile and tour their domain. The critical importance that the Mughals attached to mobility is evident from Aurangzeb’s stricture:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{an emperor should never allow himself to be fond of ease and inclined to retirement because the most fatal cause of the decline of kingdoms and the destruction of royal power is this undesirable habit. Always be moving about, as much as possible: it is bad for both emperors and water to remain at the same place; the water grows putrid and the king’s power slips out of his control. In touring lie the honour, ease and splendour of kings; the desire of comfort and happiness makes them untrustworthy.}\]

Akbar came to be seen as an emperor who was able ‘to capture the country by means of travelling through it’.\(^6\) The accoutrements of power,

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which created an aura of authority around the emperor, called for sustained material inputs on a massive scale. The imperial camp was exhibitionist in nature, showcasing the grandeur of the Mughal court. In Fazl’s rhetorical question, ‘If the majesty of royalty did not exist, how would various disturbances subside?’, the centrality of projecting power over vast distances is evident. The data given in Table 4.1 is indicative of the emphasis Mughal emperors laid on touring their domain.

Mobile imperial camps were common both in medieval Asia and Western Europe. But the wealth and display in the Mughal camp was of a scale and grandeur that surpassed in its European counterparts. The royal entourage maintained the imperial hierarchy with the princes and nobles following the emperor, flanked by 8,000 horsemen on either side. Spread over one-and-a-half miles in breadth, the camp carried with it all elements of a functional administration, complete with merchants, accountants, soldiers and artisans. The official records and accounts registers alone occupied 80 camels, 30 elephants and 20 carts. William Hawkins noted of the massive lumbering royal entourages:

When hee [the Mughal emperor] rideth on progresse or hunting, the compasse of his tents may bee as much as the compasse of London and more; and I may say that of all sorts of people that follow the campe there are two hundred thousand, for hee is provided as for a citie.

The imperial treasury, also part of the entourage, engaged in brisk trade with local economies, its financial might on full display. The Mughal coinage system, by superseding local monetary systems, helped in standardising monetary transactions across the empire. However, beyond the functional purpose that it served within the economy, the coinage system became an extension of the splendour of the empire. Rahman and Ziad note the symbolic significance that these minted coins carried to the farthest reaches of the empire:

To the Mughals, coins were not merely a means of exchange, but also a powerful and efficient means of propaganda: a symbol of imperial grandeur carrying the seal of the emperor to every corner of the empire, a testament to the spread of his domain and unchallenged sovereignty. Mughal coins were characterized by superb calligraphy and high quality execution; each

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Table 4.1
Ruling in Absentia — Years Spent Away from the Capital (1556–1739)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>49 years</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>31 years</td>
<td>49 years</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Reign Absent</td>
<td>10/49 20%</td>
<td>6/22 27%</td>
<td>14/31 45%</td>
<td>34/49 69%</td>
<td>5/5 100%</td>
<td>0/7 0%</td>
<td>0/20 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Columns one and two give details of the rule of individual Mughal emperors both in terms of regnal years and duration.
*Column three indicates the number of years spent in travel out of the total number of regnal years of each emperor, and computes the same in terms of percentage.
*Total number of years spent by all the Mughal emperors put together 69/183.
*Combined percentage of regnal years spent in travelling 38 per cent.
piece was an exceptional work of art. The innovations and features of the coins from Akbar’s reign were numerous, and, served a political purpose remarkably well.9

The imperial camp also showcased the assimilative ethos of the Mughal court. The Mughal emperors, more than their Ottoman counterparts, attached a great deal of strategic significance to travelling across the length and breadth of their imperial domain. Mobility and co-habitation ensured that sectarian and ethnic identities remained muted and the thick web of internal interactions amongst the nobles and the retainers fostered a liberal and cosmopolitan ethos. The mobile camp not only displayed the extensive resources at the command of the Mughal state, but was also instrumental in integrating its various regions within the empire.10 The ostensible display was an impressive means of projecting power over great distances and came to be a veritable symbol of the emperor’s authority. However, the itinerant royal camp moved largely within the safe inner confines of the empire than on its fringes. A native technique in vogue was to measure distance by clocking time, a practice that was followed by the Mughals. The Jesuit priest Antonio Monserrate notes of Akbar’s march to Kabul in 1581:

The distance of each day’s march is measured with a ten-foot rod by special officers, who are instructed to follow the King closely and to measure the distance from the moment he leaves his pavilion. These measurements are afterwards found very useful in computing the area of provinces and the distance of places apart, for purposes of sending envoys and royal edicts, and in emergencies. Two hundred lengths of the ten-foot rod make what is called in Persian a ‘Coroo’, but in the Indian tongue a ‘Kos’. This is equal to two miles, and is the usual measure of distance.11

Such imperial journeys of the empire not only helped renew contact and forge personal ties with local powers, but also served as surveillance missions that gathered vital information of the regions it passed through.

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The radius of action which was limited to around 1,200 km from Delhi also defined the geographical reach of imperial socialisation and enculturation. Roughly the same geographical pattern emerges if one were to examine the settled residences of the Mughal emperors, as given in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2
Settled Residences of Mughal Emperors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In capital</th>
<th>In centre</th>
<th>In north</th>
<th>In south</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akbar</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jahangir</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shah Jahan</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurangzeb</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Based on periods of > six months of unbroken residence in and around one place (excluding sieges) in the central, northern and southern parts of the empire, in round quinary percentages of the total period of regular government.

**Mughal Hegemonic Power: The Case Study of the Rajputs**

In a hegemonic order, elites are driven to submission by the hegemon through a combination of incentives and sanctions. As Ikenberry and Kupchan observe, ‘[m]aterial incentives and opportunities for political advancement […] play crucial role in making elites susceptible to the socialising efforts of the hegemon’. The causal chain we have selected for this study modifies the one devised by Ikenberry and Kupchan, and traces the influence of socialisation on the behaviour patterns of the Rajputs. Although material incentives and sanctions were the primary catalyst, stability in relations resulted from normative persuasion.

External inducement → policy change (cooperation through coercion) → norm change (cooperation through legitimate domination) → lowered coercion levels

Bull’s emphasis on the role of legitimacy in a political order highlights why reliance on coercion declines with time. He argues:

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12 Ibid., p. 108.
Rules are legitimised to the extent that members of the society accept them as valid, or embrace the values implied or presupposed by the rulers. To the extent that the rules are legitimised they do not depend for their effectiveness on sanctions or enforcement.\textsuperscript{14}

Akbar similarly ensured that his authority was self-enforcing, thereby pre-empting the resort to force. In the Rajputs, the Mughals found a loyal ally experienced in their mode of warfare and willing to serve. The following section throws light on the material setting within which the Mughals and the Rajputs found it mutually beneficial to engage each other.

The Material Setting

Hegemony does not operate in a power vacuum and accordingly, socialisation nonetheless involves an exhibition of power. The Mughal artillery and mounted archers proved decisive in military confrontations. Barring the two battles of Panipat in 1526 and 1556 and the battle of Khanwa in 1527, the battle of Tukaroi in 1575 and the battle of Haldighati in 1576 were provincial level confrontations rather than imperial battles.\textsuperscript{15} The fact that Akbar’s early reign was marked by battles in contrast to the more prolonged phase of low-key military encounters that followed suggests that he succeeded in projecting his military power beyond the immediacy of particular contexts.\textsuperscript{16} This interesting contrast can be explained by the fact that the Mughal military advantage on display in these initial confrontations proved to be particularly decisive in the expansion that followed. The Chittor siege spurred a domino effect of sorts and many Rajput principalities submitted to Akbar without a fight. Thus, Ranthambhor surrendered in 1569 followed by Kalinjar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Marwar.

The Mughal inducements of high imperial ranks and lucrative land holdings following the initial period of conquest made the Rajputs favourably disposed towards the Mughals. Indeed, Akbar’s grand strategy entailed a complex blend of interests and values that was intrinsically appealing to the Rajputs. The Mughal offer of induction into the nobility


\textsuperscript{15} Douglas Streusand, \textit{The Formation of the Mughal Empire} (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 52.

was the prime incentive to the Rajputs. As we have seen, the Mughal nobility constituted the *mansabdari* system that combined military and administrative institutions within its fold. Upon entering Mughal service, a chieftain was assigned a rank or a *mansab*, which determined the size of a military contingent he was to maintain for the imperial army. In return, a *mansabdar* was offered *jagirs* or revenue assignments in lieu of his salary and the maintenance costs incurred. These *jagirs* were not fiefdoms to which the *mansabdar* had any rights of ownership or occupancy. Akbar also introduced the notion of *watan jagirs* or the royal confirmation of the hereditary domains of chiefs, which unlike regular *jagirs* were non-transferable.\(^{17}\) Ancestral land was held not merely by hereditary right but by recognition from the emperor. Akbar gained greater control over land rights as chieftains increasingly turned to him for the confirmation of their hereditary domains. The revenue accruing from the *watan jagir* was calculated as a portion of their salary rather than as an added honour. Akbar’s mode of integrating subjugated principalities into the empire marked a significant departure from the erstwhile policy of extracting a tribute from the defeated chief in return for his continued autonomy. Rajputs were not merely paying tributes under Akbar, but were actively involved in imperial affairs as partners in administration.\(^{18}\) Imperial regulation of land rights also led to increased Mughal intervention in the succession disputes of nobles. Asserting the principle of paramountcy, Akbar assumed the right to nominate a suitable successor that entailed overruling law of primogeniture in certain cases. The ensuing contestations served to further weaken clan solidarity while enhancing Akbar’s legitimacy in Rajput affairs.

As is the case with the grand strategy of any ruler, Akbar’s seemingly disparate strategies were geared towards his primary goal of expansion and consolidation. The process of consolidation proceeded along three phases, which marked the evolution of Akbar’s Rajput policy.\(^{19}\) The first phase

\(^{17}\) There were certain key characteristics discernible in the assignment of *watan jagirs*, such as: (1) It was a non-transferable permanent assignment, (2) The emperor held the discretion to award a *watan jagir* to any noble in any location within the empire, and (3) The noble was expected to develop a long association with his *watan jagir*. Inayat Zaidi, ‘Akbar and the Rajput Principalities: Integration into Empire’, in Irfan Habib, ed., *Akbar and His India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 21.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 15.

from 1556 to 1572 saw Akbar establish his supremacy through conquest and his demand for personal submission of Rajput rulers. The first of the Rajput chiefs to associate himself with the Mughals through military and matrimonial ties was Raja Bharamal of Amber. The submission of the Kachhwaha chief signalled the beginning of a long royal association with the clan. It was during Akbar’s first visit to Rajasthan in 1562 that Bharamal proposed a marital alliance with the emperor. The marriage of the chief’s daughter to Akbar paved the way for closer collaboration between the two households. Bharamal’s entry into Mughal service was a tradition followed by his son Bhagwan Das and later his grandson Man Singh.20

The Rajputs who submitted emerged as Akbar’s key political allies, rendering military service in local campaigns against other recalcitrant Rajput principalities. Rajput contingents were part of the imperial forces that vanquished Merta in 1562 and Jodhpur in 1563. The conquests of Chittor and Ranthambhor in 1569 went on to further reinforce Akbar’s supremacy and a number of Rajput kings thought it prudent to strengthen ties with the emperor. Thereafter, marital alliances with the kings of Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Marwar were concluded. Despite their status as allies, military participation of the Rajputs remained limited during this period. It was with the Gujarat campaign of 1572 that the involvement of Rajputs in imperial affairs intensified, ushering in the next phase of Mughal–Rajput relations. The Gujarat campaign saw the Rajputs being entrusted for the first time with independent commands outside Rajasthan. Raja Man Singh, for instance, led the Mughal forces against Rana Pratap of Mewar in 1572. Akbar also broadened his support base by involving Rajputs from clans other than the Kachhwahas such as the rulers of Bikaner and Jodhpur in important military missions. The third phase saw a further intensification of Mughal–Rajput relations with Rajputs entering into Mughal administrative service. Akbar further consolidated his position by enhancing the role of Rajputs from being military allies to partners in the governance of the empire. They were appointed to joint governorship of subahs (provinces) with the strategically important Kabul and Lahore being placed under Man Singh and Bhagwan Das. The material benefits in terms of lucrative posts and land rights that these brought deepened the stakes for the Rajputs within the system.

Map 4.1
Political Map of Rajasthan, 1595

Since the Rajputs were not a homogenous group, Akbar’s Rajput policy had a significant impact on clan politics. The biggest beneficiaries were the Kachhwahas of Amber who were among the first clans to submit to Akbar. The alliance with Akbar accorded the Kachhwahas with high administrative positions and brought the little-known clan into political prominence. The clan had sound reasons to vie for royal support. Within Rajput clan politics, the Kachhwahas were not a very influential group in terms of controlling vast tracts of territory, as for instance the Rathores did. Beyond a few *parganas* (contiguous clusters of villages), their native lands were limited in size. It was only through the high ranks they came to occupy within the Mughal nobility that they managed to amass substantial *jagirs*.\(^\text{21}\) That the clan received royal patronage was evident in their increased involvement in the royal military and administrative matters. Following the Gujarat expedition in which many Kachhwahas participated and Bharamal was entrusted with the rare honour of managing the affairs of the capital, the induction of clan members into royal service increased both in terms of scale and responsibility, particularly between 1578 and 1587. The position and privilege enjoyed by the Kachhwahas far exceeded those enjoyed by any other family-group. Kachhwahas were among the four out of six Rajputs who were appointed as governors to 12 provinces and they constituted 69 per cent of the Rajput *mansabdars*.\(^\text{22}\) To optimise the available military potential of the local elite, Akbar took care not to restrict recruitment to the prominent chiefs alone but expanded it to include the leaders of smaller clans as well. This ensured that the dominance of clan leaders to potentially consolidate their power against Akbar was broken and their authority was kept under check.\(^\text{23}\)

Although the internal divisions within the Kachhwaha clan into sub-clans (chiefly the Rajawats, the Shaikhwats and the Udawats) did not significantly affect their service to the Mughal emperor, these surfaced when the emperor fell seriously ill in 1605.\(^\text{24}\) After Akbar’s reign, there is a discernible decline in Rajput representation within the nobility. The unsuccessful bid by the Kachhwahas to place Khusrau on the throne after Akbar’s death was one of the reasons why the clan fell out of favour with Jahangir. With the more obvious removal of Man Singh from Bengal as the governor in 1606, Rajput nobles no longer held independent charge

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 95.


