INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth century in Indian history is usually identified with the lineage of the Great Mughals. After Akbar (1556-1605) in the sixteenth century, Jahangir (1605-1627), Shahjahan (1627-1658) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) ruled Hindustan during seventeenth century. However, this period, has not been as much explored in terms of studying its social and cultural life as the period of Akbar has been. One major reason for the lack of such exploration of this period has perhaps been that this is a period which is shadowed either by the towering personality of Akbar, his policies and realities of the sixteenth century or, by the negative image of Aurangzeb.

Jahangir and Shahjahan – the successors of Akbar and predecessors of Aurangzeb – are seen by historians as not being able to cope with the historically long-lasting career and enthusiasm of his policies. Akbar is symbolized as an emperor of progress and liberalism, and as the propagator of a composite culture. In his times, it is told, the best practices were adopted and serious conflicts resolved. Even Akbar’s reign is seen as a ‘Golden Age’, for he is looked upon as the founding-father of the cultural commingling of the Hindu and Muslim populations. This image allows historians to see him as representing an early case of a ‘national empire’ in Indian history.¹

On the other hand, it is asserted that during the reign of his successors – Jahangir and Shahjahan – there was a gradual reversal of Akbar’s liberal religious policies toward non-Muslims, reaching its

nadir during the reign of Aurangzeb. The latter’s reign is generally seen as a period of reaction and of the resurfacing of forces that ultimately not only caused the decline of the Mughal empire but also widened the gap between the Hindu-Muslim communities, thus leading to a disintegration of the social fabric. Aurangzeb sometimes even cursed as devil incarnate due to his intolerant attitude. Akbar and Aurangzeb are thus seen as opposites and contrasts to each other, and the whole of the seventeenth century seems to be sandwiched between the personalities of these two Mughal emperors. It is as if Akbar and Aurangzeb shadow and foreshadow this century on their own: all that is ‘good’ is ascribed to Akbar; all that is ‘wrong’, for the liberal conscience of the historian, is ascribed to Aurangzeb.

The large grey area between the two emperors, both in terms of time and social space, is thus conveniently ignored. In addition, there

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2Mohammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islamic India 1605-1748*, Lucknow, 1958, p. 164. Yasin believed that just “time was needed for a Jahangir to become an Aurangzeb by one somersault”.

3J.N. Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, 5 vols., 2nd edition, Bombay, reprint 1952; R.C. Majumdar, “The Mughul Empire (1526-1707)”, *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol. VII, Bombay, 1974. These are two representative works of the widespread theory where Sarkar holds Aurangzeb sole responsible for religious tension in society due to his intolerant attitude towards non-Muslims and particularly against Hindus that further caused the decline and Majumdar one is of opinion that the entire period of medieval period including the Mughal empire was as a foreign rule. Its Pakistani counterpart was professed by I.H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947)*, Delhi, reprint 1998. For Qureshi since the victory of Sind by Al-Qasim in 712 AD there was a long continuous struggle of separate Muslim nation in Indian subcontinent. He criticizes Akbar for breaking the Muslim community in India. Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, 2 vols., London, 1841 See for colonial view that there were not much distinctive differences between Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan’s rule. However, Dara and Aurangzeb were representative of two different streams of the age – liberal and orthodox respectively.


5The researcher owes the term to Professor Urvashi Dalal, Supervisor, who coined it while giving suggestions on the problematic of social history of seventeenth century Mughal India.
are far too fewer studies of the social life under Jahangir, Shahjahan and interestingly, under Aurangzeb than under Akbar. The general historiographical trend is to see the common people – devoid of practical politics and social exigencies – as passive receptors of whatever the ruling class presented to them. This vision of Mughal social history is therefore Akbar-centric where historians actually left matters of denomination and social commingling very much to the people themselves.\textsuperscript{6} It is also due to too much focus upon the royalty. The present thesis intends to take a different path, explore the socio-cultural life of the seventeenth century Mughal times in Hindustan as a part of historical research, where the lens is focussed upon the everyday lives of people, and see it in its own terms rather than from the foot of the throne.

The historiography of the Mughal period in the twentieth century has been a highly specialized and contested field. Even when people’s history was attempted, a methodological fixation with personality occupied a disproportionately large space as compared to that given to the people themselves. Several questions can be posed with regard to the large corpus of literature on this subject, which would allow us to posit our own hypothesis. Therefore, let us see how various historians have approached these issues.

Broadly speaking, after 1920, Indian historians took up topics on social history along with traditional political and governmental aspects.\textsuperscript{7} However, social history had not yet established itself as an important branch of historical investigation. It thus remained mainly an appendix of economic history: “The socio-economic base of the state, the pattern of the distribution of power between different segments of society and between different sections in the ruling class, etc., were hardly investigated.”\textsuperscript{8} At best, only a limited understanding

\textsuperscript{7} Satish Chandra, “Writings on Social History of Medieval India: Trends and Prospects”, \textit{The Indian Historical Review}, vol. 3, No. 2, 1976, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{8} Chandra, “Writings on Social History”, p. 269.
of social structures, and the interactions of social groups and sub-groups formed on the basis of different religious affinities and value systems could thus be provided whereas these social groups and sub-groups had been living together in villages and towns for centuries. Nevertheless, the importance of these works can be seen in drawing the attention of historians to “possibilities of extracting from the existing sources the material on the social and economic aspects”.

One of the earliest Indian writings on society is traceable to the second decade of the 20th century – an essay written by Tara Chand, later published as The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture. It deals with the advent of Islam in the Indian sub-continent and its gradual influence on Hinduism. In the ‘Introduction’, the author asserts that such a wide subject can be studied only by breaking it up into two broad headings. One is, religion and philosophy, and the other is art. He saw the medieval period as a larger intermixing and commingling of cultures in which the modes of thinking and living of various communities got synthesised. The society always consisted of two distinct strata – one being small in number, but the guardian of highly developed religions, social ideas and institutions, and the second – comprising the great masses of people who occupy a humbler rung on the cultural ladder. Of these two strata of society, irrespective of different religious affinities, “the first provides the intellectual and aristocratic and the second the folk element in India’s culture”. He described Sufism as a branch of Islam that advocated universal brotherhood and criticised the caste system. Similarly, in Hinduism, the Bhakti movement advocated the same principles. The author traced this trend in Pran Nath, a Gujarati contemporary of Aurangzeb, and the founder of the sect named Dharnis. It is significant to note that a

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9Chandra, “Writings on Social History”, p. 268.
12Ibid., p. ix.
number of scholars and learned men, led by Dara Shikoh, were well-acquainted with the religious texts of religions(s) beyond theirs too. Pran Nath’s creed not only proclaimed the abolition of idol worship, removal of caste-discrimination but also brought together texts from the *Quran* and the *Vedas* to juxtapose the similarities of their essences. The book received more attention after Independence, especially when the debate on the ‘two-nation theory’ and ‘communalism verses composite culture’ surfaced in India and Pakistan. The author established that it was the teaching and wider influence of Sufis and Sants on society that forced Akbar to announce a new religion *Din-i-Ilahi*. The author proclaimed that it was not only the state that influenced the society, but society also influenced the state. In that sense, Tara Chand’s work is closest to our own objective.

