Chapter 2

STRUCTURAL GIVENS OF THE SOCIETY

We are looking to define socio-economic life with respect to our central argument, viz. the commonality of material-cultural life across religious boundaries. Historians have debated whether the medieval society was composed of classes or that of orders. India in the seventeenth century seems like a predominantly agrarian country, and the surplus extracted from the land produce being nearly the sole basis of its economy.¹ The hard, almost selfless - under great ignorance and hard luck - work done by the peasant and his family in the field, was the driving force of the Empire, and its urban-centric cultural life. In fact, urban life was like a pearl of water drop in the midst of the desert of the village - such was the degree of concentration of surplus. Although, the peasantry in-itself was a lower caste amongst the Hindus, it was divided in infinite sub-castes (jatis), so as to render the idea of an overall socio-political unity improbable.² Like most medieval societies, “profession” was not defined by individual choice, but through heredity.

Various historians have approached the medieval Indian society in various ways. Some have noted sharp differentiations in the medieval period between the Muslim period and the pre-Sultanate period.³ D.D. Kosambi distinguishes between two forms of feudalism, that from below and that from above, and argues that the Muslim invaders added to the feudalism from below, with their breaking up of the caste holds and transporting new technology, and the simultaneous development of a class

¹Irfan Habib, Essays in Indian History, New Delhi, 1995, p. 239.
²M. Athar Ali, Mughal India: Studies in Polity, Ideas, Society and Culture, New Delhi, 2006, p. 75; and Irfan Habib, Essays, p. 175.
of landlords acting as intermediaries between state and peasantry.⁴ R.S. Sharma noted continuities from the ancient period but underlined similarities with Kosambi’s thesis that the Muslim rule involved taxing the peasantry in kind.⁵ Irfan Habib notes that the ruling class was divided into two: the nobility and the zamindars, and that these two doubly exploited the peasantry while also exerting pressures on other social groups like local village men.⁶ His thesis that the Mughal Empire was plagued by a long-term agrarian crisis has been contested by M. Athar Ali, while simultaneously focusing on the composite nature of the Mughal ruling class.⁷ However, in laying the contours of the understanding of Indian history, Karl Marx had so eloquently and sharply, deserving to be quoted in full, captured the whole of Indian history as follows, in his famous journalism of India just prior to the 1857 events:

> How came it that English supremacy was established in India? The paramount power of the Great Mogul was broken by the Mogul Viceroys. The power of the Viceroys was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Afghans, and while all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all. A country not only divided between Mahommedan and Hindoo, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste; a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members. Such a country and such a society, were they not the predestined prey of conquest? If we knew nothing of the past history of Hindostan, would there not be the one great and incontestable fact that even at this moment India is held in

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⁴D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay, 1956, ch. IX and X.
English thraldom by an Indian army maintained at the cost of India? India, then, could not escape the fate of being conquered, and the whole of her past history, if it be anything, is the history of the successive conquests she has undergone. Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history. What we call its history, is but the history of the successive intruders who founded their empires on the passive basis of that unresisting and unchanging society. The question, therefore, is not whether the English had a right to conquer India, but whether we are to prefer India conquered by the Turk, by the Persian, by the Russian, to India conquered by the Briton.  

Many a things are put here in an extremely condensed way. Marx’s idea that the Indian society has no history, “at least no known history” has been fiercely contested by the Marxist historians, including Irfan Habib, who has affirmed that it was the very ‘unchanging’ Indian society which would serve as a good example of Marx’s schema of mode-of-productions. Although, Marx here may not be referring to the actual change over society, which is what most of his critics have in mind, but his idea of class-struggle. Second, in lieu of clear-cut class-struggle, Marx suggests the idea of communal antagonisms, (not just among Mohammedans and Hindus, but across tribes and castes) as the mode of antagonism in Indian history, which is what we are going to refine, if not contest, and the ‘passive basis’ of its social base – which is what comes out in Ghosh’s quasi-historical literary account. If that is not enough, Marx puts forward the following observation in one of the next paragraphs:

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Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became Hindooized, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects. The British were the first conquerors superior, and therefore, inaccessible to Hindoo civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The work of regeneration hardly transpires through a heap of ruins. Nevertheless it has begun.\textsuperscript{10}

The idea that is relevant for us to pursue here is the gradual assimilation of the foreign intruders into the fold of Indian society; their gradual ‘Hinduization’. What exactly happened, as proposed in this thesis, was much more multi-coloured and complex, as it did not simply mean ‘Hinduization’ at a horizontal level, but also the complicated exchanges between the elites and the plebeians, vice versa, and among the plebeians too. In light of this, the Muslim community in India presented a classic case of ‘extimacy’\textsuperscript{11} as far as into the whole of seventeenth century: on the one hand, due to constant exposure and inter-mingling with the rest of population having different customs, denominations and practices, they began to resemble the latter; on the other hand, they also sought to maintain a distinction from the others on account of their perceived status and religious beliefs. By the time of Jahangir’s accession to throne, thanks also to Akbar’s initiatives, the ruling elites of the Mughal court had amalgamated into a specific Hindustani community out of the various ethnically diverse ‘foreign’ elements like the Turks, Afghans, Mongols or

\textsuperscript{10}Karl Marx, “British Rule in India”, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{11}‘Extimacy’ is a neologism coined by Jacques Lacan, by joining the terms ‘intimacy’ and ‘external’ together, to designate the relationship between the psychoanalyst and analystand, wherein, the former, though aware of the most intimate details about the patient, nonetheless remains outside of the patient’s desire (of being seen as a friend).
Tatars.\textsuperscript{12} As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the accounts left by al-Beruni and Amir Khusro already give the impression of a certain sense of ‘Indianness’ amongst the local Muslims; they nonetheless remained tied to the scriptural way of life, as they sought to follow most things that were written in the scriptures, even if it meant disregarding the social conditions and the climate of the country. Thus, it can be said that as far as the latter half of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, when Akbar consolidated his rule in an innovative and bold manner, the Muslim community had regarded itself as an outsider, barring a few exceptions like Khusro. At least, South Asian Islam attempted to make a break with the Arabic Islam which had a got a more cultural sanctity due to its predominant assertion in the scriptures.\textsuperscript{13} We cannot be certain in saying whether the remaining differences they had from the non-Muslims were due to religious difference alone or it was a deliberate attempt at creating “distinction” (as conceptualized by Pierre Bourdieu)\textsuperscript{14}, between the rulers and the ruled seen working in constituting such differences:

Once a system of mechanisms has been constituted capable of objectively ensuring the reproduction of the established order by its own motion (\textit{apo tou automatou}, as the Greeks put it), the dominant class have only to \textit{let the system they dominate take its own course} in order to exercise their domination; but until such a system exists, they have to work directly, daily, personally, to produce and reproduce conditions of domination which are even then never entirely trustworthy. Because they cannot be satisfied with appropriating the profits of a social

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Mohammad Yasin, A Social History of Islamic India, 1605-1748, Lucknow, 1958.}  
\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Yasin, Social History.}, pp. 2-3.  
\textsuperscript{14}\textit{Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction, London, 1984.} Bourdieu argues that elite class’s fastest access to cultural capital endows them with the power to determine the general aesthetic taste within society. Although, Bourdieu’s study is about the modern capitalist society, this particular aspect may well be true of all social systems preceding it.
machine which has not yet developed the power of self-perpetuation, they are obliged to resort to the elementary forms of domination, in other words, the direct domination of one person by another, the limiting case of which is appropriation of persons, i.e. slavery. They cannot appropriate the labour, services, goods, homage, and respect of others without “winning” them personally, “tying” them - in short, creating a bond between persons.\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, in so far as it facilitated the larger socio-economic well-being of Mughal rule, the Mughals promoted assimilation, which was the strategy largely promoted during Akbar’s reign. It does not, of course, mean that such a tolerant policy was unforeseen in the earlier period. Even Sher Shah Suri had given grants to the Brahmins, for example. Nonetheless, the scale of this policy of sulh-i-kul was bewildering. If we keep aside the homogeneous category of ‘Muslim’ (Sanskrit ‘turushka’) to designate the successive invaders from the West, then we can free ourselves from the various confusions regarding the composition of the Mughal nobility. Once the Mughals succeeded in finding their feet in India, they came to recognize the various ethnicities among the Muslims to be given various positions and importance, including the Afghans whom they had defeated in the battle of Panipat.