\(^{24}\) Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir*, p. 89.
of significant campaigns. From 19 Rajput nobles at the end of the sixth year of Jahangir’s reign, their numbers came down to 14, nine years hence. Their zat (personal rank) and sawar (cavalry rank) positions also came down over the years, a pattern that emerges from Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Relative Positions of Rajput Nobles under Akbar and Jahangir

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status of Rajput nobles</th>
<th>Total no.</th>
<th>Zat</th>
<th>Sawar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajput nobles at the death of Akbar</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>10,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput nobles at end of 6th year of Jahangir’s reign</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>21,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput nobles at the end of 15th year of Jahangir’s reign</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35,500</td>
<td>20,650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The decline in numbers of the Rajputs did not however lead to any fundamental realignment of powers in the Mughal court, and we see by and large the continuance of Akbar’s grand strategy in content and in spirit. The next segment will examine the cultural and normative appeal that the Mughal state held for its nobility and subjects, and which was instrumental in translating its power into authority.

**The Ideational Aspect of Mughal Hegemony**

Participation in a hegemonic order offers rewards for co-operation and stiff disincentives for defiance, in the process facilitating patterns of habitual compliance. According to Ian Hurd, internalisation occurs:

[… when the actor’s sense of its own interests is partly constituted by a force outside itself, that is, by standards, laws, rules and norms present in the community, existing at an intersubjective level. A rule will become legitimate to a specific individual and therefore become behaviourally significant when the individual internalises its content and reconceives his or her interests to the rule. Compliance then becomes habitual, and it is non-compliance that requires of the individual special consideration and psychic costs.]

The nature of domination undergoes a change under hegemony as power transforms into authority. For instance, the period in which Akbar

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25 Ibid., p. 100.
commissioned the translations of ancient Sanskrit texts revered by the Hindus into Persian coincided with the intensification of Mughal relations with the Rajputs. The imperial support extended to the translation project was integral to Akbar’s efforts in making the Mughal state more identifiable with the cultural beliefs of the Rajputs. Several ancient texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Rajatarangini* were translated under royal patronage. The *Razmnama*, the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*, was the outcome of one such royal project that Akbar had initiated and was completed by 1586. The translated version was finalised by royal scribes with the help and guidance of learned Hindus. Akbar sought to popularise the translated version of the Hindu epic throughout his empire by commanding his nobles to commission copies of the *Razmnama* for their libraries.\(^{27}\) The Persian translation of the *Atharva Veda*, one of the four Vedic texts commenced in 1575–1576, was perhaps one of the first of its kind. The court’s keen interest in ancient literary and historical traditions ‘indigenised’ the Mughal state, and its assertion of power came to be seen as rightful and legitimate. Emphasising the syncretic nature of Akbar’s formulation of his authority, Streusand observed, ‘Though there had been Muslims in the subcontinent for some eight centuries, there was no synthesis of the Islamic and Indian doctrines of kingship before Akbar’s time.’\(^{28}\) The successful reformulation of hegemonic principles marked the process of consolidation as rules, norms and procedures began to take root and set patterns emerged gradually.

Complementarity of value systems justified Rajput participation in the Mughal system and maintained domestic legitimacy during the period of transformation. Zeigler contends, the Rajput:

\[\ldots\] ‘support and loyalty rested primarily upon a basic “fit” between Rajput ideals and aspirations, expressed in local myth and symbol, and Mughal actions in this area, which did not challenge fundamental Rajput tenets regarding order and precedence \[\ldots\]. Only in periods when the Mughals directly contradicted these tenets concerning order and precedence did Rajputs withdraw their support and shift the direction of their loyalties.\(^{29}\)

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Ideological compatibility between the Mughals and Rajputs was further accentuated by their complementary military cultures. The Rajput retainers were adept horsemen trained in archery and man-to-man combat in the open plains. The Mughal military culture too shared these attributes since its army was predominantly composed of a cavalry force of mounted archers and a developed artillery wing. Their mode of warfare is brought out in Babur’s description of his battleplan at Khanwa in 1527, when he noted that he ‘posted matchlock men and cannoneers along the line of carts which were chained to one another in front of us’. This basic affinity in belief systems and military ethos laid the foundation for a lasting alliance when it was ‘institutionalised’. In the next section, we will examine how Akbar tapped into the traditional Rajput institutions of marital alliances and honourable service to sustain their co-operation.

_The Persistence of Hegemonic Ideas: Institutionalising Socialisation_

Given that the efficiency benefits of socialisation emerge in the long run, its institutionalisation becomes vital. Institutions mediate between ideas and policies by delimiting and channelising the flow of ideas into the policy making process. They not only impart a structure to hegemonic ideas, but also tend to reinforce the political system itself. Institutions uphold existing power structures by building the costs and constraints of pursuing revisionist tendencies into the system. Particularly in the medieval context, institutions were also an articulation of social opinion that served to reinforce the identity and position of an individual in society. As Elias explains, social opinion was an inescapable fact of human existence in the court society in which an individual was ‘honourable’ only if he was socially accepted as such. The centrality of social perception cannot be understated in a milieu in which ‘the recognition of membership by others itself constitutes membership’.

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To analyse the cultural appeal of Mughal hegemony among the Rajputs, it is imperative to gain an understanding of the local Rajput practices and institutions which were instrumental in enhancing co-operation between the two actors. Marital alliances and honourable service constituted the two institutions through which Akbar consolidated his ties with the Rajput clans, both of which were culturally embedded Rajput practices. The Rajput society was organised around two key referents, brotherhood (bhai bandh) and marriage alliances (sagai). The notion of brotherhood was inherently territorial and collegial, in that all territorial acquisitions by a clan came under its collective control. Although the clan chief selected on the basis of primogeniture stood at the apex of the administrative system, decision-making within the clan was by and large collegial. For instance, the ruler had little control over the manner in which the lands under clan leaders (sardars), who were members of his extended family, were governed.\(^3\)\(^4\) Although part of a clan, each brotherhood perceived of itself as a distinct entity, thereby staking an equal claim over the territory the clan traditionally controlled.

**Marital Alliances**

Relations by marriage constituted the other referent of the Rajput identity. The significance that the Rajputs attached to marriage as a mode of establishing ties is evident from the fact that the term sagai stood for two practices in Marvari: betrothal and alliance.\(^3\)\(^5\) The exogamous practices of the Rajputs meant that marriages were more often than not fixed between clans rather than within the community. Inter-clan marriages built and strengthened familial ties and claims of clan members to property, thereby serving to integrate the Rajput community that was otherwise divided by clan and status differentials.\(^3\)\(^6\) Marital alliance as a strategic tool to extend power networks through personal ties was common to both Mughals and Rajputs. Akbar inherited the Timurid tradition of consolidating power through marital alliances with other potential power centres. For instance, Babur married the daughter of the Yusufzai chief so that ‘the Yusufzai horde will be conciliated’.\(^3\)\(^7\)

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\(^3\)\(^5\) Ziegler, ‘Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties’, p. 183.


\(^3\)\(^7\) Babur (1922), *Babur Nama*, p. 375.
tool was certainly not an innovation introduced by Akbar, but what was noteworthy was the scale at which a vast network was established. Akbar’s unorthodox approach is reflected in the numerous marital alliances he established for himself in violation of the stipulated four-marriage norm laid out under Islamic law. From 1562 to 1605, Akbar arranged as many as 40 marital alliances for himself, his sons and grandson, of which 17 were Mughal–Rajput marriages. The practice of establishing personal ties with the Rajputs continued after Akbar, although the number of marriages gradually diminished. From 1562 to 1715, 27 Mughal–Rajput marriages were concluded, of which only three took place during Aurangzeb’s reign.38

The Kachhwahas of Amber and the Rathores of Jodhpur were the Rajput families from which many Mughal brides were taken. Ties so established enabled Akbar to forge direct and personal ties with the ruling families of all Rajput principalities except Mewar and Bundi. Most of the political marriages with the Rajputs were solemnised at the time when the concerned chief joined Mughal service. However, the Kachhwahas and the Rathores mentioned above were exceptions to this practice, as their daughters continued to be married to Mughal emperors and princes generations after their chiefs had first submitted to the emperor. The marriages were not only marked by Hindu and Muslim rituals, but the Rajput wives were also allowed to follow their faith after marrying into the Mughal harem. However, orthodoxy began to creep in after Akbar’s reign. Although the Mughal emperors continued to take brides from Rajput families, over time their numbers declined and the religious connotations attached to them also altered. There is a discernible change in the conduct of the marriage during Aurangzeb’s reign when the Rajput brides were expected to convert to Islam prior to their marriage into the Mughal household. Table 4.4 provides details regarding the patterns and profiles of marital alliances entered into by Mughal rulers.

Keen as the Mughals were in establishing matrimonial ties with the Rajputs, they were mindful of clan considerations, refusing to marry women other than those belonging to the ruling Rajput families. Moreover, the marriages always entailed the Mughal emperor or princes marrying Rajput women, but there is no instance of Mughal women marrying into

Rajput families.\textsuperscript{39} The marital alliances established under Akbar were not only distinct in scale, but also in terms of diversity as they drew brides from more groups than did any other succeeding emperor. The period of forging personal relations with various ethnic groups coincided with the initial phase of Mughal expansion and consolidation.

\textbf{The Rajput Notion of Honourable Service}

Rajput society evolved around distinct brotherhoods, some of which were more internally stratified than the rest. In relatively undifferentiated brotherhoods, kinship was the key determinant of group politics. The lack of stratification meant that members interacted on equal terms and collectively selected a leader who had nominal authority over the brotherhood. There were other brotherhoods that were marked by a high degree of internal stratification, undercut as they were by institutions of rulership and clientship. In contrast to kinship, rulership and clientship rendered certain brotherhoods hierarchical and stratified. The ruler and client were bound in a symbiotic relationship wherein the client pledged to offer his allegiance and military service to his patron, who in turn bestowed upon his retainer his protection and other favours. Loyalty to the master constituted the supreme virtue within the Rajput cultural template, and service to one’s patron was akin to worship. The obligation to serve emerged from a deeply ingrained sense of loyalty at having eaten the salt (\textit{lun}) of the patron. The patron–client system of military service permeated the Rajput polity and determined the nature of interpersonal relations among the Rajputs.

\begin{table}[ht]
\centering
\caption{Marriage Patterns of the Mughal Emperors}
\begin{tabular}{lccccc}
\hline
 & Irani & Turani & Indian & Muslim & Rajputs & Deccani rulers & Not known \\
\hline
Akbar (31) & 4 & 6 & 4 & 10 & 3 & 3 \\
Jahangir (11) & 6 & – & – & 3 & – & 2 \\
Shahjahan (9) & 6 & – & – & – & – & 1 \\
Aurangzeb (22) & 2 & – & 1 & 2 & 3 & 8 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

The Rajput society presented a complex web of interpersonal relations from which members drew their personal identities. Within this broad template of relations and identities was also accommodated the Muslim who was to be served just as a local ruler would be. Although Rajput service to the Mughal emperor was to be indistinguishable from service rendered to a local chief, the Rajputs did distinguish among Muslims in terms of the relative power they wielded. Hence, only a Muslim ruler whose power was equivalent to or more than that of a Rajput could be rightfully served.  

**Co-optation through Normative Reorientation**

Mughal intervention led to the restructuring of Rajput social relations by playing up different facets of Rajput identity, and prompted a ‘shift in ideology’ from heterarchy to hierarchy. An expanding empire meant greater benefits, and joining the Mughal service came to be seen as opening up access to land outside Rajasthan through the imperial system of assigning land grants. As Rajput stakes in the empire increased, the traditional notions of self-sacrifice as the highest form of service began to lose much of its original appeal. The norm of salvation through continued loyal service was favoured for its perceived compatibility with the privileges of high Mughal rank and land rights. The test of loyalty thus came to be redefined from self-sacrifice to abiding service of the master.

As the Rajput society made a transition from an egalitarian order to a more hierarchical system of administration, greater normative significance began to be attached to the relative possession of sovereignty. Rajput dharma traditionally expected a clan member to both support his brotherhood and display utmost loyalty to his master. Mughal intervention highlighted the latent contradictions that lay in the observance of these principles. Imperial support to loyal Rajput subordinates through land grants and rewards consolidated the position of a privileged few over others within a clan. As the patron–client dyadic relation gained strength and brotherhoods disintegrated, Rajputs in control of land sought to transform kinship ties into relations of service. For instance, Rao Maldeo who ruled over Marwar in mid-16th century, attempted to modify this collegial nature of clan structure by introducing changes that rendered it more hierarchical. He attempted to assert his authority by reducing the clout of sardars and relegating them to the position of subordinates to the clan ruler. Sardars could now stake control over lands only upon the approval of the ruler.

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and not on the basis of their hereditary claims. To further emphasise their dependence on the ruler, Maldeo began parcelling out land as *pattas* (land revenue grants) to loyalists in return for their compliance. The changes introduced by Maldeo served to render the clan structure vertical in terms of decision making and control over clan territories, although it proved to be fragile as the disgruntled sardars rose up in rebellion after his death. Another indication that the Rajputs had imbibed elements of the Mughal court culture was the increased bureaucratisation of local administration. Written deeds became the basis of legitimate claim to land under the Mughals. Notably, the system was first introduced in Jodhpur and gradually, procedures came to be more formalised in Rajput kingdoms — a visible impact of the Rajput association with the Mughals.

Shifts in Rajput notions of honour are thus discernible, as their participation in an increasingly ritualised and formalised Mughal court deepened. B. L. Bhadani notes:

> Sacrifice of life in the battlefield by the Rajput chiefs and of their contingents was considered as the highest expression of their loyalty to their master, Akbar [...] Sacrificing life in the battlefield for his master became a major mark of merit in contemporary Rajasthani literature.  

The Rajasthani bardic literature refers to Akbar in lofty terms, addressing him by honorific titles such as *shriji*, *nath* and *chhatrapati* which imply the lord or the ruler. The emperor, portrayed in positive light even in his victory against Rana Pratap, is depicted as an incarnation of Hindu gods possessing the divine qualities of Rama and Krishna.

Richards observes that:

> by the seventeenth century, after Akbar’s initiatives, the Mughal emperors had come to be regarded as essentially Rajputs. Indeed, in some local traditions, the Mughal emperor was equated with Rama himself.

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42 Sharma, ‘Concept of Kingship and the Marwar Nobility’, pp. 60–62.
44 The transformation of Akbar’s image in the popular Rajput imagination is evident from the following verse composed by a poet in praise of Akbar: ‘O Akbar, the son of Humayun, you clear my doubts that whose incarnation you are? [...] Your charisma is beyond (the understanding) of a Jogi, you are not human being but certainly a great incarnation. O Lord of Delhi [...] tell me who you are out of the four Lakshman, Arjun, Ram and Krishna?’ Quoted in Ibid., p. 53.
In bardic poetry, Akbar’s territorial expansion is not portrayed as a threat but justified using mythical analogy in terms of Lord Indra’s assurance to the gods that the emperor would not invade their domains. The elevation of Akbar’s status to that of a Hindu god carried significant import, in that it behove the Rajputs to heed to the moral duty of obeying his orders. The impression that Akbar’s conquests were not to the detriment of Rajput interests — indeed, that he had received divine assurance — is significant for legitimising his right to rule over their lands. What is also noteworthy is that in the depiction of the historic battle between Rana Pratap and Akbar, neither is glorified or vilified in entirety. Both are shown to be faithful to their call of duty (dharma) and their confrontation is likened to the fight between the mythical heroes and brothers in the Mahabharata, Karan and Arjun. In victory, Akbar is shown to be appreciative of the gallant Rana who is glorified as the keeper of Rajput chivalry.

