# TOWARDS AN INTERPRETATION OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE[1]

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It is nowadays common for Indian history textbooks to treat the various "empires" that successively occupied the stage of Indian history, with their respective "administrations", as so many successive repetitions with merely different names for offices and institutions that in substance remained the same: namely, the King, the Ministers, the Provinces, the Governors, the Taxes, Land-grants, and so on. But D. D. Kosambi, in his *Introduction to the study of Indian history* (Bombay, 1975), rightly observed that this repetitive succession cannot be assumed, and that each regime, when subjected to critical study, displays distinct elements that call for its analysis in the context of "relations of production" (as he put it) existing at that time.

Of all the "empires" previous to the British, we know most, of course, about the Mughal Empire. And this empire displays so many striking features that it should in fact attract an historical analyst of today as much as it did Bernier. In its large extent and long duration, it had only one precedent, and that in the Mauryan Empire, some 1,900 years earlier. Well might Havell[2] regard it as the fulfilment of the political ambitions embodied in Indian polity for three millennia. And yet there is also a temptation to see in the Mughal Empire a primitive version of the modern state. Its existence belongs to a period when the dawn of modern technology had occurred in Europe – and some of the rays of that dawn had also fallen on Asia. Can it then be said, as Barthold[3] implied, that the foundations of the Mughal Empire lay in artillery – the most brilliant and dreadful representative of modern technology, as much as did those of the modern absolute monarchies of Europe? Can we say, further, that the Mughal Empire, far from being the climax of traditional Indian political endeavour, represented one of the several unsuccessful experiments of History towards that titration which has at last given us the distinct modern civilization of our times?

These questions are unlikely to be answered easily, or perhaps ever, with a simple yes or no. The factors to be considered are too numerous, and often too remote, to be evaluated or assessed with any reasonable assurance of comprehensiveness and accuracy. But is there any student of the period who does not, in his private thoughts, have a predilection for one or the other setting for the Mughal Empire, i.e. for regarding it either as the most successful of the traditional Indian States or as an abortive quasi-modern polity?

My attempt here is to discuss certain matters which may be of interest to a contingent debate on the theme which I have briefly outlined. Most of my conclusions are naturally tentative; and I can hope for no more than that the aspects touched upon may be found to be deserving of close scrutiny.

A question that comes to mind as we are on the theme of a general characterization of the Mughal Empire is, what was new – or if not new, then, at any rate, exotic – in the polity of the Mughal Empire?

In the view of a number of historians, including Professor Rushbrook Williams[4] and Professor R. P. Tripathi,[5] the institutions and mutual relations of kingship and nobility in the Mughal Empire essentially derive from Turko-Mongol traditions, contrasted with the "Afghān". The former conferred on the emperor absolute powers over his nobles and subjects, whereas the latter, particularly in the circumstances of the 15th century, tended to place the king in no higher a position than of the first among equals. This view has been criticized, first through an analysis of the surviving Turkish and Mongol traditions (for both were not only distinct, but historically different) in the Central Asia of Bābur's time, it being shown that these by no means prescribed an absolute despotism.[6] The other criticism is that it is possibly inaccurate to describe the Indo-Afghān or Lodi polity as a mere tribal confederation; for this would underestimate the underlying powers of the monarch that certain tribal forms only barely concealed.[7]

There is still a third factor, to which, perhaps, sufficient attention has not been paid. This is the continuing survival of the framework of the administration of the Delhi Sultanate, established under the Khaljīs and Tughlaqs, especially the land-revenue system. Abū 'l-Faẓl's statement that Sher Shāh sought to copy the administrative measures of 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī which he had read about in Baranī's *Tārīkh-i Fīroz-Shāhī* would have been effective as a gibe had Sher Shāh not proved himself a realist by his success in carrying out these measures. This success testified to the similarity, if not identity, of the administrative system of the early 16th century with that of the 14th.

The contribution too of the Sūr regime to the structure of Mughal polity needs to be borne in mind. Sher Shāh and Islām Shāh created the *ẓabṭ* system of land-revenue assessment, the corner stone of Akbar's land-revenue administration. They imposed the *dāgh*, or horse branding, an equally basic device for controlling the army. If 'Abbās Sarwānī is to be believed, Sher Shāh attempted a conscious centralized despotism; and Islām Shāh certainly gave shape to it by bringing the whole of his empire under direct control (*khāliṣa*), thus anticipating Akbar's measures of 1574.