K.M. Ashraf’s book *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* remained unique for a long time, as much of the later researches did not take into account society as a whole. They remained at the level of sectional studies, whereas Ashraf threw light on the lives of common people and showed wide disparities between the living standards of the ruling classes and the common people, irrespective of their identities. He analysed the society in a Marxist framework in which there is a conflict of interests among various social classes: “The masses of the people had seen the Huns, the Scythians, the Kushans, the Greeks, the Persians, and the Rajputs ruling over them. There was nothing particularly repulsive in an Arab, a Turk or any other Muslim for that matter”. Ashraf observes that it was so because the masses had barely seen any change in the character of the ruling elite. People as a term include all common people who had common sufferings and struggles irrespective of their religious

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14 Ibid., p. 165.
identity. Ashraf observed that religious identity never created any hindrance in the cultural integration of the masses. Similarly, this could be seen in the case of the ruling class also. As a new claimant of Delhi’s throne when he entered Hindustan, Babur had to fight “the combined force of Hindus and Muslims.”

The Hindu impact may be seen in the nomenclature of the titles in conferring the titles like Nayaka Khan and Satya Raja by Muslim Sultans of Bengal to their elite servants. Similarly, the popularisation of a tradition of Persian origin - of awarding the *Khilat* among non-Muslims - shows the intensity of cultural commingling between different strata of Hindus and Muslims. Ashraf also wrote about the socio-economic integration of the followers of different religions, observing that it was somewhat difficult to distinguish the lower classes of Muslims from the masses of Hindus. Most of them were originally Hindus converted to Islam, whose social position did not change much, although it may have improved in some cases. The work of Ashraf had a wider perspective of analysing the society as whole, but it covered only the period of the Delhi Sultanate.

S.M. Jaffar explained cultural features like architecture, gardening, painting, poetry and music in *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India.* He also analysed the nature of the State and the administrative system of the Delhi Sultanate. While characterising the Delhi Sultanate and Badshahat of Delhi as secular institutions, not based on Islamic law but on the Persian tradition, Jaffar went against the very title of his book. As a state policy, “the Mughals made no invidious distinction between the Hindus and Muslims, both of whom they regarded as their subjects. They freely employed Hindus in the

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18Ibid., pp. 86, 89.
19S.M. Jaffar, *Some Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule in India*, Delhi, reprint 1972. It was first published from Peshawar in 1938.
20Jaffar, *Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule*, Jaffar notes that “far from theocracy, the Sultanat and the Badshahat of Delhi were essentially secular institutions, based not on Islamic law (Shariyat) but on Persian traditions” p. 6.
service of the state, appointed them to important posts and entrusted them with positions involving great responsibility”\(^{21}\). The author credited Mughals for bringing a new aesthetic in gardening, decoration of books, literature, painting, poetry, music and dressing particularly in the elite class. Jaffar highlighted religious tolerance as a matter of policy that prevailed in the times of Aurangzeb too. Muslims and Hindus were serving state in public offices and were free to worship God in their own way.\(^{22}\)

The pompous life of the Mughals Emperors, their riches and grandeur, day-to-day garments, court-customs, winery, fruitery, Harams, modes of travelling, hunting, court etiquettes, games and amusements, fair and festivals celebrated by the Mughal Emperors – all were deeply studied by M.A. Ansari in his book *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors*.\(^{23}\) He portrays the modes of living that illustrate the contrast between the standard of living of Mughal Emperors and of the common people inhabiting their kingdom. The subject-matter of this work did not include society as a whole, but it established that the lifestyle of Mughal Emperors was not entirely a preserve of their own particular (foreign, Muslim) past tradition and ethnic groups, rather a grand combination of the Muslim, Hindu, Persian and Turk styles.

Pran Nath Chopra in his *Some Aspects of Society & Culture during the Mughal Age*\(^{24}\) studied social and cultural aspects using the indicators like dress and ornaments, diet and intoxicants, games and amusements, festivals and fairs, education and position of women in society. He widened his subject by covering people from the elite to the folk. Chopra narrated aspects of the lives of many of the upper and middle class Hindus, who had beyond doubt borrowed (more than) something from the Mughal dress, language and vocabulary besides

\(^{22}\)Jaffar, *Cultural Aspects of Muslim Rule*, pp. 73-74.
the Mughal mode of life and etiquettes. He also narrated the living
conditions of common Hindus and Muslims who continued to follow
their traditional paths. He differentiated between Sultanate and Mughal
periods in respect of Hindu-Muslim interaction. According to him,
Hindus remained more aloof from Muslims in the Sultanate period in
comparison to Mughal period. The liberal administrative policy of
Akbar made the court an emblem of all that was best in Hinduism and
Islam gave birth to the ‘national’ literature, architecture, music and
painting which become the common heritage of the society.
Consequently, a wide homogeneity is visible in the realm of art but
social customs and personal laws still continued to be influenced by
the religious creeds. This work has limitations in its analytical
assessment of aloofness or cultural commingling in various aspect of
life as explained by author itself.

Pran Nath Chopra came forward with his second volume of his
proposed series on Mughal period under the title of Some Aspects of
Social Life during the Mughal Age in 1963. In this volume he took-up
social customs, rites, ceremonies beginning from birth to death, social
etiquettes and manners to be followed in court and charity, alms and
fастs as religious obligations. Houses and furniture, mode of travelling
and conveyances, and postal system which were used by different
sections of society in different regions of country were discussed at a
length on the basis of travel accounts and primary sources. This work
is written in the same narrative style as his first volume. The author
does not care for any causation or interplay of different factors. He
simply picked up references from different sources and presents them
straightway without providing any analytical description or interplay
of different factors behind any custom or ritual. ‘Muslims’, without
any qualification were supposed to have a strong desire for a male
child across all sections, based on the facts that Humayun and Akbar’s

25Chopra, Society and Culture, p. xii.
26P.N. Chopra, Some Aspects of Social Life during the Mughal Age 1526-
wished so too.\textsuperscript{27} Similarly, we come to learn about customs, rituals, festivals and social etiquettes but cannot extract any idea of mutual interactions and participation by Hindus and Muslims in others festivals or celebrations. All such aspects are seen as unchanged since antiquity, and would have remained unchanged notwithstanding external or internal pressure or change. This work, strikingly, deals with society along a vertical divide, from top-to-bottom on the basis of religion, almost stagnant in terms of social change, and that too without discussing causations but providing catalogued information. Chopra revised his earlier works, as he claimed in \textit{Life and Letter under the Mughals},\textsuperscript{28} affirming that there was not much difference in medieval Indian culture in comparison to what preceded or succeeded it. Indian culture has been largely static, with successive historical periods merely adding to the rich variety of its practices. Although there was a sharing of culture among the elites of both religions, there was not much commingling among the poor Hindus and Muslims,\textsuperscript{29} which is the converse of what Tara Chand or K.M. Ashraf.

