UNIT 8    HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE MUGHAL STATE*

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8.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit would enable you to:

- Acquaint yourself with the various historical approaches adopted to study the nature of Mughal State,
- Analyze the various factors which influenced and shaped the studies undertaken by different historians regarding the nature of Mughal State,
- Understand the nature of political organization under the Mughals, and
- Comprehend the historiography of Mughal State.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Historiography is the study of history of academic writings and theories concerning a particular subject, which in this context is nature of the Mughal State. Historiography of the nature of state concerns with the enquiry into the utilization of political power in achieving certain objectives in pre-colonial India. The study of medieval Indian state administration and accompanying social and political

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Implications is one of the most contested subject matters, especially the Mughal Indian state. The study of Mughal state began by asserting the Hindu-Muslim divide by the imperial historians. With the establishment of colonial conquest, the propaganda was systematically spread across the academic plane, percolating to the history textbooks.

The colonial power wanted to usurp power by legitimizing from the earlier practices prevalent under the Mughal regime. With religion as the sole determining factor in historical writing and the tripartite division of Indian history into Hindu, Muslim and British epochs by James Mill1, modern historiography of the Mughal state developed on two trajectories. As the medieval Muslim state, on the one hand, the Mughal state was seen as spreading Islam in India. On the other hand, an alternative approach was developed which saw the initial challenges posed by the Mughal power to the indigenous subjects and their later mutual accommodation. One strand of history came to be seen as communal by the other projecting itself as secular nationalist.

Initially writings on the military and political organization under Mughals were given credence. Historians like W. H. Moreland in his work, *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, continued with the theories and assumptions about the nature of Mughal state advocated by the Britishers. Though Moreland incorporated the analysis of historical documents into his study. With the decline of Eurocentric theories and nationalist theories being written in the post-independence era, a major break marking the shift in the base of history writing away from these two paradigms arrived in 1956 with the work of D. D. Kosambi2 and the work of Irfan Habib3 in 1963, Marxist influence over the process of history writing was witnessed. Focus on religion was shifted to focus on the existence of class and economic processes in the country.

One of the most seminal historical works on Mughal India that came to be recognized was done by Irfan Habib in his study of the agrarian system under the Mughal regime. Much credence was given to the Persian sources. Prof Habib’s work became a seminal work of reference around which a whole body of work came to be written. Though at the time same, the liberal-nationalists such as Mohibbul Hasan and Haroon Khan Sherwani, among others continued to write on the Mughal regime in India. The latter has extensively worked upon the regional sources and published volumes on history of the Deccan. Historians such as Khaliq Ahmad Nizami and Saiyid Athar Abbas Rizvi delve into the aspects of religious policies under Mughals.

The Aligarh historians influenced by the Marxist writings evolved a new trend in historiography of the Mughal state. Even the Aligarh School shared the view of oriental historians on the distribution of resources under the Mughal empire. The Mughal state was seen by these historians as a highly centralized and systematic bureaucratic state. They categorized it into the kind of a ‘conquest state’. He state parceled out some of its powers in order to extract maximum revenue from the

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people while simultaneously maintaining a well-established system of checks and balances in order to retain the centralized power.

There were issues that were not dealt by the Aligarh school of historians. The chronology under focus was majorly from 1556 to 1707, i.e. from Akbar to Aurangzeb. There was a relative negligence of the first half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, emphasis was laid on the Ain-i-Akbari written by Shaikh Abu’l Fazl. Moreover, the epithet of ‘centralized and bureaucratic despotic ‘absolutist’ nature of the Mughal empire could find no basis in the periods of history before Akbar nor under the emperors after Aurangzeb. Also, it was argued that the Mughal state was largely an extractive state which took away almost all the surplus from the peasantry and used it for non-productive conspicuous consumption.

In the 1960s, the Cambridge School – known so because of the approach adopted by certain historians who did not necessarily belonged to Cambridge, focused on intensive archival research and writings of elites. The complex interplay of polities at the regional or local levels were paid much attention by these historians. The Mughal rule was considered indirect in nature, with no other reason than military success binding the emperor to the mansabdars. According to them, rule was dependent upon the group of intermediaries with patron-client ties forming the base. Critical of the Cambridge school, the subaltern school studied the Mughal state from a different aspect.