These achievements were acclaimed by the Afghān historians of the late 16th and 17th centuries; but they also won wider recognition. There are guarded admissions in Abū 'l-Faẓl; and a paean of praise for Sher Shāh is found in a letter written in 1611 by Mirzā 'Azīz Koka, himself one of "the old wolves" of the Mughal state.[8] What more could be required as a testimony of the popular admiration of Sher Shāh, than that Dāwar Bakhsh, a claimant to the Mughal throne in 1627, should assume for himself the very same title of Sher Shāh?[9]

But, quite obviously, Mughal polity could not have been a simple continuation

of the Sultanate and Sūr polity. Had it been such, its comparatively greater success would be impossible to explain. What, then, were the new elements of political chemistry out of which Akbar compounded such a large, stable, long-lasting political structure?

At the risk of over-simplification, I would say that these were an extreme systematization of administration, a new theoretical basis for sovereignty, and a balanced and stable composition of the ruling class.

I venture to think that in spite of the work done on Akbar's administration, notably by Moreland, Saran, and Ibn Ḥasan, there has not been an adequate appreciation of Akbar's achievement in his systematization of administration. We see such systematization in his creation of *manṣab*, classifying all individual officers into definite categories. Whereas before Akbar each appointment, promotion, fixation of pay, and obligation was in the case of higher officers a separate *ad hoc* arrangement, under Akbar every such action was reduced to a change in the *manṣab* (the number assigned to a man). Increase or diminution of pay and obligation followed a change in the *manṣab* as a matter of course, under set regulations. Much research has gone towards discovering the "decimal system" of military organization under the Delhi Sultans and the Mongols. But *manṣab* has really little kinship with any such system. It has been shown, I think quite persuasively, that there was no *manṣab* or number-rank in existence before 1574.[10] I would add that no analogous system of numbered ranks can be found in any Central Asian or Middle Eastern state – and certainly not in the Tīmūrid, the Uzbek, the Ṣafavid, and the Ottoman Empires. The *manṣab* system was a unique and, as far as centralization went, an unrivalled device for organizing the ruling class.

We get the same sense of systematization in the development of *jāgīr* as the pure form of land-revenue assignment. It is possible to argue that the *jāgīr* fits the definition of *iqṭā'* given in the *Siyāsatnāma* of Niẓām al-Mulk Tūsī (12th century).[11] But whereas in all earlier states the *iqṭā'* in practice always became confounded with general administrative charges, the *jāgīr* in actual practice exactly fitted the standard definition of *iqṭā'*. The maintenance of *jama'dāmī* (estimated revenue) figures, and the assignment of *jāgīr* to a *manṣab* holder, rigidly on the basis of the approved *jama'dāmī* equalling the *ṭalab*, or his sanctioned pay, the constant transfers of *jāgīrs*, and the restricting of *jāgīrdars'* powers to revenue collection alone,[12] are again measures for which precedents and parallels in the Islamic world are not easy to find.

Akbar's division of his empire into *ṣūbas*, *sarkars*, and *maḥalls* and his largely successful attempts to make the entire administrative structure of one *ṣūba* into the exact replica of the other, with a chain of officers at various levels ultimately controlled by the ministers at the centre, gave identity to Mughal administrative institutions irrespective of the regions where they functioned.

The systematization continued under Akbar's successors. When new administrative categories were created, whether *duaspa-sihaspa* ranks under Jahāngīr, or the month scale under Shāh Jahān, they too appear, in the ultimate analysis, to substitute general categories for individual exceptions.[13] Even in the sphere of land-revenue administration, where regional differences were inevitable, the *ẓabṭ* system – the characteristic institution of the Mughal revenue administration – was extended to the Deccan by Murshid Qulī Khān.