The nobility was directly headed by the king, and the king occupied a central place in organizing the state machinery. Various juridical positions were available for the king to explore, but most Mughal kings followed a kind of social consensus which directed not to leave any social group unrepresented. Since Islam was the state religion, it had the most important role to play in accelerating mutual understanding or, otherwise, self-aggrandizement. Both these processes took shape at the same time. It is our argument that not only at the level of elite politics and culture, a

kind of practical-cultural *mélange* of Islamic and non-Islamic Indian religions and cultures was at active work, but also it was directly or indirectly connected to life in general, and both borrowed from and reflected the common culture that Hindus, Muslims and others had created for themselves: the collaborative and composite features of medieval came to their test, at the hands of elites, in seventeenth century and got passed. It was not the case that there was a watertight compartmentalization of the two mutually opposed ideas of collaboration and sectarianism: many, including Dara Shikoh, argued that Islam, even if possessed with an “inner greatness”\(^\text{16}\) of its own, was better understood in light of the books of ‘infidels’ to any extent, without contrasting or borrowing from other theologies even if they accepted the superiority of Islam. For the other half though, like Sheikh Sirhindi, Islam in itself was enough and could and should have taken over other systems of thought and belief. The latter tendency, almost personified in the life of Sirhindi, found itself quite marginalized and did never become the ideology of the state, even at the height of Aurangzeb’s misperceived efforts at putting collaboration on back foot and putting immediate political objectives at front.

Satish Chandra opines that neither the multi-denominationalism of Akbar (which somehow prefigures modern ideas of multiculturalism or even secularism) nor the militantism of Aurangzeb could survive the historical long run; it was, rather, the compromises worked out by Jahangir and Shahjahan which took rein:

In assessing the history of the religious movements in the subcontinent during the medieval period, quite apart from the role of religious leaders, it has been usual to contrast the policies of Akbar and Aurangzeb or, earlier Muhammad bin Tughluq or Firuz Tughluq as broad liberal or narrow-based and

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\(^{16}\)I am borrowing Heidegger’s term to refer to the doxa of Nazi Party while distancing himself from the practical aspect of it, from his 1935 speech.
orthodox from one point of view, and from another, as compromising Islam or of strengthening it. In the process, the carefully crafted, gradually evolved policies of Jahangir and Shah Jahan have tended to be overlooked. Both these rulers tried to satisfy the orthodox *ulema* about their concern for the sharia and their due share in the government, without, at the same time, allowing them to flex their muscles, weaken the alliance with the Rajputs, or pursue policies which might create a sense of discrimination among the Hindus. Unfortunately, this compromise was wrecked by factionalism in the nobility, lack of its credibility among the masses and the intelligentsia, and the rivalry between Dara and Aurangzeb, and their own individual orientations. In the ultimate resort, however, it was neither the policy of Akbar nor that of Aurangzeb, but the compromise worked out by Jahangir and Shah Jahan which prevailed during the eighteenth century and continued during the nineteenth.17

This view, although largely correct, again overlooks the popular dynamics which shaped the compromised worked out by Jahangir and Shah Jahan, and the pressures of ruling a greatly heterogeneous society. It also does not take into account the weight of Akbar’s intervention, the “state-founding”, “mythical” violence,18 which, in itself, does not appear to be an outcome of Akbar’s idiosyncrasy but thanks to supra-individual, “institutional” requirements of running a system. In that sense, it appears to be very much a practical requirement than an emotional or mystical one, even if the apparent form indicates the latter. Therefore, it constituted the

hegemonic ideology and proved too difficult for powerful individuals (including kings like Aurangzeb) to be disrupted. Christopher Bayly has sought to write a “prehistory” of communalism in India, but even this exercise begins only in the eighteenth century, not earlier. Another argument based on Marxist class-analysis is made by Irfan Habib, worth quoting in full:

Coming to Islam, the facile view has long prevailed among modern apologists that it arrived as a fresh wind of equality in this land of Homo Heirarchicus. This led even R.C. Majumdar to say that ‘the democratic ideas of the Muslims, leading to a wonderful equality among the brothers-in-faith, offered a strange contrast to the caste system and untouchability of the Hindus.’ There is, however, no sign of commitment to any such equality among the writings of theologians and scholars of the period. Minhaj Siraj, himself a theologian of eminence, speaks (1260) or the importance of the ruling class being confined to ‘Turks of pure lineage of Taziks of select birth’. A hundred years later Zia Barani, acutely orthodox and massively learned in Islamic theology and history, gave a vocal and uncompromising exposition of rigid hierarchy, which, alas, could not in practice be fully realised. It is therefore, characteristic that while Hindus were denounced as ‘infidels’, polytheists and image-worshippers, there is in the entire range of medieval Islamic literature no word of criticism of the caste system, the theory of pollution and the oppression of untouchables that marked medieval Hinduism. In the sixteenth century Abdu’l Qadir Badauni in a work on theology claims no superiority for the social ethics of Muslims

over others, but concedes that Muslims had additional vices, including that of selling free people into slavery, though he claims this had abated somewhat in his own time. Indeed, the sanction for full-fledged slavery in Islamic law should strongly modify any attribution of equality to historical Islam.20

In 1606, Jahangir ordered the execution of Guru Arjun Singh, and that of the Shia Nur Ullah Shusastri in 1610.21 However, this execution was not due to any religious opposition, as he had to cope with the rise of his son, Khurram, who was touted to succeed Akbar by a number of influential people, like Raja Man Singh and Arjun Singh, who had provided shelter to Khurram. There were other measures that he took up. Jahangir apparently came to throne on the promise that he would reinstate the Islamic traditions discarded by his father.22 Jahangir himself had not been able to find much difference between Vedanta and Quran.23 So, he too followed a liberal agenda. The position of Ulema in the Mughal regime was never as strong as under Sultanate period. The religiously trained and specialized Ulema was less needed because the King had usurped its raison d’être, i.e. he [Jahangir] was able to resolve most matters because of his own learning of religious matters.24 Ironically, this learning was obtained from the Ulema itself, who had now been confined to such a role. Hence, one of the first

22I.H. Qureshi, The Administration of the Mughul Empire, Karachi, 1966, p. 34.
edicts that Jahangir issued in 1605 was about the prohibition of enforcing the state religion upon anyone.25

Since Jahangir was not focused on imperial matters, Nur Jahan fulfilling that role de facto, but on worldly pleasures like wine and arts, the victories that he achieved during his reign appeared big to him.26 The fort of Kangra, won for him by Khurram, had a Durga temple at sight that was destroyed and mosque built upon its ruins. However, the portion of the temple outside the fort was left untouched.27 The earlier military assignments were also led by the Hindu generals. This goes on to show how religion assumed a secondary role to war, which, as Clausewitz has famously remarked, is continuation of politics by other means.28

The textbook ideas of kingship stated that the king should not only have had a good conduct and kingly manners, he should also have implemented Shara. They had three key elements: a) the community of believers; b) state, to extend protection to the believers; c) the faith itself, Islam, and its implementation through Shara.29 These ideas were sought to be canonized in Jahangir’s rule by Muhammad Baqir Najm-i-Sani in his Mau’izah-i-Jahangiri (1612) and Qazi Nur al-Din Khaqani in his Akhlaq-i-Jahangiri (1622). The former was married to the niece of the princess Nur Jahan, and as an émigré from Iran; he sought to contribute to the counselling of the ruler in his kingdom, while the former was a judge of Lahore. Both sought to counsel, however indirectly and humbly, the king on state and polity in the guise of setting some standard book, and also stamp their presence into an overall Sunni environment. This literature was part of the ‘Mirrors literature’. They were hugely influenced by the Persian tradition of political theory embodied in works like Nizam al-Mulk’s

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27 Mukhia, Mughals of India, p. 19.
Siwasat Namah (1092) and Muhammad al Ghazali’s Nasihat al-Muluk (1106).