Yusuf Husain explores Bhakti movement’s interaction with Islam, Sufism, education system and origin and growth of Urdu language as significant features of social change and adjustment in \textit{Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture}\textsuperscript{30} and analyses the interplay of social forces that helped the growth of composite culture. The Sufi doctrine of equality and its renewed massive support and acceptance among the Hindus of lower origin challenged the Brahmanic fold. However, Sufism was not the only challenge. A section of Bhakti movement too had the same attitude towards caste system other discriminative rituals. Husain articulates the origin of a new language \textit{Rekhta} or Urdu as an outcome of long interaction between local

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\bibitem{27}Chopra, \textit{Social Life}, pp. 8-9.
\bibitem{28}P.N. Chopra, \textit{Life and Letters under the Mughals}, Ashajanak Publications, New Delhi, 1976.
\bibitem{29}Chopra, “Introduction”, \textit{Life and Letters}, pp. xix-xx.
\bibitem{30}Yusuf Husain, \textit{Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn., Bombay, 1959. Originally this book is a compilation of lectures delivered by author.
\end{thebibliography}
dialects like Brij Bhasha, Haryanvi and Persian, and as a psychological process of reconciliation and synthesis that could become a medium of intellectual expression till the times of Jahangir. According to his understanding, the soul of medieval Indian culture brought different lingual and religious sections close to each other, and laid the way to a condition of comprehensive social change and action. In social life, it is observable that “there were no longer strangeness” for Muslims as “the early resentment of the Hindus no longer existed”. The descendants of Muslim immigrants soon came to regard India as their home much like Amir Khusrau did, and social interaction among Hindu inhabitant of villages and urban Muslim population soon made the foundation of Indo-Muslim society. Besides the mutual influence, traceable in religious movements of Bhakti and Sufism, Persian and local languages, musical innovations and social interaction between Hindu and Muslim section of society, Husain highlighted some changes in religious celebrations like processions of Taziyas and Shab-i-Barat – both having resemblance with Jagannath Yatra and Siva-Ratri respectively. He admits that Indian society was distinctively divided between Hindus and Muslims, whose spiritual sources of inspiration were different, even though in the material world they had many things in common.32

Mohammad Yasin, in his book A Social History of Islamic India(1605-1748)33, intensively investigated the Islamic India in general and Muslim community of Northern India in particular. He had a perception that what was true for North was also true for South; so he narrowed down his work to the North India only and made a generalised it. He divided his thesis in two portions. The first portion analyses the Muslim community that further made an appraisal of the reactionary activities during the period under review. In this section, he analysed the composition of the community, relations among

31Husain, Glimpses, p. 121.
32Ibid., p. 128.
33Mohammad Yasin, A Social History of Islamic India 1605-1748, Lucknow, 1958.
various sections of the Muslim, their economic life, relations between Muslim and Hindu aristocracy and general masses, festival, customs and ceremonies. Broadly, what he established in his analysis was that the Muslims of Hindustan had evolved into a partially Indianized heterogeneous community around the small coterie of foreign conquerors and immigrants of divorce races, the Arab and the Afgan, the Turk and Turoman, Mongols and the Mongoloid Tatar. They did form a nation distinct from Indian nationality in the early days of their sway over this sub-continent. Yasin explained that the term ‘Mughal’ was a common epithet which denoted all the foreign elements in the Muslim population of Hindustan. He revealed that the Muslim aristocracy, by virtue of their favoured position in the state and society had become more ease loving and extravagant than the rest of the population. The Muslims in Hindustan never hesitated to adopt any profession which suited their temperament and was within their means. On the relationship between Muslim and Hindu aristocracy, Mohammad Yasin wrote that these relations were by no means friendly. However, the mutual jealousy and rivalry were more personal than religious. In case of general folk, these relations were cordial, and characterised by good will, mutual love and toleration. In the second portion of his thesis, Mohammad Yasin deals with the reform movements initiated by Mujaddid Shaikh Ahamad Sirhindi down to Shah Walliuallh Dehlavi and Sayyid Ahamad of Rae Bareli, along with an introductory chapter on Mahadist movement in India and the classes of Orthodoxy and liberalism during the reign of Akbar. He said that after the death of Akbar “the orthodox heaved a sigh of relief” but it was not all: “the Mujaddid aimed at an outright conversion of Jahangir to the orthodox Islamic policy in the state” Thus, for Yasin, the gradual shift towards orthodoxy in Jahangir and his successors, was creditable to Mujaddid. He proposed the idea that what is considered as reforms by a Muslim may appear as reaction from the

35Ibid., p. 152, 164. See, for example: “the son and successor of Akbar regards the slaughter of a bullock as gain to Islam”.

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political and historical view. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi, his sons and successors perhaps made a wrong approach in pressing for their reforms. They aimed at reform from the top, that is the king, and nobility; where the right method would have been to work from the bottom of the Muslim society to the top. Similarly, Yasin explained that Hindustan stood in the need of a Mujaddid beyond doubt; a reformer who could teach the Muslims to live a better life, and also allow those outside the fold of Islam to live with the same honour and prestige.

A virtually divided society on the basis of religious identity, where Hindus not only faced discrimination in state services but also had an inferior grade in comparison of privileged Muslims throughout the Sultanate period till the reign of Akbar – is the central idea in Medieval Indian Culture by A.L. Srivastava. However, the discrimination, the privileges and the inferior position of lower castes among the Hindus did not get a similar treatment in this study. Srivastava writes that “no doubt that the lower orders of the society were discriminated” but it has been exaggerated after the description given by Al-Beruni, because caste rules and obligations under these regulations “were not strictly followed”. However, in pages ahead he gave as much importance to the caste obligations that people would have taken as many baths in a day as prescribed for their caste. In any case, “bathing was compulsory for all the castes at least once a day”. Srivastava studied the medieval Indian culture under themes of art and literature, architecture, language and education, Bhakti movements and Sufism along with economic and social conditions covering from Sultanate to the end of Aurangzeb’s reign. A clear vertical division of society on the basis of Hindu Muslim identities runs through in his assessment. Hindu society was a divided yet unified entity on the basis of caste and sub-castes. The number of castes had increased due to

