Chapter 3
EVERYDAY LIFE: INTERACTIONS, RELATIONS
AND IDENTITIES

The enterprise of historical research into everyday life began in the latter half of the twentieth century among Italian historians by Carlo Ginzburg, as “microhistory”\(^1\), and among German historians, namely Alf Lüdtke, Hans Medick and Lutz Niethammer, as “history of everyday life”\(^2\). The former approach is somewhat more preoccupied with intellectual history; the latter with social history, hence being more useful for present analysis. Lüdtke defines everyday history as a methodological focus on the qualitative experience of the ordinary people, and who have remained anonymous in history. Second, this approach takes on the idea that rather than sidelining political and economic history as alien to such an approach, the latter can only be truly appreciated best in the light of everyday experience. Individuals are located within the “social field of force.”\(^3\) In this chapter, therefore, we are locating social cultures via the day-to-day experiences of the people in the seventeenth century. Since, we are taking up the study of seventeenth century society as a whole and interactions within social groups and classes, hence it is required that we incorporate some aspects of the lives of the kings and the nobility too.

Everyday life included not only interactions between always-already concrete identities of religion and class; it also transformed them through a complicated economic and super structural whole. For example, in his seminal essay on the shrine of Baba Farid at Pakpattan, Eaton has identified

\(^3\)E.P. Thompson’s phrase as quoted in Lüdtke, History of Everyday Life, p. 7.
the binding role that sufi shrines and their long histories played in interlocking the provincial rural masses on the one hand and the central authority of state on the other.\(^4\) Shrines like that in Pakpattan began with humble religious beginnings and gradually assumed important role in proselytizing the gradually settling Jats from pastoralism to agriculture (thanks to the introduction of Persian wheel), and their containment into the state’s fold.\(^5\) It is noteworthy how the name of the shrine (‘dargah’) and its second Sajjad Nashin as ‘diwan’ symbolise its functioning as a ‘theatre-state'\(^6\) which prompted the Jats to take up food-crop agriculture to pay its revenues to the central authority which, in turn, subsidized its langar (mass-kitchen). Religion, thus, was never simply a case of spiritual dimension alone.

In his unique work *In an Antique Land*,\(^7\) Amitav Ghosh has contrasted the all-welcoming and cooperative attitude of the civilizations settled around the Indian Ocean. He recounts the history of the early 16\(^{th}\) century, when the Portuguese forces demanded to the Hindu king of Calicut to fire every Muslim subject from their kingdom, as they were the enemies of ‘Holy Faith’ (a demand which was met with blank refusal), and how a few years later, a transcontinental fleet, sent by the Muslim ruler of Gujarat, the Hindu king of Calicut and the Sultan of Egypt was defeated by the Portuguese to gain monopoly of the Indian Ocean trade. Ghosh recounts vividly the cooperative and non-antagonistic nature of the Indian Ocean trade which was not only supported by people who did not believe in violence (Gujarati

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\(^5\)Eaton, “Shrine of Baba Farid”, p. 346. He writes: “The shrine [at Pakpattan] … gave clan leaders and their followers not only access to Islam, but the honour of participating in the reflected splendor of the Sultanate or Mughal courts without actually being directly subservient to the authorities in Delhi”.

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 348. Clifford Geertz’ term, as employed by.

Jains and ‘Vanias’) but also the one which brought so many people from around the globe to work in each other’s cultures and environments. If anything, Ghosh’s account refers to the non-monopolising, non-capitalist attitude of the people of Indian Ocean, and maybe that of India as well. For our purpose, it is a reminder of the established cultural norms of working in the Subcontinental environment, which has been largely immune to changes over throne or the politics of pitting one religious community against the other, which is a much more modern thing, helped if not generated by the arrival of Europeans on the subcontinent.

The seventeenth century society and polity moved ahead in different directions, and yet with an overall civilizational unity peculiar to South Asia. The Mughal court, the market, and the rural landscape all became sites of heavy contestations. The conservatism of the ruling elites gave rise to the Muslim orthodoxy. But it was resisted from within. Its figures were like Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi and Baqi Billah. For two successive generations, Mughal Emperors resisted the Muslim orthodoxy. If Akbar was generally accused of secretly practicing *Taqiyyah*, so much so as to put the Islamic state into jeopardy (in the eyes people like Sirhindi), Aurangzeb is seen as doing the exact opposite by Jadunath Sarkar.\(^8\) Now, Satish Chandra has proposed a kind of ‘syntheses between these two excesses. His idea is that neither the liberal tolerant model of Akbar nor the seemingly theocratic state of Aurangzeb could present itself as a practical model. If the problem before Akbar was not to displease the *Ulema* too much, the problem with Aurangzeb was that his policies let to the displeasure of neighboring antagonists as well as the imperial non-Muslims. Hence, Satish Chandra proposes that it was only the compromise set up during the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan, which could prove as the effective cement between a syncretic, multi religious society superimposed with the factionally

\(^8\)Satish Chandra, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1996, p. 151-152.
divided state which relied upon local zamindars and peasants for its economic functioning. We might as well slightly revise this thesis with the idea that even if the state ‘went too far’, willy-nilly; it could not break the consensus reached upon by centuries of agreements between the state and the society.

How did this consensus come into being? What were its contours? What strains did this consensus have to undergo before establishing into an officially sanctioned praxis? Which classes can be identified who formed the totality around which it could emerge? How did the state respond to evolve a complex system wherein various racial, ethnic and religious element could constitute seemingly unified state through which too rule over and extract surplus from an essentially caste based society? In the absence of civil society, how did the popular classes force the state to take into account their spiritual and cultural needs? How both, the state and the society did evolve in a background of various anti-caste movements?

It is this dialectic of give and take, which marks the relationship of Islam with Indian social setup derived from religious source, here it is Hinduism. Thus, Irfan Habib writes, from an economic reductionist perspective: “In so far as the caste system helped, as we have seen, to generate larger revenues from the village and lower the wage costs in the cities, the Indo-Muslim regimes had every reason to protect it, however indifferent, if not hostile; they might have been to Brahmins as chief idol-worshippers. This also might imply that the supremacy of the Brahmins was by no means essential for the continuance of the caste system. Nevertheless, the caste system had to undergo certain adjustments and changes, which must be recognized as important, not as a result of the policy of the sultans, but of the new circumstances.”

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The lower-caste Hindus were composed of those who provided otherwise useful labour, though conceived as ‘polluting’ in caste ideology. They were blacksmiths, carpenters, gardeners, weavers, tailors, barbers, cobblers, sweepers and grocers. Those who were not of ‘regular’, ‘useful’ type, they were referred to as ‘chandals’, and untouchability was practiced against them.

