Early Modern India and World History

JOHN F. RICHARDS
Duke University

FROM the late fifteenth to the early nineteenth century of our present era—for convenience, 1500–1800—human societies shared in and were affected by several worldwide processes of change unprecedented in their scope and intensity. Along with many other historians, I call these centuries the early modern period.[1] We distinguish this period from the Middle Ages that preceded it and from the modern nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether we are now in a postmodern period is a matter of conjecture, at least in my view. Contrary to many scholars, I do not regard this periodization as driven by purely Eurocentric considerations. The term *early modern* is merely an attempt to capture the reality of rapid, massive change in the way humans organized themselves and interacted with other human beings and with the natural world.[2] For South Asian history I believe it makes a good deal of sense to use the term *early modern* instead of *Mughal India*, or *late medieval India*, or *late precolonial India* for the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. To do so would lessen the extent to which India is seen as exceptional, unique, exotic, and somehow detached from world history. I am convinced that we must contextualize South Asian

[1] Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1981–84).

[2] Even J. M. Blaut, the most articulate recent critic of Eurocentric world history, comments: "Africa, Asia, and Europe shared equally in the rise of capitalism prior to 1492. After that date Europe took the lead. This happened . . . because of Europe's location near America and because of the immense wealth obtained by Europeans in America and later in Asia and Africa—not because Europeans were brighter or bolder or better than non-Europeans, or more modern, more advanced, more progressive, more rational. These are myths of Eurocentric diffusionism and are best forgotten" (J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World* [New York: Guilford Press, 1993], p. 206).

Journal of World History, Vol. 8, No. 2

culture, civilization, and society in this way to better understand the more specific unfolding of Indian history in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

The Creation of Global Sea Passages

At least six distinct but complementary large-scale processes define the early modern world. The first of these is *the creation of global sea passages that came to link all of humanity with a transportation network of increasing capacity and efficiency*. In 1400 there were three maritime regions and seafaring traditions from which mariners were equipped to undertake long ocean voyages of discovery: the European, comprising the Mediterranean and coastal Atlantic; the Arab-Indian, covering the Indian Ocean; and the Chinese, encompassing the China Seas and Gulf of Japan. Chinese mariners had by far the largest and most reliable ships and by Sung times had already demonstrated a capacity for voyages beyond their home waters. The Zheng He expeditions of 1405–1433 sent dozens of large ships and thousands of men into the northern Indian ocean. Had they chosen to do so, Chinese mariners could have circumnavigated Africa or sailed across the Pacific to the New World.[3] Instead, the Ming emperors rejected maritime exploration and commerce and turned their society inward after 1433. Chinese ruling elites formed and retained a deep-seated bias that prevented state investment in maritime expansion at precisely the period when European monarchs were fascinated by possible rewards from this activity.

Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, European rulers paid for and encouraged maritime exploration, mapping, and reporting that generated extensive and systematic knowledge about global geography. For the first time in human history, mariners learned that all the seas of the world are connected and navigable (save for circumpolar ice regions). As Parry puts it: "A reliable ship, competently manned, adequately stored, and equipped with means of finding the way, can in time reach any country in the world which has a sea coast, and can return whence it came."[4] For the first time in human history, European mariners created a reliable sea passage to the New World from the Old.

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[3] J. H. Parry, *The Discovery of the Sea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), p. 16.

[4] Parry, *Discovery of the Sea*, p. xi.