In the 1980s, C.A. Bayly pointed out that the earlier writings on Mughal state emphasized entirely upon the agency of state and has entirely ignored the agency of enterprising communities. He saw a continuity marking the transition from Mughal to colonial India with economic activities being carried by regional elites as hallmarks of decentralization that were formed under the Mughal rule. This viewpoint was supported by Muzaffar Alam who emphasized upon the institutions of jagir and ijara as manifestation of growth in the state administration.

Historians like Stephen Blake, M. Athar Ali, Douglas Streusand, John F. Richards and Herman Kulke termed it to be a patrimonial-bureaucratic state. The Subaltern Studies broke new ground by moving away from the top-down approach to historical understanding. These studies criticized the emphasis on elites and nationalist icons in the earlier understandings of the Mughal state. They attempted to recover the history of the masses under the Mughal regime. The Subaltern school held the belief that the local communities in the Indian society were quite autonomous and self-governing. These communities persisted with their beliefs and customs with constrained external interference. They utilized the oral archives of history. As pointed out by other groups of historians, one of the weaknesses in their approach to historical research has been the lack of attention paid to quantified data of the widespread consequences.

Revisionist theories towards understanding the Mughal state have been criticized for their analysis of historical sources and to be less assertive in character. By the 1980s and 1990s, new paradigms of historical inquiries had emerged in the realms of cultural and social history. The concept of normative text began featuring in these works. With changing approaches to looking at history of the subcontinent, useful insights into studying the varied aspects of the Mughal state have evolved over time ranging right from the analysis of historical events as evident in paintings to the problem of court culture from bottom up.
According to Irfan Habib, Mughal empire concentrated its power in the hands of high officials and Mughal ruling class. When the second edition of Irfan Habib’s work, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, was published in 1999 several fresh studies of Mughal State had emerged by then. Looking at the state from only a fiscal-administration aspect became an old school of study. Historians moved beyond the canonical position ascribed to particular historical texts and are analyzing the history of everyday lives and associations. New and fresh approached towards understanding the system of governance under the Mughal regime came to be adopted.

### 8.2 NEW TRENDS AND THEMES IN MUGHAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

- The question of religion under the Mughals generated a great deal of interest, especially overlapping with the Babri Masjid controversy in the subcontinent. The works left by Sufi saints and other saintly figures, once relegated to secondary position, during the period began to receive attention.
- Language, literature and culture under the regime. These studies broke down the earlier perceptions around the Indian state which was seen to be under a constant oriental inertia. The cultural traditions followed by the Mughal elite received much attention under these studies and continue to arose much interest among scholars.
- The earlier neglected periods of Mughal history, i.e. the first halves of the sixteenth century and seventeenth century.
- Regional monographs began receiving their due consideration. The regions of Bengal, Bihar and Punjab began to be studied in detail. Farhat Hasan’s work, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relation in Western India c. 1572-1730*, is considered as one of the seminal works of this genre belonging to the Aligarh school.
- The integration of art and architecture as part of the ‘visual culture’ under the regime. Both the fields began to be analyzed as being components of the larger propaganda and ideology of the Mughal rule. This marked a break from the preceding studies that looked at art history and architectural studies as two distinct domains of history.
- Textual editions of several important Persian works, for example Mau’izah-i Jahangiri of Muhammad Baqir Najm-i Sani, came to be studied.
- Lastly, the field of gender studies have received attention not only with respect to femininity or the studies around Mughal harem but also with respect to the notion of masculinity in the Mughal world. These studies did not restrict themselves to the Mughal elite. Rather they encompassed themselves to the people at large.
- In addition to the new fields of study, the fields of political ideology, political economy, science and technology continue to attract scholarly attention.

**Check Your Progress-1**

1) Describe the earlier approaches to study the nature of Mughal state.
2) Which aspects of the Mughal empire received attention by the imperial historians?

3) How was the Mughal state characterized by the Marxist historians? What were the differences between their study of Mughal state and that done by the Subaltern Studies?

4) Who, among the following, dealt with a major break away from the Eurocentric and nationalist theories in the post-independence era history writing of Mughal India?
   a. Irfan Habib
   b. Mohibbul Hasan
   c. Haroon Khan Sherwani
   d. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami

5) Which, among the following, was not a new trend in Mughal historiography?
   a. Art and Architecture as part of Visual Culture of the regime
   b. Language, literature and culture
   c. Political economy, science and technology
   d. State as the sole agency of governance
   e. All of the above

6) What are the new trends and approaches to study and analyze the nature of Mughal state in India?