Baqir did not contend that the Emperor ought to have the qualities of defending (imposing) the Islamic code, widely misperceived by the orthodox community to be in danger at the death of Akbar. Rather, his idea was that the ideal ruler, which Jahangir was, in his view, should have an idea of justice as central, besides other martial qualities. Perhaps, the multi-denominationalism of the Mughal Empire was also a result of the internal bifurcation of the ruling elites, whose religion was sharply divided into Shia and Sunni. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, the Mughal ruling class was composed of various ethno-linguistic groups. With such a colourful and geographically variegated ruling class, a “common” religion alone could not have provided a meeting ground. To set up some workable understanding within this divide among the elites also ensured its external reflection in multi-denominationalism for all. “Of course, religion continued to be important among the mass of the people, and even among the nobles for personal purposes like (marriage, birth and death, festive occasions, etc.). The Darbar itself provided a secular focus, along with music, painting, the chase, etc.”

By bringing together the artists and the artisans alike in the common contact of the nobles and elites, the Darbar brought down the latter from the heights of isolationist narcissism a working relation, first breaking the religious barrier in the court and then into overall society. Perversion may perhaps be thought of as a source in understanding the evolution of such culture, embodied in the Riti Kalin poetry of this period, composed in both Persian and Hindi that joined the nobility with the thread of taking pleasure in erotic descriptions of the

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female body, thus conjoining it to the common patriarchal psyche on a “non-ideological basis”.\textsuperscript{31}

Jahangir did not side with the slightly narrow views completely. Contending that God’s will was indeterminate, he stated the end (goal) of the Islamic state not as the enforcement of God’s will but the general contentment within the state.\textsuperscript{32} This view was far from the orthodox idea of ruling and polity, and it did not prioritize the protection of \textit{Shara} or the Islamic religion. Although, it apparently clashed with the theoretical content of the works of Baqir and Khaqani, perhaps, more so with the latter, it did not deviate too much from the practical recommendations made by them. Thus, even if Khaqani said that the primary task of the ruler was the extension and defence of Islam (\textit{tarwij-i-Islam}) and the elimination of the enemies of the faith of Islam,\textsuperscript{33} and Baqir said that after the Prophet Muhammad, the responsibility of the protection of the faith was that of the king,\textsuperscript{34} these assertions were generally vacuous as they never took into account the social stratification among the Muslim subjects. Furthermore, like every Islamic thinker after Prophet Muhammad, they struggled to reconcile the Islamic emphasis on radical equality, on one hand, and on the other hand, the concrete, practical distinction of society into kings and nobility on one side and masses on the other side. In short, the task before them was to theoretically unify the post-Prophetic Islam with the living reality of their societies, a task in which they largely failed. It can be argued that this distinction, between theoretical equality and practical inequality was perhaps introduced in the times of Caliph Umar, who even after assuming Caliphate and building a mighty empire, lived in a small

\textsuperscript{31}Chandra, \textit{Essays}, pp. 35-36.  
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Tujuk-i-Jahangiri}, vol. I, p. 15.  
\textsuperscript{34}Majid Khadduri, \textit{Islamic Conception of Justice}, Baltimore, 1984; Baqir, \textit{Mau'izha}, fols. 11a, 6b and 9b as quoted by Alvi, “Religion and State”, pp. 95-119. Perhaps, here Baqir could also summon the support of al-Ghazali who also said similarly that religion and politics were two sides of the same coin.
poor hut to assimilate with the lifestyle of the masses which he ruled. Hence, Baqir ultimately resorted to emphasize personal qualities of the ruler, in which he emphasized a kingly gravity with a polite and just behaviour, which were those cited by him in his letter to the widow of Jahangir after his death, with no mention of faith or its defence.\textsuperscript{35}

Similarly, the writer of a historical account of Jahangir, \textit{Maasir-i-Jahangiri}, Kamgar affirmed that the primary task of the ruler was to uphold law with the keenest sense of judgment and justice.\textsuperscript{36} Similar views were expressed by Mutammad Khan in his \textit{Iqbal Namah}.\textsuperscript{37} When Jahangir imposed a ban on the production, sale or consumption of liquor, he did not do so on the pretext of imposing \textit{Shara}. He did so rather for his own addiction to drinking. This incident alone poses as a brilliant precursor to Kant’s reversal of the commonplace idea about public and private use of reason: Kant opposed private reason, which he said meant following or doing an idea just because it was a given, like in a firm or a social milieu, while public reason was the application of an idea totally out of the individual’s thinking.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, by banning liquor, Jahangir did not follow the private use of reason, as would have meant by following \textit{Shara}, but he rather followed the public use of reason, which Kant held superior,

\textsuperscript{37}Mutammad Khan, \textit{Iqbal Namah}, p. 17; Alvi, “Religion and State”, pp. 95-119.
\textsuperscript{38}Immanuel Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment’}, London, 2013.
Jahangir’s act of banning alcohol, thus, appears in contradistinction to the legend ascribed to Gandhi, when he was visited upon a mother anxious about her young son’s habit of consuming jaggery. Gandhi asked her to come back to him next week with her son, and he advised him not to eat jaggery too much. On being asked about by the mother why he could not give this simple advice a week before, Gandhi replied that because he too was affected by the same habit, and during that week he got rid of it. In this story, Gandhi appears opposed to Jahangir as the latter banned his addiction universally to curb his own addiction, while Gandhi curbed his own addiction in order to cure that of others.
just because it appealed to his inner, subjective reasoning.\textsuperscript{39} In a similar manner, except for the criminal law, every religious community could follow its own laws with regard to marriage and other customs. Jahangir had installed a long, golden chain in his court for anyone to appeal for justice,\textsuperscript{40} which was widely lauded. It is undeniable that religious prioritizing was done in delivering justice in case of different religious identities of individuals concerned.

So, what did this justice mean, in concrete terms? Did it mean accepting the difference of religion of one’s subordinates, and meting them an equal treatment? If that is understood of justice, then Jahangir really meant it. Raja Kalyan Singh was made the governor of Orissa, and Raja Vikramjit the governor of Gujarat. No special treatments were given to Muslim nobility, nor were they discriminated along the lines of Shia-Sunni divide. Many Hindus continued to serve Jahangir in much the same position as during his father’s reign, and even Raja Man Singh, who was in favour of Jahangir’s son Khusrau being proclaimed the king. After his death, Man Singh’s stone portraits were made on the orders of Jahangir.\textsuperscript{41}

Shahjahan is also similarly presented as a restoration of the core Islamic rule in contrast to Akbar’s liberal policies. He also began sending gifts to Mecca. However, he not only did not pay any heed to Mujaddid and his followers, he also visited saints who held \textit{wujudi} ideas. His religious zeal seems confined to his early years of throne, after which he seems to have understood how impractical could imposing \textit{Shara} be.

During his tenure, a strange custom appeared in some areas of Punjab, in which Muslim women married to Hindu husbands would have to undergo Hindus rituals of widowhood after the untimely death of their

\textsuperscript{39}Tujuk\textit{-i-Jahangiri}, vol. I, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., vol. I, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., vol. I, p. 332.
husbands (i.e. widow-burning). Shahjahan sought to ban this practice and imposed conversion to Islam for such men who had married Muslim women. Within a decade, though, his efforts came in vain and he thought it wiser to leave social customs untouched for the better of his rule.\textsuperscript{42} He had other vices, like spending imperial treasure on elite architecture than welfare.

Thus, the internal variations of the ruling class – the nobility – themselves posit the question, remaining to be answered, whether the kind of composite culture we came to witness in Indian history was due to the divided nature of the nobility or, vice-versa, the colourful composition of culture itself provided the backbone for even the minorities within the official religion could adjust itself in such an emphatic manner so as to produce the most of its literary output.\textsuperscript{43} These divides were not only along ethnic (e.g. Afghan versus Persian), or sectarian (Shia versus Sunni) lines: they were across regions, languages, and even the role assigned to a particular ethnicity in the vision of the kings, the latter being always conscious about the identities of their subordinates.

As Jadunath Sarkar says, “it is little known except to serious students of our country’s history that Muslim Civilization in India developed in two independent centres, Delhi and the Deccan, and on two broadly different lines. These differences were due to race, creed and language no less than to geography and history.”\textsuperscript{44} While, in the Sultanate period, Turks and Afghans occupied key positions in the state apparatus, the Persians occupied relatively less important but intellectually prominent


\textsuperscript{43}Yasin, \textit{Social History}, pp. 6-7. Mohammad Yasin thinks that it was because of the small number of the Muslims overall in the Indian society which disallowed to break this unity in a significant way.