This kind of normative reorientation to Mughal domination is evident in the local literature of other Rajput kingdoms as well. A good example would be the princely state of Orchha in modern day Madhya Pradesh, whose encounter with Mughal power produced pejorative literary images that eventually grew benign over time with the gradual acceptance of the emperor’s supremacy. Allison Busch explores three works in historical poetry by the 17th century poet Kesavdas to trace the altered perceptions of Mughal power in Orchha. The first historical poem (Ratnabavani) written in the context of Orchha’s defeat in the hands of Akbar in 1570s, valorises Prince Ratnasena in his futile efforts to repel the Mughals who are portrayed as the reviled ‘Turks’ and ‘Mlecchas’. The second work (Virsimhdevcarit) written in 1607 is set within the context of court intrigue in both the Orchha and Mughal political orders, and results in the forging of a new alliance between the respective claimants to power. Derogatory connotations attached to ‘Turks’ now give way to more blurred and nuanced notions of righteousness and villainy, characterised by the shifting sympathies of the poet. The passage in which Kesavdas dwells on Akbar’s anguish over the murder of Fazl by the Orchha prince at the behest of his rebellious son Salim is particularly striking. In the third historical poem (Jahangirjascandrika), the image of the virtuous Hindu king is eventually transposed on the persona of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. While on the one hand, Jahangir is ‘Hinduised’ by his comparison to Raghubira and Rama (allegories employed in praise of the ideal Hindu king), the work consciously employs Perso-Arabic vocabulary, signifying the cultural

acceptance of the Mughals. Busch rejects the interpretation that the change in imageries occurred on account of shift in power balances, arguing instead that the later literary responses reflected an increasing recognition and inclusion of the Mughals within the matrix of local cultural identities. It is imperative, she argues, to examine the cultural context which led Kesavdas:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{to construct images of the Mughal emperor in terms of this Sanskrit-derived symbolic repertoire of kingship that stemmed back perhaps two millennia in \textit{kavya} and public \textit{prasastis} (panegyric). The historically important point is that for this regional Braj author, in the year 1612, Mughal rule had become fully routinized, and was entirely comprehensible within the traditional Sanskritic episteme of Hindu dharma and kingship. And this was a marked departure from how the Mughals were perceived just 30 years prior in Kesavdas’s first work, the \textit{Bavani}, where they were hated interlopers.}\]

The changing metaphors employed for the Mughal emperor in Kesavdas’ poems signify the gradual shift that occurred in Rajput perceptions. The initial sense of suspicion and hostility among the Rajputs gave way to a more accommodative and sympathetic perspective that reflected an acceptance of the Mughals as one of their kind. The altered perceptions were the result of a coherent imperial ideology that was notable for its rhetoric of accommodation, a subject that will be the focus of our study in the next section.

**Imperial Ideology: The Rhetoric of Accommodation**

Historically, conquest and the establishment of imperial rule were justified in terms of a grand objective and were often regarded as a mark of the king’s valour and virility. Justification of conquest in moral terms was not a novel strategy. Philip II of Spain desiring status quo in the neighbourhood, had declared, ‘I would very much like to justify my actions to the whole world and show that I do not lay claim to other states.’ He further asserted that ‘God is my witness that I have never made war to gain more kingdoms, but only to maintain them in the [Catholic] faith and in peace.’

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49 Ibid., p. 47.
Likewise, Mahmud of Ghazni attributed religious significance to his plunder of the subcontinent, whereas Babur claimed India to be the land of his ancestors. With the accession of Akbar, conquest was justified in terms of justice and good governance for the first time. His rule was portrayed as the manifestation of peace and harmony for his subjects.\textsuperscript{51} Conquest thus came to be seen as a means towards the establishment of a just system rather than an end in itself. In strategic terms, this implied the justification of the use of force as a means of accommodation. For instance, Akbar sought to justify Malwa’s invasion on grounds of righteousness. Malwa’s ruler Baz Bahadur was portrayed as tyrannical and unjust who engaged in ‘unlawful and vicious practices’. Nizam al-Din Ahmad, a minister and chronicler at Akbar’s court, justified the emperor’s conquest on the grounds that Baz Bahadur:

\[\text{[...]}\text{had no care of (sic) his kingdom. For this reason the arms of tyrants and oppressors had become long on faqirs and on the poor, and [...]the greater part of the people were stricken almost to death by the hand of his tyranny.}\textsuperscript{52}

The moral justification of the conquest couched in the rhetoric of righteous rule thus cast Akbar in the role of a liberator. It is important to note that the rhetoric at no point invoked religious principles to justify the invasion, but instead projected Akbar as the upholder of ‘secular’ universal virtues of justice.

The Chittor siege of 1567–1568 offers a study in contrast where the justification of the attack was cloaked in religious rhetoric. Chittor, the capital of the most powerful of Rajput principalities Mewar, was the largest and most formidable fortress in the subcontinent. Mewar had come to be the symbol of Rajput resistance to Mughal power and for this reason, the capture of Chittor held enormous political significance for Akbar. It also explains Akbar’s refusal to accept the personal submission of the Rana. The prolonged siege, which resulted in high Rajput casualties, finally ended in the capture of the fort. Angered by Rajput defiance, Akbar declared \textit{jihad} against Rana Udai Singh and the massacre that followed killed 30,000 people.\textsuperscript{53} The justification of the siege was laden with religious rhetoric contained in the \textit{Fatahnama} that Akbar issued following the conquest. As against the Malwa case where Akbar was portrayed as a

\textsuperscript{51} Mukhia, \textit{The Mughals of India}, p. 50.

\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in Chandra, \textit{Medieval India}, p. 103.

king moved by universal principles, the Chittor conquest projected him as a ruler who was implementing a religious sanction. Akbar was projected as being both the upholder of the universal order and the destroyer of infidels, an all encompassing image that he fostered through his ‘ideology of paternalism’.

‘The Ideology of Paternalism’

Akbar sought to bring all state policies in line with his grand strategy of accommodation, and accordingly his imperial ideology became the primary means in its pursuit. Inconsistencies and contradictions were ironed out so that every institution of the Mughal state apparatus became an extension and reflection of his vision. Given the eclectic nature of the Indian ruling elite and the massive military manpower it commanded, Akbar had to devise a strategy to co-opt and not exclude the regional powers, and this inclusive and universal strategy became the ‘ideology of paternalism’. Father Monserrate, a Jesuit priest who visited the Mughal court in 1580, observed of Akbar:

> It is hard to exaggerate how accessible he makes himself to all those who wish audience with him. For he creates an opportunity almost everyday for any of the common people or of the nobles to see him and to converse with him; and he endeavours to show himself pleasant-spoken and affable rather than severe toward all who come to speak with him. It is very remarkable how great an effect this courtesy and affability has in attaching to the minds of his subject.\(^ {54} \)

Fazl was well aware that he had to formulate a theory of sovereignty that at once set Akbar apart from his subjects, his predecessors and his contemporaries while at the same time sought to integrate all. In short, he had to devise a theory that informed his master’s mission and couched his military conquests in moral rhetoric. Fazl observes in the *Ain*:

> Just as spiritual leadership requires a regulated mind, capable of controlling covetousness and wrath, so does political leadership depend on an external order of things, on the regulation of the difference among men in rank, and the power of liberality.\(^ {55} \)

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Fazl carefully crafted Akbar’s image as the Universal Man along the lines of the Sufi thinker Ibn al-Arabi’s conception of the Perfect Man. Such a portrayal cast the emperor beyond the traditional role envisaged for the king in Islamic kingship. His elevation of Akbar to a distinct position as ‘the emanation of God’s light’ or the extension of the divine force approximates the status of the king within Hindu kingship. A shift away from the position of a Muslim king towards his Hindu counterpart is discernible in Fazl’s articulation of Akbar’s authority. Fazl’s universalism was not dichotomous in that it was not posited against an outside entity. A universal order did not envisage a relentless war against the infidels but instead sought the attainment of a harmonious balance within. Gommans notes that ‘[t]he most interesting aspect of Akbar’s sovereign cult was […] not the tendency to emphasise the exclusive position of the Mughals, but its almost all-inclusive capacity to incorporate all those willing to serve them’. This seamless quality of Akbar’s authority was in contradistinction to Philip II of Spain’s decision to institutionalise a clear dichotomy between the public and private domains. The nucleus of his administration comprised over 4,000 people, consisting of officials, staff and their accompanying families. The unwieldy number was a hindrance to mobility and compelled Philip to locate his government machinery in Madrid in 1561. His rather public and ostentatious court was in sharp contrast to his more informal reclusive retreats where he would retire to occasionally. The Velecian royal councillor Fadrique Furio Ceriol noted in 1559:

Every prince is made up, as it were, of two persons: the first, the natural person, is fashioned by the hands of nature and as such is given the same essence as other human beings. The other is a gift of fortune and the favour of heaven, created to govern and protect the public good, for which reason we call it the public person[…] Each and every prince may therefore be considered in two distinct ways: as a man and as a sovereign.

Apart from formulating his authority in holistic terms, Akbar also understood that the Mughal state could not be accommodationist and theocratic at the same time. Historically, Islamic power in South Asia has focused on the extension of territorial control rather than on intensification through conversion. The fact that Muslim populations were not concentrated around the central areas of Muslim control was indicative of the absence of state-run conversion programme under either the

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56 Gommans, Mughal Warfare, p. 56.
58 Ibid.
Sultanate rulers or the Mughals. Akbar realised the need to personalise and secularise his authority so as to appeal to his heterogeneous subjects. Note for instance how men were rewarded ‘non-Islamic symbols’ such as ‘the personal robes of the Emperor, turban jewels, swords, horses and decorated quivers, [but] never with Korans’. Although induction into the Mughal nobility required the assimilation of the court culture, it did not entail conversion to Islam, ‘a phenomenon whose parallel would have been inconceivable under the Habsburgs[…]and somewhat difficult under the Ottomans’.

The Mughal state was not a theocratic state on two critical counts. First, conversion was not a state policy. Conversion was ordered as a form of punishment to those guilty of serious crimes, whereby the emperor pardoned death penalty on the condition that the offender converted to Islam. Akbar made such an offer to Hemu whose brief reign over Delhi came to an end with his defeat at Panipat in 1556. Hemu’s decision to turn down Akbar’s offer cost him his life. Barring conversion under duress, the Mughal state did not systematically pursue a policy of proselytisation and non-Muslim officers seldom faced curbs on their religious freedom. Second, the Sharia was not the sole basis of jurisprudence in the Mughal state. The Sharia ruled in matters pertaining to criminal justice, whereas civil law cases were governed by the religious codes of respective communities. This tendency to resist the religious interpretation of state matters was reflected in Mughal historiography as well. In contrast to

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60 Interestingly, the *Ain* makes no direct reference to Islam, which is referred to as ‘Ahmadi kesh’ or the Mohammedan doctrine. The term, which Akbar invented, does not figure in any other Persian text, further emphasising the fact that the emperor had sought to distance himself and his authority from formalised conceptualisations of all religions. Athar Ali, ‘Akbar and Islam (1581–1605)’, in Milton Israel and N. K. Wagle, eds, *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honour of Professor Aziz Ahmad* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), p. 125; Stewart Gordon, *Marathas, Marauders and State Formation in Eighteenth Century India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 190.


the Sultanate period, the historians of the Mughal era did not attribute the shortcomings of non-Muslims to their religious disposition. For instance, a typical description of Hemu in his clash with Akbar was restricted to branding him as arrogant and haughty, character traits that had little to do with his status as a ‘non-believer’. Hardy writes that the notion of the Muslim ruler as the keeper of peace and stability within the system ‘[…]was embodied in the shari’a of Islam or, as in the work of Abu’l Fazl in Akbar’s reign, [embodied in] the ruler’s God-endowed perceptions of justice as an equilibrium between men of different God-given qualities, capacities and needs- and perhaps of beliefs also’.

Locating the use of force within the larger discourse on righteousness and peace was in keeping with Akbar’s image as the upholder of balance and harmony in society. Among the many measures that aided Akbar in broadening his social appeal, pursuing which he believed would be for the betterment of his people, was ‘the path of reason’. The subsequent section will look at why Akbar privileged the faculty of reason in his pursuit of peace and stability.

**The Path of Reason**

Akbar’s military campaigns were portrayed as the progressive realisation of the state of *Sulh-i kul* (absolute peace). In bearing greater affinity to the Sufi and Bhakti sects than to orthodox Islam or Hinduism, *Sulh-i kul* appealed to the faculty of reason over blind faith. Akbar asserted, ‘The pursuit of reason and the rejection of traditionalism are so brilliantly patent as to be above the need of argument.’ His recitation of the *khutbah* (sermon that is part of the weekly congregational prayer) in 1579, commonly seen as an assertion of Islamic sovereignty, must be seen in the larger context of his efforts to break away from the orthodoxies of the *ulema*.

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64 Ibid., pp. 201–2.


66 The *khutbah* also contained the term ‘Allahu Akbar’ which could be interpreted to mean either ‘God is Great’ or that ‘God is Akbar’. The duality was perhaps intentional, since it permitted the allegory of Akbar as God’s prophet, a metaphor that further distanced him from the *ulema*. 
of the declaration allowed Akbar greater independence in determining matters of religious jurisprudence (traditionally reserved for the Caliphs) than as an enforcer of the Sharia. Given that Akbar wished to be released from the encumbrance of heeding to the advice of the ulema which he found to be increasingly untenable and orthodox, his move to redefine his role in the khutbah reveals a new dimension of his religious policy. Indeed, this overtly religious initiative to break away from religious orthodoxy eventually became the basis for Akbar’s syncretic cult.67

Social strife signified the absence of Sulh-i kul, and was believed to be brought about by the blind imitation of practices. Accordingly, if peace and harmony were to be restored, retrograde practices and rituals had to be purged. Thus, convinced of the need for reform, Akbar prohibited sati, condemned child marriage and abolished the Jizya tax on non-Muslims, stressing that such social ills were contrary to reason. Clearly, reason was promoted as a universal attribute by Akbar. In a pluralistic setting, reason was to be the unifying force in society, and its pursuit alone could help the emperor achieve a harmonious social balance. The doctrine of Rahi aql (path of reason) sought to draw religious leaders from diverse faiths into a shared conversation on universal values by appealing to the faculty of reason. Fazl articulates the ideal state of being, in which the principle of reason prevails as the supreme arbiter of differences.