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8.3 NATURE OF THE MUGHAL STATE

The study of the nature of Mughal state, especially in the context of the study of nature of pre-colonial state in India is a very interesting subject matter. There are several theories promulgated by different historians towards understanding the Mughal empire:
8.3.1 Oriental Despotic State Theory

The concept of Asiatic Despotism and the Asiatic Mode of Production emerged in the writings of Karl Marx in a different context. With respect to the nature of pre-colonial state in India, Francois Bernier⁴ propounded his theory of Oriental Despotic Monarchies which were essentially different in character from the European state. Under this theory, monarchies were the ones where:

i. King was the owner of the land and extractor of revenue

ii. Unlike hereditary European lords, temporary tenures were held by tax collectors, a system that reflected state ownership of land

Francis William Buckler, in his essay ‘The Oriental Despot’, described the Mughal sovereignty as a model of ‘corporate kingship’ wherein all the nobles were ‘members’ in the set-up rather than being servants. This system of governance led to the exploitation of peasantry and decline in economic development and prosperity of the people. The element wherein there was a lack of restraint in the collection of taxation lent the state a ‘despotic’ character. The Britishers were opined to have infused an element of freedom into this existent Oriental Despotic State.

James Mill⁵ and John Crawfurd adopted the argument formulated by Bernier and argued in the East India House that India was the most lightly tax country in the world. Later, W. H. Moreland⁶ in his seminal work opined that, after weather conditions the most dominant factor in the economic life of the people in the Mughal period was the state administration. The whole focus of the theory of an Oriental Despotic state rested on the premises of land and taxation.

This model of state sovereignty has been nuanced by historians. Historians such as R. P. Tripathi – Some Aspects of Muslim Administration; Ibn Hasan – The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire; and P. Saran – Provincial Governments of the Mughals, asserted the fact that the various administrative institutions of monarchy were based on the geographical and cultural institutions of the country. They argued that there was little scope of over-taxation in the Mughal regime. After 1947, the Marxist influence on historical writings became much evident. The major interpretation of pre-colonial Indian state under the Marxian influence was

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⁵ Mill, James, (1817) The History of British India, in 6 volumes (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy

propounded by D. D. Kosambi. D. D. Kosambi argued that with a change in regime, distinct elements in the ‘relations of production’ evolve.

8.3.2 Centralized State Theory

According to this view, the state power at the centre penetrates to all the levels of society via revenue inflows from the periphery. This approach has largely been termed as a Centre-Oriented Theory. Policies leading to political unification by exerting power over the local regimes, secular norms of governance and composite composition of the ruling classes, among other state practices, are emphasized by the promulgators of this theory of Mughal state. The nationalist historians developed this theory within the confines of a liberal nationalist state in order to counter the imperialist view. The Mughal state aimed at achieving communal and political unification.

According to the centralized state theory, the state administration penetrated into all levels of the society through the agency of the intermediaries. The intermediaries such as merchants, artisan and peasants were entirely dependent upon the state. Thus, state and society remained closely tied aspects in the regime. Every phenomenon revolved around the centre. As per the centralized state theory, all aspects of society were viewed from above. Much of the influence exerted upon this theory is by the chroniclers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who mostly portrayed the Mughal state in a similar light. Much emphasis has been laid upon the systematization of administration done under emperor Akbar, especially the mansabdari system and uniformity in division of offices for different regions. These offices and centralized administration were carried on and strengthened under successive emperors.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Satish Chandra synthesized the work already done on the Mughal polity and administration. Irfan Habib accepted the Centralized State Theory that emphasized on the centralized ruling class which collection land-tax. To him, this was a hierarchical system wherein resources were shared between the ruling class and the class of zamindars. This assertion was based on an extensive scrutiny of historical and official works in addition to local documents. With the help of Marxist tools of analysis, these studies reinforced the dominant nationalist interpretation of Mughal state in many essential facets.

The earlier model of Mughal agrarian system being bipolar in nature, with the state and the peasantry constituting the two major elements, was replaced with a three-tiered division of society under Mughals – the ruling class (state), the zamindars (zamindar) and the peasants (peasantry). The Mughal state was viewed as the foremost exploiting instrument. The hierarchy among the class of zamindars was reinforced.