Side by side with this immense work of centralization and systematization, we see the exposition of a new stress on the absoluteness of sovereignty. The accepted Mughal doctrine of sovereignty was derived from several distinct sources which could by no means be logically inter-related. It partly consisted of an exaltation of the blue blood of the Mughal dynasty. The long history of the Mughals as a ruling dynasty, going back to Tīmur and Chengiz Khan, rulers not of obscure states but of World Empires, was an asset which the Mughals put to skilful use. Abū 'l-Faẓl's *Albarnāma* offers a superb example of the propaganda carried on for the dynasty on the basis of its past. The Mughals accentuated the consciousness of their exalted status by abstaining from marrying princesses of the dynasty to anyone except a member of the imperial family. On the other hand the privilege of marrying a daughter to prince or emperor came to be zealously guarded by a few Īrānian, Tūrānian, and Rājpūt families of high status. The historic halo around the dynasty justified the submission of the chiefs of the proudest clans to its suzerainty.

A second element derived from the earlier Muslim political thinkers. In the chapter, *Rawāī-i rozī*, in the *Ā'īn-i akbarī*, Abū 'l-Faẓl repeats the well-known theory of social contract to justify the sovereign's absolute claims over the individual subject. The strength of this theory lies in its secular character and its foundation on alleged social needs. It has the further merit of being rational.

But rationality was probably not deemed a sufficient incentive to the total obedience that the Mughal sovereign sought. A third element then entered; and that was religious. Ever since the Ṣafavids had successfully utilized their past as religious leaders and based their sovereignty on their spiritual authority, the attractions of a similar position for *sunnī* sovereigns were irresistable. The Ottomans ultimately purchased from existing claimants the authority of the 'Aḅbāsid caliphate; but they were anticipated by Akbar, who, through the *maḥzar* of 1579, attempted to assume the position of an interpreter of Islamic law and, in spheres where the existing corpus was silent, of a legislator.[14]

For reasons into which we cannot go here, Akbar's attempt to establish such a position within the framework of Islam proved abortive.[15] Moreover, it did not solve the problem of spiritual authority in relations with his non-Muslim subjects. It therefore gave way to a new attempt in which it was claimed that the emperor enjoyed the position of a spiritual guide and that this position derived not from any particular religion, but directly from God. "Sovereignty is a ray of light

from the Divine Sun", claims Abū 'l-Faẓl.[16] As such men of all faiths were beneficiaries of the Divine Light. Thus Aurangzeb would write to Rānā Rāj Singh when seeking the throne:

> "Because the persons of the great kings are shadows of God, the attention of this elevated class (of kings), who are the pillars of the great court, is devoted to this, that men belonging to various communities and different religions should live in the vale of peace and pass their days in prosperity, and no one should interfere in the affairs of another. Any one of this sky-glorious group (of kings) who resorted to intolerance, became the cause of dispute and conflict and of harm to the people at large, who are indeed a trust received from God: in reality (such a king) thereby endeavoured to devastate the prosperous creations of God and destroy the foundations of the God-created fabric, which is a habit deserving to be rejected and cast off. God willing, when the true cause (i.e. Aurangzeb's own cause) is successful, and the wishes of the sincerely loyal ones are fulfilled, the benefits of the revered practices and established regulations of my great ancestors, who are so much esteemed by the worshipful ones, will cast lustre on the four-cornered inhabited world."[17]

Akbar initiated the practice of *jharoka darshan*, a striking innovation which nevertheless seemed in accordance with Hindu tradition. To a more select circle of disciples, styled the *irādat-gazīnān* by Abū 'l-Faẓl, Akbar was the spiritual guide. Akbar's successors enlarged this circle practically to include all their nobles; and it became a convention for every high noble, whether Muslim or Hindu, to address the Emperor as *Pir-ō murshid*, and designate himself as his *murīd*.

It can be seen that, combined with the tolerant religious policy of which Akbar was the author, the basing of political authority on spiritual sanctity was an intelligent device to strengthen the sovereign's position. Its logical implications lay, however, not in secularism, but in an as yet dormant and unelaborated concept of religious equality. Abū 'l-Faẓl's claims for his master could only be justified by the theories of Dārā Shukoh.