37Srivastava, Medieval Indian Culture, pp. 20-21.
38Ibid., p. 25.
inter-caste marriages between male and female of upper castes and vice-versa, through a practice called *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. According to Srivastava, caste rules and taboos had become more rigid in medieval period. Nevertheless, Brahmans and Sudras got some relaxations and they could adopt new professions which were forbidden for them before. However, the position of women worsened during the Sultanate period. Social evils like early marriages and *purdah* system were also an outcome of the Sultanate period, though there is no answer to the question why a girl did not observed *purdah* while a daughter-in-law had to do in the same family. Muslim women of India were not as privileged as their Arab counterparts. They were subjugated to the will and wish of their polygamous husbands. They were not supposed to talk with any man, even in a close relation. They were made to observe *pardah* and every women belonging to upper class could not cross thresholds without the *burgah*. In earlier descriptions, the author stated that the custom of *pardah* occurred only due to Muslim rule. As evidence, he pointed out some references of participation in wars by some Rajput women of ruling family, even as late as in 14th century.\(^{39}\) Can we conclude from this argument that there was no *pardah* system in fashion among the Muslim people on the basis of scattered examples from Mughal ruling family? This question is not taken up by him. He denied mutual influence in religious arena after the contact of the duo *i.e.* Hinduism and Islam. He posed the question that if Shankaracharya had borrowed the theory of monism form Islam then, “why did he fail to condemn and denounce image-worship which is a cordial doctrine of Islamic theology?”\(^{40}\) This questions of Srivastava raises another question: what if the process of ‘absorbing’ from other ideology and ‘merging’ of one’s ideas into another ideology is the same thing; and was Srivastava speculating the extinction of Hinduism just for the sake of an answer to his arguments contrary to evidences of mutual influence?

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\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 256.
His conclusion shows Islamic influence on the upper class Hindus, reflected in evolution of dresses, food and social customs; in literature and emergence of Hindu scholars of Persian language, development of Urdu as literary language; in recreational life; remarkable change in the architecture buildings of Mughal and Hindu rulers, and even of Hindu temples; in paintings of Hindu and Mughal School of paintings; in garden plans. Also there were changes in social life of Muslim community like the continuance of some customs by Hindu converts even after accepting Islam; in celebrations of festivals like *Shab-i-Barat*, ceremonies of *aqiq* and *bismillah* which were observed in the same manner as in the Hindu *mundane* and *vidyarambh sanskar*, marriage ceremony *haft-o-nuh* was said to be an imitation of *solah-shringar* like Hindu bride; in the male headwear the use of *paag* by Muslims was an adoption of Hindu *pagri*; Hindu caste system influenced the concept of equality of all Muslims and as a result, a Sayyad or Shaikh could not think of a marriage alliance with a lower rank of Muslim, even in early days of Delhi Sultanate. Muslim religious thought and practices were also influenced to an extent; but in the very beginning of his conclusion, he saw Hindu-Muslim contact since the earliest times, strikingly enough, as a “clash of these two powerful religion and cultures” that could not “produce any real fertilising effect on the medieval Indian society.”

M. Mujeeb has divided his study *The Indian Muslims*, ranging from medieval to modern period, into four parts. This fat volume has very little to say about the seventeenth century, which has been dealt with in passing in the chapter on social history. He says that if one were to visualize common people in seventeenth century, there would hardly be any noticeable difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. Poor Hindus and poor Muslims looked pretty much the same. The major differences between these communities lay not in the social

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41 Srivastava, *Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 255.
field but in spiritual field. New philosophies were devised to facilitate mutual co-existence, like *wahadat-ul-wujud*. If there was collaboration at the lower level, the elites tried to outdo each other in asserting incompatibility of different religions. The question of religion almost became a class question. However, the elite condemnations of each other’s religion did not extend so far as to condemning the social practices like *Sati*. Hindus accepted the Muslim etiquettes and elements of high culture. Exactly why this occurred, there is no light on this question. It may be a case of reciprocal acculturation because the Muslim adapted the Hindu manners of marriage and discrimination. The Muslims accepted Hindu caste system and granted the *kafirs* an equal place in the eyes of the world. At the same time, it was only by the seventeenth century that Hindus and Muslims accepted each other with their flaws.

A. Rashid’s study *Society and Culture in Medieval India* stops just prior to the accession of Akbar. Primarily a study of Delhi Sultanate, Rashid models this work on the lines of K.M. Ashraf’s work. It studies the medieval culture in its extended definition which includes not just the mental sphere but also the material culture like food, clothing, manners, festivals, education and social stratification. It deals with the Sufi and Bhakti movements, women and common people. Although, it does not cover the time period of our study, it is important methodologically. He devastates the myth propounded by Elliot that the rule of the British Company was far more peaceful and respectful towards the life of the individuals, saying that there was much less violence over common people during the Sultanate rule.44 They were also better off economically. They put away social history aside and saw Islam merely as a religion of war.45 A closer look at the sources reveals a careful and nuanced handling of religious matter relating to common people by the rulers, who continued to suppress their individual disgust of popular religion to facilitate smooth

functioning of administration.\textsuperscript{46} Archaeological records show, contrary to communal assertions, the construction of newer temples under the Sultanate rule. An Indian historian who imitated the style of the colonial historians also saw the Muslim rule as a long crusade against Hindu culture and civilization, he asserted.\textsuperscript{47} For this genre of historians – colonial/communal – there was no space for social commingling but only a ‘Chinese Wall’ between both the communities. In reality, however, one finds “political cooperation, social cohesion and cultural collaboration between Hindus and Muslims.”\textsuperscript{48} Conflicts were at worst political and temporary. Rashid’s work is extensive and analytical in nature beyond of the temporal range of our topic.

P.N. Ojha in his book \textit{Aspect of Medieval Indian Society and Culture}\textsuperscript{49} states that Hinduism and Islam flowed together like two streams in medieval period of Indian history; almost along parallel to each other and running close and far in different times. The mutual contact between Islam and Hinduism has been reinforced by each community. At this time, Islam came to influence Hindu life and living, religion and philosophy, arts, architecture and education. Hinduism, in a likewise manner, influenced Islamic life and thought. The most important feature of this period, from the cultural point of view, was assimilation and fusion as well as the contacts between the two religions and their followers, who differed with each other completely. Ojha pointed out the two different opinions of Islam in its evolution in India. One opinion underlined the use of force. The advocates of this theory held that Islam could spread in India mainly because it could establish its political power in the country. On the other hand, there is another school which holds that Islam came to India by means of peaceful and gradual penetration. The advocates of

\textsuperscript{46}Rashid, \textit{Society and Culture}, P. 226.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p. 216. Rashid cites here K. M. Munshi as a legendary example of this sort of writing.
\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., P. 230.
\textsuperscript{49}P.N. Ojha, \textit{Aspects of Medieval Indian Society and Culture}, Delhi, 1978.
this theory said that since Islam made no class distinction, a number of low caste Hindus – mostly untouchables, who have no place in Hindu society – were attracted toward this religion and they embraced it gladly. Ojha stated that both these factors i.e. force and the merit of Islam itself, played important role in its spread in India. He emphasized that, whatever the case may be, both Islam and Hinduism acted and interacted with each other over centuries. Hinduism in earlier times had assimilated within its fold a number of foreign religions and culture. However, it failed to do so in the case of Islam. Islam could not be completely assimilated by Hinduism, although both these religions have flourished in India. Ojha also pointed out in, his book, those cities and towns displayed more markedly the fusion of the two cultures than the distant rural areas, and the numerical inferiority of the Muslim was counterbalanced by their political power and importance. Thus, the rural culture, despite witnessing large scale change in religion, remained dominantly Hindu, because people can change their creed easily but not their traditional way of life. Ojha concluded in this important book that the process of reconciliation and mutual adjustment had continued throughout the medieval period. That case was similar to the process of fusion of two distinct cultures but did imply not the absorption of one into the other.