With the increasing influence exerted by the segmentary state model propounded by the American sociologists in the 1970s, the centralized state model came to be criticized by many historians. Douglas E. Streusand’s The Formation of the Mughal Empire questioned the centralizing nature of Mughal empire. Though he saw four levels of transformation under the regime: central power, acceptance of emperor Akbar, the mansabdari system and subsequent changes in the regime. He has

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tried to integrate both the theories for the Mughal state throughout his work. The real question posed by critiques is on the level of control exerted by the Mughals in several regions, i.e. away from the centre.

8.3.3 Patrimonial-Bureaucratic State Theory

One of the new paradigms to study the Mughal state has been to view the nature of state from the lens of a patrimonial-bureaucratic rule. This theory derives from the Max Weber’s model on patrimonial state. Under this model, a persistent divide exists between the patrimonial polity and bureaucratic administrative structure under a pre-modern regime. A ruler governs the state on the same lines as a patriarch asserts authority over his household or within the patriarchal domain. The larger realm is considered as an extension of this patriarchal domain where supreme authority is asserted in all realms such as military and jurisdictional.

This patrimonial model of political organization, when operating on a huge scale within a large territorial area, is referred to as a patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. Since through the medium of several tactics and policies, authority is diffused in order to govern varied regions. To ensure that the administration is carried successfully, an array of army was organized who were loyal to the ruler. The enormous troops were divided into two groups, first those who were directly under the service of the emperor and second, those who were the soldiers of the subordinates bound to their commanders.

Similarly, in other realms of administration members served at the pleasure of the emperor and displayed a certain level of loyalty and allegiance. A large proportion of state revenue was assigned to such class of officials. Over a period of time, this system led to the waning of power possessed by the emperor. Therefore, checks and balances were maintained by the person of the emperor to curtail this increase in power held by state officials. For example, periodic rotation of officials was set in place along with a huge network of spy officials who reported directly to the emperor. Elaborate rules governed the court and throne, confirming to the patriarchal relationship shared between the emperor and subjects. The centrality of the imperial household is persistent in the organization of the administration.

Historians like Stephen Blake have analyzed the highly bureaucratic mansabdari system as described in the Ain-i-Akbari as confirming to this patrimonial-bureaucratic state model. Wherein the mansabdars and other components of the Mughal army are seen as an adjunct to the patrimonial-bureaucratic empire. The army personnel were called to the court at times of promotions or change of assignment. They were promoted as mansabdars after standing duties in the imperial household and an approval done by the emperor himself. Likewise, management system of the land revenue administration also followed the patrimonial-bureaucratic pattern. Even while touring the territories, the emperor used to hold court regularly and the state work was carried much efficiently.

Many contemporary Asian states – the Safavid Empire of Iran, the Ottoman Empire of Turkey and the Ming Empire of China have been categorized by historians as patrimonial-bureaucratic states. The Mongol and Turkish influences of their ancestors are opined to have contributed to the working of Mughal state. The strong centralizing tendency and the well-organized bureaucratic administrative system is considered as a legacy inherited from Central Asia by the Mughals.
Some of these elements were already exhibited by earlier empires in India, Delhi Sultanate and the Mauryan Empire. And some of the elements were brought by emperor Babur upon his arrival in the subcontinent, later refined and crystallized by emperor Akbar. The emperors after Akbar largely followed the practices established by him.

The following features characterized the patrimonial-bureaucratic nature of Mughal state:

- Emperor as a divine patriarch
- Imperial household as the central element in governance
- Army personnel completely dependent upon the emperor
- Structured administration controlled by the imperial household
- Various checks and balances kept by the emperor

### 8.3.4 Segmentary State Model

Post-1970s, the historiography of Mughal state was influenced by the American sociologists’ segmentary state model. In the segmentary state model, all the segments or components of a formal state are said to be in existence. These segments are coherent in themselves and are held by a sovereign in a nominal manner. According to this approach of history writing, the penetration of centre into the regional or periphery areas was overruled. The relationship between the centre and the periphery was looked upon as a ritual one, rather than being political in nature. Ritual obligations tie the periphery to the centre.

According to the segmentary state model, the society is divided into a hierarchical structure, each segment or unit converging into the succeeding unit. For instance, village, locality, supra-locality and the larger kingdom. Burton Stein raised objections on the development of a centralized state institution in India in view of the cultural and social environment. With respect to South India, he propounded the ‘segmentary state model’. In this approach to the study of governance, institutions such as caste, status and religion were given credibility in understanding the regime of state and local authorities. This theory was not itself free from criticism from other historians who refuted it in the context of South India.