The inner and external conflicts should turn into amity, the thorn-bush of enmity and hostility into the garden of friendship and the sounds of reasoned arguments should come forth and an informed assemblage be arranged.68

Further emphasising the inclusive character of Sulh-i kul, Jahangir wrote:

Let the disciples never make their own time dark and disturbed by the hostility against any religion (millat) from amongst the religions; with men of all faiths, let them follow the path of Sulh-i Kul (Absolute Peace).69

Although the underlying spirit of Din-i Ilahi and Sulh-i kul were the same, namely the spiritual supremacy of the emperor and adherence to reason, the two served very different purposes. Din-i Ilahi was to be observed and followed by a select number of followers chosen by the emperor himself,

whereas *Sulh-i kul* served a larger purpose as the ideational dimension of his grand strategy. *Sulh-i kul* was the ideological extension of Akbar’s strategy of accommodation that saw conflict as a transient state of affairs and not a perpetual one. *Sulh-i kul*, under which differences were reconciled to achieve a dynamic state of harmony, was also a reflection of the prevailing intellectual milieu in which prominent Bhakti saints like Tulsi and Dadu propounded moderation in their writings.\(^{70}\) As the prevailing norm, *Sulh-i kul* came to inform imperial measures in all areas of royal administration.\(^{71}\)

By its very nature, accommodation implied limitations on the exercise of power. The challenge that lay before Fazl was that having created an aura of divinity around Akbar, limitations on his sovereignty could not be attributed to external causes. Since Akbar was projected as a divinely ordained emperor, the constraints on his power had to be intrinsic to his capacities rather than externally induced. The emperor’s responsibility to ensure harmony and enforce justice in society through paternal care and fair rule were inherently self-limiting in the exercise of his powers. Fazl’s writings are as much a celebration of loyalty as a virtue, as it is of Akbar’s divine sovereignty. The most virtuous of all are those who have unconditional loyalty to the emperor, whereas the less noble ones are those who seek to draw benefit from their loyal service. The ones who are disloyal and contemptuous of the emperor’s authority are the most condemned rebels who must be vanquished.\(^{72}\)

From Table 4.5, it is evident that Fazl’s gradation approximates most analyses of power dynamics. While co-operation through socialisation elicits absolute loyalty, interest-based co-operation is more tactical and prone to vacillation as there is a constant revaluation of gains and losses. Co-operation elicited through purely coercive means is what Fazl refers to as the ‘cleansing operation’ against the rebels. It is least virtuous to Fazl precisely because it is hardly a cost-effective means of keeping control, and hence the least desirable of all possibilities.

**Conclusion**

The case study points to the centrality of the ideational facet of hegemony, an aspect as significant as the material foundation upon which it is


\(^{72}\) Mukhia, *The Mughals of India*, p. 50.
erected. Enhanced Rajput participation in imperial affairs, albeit initially for instrumental reasons, brought about a discernible shift in their value orientations. It attests to the fact that socialisation performs a systemic function, namely that of order maintenance and thereby, is not entirely reducible to a materialist understanding of power. In the second case study on the Deccani powers, we shall see how the Mughals sought to maintain a fragile balance of power at the empire’s fringes. The functionality of norms in conditioning perceptions and regulating behaviour is once again brought to the fore, this time by its very absence. The Mughal bid to power in the Deccan, based primarily on a coercive strategy, was devoid of cultural appeal in any significant sense, a facet of Akbar’s grand strategy that we shall now turn to examine.

### Mughal Coercive Strategy: The Deccan Case Study

As we have seen, complementary value systems were instrumental in forging long-lasting ties of loyalty with the Rajputs who came to accept Mughal domination as legitimate. The process of socialisation, by capitalising on the compatibility of their value orientations, proved effective in pre-empting the resort to coercion. The prerequisite to socialisation, as the previous case study demonstrated, is participation in the hegemonic system which draws in subject actors through a complex web of interactions. Ikenberry and Kupchan rightly note that:

> through frequent participation in the institutions erected by the hegemon, elites in secondary states are exposed to and may eventually embrace the norms and value orientations that these institutions embody.\(^{73}\)

\(^{73}\) Ikenberry and Kupchan, ‘Socialization and Hegemonic Power’, p. 292.

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<tr>
<th>Power analyses in IR</th>
<th>Fazl’s categorisation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Socialisation and normative persuasion</td>
<td>Unconditional loyalty</td>
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</table>
The second case study on the Deccani states serves to illustrate the working of a coercive strategy within the broad rubric of accommodation. As the Mughal empire expanded, it steadily brought new territories within its fold in the 16th and 17th centuries. The outer reaches of the empire reached its limits on its western and eastern flanks by then. However, the empire’s southward march continued and the Deccan campaign was to consume much of the time and resources of the Mughal state till the 18th century. The southward shift in focus reveals a different set of dynamics in motion wherein the material aspect of Mughal hegemony was predominant and its ideational facet muted to relative insignificance. The Mughal–Deccan encounters did not proceed beyond the initial phase of attacks and retreats and thus, Mughal control whenever gained remained tentative. The distance factor was further compounded by an absence of cultural affinity between the Deccan Sultanates and the Mughals. By the parameters of Mughal hegemony already outlined, the states in the Deccan fell beyond the pale of the thick web of interactions that marked off the areas surrounding the imperial core. The Deccan states were located on the empire’s fringes, the contours of which were beginning to emerge from the consolidation process.

**Distance as a Variable in Mughal–Deccan Relations**

The Deccan is referred to in epics like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* as Dakshinapatha, commonly implying the land south of the river Narmada and the Satpura ranges. Khandesh, as the Tapti region in northern Deccan was known, marked the gateway to the rest of the Deccan peninsula. According to medieval Indian historian Ferishta, ‘Dakhan the son of Hind had three sons and the country of Dakhan was divided among them. Their names are Marath [Maharashtra], Kanhar [Karnataka] and Tilang [Andhra].’ Deccan history remains an understudied aspect of the Mughal empire, not least due to the lack of reliable sources on relations between the Mughals and the Deccan Sultanates. Fazl’s account remains by far the only extensive Mughal account of the Deccan campaigns. The period of greater Mughal engagement in the region is not sufficiently elaborated even in Deccan chronicles. Thus, the history of the Deccan has to be perforce pieced together from fragments in Persian, Deccani and Portuguese literature. The chronicling of Rajput history in contrast, is much richer in

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terms of historical accounts, and hence there is far more secondary material available on the Rajputs than on the Deccan powers. The case also marks a study in contrast to the Rajputs insofar as coercion dictated the terms of co-operation with the Mughals. This was largely on account of the lack of socialisation that had served to stabilise Mughal–Rajput relations. The primacy of location in the expansion process of the Mughal empire explains its spatial pattern. Schwartzberg notes that:

[...]many small and medium-sized states have survived over much of Indian history merely by virtue of their remoteness from the contemporary principal centers of political and military power. This is, of course, what accounts for the continuation of [the Deccan states of] Bijapur and Golkonda as independent entities well beyond the time when the Mughals attained pan-Indian status.⁷⁶

The pattern of marginalisation that Schwartzberg outlined is corroborated by Gommans’ observation on the areas covered by the imperial perambulations of the Mughals. The radius of approximately 1,200 km from the imperial capital that was covered by the mobile imperial camp roughly coincided with the regions from where pan-Indian and supra-regional powers had historically emerged in the subcontinent. The north-west region had historically been the seat of political power through the major historical periods. The south and the north-east which fell outside the pale of imperial socialisation under the Mughals tended to be areas that witnessed low levels of political activity in terms of the emergence of pan-Indian and supra-regional powers. The Mughal southward expansion began once the northern and north-western areas around the centre had been secured. Not surprisingly then, the Deccan located at its fringes saw more wars and battles than the pacified core.

The composition of the Mughal nobility also offers interesting insights to validate this proposition. A spatial overview of Mughal territories brings out the sizeable representation of core areas. The Rajputs constituted a sizeable chunk of the total number of mansabdars, whereas the Deccan states went largely under-represented even after they were brought under Mughal control. The Rajputs and other Hindus together made up over 22 per cent of the high ranking nobles within imperial service.⁷⁷ In contrast,

Map 4.2
The Deccan, 1565

no Marathas, known to have had a long and close association with the Deccan Sultanates, were inducted into the mansabdarī system between 1600 and 1630. This period coincided with the early decades of Mughal forays into the Deccan. The marginalisation of the Marathas from the imperial administration was indicative of their peripheral status within the empire. The fact that there was no convergence in their military ethos compounded the distance between the Mughals and the Marathas. The lack of normative persuasion made itself felt in the constant realignments of Mughal–Deccan power configuration. Such political fluidity was characteristic of a system wherein actor preferences altered constantly based on perceptions of shifting interests. Fluid alliances in the Deccan represented tactical responses to changes in the military balance of power. As a result, Mughal rule on the southern fringes remained tenuous and was constantly being negotiated. A brief history of the Deccan and its key players would contextualise the nature of Mughal forays in the region.

The Material Setting

Five Deccan states emerged from the ruins of the first Muslim state in Deccan history, the Bahmani kingdom. Established in the 14th century, the Bahmani kingdom ruled for over a century before it began to disintegrate under Sultan Muhammad Shah IV. The first to break away were the territories of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Berar in 1490, followed by Bidar and finally, Golconda in 1518. The fractured region was prone to instability and conflict with fluctuating allegiances and intrigues being the norm. Regional instability was further compounded by a collective awareness of their vulnerability to attack from the north. Within the Deccan, discernable patterns of role-playing emerge from the apparently chaotic political scenario. Bijapur and Ahmadnagar emerged as the key adversaries and the rest of the regional players were arranged around this particular dyad. While Golconda attempted to maintain a political balance between the two rivals, Bidar under Amir Barid sought to secure itself by playing off the two, earning the epithet of the ‘Fox of the Deccan’. The Portuguese, by dint of being the earliest Europeans to establish a base in India, also came to be an important player in the geopolitics of the Deccan during the 16th and 17th centuries. Their modus operandi to seize control

over key commercial hubs that lay along busy trading routes in the Indian Ocean enabled them to gain a foothold in the already functioning trade system.

Although Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda collectively wielded power that exceeded the resources of the erstwhile Bahmani kingdom, they could not bring to bear their combined strength on the aggressive Vijayanagara empire which was steadily making gains in the early 16th century. However, this was not to be the case in 1565 when the Deccan Sultanates presented a united front and managed to vanquish Vijayanagara at Talikota. The southward expansion of the Deccan Sultanates was a drawn out exercise that eventually sealed the fate of the Vijayanagara empire lying to the south. The defeat can be partially explained by events preceding the battle, and was itself to be the precursor to developments that were to radically redefine the political landscape of the Deccan in the years to come. The Vijayanagara empire was already a much weakened entity in the mid-16th century with the emergence of multiple power centres under well-entrenched provincial governors. The defeat of 1565 was in that sense not entirely unexpected, and it set in motion the gradual disintegration of the Vijayanagara state as Golconda and Bijapur repeatedly hived off territories under its control till well into the 17th century.80

The political economy of the South can explain significant dimensions of Deccan politics, particularly with regard to the role of the Portuguese who had made Goa their base in early 16th century. The commercial profile of some of the powerful states in the Deccan underwent a drastic makeover in the late 16th century. Golconda, for instance, moved away from merely remaining the militarily fortified town that it once was under the Bahmanid empire. Instead, it became a bustling city having strong links with ports that were part of the overseas trade network such as Masulipatnam. That economic relations in the Deccan cast a significant influence on the politics in the region was borne out of the fact that trading links with competing networks often arrayed powers against one another. Ties with Masulipatnam meant that Golconda had de facto become part of the anti-Portuguese league. This is so because Masulipatnam was among the ports that stayed away from the regulatory regime set up by the Portuguese, and hence it preferred to trade with towns outside this network such as Chittagong and Aceh. Relations between Bijapur and the Portuguese Estado da India were also not particularly cordial, evident

from Bijapur’s attack on Goa in early 1570s. However, the agreement that followed between the two in 1575 paved the way for a relatively stable phase in their relations. As a result, we see that Ibrahim Adil Shah II’s reign from 1580 for nearly half a century was an uneventful period in Bijapur’s equation with Goa. Despite facing very real prospects of economic rivalry from the Deccan Sultanates particularly Golconda, the Porugaluese Estado received repeated orders from its high command to broker peace in the region. The strategic objective behind the need for restraint, and in fact to play a proactive role in engineering a coalition of the Sultanates, was to prevent the Mughals from expanding further south at the turn of the 17th century. The foray of the Mughals into the distant Deccan did not help to stabilise the political climate in any significant way, and instead they found themselves entangled in the shifting alliances that characterised inter-state politics in the region.

**The Cultural Context**

The king in the Deccan was seen as the representative of God on earth and his coronation was loaded with religious significance. The religious leaders appointing the ruler played an instrumental role in settling succession disputes, and their support to the Sultan was considered invaluable in aiding him to gain legitimacy among contending factions and the masses. Usually, succession issues were determined along religious and racial lines, and outcomes based as such tended to be both stable and lasting. However, political transitions from one regime to another saw brief periods of fluidity when contending religious and racial identities vied for power and precipitated the downfall of an established order. An illustrative example would be the rebellion of the five Bahmani governors belonging to diverse backgrounds, paving the way for the downfall of the Bahmani kingdom and the establishment of the five successor states in the Deccan. Although the Deccani states were predominantly Islamic, their rulers often belonged to different religious dispositions. For instance, whereas the Bahmani kingdom Berar and Bidar were Sunni by disposition, the rulers of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golconda followed the Shia faith. The clerics cast considerable influence on the religious disposition of the Sultans, evident from the conversion of the Nizamshahi ruler Burhan

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81 Ibid., pp. 151, 160.
83 Ibid., p. 483.
from Sunni to Shia faith at the instance of theologian Shah Tahir. The Deccani states were ridden with factionalism, particularly between the Dakhni nobles who considered themselves as part of the indigenous population and the Afaqis who were regarded as immigrants to the courts of the Sultanates. The tensions were further compounded by the fact that the two factions were divided on the religious issue, with the Dakhni nobles following the Sunni sect and the Afaqis being of Shia disposition. However, the Deccani rulers were careful in observing the religious codes that laid down the prerogatives and duties of the king, irrespective of their religious persuasions. Texts such as the Quran and the Vedas were seen as sources of legitimacy and adherence to these assured the kings of popular support. The observance of the sacred was a common practice in the Deccan and is akin to such similar exercises that Mughal rulers carried out, albeit on a smaller scale. The Deccani states were structured on the lines of the institutions established by the Delhi Sultanate, although they came to develop strong ties with the Safavids of Persia. As George Michell and Mark Zebrowski put it, the Deccani rulers may have ‘perceived the Safavid state as the source of their own legitimacy and the Sunni Mughal empire as their enemy’.