In his other work, Ojha endeavored to present a brief study on Mughal India, in *Glimpses of Social Life in Mughal India* by unfolding the various aspects of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He made his study under the repeating themes of food, drinks, housing, dresses, toilets, ornaments, amusements, education and learning etc. along with a section on position of women in the society. Ojha emphasized that position of women reflects the standard of civilization, culture and refinement in a society. Taking marriage and divorce as an indicator he found that among upper caste Hindus, divorce was not acceptable. It was acceptable only among the lower castes of the Hindus. Polygamy was not restricted on the basis of

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religion among the Muslims but had an economic constraint that restricted Muslims of lower economic strata up to one marriage instead of religiously allowed four.

M. P. Srivastava’s study *Social Life under the Great Mughals* is repeat with repetitive descriptions of food, drinks, dresses, games, festivals, etc. without providing anything substantially newer than what other historians have already said before. He also repeats the concept of treating the Hindus and Muslims as separate entities and comparing their lives. In doing so, he finds the same dietary habits, customs, forms of entertainment and modes of life. The similar tendencies that we see in matters of dressing exhibit themselves to the extent that it was very difficult to differentiate a Hindu nobleman from a Muslim, once he removed his *tilak* from his forehead or any other distinctive ornament. Muslim aristocrats regularly consulted Hindu astrologers and the Muslim kings performed *tula-dan* in a very Hindu manner, including Aurangzeb. As per education, there were private schools in every town and village in the times of Jahangir. Medicine, mathematics and astronomy were studied together by students of different religions. These things brought people together than their faiths separated them. His study does not consider the systems of thought developed especially in this century so as to allow us seeing the post-Akbar dispensation.

Neera Darbari takes up the study of socio-economic aspects in the latter half of seventeenth century in her book *Northern India under Aurangzeb*. Hindu caste system basically remained the same as in previous centuries. She sees society divided not only along religious lines, but also along the regional cultural diversity of the Hindu society. On the one hand, the Hindu society has been diversified geographically; on the other hand, the Muslims have been seen as a

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52 Srivastava, *Social Life under the Great Mughals*, p. 2-17.
homogenous bloc,\textsuperscript{53} because they are seen as engaged in the same life processes as anywhere else. The Christians, though, have been separately studied – which something has been done rarely before.\textsuperscript{54} Only the poorer classes must have converted to Christianity, she informs but without citing any source. Even the Hindu King of Jaipur had banned conversion of Muslims to Christianity. Hindu-Muslim interactions have been cited but they do not cover the entire century or the holistic social foundations.

Khaliq Ahmad Nizami’s, \textit{State and Culture in Medieval India}, underlines a long historical process of absorption, assimilation and adjustment of various elements and tendencies running over centuries. These resulted in the complex social entity of the seventeenth century India.\textsuperscript{55} The author has used the Sufi records and philosophies as important sources for medieval history, affirming that Sufis did not even take the signifiers ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ seriously for they believed in none. They became vehicles of the composite culture and provided a language for its articulation. The same doctrines facilitated the status of ‘Guru’ or ‘Pir’ to the same person at the same time.\textsuperscript{56} This work mainly covers the Sultanate period and in a dynamic sense of the cultural interaction.

A mere glimpse over the large body of history writing on the social aspects of medieval India suggests a plethora of different trends and methods of capturing the past. Close analysis further reveals, on the one hand, how much this history writing has borrowed from the studies of other societies and models and, on the other hand, how much this reflection on medieval India has been written as a response to events and ideas circulating in historians’ own lifetimes. In fact, social history as distinct from economic history has been a very recent

\textsuperscript{54}Darbari, \textit{Northern India}, p. 152-159.
\textsuperscript{55}Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, \textit{State and Culture in Medieval India}, New Delhi, 1985.
\textsuperscript{56}Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, \textit{State and Culture}, p. 273.
phenomenon, not just in India but elsewhere; and its scope has been expanded from a history of the underprivileged to that of society as a whole.\textsuperscript{57} Social historians have devised new concepts and methods from various other disciplines like anthropology, sociology and linguistics apart from economic history – the latter being the primary site from where social history has been worked out.

Therefore, across more than a century of history writing, there seems to be a gigantic expanding of scale – so as to allow the bypassing of our period and, simultaneously, a dynamic contraction on the other hand, of the issues to be covered up. This second approach regards the people’s own contribution to the making of history, reducing them to being passive objects of the rulers’ whims and caprices. It does not allow the historian to see how the social policy of the rulers was formed after several negotiations with the ordinary folk, who formed the backbone of the economic and social edifice of the Mughal Empire.

On the basis of literature reviewed, it seems that in our times, there has been a tendency to view culture in religious terms, e.g. ‘Hindu culture’ and ‘Muslim culture’, in most historical assessments. Civilization is reduced to ‘culture’, and culture is conflated to ‘religion’. Social history of the Mughal period has not yet been seen on its own terms, as it should have been – autonomous and yet involved in a complicated relationship with the influence and personal attitude of individual Mughal rulers. Questions of social interaction, intellectual synthesis and cultural commingling have not been raised in a satisfactory perspective. The various studies of this divided society – based on the caste, class, gender, religion, ethnicity– its various aspects such as manners, customs, beliefs, and other cultural aspects appear to be dealt with in statistical descriptions, rather than through qualitative analysis. The society of seventeenth century Hindustan is

painted and portrayed to be cast so much after the image of individuals that it seems merely to be a society defined by a single person *i.e.* of the then ruling Mughal Emperor, then as a society involving class and community relations and daily and long-term interactions. Hence, the dominant understanding of society seems merely to be a personification of society as Jahangir, Shahjahan or Aurangzeb’s society rather than that defined by the contemporary common folk outside of the orbit of the elite lived in forts.