Douglas E. Streusand expanded this model to the territorial bounds of Mughal India, especially for the time-period from 1556 to 1582. Streusand had studied the military and fiscal hierarchy existent in the Mughal state, the influx of varied groups into the empire apparatus, and the nature of sovereignty exercised by the emperor, especially the mechanisms evolved under the reign of emperor Akbar. Many transformations have been observed under Akbar’s regime – increasing exertion of central power, acceptability of the sovereign power, and standardization of the Mansabdari system. The Mughal conception of kingship constituted an amalgamation of several earlier concepts practiced in the country. Mughal policies established by Akbar, for example, the abolition of *jiziah*, introduction of *sulh-i-kul* and adoption of a liberal religious policy had huge administrative and social implications.

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8 Streusand, Douglas E., *The Formation of the Mughal Empire*. 
Streusand transposed the elements of segmentary state model as promulgated by Burton Stein in the context of zamindari areas in the Mughal polity, and the central state approach in the context of parganas falling under direct control of the central administration. As opposed to the centralized state model, the segmentary state model argues for the existence of autonomous regional powers with no economic linkage with the central authority. The historians have taken a larger view-point. Many studies from below have been undertaken where the focus has been on lower classes of society and their lives as active participants in the various processes of state.

Check Your Progress-2

1) Who categorized the Mughal state as an Oriental-Despotic State? And Why?

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2) Differentiate between the Centralized State theory and Segmentary state model in the context of Mughal state in India.

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3) Explain the main proponents of the Patrimonial-Bureaucratic State theory.

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8.3.5 Revisionist Theories

C. A. Bayly presented a theory of continuity under the British regime by assigning authority to the ‘social classes’ wielding economic power who shifted loyalty to the British after the decline of Mughal state. In his study of the Mughal polity, decentralization and regional polities emerged as prime factors defining the character of the state. The penetration of the Mughal empire was confronted by the regional traditional village elites. Therefore, the decline of the empire in the eighteenth century did not lead to a setback at the economic front and there was continuity between the Mughal empire and the colonial regime.

C. A. Bayly and Sanjay Subramanyam, of late, categorized a ‘contact zone’ or ‘grey area’ - an area where the state and society converged. This ‘grey area’ constitutes of the place where the elements of centralized state model and segmentary state model converge. Initiatives from above and engagements from below submerge together. According to Subramanyam and Bayly, certain social groups articulated between the state and society. In South India, these social groups were largely the revenue farmers or ‘portfolio capitalists’ who were participants in the economic processes. They ensured guaranteed economic gains to the state.

Hence, C. A. Bayly recognizes the signs of economic growth in the state. The agents of this economic growth were not always created by the state such as...
mansabdars or jagirdars appointed by the state. Some of these agents of growth were already embedded within the structure of society and grew in power with procuring more and more resources at their disposal. They constituted the political economy for a particular region. Similarly, historian Muzaffar Alam⁹ emphasized upon the institutions of jagir and ijara as manifestation of growth in the state administration. Frank Perlin has criticized the economic study of Indian history that focus on Mughal and Maratha-centric treatment. To him, the watan was the basic unit of political power.

Recently, the work done by Farhat Hasan¹⁰ has made significant contributions in the way Mughal state has been perceived. He does not categorize the Mughal state into a unilateral, centralized or patrimonial-bureaucratic model. Rather according to his research the Mughal power was a result of the day-to-day interactions with the local elites. The dense network of imperial-local alliances or bonds sustained the power house of Mughals. For instance, the merchant associations in different regions mediated the state demands on their associates. The local merchant associations in Cambay and Surat performed this role in the region of Gujarat. These elite houses were not subservient to the stately authority. They employed different mechanisms to counter any oppression done onto them by the state officials or to put forward their demands to the state. The people found their own ways to sustain under the larger regime. Everyday struggle was witnessed by the state authorities, be it in courts or markets.

8.3.6 Islamic Theory of Sovereignty

One of the earliest historical research that looked at the Mughal state in the context of role of Islam in the functioning of state, colonization of India and struggle for independence posed the question whether it was a theocratic state or not. These ideas date to the posterior. The concept of conquest being used as a legitimizing tool was a prevalent trend in medieval times. Modern colonialism altered the very meaning of conquest, primarily done for the economic benefit of one nation by controlling the resources of another nation.

