INTRODUCTION
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Since the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism, much work has been done on the European perception of the Asian World, on how the colonizers viewed the culture and society of the colonized, and how their perception carried connotations of power and control. Beyond generalized impressions however, very little has been written on how the Asians viewed the Europe and the Europeans and more importantly, how their perception of the European 'other' shaped the course of their interaction with the European merchants and traders before the intrusion of colonialism. The present study is concerned with exploring the relations between the European merchants and the Mughal court from the perspective of the Mughals.

One of the important problems that this study investigates is how one of the biggest Asian empires i.e. the Mughals perceived European civilization before Europe came to dominate the global economy. Colonialism constructed its framework of knowledge and communication to create a hierarchical basis for the characterization of the Asian civilization. In the way the Europeans constructed the Asian 'other', they were influenced by the European Enlightenment thought based on positivist sciences

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2 Aijaz Ahmad interprets Said's orientalism as nothing beyond the familiar trope of a power which permeates everything and reproduces itself copiously in all the pores of society and textuality but has no origin, no object, even no agency; Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures, Delhi, 1994, p.185.
Foucault's ideas about 'epistemes' and the close tie between power and knowledge reduce the role of the economic base and increase the role of social consensus-political power and knowledge in determining the historical configuration of societies.
and instrumental rationality. European orientalism manipulated its knowledge of Asian civilization in order to establish principles of domination and rules of governance.

One of the important problems that this work seeks to understand is the Mughal perception of the European trade, since they first came to India mainly as merchants and Company servants, and established their factories and settlements at different places in the Mughal domain. Following from this, we shall also be exploring the nature of Mughal response to European ‘presence,’ and seek to unravel the connection between perceptions and policies, that is, the extent to which Mughal perception of Europeans shaped their commercial policy responses toward them. The expansion of European trade in India that ultimately led to India’s subjugation by the English East India Company, was crucially facilitated by a concessional (practically 'Free Trade') policy of the Mughal rulers. We have sought to investigate as to why the Mughal rulers favoured the European merchants. The idea of a merchant body working as a pressure group was not new to the Mughal ruling elite, but in the case of such European companies, the response was far from appropriate. The Mughal perception of the European merchants not only explains their largely favourable policy towards the European merchants and traders, but also provides important clues to the Mughal commercial policies towards them, as well.

The other problem that this study is concerned with is to understand the nature of Mughal reception to European science and technology. This is an important problem to explore because their reception of European scientific knowledge and technology crucially influenced technological development in India. Irfan Habib locates the reasons of the Mughal ‘indifference’ to
European technology in the economic position of the Mughal nobility. According to Habib, the Mughal ruling class was based on an internally stable system of extraction of agrarian surplus, its transfer to towns through sale of foodstuffs and raw materials, and the existence in the towns of a large urban population offering craft-goods and services of all kinds. So long as an internal agrarian crisis did not break out, the Mughal ruling class did not feel scarcity of resources and were unwilling to accept European technology. Only in war weaponry was this need felt; and this could be met by importing European guns as well as gunners. He also explores the possibility that the fairly sizable amount of merchant capital which existed could have been a source for investing in new technology, and hence that, left to itself, Indian society capitalist development would have soon followed. If this did not happen, it was because, says Habib, “the agrarian exploitation pursued successfully by the Mughal Empire made its economy immune, by and large, to the temptations of imitating European technology until it was too late.” 

3 A. J. Qaiser has however, enumerated several important sectors in which interaction with the Europeans crucially led to the development of technology in Mughal India such as artillery, ship-building, and in subsequent period, such as in glass technology, artillery, clock-making etc. 

4 It still remains an intriguing problem of Indian History as to why the Mughals showed an unusual lack of interest in European science and technology. The accounts of the time are replete with references to the technological ingenuity of the

4 A.J. Qaiser, Indian Response to European Technology and Culture (1498-1707A.D.), Delhi, 1982, p.35-77, 139.
Firangis, it being mentioned with pride if craftsmen at any place could manufacture articles that might compare with those of European manufacturers.  