The tug of West Asian culture cast a deep influence on the Deccani culture and set it off from the Islamic culture that developed in north India. Cultural affinities brought about by centuries of intermingling through merchants, saints and soldiers are reflected in the architectural marvels and artistic works of the Deccan. The contrasting cultural dispensations of the Mughal and Deccani courts are discernible in the realm of arts, a fact highlighted by Zebrowski.

Few Deccani paintings record historical events or realistically portray their subjects as Mughal art does. Nor was there much interest in the thrills of the hunt, court ceremonial or Hindu ritual, favourite Rajasthani themes.

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85 Mughal art drew on the influences of European style, evident from the painting of St. Matthew by Kesu Das in 1588 in which the subject and the motifs used are distinctly European. Indeed, European art became one of the significant benchmarks against which Mughal skills were gauged. Beach, *Mughal and Rajput Painting*, p. 55. For more on European influences on Mughal court culture, see Peter Burke, 'Renaissance Europe and the World', in Jonathan Woolfson, ed., *Palgrave Advances in Renaissance Historiography* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 59–63.
Instead, princely portraits predominate which aim to establish a gently lyrical atmosphere, often one of quiet abandon to the joys of love, music, poetry or just the perfume of a flower [...]. We are admitted into a private world of feeling [...] and rarely do we see an army on the march. Reflection and reverie triumph over dramatic action.  

Part of the influence also had to do with the ties that the Deccani dynasties claimed with West Asia, either on religious or ancestral grounds. The Adil Shahi dynasty of Bijapur traced familial ties to the Ottoman dynasty of Istanbul, whereas Golconda’s Qutb Shahis were descendants of Turkman princes who had fled Iran during the 15th century. Despite their avowed allegiance to the Sharia, the Deccani states were largely secular in practice. This is evident from the fact that non-Muslims not only filled the rank and file of the state administration, but also occupied important positions in the political system. Hindus were left free to practice their religion without state control. The brahmins received state favours in terms of appointments to high offices and as advisors on matters of astrological significance. The Sultans acknowledged the force and legitimacy of local customs and did not attempt to interfere in their observance by communities. In matters of civil law too, the state did not impose the Sharia on the Hindu populace who were free to observe the shastras. The state however intervened in the case of criminal law, the application of which saw little discrimination on religious grounds. The Sultan was also not seen to be above the laws laid down by the Sharia, and all Deccan rulers persevered to adhere to its tenets to the extent possible.

The Mughal Initiatives in the Deccan

Having consolidated his position in the north, Akbar turned his attention to the south in 1564. Strategically, the southward turn was only inevitable given the fact that Akbar was keen on securing access to the Gujarat ports as well as on countering the threat of an expanding Portuguese power. Mughal relations with the Portuguese come into sharper focus in the 1570s than before because of a host of reasons. Seizing control over the port city of Gujarat in 1573 meant that the Mughals for the first time had a coastal presence, which in turn meant that they had to negotiate with the Portuguese over terms of trade. The hajj ships also had to be ensured safe passage, for which obtaining the cartaz (license for naval trade) issued by the Portuguese was essential for the Mughals. The Portuguese of course

87 Sherwani, History of Medieval Deccan, pp. 490–93.
had a vested interest in maximising gains from such arrangements. These push factors compelled the two powers to enter into negotiations with each other, a process that was fraught with hostility and friction. The absence of a permanent diplomatic presence in each other’s capitals did not help matters much, as far as Mughal–Portuguese relations were concerned.\textsuperscript{88}

The Mughals like the Portuguese were keen observers of developments in the Deccan. The earliest Mughal expeditions to the southern states were not military operations. Akbar sent diplomatic envoys that reached Khandesh, Ahmadnagar, Hyderabad and Bijapur in 1591, the last mission supposed to return with a reiteration of support that Ali Adil Shah had pledged towards the end of his reign. The diplomatic missions returned two years later with rejections from all courts. Of all the Deccan powers, Ahmadnagar proved to be the most vulnerable due to internal factionalism.\textsuperscript{89} Intervening in the political dispute in Ahmadnagar, the Mughals extended their support to Burhan and inducted him as a \textit{mansabdar} into the nobility. With Burhan assuming the title of Burhan Nizam Shah II in 1591, he became increasingly assertive in Deccan affairs, a development that Akbar did not particularly relish. Burhan’s death in 1595 left Ahmadnagar considerably weakened, thereby brightening Mughal prospects in Deccan. The Mughals attacked Ahmadnagar, prompting Bijapur and Golconda to extend their support to the besieged state. The battle of Sonepat took place in 1597 in which despite initial reversals, the Mughal forces managed to beat back the combined forces of the three Deccan powers. The outcome of the battle at Sonepat reaffirmed in a way the fate of Deccan to remain a fragmented entity. Bijapur was punished by the Mughals for coming to the aid of Ahmadnagar, as was Golconda. The ensuing phase of diplomatic parleys between Bijapur and the Mughal state effectively ended the prospect of a coalition of the Sultanates rising challenging Akbar’s advances in the Deccan. Following the annexation of Ahmadnagar in 1600, Golconda was forced to submit to Mughal supremacy in 1636 and consequently Sunni faith was declared as the state religion. The dynastic rule of the Qutb Shahis over Golconda eventually came to an end with the capture and death of Abul Hasan in 1687.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{88} K. Subrahmanyam, \textit{Shedding Shibboleths: India’s Evolving Strategic Outlook} (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2005), p. 79.


\textsuperscript{90} Michell and Zebrowski, \textit{Architecture and Art of the Deccan Sultanates}, p. 18.
Ibrahim Adil Shah, the ruler of Bijapur, on his part sought reconciliation with the Mughals by offering his daughter in a marital alliance to Prince Daniyal. Akbar accepted the proposal in 1604, hoping to replicate his successful Rajput strategy with the Deccan states. However, the lack of other institutionalised means of enculturation led to the failure of these isolated cases of co-operative ventures. This was compounded by Daniyal’s untimely death that terminated the nascent marital alliance with Bijapur.

Thus, it was no surprise that the Mughals never got an opportunity to consolidate their position in Deccan. The Deccan campaign was, as Sanjay Subrahmanya terms it, the ‘true war of attrition’ that tested the limits of Mughal accommodation. The sheer distance of the region from the centre had compelled Akbar to delay sending any mission there, although he had been considering the idea since 1577. Militarily, these campaigns posed huge logistical challenges, and any attempt to draw the states into the empire’s fold would have meant stretching the supply lines too far.

**The Ideational Aspect of Mughal–Deccan Relations**

The material setting was further compounded by the absence of cultural affinity between the Mughals and the Sultanate kingdoms. The Deccan remained marginalised from the imperial processes of socialisation by several key indicators. For instance, the forays of the imperial camp did not extend to the outer reaches of the empire. The power projection capabilities of the Mughal state were confined to areas around the centre and hence, a potent mode of display of the grandeur and might of the empire could not be employed in the distant Deccan. Also, the Mughal state did not offer lucrative positions within its mansabdar system to the nobility from the Deccan. Their low representation in the Mughal nobility is a telling reminder of the extent to which the marginalisation of the Deccan was institutionalised within the Mughal state. Without the promise of interest sharing, the Deccan officials had no stakes in a system that did not cultivate and safeguard their aspirations. As the Rajput case demonstrates, the safeguarding of interests was the preliminary stage in the development of ties of loyalty. It is evident that Mughal interaction with the Deccan states did not develop beyond the level of tactical engagement. Excluded from the system in every sense, they failed to see a convergence of their interests

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with those of the Mughals. The outcome was that the two parties dealt with each other as per the dictates and contingencies of time. An instance of such vacillations would be Burhan’s appeal to the Mughals to support his claim to the Nizamshahi throne. Despite Akbar’s intervention which enabled him to assume power, Burhan upon return in 1591 sought to consolidate his position with the help of the neighbouring kingdom of Khandesh. The displeasure of the Mughals at this move is evident in Fazl’s observation that Burhan upon taking over Ahmadnagar:

[...] should have increased his devotion and gratitude, and been an example of obedience to other rulers in that quarter. The wine of success robbed him of his senses, and he forgot the varied favours he had received from the Shahinshah. In his evil fortune he set himself to oppress the weak, and considered that his profit consisted in the injury of others.  

The rhetoric of conquest was not altogether absent from the chronicling of Akbar’s Deccan operations, as Fazl justified the Mughal invasion of Ahmadnagar in terms of the pursuit of higher objectives. He wrote that the ‘[...] sole idea of Shahinshah was to clear the territory of Ahmadnagar of the weeds and rubbish of rebellion, and then to prevail over Bijapur, Golkonda and Bidar’. Despite the moral justification behind the military campaigns, Mughal uncertainty over control of the Deccan continued even after its eventual annexation to the empire. The tenuous nature of Mughal rule in the region highlights the critical role norms play in ensuring stability and predictability in political relationships. The Mughal empire presents a classic example of a state that was hesitant to reformulate an equation that had worked successfully with ‘the geographically, ethnically and linguistically adjacent Rajputs’. The costs of this inflexibility are summed up by Gordon:

Clinging to this single [Rajput] ethos of what constituted a correct cavalryman, horse, battle, method of entre’, pay and reward, the Mughals failed completely to manipulate or even see the symbols, actions, and attitudes which might have generated loyalty and made the whole Deccan operation far less costly.  

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94 Ibid., p. 183.
Given the lack of cultural appeal and engagement at the level of popular discourses and belief systems, the Mughal state remained a distant and alien entity with which the kingdoms in the Deccan failed to identify. A conjunction of both material and ideational factors thus explains the costly and relatively ineffective campaigns that the Mughals had to wage in the region.

**Conclusion**

The contrasting case studies demonstrate the centrality of norms in facilitating and impeding a dialogue between two actors. Complementarities in belief systems created the edifice for a possible engagement between the participants, the terms and ‘language’ of which are mutually comprehensible and familiar. The Rajput case study represents an example of a high degree of convergence of interests and values of actors. The Mughals were keen on tapping the vast military resource base of the Rajputs and absorbing the local elite into their administrative system. For the Rajputs, the opportunity meant holding high lucrative positions that would further enhance their status among the clans. These relations were further cemented by the affinity in their belief systems that made the Rajputs receptive to Mughal hegemonic norms. Akbar’s accent on moderation, paternalism and his willingness to accommodate a diversity of views played no small part in congealing an understanding between the two sides. The Rajput notion of honourable service by evoking qualities such as loyalty enabled the equation to evolve beyond an instrumentalist alliance. The ‘thick’ web of interaction that characterised Mughal–Rajput relations was conspicuous by its absence in the case of the Deccan powers. Neither did they identify with the hegemonic norms of the Mughals nor did they regard them as their legitimate rulers even when forced to submit. The result was an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust that made relations between the powers vulnerable to fluctuations in the alliance system. The case studies go on to highlight the power of norms and the function socialisation plays in system maintenance. They also underline the need to explore the latent aspects of power, which remain an understudied area in international politics.
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New Directions in International Relations

This study has perhaps thrown up more questions than answers, partly because it seeks to locate itself in the grey zone that lies between the supposedly polar opposites: the material and the ideational, the general and the particular, theory and history. While this may offer a promising area for creative future research, it is a sombre reminder of themes little researched upon. Research that falls in the interstices of theories and disciplines does not necessarily convey ambiguity of position, as is often the charge. Rather, the grey zone is the zone of interdisciplinarity.

The study has drawn from different disciplines and theories in an attempt to address the lacunae of ahistoricism, Eurocentrism and presentism within International Relations (IR). It has found that an admixture of theories has better explanatory power on how different societies negotiate power. For instance, while realism can explain the conditions under which a particular actor assumes power, constructivism helps explain how identity formation is integral to the dynamics of power through mutual engagement between actors. Likewise, disciplines such as sociology and philosophy alert us to the need to recognise the particularities of history operating beneath the massive cycles of power dynamics. Despite the prospect of being enriched by these cross-disciplinary streams, IR and history have failed to bridge the yawning divide. Unless theory begins to accommodate the element of contingency, hybrid research projects would continue to be regarded as studies in ambiguity.

This chapter is divided into three broad sections, each of which presents the findings of this study along with some of its key research foci. The first section, following a brief encapsulation of the study, makes the case for rethinking cultural representations on India. It will also look at the understudied and enormous transformative potential of soft power, especially in moulding identities and self-perceptions within particular cultural contexts. The second section makes a theoretical pitch for the need to initiate conversations among different disciplines, an intellectual exercise which IR is likely to significantly gain from. It will debate the prospects for a dialogue that is mindful of historical experiences, cultural
The Study in Brief

This investigation has looked at the ‘internal’ politics of geography: the manner in which the inner contours of polities shaped their response strategies and how strategic thinking evolved under conditions of endemic conflict, compelling actors to institutionalise practices that enhanced stability in the system. This aspect of geopolitics is equally, and perhaps more important, than the oft examined ‘external’ facet in understanding the historical processes through which strategic practice developed in India. Seen from this perspective, attempting to work backwards from the territorial consciousness that developed under the modern Indian state is fallacious, just as the exercise at extending ancient and medieval strategic traditions to the contemporary context would be unviable. As the study demonstrates, the social context in which the Mughals came to power was one in which a monopoly over force was impossible to achieve, much less maintain. The military balance of power largely determined the type of grand strategy that a ruler opted for and set the tone for policies at the highest level. In the case of the Mughals, high levels of social militarisation prompted Akbar to adopt an accommodationist grand strategy.\(^1\) The fairly even distribution of retaliatory power meant that the Mughals could ill-afford to resort to sustained coercion against their adversaries. However, beyond establishing the correlation between the existing balance of power and the chosen grand strategy, a hard-nosed realist interpretation is not very helpful in explaining the soft power of the Mughal state.

One of the key arguments that this study makes is that socialisation plays a key systemic function, in that norms are constitutive of identities and hence cast a decisive influence on behaviour. The assertion is mindful of the fact that the pull of soft power was of course mediated by the distance factor in the medieval period. In Mughal India, the Rajput principalities were among the areas comprising the core region around the political centre that came to experience Akbar’s accommodationist policies. This was in contrast to the peripheral kingdoms of the Deccan which were marginalised from these co-optive strategies. The core areas tended to experience lesser incidence of warfare as a means of dispute settlement.

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with the imperial power than the peripheral areas, which saw a greater occurrence of wars. The distance factor thus produced two strategic variations of an accommodationist grand strategy, namely socialisation and coercion. Socialisation required the hegemon to make his authority identifiable to his allies through a complex blend of material and ideational factors, thereby eliciting their willing co-operation. As a long-term strategy, it entailed an array of tactics that pre-empted the resort to force and rendered relations more stable. By contrast, a coercive strategy was far more volatile, implying the issuance of threats and frequent military campaigns. While coercion as a strategy worked within the logic of immediacy and short-term goals, it proved expensive and unsustainable in the long run.