Historians like Doughlas E. Streusand who are critical of both the centre-oriented studies and segmentary state oriented studies of Mughal state, have used a new theory called the Hybrid Islamic administration theory. According to this theory, at one level i.e. at the level of empire centric regions the administration is imposed from above. Whereas at the provincial level, indigenously developed administration used to exist. This model for studying the nature of Mughal state is not a decline-oriented study.

Whether it was the methodology of history writing being adopted by individual contemporary historians under successive emperors at the Mughal courts or the general trend of asserting power by conquering lands, with references to kafirs and kufr, for instance the Battles of Panipat (Babur) and Kangra (Jahangir) – such methodology and episodes reflect upon the proselytizing zeal of the Mughal state. But the real question is that how far was Islam institutionalized in terms of the functionality of the state. Historian Harbans Mukhia has placed two criteria as an

⁹ Alam, Muzaffar, Writing the Mughal State.
answer to this question: the aspect of conversion of subjects to Islam and second, the jurisdiction of Islamic law in the territorial expanse.

The tolerance of individual emperors varied during their respective reigns with some demolishing temples and others assisting in getting temples constructed. Also, the motivations for conversions ranged from intellectual conviction to gaining promotion in the administrative hierarchy. With majority of episodes of conversions relating to politically affluent individuals who had an act of defiance or dereliction of duty in the eyes of the state. The proportion of Muslim population within the central territories ruled by the Mughals is said to have never exceeded 15 per cent. Moreover, documentary evidences of reverse conversions are also found under the Mughal rule. In the absence of substantiated evidence, it would appear an excess to categorize the Mughal state as a theocratic state, Islamic in this case.

Islam was one of the legitimizing elements during the Mughal regime, but it was not the only one. There were several other factors that were used to legitimize the rule by the regime. For instance, during Akbar’s rule whence a new theory of kingship was developed by the emperor who was the paternal head of the empire and emphasis were laid upon social harmony. Neither was Islamic law the only basis of administration and jurisdiction by the state. While Islam gave an identity to the rulers but governance was carried on an administrative set-up where power and resources were shared amongst the officials and different segments of society.

In addition to the composite nature of Mughal nobility and establishing institutions of centralization, the Mughal rulers were seen stressing upon the absoluteness of the sovereign. While legitimizing this absolute status, marital alliances were forged with elite chieftains in different territorial areas. A direct relation was also established between the emperor and his subjects. Also, with respect to religion apart from attempts to assert status within the framework of Islam, the emperor enjoyed a position of spiritual guide amongst the non-Muslim subjects. Though the presence of Islam as a structure was very much present in the state’s functioning at the political, intellectual and popular realms. Practices such as jharoka darshan, tolerant religious policies and basing the legitimacy of rule on spiritual sanctity not only gave stability to the regime but at the same time ruled out the state being absolutely Islamic or Theocratic in nature.

8.3.7 Gunpowder Theory

Recently, historians have associated the increasing use of gunpowder or firearms beginning from the middle of fifteenth century as a crucial factor in the increasing power asserted by empires across the world. The highly centralized empires across Asia have been categorized by historians like Marshall G. S. Hodgson as ‘gunpowder empires’. The changes brought by the introduction of gunpowder technology in the context of state formation in India were very crucial. Others empires that have been categorized as ‘gunpowder empires’ are the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire and the Uzbek Khanate.

During the second half of the fifteenth century, some primitive form of gunpowder artillery is said to be in existence in different regions of the country. A personnel working in the field of firearms was referred to as kashakanjir in north India. In Kashmir, references to a weapon called topa in Muslim language and kanda in the Kashmiri dialect are found. Contemporary texts, as cited by historian Iqtidar
Alam Khan, such as Ma’asir-i Mahmud Shahi (1468) and Riyazu’l insha’ (1470) also cite existence of the usage of some form of cannon in the region of Malwa and Deccan in those days. The siege of some of the stronghold fortifications – Champanir, Mandalgarh, Vijaymandirgarh - was a reflection of the destructive power of gunpowder artillery. Many of these forts had to be redesigned in the fifteenth century.

These costly cannons were possessed by some of the prosperous regional kingdoms like Vijayanagar and Malwa. Most of the zamindars and chieftains could not afford such equipment. Many of the powerful regional kingdoms conquered fortifications in the periphery or neighbourhood with the help of gunpowder artillery, thus, consolidating the process of state formation. This led to territorial expansion by powerful kingdoms. This process was accompanied by other factors such as increasing control on local chiefs and increasing sources of revenue. This further gave impetus to the strengthening of power by powerful kingdoms.