The degree of specialization introduced through the caste-system proved beneficiary for the Mughal rule as well. The caste-system was one of the locus standi of the urban system, as it allowed delegating ‘menial’ jobs to the lower rungs of the Hindus, and even to Muslims defined by their “qaum”. The composite culture was not possible in the countryside because of the large religious homogeneity of the population, although an attempt has been made in the next chapter to delineate the growing heterogeneity in terms of the new religions propagated by through the rise of the Bhakti movement. Thus, from the very beginning, Islam was not interested in ameliorating the condition of lower caste people.\textsuperscript{10} Although, it was concerned with the plight of Hindu women, who had to undergo the sati ritual in theory, in practice it did not or could not attempt to take such things head-on. These questions only affirm, albeit in a negative manner, the idea of ‘composite culture’. A Hindu weaver looked more similar to a Muslim weaver than to Rajput elite from his own religious group. Class mattered more in most matters, more often than not.

It can be easily surmised that these groups did not simply interact inside the court but outside of it as well. It cannot be assumed that these groups had a ready-made sense of association or collaboration. There must

\textsuperscript{10}Irfan Habib, “The Peasant in Indian History”, \textit{Social Scientist}, vol. XI, No. 3, Marx Centenary Number, March 1983, pp. 21-64. has written: “Islam made almost no impression on the caste system. Indeed, except for a very low-keyed disapproval by the scientific-minded Alberuni, medieval Islam produced no critique or condemnation of the system.”
have been great intrigues and power struggles, alliances forged here and
broken there, on the basis of lineage and fondness. To live together and
think together is a social process which takes its own time. If they appeared
similar, it did not readily translate into the idea of dissolved or mixed
identities, beliefs, customs and habits. If that were to be so, various cultural
or social identities would not have come into being in the first place.
Differences could arise and be created from time to time. In such a situation,
social, political and religious factors could divide or align contradictory
forces. For example, it can be observed that these various elements got
incorporated into the Mughal service due to historical circumstances and
partly as a conscious imperial policy. Akbar, “often assigned officers
belonging to various groups to serve under one superior officer, at the same
time, the distinct or separate character of each group was respected”, and
attempted to curb sectarian elements “the imperial government regulated the
proportion of men belonging to his own race or clan, which a Mansabdar
could recruit”.11 Through this policy, he tried to contain divisive elements
that could produce tensions. Thus, he encouraged various people to live
together despite differences. Under Aurangzeb, this model was rejected in
theory but not in practice. At the popular level, of course, the rivalries of the
court had no place in the lives of the ordinary folks, and they shared a lot
more in common than people of different religions above them. Indeed, there
had been no violence between the two communities, up until so far as the
arrival of the modern politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
century, under the British. Once the coercive layer of the Hindu state came,
with the coming of the Muslim rule, till the reigning supreme of orthodoxy
and degeneration, there were only positive exchanges within the two
religious systems. We will be explaining shifts in culture and religion in the
next chapter, though; it suffices here to say that not only a certain common
ground was indeed touched upon by the various Bhakti and Sufi movements.

Added to this was a complex interplay of faith and reason: Bernier notes that the reason why Rajputs were still inducted and given high posts under Aurangzeb was, according to him, their employability against the Muslim kingdoms of Deccan or against the Persians, besides their overall chivalrous nature and divisive position within the Hindu society.\textsuperscript{12} This perspective still misses out why most of the Rajputs \textit{themselves} allied with Aurangzeb, even on account of his professed anti-pluralism. The Rajputs had allied with Aurangzeb because the latter had promised to return their lands to them, which had been seized during Akbar’s reign. Moreover, they would choose Aurangzeb not despite of, but in spite of his religious views, as in even with the king professing certain anti-pluralist, sectarian views, the overall polity would not change much. Again, it was the institutions which mattered more than the individual.

Still, there were clashes of interests among the Rajput nobility and the Muslim nobilities. They happened not because of the religious divide but because of personal interests. It is not to deny the sectarian outlooks which were quite prevalent, yet to see them as the hegemonic ideas would be mistaken. Rajputs had been recruited by Akbar’s policy of \textit{Sulh-i-kul} and were still serving the Mughals, against the “Hindu” enemies of the state (Marathas, Jats). Emotional bondage may or may not be sufficient here but a desire for self-aggrandizement and assuming privileged positions within the court of Delhi may be so. As we have noted, the changed social reality and an entirely different political ideology had been at work and had been institutionalized. The old duopoly of the Brahmins and the Kshatriyas did not remain, as India had been linked to the world outside South Asia, the newcomers from where had also brought their political ideals, who had, however, regarded preserving the social reality as their paramount task rather than spreading their religion. From the beginning, for example, in

\textsuperscript{12}Francois Bernier, \textit{Travels in Mogul Empire, A.D.1656-1668}, ed. Archibald Constable, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn., 1986, pp. 210-211.
Barani’s conception, the Muslim state in India could not have followed the Sharia in the true sense of the term.\textsuperscript{13}

Thus, a highly centralized state was necessary, and also, dialectically, the one which could claim some sort of inclusivity, even if it meant to include many heathens. This set-up was saved only if the lower-class people were kept out, even if it meant to keep those subjects whose religion was the same as the official religion. A state of mind against the lower-classes was the predominant mentality, as even under the welfarist Akbar, Abul Fazl basically re-wrote the Brahmanical system in his writings, except for giving a less important role to the intellectual classes. He had divided society into four classes: a) the warriors, b) the traders and the merchants, c) the intellectuals, d) the peasants and labourers. The affinity to the \textit{varna} system can be readily seen here, with the Brahmin class coming at the third level in this scheme. However, another difference was that Fazl had insisted upon merit deciding one's standing, rather than birth, unlike the Hindu system.\textsuperscript{14} This very classification order reflected the changed social order. The common folk were thus deemed as \textit{ihtekar}, the hoarding of grain, so much so that a Muslim by religion had to ordain the butchers and fishers to remain outside the city since their profession meant taking the lives of animals. Thus, “Hindu” or brahminical consciousness had already become a part of the supposedly egalitarian, Islamic theology. When the later Mujaddids like Sirhindi and Waliullah argued for the further Islamicisation of the state, they

\textsuperscript{13}Chandra, \textit{Historiography}, p. 208. says, “Barani accepted that a true Muslim state based on \textit{din-dari} was not possible in India. In a state based on \textit{jahandari}, while all deference was to be paid to \textit{shara} and the Muslim theologians, the governance of the state depended on the secular ruler who could frame \textit{zawabit} or state laws for the welfare of the state.”

\textsuperscript{14}Can it not be argued that even if we start with the premise of merit we come to follow the same birth-based system? None of the modern anti-caste movements had argued for replacing birth-based inequalities with inequalities based upon merit, with this politics taking a precise theoretical formulation under Ambedkar.
did not contest the elite and the fundamentally inegalitarian nature of the state even for the Muslims.