Our survey of historiography suggests that while a number of questions have been raised and dealt with, a number of other questions are yet to be answered or even posed by the historians. It is important to see changes in the behaviour and cultural characteristics of people with the change in throne, which is not always correlated and as one-sided (top-down) as it is generally assumed. Was there any echo of a change in society’s values and relations within communities in tandem with changing of Mughal rulers of seventeenth century? Did change-over of throne bring changes in thoughts of common Hindu and Muslim people? Can we identify long-term and short-term religious movements? Do we see popular movements building up in the pre-colonial period, and shaping administrative or social institutions? Did people, instead, live in water-tight compartments, restricting themselves to their religion and beliefs? On the other hand, more importantly, can the people be straight jacketed into broad-brush and mutually-exclusive categories such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’? Can ordinary people be classified into modern categories when, in our period of study, they share more among themselves than with religious scriptures – such as daily practices, superstitions, traditions, diet, dress, etc.? Are there floating categories which can make social identity fluid? Can we yet identify the individual as the locus of social history?

The aim of this study is to observe the history of everyday life and to argue that this pillar of seventeenth century society has been left
largely unexplored by the history-writing so far. Its objective is to look at long-term and short-term processes of social interaction, modes of thought, religious movements, material practices (including economic exploitation), exclusions, discriminations, and structures of feeling which join and disjoin people from each other. In an era, where politics is not possible, in the modern sense of the term, what were the sites of negotiation and subversion? What was the relation of the state to individual or community? What new philosophies emerged in the seventeenth century, which were peculiar to its social situation? Can court politics too be explained in terms of social practices and alliances as, for example, in the case of Dara Shikoh and Sarmad? What role do social processes play in determining the geography of the empire?

**Chapterization**

The present work deals with the topic in the following chapters:

**Chapter-1 Social Relationships before Seventeenth Century:** This chapter begins with connotation and geographical expressions attached with the word Hindustan and explore the history of Indian society since the arrival of Islam in eighth century to the beginning of seventeenth century in India. It looks at important historical and literary sources from that era and seeks to lay out various forms of continuities and discontinuities in the seventeenth century as distinct from the preceding centuries. It views social interactions in three phases classified as far distant relations, on the peripheries and later while living together from Sultanate to Mughal period till the close of Akbar’s reign. This chapter laid out a type of *longue durée* (long-term) of the medieval period before we can begin to discuss to *courte durée* (short term) of the seventeenth century.

**Chapter-2 Structural Givens of the Society:** This chapter explores the economic and the social life of the seventeenth century Hindustan. It draws upon a vast literature on the social structures, classes, their
interactions and discourses. It seeks to situate wider religious and political beliefs in the context and argue that cohesion was both a cause and an effect of the requirements of running a vast empire in the absence of the modern technology and governance. It also explores, distinctly, the discourse at the court, the city and the rural sphere, while trying to study their various interactions. A historiographical explanation of the mosaic nature of the Mughal ruling elite is sought in the diversity and scale of the Empire; and hence, the requirements of the culturally synthetic discourse.

Chapter-3 Everyday Life: Interactions, Relations and Identities: This chapter explores everyday life in the seventeenth century. It emphasizes the study of popular classes as well as that of the ruling classes, and hopes to find common links in their lives. Various social classes, their world-views, customs, traditions and religious practices are covered. It attempts to find common denominators in the field of culture based upon a long tradition of mutual interaction and cohesive development, while also taking into account the role of class exploitation and caste-based discrimination in the seventeenth century. Accounts from the foreign travellers are used to reflect upon an exterior view on the Indian society. It is a study of the syncretic processes with the change in the composition and heads of the ruling classes. Its primary task is to reflect upon the mixed traditions and cultures of the elites and popular classes. Above all, it is a detailed account of the structural aspects of society.

Chapter-4 Culture and Manifestation: It explores the moral, philosophical and cultural ways of thinking of the different stratum. It explores cultural interactions among various groups, classes and religions and argues for a common substratum to them. It explores the dynamic of intellectual and cultural history and attempts to get an insight into the minds of the people and various classes in the seventeenth century. It gives a huge emphasis upon the Bhakti and Sufi traditions as it looks at their evolution in synchrony and
diachrony from the imperial power. Did the millennium-old experimentation in theology, political ideologies and anti-caste sentiments get to sit well with the composite ruling class practicalities? How was the position of different regions and classes situated to handle changes? Was there a freedom of thought and religion? It argues for a distinct social culture in the seventeenth century as it posits that this was a century of experimentations, drawing upon the works of the earlier centuries.

A word may be said about the use of the term ‘Hindustan’. The formation of a half-ring by the Himalayan mountains in the north and covering of the rest of the three sides by the great oceans is a classic description of the Indian subcontinent’s geographical expression. The geographical entity of the Indian subcontinent has remained intact for millennia but its historical identity as ancient Bharatvarsha, Aryavarta, Madyadesa or medieval Hindustan are relatively recent and that too with varying connotations.\(^{58}\) The Puranic Bharatavarsha is today commonly identified with the whole of the Indian subcontinent whereas no such designation has been found in ancient literature, whether Indian or foreign.\(^{59}\) The region identified by the Vedic river Sindu and its tributaries was called Heptahindu in the Zind Avesta which is an equivalent of the Vedic Saptasindu. It refers only to the north-west area of the Indian subcontinent. The ‘al-Hind’ in Arabic sources represents land beyond the river Indus in an unqualified manner but it does not ascribe to the whole

\(^{58}\) D.N. Jha, “Looking for a Hindu Identity”, Presidential Address to the Indian History Congress, 66\(^{th}\) Session, Santiniketan, 2006, p. 4. The Rig Vedic Saptasindhava represents north-west i.e. Punjab plains and Panini’s Pracya Bharata of 500 B.C. covers territory between north and east India only. The earliest geographical reference of Bharatavarsha excludes Magadha in first century B.C. In Mahabharata (200 BC to 300 AD) a larger area was covered under Bharatavarsha but this too excludes part of Deccan and South of the Indian subcontinent. In Amarakosha, (4\(^{th}\) – 5\(^{th}\) AD) Aryavarta finds a status synonymous to Bharatavarsha and one of its further geographical division was named as Madhyadesha which was said to be bound in the “west by Adarsana near Kurukshetra and on the east by Kalakavana near Allahabad according to eleventh century commentator Kshirasvamin”.

of the subcontinent. The sources of medieval India also use the word ‘Hindustan’ both ways i.e. as whole of the Indian subcontinent itself and secondly, something like a constituent region of the Indian subcontinent. Similarly, the Arabic ‘Hind’ or Persian ‘Hindustan’, coined after the Persian tendency of adding the ‘stan’ suffix to the territorial names, led the historians in general to reach the conclusion that “the word may refer here in a general way to northern India”. Here, for the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘Hindustan’ refers to the regional area only instead of the whole of the Indian subcontinent.

