the

Mughals of India

Harbans Mukhia

Blackwell Publishing

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Mughals of India

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For Boni

The *Moguls* Feed high, Entertain much, and Whore not a little.
John Fryer, English traveller to India, 1672–81.

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In writing this book I have been privileged to have accumulated an enormous wealth of the debt of gratitude from a very large number of friends, colleagues and students. It was the late Burton Stein who suggested my name to Blackwell Publishers when they were looking for an author for this volume in their 'Peoples of the World' series. In the last nearly two decades of his life, Burt had shared with me many intimate moments of joy and sorrow about virtually everything under the sun, history-writing included. My sadness at his departure is the greater for the certainty that he would have been mightily pleased to see the book in print, though he probably would not have agreed with almost anything it contains. That was Burt: forever joyful, friendly and critical, of the kind that revives one's faith in humanity.

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lasting impact on my own understanding of Mughal history, even though he makes no reference to it. I am, however, unsure if I came up to anywhere near his expectations.

My friend Mubarak Ali, fiercely and combatively secular historian of the Mughal period, located at Lahore, was one I could always turn to whenever I needed any bit of information and guidance. If the state of relations between India and Pakistan, now mercifully somewhat on the mend, had made it impossible to exchange letters and books, fortunately the email still remained immune to government's intervention on either side. His responses to my queries were invariably prompt, full of information and insights and, of course, generous. His unpublished doctoral dissertation 'The Court of the Great Mughuls', submitted way back in 1976 to Ruhr University in Germany, and its revised Urdu version were extremely valuable, rich as these are in empirical data.

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well from me. It is not for nothing that they are both as renowned for their generosity as for their scholarship.

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My son Sudeep and daughter-in-law Sunetra, both journalists, were subjected to reading the evolving text as sort of arbitrarily identified representatives of the target audience of the book; their stern refusal to subscribe to victimology in the process is thus all the more appreciable. Sunetra's childlike laughter at the most vaguely amusing situation dissolved a lot of the tension that is every author's destiny.

While writing the Introduction, I needed some very old articles unavailable in New Delhi. My niece Ishita Pande struggled hard to find time from her own doctoral research in history at Princeton and Oxford to send me copies: victory in the end of old filial and comradely spirit.

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If the impress of French historical writing, especially of the *Annales* mode, on this book is quite visible, I suppose I owe it to the depth and duration of my interaction with that magnificent institution, the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, in Paris. I have been almost a permanent fixture at the MSH each year in the summer during the tenure of the first three of its Administrateurs, Fernand Braudel, Clemens Heller and Maurice Aymard, who continues in saddle. I also received invaluable help and affection from the late Georges Duby. I revel in the fortune of having Jacques Le Goff, Guy Bois, Michel Vovelle, Etienne Balibar and above all Maurice Aymard among my closest friends, with all of whom I have spent innumerable hours discussing history, society, politics, culture, indeed life in all its hues. Maurice has long treated me as virtually a member of his immediate family.

I am aware of the inadequacy of saying just 'thank you' to all of them. Language still remains such a poor means of expressing feelings; but

what else does an author have to stand in for it? So I say 'thanks' to them from the depth of my being.

It is a pleasure of course to be published by Blackwell. I nevertheless harbour two regrets on this score: their reminders about the delay in completing the book were ever too gentle; and they 'persuaded' me to delete some 90 per cent of the references to the sources that I had put in in the first draft. I have had to drop virtually all references to the primary sources in the Persian language, from which I had laboriously collected data for nearly a decade and a half. I take solace in the reason given by Georges Duby for the gradually diminishing references to sources in his later works: having established his bona fides earlier on, he hoped that his readers would accept his statements as based on solid primary data even when no references had been provided. I am however aware that while in his case this reason would have been accepted as perfectly valid, with no trace of doubt, in mine it might be viewed as suspiciously evasive. I might add that the excerpts from most – though unhappily not all – Persian language medieval Indian texts given in the book have been translated afresh by me even where standard translations exist. The exceptions are *Babur Nama*, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri* and *Shah Jahan Nama,* where I have relied exclusively on translations.

Helen Gray, freelance copy-editor, put each word of the entire text meticulously through a microscope. She also strove hard to ensure I wrote correct English; the flaws that remain are in spite of her.

Boni, like the good wife, learnt to accept her suffering in silence while I wrote this book, which she perceived as having sheer fun; she was perhaps right on both counts. To her I owe the biggest debt of all; I try to repay it in part by dedicating the book to her.