Europe's discovery and exploitation of reliable sea passages throughout the globe was its single most important advantage over other early modern societies. The new maritime connections did not supersede older land routes, nor did they attract more than a portion of long-distance trade. It was European knowledge of and access to these new global routes that conferred a commercial, military, and diplomatic edge over other societies. Steady, incremental improvements in ship design and construction, navigational techniques and skills, and seaborne armaments characterized early modern European shipping fleets. Mariners routinely charted the coasts and harbors of the world's continents and islands, and identified prevailing winds and currents in the oceans. By the late 1700s European mariners even had reliable techniques for measuring longitude as well as latitude.[5]

The Rise of a True World Economy

The second important large-scale process is *the rise of a truly global world economy in which long-distance commerce, growing rapidly, connected expanding economies on every continent.* The buoyant world trading system of the early modern period rested on global maritime and linking overland routes that connected all human societies. Over these routes the costs of carrying both rarities and bulk commodities, and the risks involved, declined between 1500 and 1800. At the same time, demand and supply signals moved with greater dispatch to a wider network of traders. Throughout the world increasingly sophisticated regional monetary systems based on comparable gold, silver, and copper coinage and paper-based bills of exchange facilitated trade. Annual shipments of gold and silver from New World mines gave early modern states new sources of supply for their expanding coinage needs—in sharp contrast to the metallic "famines" of earlier centuries—and helped discourage debasement of currencies.

Throughout these centuries the world trading system focused on Europe. Antwerp in the sixteenth century was the first "true general emporium" for world trade.[6] Then followed Dutch dominance of world trade, with Amsterdam at its center, between 1580 and 1740. London superseded Amsterdam for the remainder of the early modern period

[5] Dava Sobel, *Longtitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

[6] Jonathan I. Israel, *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 405.

and thereafter well into modern times. During the period of Dutch hegemony over world commerce, Amsterdam was an active entrepôt situated at the apex of the world's markets. A confident, well-financed merchant elite in Amsterdam controlled massive shipping capital and dominant capital resources. Dutch merchants could purchase products in demand at source anywhere in the world at higher prices, bring them to Amsterdam, store them safely, add value by processing and packaging, and sell them profitably. The Dutch federal republican state, with its commercial and financial stability, intervened actively in all fiscal and marketing processes to prevent fraud and impose standards. Confidence in the state made Amsterdam's interest rates the lowest in early modern Europe.

The Dutch republic's greatest contribution lay in the creation of trading companies that were given monopolies of trade in various parts of the world. The Dutch West Indies Company and the Dutch East Indies Company were two of the largest of these "armed politico-commercial organizations of unprecedented scope and resources not just with regard to the scale of their business operations but also in respect of their military and naval power".[7] In Asia, the Dutch East India Company, along with its English counterpart, formed the leading edge of European aggressive expansion in the early modern centuries.[8]

Commodity production for enlarged markets is a shared feature of early modern societies. Farmers and loggers in Poland, the Ukraine, and other lands around the Baltic shipped food grains and timber for the world market. Peasants in western Anatolia produced mohair yarn for export. Russians and settlers in the North American colonies sold furs and deerskins. Both North American and Latin American ranchers exported hides and dried meat to European markets. Growers in the coastal lands of eastern Brazil and the Caribbean islands supplied tons of sugar to the world market every year. Producers in Venezuela shipped cacao, while those in Guatemala, Honduras, and northern India exported indigo. The peoples of island Southeast Asia exported nutmeg, pepper, and other spices for world markets. Weavers in India produced cotton and silk textiles that found new markets in Europe. Traders in south India sold diamonds for world consumption. In addition to the world trade in material goods, European demand for cheap forced labor stimulated the export of slaves from Africa and Asia—often displacing more expensive European indentured laborers.

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[7] Israel, *Dutch Primacy*, p. 411.

[8] The most complete study of the English East India Company remains K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

The Growth of Large, Stable States

The third large-scale process that distinguishes the early modern period is *the growth, around the world, of states and other large-scale complex organizations that attained size, stability, capacity, efficiency, and territorial reach not seen since antiquity, if then*. Early modern states displayed impressive new abilities to mobilize resources and deploy overwhelming force. On the Japanese archipelago, the Tokugawa regime united the warring states of medieval Japan to form one of the world's most powerful states for the time. In Russia the czarist state consolidated power and expanded its territory. In western Europe, the French monarchy built a centralized state structure that directed colonial expansion throughout the world. On the British Isles, England forcibly assimilated Scotland and Ireland and built a vast colonial maritime empire. In the Middle East Constantinople was the hub of an expanding, confident, centralized Ottoman state, while Isfahan was the center of the rival Safavid empire. In India the Mughal empire imposed centralized rule over nearly the entire subcontinent for the first time since the Mauryas. Spanish colonial rulers imposed centralized authority over Central America and much of South America; the Portuguese did the same in Brazil. Even in China the Qing dynasty may well have controlled a more effective, powerful state apparatus than that of its predecessor, the native Ming.