\textsuperscript{44}Jadunath Sarkar, \textit{House of Shivaji}, Calcutta, 1940, p. 1.
positions. On the one hand, the various ethnicities from Central and West Asia – Turks, Turanies, Shaikhjadas, Rajputs, Tartars, Iranians, Afghans – were aware of their ruling class status as distinct to the ruled non-Muslims, on the other hand, they were also fighting for supremacy, which was a fact reflected in the varying leadership of the Sultanate state at Delhi. Foreigners were basically divided into Iranians and Turanis. In the seventeenth century, they were joined by the Deccanis, a new and large signifier which meant Hyderabadis, Bijapuris and even Marathas. A seventeenth century chronicler, Chandra Bhan Brahman, gives a vivid picture of such a composition of elites working at the Mughal court as “Arabs, Persians, Gilan, Mazandaran, Khurasan, Sistan, Trans-oxiana, Khwarazm, Qipchaq Steppes, Turkistan, Gharijstan, Kurdistan, various classes and groups of persons from every race and people… various local groups, men possessed of knowledge and skill as well as men of the sword, viz, Bukhari and Bhakkari, Sayyids, Shaikhzadas, tribes of the Afghans such as Lodhis, Rohillas, Khwahishgi, Yusufzai, etc. and clans of Rajputs… Rathors, Sisodias, Kachhwas, Haras, Gours, Chauhans, Jhalas, Chandravats, Jadauns, Tonwars, Baghelas, Bundelas, Bais, Badgujar, Panwars, Bhadurias, Solankis, Sekhawats and all other people of India, such as the races of Ghakkars, Langhas, Khokkar, Baluch”… from various parts of Indian subcontinent on various positions, ranging from highest Mansabdars to ahadis. This was the great Indian bazaar of identities at the court.

As far as the nobility was concerned, there was high degree of sense of superiority, albeit sectarian, with each group having one or other matter of pride. At beginning, the word ‘Mughal’ meant all the foreign strata among the Muslims, but, as Bernier noted, its meaning evolved to something different in the 17th century. It came to denote, varyingly, the

46 Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility, p. 15.
light skinned or the “circumcised” \(^{47}\) (Muslim), i.e. Persians, Turks, Uzbeks, or Arabs. \(^{48}\) Roe and Fryer noted that the ruling elites were proud of being whiter than the rest of the Indians. \(^{49}\) In all these rivalries and jealousies, religion does not seem to be the prime cause; instead, we see that religion could theoretically not be approving of such notions. Ironically, the core of Islam’s preaching was always compromised in reality, and yet one’s self-affirmed adherence to this core was utilized as an ideological weapon against the other groups. Similarly, Shia and Sunni divide was also another factor to be responsible for jealousy due to rival’s success. \(^{50}\) In the early days of Jahangir, it was perception of some nobles that he was favoring Khurasanies and Shaikhzadas against the Turanis and Rajputs. \(^{51}\) Shah Jahan was especially fond of Shias. He even transplanted some of his favourite nobles at Dacca, where their descendants live till today. Indigenous Muslims had to be content with lower status, and there was a craze for Kashmiri women among those who entered the Mughal court, for marrying so as to have a whiter offspring. \(^{52}\) Among the nobles, being close to royal favour and putting aside rivals was a common goal to achieve and it seems to have been a continuous feature of the aristocracy. Religion thus of course played a dominant role; however, strong evidence does not support this perception as much as it tells about human tendency to generalize the causation on the basis of region, religion or caste.

If in ancient India, Sanskrit played the role of the hegemonic language, then in the medieval period, the same role was played by Persian. We shall take up the role of the language in the next chapter, however, in the present context it means that despite the religious sect

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\(^{50}\) M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, 1970, p. 16


\(^{52}\) Bernier, *Travels*, p. 404.
being accorded a secondary position (Shiaism, which was considered inferior to the Sunnism, the latter being the official religion of the state). Maybe, their linguistic competence and intellectualism made them an important group in the Indian nobility. Persecuted by Chengiz Khan and his Mongol descendants, a lot of Persians travelled to Hind to seek employment and recognition. Their importance grew heavily under the Mughals, along with the fact that this rise was not simply due to taking over positions which were occupied by Turks and Afghans, but also due to the fact that intellectual roles too grew in importance. Sectarian differences dotted the history of medieval period even within “one” religion. The problem with the Persians was that the entire ruling representatives were Sunnis. So, Persians had to work out novel interpretations of Quran to at least hide their religious understanding in practice. This is called as Taqiyyah (‘religious hibernation’).\textsuperscript{53} It was claimed, from the marginalized orthodox quarters during Akbar’s reign, that Akbar himself practiced Taqiyaah as he was a closeted Shia.\textsuperscript{54} Even the foreign travellers adopted the viewpoint of the ruling Sunni ideology about Shias. Bernier claims that the Persians were always keen “a vain and overweening desire to exalt there nation” and were psychologically attached to the Persian regime,\textsuperscript{55} a suspicion which got confirmed during Shahjahan’s expedition of Kandhar. However, they formed the crème de la crème of the sub-continental Muslims, and were regarded high in fashion and culture.

Next in practical importance, though superior in ideological hierarchy, were the Turanis, who were also identified as the brethren of the founders of Mughal rule. Aurangzeb held them high not only because of

\textsuperscript{53}Jean Beaptiste Tavernier, \textit{Travels in India}, Delhi, 1977, p. 176. It was said about Akbar, due to his unorthodoxy, that he was secretly a Shia who practiced Taqiyyah. See, Friedrich Christian Karl August graf von Noer, \textit{The Emperor Akbar, A Contribution Towards the History of India in the 16th Century}, vol. II, p. 89.


\textsuperscript{55}Bernier, \textit{Travels}, p. 146.
their ancestry but also because of their military attitude and readiness to take matters in their hands: “The Turani people have ever been soldiers. They are very expert in making charges, raids, night attacks and arrests. They feel no suspicion, despair or shame when commanded to make a retreat in the very midst of a fight…and they are a hundred stages removed from the crass stupidity of the Hindustanis, who part with their heads but not leave their positions (in battle).”\textsuperscript{56} It is important to note a kind of a practical opportunism in the polity: it was not that the overall polity turned more towards orthodoxy during the period of Aurangzeb’s time; rather, it was the political needs of the princely Aurangzeb which pushed him to the side of orthodoxy. We can even propose a rather modern distinction between public and private in the Mughal period, even amongst the kings. So, whilst Aurangzeb detested the Shias in private, and sometimes in public, calling them \textit{rafizi} (heretics), \textit{batil mazhaban} (erroneous), and even \textit{ghul-i-bayabani} (cannibals), he was ready to deal with them practically insofar as they remained quiet and subordinated to his authority. Aurangzeb’s own \textit{wazir} was a Shia.\textsuperscript{57} Apropos them, he said: “What connections have earthly affairs with religion, and what right have administrative works to meddle with bigotry? For you is your religion and for me is mine… Wise men disapprove of the removal of the able officers from the office.”\textsuperscript{58} Even here, the Indian Shias were the stupidest, even if Persians could claim a higher access to intellect and were more cunning.