The third important element which Akbar introduced into imperial polity was, as I have mentioned, the establishment of certain principles governing the relations between the king and the nobles. That Akbar created a composite nobility has been well recognized since the 17th century, when the author of the *Dabistān-i maẕāhib*, ascribed the prosperity of the Mughal dynasty to the fact that Akbar had succeeded in removing the dependence of the sovereign on the Muslim nobility alone.[18] Though the attribution of the creation of a composite nobility to Akbar is now a part of the established historical dogma, it can be accepted only with much qualification. A composite nobility, in terms of race, existed already under the Khaljīs (1290–1320); and a composite nobility, in terms of religion, under Muḥammad Tughlaq.[19] The latter sultan too linked his policy towards the nobility with innovations in his religious policy, such as a

repressive attitude towards the Muslim orthodoxy, public discourses with *yogīs* (Hindu mendicants), and personal participation in the *holī* festival.[20] And yet the effort to give stability to the political structure of the sultanate by this means had not been successful.

It may be that there are also autonomous causes for the greater success of Akbar in creating a loyal nobility. For instance, the gradual progress of Islamic-Persian court culture among the higher classes of non-Muslims, including the Rājpūts, might have generated a common cultural groundwork for the political alliance between sections of Muslim and non-Muslim aristocracies.

There is also another factor to consider. The rural aristocracy, descendants of the ruling class of the 12th century, had not only fresh memories in the 13th and 14th centuries of their past glories, but probably then objected to the imposition of the exotic fiscal system, whereby the bulk of the agricultural surplus was claimed by the sultan as *kharāj* (land-tax) to be distributed among his nobles, the *muqṭi's* or *iqṭā'*-holders. By the 16th century, the *kharāj* system could no longer be seen as an innovation, and the rural aristocracy, having been reduced to the status of *zamīndārs*, must have largely accommodated themselves to it.[21] It was thus possible to introduce into the Mughal nobility certain *zamīndār* elements (e.g. the Rājpūt chiefs, Ghakkars, etc.) without endangering its foundations.[22]

Both these factors are easily admitted. But one significant contribution of Akbar that continued to be honoured by his four immediate successors must be given due recognition. This was the enunciation of an essentially humane approach to the individuals constituting the nobility. In this respect, the Mughal Empire stood apart from the Sultanate; and it also stood apart from the Ṣafavid and other polities of the contemporary Islamic world.

The official chronicler of Shāh Jahān tells us:

> "In matters of punishments, His Majesty does not regard the nobles as different from ordinary human beings. If perchance mention is made in His Majesty's presence of the cruelty of the Emperors of Constantinople, Irān, and Uzbeks, and of their ferocity in awarding punishments, His Majesty gets so perturbed that the signs of sadness are apparent from his illustrious forehead. His Majesty has often been heard to say that God has given the kings authority and made all men their subjects for the sole purpose that the entire attention of kings be directed towards the maintenance of justice, which is the basis of the functioning of the world and the races of men. Therefore, the king should so award punishments that the cruel cannot oppress their victims, and (the nobles) may treat the poor mildly, and the garden of the world flourish owing to the removal of the thorns of cruelty. Not that in the name of awarding punishments the king should slaughter large numbers of men for a small fault, and on a small suspicion injure fellow beings, who are a trust from God."[23]

The boast for the Mughal Empire implicit in this passage was not an empty

one. The Mughal emperors really shine by contrast with their despotic contemporaries. Taking the *Tārīkh-i 'ālam ārā-i 'Abbāsī*,[24] I compiled a list of the leading nobles executed by Shāh 'Abbās I (1587–1629), the great Ṣafavid emperor. I found that during 31 years, he executed no less than 48 prominent officers of his, generally upon the slightest suspicions. Some of the executions were on religious grounds.[25] When we turn from this gory record to the annals of the Mughal Empire, we find that even dismissals, let alone executions, are very rare. When high officers were dismissed for major faults, they were usually pensioned off with land grants. Confiscation of individual nobles' property, as punishment, was unknown. So also the humiliation of the family of a noble no longer in favour. It was only in the rare cases of rebellions or wars of succession that the nobles met violent ends. Even here an unwritten custom provided that only under exceptional circumstances were nobles of the defeated side to be executed after a battle. In an overwhelmingly large number of cases, nobles who escaped death on the battlefield could be sure of escaping it at their captor's hands. In the wars of succession, it remained indeed usual, until 1713, to offer appointments to the supporters of the defeated claimants. During the war of 1658–9, for example, neither Aurangzeb nor Dārā Shukoh executed any noble. It was only the princes of royal blood whose lives remained insecure, ever since Shāh Jahān in 1628 established the practice of executing possible rivals.