The Growth of World Population

A fourth factor is *the doubling of world population during the early modern centuries*. Between 1500 and 1800 world population probably changed as follows:[9]

Year	World Population
1500	400–500 million
1600	500–600 million
1700	600–700 million
1800	850–950 million

[9] My estimates are based upon population figures given in Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 1:40–49; Paul Demeny, "Population," in *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action*, edited by B. L. Turner II et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 42–43; and Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 349. McEvedy and Jones's figure for 1500 is revised upward to adjust for their underestimate of New World populations.

Human numbers increased slowly but steadily, with an accelerating rate in the eighteenth century. According to this calculation, world population grew by 350–550 million over three hundred years. Overall, this is a slow, almost imperceptible rate of increase that masks regional variations of some consequence. Some 50 million or more inhabitants of the New World in 1492 suffered a huge die-off from previously unknown infectious disease and colonial brutality during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By 1800 the total population of the New World was barely half that of the precontact total. This holocaust, however, did not deflect a strong global upward trend in the early modern period. The available direct and indirect evidence strongly supports the view that in all other regions of the world human numbers grew steadily. Some episodes of population growth were unusually rapid. The population of Japan under the Tokugawa regime went from 12 million in 1600 to 31 million by 1720.[10] The Russian population doubled from 14 million to 29 million between 1722 and 1795.[11] Nor do we see any retreat from these levels thereafter.

Intensification of Land Use

The fifth important process throughout the early modern world was *the intensified use of land to expand production in numerous episodes of settler frontiers*. In addition to European settlement of North and South America and Dutch settlement of South Africa, Russia, China, eastern Europe, and parts of western Europe were engaged in substantial processes of internal colonization. Growing populations, aggressive states, and market forces combined to send pioneer-settlers into forests or savannas to reclaim land for plow cultivation or commercial pastoralism (ranching). Pioneers cleared forests, drained wetlands, and fenced grasslands. They claimed property rights over newly defined and bounded plots of land. The pioneers displaced thinly settled hunter-gatherers, horticulturists, shifting cultivators, and pastoral nomads, who were assigned a "savage" role by the intruders. Backed by the power and authority of the centralizing state, pioneer-settlers drove away, killed off, or subordinated indigenous peoples in order to claim land for cultivation or ranching. Early modern frontiersmen invariably were tied to domestic and international markets for the goods they pro-

[10] Conrad Totman, *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 140.

[11] Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, 1:47–48.

duced. This continuing process of settlement had a windfall effect whereby abundant new resources—soil, timber, wildlife, and minerals—were put into concentrated modes of production for an expanding world economy.[12]

The Diffusion of New Technology

A final process was *the diffusion of several new technologies—cultivation of New World crops, gunpowder, and printing—and organizational responses to them throughout the early modern world*. Tobacco use and tobacco growing spread rapidly throughout Africa and Asia as a result of the New World connection. Coffee, tea, and chocolate offered new, quickly adopted stimulants as hot drinks mixed with sugar. Perhaps more significant was the adoption of maize and calorie-rich sweet potatoes. With these new cultivars, farmers could clear hill forests and profitably grow these highly productive food crops. New World food crops provided a technical breakthrough that stimulated expansion of cultivation throughout China, Japan, and Taiwan in the eighteenth century. Maize and potatoes added to the productive capacity of European, and later African, agriculture.