Even the Brahmins, perhaps materially and intellectually weaker than ever, were exempted from the poll-tax (*jiziya*), which was lesser than *zaqat*, under as stated orthodox like Aurangzeb. As the ruling class came to be progressively Indianized, they suddenly realized and tried to take steps against this happening. So, how did the life of the commoners pass. It was not for nothing that Diwali and Dussehra were celebrated as state festivals under Akbar. Even when Holi and Diwali were banned under Aurangzeb, it is to be noted that in private these festivals were celebrated, not just within the community but both he Hindus and Muslims celebrated their festivals. Bhimsen, writing in the period of Aurangzeb, informs how not only various Muslim nobles visited the Hindus on Holi, but they were also more active than the Rajputs nobles whose homes they would visit in celebrating Holi.\(^{15}\) The semi-official, news recording documents of the times – the *Akhbarat* – inform us how the Hindu nobles used to organize *iftar* parties for the Muslims in that period. On the other hand, the Muharram festival had been banned by Aurangzeb totally.\(^{16}\)

In a curious case of a holistic social syncretism carried out by the particular section of society called women. Although, they were denied much freedom, women became carriers of Hindu-Muslim mélange. They worshipped for their Hindu husbands at Dargahs and Sufi shrines, and they sought to protect their families from bad times by carrying out rituals belonging to different traditions. R. A. Nicholson has argued that owing to the complex nature of their philosophical ideas which were difficult enough to be understood by the common (and Hindu) masses, the Sufis developed a

\(^{15}\)Bhimsen, *Nuskha-i-Dilkusha*, pp. 50.

sense of superiority and distrust of the masses.\textsuperscript{17} However, as Shemeem Abbas has argued, Sufi poetry was inspired, at least in terms of musical lyricism, from the songs of the rural women. This is evident from the natural ease with which female folk singers of today are able to sing the Sufi poetry of Bulleh Shah and others.\textsuperscript{18} Eaton also corroborates this view from his study of Deccan Sufis. He notes that the (non-Muslim) rural women in Deccan sang the songs composed by Sufis while doing their grinding work, which required a certain rhythm.\textsuperscript{19} It is also noteworthy that Sufi songs became part of almost every aspect of life – be it marriage, the harvesting of crops, grinding of \textit{jowar} and so on. Sufi tradition literally aided economic production in this respect by providing relief and sense of collective belonging. He identifies three elements in these ‘chakki-namas’: “(a) an ontological link established between God, the prophet Muhammad, one's own pir, and the reciter herself; (b) the use of the grindstone or the spinning wheel, or the mechanical parts thereof, to illustrate the above; and (c) the use of the mystics’ \textit{zikr}, or spiritual exercise, to accompany and even to regulate the various phases of the woman's work.”\textsuperscript{20} In North India too, they roughly followed the same pattern, and some of these elements can still be found in an increasingly puritan culture in the countryside.

Since women constituted half the society, then the commonality of suffering and condition at the hands of patriarchy is a veritable proof of the composite nature of seventeenth century society. Most sources about the condition of women come from the European travellers’ accounts of Indian society. Society still being a predominantly patriarchal society, coupled with caste hierarchy meant that the burden of the tradition, as always, had to be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}R. A. Nicholson, \textit{Studies in Islamic Mysticism}, Cambridge, 1967, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{18}Shemeem Burney Abbas, \textit{The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India}, Austin, 2002, p. 110.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Eaton, “Sufi Folk Literature”, p. 194.
\end{itemize}
carried on the shoulders of the second sex, mostly through the institution of marriage. Sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage formed the crux of this strategy, which also drew the surprise of Europeans, who were mostly drawn to depict women’s beauty, sexuality and unfreedom. Thus, Manucci would write that most marriages would happen even before the children would begin to talk, with maximum age limit being ten. Pelsaert, Careri and Ovington all emphasized the fact of very low age of marriage, especially amongst the Muslims while the age could vary with Hindus. Ovington, though concerned about the lack of opportunities of love marriages, sought to empathize with this Indian custom by arguing for its usefulness in avoiding fickle mistress. The controversial episode of Aurangzeb’s failed attempt at marrying Charumati, who instead chose Raj Singh of Mewar, found reflection in the European chronicles as that of the relative freedom of elite women to exercise some measure of control at their marriage. Pelsaert was also concerned with the bridegroom’s point of view, as he could sympathize with one who did not at all get to see his bride before marriage. He found, in Agra, the noisy, lengthy and expensive marriage rituals, mostly

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21 B.R. Ambedkar, “Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development”, The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, OUP, Delhi, 2004. This argument forms the crux of the best twentieth century criticisms of caste, like that of Ambedkar. Ambedkar proposed that caste society could work only with a complex setting between endogamy and exogamy so as to maintain social order from the ‘excesses’ of surplus men and women, i.e. men and women left out of marriage.


24 Ovington, A Voyage, p. 311.


26 Pelsaert, The Remonstrantie, p. 84.
initiated by the bridegroom’s family, wherein he found heavy dowry being customary (from 100 to 1000 rupees), along with other expenses like jewellery to be borne out by the bride’s family. Rajput women’s performance of *jauhar* or mass sati is too well-known to be recounted here.\(^{27}\)

If state’s interference in social customs was a proof enough of state’s non-sectarian approach to social practices, one of the most signal aspect which transcended any religious divide, if at all, was the class-character of polygamy. Polygamy was, usually, economically expensive and could be afforded only by men of upper classes. Thus, even among the Muslim community most cases of polygamy were found among elites. Among Hindus, it was the nobility and wealthy men, even if Della Valle wrote about monogamy being practiced among Hindus widely.\(^{28}\) They could also remarry in case the woman came to be seen as infertile.

Muslim women had to observe *iddat*.\(^{29}\) Hindu women could remarry but only the brother of the deceased husband. Strange as it may sound, the steps towards welfare in this direction were taken by Aurangzeb who set up various Suhagpuras for widowed women.\(^{30}\) However, it was the practice of widow burning that struck both horror and amazement alike in the eyes of the westerners. Especially, Terry and Hamilton chose to praise this practice rather than criticizing it; for them, it embodied the highest form of love a woman could have for her husband. Despite this, demands of their own Christian faith, which was critical of such human sacrifice, led them to ambiguities. Henry Lord thought that the practice of *sati* would confer respect for the otherwise (perceived) infidelity of women. According to him,

\(^{27}\)Tod, *The Annals*, vol. I, Ch. XXIX.
\(^{30}\)Manucci, *op cit.*, vol. II, p.60.
the practice of *sati* began as a male response to the feminine practice of poisoning the husband, to fulfil her desires and passions. It was to be legitimized thus by the King and the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{31} Pelsaert mentions the frequency of *sati* in Agra (2-3 times a week), and the fact that it was more common among Rajput women, who got specially motivated to throw themselves into the pyre upon receiving the turban belonging to their husband, who, most commonly, died in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{32} He also mentions that sati was largely voluntary, the woman not being generally forced to undergo such an act. However, this is contradicted by Bernier’s account, who reports the case of a 12-year old widow being burnt in Lahore,\textsuperscript{33} even if he too sometimes saw the love of woman in this practice. Manucci speaks of the practice of the confirmation of the widow’s consent upon setting over the pyre. She was so asked three times, always in affirmative.\textsuperscript{34} Bernier, having been witness to many a cases of widow burning, describes in glowing details the scene of sati. The woman was barely conscious as she approached the pyre, she trembled and cried even as she got carried to the spot by three or four Brahmins; she was tied with ropes and put on fire. Almost all the European travellers remark on the willingness or unwillingness of the women who became sati, with most cases being told to be involuntary.\textsuperscript{35} Tavernier notes that small variations were allowed for the act of sati, wherein sometimes a small hut was constructed for the specific part, or a pit