Afghans were the ones removed from power by the Mughals, as they had been the masters of the country during the rule of Suri and Lodhis. They had a Spartan attitude and strong determination, and because of their defeat at the hands of the Mughals, as per Bernier, they had a desire to

\textsuperscript{58}\textit{Ahkam-i-Alamgiri}, p. 99.
overthrow them and rule by themselves.\textsuperscript{59} They were ruthless, ferocious and ill-tempered in utter contrast to the highly cultured Persians, and shared with the Rajputs the custom of intoxicating themselves before any battle.\textsuperscript{60} They settled in Bihar and Bengal, and although some of them passed high tests for administration, most of them were considered too rustic for civil life.\textsuperscript{61}

Apart from the foreign-origin Muslims, there was the least significant group of Indian Muslims, which constituted of two kinds of people: those who were born as a result of inter-marriages between the foreigners and the locals; and those who simply converted from their religions to Islam (\textit{Nau-Muslim}). They formed the plebeian section of the population, apart from people from other religions. Many of them even carried through their caste names after conversion,\textsuperscript{62} or simply keep high-sounding Arabic titles for themselves.\textsuperscript{63} If a Rajpur or Jat converted, he would be called as so. A proverb from those times is like this: “Last year I was a weaver; this year I am a Sheikh. If everything goes well and prices rise I will be a Sayyed next year.”\textsuperscript{64} Some of them claimed to have their origins tracing back to the Prophet’s lineage (Qureshi)\textsuperscript{65}, so as to claim higher status. They were universally Sunnis. Those who claimed to be Sayyeds were exempted from the mandatory form of etiquette, and were endowed with supernatural powers. Even Aurangzeb asked his son Bidar Bakht to apologise to his Sayyed wife for calling her ‘paji,’ on grounds that to call a Sayyed a paji is to act like a \textit{paji}.\textsuperscript{66} A few of them even got

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{59} Bernier, \textit{Travels}, pp. 207.
\bibitem{62} Akbarnama, III, p. 140.
\bibitem{63} Roe, \textit{Embassy}, p. 279.
\bibitem{64} Rose, \textit{Glossary}, III, p. 399.
\bibitem{65} Muntakhabu-i Tawarikh, III, pp. 398, 399.
\bibitem{66} Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, pp. 80-81; Yasin, \textit{Social History}, Lucknow, 1958, p. 17
\end{thebibliography}
political power in their hands after Aurangzeb, in the form of the famous Sayyed brothers who successfully installed two Mughal kings after their own interests. They developed a communal sense around themselves and even managed to defy a king as strong as Aurangzeb sometimes. Many of the Sayyeds were awarded the title ‘Khan’ for their bravery and valour, and were even given the task of leading the march of the imperial forces when in battle.

The Hindus of the seventeenth century found themselves in a curious position: while most of them were not homogeneous, even lacking a coherent definition, what tied them in a certain socio-economic relation to each other was the institution of caste or varna, even if they formed the large majority of the subjects. The general stratification of the Hindus was not very different from what it had been in the medieval period before the preceding centuries. The formal structure of Hindu society divides the society in hierarchic varnas, across the gradient of pollution, namely Brahmin, Khshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Besides these varnas, there was a large group excluded which, at the same time, did not belong to Islam, viz. Antyaz. Since these groups had never been part of the Hindu society even before the Muslims came, it would be fallacious of the modern historian to readily assume them to be Hindus. Another religious identity was of those who came to be seen as belonging to some sects of Bhakti. A great many movements had been launched since the ancient period, like the

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67 Yasin, *Social History*, pp. 17 “During the thirty-seventh year of the reign of Aurangzeb (1694 A.D.), Amanullah, a trusted servant of Shah Alijah fatally stabbed a Sayyid of Barha, who was a mansabdar. The other Sayyids in a body went to the residence of Amanullah whose supporters also came out to meet them. The matter was reported to Aurangzib who asked them to go the Chief Qazi, and the Sayyids had the courage to disobey the orders of the Emperor and say, “We won’t go to the Qazi, we shall settle the matter with our enemies”. However, they dispersed when the Emperor personally intervened into the matter. Saqi Mustaid Khan, *Masir-i-Alamgiri*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta, 1947, pp. 221, 222.

68 A.L. Srivastav *The Sultanate of Delhi*, 1959, Allahabad, p. 331. He holds that 95% of the population was Hindu during the Sultanate period. Although we cannot be sure about the exact religious proportion, the majority remained Hindus without doubt.
heterodox religions and sects like Buddhists, Jainas, and Ajivikas, but caste-structures had still managed to survive until they were refashioned even later by the British though their census and other measures.\(^69\) With the end of the first millennium, Brahmanism had survived these heterodox sects and had been greatly revived by Shankaracharya. However, the Bhakti movement, in its various shades, was an ongoing process and it received a great deal of impetus with the arrival of Islam as a religion, and as a political power. Thus, the position of the Brahmins, who had now collaborated with the Rajputs to evolve out a complex Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance, was relegated to outside state power. In theory, they still remained at the apex of Hindu varna system, but practically, for them, survival purely by fulfilling the ritual process had become impossible; hence, it had become imperative for them to seek alternative means of employment. Some of them even took to agriculture. It changed their social standing vis-à-vis other castes and they were asked questions about the abandoning of their traditional means of livelihood to jostle others out from all quarters – from Tulsidas, the arch-exponent of the caste system, to a plethora of Bhakti saints who questioned the difference between reality and scripture. Subsequently, the intellectual roles that the Brahmins played historically began to be taken over by Kayasthas too, who took roles in clerical and intellectual positions.\(^70\) Where the Rajput rule still remained, the Charans also came to fore, who became bards recording and singing the quasi-historical “achievements” of Rajputs and upper-castes. Even today, in some areas, they record the family lineages, supplying the historians with important records.


\(^70\) K.N. Chitnis, *Socio Economic History of Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1990. This is an account which is universally found in almost every work on medieval India to name a few; and see also, Neera Darbari, *Northern India under Aurangzeb*, Meerut, 1982.
The Jainas constituted the most important non-Hindus. They were associated with trade and mercantile activities. Some of them were predominant in the coastal areas, with little presence in the northern regions where they came to be shopkeepers and grocers. Besides them, there were the tribal in the forest areas who were only nominally within the caste-system, as their life-style made it difficult for them to be assigned a permanent position within the highly restrictive caste-system.

The fall in the social status of the Brahmins was matched for the rise in the Rajputs’ political status: they had carved out themselves as a class with chivalrous attitude and born to rule and fight. The Rajputs were the single most important Hindu community, for their involvement in administration and military in the highest orders. Akbar had identified the Rajputs as the single most important non-Muslim group, because of their clinging on to autonomous kingdoms and much valued importance within the caste-system. It was Akbar’s policy to recruit them and have matrimonial relations with them, if necessary. By the time of Aurangzeb, emotional bonding was done away with; however, in the initial period of Aurangzeb’s reign, they were extraordinarily favoured, thanks to their political alliance with Aurangzeb rather than Dara. It has even been claimed that the Rajputs did not ally themselves with the more liberal Dara Shikoh in the internecine war for throne because Aurangzeb had promised them the restoration of their territories which had been taken as a form of punishment for Rana Pratap’s resistance. Religious considerations and social harmony was not a question which bothered those in the higher echelons of power – a fact which, if it did not make the powers that be

\footnote{This corresponding fall and rise reminds us of Jacques Lacan’s dictum that what is repressed in the Symbolic comes out in the Real, and vice versa. Real here is understood as the structuring principle of reality; the “dark matter” which is the basis of all “reality” but which itself is never visible. If the Brahmin was no longer the religious head in the court, he exercised his domination in the realm of social life, by politely appropriating the heterodox movements under the name of “Hinduism”.}

\footnote{Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, pp. 25-26.}

\footnote{Ibid., pp. 22-23.}
more tolerant under Aurangzeb, did not leave it changed either. Realism mattered before the lofty ideals of religious or social equality of all subjects, or, the opposite, sectarian narcissisms.

The association of chivalry not only benefitted the Rajputs in allowing them to pose as the ruling class; they also received huge importance at the Mughal court. However, the coming of a politically incompatible religion – Islam – made issues complicated. It unfolded different economic and social structures. At the level of beliefs and their material expressions, the seventeenth century society appears to be constituted of the two big religions; however, a bigger picture would reveal stratification not just along religion but to caste, occupation or position. Like most medieval societies, “profession” was not defined by individual choice, but through heredity. Despite so many divisions, each group had a certain degree of interaction with the other groups. Divisions were not along religion or community but also along linguistic lines, each having a mild self-consciousness. Even then, a fair amount of knowledge about the other was prevalent. For example, between the Hindu clergy on the one hand, and the Muslim clergy on the other, there was limited interaction, but at the popular level, the Bhakti and the Sufi there was a lot of interaction. The interaction at the top level was highly subjective and arcane; it was a regular affair, in contrast, at the plebeian level.