Sources

Acknowledging the limitations in secondary works, our working hypothesis – that social interaction at lower levels of society shaped elite discourses and practices of cultural assimilation and vice versa – is confirmed. These complex processes assumed shape and permanence over centuries. To observe them, we would need to examine a number of travel accounts, archaeological records, literary sources, anecdotes and oral histories of our time period. Micro-level incidents – serving as concrete proofs of our hypothesis – are found in court records, histories and chronicles, citations, deductions and memoirs. The profuse availability of sources is a desirable situation for a student of history, dealing with a particular time and topic; it can be optimal due to language barrier and access to the sources. Here, the researcher cannot claim exhaustive use of available sources as only those were available as translated from Arabic and Persian

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61 Jha, “Hindu Identity”, p. 4; Ali, Geography of Puranas, p. 134 Ali holds that Puranic Madhyadesha and Hindustan of the Muslim historians were same and one; Douglas E. Streusand, The Formation of the Mughal Empire, Delhi, 1999, p. 21 Streusand observed that in Mughal records broadly the Indo-Gangetic plain and its immediate environs was considered Hindustan excluding Deccan, Kashmir and Afghanistan from it.
could be used for this thesis, in addition to travellers’ accounts, literature in vernacular languages beside the secondary sources.

The study of seventeenth century Hindustan cannot be carried out in isolation from other centuries. It is in continuation of preceding centuries – that is why historical works covering from eighth to sixteenth century mainly based upon *Chachnama*, *Al-beruni’s India*, *Rehla*, *Baburnama*, *Humayunnama*, and *Tarikh-i-Rasidi* and taken into consideration for various social changes and developments of the period. The second half of the sixteenth century, dominated and ruled by Akbar’s persona and statecraft seen as Hindustan on the eve of seventeenth century in this thesis is sourced from Abul Fazl’s *Akbarnama* and *Ain-i Akbari*. Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni’s *Muntakhab-ul-Tawarikh*, a secretly written book is very useful and counter balancing source against authoritative history writings of Abul Fazl for the period. Several important and relatively obscure documents like *Halat-i-Asad Beg* or *Wakaya’-i-Asad Beg* – a personal memoir of the author during the latter years of Akbar’s reign especially of the murder of Abu-l Fazl – have been used.

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Like Babur, Jahangir too wrote his memoirs *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* whose English translation rendered by Alexander Rogers as *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir* which is a very useful source that provide glimpses of Jahangir’s ambitions, personal relations with individuals – his son Shahjahan, nobles and Saints, his beliefs, opinion and judgements about various astronomical events, festivals and rituals. This kind of information makes it a unique document of Jahangir’s reign as it gives private information that none other than Jahangir himself could reveal. In later years he gave up writing of his memoirs but dictated to others. Thus Mu‘tamad Khan, from 16th to 19th regnal years, wrote on behalf of Jahangir and from the 19th regnal year he wrote a separate history of Jahangir that became third volume of his *Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri*. It is an auxiliary source of the reign of Jahangir and his predecessors. Khwaja Kamgar Husaini completed *Maasir-i Jahangiri* in 1630 seems a short version of Jahangir’s memoirs with addition and omission of some facts to criticise the role of Nurjahan – chief queen of Jahangir, in the state affairs and what might suitable to Shahjahan. Muhammad Hadi’s *Wakiat-i Jahangiri* is another source but barring a few incidents do not add much in the existing knowledge.

Shahjahan’s reign is covered by Muhammad Salih Kambu’s *Amal-i Salih or Shahjahan Nama*, which contains information on lives of Shahjahan’s ancestors going up to Amir Timur. It is the full history of Shahjahan’s reign and first two years of his prison. However, the first official history of Shahjahan’s reign was Mirza Amin Kazwini’s *Padshah Nama* though it covers only the first ten years of Shahjahan’s

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reign. Abdul Hamid Lahauri’s *Badshah Nama* covers from the beginning to the first thirty years of Shahjahan’s reign. Later it was completed by Muhammad Waris. Thus, we have three different authors of a single work called *Pahshah Nama*. Inayat Khan’s *Shahjahan Nama* is a simple rendering of earlier works on Shahjahan’s reign. The author of *Amal-i Saleh*, Muhammad Saleh Kambu had a good knowledge of Hindi besides Persian. He gives information regarding last years of Shahjahan till his death and also provides a list of *saiyids, shaikhs, learned men, physicians, poets* etc. and *mansabdars* of the Shahjahan. Muhammad Sadiq Khan’s *Tarikh-i Shahjahani* is written mainly on the basis of news obtained from *waqia-navis*, besides the account of Sadiq Khan’s participation in the decisive battle of Samugarh between Dara Shukoh and Aurangzeb.

Chander Bhan Brahman’s *Qawaid-i Sultanat-i Shahjahan* is a very interesting but brief text, describing rules and regulations of Shahjahan’s court. The text has been little used by Indian historians. It is part of the author’s *Chahar Chaman*. Since, it is not translated in full only partial translations and citations from other sources were used. In fact, many sources of our inquiry are yet not translated, hence, only available citations from secondary works were used after due scrutiny.

Mirza Muhammad Kazim Shirazi was the official chronicle writer during Aurangzeb’s rule. He wrote the first 10 years of Aurangzeb’s rule in *Alamgir Nama* and presented it to the Emperor but he did not like it anymore and ceased the history writing. Even then, we have a number of sources for the period of Aurangzeb’s reign like Sujan Rai Bhandari’s *Khulasat al-Tawarikh*, as a general history from early times to the 1660; Bhim Sen’s *Nuskha-i Dilkusha*, Isar Das Nagar a Gujrati Brahman, wrote *Futuhat-i Alamgiri*. He was a eye

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witness of some important events as a partisan of Aurangzeb and gave record of such events as a sole authority. All such sources which are in Persian or Arabic language and whose translations are not available in English or Hindi though have been referred but from secondary sources or partial translations.

Hamid ud-Din Khan’s *Ahkam-i Alamgiri*, has been translated and edited by Jadunath Sarkar as *Anecdotes of Aurangzeb*.\(^{72}\) Saqi Mustaid Khan’s *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*\(^ {73}\) covers a long span of Aurangzeb’s reign beginning with the ‘War of Succession’ to the death of Aurangzeb. A good amount of information with the exactness of dates makes it a very useful source of the period. A compilation of private letters of Aurangzeb titled as *Ruqqat-i-Alamgiri* or *Letters of Aurangzeb*\(^ {74}\) is another source with a different nature of content. Khafi Khan’s *Muntakhab al-Lubab*\(^ {75}\) compiled near after the reign of Aurangzeb, provides good information on various aspects of economy and other political events of the reign of Aurangzeb.