The early modern world saw the rapid evolution of gunpowder-related technologies. Both portable personal firearms and cannon gained ease of operation, power, and accuracy. Use of cannon on warships went through several generations of improvement in both guns and ships. The production of gunpowder, cannon founding, and musket and pistol manufacture became ubiquitous. Early modern states, confronted with the greatly increased costs of firearms, turned their attention to improving their tax assessment and collection. Military organization around firearms on land put new emphasis on infantry and mobile light field artillery in place of the medieval reliance on heavily armored mounted cavalry.

In retrospect, the most potent new technology of the period was printing with movable metal type. The new invention was especially suitable for the roman and other writing systems with a limited number of symbolic letters. Gutenberg-style printing was closely associated with European expansion and domination. China, Japan, and Korea, all of which have ideographic writing systems, remained attached to their sophisticated technology of woodblock printing, which supported

[12] John F. Richards, "Land Transformation," in Turner et al., *The Earth as Transformed by Human Action*, pp. 163–78.

wide publication of books. The Islamic and Indian worlds were slow to give up manuscripts and the pen to use less appealing metal-type printing.

The Case of South Asia

If, for the purposes of argument, we accept the validity of these broad generalizations about early modern world history, do they apply to South Asia? Does the subcontinent share in these traits of early modernity? Before answering that question it might be well to address at least two possible concerns. First, for this period (or any other period), can we treat the Indian subcontinent as a meaningful social and cultural unit? Can we make generalizations that hold throughout the entire subcontinent? Many South Asian scholars argue that only linguistic and cultural regions, such as Andhra, Maharashtra, or Bengal, can be seen as meaningful units. Others look to smaller regions or even localities as the only useful social and political units. Generalizations made for the entire subcontinent are suspect.

My own view is that the degrees of similarity in society and culture among all regions in the subcontinent are such that we can reasonably discuss and analyze South Asia as a unit. Granting fuzziness in border areas, we can look at a wide range of similarities that tie the subcontinent together. The contrast between, say, the forced-labor tax systems of the states of Southeast Asia and the land-tax systems of South Asia is but one example. The caste system is not found in Southeast Asia—or other parts of the world, for that matter—despite strenuous attempts to find analogues elsewhere. Strictly endogamous, birth-ascribed, named social units—miniature ethnicities—arranged hierarchically by principles of purity and pollution and traditional occupation and buttressed by religious dogma is a uniquely South Asian phenomenon. It is a truism that Muslim groups in South Asia have found it difficult to avoid castelike organization despite the egalitarian teachings of their faith. The caste system has certainly evolved and changed, particularly in response to new pressures, such as those generated by Islam or by colonial European rule, but the system itself is not replicated elsewhere in the world.

Travelers coming to the subcontinent from Europe, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, or other regions of the world leave no doubt about the differences between India and their home regions. The ruminations of Babur on the contrast, often drawn unfavorably, between northern India and Central Asia are well known. In addition to hav-

ing customs seen as very strange, such as disposal of the dead by cremation, India was enormously productive, wealthy, and densely populated by comparison with Central Asia or even the Middle East.[13] We can also contrast the relative porosity of early modern South Asia with the impermeability of China. All manner of foreigners—traders, religious figures, adventurers—moved freely about the subcontinent. They encountered little or no state concern or control. Contrast this freedom with the strict control exerted by the Ming or Qing dynasty over any and all foreigners and over external trade by means of the tribute mission system.

The second objection to incorporating South Asia into early modern world history is that earlier scholars overestimated exogenous forces for change in this period. This bias marred the writing of South Asian history by Eurocentric scholars before 1947 and to some extent thereafter. I do not wish to return to the notion of a passive, "traditional and oriental" South Asia that only "progressed and modernized" because of influences from Europe. We cannot revert to this outworn approach. Over the last half-century historians, scholars of religion, art historians, anthropologists, literary scholars, and others have demonstrated by painstaking, detailed research the energy and dynamism of South Asian society and culture. Some of these processes came from the outside; others likely did not. The point is that these are world processes that share attributes with those in other regions but have their own unique character in South Asia.