Indeed, land revenue was collected as a form of rent.\(^{74}\) Thus, it came to be seen to the later rulers – the British – that sovereignty in India meant a right to a certain portion of the land produce. In such a system, the peasants (called *raiyyats* – the ruled, along with the untouchables) were at the bottom, and the king at the top, with a series of intermediate classes in between them. Despite this, the peasantry was not an undifferentiated class, as even with the abundance of land, it had at its base a class of landless peasants: the untouchables formed the bulk of them and they

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constituted 16-20% of the population in the villages. The richer peasants who owned the land and employed caste-enforced labourers were called *khwud-kasht*\(^75\). A few verses from Guru Arjan Singh may well testify to the presence of caste-bound labourers: while the *khasam* had the property of the land, and kept watchmen (*rakha*) to keep a vigil; the peasant (*kirsan*) used to call the reapers (*lavas*) to harvest the crop.\(^76\) Caste-ideology certainly prevented the peasantry, who were almost universally non-Muslims, to be united in a class-conscious manner, rather than justify the zamindars’ right to expel them from land, the peasants, in fact, recognized such a right.\(^77\) As Habib is forced to write, apropos the presence of landless labourers:

> There are, perhaps, few parallels in the world when the oppressors and the oppressed majority in society have joined together to keep a minority in such utter degradation.\(^78\)

Hence, contrary to what may be expected, without the zamindar, the peasant could not be supposed. A European feudalism like situation, which Marc Bloch has so fascinatingly brought forward to us,\(^79\) emerged wherein the nobility gave lands to the religious persons in lieu of heaven in afterlife. These landholding classes were called *brahmadeya* in case of Hindus and *aimma* or *madad-i mash* in Muslim cases. Besides the zamindars, there were other local receivers of the share in land revenue, which either went on to form the bureaucracy, the army or the local musclemen. It was the *muqaddams* who were given the responsibility of collecting revenues as well as quasi-judicial powers to resolve disputes at the village level. Although landowners in the *madad-i-mash* areas received


\(^{76}\)Guru Granth Sahib, p. 143, 179.

\(^{77}\)Habib, *Agrarian System*, p. 175.

\(^{78}\)Ibid., p. 235.

grants, landowners in other areas would only be able to get some fraction of the revenue as commission.

It was not simply a society of order wherein one order was simply relegated to the other; it was a combination of order and class, which again, in turn, was vastly coloured by religious, ethnic and caste divide. In comparison to the feudal system in Europe (where society was juridically classified into various ‘orders’)\(^{80}\), the social system in India was less compartmentalized. It was an overlapping of social classes, orders, religious groups, castes and idiosyncratic individuals who were surprisingly large in number. The lower castes, assuming to be having no ‘rights’ at all, were subsistent upon the ‘moral economy’\(^{81}\) - so much studied in the English context.

They could collect the leftovers of crops and cattle. Besides the, there were *paikasht* or peasants without any base. They were the free cultivators type who were allowed to cultivate on certain conditions and commissions.\(^{82}\) The regular cultivators were called *khwud-kasht* or the *paltis*; or certain low-tax paying upper castes.\(^{83}\) Standing a bit above was the other designates and groups like *muqaddams, patels* who also had a share in the land revenue, though not fixed like that of zamindar’s. These and other people of their class extracted surplus either through heredity, custom or through commission. Since the economy was commoditized to a fair extent, the land revenue could be paid either in produce or in money, which meant that monetization could lead to inflation and thus further


\(^{82}\) Satish Chandra, “Some Aspects of Indian Village Society in Northern India during the Eighteenth Century”, *Indian History Review*, 1974, pp. 51-64.

immiseration, but also that people from long distances could interact via market.

There is an image we get in the colonial historiography of the oriental villages: they are described as static, unchanging, continuing perhaps from times immemorial. They are also romanticised by writers like Max Mueller. However, the two commodities without which the village could not do were iron and salt. For their exchange alone, the cities would be needed as the sites for such exchange. The, there was the question of trade, and the land revenue generated had to be put in circulation for exchange and consumption, and for this the cities were required. It took the British a long time to displace Surat and establish Bombay as the centre of Arabic Ocean trade. Khafi Khan mentions how in the 1660, the rural poor flocked to the streets of Delhi in massive numbers to flood its streets in times of starvation. Banarsidas, the somewhat rich or middle-class author of Ardh Kathanak escaped from Agra to a nearby village to prevent himself from the Plague epidemic. Thus, internal migration was a rampant phenomenon. Bernier’s thought of Delhi as an assemblage of villages and military camps because of the kaccha houses giving him the impression that Delhi was really a city superimposed over a collection of villages.

Moreland writes about the condition of the common folk during this period:

Weavers, naked themselves, toiled to clothe others. Peasants, themselves hungry, toiled to feed the towns and cities. India, taken as a unit, parted with useful commodities in exchange for gold and silver, or, in other words, gave bread for stones. Men and women, living from season to season on the verge of hunger, could be contented as long as supply of food held out:

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84 Khafi Khan in Elliot and Dowson, *History of India*, vol. VII, pp. 263-264.
when it failed, as it often did, their hope of salvation was the slave-trade, and their alternatives were cannibalism, suicide, or starvation. The only way of escape from that system lay through an increase in production, coupled with a rising standard of life, but this road was barred effectively by the administrative methods in vogue, which penalised production and regarded every indication of increased consumption as a signal for fresh extortion.\textsuperscript{86}

Thus, a very high degree of exploitation was there is for all to see. The condition of the peasant was extremely poor. Geleynessen noted that there was “little difference between [peasant] and serfs such as are found in Poland, for here [too] the peasant must all sow...”\textsuperscript{87} Peasants were basically divided into two categories: \textit{ri’aya} or \textit{ra’iyat}. Landed farmers were also called \textit{muqaddams}. The former were not land-holding but tax-paying cultivators; the latter being land-owning peasants.\textsuperscript{88} One of Aurangzeb’s \textit{farmans} made another category of \textit{reza ri’aya} - peasants who did not hold any land and were wholly in debt. They were highly numerous and exempted from the poll-tax (\textit{jizya}).\textsuperscript{89} The peasants were routinely indebted and had to work on the fields of other independent peasants. Reaping, harvesting and cleansing tasks were performed by the lower castes. They catered to the “untouchable” part of labour, such as scavenging, tannery, etc. When not employed in their regular untouchable work, these castes were engaged in the agricultural work on the field; however, to regard the regular jobs as non-agricultural would be simply erroneous. They were known as \textit{Thoris} in the Ajmer province, and \textit{Balahars} at other places; the latter being the same name as Ziauddin

\textsuperscript{86}Moreland, \textit{From Akbar to Aurangzeb}, London, 1923, pp. 304-305.
\textsuperscript{87}Geleynessen, \textit{Journal of Indian History}, vol. IV, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{88}Habib, \textit{Agrarian System}, pp. 136-137.
\textsuperscript{89}Nigranama-i-Munshi, cited in Habib, \textit{Agrarian System}, p. 139.
Barani uses to describe them in the 14th century.\textsuperscript{90} They also provided for the extra pair of hands required at the time of harvesting, that too, at depressed wages.\textsuperscript{91}

Most villagers, thus, were peasants, classified according to castes or \textit{qaum}. A village was usually dominated by peasants of one caste (Jat, Gujar or Thakur). If the whole village was indebted, then the state could put in people of other lower castes instead of them. Original, land-holding, inhabitants of a village were called “\textit{panch muqaddaman}”. The collectivity of the \textit{panch} was called as \textit{panchayat}, a term which begins appearing only after 1599.\textsuperscript{92} The \textit{patwari} was the local officer who kept records of the village, which were later used for auditing the records maintained by other officials. The \textit{muqaddams}, \textit{chaudhuris}, and \textit{patwaris} spoke for the village as a whole, and the opinion or the existence of the smaller peasants, women and children did not count. The powerful people then used to pass their revenue burdens to the lower rungs of the peasantry, gradually submitting them to their own needs. Under the reign of both Akbar and Aurangzeb, therefore, officials were warned to accept the viewpoint of local powerful people (\textit{mutaghalliban}). The community mechanism to generate revenues thus inevitably put extra pressure upon the lower peasantry.