It is this approach to the nobility, in which loyalty to the throne was assumed from every one, that was perhaps a major factor that enabled the Mughals to avoid a crisis in their relations with the nobles after the aristocratic rebellion of 1580. This approach had a corollary to it. While the Mughal emperor undertook no obligation to maintain an hereditary nobility, and in theory could appoint anyone to any *manṣab*, in actual fact recruitment to the nobility was confined to certain foreign racial elements and indigenous clans which, in spite of their diverse backgrounds, were bound to the Mughal dynasty in grateful obedience. If one collects data about the *manṣab*-holders under the different emperors, one is surprised at the broadly unvarying nature of the proportions shared by the various elements.

In the following table I give the composition of (*a*) the 98 *manṣabdārs* alive in 1595, and enjoying the *manṣab* of 500 and above; (*b*) the 100 highest *manṣabdārs* in service in 1620; (*c*) the 100 highest *manṣabdārs* in 1656; (*d*) the 202 *manṣabdārs* appointed/promoted to the *manṣabs* of 2,000/1,500 and above during the period 1658–78; and (*e*) 277 *manṣabdārs* of the same ranks serving during 1679–1707.[26]

It will be seen from this table that the main disturbance in the proportionate strength of the various elements in the Mughal nobility was caused by the entrance of the Marāthās and other Dakhinis (the real strength of the latter is concealed in the break-up of the table we have given), who appear in increasing numbers from 1656 onwards. This intrusion is, of course, explained by the

| | Tūrānīs | Īrānīs | Afghāns | Indian Muslims | Other Muslims | Rājpūts | Marāthās | Other Hindus | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (*a*) 1595 | 33 | 23 | 2 | 14 | 4 | 21 | 0 | 1 | 98 |
| (*b*) 1620 | 22 | 33 | 8 | 11 | 4 | 21 | 1 | 0 | 100 |
| (*c*) 1656 | 22 | 33 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 21 | 5 | 1 | 100 |
| (*d*) 1658–1678 | 37 | 67 | 15 | 26 | 14 | 27 | 14 | 2 | 202 |
| | 18.5% | 33.5% | 7.5% | 13% | 7% | 13.5% | 7% | 1% | |
| (*e*) 1679–1707 | 42 | 65 | 18 | 35 | 34 | 28 | 47 | 8 | 277 |
| | 15.5% | 24% | 6.6% | 12.5% | 12% | 10% | 17% | 3% | |

increasing involvement of the Mughal Empire in the Deccan, especially during the reign of Aurangzeb (1659–1707).

Thus we see two opposites reconciled successfully in Mughal polity, namely the absolute despotic power of the emperor, bolstered by immense centralization and a theory of semi-divine sovereignty; and a structure heavily systematized with such conventions governing the relations between the king and his nobles as to deserve even the appellation of "constitution", with a small if not a capital "c". We have seen, further, that in the formation of this policy both the development of institutions, already in existence under the previous regimes, and a deliberate policy on the part of the Mughal emperors, had distinct roles to play. These two causal factors did not have a directly "modern" origin, even taking that imprecise term in the widest of its possible senses.

And yet it is possible that some of the changes that took place at the dawn of the modern era did exercise certain influences on the last-stage, but crucial, development of medieval institutions that we have just considered, and on the ideas and intellectual atmosphere in which what was new in the Mughal imperial polity was formulated.