\textsuperscript{31}Ram Prasad Chandra, *Early English Travelers in India*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1965.
\textsuperscript{32}Pelsaert, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{33}Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
\textsuperscript{34}Manucci, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 97; vol. III, pp. 60-61.
\textsuperscript{35}de la Valle, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85; Manucci, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 56; Jahangir could not succeed in preventing sati in Agra, Hawkins in Foster (ed.), *Early Travels*, p. 119.
was dug for allowing the sati to jump in.\textsuperscript{36} Even the Emperor Jahangir was not able to prevent a case of sati in Agra.\textsuperscript{37}

It was remarked by the travellers how divorce was one-sided and exploitative for the women. It depended upon the whims and the caprices of the religious judges to decide the guilt of women. The Qazi would keep the complaining woman in his house for three days if she demanded divorce, and then decided.\textsuperscript{38} Compensation was usually paid for by the husband. Among the lower-castes, where divorce was more common, the husband would give his wife a straw called \textit{turumbu}, which dissolved marriage.\textsuperscript{39}

Tavernier’s account may help explain the voluntarism of some of the \textit{satis}. He gave two reasons: one, the promise of a better life in the afterlife; two, the harsh and unlivable life thrust upon a woman after the death of her husband. The images of materially and psychologically stripping life must have forced second thoughts onto many a women not initially willing to throw themselves into the pyre.\textsuperscript{40} Bernier too noted the deep rooted customs and cultural norms associated to chastity and virtue.\textsuperscript{41} Ovington noted a male conspiracy in the practice of sati to deter women from murdering their husbands. Tavernier noted that Aurangzeb had tried his best to prevent this practice from taking place, making it mandatory for the sati to inform officers before going for the act, who would do their best to prevent her from doing so.\textsuperscript{42} However, these officers could well be bribed from various parties.

\textsuperscript{36}\textit{Tavernier, op. cit.}, pp. 170-171.
\textsuperscript{38}\textit{Manucci, op. cit.}, p. 419.
\textsuperscript{39}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 419-20.
\textsuperscript{40}\textit{Tavernier, op. cit.}, pp. 209-10.
\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Bernier, op. cit.}, pp. 310-311.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Tavernier, op. cit.}, p. 231.
Among later Mughals, only Jahangir paid attention to this aspect. It has been reported that during his reign, in some convert Muslim families in Kashmir, widows were buried alive with their dead husbands, as sati. Most of them did not leave their older ways of living after conversion, so much so that Jahangir was forced to declare a death penalty for those converts in Kashmir who buried the widows alive with their husbands, marry girls young or strangulate them if they were born in a poor family. Many a Muslims also learned to force this kind of brutal chastity upon their women, as the author of Baharistan-i-Ghaibi, Mirza Nathan, asks his junior to direct the ladies of the harem to perform jauhar rites.

Since the European travelers were at a distance from their own country, they were particularly interested in the sub continental women. The local customs of purdah and privacy increased their fantasizing. Women of the upper classes and Muslim households always went with purdah in public. Women were though allowed whenever they liked to go out in public amongst upper classes. However, women of the lower classes had considerable limitations attached. Removing the veil was almost always considered, no matter what the condition, improper and blasphemous, among the Muslims, as even the physicians were not allowed to touch a female upon her falling to illness. Bernier, the court physician, once had to treat a female patient so grossly ill so that she could not come out the slightest. Hence, Bernier was led by eunuch, blindfolded, so that he could attend to her. Women of the poorest class otherwise had no choice but to work

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46John Fryer, op. cit., p. 118
49Bernier, op. cit., p. 267.
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However, it is otherwise reported that Hindu women had more freedom, as they did not have to practice purdah always. In this regard, the accounts of two Central Asian travellers, hailing from the very place of the origin of the Mughals, would be interesting to look at: Mutribi al-Asamm Samarqandi and Mahmud Amir Wali. Amir Wali’s account was written at the behest of Nazr Muhammad Khan. He was interested in India from a romantic perspective—that of dating Hindu women, with some of whom he had come in contact who were living in Central Asia with their families. After describing in great detail the temples and the people at Mathura besides Raja Man Singh’s temple, he writes:

Men and women, old and young, rich and poor among the Hindus go to the bank of the river. Beaming with joy, men and women, without shame mixing together but committing no impropriety, try to outdo each other in performing their rites, rasio, and all their false prayers. In the meantime, a few

58 Bernier, op. cit., p. 267.
thousand pleasure-seekers assemble at the other side of the bank of the river with the object of witnessing the scene, obtain a sight thereof. Such a sense-enticing sight is obtained that one might lose the rein of Islam and become a follower of the Hindus! Verily, from the heresy of the faces, figures and features of those modest blossoming-faced (women), it is no wonder that one’s faith may be shaken and the glass of shame broken by stone; all self-control disappears! In short, after the prescribed rites, they go to the temple, they perform the puja, prostration and dandwat, as is laid down in their religion.\textsuperscript{63}

Mahmud observations lead us to conclude that unmarried Hindu women were not required to observe purdah. Further, this supported by the fact of his voyeurism at the Banaras ghats, wherein he was able to fulfill his fantasy tour of India. He also travelled with Hindu pilgrims and even witnessed what may be called a religious suicide,\textsuperscript{64} although Iqbal Husain is circumspect of such a practice.\textsuperscript{65} His account of the Muharram celebrations at Lahore is remarkable, as in it informs the reader of a semblance of idolatry among the Muslims of Lahore, who seem to be celebrating this festival with their Hindu neighbours, and following the festivals of the latter in most respects, probably along the lines of Holi. Even the rich people of the city prepared shrouds (nash) of Husain Ali, the martyr of Karbala, and also images of Ibn-i-Mujlim. Their festival, spread across ten days, was divided into two halves of celebration and sorrow, with the effigy of Ibn-i-Mujlim burned at the end of the festival. He reports that the Hindus used to suspend their daily life along with the Muslims, and in the aimless, sporadic


\textsuperscript{64}\textit{Bahr-I-Asrar}, pp. 18-19 as cited by Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{65}Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 147.
violence which ensued after the festivals killed Hindus and Muslims alike.\textsuperscript{66} Most importantly, he mentions conversion from Islam to Hinduism of twenty-three men, who were probably Muslim Bairagis, probably for the pursuit of romance, which suggests that religion, although very important, was not shut watertight from other faiths:

One of the strange affairs of that place that I witnessed was that twenty-three Muslims fell captive to their [the beautiful Hindu women’s] charms. Having fallen in love, they had deserted their religion and accepted their creed.\textsuperscript{67}

After this, the explanation:

For sometimes I held the company of them and questioned them about their mistaken way. They pointed towards the sky and put their fingers on their foreheads. By this gesture, I understood that they attributed it to Providence and Fate.\textsuperscript{68}

Although Mughal women, i.e. women of the royal family were not quite like Razia Sultan, they nonetheless played crucial and important roles in the political arena, which only grew important in the seventeenth century. It is clear from a mere cursory look at the records of those times that despite receiving a lot of the patriarchal violence and its ideology, women possessed a sense of independence and dignity, and that they were not shy to use their virtues whenever opportunity presented to them.