As the first case study demonstrates, stability in Mughal–Rajput relations was facilitated to a great extent by the complimentary belief systems and military ethos that the Mughals and the Rajputs shared. The Rajput tradition of honourable service to the master as the mark of loyalty served Mughal interests well. Rajput princes were offered high offices that made them participants in governance, and their regular presence at the Mughal court brought their domestic issues to the attention of the emperor who took keen interest in their internal politics of succession. Moreover, Akbar maintained regular contact with the rulers of Rajput principalities through the perambulations of the mobile imperial capital.

The second case study on the five Deccani kingdoms illustrates the working of a coercive strategy within the broad rubric of accommodation. It reveals a different set of dynamics in motion, wherein the material dimension of Mughal power was more pronounced than the ideational aspect. Unlike the Rajputs, the Deccani kingdoms based their co-operation with the Mughal state on a shifting calculus of interests rather than on perceptions of legitimate dominance. The practices through which the Mughal emperor exercised power over the Rajputs were singularly absent in the Mughal dealings with the states in the Deccan. Measures to establish control at the periphery were restricted to bargaining tactics and did not graduate to more advanced levels of control that enculturation entailed. The lack of socialisation, evident in the limits of power projection and lucrative employment, is evident in the political fluidity and constant realignments of power equations that marked Mughal–Deccan relations.

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Contextualising the Case Study

Although the Mughal period is not an era that is taken to be typically representative of Indian history, it does throw up some interesting reflections of the country’s traditions of kingship and authority. We can glean certain broad conclusions from the specificities of the two case studies of Akbar’s grand strategy undertaken here.

So what lessons does the Mughal case study offer for India’s strategic practice? Above all, Akbar’s strategy reflected the overriding compulsion to indigenise his power: its sources, its ostensible representations and its actual exercise. His realisation that perceptions of legitimacy required him to ‘go native’ as it were in many overt ways was shared by many ambitious rulers in the past. Akbar consciously fashioned his image on the lines of the traditional Hindu king. This included deference to the all-important notion of ‘balance’ personified by the Hindu king, thereby locating the institution of kingship firmly within society rather than above it. The position of the king was a paradoxical one; while his intrinsic divinity was recognised, it was at the same time tempered by the spiritual domain of the priest.\(^4\) This complex status of the king continued into the medieval era without radical changes. We have seen how Akbar’s image was a careful replication of the medieval Hindu king whose vital function entailed protecting the realm of norms and beliefs. The association of his persona with the sun as the source of light, his daily appearances for the benefit of the gathered public and his representation as a paternal figure and a spiritual guide to his people were all initiatives that went on to indigenise his authority according to existing traditions.

Furthermore, his accommodation reflected the syncretic Indian culture which did not delimit communities on either racial or religious grounds. It was only during the colonial period that delimitation and exclusion became the basis of India’s identity when the search for the country’s untainted essence commenced.\(^5\) For Akbar, expansion and consolidation in a territory that was politically fragmented into kingdoms and ruled by locally entrenched elites necessarily entailed a degree of accommodation. Although some of Akbar’s conciliatory tactics were in line with the policies

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his predecessors had pursued, his personal interest and curiosity in other religions and cultural practices played no small role in fashioning the nature and scope of his policies of accommodation.

**Culture as a Verb**: Rethinking Cultural Representations on India

It is imperative to understand that when it comes to formulating cultural explanations of state behaviour, culture and history go together. Culture studies on India have tended to reiterate standard orientalist caricatures. Although certain culturalists like Tanham and Rosen appear to base their claims on extensive historical references, this recourse to history has been both selective and anecdotal. This instrumental view of history takes the contemporary connotation of concepts back in time to demonstrate their resilience. It requires the retrospective positioning of historical events and occurrences in a manner that conveys a sense of continuity with the present. This assumption undergirds Waltz’s claim that the ‘texture of international politics remains highly constant [throughout history], patterns recur and events repeat themselves endlessly’. Seen thus, history is reduced to being a reiteration of what already existed, and an inevitable path to the present in which the cultural landscape reveals itself with unparalleled clarity. Culture thus moves out of the ambit of history; it does not owe its existence to any particular historical antecedent predating and in that sense, existing outside history itself. Such a view assumes that culture maintains its pristine form, untarnished by countless messy historical occurrences.

More often than not, culture is assumed to be located in certain characteristics that are believed to have withstood alien influences brought in by invading armies. It thus transmutes into an independent, unassailable entity that is indestructible by external forces. Such a theoretical position presumes the existence of an indigenous people who become the living repositories of their distinct cultural heritage. The anti-essentialists offer an alternative reading of culture that stresses on the ‘processes’ of identity formation than on a static identity itself. Reeves emphasises the

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need to move ‘beyond the notion that there is a place and obvious space for everything and it can all be bottled, pickled, canned and put on a shelf forever marked “culture”’. Hence, the abiding ‘human focus’ of culturalists — both in the articulation of culture by notable personalities in the past, and its presence as the ‘mind-set’ aiding and conditioning its people — is hardly surprising. For this very reason, studies on post-colonial societies have to necessarily be overtly cultural to acknowledge and confront such tropes. And they must also be genuinely historical, since to hollow out history from such studies (as many self-confessed culturalists often do) is to hollow out culture itself. Katzenstein rightly observed that culture must not be viewed as ‘a child of deep continuities in history’, but the focus instead should be on the ‘political processes by which norms are contested and contingent, politically made and unmade in history’. Culture here signifies not the essentialist frames of reference that become its ‘markers’, but the shifting norms and belief systems that inform identities in different time frames.

Before assessing what Indian history and culture have together thrown up by way of possible leads, it is necessary to begin with what India’s strategic inclination has not been. This pertains to a set of colonial images that have endured past their time and carry with them enormous strategic significance. These cultural images of India, well-entrenched as they are in the popular psyche and duly reproduced in academic writings, need to be critically analysed: their colonial lineage, the motivations behind their formulation and their influence on subsequent cultural theorisations. What makes these tropes of special interest to us is the manner in which they were elaborately constructed to be seen as authentic representations of reality. The power of these imageries is evident in the way Indians came

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to see themselves through such representations, believing themselves to be culturally incapable of strategising. Importantly, Indians came to believe in a reality that did not exist prior to or independent of the colonial portrayals. When knowledge is constructed in a manner that affects the construction of social reality itself (which is what reflexivity is all about), the motifs become the naturalised truth. Social reality then does not exist independent of its representations, and the subtle transformation of stylised images into actuality is complete. Thus, any attempt at an alternative approach must begin with the onerous task of dismantling these obvious givens. Although this is by no means a novel exercise, carried out as it has been with great deal of deftness and sensitivity within the subaltern and postcolonial literature, it is yet to be undertaken within IR. This disconnect reflects the innate resistance within IR to open itself up to new research orientations. Constructivism, which seeks to problematise the status quo by focussing on the reflexive loops between knowledge and social reality, creates an opening that is conducive to such a critical enquiry.

Having established the colonial constructions as an instance of reflexivity, we can return to the task of negations we had started with. One of the widely prevalent claims on India put forward by strategic culturalists pertains to caste as a broad template informing its strategic outlook. Scholars like Tanham, Rosen and Latham have resorted to the caste argument to make the case that India has an essentially hierarchical view of IR. It is further argued that the caste system was responsible to a great extent for a fractured Indian society that was intrinsically too weak to defend itself against foreign invasions. The trouble with a casteist interpretation is that caste as an inflexible institution is taken to be the representative trope of Indian society, which itself is driven by the search for the ‘pure’ quintessential Indian culture. To locate the essence of India in the caste structure is to render a reductionist and ahistorical reading of Indian culture, a tendency that culturalists in particular need to guard against.


The other prominent strain of argument discernible in many of the notable works on India’s strategic culture concerns its idealist, other-worldly orientation. Culturalists argue that Indian philosophy reposes faith in the pre-determined course of fate which human agency can do little to alter. The inability to influence the course of their own lives thus prompts Indians to turn to ‘other-worldly’ pursuits such as meditation and religiosity, away from the mundane material concerns of this world. This particular argument traceable to colonial literature is flawed for its distorted reading of Indian philosophy, which in fact lays considerable stress on adherence to individual duties and responsibilities.\(^{14}\) Theories on the immutability of caste as a collective identity and the Indian sense of cyclical time that was seen to impede purposeful individual action and rational judgement were among the caricatures that contributed to the image of a passive Indian lacking agency.

**Discerning India’s Strategic Traditions: Culture Meets History**

The rationale behind any study is to go beyond negations and suggest a different approach. Indeed, repudiations are employed in the process of building a case, which in turn renders the entire exercise of negation meaningful. That said, it would be appropriate at this juncture to suggest an alternative reading of India’s strategic practice. The existing historical research material does not point in the direction of a single Indian strategic culture that unfolded with logical coherence over time. A more suitable and relatively flexible approach would be instead to look at broad strategic traditions that reflected and informed inter-state relations in pre-colonial India.

A long view of a country’s strategic past reveals that certain traditions were formulated on the manner in which political space was to be organised, controlled and defended. These traditions are best seen as successful and optimal responses to the challenges to state power prevalent at a particular time. In Indian strategic thought, the realist tradition that focussed on the calculated acquisition and exercise of power is juxtaposed with the moralist tradition, which stressed on the ethical dimensions of power such as peace and justice.\(^{15}\) The two traditions trace their lineage to

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two conflicting notions of the state that are expounded in classical texts. The nitishastra texts conceive of the state as a managerial, unitary and bureaucratised entity capable of attaining power (artha). Kautilya’s ‘circle of kings’ was one such response, given the fractured political environment he wrote in. A response strategy at variance with Kautilya’s calculative king focussed on the just ruler whose primary role was to maintain the rule of dharma on which his society was based. In this alternative smriti conception, the basis of kingship is primarily ethical and religious (dharma) supported by a network of personal relationships. The two contending philosophical strains are discernible in the epics and texts down the ages, although the extent to which each succeeded in influencing the strategic practice of kings is a matter that has already been analysed in this study. However, what can be stated in unambiguous terms is that Indians down history have not only known how to strategise but have also negotiated and mediated security problems in diverse ways.

The broad contours of Akbar’s grand strategy bear affinity to the core principles of the moralist tradition, and there are several reasons for this categorisation. For one, accommodation is based on a non-zero sum view of security, implying that the security of the state does not necessitate the extermination of the enemy. By differentiating between the enemy and the conflict situation, the policy of accommodation allows greater scope for negotiations, making the prospects for an impasse less likely. Furthermore, the moralist tradition places a high premium on ethical and moral concerns which eventually inform the conduct of war. This abiding concern with the calibrated use of force and with the ethical dimensions of war making is discernible in Akbar’s conduct with both the Rajputs and the Deccan Sultanates. The compelling preoccupation with the moral dimension, which placed a restraint on the use of unethical and insidious tactics to achieve war objectives, ensured the calibrated use of force and served to contain the escalation of conflict. Although the resort to war was exercised after co-option had failed, remedial conciliatory measures were quickly resorted to once the outcome of the war was settled.

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The two traditions were in a way responding to the prevailing political climate in ancient India. Political fragmentation was the norm during the ancient and medieval periods, but this however did not imply political chaos as is commonly assumed. Indeed, although ancient India was fragmented into multiple kingdoms, the political landscape formed a chequered board on which Kautilya based his well developed network of alternating relations of alliance and enmity. Sovereignty in India was a nebulous concept that did not entail the clear demarcation of the king’s political realm. Since theoretically the authority of the king was universal (given that he was seen as the microcosm of the entire cosmos), making a distinction between the internal and the external domains was self-limiting. The logic of the all-encompassing authority of the king extended to the use of force as well. A dualistic understanding of the use of force (of seeing internal violence as sedition and external force as war) was likewise absent in Indian theorisations. Thus, the strategies employed in war against external enemies were similar to those against internal opponents.\textsuperscript{18}

As far as the charge that India lacked traditions of strategising is concerned, is it inconceivable for a country with multiple kingdoms to devise multiple means of vanquishing its opponents? At any given historical moment, the Indian subcontinent consisted of a number of local, regional and pan-Indian empires varying in scale and strength. It was but natural that each responded to military challenges in ways that suited its conditions and capacities best. Moreover, disruptions through invasions and historic battles were not unique to India, and every country claiming a coherent strategic tradition has undergone periods of political uncertainty and chaos. To search for eternally valid rules of strategy continuing down history is to commit the fundamental fallacy of treating history as the preserve of a ‘pure’ and unassailable culture. Dipankar Gupta cautions that:

\[\text{\ldots} \text{academics cannot imitate the mode of discourse prevalent in popular construction of reality, if sociology and anthropology are to act as ‘levellers’ and as humanizing disciplines. Aimless studies of culture not only sediment around typifications which divide humanity in the popular consciousness, but often even substantiate them.}\textsuperscript{19}\]

\textsuperscript{18} Brekke, ‘Between Prudence and Heroism’, pp. 120–21.
If the cultural turn in IR has persisted with the reiterations of stereotypical images of 18th and 19th century scholarship on India, then culture studies has taken a turn for the worse indeed.

Culture transmutes and transforms in every age. To assume that a single culture operated for the whole of India and that there existed no tradition of strategic thinking is a dangerous proposition. A tradition that suited the imperatives of a particular time period did not appear appropriate in another, causing it to recede behind a more astute strategy. The interplay of these response strategies is rooted in culture insofar as the language and the metaphors employed belonged to a particular cultural milieu. The cultural tropes and practices resorted to for the legitimisation of power are resonant of a certain way of life unique to that societal context alone. The nature and profile of that society itself may change over time, and so would the terms in which power is conceived of and exercised. History, in that sense, permits us to conceptualise culture in dynamic terms. One can put forward a set of tentative assumptions on how culture may have impacted strategic thinking in India. It gradually gave rise to a consciousness of the antiquity of the country, and this awareness was reflected in myriad ways in the writings of different ages. For instance, rulers through history routinely exalted the greatness of this land, the conquest of which was seen as a feat of the mighty. It has variously been described as the land of plenty inhabited by people with pleasing countenance. The appeal had a lot to do with the fertile plains in the north and the trade routes that India straddled. But the association of the subcontinent with significance, enormity and achievement was an abiding subject of interest for writers in ancient, medieval and colonial India. The consciousness assumed patriotic dimensions under the nationalists who took recourse to history to demonstrate their pride and loyalty for the country. One of the most popular motifs of that time was the ‘Golden Age’ under the Gupta dynasty, representing the best and the finest of Hindu rule. This flavour of national pride also surfaced in the writings of Gandhi and Nehru who attributed India’s greatness to its ancient civilisation, resilience and the spread of its culture to other lands.

A notable attribute of India’s philosophical literature (taken to be the mainstay of its culture by strategic culturalists) is the marked paucity of

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treatises devoted to military affairs. If a researcher were to embark upon a search for historical military texts, she would come upon few other than the Arthashastra. However, a more rigorous search would yield a richer repertoire in the extant epics and Vedic texts that contain incisive references to military and political affairs, strategising and war making. That the bulk of such material is couched in ostensibly religious and sacred literature perhaps indicates a self-conscious desire to define security in holistic terms. This was particularly the case with the moralist tradition rather than with the realist strand, which tended to produce treatises such as the Arthashastra that dealt more directly with state security. Although the identification of a distinct strategic culture may be difficult in India’s case, its underlying emphasis on firmly locating the state within the larger social milieu is instructive. Certain key elements of India’s strategic practice that have resurfaced time and again are discernible.