**Travellers’ Accounts**

European from far of lands travelled for assorted reasons through the Mughal India in sixteenth and seventeenth century. Some of them travelled to explore commercial gains seeking gold, silver, rare gems and crafted items from India that was wealthier from their own countries in that times. Some of them added pleasure and diplomacy or for a religious mission. They witnessed Mughal India on road and through the country side and villages. A large number of foreign travellers left their experiences as travel accounts of their journeys and

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observations across the years. Pierre Du Jarric wrote *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of the Jesuit Mission to the Court of Akbar* on the basis of letters and reports of Jesuits who were in Akbar’s court. Monserrate’s *The Commentary of Father Monserrate*\(^\text{76}\) gave us detailed account of his stay and journey during the reign of Akbar and provides various information regarding Mughal administration, area and other related state affairs besides the personal style and life of the Emperor. John Mildenhall reached Agra in 1600, met Emperor Akbar and could not go back England ever due to illness he died and buried in Agra in 1614. He was the first Englishman to be buried in India. However, he met Emperor Akbar but East India Company regarded him an outlaw and later sent William Hawkins to pursuit him and declared all his doings on behalf of company null and void. In the other accounts of early English travellers John Fryer (1627-81) lived in Mughal India for almost fifty years and gave important details on economic aspect of Mughal rule.

William Hawkins who was ambassador of James I the then king of England reached to the court of Jahangir in 1608 and lived there till 1611. Ralph Fitch (1608-12) came with Hawkins and travelled from Surat to Lahore. He was the first who gave attention to the love story of Prince Salim and Anarkali that he heard as bazaar gossip. William Finch too came with William Hawkins, Nicholas Withington (1612-1616) saw the custom of Sati prevalent in the Rajputs and admired it, Thomas Coryat (1612-17) and Edward Terry (1616-19)’s travel accounts are compiled and edited by William Foster as *Early Travels in India*.\(^\text{77}\) Father Fernao Guerreiro gives some political developments like Jahangir’s rebellion against his father despite that it was not his taste and area as he was a missionary. In *Jahangir and the Jesuits*\(^\text{78}\) we


find issues relating to conversion and of religious nature in a great length. Francisco Pelsaert’s *Jahangir’s India: The Remonstratie of Francisco Pelsaert*\(^7\) is another source of importance.

Peter Mundy was an Italian who travelled, for four years through Mughal India from Surat to Agra and Patna, during the reign of Shahjahan. He visited Agra and saw the early constructions of the Taj Mahal. His travel account\(^8\) provides information on society and economy in comparative style as he compared all the customs, rituals and whatever he saw in the way. Only in fewer instances he passes remarks of condemnations on them. He notices environmental aspects like arrival of Monsoon and divested effects of famines. Fray Sebastian Manrique,\(^9\) a Portuguese Missionary visited Mughal India in 1640 and travelled through Goa to Patna and Gaur to Multan and observed socio-religious aspects of life. He was impressed by the richness of people in north India and for him the reason behind this richness was fertility of Gangetic Plain. He saw the rising construction of the Taj Mahal and, observed *Jharoka Darshan* and royal marriages, prised mango and orderliness of Mughal camps are some facts in which only a traveller from a far off land could find extra ordinariness. Niccolao Manucci’s account *Storia do Mogor*\(^10\) covers the last six years and first twenty one years of the reign of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb respectively. His style of narration is simple but interesting and factual as he had so many intimate friends in elite circle and he himself even participated in war of succession fought between Dara and Aurangzeb.

The French Physician François Bernier and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier were French who experienced the time and reign of

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Aurganzeb. Bernier was a practitioner physician and once he accompanied Aurangzeb to Kashmir and had travelled through Surat, Ajmer, Lahore, Rajmahal, Qasim Bazar, Masulipatam, Golconda – almost whole of Mughal India. In his travel account named *Travels in the Mogul Empire*83 one finds a lively description of the war of succession, contemporary society, customs and convictions prevailed at the time though he was more curious for the possibilities of trade between India and France. Tavernier was a diamond merchant who visited Mughal India six times during 1638-63 and left his travel account as *Travels in India*84 and noticed life and condition of the people. John Fryer’s *A New Account of East India and Persia being Nine Years Travels*85 is a valuable source of information on socio-economic conditions but it is limited to the coastal areas as he did not journeyed through the main land far from Junar, seventy five miles from Bombay. However, he paid attention to the knowledge and acquirements of science and medicines. Alexander Hamilton travelled in eastern parts of India and focused on socio-economic conditions of the people in his account *A New Account of the East Indies*.86 Though he travelled a lot but his account seems repetition of earlier travel accounts.

Our travellers travelled through the home of various local dialects and languages of a vast empire. They recorded luxurious houses and lavish life styles of elites and in contrast poor people who had to sale out their kids in the miserable times of famine. They recorded everything which they found unique, or strange form their perspective. In the travel accounts of European travellers, we can see

vivid, real, flawed subjective portraits of the ordinary people who travelled and to whom they encountered during their journey through the Mughal India. Thus, only through the traveller’s gaze we could noticed and recorded the events, actions or customs which had been left aside by court historians considering them as not much important or due to ordinariness.

**Hindi and Regional Literature**

A major insight into the society of the Mughal India is gained not just from the Persian sources, which comprises of accounts mainly left by the elites and well-educated, but also by reading the various dialects preceding modern Hindi and Urdu. Since Amir Khusrau onwards, Hindwi or Adbhramsa sources have been numerous, and their vernacular developments by the various Bhakti poets are as major sources as any. Virtually any couplet left by Kabir and the texts of the Sikhs, the Satnamis, the Dadupanthis, Reeti poetry – constitute highly important sources for our study. In this regard, a text like *Ardhakathanak* written by Banarsidas, a trader from Jaunpur region, is most important. It is almost like a travelogue, and offers insights into various social customs of the period. The religious faith of its writer, i.e. Jainism, allows him to observe the life of the Hindus and Muslims from a peculiar position. It is remarkable also in reflecting the link between popular and elite culture, with numerous events and emotional dramas. The texts left by the Reeti poets, like Bihari, throw light on the relation between the court and the general ‘libidinal economy’ of the social culture of the period. Bihari’s *Satsai*, for example, reflects on the culture at the court of the Raja Jai Singh, but, by implication, on the wider social customs of that period.

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Besides these, the numerous works of the Sufi poets also hold chief importance. Baba Lal’s compositions, never too far away from a royal connection in the form of Dara Shikoh, are significant. Bulle Shah’s poetry is a philosophical rejection of the sectarian divide and a sublime passage into the matters of this world and the other world. English translation of some of his poetry has been recently published.89

A method suitable for writing a cultural history requires that we study the life-processes under the seventeenth century. Hence, a largely historiographical section on the economic and social history is required so that we can get to understand the complex social interactions. Since, a lot of emphasis goes to the lower classes, we have taken up a few sources of the non-ruling classes and languages. In understanding the top-to-down and down-to-top social interaction, both the elite and subaltern discourses prove useful. It would not be appropriate to use some postcolonial definitions of the term ‘subaltern’ here, at least in the sense Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak uses it, i.e. the subaltern is not the one who does not speak.90 If one were to follow her definition, there would be no way left to know the life-world of the subaltern in the seventeenth century, most of whom included sati women.