Islam theoretically does not differentiate between the capacity of men and women to administer; however Muslim societies have been overall patriarchal. Their influence could only be direct, via influencing males in


\textsuperscript{67}Husain, “Hindu Shrines”, p. 147.

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 147.
important positions in the forms of mothers, sisters, princesses, queens or in rare cases through official positions - roles which required recognising the theoretical supremacy of men. Thus, one way the elite women could influence politics was through commanding the strong and financially important harems.

One of the lasting images Western scholarship has left is its portrayal of imperial harem as the site of hapless women left to the whims and caprices of the kings. This idea is, however, now challenged and most such assertions are not heavily contested. It is now posited that the realm of the harem was regulated from above, especially under Akbar and such an arrangement continued till the end of the seventeenth century at least.

One of the ways in which such arrangements were instituted was through the organization of the physical space. Not only women were conferred with various titles and specific roles, women of the imperial harem also negotiated or even directed, at times, the centers of imperial power. One of the first women to assume an important position was the adolescent Hamida Begum, the eventual wife of Humayun, who resisted the designs of the king upon her during his exile from Delhi. On being approached she is reported as having replied thus: “Oh yes, I will marry someone, but he shall

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72 Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology, New York, 1963. See for one of the most important lessons of Lévi-Strauss’ scholarship and the inspired anthropology has been that not only food but architecture too represents frozen ideology. Hence, Mughal architecture embodied all the insignia of the social norms and ideologies of those times.
be a man whose collars my hands can touch and not one whose skirt it does not touch.”\textsuperscript{74} This is a powerful assertion of one’s independence, especially in the context of being approached by a king. Hamida Begum proved to a wise choice for Humayun as she supported him in the distressing conditions of exile from his own kingdom at the hand of the Afghans. She also set examples before the later queens who were initially mere exchanges in the power games but later on came to play a more prominent role. Hamida Bano not only supported her husband Humayun but also their young son Akbar who was largely isolated from the political circles by Bairam Khan.\textsuperscript{75}

The first truly embedded and long-term Emperor was this instituted as a result of the support from two women at least, his mother and his wet-nurse Maham Anaga. The latter rescued Akbar from adversity on more than once occasions.\textsuperscript{76} Maham Anaga this earned a crucial leadership within the harem, whose importance was always valued highly by Akbar. Though, when she outgrew her ambitions, she was politely asked by Akbar to withdraw from the office of the prime minister which was basically meant for men, in favour of Munim Khan in 1560.\textsuperscript{77} This was so because it was reported that Maham Anaga began focusing upon self-aggrandizement and the promotion of her own family. Hence, it must not be concluded that women’s role in the social sphere was one where they could freely pursue self-interest.

The kind of role Maham Anaga played during Akbar’s period was to be played later on by Nur Jahan and Jahan Ara Begum. Of them, Nur Jahan was the bolder, for it is too well-known to be reiterated that actual political power during the latter part of Jahangir’s reign was well within the hands of

\textsuperscript{74}Gulbadan Begum, \textit{Humayun Nama}, ed. and trans. A.S. Beveridge, Delhi, 1972, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{75}R.C. Majumdar (ed \textit{et.al.}), \textit{History and Culture of Indian People}, “The Mughal Empire”, Bombay, 1984, pp. 108-109.
\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Akbar Nama}, vol. II, p. 141; vol. I, p. 395.
\textsuperscript{77}Majumdar, “The Mughal Empire”, p. 113.
Nur Jahan, so much so that she had even gold coins issued in her and her own husband’s names.\textsuperscript{78} According to an interpretation, the reason Nur Jahan was so fired up to retain political power was her inability to produce an heir to throne.\textsuperscript{79} However, such an interpretation may only end up reinforcing the patriarchal construct of a woman yielding to masculine power even while apparently pursuing her own self-interest. On the other side, it may well have been her being a woman which allowed her to pursue self-aggrandizement without much accountability.

There were usual and unusual occasions for grievance within the royal family. The Mughal family functioned as a house divided at every generational step to decide upon who would be the king, the brunt of the infighting and internecine wars was borne out by the women, including the wives of the soldiers who fought for either side. In such scenarios, women gave way to their feelings through writing, a clear case of acting-out in the absence of control of the political power. It probably began with Gulbadan Bano, the sister of Humayun who wrote \textit{Humayunnama} as a nostalgic memoir of her brother and his times - a text which was not even given official acknowledgment in Akbar’s list of family documents.\textsuperscript{80} This time too, architecture helped embodying nostalgia in the form of Humayun’s tomb constructed by Gulbadan Begum.

If Gulbadan Begum’s feelings assumed the form of literature and architecture, or even odes, then Jahan Ara Begum’s calculated machinations reflected the maturing family history. She was appointed as “Begum Saheba” at the age of seventeen, and assumed the functions of the queen at the death of her mother Mumtaz in 1631. Her most important role came

\textsuperscript{78} Lal, \textit{Domesticity}, p. 156-159. The only other instance such example is come from Emperor Samudragupta’s coins bear his image with that of his queen.
\textsuperscript{79} Bokhari, “Gendered Landscapes”, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{80} Harbans Mukhia, \textit{Historians and Historiography during the Reign of Akbar}, p. 150.
during the war of accession to throne after her father Shah Jahan’s fate was all but sealed first by illness and then by his son, Aurangzeb. Jahan Ara sided with Aurangzeb and even prevented him from being killed in an intrigue conceived by Shah Jahan and Dara.\(^8\)\(^1\) She also functioned as the new emperor’s guide and corrective as if she had become the queen for life-time. First, she suggested to Aurangzeb to withdraw from struggle to for power, but when she re-read the situation, she threw full weight behind her brother, against the others. It also reflects upon the cold internalization that royal women had come to develop in face of inevitable death for one member of the family or the other. Her letters written to Aurangzeb pose a contrast to the nostalgic writing of Gulbadan Begum, or to the issue of coins by Nur Jahan. It was almost as if the inability of these women to produce an heir had been overcome by her symbolically; she gave birth to the King Aurangzeb if not the person Aurangzeb.\(^8\)\(^2\) This way, her solidarity with the deposed and imprisoned Shah Jahan reflects her adherence to tradition and father in playing out the assigned role to women.

Her sister, Roshan Ara, also had a more or less similar role to play. However, if Jahan Ara chose to give a different route to her desires, Roshan Ara chose the more traditional manners in negotiating with the powers and she entered into an understanding with Aurangzeb that the latter would lift the ban on the marriage of royal princesses introduced by Akbar once he became the king. The gardens and public monuments got constructed in her name thus represent the failure of such negotiations.