**Key Elements of India’s Strategic Practice**

The prevalence of certain enduring political and social conditions has thrown up a set of identifiable characteristics of Indian strategic practice. These elements are by no means patently Indian and absent from the cultural histories of other countries, quite simply because cultures grow through the co-mingling of influences than in glorious isolation. That said, two key defining features went on to shape India’s strategic practice, namely political fragmentation and the social context of power.

**Political Fragmentation**

Political fragmentation was an enduring feature that we encounter in ancient and medieval India despite the existence of large empires in history. Small kingdoms were local strongholds of power that were dominated by the landed elite and backed by indigenously recruited military force. This meant that dislodging local rulers would have entailed disturbing the existing agrarian structure and subduing the growing military labour market. These were seen by rulers keen on expansion as ventures too costly and risky to be undertaken. As a result, we see the establishment of empires through the subjugation of regional kingdoms that mostly predated and existed alongside the larger political entities. The necessity of tackling numerous, dispersed and well-entrenched adversaries had a profound influence

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on the evolution of strategic traditions in India. Both the realist and moralist traditions wrestled with multiple-actor scenarios that fashioned multifaceted response strategies. Although both differed in terms of the goals that the state was expected to pursue and the means it was to adopt in their pursuit, the two traditions advocated a calibrated use of force. Force was to be a measure of last resort exercised only after all other options had been exhausted. Thus, it is not surprising that references to the use of brute force at the outset of an adversarial situation are rare in ancient Indian texts belonging to both schools. The Kautilyan emphasis on alliance-building through the mandala theory rather than a total reliance on indigenous military capability also reflected the preference for collaborative strategies. Ancient India as a conglomeration of many warring kingdoms presented an ambitious ruler with a political scenario that could potentially dissipate his resources and energies through constant war-making. The most efficient response strategy emphasised accommodation and alliance building. Assimilation was another strategy that found favour although the mode employed varied in each era. For instance, the caste system is regarded as a means through which outsiders were initially absorbed into Indian society. However, as our case study suggests, assimilation under Akbar had less to do with the caste system than with the overlay of a secular identity revolving around the emperor above other primary identities.

**The Social Context of Power**

The second defining reality that shaped strategic choices was the Indian notion of power. Power was not traditionally conceived in purely political terms but was inextricably linked to ritual authority. The king was not only the head of the temporal realm, but was also seen as the microcosmic embodiment of all elements of the universe. His position was at once circumscribed and sacred, and thus the location of the Indian state within society was far more complex than that of its European counterpart. This complexity yielded a commensurate emphasis on the material and the ideational dimensions of power by both strategic traditions. Thus, we find Kautilya cautioning his king against neglecting the power of symbolism that was recognised and acknowledged by his subjects. Such a layered understanding of power also meant that force was seen as one of the many means available to a ruler. This served to nudge rulers into exploring

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moderation in conflicts as a common strategy. Issues of security remained recessed within broader issues of stability and good life, and often implied that these were couched in acceptable terms. For instance, the notion of balance, whether personified in the king or implemented as a calibrated response to a conflict situation, frequently came to the fore in Indian politics. Although the modern Indian state conceives of its security in primarily militaristic terms, its emphasis on rhetoric and lofty ideals echoes the compelling need to seek a social and ethical justification of security.

Indian grand strategies of any hue, whether accommodationist, offensive or defensive, sought to undergird the notion of security within the larger normative framework of good life, harmony and stability. Importantly, the ethical underpinning of security resonated well with the image of the king as the keeper of societal values and the balancer of conflicting forces. At the operational level, the wide array of strategies at the disposal of the state was logical, given the diverse and diffuse nature of threats to its security. While none of the prescribed measures were in any way uniquely Indian, a taxonomy that prioritised negotiation, compromise and sedition over the resort to force has endured as an abiding feature of India’s strategic practice. This is not to tow the much-favoured culturalist line of argument that Indians are culturally programmed to exhaust options of peaceable co-existence. The claim that political fragmentation was a regressive condition in India that led to chaos can be traced to the normative appeal of the modern state for its absolute control over its territory. Fragmented territories with fungible boundaries were the prevalent norm in the ancient and medieval periods, and were hardly unique to India. The strategic traditions directed the king to vanquish and not annihilate his enemies, quite simply because there were too many to engage with in futile and costly endeavours. Leaving the domain of the vanquished ruler undisturbed in return for his submission was an eminently desirable political arrangement. Thus, we see the familiar picture of the king withdrawing to rule from his designated capital after extracting the assurance of recognition and submission from the local ruler. The modus operandi was in no way idealistic and politically naïve; just very practical and well-suited to the conditions that ambitious kings had to deal with.

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25 Inden, Text and Practice, pp. 132–33.
This study will probably leave many questions unanswered, particularly those pertaining to the existing status of the strategic traditions mentioned above. Tracing traditions across eras is no less hazardous than delineating the essential elements of a strategic culture down history. Traditions last because the conditions supporting them do; they change or recede when those conditions are radically transformed. The dramatic transformation in India’s case came with the advent of colonialism that, barring the brief period of lingering influences following the transfer of power, marked the sundering of existing power relations among the indigenous elite. Technological advancements coupled with the colonial overlay redefined the whole notion of the empire and the manner in which it came to be administered.\textsuperscript{27} The empire was now more organised and elaborate than its ancient and medieval manifestations, and increasing regularisation in the functioning of the state apparatus implied that projecting power over distances was no longer the challenge it had been in the past.

The mandate of this study does not extend to looking at how distance has been managed better since the medieval ages and its impact on centre–periphery relations. This is because the key coordinates of the study have undergone drastic changes in the modern era. Distance does not remain the insurmountable hindrance for states to establish control that it was in bygone eras. Hegemons have also found other means of co-opting non-compliant actors and making them participants within the hegemonic discourse. Constituencies of support today are no longer maintained through discipleship or through exhibitionism of the kind that was in display on medieval settings. But the potency of power remains unaltered, despite the fact that its expressions have undergone a change. Dominant states have devised their own means of projecting power and working geographies to their advantage. US efforts to nurture ‘symbolic showcases’ during the Cold War among peripheral countries in Latin America and Europe were one of the many expressions of American soft power.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{28} Countries such as Puerto Rico, South Korea and Greece were extended generous financial support by the US to enhance the credibility of its developmentalist model among the Third World countries. Ramon Grosfoguel, ‘Geopolitics of Knowledge and Coloniality of Power: Thinking Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans from the Colonial Difference’, in Stephen Pfohl, Aimee Van Wagenen, Patricia Arend, Abigail Brooks and Denise Leckenby, eds, \textit{Culture, Power and History: Studies in Critical Sociology} (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), p. 481.
It is of little surprise that the Indian strategic traditions did not survive in any recognisable and functional form during the colonial period. The two conditions supporting their sustenance, namely the scenario of fragmented polities and the social context which invested political power with symbolic significance, underwent drastic change under colonialism. Territorial space gradually came under centralised control that is characteristic of a modern state. Further, the imperatives of the colonial mission and the attendant process of bureaucratisation caused the British state to consciously distance itself from the Indian society.\(^{29}\) Although recent research reveals the vulnerabilities and dependencies of colonialism that shaped the colonial state in ways it could not avoid, the disruption it caused in strategic affairs was far more definitive.\(^{30}\)

**Conversations: IR and Other Disciplines**

Probing commonalities and accepting theoretical affinities does not signify the absence of intellectual rigour, just as defending dogmatic positions is not a mark of committed scholarship. There exists today a growing body of literature that challenges historical and cultural essentialisation within various frames of reference such as the nation, caste, religion and gender.\(^{31}\) This trend towards problematising received wisdom has been woefully tardy in IR barring a few exceptions.\(^{32}\) A look at the research orientation of articles in prominent journals on IR would confirm this distinct lack of

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It is ironic that for a discipline whose origins lie at the intersection of fields as diverse as history, sociology and comparative politics, IR should have become isolationist and conservative over time. For instance, culture and international politics are often regarded as phenomena operative at different levels, an incongruity that one seldom encounters in other disciplines.

What explains IR theory’s fixation with similarity and its unease with difference? The positivist influence evident in the field’s search for unchanging laws that dictate and explain state behaviour partly accounts for its conservatism. The quest for immutable laws of IR required discerning consistent and invariant patterns amenable to generalisation. Predictably, certain orders radically different from the espoused system did not fit into such explanatory schemes and over time, the factor of contingency gave way to a trans-historical interpretation of IR. Divorced from history, mainstream theories developed several theoretical blind spots such as the inability to explain the evolution of the international system. Theories which assume that the modern international system came into being in 1648 at Westphalia commit the conceptual fallacy of treating the notion of the international system and its Westphalian model as one and the same. References to history, if at all, are confined to European origins of the international system, thereby mistaking the model for the concept itself.

The extent to which IR has become exclusionist is evident in the homogeneity of its scholarship, with political scientists accounting for almost 90 per cent of the research output in prestigious journals on IR, while historians with 0.3 per cent share and sociologists with 1.3 per cent share could hardly be said to be representing their respective disciplines. Clearly, if numbers are anything to go by, IR continues to remain a restricted field of enquiry that literally offers limited research space to other disciplines. Marijke Breuning, Joseph Bredehoft and Eugene Walton, ‘Promise and Performance: An Evaluation of Journals in International Relations’, International Studies Perspectives, 6:4 (2005), p. 457.


Several theorists have contested the conventional view that the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked a neat break with the past. Andreas Osiander, for instance, argues that the advent of industrialisation marked a far more radical transition in terms of the integration of economic networks it entailed and the political means that were devised to administer them. Andreas Osiander, ‘Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth’, International Organisation, 55:2 (2001), p. 281.

And yet we find that fields such as history, sociology and philosophy have been receptive to new interdisciplinary orientations. The historical case study undertaken here has been entirely contextualised within this ongoing debate between disciplines, with the larger objective of seeking to correct distortions that have entered theorisations on India’s strategic practice. There are two key axes of interdisciplinary debates that we examine here which compel us to rethink many accepted givens in IR theory, namely postcolonialism and philosophy. The points of divergence are in themselves nodes of connectivity between disciplines that are beginning to be explored at the fringes of IR.

1. IR and Postcolonialism

Unlike the more structured discipline of IR, postcolonialism has been loosely defined and hence been more inclusive in setting its agenda. Postcolonialism contends that more than its measurable attributes, power operates in insidious ways by imparting the grammar of the debate itself and its explanatory tools. It chooses to study the more latent forms of power such as representation to which IR accords secondary importance. Moreover, IR’s acceptance of the offshoots of modernity, namely the notions of linear progress and the nation-state, does not sit well with the orientations of postcolonialism. Its opposition to the state as the unit of reference puts postcolonialism on a direct collision course with IR.

37 Interestingly, the introductory chapter in Norbert Elias’ *The Court Society* is dedicated to exploring the relationship between sociology and history. The two disciplines differ in orientation, where history preferred to study the uniqueness of an individual king while sociology chose instead to analyse the royal position that individual kings temporarily occupy. His emphasis on the complimentarity of approaches is evident from his assertion that ‘[…] the understanding of the uniqueness of a king remains fragmentary and uncertain without a study of the royal position which is not unique and individual in the same sense’. Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 20.

38 IR’s affiliation with modernity runs deep and is evident in its primary referent in international politics, i.e., the state that delineates the internal from the external realm. Furthermore, the modernist interpretation of progress became the moving force behind the developmentalist project that was institutionalised in international ventures such as the League of Nations trusteeship plan and the Marshall Plan. Phillip Darby and A. J. Paolini, ‘Bridging International Relations and Postcolonialism’, *Alternatives*, 19 (1994), pp. 386–90.

39 The trajectories taken by the two fields are also a study in contrast. IR began as a European enterprise and gradually spread outwards, carrying its repository of concepts and theories. Being relatively impervious to contemporary developments
The utter lack of dialogue between the two fields has prompted scholars to pessimistically observe that IR and postcolonialism ‘pass like ships in the night’.\(^{40}\) It is then hardly surprising that the three themes on which postcolonialism has focused on are also three of the most understudied areas within IR, namely orientalism, imperialism and culture.

2. IR and Philosophy

Quite unlike its equation with postcolonialism, IR theory has always borne a strong affinity to political philosophy, borrowing abundantly from the writings of philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke and Hegel. Given that most works in IR speak of distinct traditions that trace their lineage to ancient and medieval thinkers, the prospect of exploring the history of ideas that philosophy offers is both exciting and timely. The fallacy often committed by theorists and even historians is to trace a given idea in its developed form back in time. Quentin Skinner refers to this tendency as ‘the mythology of doctrines’, wherein an idea assumes an identity independent of its evolutionary history.\(^{41}\) A selective reading of history is then reduced to ‘searching for approximations to the ideal type’ and ‘pointing out earlier “anticipations” of later doctrines.’\(^{42}\) To pluck an idea on the margins, the discipline’s agenda was largely confined to the staple concerns of great powers and the attendant benefits accruing from an international order that was accommodative of their interests. Postcolonialism, on the other hand, as the ‘voice of the dispossessed’, revealed in articulating the interests and concerns of the marginalised, seeing its eclecticism and open-ended agenda as an intellectual virtue.

\(^{40}\) Darby and Paolini, ‘Bridging International Relations’, p. 384.

\(^{41}\) Susanne Rudolph similarly cautions against transposing a contemporary concept into a time-frame when it did not exist or carry the same connotations. For instance, what could possibly be interpreted as an ‘agent’ in the \textit{Arthashastra} is instead termed a ‘spy’, which presupposes the existence of a highly bureaucratised state machinery — a typically modern construct. The choice of terminology is not an innocent one since such interpretations of history assume the existence of oriental despotisms that were able to exercise their absolutist control through an extensive spy network. Rudolph, ‘Presidential Address’, p. 738.

\(^{42}\) Norbert Elias’ sociological approach to the study of court society in 17th and 18th century France can be considered a notable work on the history of ideas. For instance, although Elias concedes that ‘court society is a social formation whose market-value is low’, he firmly believes in the ‘subordination of present-day values’ to the valuations prevalent during the historical period under focus. Elias, \textit{The Court Society}, p. 28; Quentin Skinner, \textit{Visions of Politics}, vol. 1: Regarding Method (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 60–63.
out of its context is to effectively lose track of its deviations in history. History of ideas thus seeks to study ideas in their historical contexts rather than with their modern-day connotations.