Having at least addressed these questions, does India fit this paradigm? Yes, it does—at least in my judgment. Certainly the maritime connection is firm. Indian ports and shipping had for centuries been tied into the Arabian Sea, Red Sea, and Mediterranean system on one side and into the Bay of Bengal, Straits of Melaka, and China seas on the other. With the northern European trading companies in the lead, India after 1500 was tied into the global system of sea passages.

The role of the subcontinent in the world trading system in the early modern period was decidedly significant.[14] Throughout these cen-

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[13] See, for example, Richard Foltz, "Two Seventeenth-Century Central Asian Travellers to Mughal India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd series (1996): 367–77.

[14] I have previously argued (John F. Richards, "The Seventeenth-Century Crisis in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 24 [1990]: 625–38) that the fiscal crisis that seems to have overcome several large Eurasian states in the first half of the seventeenth century did not occur synchronously in Mughal India. Symptoms of crisis appeared only at the turn of the eighteenth century in the subcontinent. This argument does not necessarily undercut the notion of tightening economic ties that incorporated India into the early modern world economy. Instead, the strength of the early modern South Asian economy and trade balance precluded a fiscal crisis similar to that found elsewhere.

turies the subcontinent retained a favorable balance of trade with the rest of the world. Indian diamonds, pepper, handwoven cotton and silk textiles, and other commodities kept their old markets and found new outlets. Largely self-sufficient for its own needs, India was the ultimate sink for the flow of New World silver and gold.[15] Production for the world economy had more than peripheral importance. Cotton grown in the black-earth regions of western India traveled by pack bullock to Coromandel on the east coast, where it was cleaned, spun into yarn, handwoven into yards-long pieces, bleached, and printed for export. Payment for these goods took the form of imported gold and silver coins paid to merchant middlemen and ultimately to the producers themselves. Om Prakash has calculated that Dutch purchases of textiles in Bengal in the late seventeenth century likely generated 100,000 new jobs for that region.[16]

I have spent much of my career arguing that between the early sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries the Mughals conquered and ruled a dynamic, centralizing state. By 1690 the Mughal emperor was the acknowledged ruler over nearly the entire subcontinent. Simply on the basis of its ability to tax society, maintain political stability, and monopolize force, the Mughal empire must be judged a success. I have also stressed the dynamism of the imperial system, which continued to deepen and strengthen imperial institutions until structural breakup occurred in 1720. In the end the Mughal empire failed to convert the armed, warrior aristocracies of the countryside into quasi-officials in the major structural change that was needed for truly centralized rule. This was a task that the British would require a full century or more to accomplish. Despite this failure, I believe that in terms of scale, efficiency, and wealth, the Mughal empire compares favorably with the contemporary Ottoman and Safavid empires and with any state in Europe. As a recent review of my collected essays by Andre Wink points out, I have held this view with rather unimaginative consistency.[17]

Frequently over the past thirty years I have encountered arguments by colleagues that the Mughal empire had little or no impact on local societies, local lords (*zamindars*), or everyday life. Historians of southern India have stressed the decentralized nature of political power and

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[15] John F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), pp. 22–23.

[16] Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630–1720* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[17] Andre Wink, review of John F. Richards, *Power, Administration and Finance in Mughal India* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), *Journal of Asian Studies* 54 (1995): 1143–47.

authority in the "segmented states" of that region.[18] Historians of the Marathas have drawn our attention to the prevalence of resistance and rebellion to Mughal rule in that region by local elites.[19] Throughout, my position has been and remains that the development of unprecedented state power and political unification under the Mughals is a defining characteristic of early modern—not Mughal—India, just as it is for other regions in the world.