Princesses and queens were not the only women in harem. They were surrounded by women of lower strata, called as *sahelis* though which was


\(^{82}\)Perhaps it is here that we can understand Lacan’s idea that what is repressed in the Real emerges back in the Symbolic; even if Jahan Ara was unable to produce, thanks to the ban on the marriage of princesses by Akbar, an heir, she did so politically.
only a cold euphemism of sorts to underline the master-servant relationship, better translated more domestic helps than company. Time to time, they were regarded with suspicion and hence were laden with work from morning till late. Since, most of them could have their spouses working within the army as soldiers, they had more of a reason to be faithful than play gimmicks. They mostly functioned as the messengers between imperial life and life outside the harem and court.

Women were traded in the market and were regularly sold as slaves. In Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s novel *Of Love and Other Demons*, there is a scene where a beautiful Abyssinian is being sold in the market for her weight worth in gold. If not quite their weight worth in gold, Abyssinian women were sold in the market usually at the price of Rs. 250 in the bazaars of the Mughal empire. If a whole family was sold, then children were not separated from the mother. Slave women also functioned as midwives and maids. Slave women married to anyone could be sold off by the principle wife and the money thus obtained could be deposited for use in emergency. Women working at the harem would receive monthly salaries and gifts on special occasions like child birth or marriage. They had to perform various duties, including entertaining the royal women. Interestingly, they could also function as guards, as they did with so much festivity during the royal reception of Roshan Ara at Aurangzeb’s court. Female guards were called as Urdu Begis, who also had to act as palanquin bearers and accompany royal blood during hunting. Sometimes, they were given special rooms in the court, though their status was lower than that of concubines. Manucci also mentions that they were always laden with gifts to be distributed among

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84 Bhakari, *Zakhirat-ul-Khawanin*, p. 49.


the poor while leaving the palace. The only serious attempt at emancipating them was taken under Akbar’s reign, when the nature and salary pertaining to their job was sought to be regularised.

On the other hand, a huge corpus of theological or quasi-theological literature lied before the Sultans to direct them to rule countries like India which had Islam as the state religion but bulk of the population as non-Islamic, even pantheistic. This posed problem before the state but it managed by not attempting to solve them: from an early time, the Muslim rulers of India had understood that the best way to rule was in resisting the temptation of proselytizing the entire country and leaving the culture and life of the indigenous people to themselves, until they paid taxes. The biggest proof was Barani’s *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* and *Tarikh-i-Firoz-Shahi*, which called for total indifference to caste-system despite its infidel origins and manners. This aloofness formed the crux of the royal agenda, until Akbar thought to assimilate the belief-systems and bring the different communities together for further stability. To put it in modern terms, the genius of Akbar lay in his addition to the repressive state apparatus the idea of ideological state apparatus.

Even a cursory look at elite sociology would enable us to capture the social reality of the times. Ever since the beginning the policy of Muslim rulers had been that of continuing rather than discontinuity. Even under Muhammad Ghori and his governors, the earlier way of administration had been kept intact, and social system left untouched. The rise of Persia and its intellectuals within the Islamic world had influenced the writing of directive texts on political theory, and the Persian texts had themselves been influenced with cultural diffusion with India. Indeed, Ibn-al Muqaffa had translated the *Panchatantras* into Arabic, which later inspired the writing of

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the Adab literature,\textsuperscript{89} thus, from the very beginning, one of our hypotheses -
the pre-Islamic and even post-Islamic dialogue between Arab and the East -
stands confirmed. Only such a theoretical background would help us
understand why even under Ghori, at least three generals were Hindus.\textsuperscript{90}
Muslims were generally anti-institution, and not against individuals, which
explains why despite the worst denunciations of the Hindu systems by the
kings, they chose Hindu personnel within their state apparatus.\textsuperscript{91}

In this respect, one feature was the development of the Riti poetry as
a parallel development to the writing of political texts, allowing nobility to
interact on a largely non-religious, (secular) basis.\textsuperscript{92} Along with Akhlaq
Nama, the Persian poetry of the period, this kind of court poetry signified a
shift from denomination to culture, thus indicating a shift to a composite
albeit perverse assimilation of sorts, in which love and eroticism occupied
main position. While this potpourri of eroticism and high culture was being
attempted, the Jaziya was being imposed by Aurangzeb to finance his wars
in the Deccan. A host of historians, coming from contrasting schools have
univocally criticized this imposition of Jaziya, either for laying the basis of
modern communalism or as exploitative mechanism of the medieval state.

\textsuperscript{90}Aziz Ahmad, \textit{Studies in Islamic Cultures in the Indian Environment}, New
Delhi, 1964. Sundar, Nath and Tilak.
\textsuperscript{91}Mohammad Yasin, \textit{A Social History of Islamic India}, Lucknow, 1958 p. 50
writes as “Generally speaking, the Muslims were against Hinduism but not
against Hinduism.”
\textsuperscript{92}Chandra, \textit{Historiography}, p. 196.
Fashion and Daily Life

Akbar had encouraged the practice of shaving one’s head and beard on the death of someone from the family. Bernier and other Europeans had also noted the caste-ideology within the Muslims, obviously learned from the Hindus. A tragicomic scene happened when Aurangzeb found his own son celebrating Holi in a Hindu style; the poor descendant of Akbar had to face the sarcastic ire of the Father-Emperor like this: “A saffron-coloured helmet on your head, a red garment on your shoulder, your venerable age verging on forty-six years; hurrah on the beard and moustache!” Aurangzeb shared this dislike of Holi with certain Jainas too. We have already noted how Muharram celebrations at Lahore were similar to Holi, which is supported with evidence from Monserrate, who found only these two festivals being the ones celebrated en masse.

This fusion of Hindu-Muslim culture, although by no means completely smooth and emotional, is reflected through almost all facets of social life. But, if the spillover of this fusion was perhaps nowhere as important as in the highest echelons of the Mughal Army, that too, not when it was well-entrenched into Akbar’s model but when, under Babur, the Mughal Army avoided touching the waters of Karmanasa river, whose water was supposed to be capable of undoing one’s good deeds (almost the opposite of what was thought about the river Ganges). Already, Firuz Shah Tughlaq had to take steps to prevent Muslims from idol worshipping. It has been noted, under Aurangzeb, that Brahmin teachers at Banaras and Sindh

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94 Bernier, op. cit., p. 259.
95 Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, p. 34.
96 Monserrate, Commentary, pp. 21-23.
97 Babur Nama, pp. 659-660.
98 Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi, Elliott and Dowson, vol. III, pp. 365.
had pupils from all religions from faraway places. Similarly, madarsas too admitted young boys, mostly in rural areas, under their fold, where they were taught languages and mathematics. Maktabs performed the same function in urban areas. Balkrishna Brahmin was sent to Abdul Majid’s maktab in line with the tradition of the family. Abdul Majid was regarded as having no parallel as a teacher in Hisar, and he taught Balkrishna to write, and so well that Balkrishna got his nickname as ‘munshi’. For higher education, he remained under the tutelage and internship of Sheikh Jalal Hisari for nine years. Similarly, Surat Singh, the author of Tazkira-i Pir Hassu Teli, was trained by Abdul Karim from whom he learned about the poetry of Khaqani Yusufi, Amwari and Ja’mi. It was, perhaps, a result of these poetry lessons that he went and attended a mushaira at Shahjahan’s court, wherein an equal number of Muslim and Hindu poets participated, the “most famous” being Nand Dayal, along with Dayal and Chandrabhan Brahmin.