Although contextualism has been closely associated with disciplines like philosophy and anthropology for long, its application to IR has been a recent development.\textsuperscript{43} IR theory, which tends to approach concepts such as sovereignty and the international system in their evolved manifestations, could benefit from current debates on the history of ideas. Julie Reeves asserts:

\begin{quote}
Understanding the heritage behind concepts […] sheds light on our knowledge of the history of the IR discipline […]. The idea that idealism begat realism begat neo-realism and a whole load of critiques is too simplistic; at worst it creates the impression that the subsequent set of ideas are an improvement on the latter, which may not always be the case.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

The exploration in the history of ideas exhorts us to problematise, a task that can be both powerful and disorienting. We realise that what ‘we may be disposed to accept as “timeless” truths may be little more than contingencies of our local history and social structure’.\textsuperscript{45} It allows us to unbundle a number of cultural tropes typically representative of a post-colonial state and uncritically accepted within IR. The history of ideas nudges us to re-examine notions of sovereignty, power and identity in different temporal frames and warns us against attributing contemporary meanings to these.

For IR to build bridges with other fields of enquiry, cross-theoretical conversations could be a useful starting point. Its success will hinge on the scope IR offers to new lines of intellectual inquiry in history and culture studies within the discipline. It is evident that the contrasting positions of realists and constructivists cause them to talk past each other, with what passes for debates tending to generate more heat.

\textsuperscript{43} Two strands of the contextualist approach are discernible, namely its historical and cultural versions. Unlike historical contextualism which abjures any attempt at establishing continuities with the past, cultural contextualism presumes a continuing link between the past and the present through the transmission of distinct cultural traditions. Stephanie Lawson, \textit{Culture and Context in World Politics} (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 42.

\textsuperscript{44} Reeves, \textit{Culture and International Relations}, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{45} Skinner, \textit{Visions of Politics}, p. 89.
than light.\textsuperscript{46} Realism regards culture and international politics as operating at different levels, as too the research interests of comparativists and realists.\textsuperscript{47} The dimensions of power that define the concept in realism are also at sharp variance from those in postmodernism. Realism seeks to quantify power as a measurable resource of the state, making its dynamics visible and evident. The positivist imprint is more than evident in its emphasis on empirical analyses of a state’s material capabilities. The discipline attributed primacy to causation and accordingly, theories furnishing causal explanations for international politics dominated the academic landscape of IR. Interpreted thus, power came to be seen as working in a linear mode, directing the subject to commit the desired action. In contrast, postmodernism finds power operating at latent levels through knowledge structures and discourses. This makes its approach to power more nuanced, wherein power operates in a non-linear mode akin to a web, through institutional and intellectual structures, rather than merely as a quantifiable resource.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Incidentally, Hans Morgenthau’s engagement with the role of ideas in the formation of collective identities through threat perception bears greater affinity to the constructivist cause than to the neorealist project. Realism’s intellectual interaction with other schools is deeper than the realists would care to acknowledge. Ronen Palan and Brook Blair, ‘On the Idealist Origins of the Realist Theory of International Relations’, \textit{Review of International Studies}, 19:4 (1993).

\textsuperscript{47} Lawson, \textit{Culture and Context in World Politics}, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{48} Although both approaches are concerned with the relationship between structure and history, realism and postmodernism differ sharply on what historical change entails. For realism, history is about change in power configurations and which of the competing structures dominate. Historical change hence does not entail the dismantling of the power structures themselves. Postmodernism, on the other hand, sees change in the displacement of structures of power, including knowledge structures that reinforce power relations. Jennifer Sterling-Folker and Rosemary E Shinko, ‘Discourses of Power: Traversing the Realist-Postmodern Divide’, \textit{Millennium}, 33:1 (2005), pp. 639–42; Robert J. C. Young, \textit{White Mythologies: Writing History and the West} (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 51. However, critical realism’s focus on reading the complexity of the social world in underlying structures, potentials and capacities that may remain undetected or unrealised approximates the post-positivist orientation. Heikki Patomaki and Colin Wight, ‘After Postpositivism? The Promises of Critical Realism’, \textit{International Studies Quarterly}, 44:2 (2000). The postmodernist interpretation locating power in intangible practices and institutions fills an important realist lacuna that regards power as a chiefly measurable attribute. Steven Best, \textit{The Politics of Historical Vision: Marx, Foucault, Habermas} (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), pp. 22–23.
Theoretical approaches such as postcolonial studies, historical sociology and constructivism seek to prise open rigid constructions of power. They also challenge the dominance of the Western tradition in political and military thought, against which the lesser traditions appear as partial and momentary interventions. From the vantage of an exalted lineage, the absence of a tradition altogether becomes lamentable, taken as it is to be a statement of incoherence and the lack of enlightened thinking. Be that as it may, the intellectual exercise of tracing disciplinary genealogies is eventually about the dynamics of power; about who dominates the discourse, who celebrates their history, and which construction becomes the archetype of a tradition. In a Eurocentric framework that has celebrated the West as the seat of scholarship, it is of little surprise that thinkers and strategists from the margins seldom figure. Critical discourses such as postcolonialism offer us several openings to intervene in the ensuing debate on interdisciplinarity, a number of which hold significant implications for the study of IR in post-colonial societies like India.

Historicising IR

The question that naturally emerges out of this appraisal pertains to how history is supposed to correct the skewed picture. Three reasons for adopting a historical approach come to mind. First, historical contingency acts as a check against essentialist interpretations of state behaviour of the kind that are typical of many writings in culture studies today. This is where contextualism comes into the picture when we undertake to study the impact of ideas. As the history of ideas has shown us, not only were concepts imparted different meanings, but they also moulded identities differently.

49 D. D. Kosambi was one of the earliest Indian historians to grasp the value of an interdisciplinary approach and consciously sought to apply it in his study of Indian history. A mathematician by profession, Kosambi cultivated his love for Indology through meticulous research, which was paradigmatic in many ways. His An Introduction to the Study of Indian History marks a departure from the chronological and dynastic approach that was followed till then. He instead chose to employ the comparative method of studying history which offered a richer account by factoring in the historical developments and works in other spatial settings. The comparative technique as Kosambi envisioned, was inherently interdisciplinary, drawing upon a range of methodological tools and interpretative methods, thereby providing a holistic understanding of historical developments. Romila Thapar, History and Beyond (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 90.

50 Lawson, Culture and Context in World Politics, p. 39.
Second, historical contingency allows greater room for critical perspectives to emerge and find a voice within the discipline. This is especially critical in the case of post-colonial societies such as India where colonialism has left an indelible mark on the processes of state- and identity-formation. A contingent approach allows the researcher to problematise many of the cultural tropes that were accepted as naturalised verities. Placing them in historical context would reveal the undercurrents of power that led these caricatures to emerge and the manner in which they were legitimised within the colonial discourse.

Third, a historical perspective enables the theorist to better explain the manner in which the sovereign state system evolved out of a system of imperial orders. The empire occupies the central position in this study, both as a theoretical concept in which the internal and the external domains often overlapped, and as an empirical case study on the manner in which power and political control were constantly negotiated in history. The notion of the empire allows for a more historically ‘deep’ discipline that is representative of the political experiences of the non-Western world. It also reveals the mutually constitutive elements of what has so far been considered as formal interaction between the imperial power and the colony during the 19th and 20th century. If history matters, as too the contingent forms that political units may take from time to time, then the study of empires in the time span of a country’s evolving strategic practice is both logical and necessary. The emphasis on the sovereign state system tended to marginalise one of the most enduring political systems in history from the discourse on international politics. The study of imperial systems would make the history of IR more representative and balanced.

This once again brings to the fore the compelling need to locate supposedly ‘neutral’ notions within historical contexts. Concepts such as power and hegemony hold little meaning outside their socio-historical context, and to attribute contemporary connotations to these would be fallacious. For instance, the theorist needs to be attentive towards the manner in which actors exercise ‘different forms of power (authority, force, care, and so on)

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through different expressions (linguistic, symbolic, material, and so on) to produce different social realities’. The philosophy of history holds important lessons for the IR theorist here. The history of ideas enables the researcher to go back in time sans the baggage of loaded contemporary meanings and concepts. The connotations that the thinkers of antiquity implied may have long since disappeared, but a historical enquiry reaffirms the fact that the evolutionary path of a particular notion was neither linear nor inevitable. It offers an important corrective to IR theory which often associates concepts with a timeless and eternal quality. The tendency to mine history for substantiations of our contemporary concerns also stems from such contrived linkages with the past. This is particularly true in the case of Indian strategic culture, an area that has thrown up a clutch of colonial caricatures invoking India’s pristine antiquity.

**Marginalia: Some Thoughts and Afterthoughts**

The purpose of any study should be to go beyond being informative and indicate where it leaves the reader in terms of possible leads for further research. This is particularly so if a little-researched area is investigated. The history of India’s strategic practice remains an understudied area in the true sense, despite recent research that has presented an ahistorical and static image of the country’s strategic thinking. This study, with its focus on the conduct of inter-state relations during a historical period and the orientalist caricatures that are reiterated in contemporary literature, leads off along several exploratory paths.

The possible synthesis between history and theory would be a fascinating area to probe, especially since substantial ground for it has already been laid. Interested researchers only need to cast a glance back at the interdisciplinary origins of IR and the subsequent evolution of historically

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 nuanced schools of thought such as the British Committee to realise that the recent turn to interdisciplinarity is not a new development.\textsuperscript{58} At present, a researcher undertaking work in an area of no immediate topical concern finds herself working against the grain of contemporary research. Interdisciplinary studies provide the theoretical foundation for the study of systems differently ordered than the present one. Interdisciplinary theories, by creating spaces for studies in history, generate greater theoretical acceptance and tolerance within the discipline. Perhaps another area of related interest would be to undertake an investigation on the exercise of soft power in different historical epochs. The dimensions of soft power would diverge not only along the historical continuum, but also along a spatial scale. At any point of time, empires would have resorted to different means of projecting their power in response to their diverse socio-political conditions. Historical studies enrich theories by providing a wider template within which concepts can be studied.

This brings us to the debate on the role the IR theorist is expected to play, a question that is obviously linked to the larger issue of what function the discipline of IR sees itself as fulfilling. The turn to history does not necessarily entail tackling IR’s fixation with all things contemporary. After all, a theory can refashion its premises to accommodate the vagaries of history while continuing to fix its gaze on current issues.\textsuperscript{59} There is nothing wrong per se in analysing contemporary events, which are no less political or international than occurrences in history. It is in fact necessary to engage with issues which hold significant implications for the way identities are ordered and resources managed. History may even prove helpful in navigating the uncertainties of the future which, as Booth puts it, ‘is always a foreign country, and it is one whose language we do not know’.\textsuperscript{60} The trouble arises when deciphering fast-paced events becomes the sole preoccupation of the theorist who learns to arrange her research interests around the criterion of immediacy and current relevance. ‘Relevance’ is an elusive target, often a fast-moving one, more so when it comes to the


study of international politics. There are innumerable instances of empirical research work that have not lasted beyond the passing of issues themselves. Although in principle IR theory encompasses the politics of all sovereign entities down history, ‘relevant’ issues concerning the present have de facto come to have a stranglehold on defining the subject matter of the discipline.\(^{61}\) The grip of presentism is most evident when research into historical cases is dismissed for being ‘irrelevant’ to current concerns.\(^{62}\)

If the growth of other disciplines is indicative of anything, it is that for a field to evolve, it must lift its gaze above the apparent and the transient and take a long view of history. Certain theories like neorealism claim to have risen above the particularities of politics, but their generalisations also tend to eschew history and contingency. This unfortunate inclination stems from seeing generalisation and contingency as mutually incompatible orientations. When IR realises that history has more to offer than furnish evidence we selectively seek, it would evolve in the true sense. And when the theorist realises that she is not merely a policy specialist analysing the breathless pace of events, it would perhaps afford her the time to pause and reflect.

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Appendix

Dynastic Lineages of the Mughal Empire and Other Regional Powers

**The Mughal Dynasty**

Zahir al-Din Babur, 1526–1530
Nasir al-Din Humanyun, 1530–1556, 1540–1555
Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar, 1556–1605
Nur al-Din Jahangir, 1605–1627
Shah Jahan, 1627–1658
Aurangzeb Alamgir, 1658–1707
Bahadur Shah I, 1707–1712
Jahandar Shah, 1712
Farrukh Siyar, 1713–1719
Shah Jahan II, 1719
Rafi al-Darjat, 1719
Muhammad Shah, 1719–1748
Ahmad Shah, 1748–1754
Aziz al-Din Alamgir, 1754–1759
Ali Gawhar Shah Alam II, 1759–1806
Akbar II, 1806–1837
Bahadur Shah Zafar, 1837–1858

**The Bahmani Dynasty (Gulbarga and Bidar)**

Alauddin Hasan Bahman Shah, 1347–1358
Muhammad I, 1358–1375
Mujahid, 1375–1378
Dawud I, 1378
Muhammad II, 1378–1397
Dawad II, 1397
Tajuddin Firuz, 1397–1422
Ahmad I, 1422–1436
Alauddin Ahmad II, 1436–1458
Humanyun, 1458–1461
Ahmad III, 1461–1463
Muhammad III, 1463–1482
Appendix

Mahmud, 1482–1518
Ahmad IV, 1518–1520
Wallyullah, 1520–1526
Kalamullah, 1526–1538

The Adil Shahi Dynasty (Bijapur)
Yusuf Adil Khan, 1490–1510
Ismail Adil Khan, 1510–1534
Mallu Adil Khan, 1534–1535
Ibrahim I, 1535–1558
Ali I, 1558–1580
Ibrahim II, 1580–1627
Muhammad, 1627–1656
Ali II, 1656–1672
Sikander, 1672–1686

The Nizam Shahi Dynasty (Ahmadnagar)
Ahmad Bahri, 1496–1510
Burhan I, 1510–1553
Husain I, 1553–1565
Murtaza I, 1565–1588
Husain II, 1588–1589
Ismail, 1589–1591
Burhan II, 1591–1595
Bahadur, 1595–1600
Murtaza II, 1600–1610
Burhan III, 1610–1631
Husain III, 1631–1633
Murtaza III, 1633–1636

The Baridi Dynasty (Bidar)
Qasim I, -1504
Amir I, 1504–1543
Ali Shah, 1543–1580
Ibrahim, 1580–1587
Qasim II, 1587–1591
Amir II, 1591–1600
Mirza, 1600–1609
Amir III, 1609–1619

The Imad Shahi Dynasty (Berar)
Fathullah, -1510
Alauddin, 1510–1530
Darya, 1530–1561
Burhan, 1562–1574

The Qutb Shahi Dynasty (Golconda and Hyderabad)

Sultan Quli Qutb al-Mulk, 1512–1543
Jamshid, 1543–1550
Ibrahim, 1550–1580
Muhammad Wuli, 1580–1611
Muhammad, 1611–1626
Abdullah, 1626–1672
Abul Hasan, 1672–1687
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