A village could have not one but many \textit{muqaddams}. Where the Brahmin was a cultivator, he became the \textit{muqaddam}.\textsuperscript{93} The office of the \textit{muqaddam} was hereditary, yet it could be put on the market freely. They used to assess the total land revenue of a village, and were given certain privileges for this service (around 2.5\%). He was also the local judiciary of the village, and helped in solving and judging matters of crime. The office

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\item[90] Habib, \textit{Agrarian System}, p. 141.
\item[91] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 144.
\item[92] \textit{Ibid.}, p. 149.
\end{footnotes}
of patwari has continued since the times of Alauddin Khalji. According to Ain-i-Akbari, patwari’s job was to maintain the account of expenditure and income of the village. After the revenue had been assessed, the patwari had to write its measure in front of everybody’s name, and for that he would issue a muchalka for the higher officers. He was paid for by the village as well as the central authority, with his expenditure being one per cent raised through additional tax. The zamindars were a level above these officials, and they levied a certain part of the tax as their malikana. They may or may not have cultivated themselves (through the use of others’ labour, of course), but their proprietal rights were above the villages as a whole. Not all villages fell under zamindari system, as those where no zamindari rights were recognised were called ra’iyat, while the others were called khwud-kasht-i-zamindari or talluqdari.

This exploiting class was ‘non-discriminatory’, i.e. it was not measurable in the preponderance of one religion or caste.

The zamindari sale deeds from Awadh provide us with ample evidence of how the [zamindari] rights were sold to men of different castes and, in many cases, of different religions, from those of the sellers. The group of five villages in Hisampur, which we have already referred to as illustrating some aspects of zamindari right, may again serves as an example. Even originally, these five villages, adjoining each other, did not belong to men of one caste: three belonged to Brahmins and two to Khatris. But over a period twenty years two Saiyids, father and son, through successive purchases, bought out all the old zamindars. In the pargana of Sandila, the Bachhal and Gahlot clans of the Rajputs were recorded as zamindars in the

95 Ibid., p. 300.
ain. But a document of Akbar’s reign itself shows a number of Brahmins and other selling satarahi and bisi rights in a village in this pargana to a Muslim. And in Aurangzeb’s reign, a number of Muslims (Shaikhs) and a Hindu carpenter band together to sell the milkiyat, that is, the satarahi of a village in the same pargana to two Hindus belonging to the caste (qaum) of Kalwars (distillers). One could go on multiplying such instances from the documents. In course of time such transactions could modify the dominance of particular castes over the zamindari in particular localities: in pargana Bilgram, for example, we are told that the Rajputs had been the ancient zamindars, but then Muslims acquired a large share of it, mostly by purchase.  

This passage shows the composite nature of the ruling classes. If anything, that they were saleable positions means that belonging to the ruling ‘class’ was a matter of class than anything else, unless one belonged to a lowly caste, which would anyway not be able to purchase such rights. However, the composite culture here comes out rather in a negative way, than is thought out by most people.

It is important to note how the zamindars organized brutal force, both for asserting their power over their milkiyat and to defy competitors from the outside castes. The total number of troops that the zamindars had was assessed to be around 4.4 million. Most of the recruits were from the same castes as the zamindars, who would construct fortresses of their own across the country. They sometimes defied the power of the central authorities, and the records are ample to record armed conflicts on a regular basis. Zamindars were not defined according to religion, but were a class-conscious group. They had large elements of Rajputs, Brahmins, Jats,

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and Kayasthas. If the Mughal rule later collapsed, it was then due to the high degree of chaos and struggle which ensued at the lower level to divide the surplus earned from the peasantry. The *manasabadri* system became highly inefficient, exploitative and appropriable by the British.

In the middle of sixteenth century, Babur was critical of the Indian cities for their lack of charm and stability.\(^{100}\) Already the accounts by Mahmud Wali Balkhi and the European travellers’ accounts have provided us with the gaze of a nonplussed outsider for whom every small or big facet of foreign culture is a wonder. Given this, the contrast between the town and cities has not entered the historian’s gaze. Even if Hamilton notes the general ignorance of the western travellers’ lack of local languages\(^{101}\), the contrast that one felt in a tropical country from their temperate regions was considerable.

Again, Bernier and Pelsaert offer the most interesting commentaries of all. Bernier wrote in a letter in 1963: “I know that your first inquiries on my return to France will be respecting the capital cities of this Empire. You will be anxious to learn if Delhi and Agra rival Paris in beauty, extent, and number of inhabitants.”\(^{102}\) He remarks that Delhi is built so as to allow lying out in open in the continuous six months of excessive heat. In lieu of a denunciation of the unappealing look of the tropical cities, he propounded a cultural relativism, arguing how the temperate cities would have to be entirely remodelled if they were to be transported to Asia somehow. There was no protection of the city like it was in the West, however, a wall surrounded the Delhi so as to give it a crescent shape. He praises the fruit-market for its beauty, for it was filled of fruits from Persia, balk, Bukhara and Samarkand. There was a considerable expenditure on fruits by the rich people, even if the price of the fruits was considered high


by Bernier.\textsuperscript{103} Bernier himself grew a liking for mangoes from Golconda, Bengal and Goa, while he was critical of the local mango. In this respect, the destruction of Sirhind in 1708 remains a sad chapter, as Sirhind was one of the most flourishing cities of the Mughal rule.\textsuperscript{104} Most cities of medieval India were centres of artisanal production and proto-guild organization, tied by ties of caste, can be readily observed. Even then, economic activity alone was not the most important reasons for their existence about. Bernier wrote about the class-divide in Delhi when he says that in Delhi one is either a rich or poor, no in-between.\textsuperscript{105} Pelsaert mentions that since Agra underwent a rapid growth, Hindus and Muslims were quick to settle anywhere they found a plot, across the class divide.\textsuperscript{106} Even in Delhi, in the then prosperous are of Chandni Chowk, Bernier was concerned with the presence of thatched houses. Cities like Ahmadabad, Lahore, Patna, Delhi/Agra and Burhanpur were extremely important for the assertion of the imperial rule.

This way, the conquering of Chittor and Golconda was also an assertion of the authority of the imperial rule. The founding of new cities could also mean asserting the rule of law and order. Jahangir, whose name implied him being the ruler of the world, was commented upon by Pelsaert that he did not rule more than a few roads.\textsuperscript{107} J. H. Grose remarked on his visit to Surat: “The City on the bank [of the river] is perhaps one of the greatest instances in the known world, of the power of trade to bring in so little a time wealth, arts, and population to any spot where it can be brought to settle.”\textsuperscript{108} A port city like Surat was both a city for trade and a take-off point for Mecca. Trade used to take place between Surat and

\textsuperscript{103}Bernier, \textit{Travels}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{104}Khafi Khan, \textit{Muntakhabu-l Lubab}, ed. and trans. Sir H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, \textit{The History of India as Told by its own Historians}, vol. VII, pp. 414-415.
\textsuperscript{105}Bernier, \textit{Travels}, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{107}Pelsaert, \textit{Jahangir’s India}, p. 58-59.
Persia, Aden, Basera and Mocha. It was truly a cosmopolitan city. Hamilton estimated its population to be 200,000 around 1700 AD. Thus, in the period of our study, urban-rural dichotomy prevailed as massively as it could, and the balance certainly tilted in favour of the cities.

This meant the rise of the middle and lower classes. Among the former, there was a definite strengthening of the intellectual classes, who took up the studies of languages, accountancy and theology. It was, not the least, unaffected by the prevalent socio-economic conditions. Most studies of the economic relations of the Mughal regime, apart from identifying it as an agrarian-rent system, agree upon its features of a commoditized economy, relying upon external trade which was increasingly becoming centred on the trade with western powers. There was a considerable prevalence of proto-industrial sector, which was controlled by merchant capital (sometimes also provided by the nobility), functioning in the urban centres. Bernier, Tavernier and other Europeans have referred to them as *karkhanas*. These sites have been regarded as the equivalents of the guild system of the European context. However, Irfan Habib points out that the prevalence of a money system should not be exaggerated because it was largely meant for the transfer of rural products to the urban centres (i.e. royal treasury and subsidiary classes). At least, in the coastal areas like Gujarat, the middle-classes played a dominant role in the economic affairs, and some of them even survived the competition from British expansionism in the later centuries. Prominent among them were the mahajans, money-lenders, traders and certain nobles.