If one the one hand, people like Sirhindi and Wali Ullah were asking the Muslims to return to their sources and be “true Muslims”, on the other hand, the Muslims had got deep into Hindu superstitions (which equals to adopt their views of nature and other phenomena). Every rich Muslim family

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102 Ibid., fols. 65a-67b.
103 Ibid., fols. 97b-98a.
105 Surat Singh, “Pir Hassu Teli”, fols. 86b.
had an astrologer of their own.\textsuperscript{106} Jahangir himself mentions consulting the astrologers about his time of marching from one place to other.\textsuperscript{107} Bernier writes that not even armies would begin fighting until their respective astrologers had asked them to, called as the performing of ‘\textit{Sahet}’\textsuperscript{108}. 

Manucci mentions, after dismissing the urban legend that Shahjahan had Jahan Ara’s secret lover burned after the latter hid himself in a vessel, that in one day Shahjahan shared his perception with his daughter that his officers no longer obeyed him - a sign of the things that his reign was coming to an end. In order to lengthen his reign, Jahan Ara took recourse to a form of superstition only traceable to Hindu ethos. She tried to lengthen the days by distributing gifts among the poor, and liberating many slaves. She made them circumnavigate her father thrice before releasing them. The slaves were sort of expelled, rather than freed, as they were thought to have personified evil around the Emperor.\textsuperscript{109}

On another occasion, Shahjahan is told by an astrologer that the stars were so aligned that the greatest person, i.e. The Emperor Shahjahan, might die. Hearing this, Shahjahan went out for a long plan of hunting, and made in-charge his \textit{kotwal} as the governor of the palace. Two months later, the \textit{kotwal} died. Shahjahan returned and got impressed with the astrologer, who was paid handsomely. Manucci surmised that the astrologer might have poisoned the \textit{kotwal} with his physician friend inside the palace.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{106}Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. I, pp. 212-213. He mentions about every Hindu and Muslim household being directed by the astrologers even about the timing of even the smallest things to do.
\textsuperscript{107}\textit{Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{108}Bernier, p. 161. It should be read as ‘\textit{sa}’\textit{it}’.
\textsuperscript{109}Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 212.
Dara Shikoh too is learned to have believed a great deal in astrologers, one of whom had declared that he would become king. As Manucci observed, it was an all-win strategy from the astrologer, as he hoped to profit from the declaration in case he really became the king, and if the poor Prince failed, he would have to run for his own life than running after the astrologer. Dara is also said to have stepped directly on to the chariot from the stairs of the royal palace while leaving for his last to fight with Aurangzeb, but to no avail.

Things like necromancy and magic-hunting were prevalent. Muslims also approached holy men for seeking offspring, especially sons or spouses. On a whole, the Muslim and the Hindus had most part of their mental universe in common which had a dialectical relationship to their material surroundings. The very design of the towns, where almost the entire Muslim population resided, almost forced the religiously heterogeneous population to interact within its different sections, as the towns were surrounded by heavy walls, and were concentrated around centers of power. They contained the elites and the artisans, the religious scholars, the shopkeepers and people in state service. The important thing to note is that there was no division of the physical space on the basis of religion, although it certainly involved other divisions, that of caste and profession. Pelsaert puts it in almost similar words, about Agra: “...the whole place is closely built over and inhabited, Hindu mingled with Moslems, the rich with the poor...” Not only the plebeians, but the patricians too inhabited the common areas. We find a lot of muhallas named after such professions: jauhariwaras (goldsmiths), mochiwaras (leather men), teliwara (oil-pressers)

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and so on. The neighbour of Surat Singh was a Muslim named Abdul Karim.\footnote{Surat Singh, “Pir Hassu Teli”, fols. 181b.}

What was true of Agra was true of other cities like Delhi, Lahore, Cambay, Ahmadabad and Surat. The closed environs of the city and the indiscriminate population made different religious communities enter in mutual cooperation. The mercantile class in the seventeenth century port cities was persecuted by the city officials (\textit{qanungo}) - themselves the biggest traders in the city - appointed by the Mughal court. They also monopolized sea-trade for themselves, and forced the traders to pay extra cess so much so that the traders of Cambay were forced to migrate to Surat.\footnote{Mirat-i Ahmadi, vol. 1, Bombay, pp. 274, 278.} In protest against the usurpation of the wealth and trade of a Baniya, in 1666, the entire Surat city (led by Hindu and Muslim merchants) protested and shut itself down. Also, in the legal framework worked out by the Mughal rulers, special space was left out for non-Muslims, who were to be judged according to their own religious/judicial notions, and some other relaxations were given to the practice of Shariat. As per the Shariat principle of equity, Akbar had appointed a few Brahmins for judicial purposes of the Hindus.\footnote{Muntakhab-ut Tawarikh, p. 356.} Jadunath Sarkar informs that some of the judgments were also delivered in Sanskrit.\footnote{Jadunath Sarkar, \textit{Mughal Administration}, Calcutta, 1954, p. 101.} Very much the same system was continued in Shahjahan’s time, when he issued orders for the continuance of prayers in a Mathura temple,\footnote{Tarapada Mukherjee and Irfan Habib, “The Mughal Administration and the Temples of Vrindavan during the Reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan”, \textit{PIHC}, Dharwad, 1988, pp. 287-99.} as a form of \textit{ibadat-i-ilahi}(worship of God). Most significantly, it is Aurangzeb himself who makes it clear in \textit{Fatawa-i-Alamgiri} that “[n]on-Muslims (zimmis) of a Muslim state were not subject to the laws of Islam.
Their legal relations were to be regulated according to the precepts of their own faith.”