With the introduction of new techniques and methods in artillery due to the influence from West and expertise brought by Babur in sixteenth century India, gunpowder became a symbol for affirming the strength of a powerful kingdom. Though this technology did not come without posing some challenges such as difficulty in mobility and slow rate of firing. Despite the challenges, gunpowder was majorly used as a symbol of power assertion. Gunpowder did not play a chief role in the process of consolidation of empire by the Mughals. Apart from the siege of Chittor in 1568 and the siege of Ramthambhor in 1570 under Akbar’s reign, firearms did not play a very crucial role in territorial acquisitions under Akbar’s military campaigns and under the reign of other Mughal emperors. During the early sixteenth century, light artillery was effectively utilized in the siege operations and on the battlefield.

The usage of light cannons mounted on carriages or matchlock muskets aided the growth and consolidation of a centralized Mughal empire. One of the most significant innovation in terms of firearms in the seventeenth century was the placing of cannons on swivels mounted on the back of the camels. Matchlock muskets were effectual firearms of combat. At times in a battle formation, these were used so as to provide cover to artillery carts in the battlefield. The forceful attack and large scale of destruction caused by matchlock muskets, in comparison to mounted archers who continuously discharged arrows, could play a decisive role in a war. On an average, under the mansabdari system, one musketeer existed over five to eight horsemen in a contingent. These musketeers were an integral part of the contingent in direct service of the Emperor and remained a crucial component in maintaining control over local chieftains.

The importance of matchlock musket has been stressed by few historians in the Mughal warfare and centralizing character of the empire. Whereas historians like Irfan Habib have considered mounted archery as the mainstay of Mughal warfare.

Almost all the theories concerning the nature of Mughal state harmonize on the bureaucratic formation of the empire and the prevalent strong centric aspect. These studies have supplemented the study of regional polities and state institutions. Study of regional polities and new readings on village communities or crime and punishment under the Mughals does not imply that the institutions of governance such as Mansab and Jagir were of any less importance. Rather they reveal the
importance of varied factors, like distance from the central ruling authority and power asserted by different local authorities, in the overall nature of state under the Mughal regime in the subcontinent.

It is important to understand here that a centralized state need not necessarily exert influence and power equally in all the regions. Also, a regional or decentralized power might exert very strong power within its territorial boundaries while a central state exists simultaneously. The scrutiny of these concepts must rely on an objective analysis of the available documentation. Of all, the Centralized State theory is regarded as the most credential among historians, who share the same view with respect to certain institutions such as mansab and jagir. Though it is equally crucial to understand the cultural and social environment in which the Mughal state existed and the varied practices established under its regime with their powerful impact upon the people.

The varied perspective of historians or specifically the historiography of Mughal state should be understood in the context of the time-period when a particular theory concerning the state under Mughals was perceived. The element of presentism ingrained in a theory needs to be understood. For instance, nationalist studies, neo-Marxist studies, and others where looking back at history in order to justify the present actions or decisions. The right methodology would be to look for answers to means through the medium of which the rulers justified their actions at that point in time. Moreover, the categorizing of Mughal state into oriental, despotic or a combination of varied elements is arrived at while looking at some specific aspect of the state. Depending upon which aspect was being analyzed, the nature of state was categorized. One needs to place the Mughal state as part of a particular type of political organization.

Mughal India was not merely a world of Muslim rulers. The differentiated hierarchical and economic classes within the caste and communities cannot be kept in isolation. The centralizing nature of the Mughal empire cannot be viewed without the composite institutions and comprehensive policies. The nature of Mughal state should rather be understood in its own historical context. It cannot be understood as an Islamic state or a welfare state. It was no mere simple continuation of preceding regimes or an ancestor to the British raj in India. It exerted a profound impact on the economic and social conditions of the people. The nature of such an empire can be understood by the accompanying hierarchies and established traditions. Every successive emperor contributed new elements while keeping the larger administrative structure integral. A new theory of kingship evolved over time, which will be dealt in detail in the next unit.

Check Your Progress-3

1) Who, among the following, propounded the Gunpowder Empire theory for Mughal Empire in India?
   a. Irfan Habib
   b. Mohibbul Hasan
   c. Iqtidar Alam Khan
   d. Marshall G. S. Hodgson
   e. None of the above
2) How did the Revisionists view the Mughal rule in medieval India? Examine.
........................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................