I would begin by taking up a small point: the system of coinage. The Mughal system of coinage was tri-metallic, with coins uttered in three metals, gold, silver, and copper, with the highest degree of purity achieved anywhere in the world. Such coinage too had its predecessor in the sultanate coinage of the 14th century. But during the 15th century coinage had been heavily debased, the main coin being a copper *tanka* with a progressively declining silver alloy. Sher Shāh sought to eliminate the debased coinage, and he minted the first rupee, a coin of 178 grains of practically pure silver. By the end of the 16th century the attempt that had continued under the later Sūrs and yet more vigorously under Akbar, succeeded in making the rupee the basic unit of currency actually in use.[27] It is useless to dilate upon the importance of this achievement for successful functioning of commerce and credit, and the importance of the latter, in turn, for the functioning of a highly centralized administration. Yet it is not to be forgotten that the coming of the rupee was linked to the Spanish discovery of the New

World, because that led to a heavy influx of silver, plundered and minted in the newly discovered continents, into the "Old World", thereby ending the silver famine that had prevailed there since the 14th century. Thus what would have been otherwise exceptionally difficult if not impossible – namely, the institution of a pure silver currency, previously limited by conditions of very high silver prices – became possible as an economic by-product of the Age of Discovery.

There is also the role of the artillery to be considered. It is true that the Mughal army, like the Ṣafavid and Uzbek, and even the Ottoman army, was mainly a cavalry force. It was characteristic that the *manṣab* indicating the size of military contingent its possessor was obliged to maintain, was styled *suwār* or "horseman". But it would be wrong to think that artillery had no more than a marginal role to play in the Mughal army, especially when we remember that we ought not to be thinking of cannon only, but also, and even particularly, of muskets. After all, if in 1647 there were 200,000 horsemen under the imperial banner, there were also no less than 40,000 infantry-men, consisting of "match-lock men, gunners, cannoneers and rocketeers".[28]

It is quite likely that the increasing use of artillery during the hundred years following the battle of Panipat, in 1526, gave the Mughal army a decisive weapon against the traditional chiefs with their old-type cavalry retainers (of whom the Rājpūts were a characteristic illustration). Moreover, artillery gave to the towns, where alone guns and muskets could be manufactured, a new basis for political and military domination over the countryside. In so far as the Mughal ruling class was mainly urban in character,[29] it must certainly have gained as a result of the new military importance of towns.

We can thus at least identify two new sources of strength and stability that "modern" developments gave to the Mughal polity – the silver influx, a component of the Price Revolution, and the artillery, an early product of modern technology. It is, moreover, possible that the developments in Europe were influencing ideas too, indirectly but powerfully.

Information about the Europeans was available to Akbar and his contemporaries; and this was not confined to knowledge about the Jesuits and Christianity. Abū 'l-Faẓl was aware that the Europeans had discovered the Americas, which he called *'ālam-i nau*,[30] the New World. The accounts of the time are replete with references to the technological ingenuity of the *Firangīs*, it being mentioned with pride if craftsmen at any place could manufacture articles that might compare with those of European manufacturers. As is well known, by the 17th century European physicians and surgeons had established a reputation for Western science; and, in a notable encounter of the two cultures, Bernier explained the theory of the circulation of blood to Dānishmand Khān.[31]

Such information, showing the lead that Europe was attaining in several branches of human activity, could not but engender questioning about the finality of traditional knowledge. This question took several forms. On one side was the

rational approach of Abū 'l-Faẓl, who would point out that zinc, as a separate metal (a recent discovery in Asia), was not known to the ancients,[32] or would say that al-Ghazālī spoke nonsense when he condemned sciences that were not manifestly based upon the Qur'ān.[33] Then there was Dārā Shukoh and men of his stamp, who rejected the traditional sciences, but also rejected rationality, and sought to establish an obscurantist spiritual dogma on the foundations of Comparative Religion.[34] Further to the "right" still, there were men like Mullah Nāṣir of Burhānpūr who thought that no particular sanctity attached to the classical Islamic jurists, and what they said could be challenged by men of equal or greater learning, like himself.[35] Even Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī was thought by his critics to be tarnished with similar thoughts of his own superiority over the earlier interpreters.[36]

In the previous (16th) century, the Mahdavī Movement had attained considerable success; and it was certainly a consciously "revisionist" doctrine.

All these were symptoms of a cleft in the hitherto solid structure of faith in the traditional cultural heritage of Islam. It was this void that was unconsciously sought to be filled by the special position of the Mughal emperor as a spiritual guide, and the self-conscious view of the Mughal Empire as a great new polity, essentially just and humane (to the individual members of the ruling class). If this hypothesis is accepted, then we can perhaps see a dual ideological role of the Mughal Empire. On the one hand, the need of an official theory of sovereignty, and of the specific role of Mughal polity, arose because of the undermining of the traditional ideological structure from tremors originating from the remote and largely unidentified developments of the early modern world; but, in its turn, the theory cemented and strengthened the traditional culture and made the Mughal Empire its upholder and protector.