As far as population is concerned, most scholars postulate considerable growth, despite spectacular famine and disease episodes. For example, McEvedy and Jones put the total population for the Indian subcontinent in 1500 at 100 million, climbing to 185 million by 1800.[20] Irfan Habib's estimates are somewhat higher; he suggests that the figure in 1600 was 140–150 million, rising to about 200 million in 1800.[21] The evidence for growth in human numbers is necessarily largely indirect since the Mughals and other early modern polities in the subcontinent did not conduct censuses. With appropriate adjustments, population trends can be drawn from the sequence of Mughal land revenue assessments in the same regions. The type of land-use change, settler frontier, and expansion of cultivation and production described earlier does apply. In Bihar under Shah Jahan's reign, Rajput *zamindar*s [landowners] in Rohtas district expanded cultivation with the encouragement of the state. A later description of Shahabad in this period states that "most of the zamindars during the reign of Shahjahan originated in *bankatai* or populating land after clearing forests. Those who did so became zamindars and obtained *nankars* [part of the revenue as zamindari right] for their lifetime. After the death of such zamindars, their sons obtained sanads [written orders] for the rights held by them on condition of continued service."[22]

Finally, with one exception, all of the major early modern technologies diffused throughout the subcontinent. New World cultivars, nota-

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[18] Burton Stein was the foremost proponent of this view of premodern states in India. See his *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985) and *Vijayanagara* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[19] For example, Andre Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth Century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[20] McEvedy and Jones, *Atlas of World Population History*, p. 185.

[21] Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1:167. Habib draws on estimates made by different scholars for different dates.

[22] Quoted in John F. Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 191, from Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 65–66.

bly tobacco and maize, spread rapidly throughout South Asia in the seventeenth century. Others, such as chili peppers, were adopted more slowly but diffused widely. The Mughal empire succeeded in part because of its command of gunpowder technology. Gunpowder, cannon, and muskets were manufactured in India in considerable numbers to meet military needs. Cultural resistance precluded widespread adoption of movable-type printing in India until the early nineteenth century. The techniques were known and demonstrated by missionaries and the European companies but did not diffuse readily or easily.

What are some of the implications of this early modern model for our study of South Asia? Certainly India's rising economic capacity should be reassessed.[23] The economy grew simply to meet the needs of a near doubling of population as well as the intensifying demands from the world market. The extent to which industrial production was a product of scattered, rural industrial operations is not well recognized. New work currently being done by Thelma Lowe combines field archaeology with documentary research to suggest wide spatial distribution of sites for steel production in the Telugu lands during the early modern centuries.[24] Indian merchants competed successfully with the European trading companies and traded actively with Central Asia, the Middle East, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. As Stephen Dale has shown, colonies of expatriate Indian merchants resident in Moscow carried on regular trade with the subcontinent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[25]

Most difficult and challenging is the notion of cumulative and accelerating change in early modern India. Can we infer that the circulation of people, commodities, and ideas became more dense and rapid over the early modern centuries? Surely new cultural production —manifest in the popular religious movements of northern India— increased in size, intensity, and variety. Wrapping our minds around the notion of change demands a conscious effort. Most of us still operate with an unstated assumption that precolonial India was nearly static. The statement that generalizations made for 1500 can still apply in 1750 or even 1800 is another version of "traditional" or "premodern" India. We must put aside our knowledge of the colonial outcome

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[23] Andre Gunder Frank, "India in the World Economy, 1400–1750," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 July 1996, pp. 50–64. In this recent piece, Frank argues that "the common global expansion since 1400 benefitted the Asian centres [India and China] earlier and more than it did Europe, Africa and the Americas" (p. 50).

[24] In her dissertation in progress at the University of California, Berkeley.

[25] Stephen F. Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

and look with fresh eyes at new institutions, new social forms, new cultural expression, and new productivity in the early modern period. Also difficult is the need to work up a cross-disciplinary understanding of the dynamics of change throughout the subcontinent in the early centuries.

We must generate better integrated, multidisciplinary historical research in early modern South Asia (not Mughal India), in which scholars move seamlessly between the particulars of local and regional histories to broader South Asian and world description and analysis. South Asia is too important to be consigned to the dusty shelf of oriental curios when world history is written in the future.