3) Was the Mughal state a theocratic state? State reasons.
........................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................

8.4 SUMMARY
In this unit, we have tried to understand the various theories promulgated by different groups of historians concerning the nature and character of the Mughal state. During this discussion, we came across the several institutions and their character as established under the Mughal rule in India. The major features of each of these theories have been given in detail. These theories and their rationale have been dealt with respectively. The factors that should be kept in mind while understanding all these theories have been explained, thereby, demonstrating the inextricable value of these scholastic traditions. Further, it is explained as to why an analysis of various theories depicting the nature of Mughal state is crucial towards a better understanding of different viewpoints and for studying the institutions and customs practiced during the Mughal empire. Such an analysis in addition to an understanding of the cultural and social environment in which the Mughal state existed will help us comprehend the historical and socio-political perspective of the Mughal rule in India.

8.5 KEYWORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banduqchis</td>
<td>Musketeers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barqandaz</td>
<td>A corps of mounted musketeers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunpowder Empire</td>
<td>An Empire with considerable success in military expeditions achieved with the help of firearms, especially cannon. For example, the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire and the Mughal Empire during the medieval times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historiography</td>
<td>The study of writing of history with respect to a particular subject matter. For example, the historiography of the nature of Mughal state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashakanjir</td>
<td>A personnel working in the field of firearms during the fifteenth century India. He used to throw balls through the usage of explosive material/cannon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental Despotism</td>
<td>The viewpoint wherein the society is viewed in a polar apparatus is associated with the</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Indian Political System
theory of Oriental Despotism. At one end of the pole lie the rich classes, on the other the plebian classes – peasantry and artisans

**Riyaz-ul Insha**
A historical work for the Bahmanis of Gulbarga by Mahmud Gawan. It is a collection of letters written by Khwaja Mahumud Gawan written in Persian

**Subalern Studies**
The studies undertaken with a bottom-top approach wherein emphasis is laid upon the lower classes of society

**Theocracy/Theocratic State**
A government wherein priestly class rules in the name of God. Or a state which governs with one dominant religion and people belonging to other religions are not allowed to practice their own religion

**Topa/Kanda**
Most probably meaning cannon in Muslim/Kashmiri dialect

**Watan**
Locality

### 8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

#### EXERCISE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Check Your Progress-1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) The Imperialist approach towards the study of Mughal state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) The Nationalist approach to the study of Mughal state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) The Cambridge School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv) The Subalern Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) The various arguments made by Imperial historians regarding the nature of Mughal State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) The reasons for their arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) See Section 8.1. Your answer should include the following points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) When was the Marxist influence introduced upon the historiography of the Mughal state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) What were the new aspects analyzed by the Subalern Studies concerning the Mughal state?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) How were these aspects different from what the Marxists opined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) a. Irfan Habib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) d. State as the sole agency of governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) See Section 8.2. In addition to the new fields of study, the fields of political</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ideology, political economy, science and technology continue to attract scholarly attention.

Check Your Progress-2

1) See Section 8.3.1. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The main features of the argument
   ii) The historians who supported this argument
   iii) Why was the theory criticized by some historians?

2) See Section 8.3.2 and Section 8.3.3. Make a comparison of the major points of difference between the Centralized and Segmentary Theories propounded by historians for understanding the nature of Mughal state.

3) See Section 8.3.4. Your answer should include the following points:
   i) The source of inspiration for patrimonial-bureaucratic theory on Mughal state
   ii) The main features characterized under the patrimonial-bureaucratic nature of Mughal state

Check Your Progress-3

1) d. Marshall G. S. Hodgson
2) See Section 8.3.5. Your answer should include the recent studies undertaken by C. A. Bayly, Frank Perlin, Muzaffar Alam and Farhat Hasan.
3) See Section 8.3.6. Your answer should include the premises and validity of this argument regarding the nature of Mughal state.

8.7 SUGGESTED READINGS


**8.8 INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO RECOMMENDATIONS**

Interview with Prof. Irfan Habib on the theme History and Historiography

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zoJppZCEt8&list=PLwUYIeLOKZ8SgFJH6sAPhRjmokkdAFJHm

Harbans Mukhia on Mughal History and Historiography

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XnCwJbeYtrA