It can be easily surmised that the various ethnic groups did not simply interact inside the court but outside of it as well. It cannot be assumed that these groups had a readymade sense of association or collaboration. There must have been great intrigues and power struggles, alliances forged here and broken there, on the basis of lineage and fondness. To live together and think together is a social process which takes its own time. If they appeared similar, it did not readily translate into the idea of dissolved or mixed identities, beliefs, customs and habits. If that were to be so, various cultural or social identities would not have come into being in the first place. Differences could arise and be created from time to time. In such a situation, social, political and religious factors could divide or align contradictory forces. For example, it can be observed that these various elements got incorporated into the Mughal service due to historical circumstances and only partly as a conscious imperial policy. Akbar, “often assigned officers belonging to various groups to serve under one superior officer, at the same time, the distinct or separate character of each group was respected” and attempted to curb sectarian elements “the imperial government regulated the proportion of men belonging to his own race or clan, which a Mansabdar could recruit.” Through this policy, he tried to contain divisive elements that could produce tensions. Thus, he encouraged various people to live together despite differences. Often, there were attempts to pit one section of nobility against the other, or competitions and jealousies existing among the rival sections often threatened their loyalty to the throne, but it was largely down due to Akbar’s *sulh-i-kul* that these differences were always contained, until the decay of the Empire began. It has been estimated by Moreland that

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123 *Athar Ali, Mughal Nobility*, p. 15.
roughly seventy percent of the nobility under Humayun or Akbar was of foreign origins, though by the coming of the eighteenth century their share in administrative and political power had declined sharply. Thanks to their gradual assimilation with the local population, and settlement in India, by the time of Aurangzeb people with foreign origins had been reduced to a minuscule minority within the nobility. Under the “orthodox”, “foreign-loving” Aurangzeb, the practical aspects of being associated with a “foreign origins” withered away.

Religion generally assumes greater importance in a pre-Industrial, pre-modern society, as a stand-in for scientific understanding. It is not possible to denounce it simply as an ‘ideology’ with reference to medieval India. The sixteenth century in India had given rise to many egalitarian currents, and an overwhelming majority of them had originated from ‘religion’. The lacks of conflict among ordinary masses were noted by European travellers too, as Tavernier observed. A highly divided society cannot work along religious lines alone. The consolidation of Mughal rule in the seventeenth century meant several continuities and discontinuities. It involved, on the one hand, the expansion of the ruling class – which meant the recruitment of various religious and ethnic groups - by broadening its social base and, on the other hand the emergence of various popular broad-minded religious movements, whose thriving ground, was the common populace. The emergence of Akbar’s rule was thus also an objective development of the processes of accommodation, not just of ruling elite but also of a religion. In Akbar, the processes coincided. With later generations, they became disjunctive but the social basis remained the same. According to Satish Chandra, the four conditions of Akbar’s rule were as follows; “(a) the social base of the Mughal state, and of the ruling classes, broadens continuously, with greater space to the lower orders; (b) that the ruling

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classes moved towards acceptance of a truly secular ethos; (c) that the mass movement led by radical Bhakti and popular sufī saints, upholding cultural plurality and toleration, are further strengthened; and (d) that there was a rapid enough economic growth to cope with increasing administrative and developmental cost, and to meet growing aspirations.\textsuperscript{127} He further says that “none of these conditions could be adequately fulfilled during the seventeenth century”.\textsuperscript{128} He thinks that it was due to a) the reluctance of the closed-door ruling class to allow further strata, b) the failure of the secular tradition to become hegemonic upon the entire society; c) the failures on the economic front which coloured every opposition to the centralized state as assertion of one or more religious factors. However, in our view, the social bonding of the sixteenth century proved too strong to be countered by the reversal of the other factors (political, religious and economic). Bayly has attempted to trace a history of communalism, and he is not able to trace any riot before the end of the rule of Aurangzeb.\textsuperscript{129} It can be posited that the communal riots of the post-Aurangzeb era were not marked by the kind of modern riots of the nineteenth or twentieth century. Also, that these riots took place due to the weakening of the imperial hold, and not due to its consolidation.\textsuperscript{130} Furthermore, the whole of medieval Indian history shows that religion, though having a great importance in the lives of the people and social life, was not a political factor. In fact, even the Jat and Maratha opposition to Mughal rule was not a religious affair, but attempts towards either building a smaller state within a larger socio-political milieu or takeover of a preceding empire, which got hampered due to the entry of Afghans and the British. Otherwise, ordinary people created channels of

\textsuperscript{127}\textsuperscript{127}Satish Chandra, \textit{Essays on Medieval Indian History}, New Delhi, 2005, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{128}\textsuperscript{128}Chandra, \textit{Essays}, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{129}\textsuperscript{129}C.A. Bayly, “The Pre-History of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860”, \textit{Modern Asian Studies}, vol. XIX, No. 2 (1985), pp. 177-203.
\textsuperscript{130}\textsuperscript{130}Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, “The Dynamics of Composite Culture: Evolution of an Urban Social Identity in Mughal India”, \textit{Indian History Congress: Proceedings}, 72\textsuperscript{nd} Session, 2011.
expressing discontent about an exploitative system through Bhakti and Sufi movements which had active theoretical and practical collaborations.

For the purpose of this thesis, a distinction must be made between the ‘hegemonic’ and the ‘dominant’: although Gramsci’s laboured attempts at defining the coercion by the exploiting class in a quasi-modern society like that of Italy are remarkable, they offer, despite their high historical-embeddedness in Grassmci’s immediate surroundings, a veritable tool to understand the pre-modern societies as well. If by hegemony Grassmci meant that the ruling class was able to maintain and reproduce its rule through the use of ideology than coercion, then, in the next step, even this coercion itself became the part of this hegemony.\(^{131}\) What is dominant is not necessarily hegemonic: if Aurangzeb and his orthodox coterie could impose itself upon a fairly multi-denominational polity, it does not mean they were hegemonic too. It was the multi-denominational social collaboration, led by popular class based Bhakti and Sufi movements, which was hegemonic. In the times of our analysis, hegemony comes later than dominance: the ‘hegemony’ of the casteist Brahman-Rajput alliance\(^{132}\) was violently broken by the Gaznavi-Ghur invasions (whose immediate by-product was the unleashing of the egalitarian religions and vernacular literature in the Subcontinent); the Sultanate rule then continued through violence of the ruling groups and the passivity of the local people (who meanwhile, imbibed a lot from the cultural mixing-up), preparing ground for the Mughal take-over by promoting assimilation, with however much coercion, or by continuing the


\(^{132}\) Norman P. Zeigler, “Marvari Historical Chronicles: Sources for the Social and Cultural History of Rajasthan” in *IESHR*, vol, XIII, No. 2, 1976. The Rajputs later collaborated in state power during the Mughal rule; they not only had matrimonial alliances but they also got high posts within the court, while they closely collaborated with the Muslims at the local level, even if they waged a struggle against Mughal authority. They, however, could not remain the single ‘Hindu’ site of power.
caste-structure of the Indian society in general; finally, the Mughal rule, breaking the Afghan or other local rule by force, and then submerging itself into the Indian society as they found it. It was, as if, Akbar was predestined to take steps to imprint the Mughal rule on the Indian society through numerous give-and-takes between the rulers and the ruled, between one religion and others, between one location and other. In the next step, Akbar’s idea of multicultural, multi-denominational decency became hegemonic, despite the dominance of a varying ruling echelon at the top of the society (e.g. Aurangzeb). This schema does not mean that the preceding Sultans did not promote inter-cultural exchange, or that the kings after Shahjahan broke this exchange completely: it simply means that the late sixteenth century and the bulk of the seventeenth century represent the tidal apex of assimilation, which continued under later Mughals as well (through music, languages and arts), and in the popular syncretic movements.