There were many other middle-class professionals like clerks, physicians and teachers. There is disagreement among scholars as to which extent these classes were independent or tied to the court. Moreland, for example, considered the administrative urban classes (accountants, clerks,

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etc.) to be insignificant and burdensome upon the state. He is countered by Iqtidar Alam, who states that:

[Moreland] appears to ignore the high degree of specialization that existed in Mughal India in such fields as revenue administration, production and use of firearms and management of the complex and massive construction projects. His interpretation apparently rests on an implicit understanding that, unlike merchants and artisans, the intelligentsia were joined to feudal property by customary ties.

He, instead, points out to the high degree of specialization for different professions in the Mughal economy, which managed different aspects of its social system. He points out the fact of a certain Surat Singh (author of the source) who managed to purchase a house worth Rs. 700 in an elite locality in Lahore, without ever having served on a position higher than that of a *karkun*. The same source reveals that a certain Khwaja Udai Singh spent three thousand Rupees for the construction of a well near a dargah. Alam then cites, basing himself upon an interesting and extremely insightful source *Tazkira-i-Pir Hassu Teli*, the story of Khwaja Hari Chand, a pargana level official, distributing gold and cows among Brahmans every morning, while also offering food to thirty six castes. Another Abdus Samad Khan, had orchards, sarias, and hammams as his private property. Iqtidar Alam claims that it is only this richesse of the middle-class strata, which mostly had Hindus – Kayasthas, Baniyas, and

\[111\text{
W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar*, pp. 73, 77-78.
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\[113\text{
*Tazkira-i-Pir Hassu Teli*, MS. Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, fols. 181b, 151b.
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\[114\text{
Alam, “The Middle Classes”, p. 32.
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\[115\text{
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Brahmins, their monopolizing ‘offices of mutasaddis and karkuns’ – which prompted Shah Waliullah to write his letter to Shah Durrani. In fact, so much indented had this bureaucracy got into the Mughal revenue system that innumerable sorts of cheating, malpractices and fraudulent activities went on, even under an authoritarian ruler like Aurangzeb, to the extent that the royal treasury received considerably less revenue than due. It is reported that while tax was collected in the form of Shahjahani currency, it was deposited in Alamgiri currency which would result in a net surplus for the intermediary.\textsuperscript{116} Or, records at the village level were changed to show the officially demanded revenue while larger revenue was eventually taken away from the peasant. Such practices gave rise to a lot of corruption, which was, in turn, based upon extensive exploitation of the peasantry.

There were other significant classes like that of medical men. Such people were high in demand in the urban areas. In the rural areas, jarrahs or desi (quacks) practitioners replaced them. Manucci was employed as a physician in Dara Shikoh’s court. However, when the Prince lost his war for succession with Aurangzeb, he had to leave the court for Lahore, where he earned his name by successfully treating the wife of a qazi who was declared untreatable by everyone else. Thus, he managed to earn such a good income with his newfound prestige that he politely declined the offer of the governor of Lahore to be his appointed physician.\textsuperscript{117} For an earlier period, Badauni informs that his own father was a practitioner in Sirhind (mutatabbib). Many of the physicians of those times were not different from quacks (na-tabib), and one of them even caused the death of the poet Qaidi Shirazi. \textit{Muntakhabut Tawarikh} informs about a doctor who came to occupy a prestigious respect.\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ardh Kathanak} informs us about many

\textsuperscript{116}See the case of a Mahajan from Hisar, Lahim Das, not depositing the tax in the various kinds of currency coins but only in Alamgiri: Balkrishn Brahman’s in the collection of \textit{Maktubat} MS, Rieu iii, 837, Add. 16859, fols. 61b.

\textsuperscript{117}This long sequence is found in Manucci’s \textit{Storia do Moghor}, vol. II, pp. 176, 179, 214, 227.

\textsuperscript{118}\textit{Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh}, vol. III, pp. 170, 315, 163.
respectable practitioners, with a barber also being an expert in treating syphilis.\textsuperscript{119} It also cites Hisar and Jaunpur as two cities with good physicians. Another small official of Shahjahan’s time was treated by a local physician on being bitten by a dog, and he was given such a powerful drug that he really went mad for some time.\textsuperscript{120} Another French physician, Martin, of this time had set up his practice in Delhi during this period.\textsuperscript{121} It appears that physicians serving at the court were a miniscule proportion of the physicians overall, and most of them were from Persia. A large number of them were employed by the Mansabadors to look after their soldiers.

Those who performed clerical and accounting tasks at court and under nobles were drawn mostly from the Jain Banias and Khatris, a tradition which probably began in the fifteenth century. Nanak’s father too was one such Khatri.\textsuperscript{122} Manriques observed the enormous wealth possessed by the Khatris in North India during this period.\textsuperscript{123} They were engaged in trade and commerce besides holding up their jobs in the court. They settled in around the port areas where conditions were more suited for their business. \textit{Miratul Haqaq} mentions the remarkable communal solidarity among them,\textsuperscript{124} while \textit{Ardh-Kathanak} informs that the Banias settled mostly in the Gangetic plain suggesting that interactions between the trading and the ruling classes were quite marked in this period, which was not affected by the different denominations of the participating classes. Thus, migration of whole groups or social classes was not absent in the Mughal India too. In \textit{Ardh Kathanak}, there is a reference to a whole community – Oswal – settled at Fatehpur from Rajasthan.\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{enumerate}
\item[119] \textit{Indica}, vol. VII, No 1-2, pp. 48-119.
\item[120] \textit{Ibid.}, vol. VII, No 1-2, p. 97.
\item[121] Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 213.
\item[124] \textit{Miratu-l Haqaq}, fols. 355b.
\item[125] \textit{Ibid.}, vol. VII, No 1-2, pp. 60, 107.
\end{enumerate}
On the other hand, there was the nobility and the elite classes. Even if Akbar was not a despotic ruler like Louis XIV, he nonetheless had an unwritten commitment with the nobility – so diverse and colourful in composition – to allow the diversification of nobility while, on the other hand, smoothen the surplus-extraction process with the strengthening of *mansabdari* system. This system could function well until Aurangzeb because it was based upon the condition of a territorial expansion of the Empire (so that new *mansabs* could be available for distribution). If the system came to a crisis after (or, during) Aurangzeb's rule, it was not simply because of the latter’s obduracy and orthodoxy as Jadunath Sarkar would lead us to believe, or as I.H. Qureshi or Aziz Ahmad would rue the decency of Akbar’s policy of multi-denominational tolerance *sulh-i-kul* (these approaches being the two sides of the same coin); rather, it was because of the structural crisis – the triumvirate of the peasantry, intermediate classes and the ‘First Estate’ (the king and the nobility) fighting each other for space, as pointed out by Satish Chandra, which pushed the *jagirdari* system into increasing incompetence and eventual fallout by the time the British took power in their hands. Since, the *jagirdars* could be transferred arbitrarily after a few years, they sought to literally plunder the peasantry instead of introducing reforms so as to lead to the ‘agrarian crisis of the Mughal Empire’ (Habib’s term), which ultimately cast doom to the political and social life of the Empire.

How was this social order, so violently ended by the Afghan and British invaders, constituted? What was the position and place of different groups and orders within it? What cultural practices did it initiate and what it continued? Did this social formation, which evolved a great deal in its

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128 Satish Chandra, *Medieval India; Society, the Jagirdari Crisis and the Village*, Delhi, 1982, pp. 60-61.
own time, encourage social assimilation? What was the social basis of its functioning? Such are the questions that we need to ask. In the first part of the seventeenth century, the Mughal regime appears to be rising towards the point of apogee; in the latter half of it, under Aurangzeb, despite territorial expansion, the Mughal regime appears to be riding a low tide. This phase has more similarities with the eighteenth century. Debates about the viability of the Mughal regime focus either upon the land-revenue system or upon the inclusion of the newer lands into the mansabdari system, on the one hand and, on the other hand, the flooding in of the state apparatus with newer mansabdars who vied with each other for control over a largely decreasing agricultural land. What changes occurred, therefore, in background of this crisis of the upper strata and what changes in mentalité of the common masses as well as that of the elites.