The notion of rulers as repositories of power, exercising unrestrained authority on a totally helpless and voiceless peasantry is not borne out by the evidence, here taken from Eastern Rajasthan. There were several loci of power both within the categories of the rulers and the subjects. We have probed into what constituted these positions of power and influence. The power engendering elements (caste, kinship, lineage, land, resources, office etc) divided the rural world not only vertically into the two categories of the rulers and the subjects, but also horizontally into several categories, sometimes tied together loosely by a commonality of interests and sometimes torn apart by strife. Consensus and antagonisms co-existed, as did exploitation of peasants and protection offered to them.

The rulers of Amber exercised power in three different capacities— they were rulers of their watans, jagirdars of the Imperial Court in areas assigned to them and ijaradars in areas taken on ijara. The extent to which this lack of territorial cohesion within the Amber principality affected the power of the ruler is difficult to gauge from the available sources. The recurrent complaints by jagirdars of the region against interference by the Raja in their respective jagirs shows that attempt of the Raja to increase his area of influence did
not go un-challenged. How far this reflected in the popular perception of sovereignty is again difficult to assess. It is certainly more than just a coincidence that all the cases of direct appeals by subjects to the Mughal Emperor emanated from areas which were not in the watan of the Amber rulers. Popular perceptions of the highest seat of authority may have therefore varied within the Amber principality. Alliance with the Mughals thus had two implications for the nature of the power exercised by the rulers of Amber. At the cost of formal ritual submission to the Mughal Emperor, the Raja gained greater defacto power both over his clansmen as well as his foes in the region. The power that accrued to the Raja as a result of the alliance with the Mughals was substantial. We know of the effort put in to keep the Mughal Emperor kindly disposed.

The authority system of the Kachhwaha principality was rooted in customs and tradition. The state upheld customary practices and tried as a matter of policy, to check violation of norms. The state ensured submission not just by the exercise of coercive power but also by the offer of reward, patronage and a host of other favours. Fines, punishments etc. were meant to deter subjects from deviating from established norms. Concessions of various kinds, exemptions, award of robes of honour, patronage in the form of grants, allowances etc were meant to be incentives. The exercise of power by the state thus had two aspects- the former, essentially...
negative in nature and the latter of an affirmative kind. Compliance, both of the nobility as well as the subjects was ensured by the use of both these instruments.

We have ample evidence from Eastern Rajasthan about the paternalist posturing of the state. Peasants were consoled during times of indigence and famines when cultivation fell off. The phrase ‘दिलासा तसल्ली’ appears frequently in documents. Their credit requirements were taken care of and bohras were instructed to provide for them. They were patiently dealt with when they reported inability to pay. Officials were directed to be lenient. Concessions were granted to bring wasteland under cultivation and help was extended for extension of irrigation facilities. Peasants were consoled when they reported their inability to survive in face of excessive harassment. Those indulging in excesses were warned. The state appealed time and again to reason. ‘और बाजबों खेचल’ was to be restrained from. When excessive collections were reported, those accused were directed to recompensate the peasants. The relationship between the state and the peasantry therefore cannot be reduced merely to the ambit of exploitation. The state’s exploitation of the peasantry was tempered by the ideology of guardianship. Welfare of the peasantry was a basic norm of policy. The state had to be just and fair in order to be legitimate.
The theory of unmitigated exploitation does not hold. Exploitation of the peasantry was not irremediable. There was an ultimate boundary, a limit beyond which it was not feasible to push the peasants. Claims of the different components of the ruling class had to be by and large mutually accommodating. Transgression of the customary sanction by any one constituent of the ruling class was loss of the other and this invariably worked to the advantage of the peasants. Members of the ruling class became mutual checks on each other and the peasants got some relief, some degree of respite. While the state allowed a certain measure of exploitation in the garb of custom and tradition, it also contained it within feasible boundaries. The effort was to balance the degree of extraction of surplus from the peasants with their paying capacity. To let go would have been suicidal.

Any discussion of the powerlessness and state of dependence of the peasantry has to take note of the magnitude of the differentiation within the peasant body. There are not just the categories of the gharuhalas, paltis, pahis etc. but also the rich and the poor gharuhalas, the dependent and the not so dependent paltis, pahis who owned ploughs and those who were totally resourceless. The evidence from our region suggests not a uniformly dependent situation but varying degrees of dependence and independence, affluence and resourcelessness, power and powerlessness. The
weakest and poorest within each section were most susceptible to exploitation. The capacity of peasants to resist excesses, the method they chose for redressal of grievances and the manner in which they did so was also moulded by this fact of differentiation within them. The better placed gharuhalas were more inclined to resort to petitioning to defend their rights. Ordinary mortals petitioned comparatively lesser. Their petitions were mostly forwarded through the Patel unlike the gharuhalas who petitioned individually. Rajput cultivators collectively and openly refused payment of revenue. Others took to the covert and non-confrontational ways of delaying, evading and cheating.

It would be a gross over-simplification to say that peasants were forever at the receiving end of exploitation and harassment. They were undoubtedly the vulnerable party in the exercise of power, but their helplessness and powerlessness cannot be overdrawn. As tillers of soil and producers of hasil (literally the ones who gave birth to the coveted hasil) in a land abundant and scarce labour situation, the vulnerability of the peasantry did mellow down at least to the extent of equipping them with a voice to argue and bargain with, a voice to threaten and resist with. The entire gamut of peasant behaviour was never totally defined by the state or contained by its dictates.
There was no dearth of strategies with which peasants countered the exercise of power. They played up to the rhetoric of the obligation of rulers to be fair in order to be legitimate. In a unique document, the Patel, Patwari and raiyats invoked their sense of belonging and urged the state to provide for them. "समस्त रैत की सलाम..... न्हे तो आप का रैती छा, खातिर ज्ञा करो...." (Amber Records, Bhadva Sudi 13, VS 1855/AD1798). They petitioned for redressal of grievances. They defended their rights and entitlements and safeguarded their privileges. They insisted that the terms of their pattas be honoured. They produced sanads when officials tried to snatch away their privilege of exemption from dues and services. They tried relentlessly to win concessions. Peasants argued with officials. 'न्हे किस भांति दे सका' and threatened to go to higher authorities. They threatened to desert villages. 'महा को भी टिकीये न्ही' They had the skill to find loopholes in the system and manipulate rules explicitly or implicitly and retain as much of their produce as possible without incurring the wrath of the state. They drew the lines between acceptable and un-acceptable demands. What was not acceptable was not always taken lying down. They were capable of displaying considerable temper, without necessarily resorting to an open and violent confrontation. They colluded and connived. They concealed crop from assessment. They did not always yield willingly. They defied and misbehaved with officials. They were anything but passive and un-resisting. The
evidence from Eastern Rajasthan infact shows that they were on the continuous look out to cheat, evade, get away and delay payments. The plurality of their strategies is, in fact, striking.

Resistance, therefore cannot be reduced just to the 'I Dare' or 'We Dare' situations. The emphasis on armed resistance, though certainly not misplaced, should not deter us from taking note of the everyday variety of resistance. There is much more to peasant resistance than just violence, rebellions and confrontation.