The suggestion that I should like to make is, then, that we should not treat the Mughal Empire as simply the last in the line of succession of the traditional Indian empires. It is true that its structure and institutions had deep indigenous roots. Its success also owed not a little to the genius of one man, Akbar. But the circumstances and atmosphere in which it was created were shaped by certain other factors as well, that had much to do with the very events that played an important part in the origin and development of modern culture in Europe. A certain intellectual ferment was in the air in India also, stirred in unseen ways by the advance of Europe; and this too contributed to the acceptance of a new ideological basis offered for the Mughal Empire.

I am not suggesting that these factors converted the Mughal Empire into a modern state. If it had some rudiments of an unwritten constitution, it did not yet claim for itself the legislative power and functions that are the hallmarks of a modern state. It was essentially the "perfection" of a medieval polity, made possible by certain early modern developments. Though this gave it the stability and power denied to its predecessors, it still did not resolve the new contradiction

inherent in the existence of a medieval polity in a world advancing to modern conditions.

As I see it, this contradiction expressed itself mainly in the contrast between the sense of unity infused in the imperial ruling class, in spite of its heterogeneity, and the absence of the consciousness of such unity among the mass of the imperial subjects. In other words, the subcontinent of India had a centralized quasi-modern state without any developing sense of nationhood. It is true that "Hindustān", a word so often used, was more than a simple geographical expression. But if it was so, this was not because of any new popular consciousness, but because of its geographical correspondence with the area in which Hindu mythology had been enacted and places of pilgrimage lay scattered. This was not sufficient to overcome divisions of caste and community.

It was, perhaps, for this reason that the Mughal Empire proved so vulnerable to the challenges from the Marāthās, Jāts, Sikhs, and Afghāns, who represented not its conventional political opponents, but forces of a new kind, involving the entry of peasant-soldiers. This is not the place to discuss how far these forces were the product of the "agrarian crisis" of the Mughal Empire. What for my present purpose is more significant is that while no serious division occurred within the Mughal ruling class, in the face of these challenges it still proved incapable of meeting them and failed to invoke any popular support in its struggle. It seemed as if the people at large were indifferent to whether they were under an imperial or a regional regime.

Admittedly, all this is hypothesis, even speculation. But my whole purpose here is simply to suggest a sphere in which speculation may usefully be pursued, in that it may lead to our attaching fresh significance to facts hitherto not noticed, or hardly noticed at all. Then, one day, perhaps, we may really assign to the Mughal Empire its true place in history.

## NOTES

[1] This is a revised version of my presidential address presented to the Indian History Congress, Muzaffarpur Session, 1972, Section on Medieval India.

[2] E. B. Havell, *A history of Aryan rule in India*, London, n.d., 520–1.

[3] V. V. Barthold, "Irān", tr. G. K. Nariman, in *Posthumous works of G. K. Nariman*, ed. S. H. Jhabvala, Bombay, 1935, 142–3.

[4] "It will thus be seen that Babur had not merely to conquer a kingdom; he had to create a theory of kingship. He was determined to be no sultan, hampered by all limitations which had beset the Lodi dynasty; but a *pādshāh*, looking down upon even his highest *amīrs* from the towering eminence upon which the divine right of Timur's blood had placed him" (*An empire builder of the sixteenth century*, London, 1918, 161).

[5] "The Chaghatai conqueror Bābar came to India with ideas (of Sovereignty) that were not quite similar to those of either the early Turkish rulers of Delhi or the Afghans" (*Some aspects of Muslim administration*, Allahabad, 1936, 105, *et seq.*).

[6] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Turko-Mongol theory of kingship", in *Medieval India: A miscellany*, II, 1972, 8–18.

[7] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqi, *Some aspects of Afghan despotism in India*, Aligarh, 1971, 1–60.