Our study seeks to delineate the reasons for the failure of Mughal elites to develop adequate receptivity to European advances in science and technology, despite their obvious advantages. However, the Mughal attitude towards European science can not be branded as entirely indifferent, and hence it becomes necessary to examine the ‘selective’ process in their acceptance of European science. The Mughal India’s lack of capacity to generate growth of science and absorb scientific ideas received from external sources has been dubbed as an ‘ideological failure’ by Irfan Habib⁶ and more generally as a ‘cultural failure’ by M. Athar Ali.⁷

The Mughal aristocracy was unaware of the developments in Europe during the renaissance, and the developments in the field of science, specially biology, chemistry, medicine and astronomy, during the period. It was only around the second half of eighteenth century that they began to realize the importance of Western scientific ideas and inventions, and came to realize that Europe was far advanced in this field. In 1793, Abu Talib, before his visit to Europe appropriately notes in the synopsis of his projected scheme


⁶ Irfan Habib, Reason and Science in Medieval India, Essays in Honour of Prof. R.S. Sharma, ed. D.N. Jha, N. Delhi, 1996.

of world history:

‘Europe was witnessing the birth of the great philosophers (failasuf-i-azam) to the degree that even a great number of common people (‘awamm-al nass) had developed a philosophical disposition. The Europeans were seeking to relate themselves with the Greek philosophers, as if the Greeks themselves had become part of Europe’s soil.\(^8\)

As is well known, by the seventeenth century European physicians and surgeons had made far-reaching developments in medical science. This was probably not lost to the Mughals as well, for European physicians were employed not only by the Mughal Emperors but also by the members of the nobility.\(^9\) The question that this provokes is one of discrimination in reception; the lack of reception of European science was not complete or total, and we need to see the basis on which aspects of western sciences were accepted, rejected or treated with gross indifference.

We have also tried to delineate the principles on which the Mughal court and the social groups associated with the court, perceived the European beliefs, knowledge and cultural values. Along with it, I have studied the thought patterns and epistemological principles that informed their perception, with a view to unravel the process of the ‘othering’ of the European people. It is an important problem, scarcely studied, as to how the European ‘other’ came to be constituted and articulated in Mughal

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Another important aspect that this study has attempted to bring out is the cultural dimensions of the interactions between the Mughal court and the Europeans. This includes their perception of Christianity and the religious beliefs of the Europeans. Indeed, Mughal court created an atmosphere for a mutually enriching dialogue between Islam and Christianity over theological and metaphysical issues.\(^\text{10}\)

A study of the cultural interaction between the Mughals and the Europeans also includes the study of the cultural significance of the exchange of gifts and presents between them. A transaction of gift is not only a material transaction but carries important social and cultural connotations, and the framework in which the people of two different cultures exchange gifts determines their mutual perception of each other.\(^\text{11}\)

It is a curious problem that despite interaction with Jesuit Fathers and other European envoys about European geography, who also provided maps and Atlases,\(^\text{12}\) no effort was made by the Mughals to enhance their knowledge of the geography of Europe. It is one of our aims to investigate the nature of their perception of European geography, and the reasons for their casual indifference for the continent.


When two civilizations interact, they create a dialogic process of immense potential. However, what one civilization can learn from the other depends on their mutual perceptions. Often unequal relations of power convert the dialogue into a monologue, thereby disrupting the creative potentialities that such an encounter provides. Equally importantly, appreciation of mutual differences can thwart the dialogic process, and cause to construct the ‘other’ in hostile and irreconcilable terms. Scholars have indeed studied the European encounter with the colonized world in several richly documented and theoretically enriching studies. However, these studies look at the encounter from the European perspective, often after the establishment of colonialism. My study, on the other hand, reverses the ‘gaze,’ as it were, and looks at how the Mughals perceived the Europeans before colonialism.