[8] "Sher Shāh Afghān was not a king (*malik*) but an angel (*malak*). In six years he gave such stability to the structure that the foundations still survive" (B.M. MS Add. 16859, f. 19a).

[9] This curious fact is not mentioned in the Indian chronicles. But it is the title Dāwar Bakhsh assumes in his *farmān* of 1627 to Rāja Jai Singh (Bikaner, old serial No. 176, New S.021). This is corroborated by the *Tārīkh-i 'ālam ārā-i 'Abbāsī*, Tehran ed., A.H. 1314, 750.

[10] A. J. Qaisar, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Delhi Session, 1961, 155–7.

[11] *Siyāsatnāma*, ed. C. Scheffer, Paris, 1891–3, 28.

[12] cf. Irfan Habib, *Argarian system of Mughal India, 1556–1707*, London, 1963, 256 ff.

[13] cf. W. H. Moreland, "Rank (Mansab) in the Mughal state service", *JRAS*, 1936, 641–65; Irfan Habib, "The Mansab system, 1595–1637", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Patiala Session, 1968, 221 ff.

[14] cf. S. Nurul Hasan, "The mahzar of Akbar's reign", *Journal of U.P. Hist. Soc.*, XVI, 1968, 126.

[15] cf. Iqtidar Alam Khan in *JRAS*, 1968, 34–5.

[16] *A'īn-i akbarī*, 3

[17] For the text of the *nīshān*, see Kaviraj Shyamaldas, *Vir Vinod*, 11, 419–20 note.

[18] *Dabistān-i mazāhib*, ed. Nazar Ashraf, Calcutta, 1809, 432.

[19] See my article, "Foundations of Akbar's organization of the nobility: An interpretation", *Medieval India Quarterly*, III, Nos. 3 and 4, 1958, 80–7.

[20] 'Iṣāmī, *Futūḥ al-salāṭīn*, ed. Usha, 515.

[21] cf. Irfan Habib, "Social distribution of landed property in pre-British India", *Enquiry*, old series No. 12, 54–6.

[22] Dr. Ahsan Raza Khan in his unpublished thesis on the chiefs under Akbar has collected interesting data about the chiefs (high *zamīndārs*) who were granted *manṣabs* under Akbar.

[23] Lāhorī, *Bādshāhnāma*, I, 139–40.

[24] Tehran ed., A.H. 1214.

[25] e.g. in his 17th regnal year.

[26] These data are based (*a*) on the *Ā'īn-i akbarī's* list of *manṣabdārs*; (*b*) on Irfan Habib's list (unpublished) of *manṣabdārs* under Jahāngīr, mainly based on the *Tuzuk-i Jahāngīrī*, and (*c*) on Wāriṣ, *Bādshāhnāma*, Ethe, 329, for the list of *manṣabdārs* in 1656. The racial composition has been established by detailed checking with the biographical information in the chronicles (e.g. Lāhorī) as well as the *Zakhirat al-khawānīn* and the *Ma'āṣir al-'umarā'*. (*d*) and (*e*) are based on the list of *manṣabdārs* of Aurangzeb's reign given in my book, *The Mughal nobility under Aurangzeb*, London, 1966.

[27] cf. H. N. Wright, *The Coinage and metrology of the Sultans of Delhi*, Delhi, 1936, 260–1; Irfan Habib, *IESHR*, IV, 1967, 217–9.

[28] Lāhorī, *Bādshāhnāma*, II, 715.

[29] See my *Mughal nobility under Aurangzeb*, 154 ff.

[30] *Ā'īn-i akbarī*, III, 22.

[31] Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, Bombay, 1934, 324, 339.

[32] *Ā'īn-i akbarī*, I, 24.

[33] Muḥammad Hāshim Kishmī, *Zubdat al-Maqāmāt*, Mahmud Press, Lucknow, A.H. 1302, 131.

[34] cf. Qanungo, *Dara Shukoh*, Calcutta, 1935–, 78 ff.

[35] Muḥammad Baqa, *Mirāt al-'ālam*, MS Aligarh; 'Abd al-Salām, 84/314, Pairaish III.

[36] S. A. Rizvi, *Muslim revivalist movements in northern India in the 16th and 17th centuries*, Agra, 1965, 268–70.