March 2004
Centre for Historical Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi

Chronology of Emperors' Reigns

Zahir al-Din Babur: 1526–30
Nasir al-Din Humayun: 1530–56
with an interregnum, 1540–55
Jalal al-Din Muhammad Akbar: 1556–1605
Nur al-Din Jahangir: 1605–27
Shah Jahan: 1627–58
Aurangzeb Alamgir: 1658–1707
Bahadur Shah I: 1707–12
Jahandar Shah: 1712
Farrukh Siyar: 1713–19
Shah Jahan II: 1719
Rafi al-Darjat: 1719
Muhammad Shah: 1719–48
Ahmad Shah: 1748–54
Aziz al-Din Alamgir: 1754–59
Ali Gawhar Shah Alam II: 1759–1806
Akbar II: 1806–37
Bahadur Shah Zafar: 1837–58

Introduction

This book has turned out to be an essentially experimental venture in many ways, almost independently of the author's volition. When Blackwell Publishing approached me some dozen years ago to do a volume on 'The Mughals' in their 'Peoples of the World' series, I readily agreed and gave them an outline with a commitment to hand in the script within a three-year deadline. The outline was quite simple in its essence: the Mughal conquest of India in the sixteenth century, the organization of the state, administration, economy, trade and life in urban centres, and in the countryside, and so forth. In other words, encapsulating the existing state of knowledge on the subject, not an awesome task for one who has taught this history in two major Indian universities for over four decades.

If writing the book exceeded the deadline by more than a decade, it was largely because in my enthusiasm I started reading up the primary sources over again. By and by, not only had questions that hadn't occurred to me earlier begun to arise, but the whole perspective of the project altered radically; by now virtually nothing of the original outline has remained intact.

In its place a sort of broad profile has evolved of what I, at this moment, believe are the key entry points for understanding the nature of Mughal state and society. By and large, these entry points have remained unexplored in the arena of the history-writing of Mughal India, even in the midst of innumerable studies of a whole spectrum of themes and some very innovative endeavours. This might explain the preliminary nature of my own explorations here.

Even as the title originally proposed – 'The Mughals' – could arguably be self-explanatory and self-sufficient, in that the identification of the Mughals with India is virtually given for the professional historian, the popular image – and, more importantly, the image of the Mughals constituted in India's political scenario as one of several 'foreign' Muslim dynasties ruling over India in the medieval centuries – leaves some space

open for re-endorsing the identification. The Mughals themselves never had to face the problem of being 'foreigners' ruling over an 'alien' land; both these notions are of posterior, indeed of very recent origins. In an ambience where conquest constituted its own legitimation, the notions of being alien and foreign would have very doubtful provenance. This indeed was characteristic of much of the ancient and medieval world, until the arrival of nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries colonialism. Modern colonialism has altered the very meaning of conquest, with governance of land and its people, now on behalf of, and primarily for the economic benefit of a community of people inhabiting a far-off land. It stands in contrast with conquest in the medieval world when the victor either returned home taking such plunder with him as he could gather after a battle or two, or settled down in the vanquished land, submerging his and his group's identity in it to become inseparable from it. There are very few inhabited patches of land on our earth devoid of such merger between the 'conqueror' and the 'conquered' through history.

There are, besides, other branches of the same family of the Mughals, descended from Chingiz Khan and/or Timur. One had stayed 'home' in Central Asia. It was thus that a text relating to it, the *Tarikh-i Rashidi*, written in the mid-sixteenth century by Mirza Haidar Dughlat, was rendered into English by Ney Elias and Denison Ross under the title *History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*. Another branch with similar claims of descent had migrated to Iran.[1] Not quite welcome in the history of Iran, this branch was later replaced there by the Safavids. Thus *The Mughals of India* also seeks to draw some distinguishing lines among the collateral branches.

Interestingly, the term 'Mughal', now synonymous with grandeur in almost all forms in the cultural arena, might perhaps have sent a shiver of horror down the spine of the dynasty's early rulers in India. The Persian language term, pronounced 'Mughul' in Iran and 'Mughal' in India, came to acquire a generic meaning that broadly signified peoples of the Central Asian regions, speaking the Mongol languages and dialects; there were others, however, also Central Asians, seeking to draw distinct-

1 *The Tarikh-i Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat. A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia*, Eng. tr. by Ney Elias and Denison Ross, Patna, 1973. Unfortunately the date of its first publication, sometime after 1895, has not been mentioned. For a competent overview of the Mughals in Iran, see Abbas Iqbal, *Tarikh-i Mughul az Hamla-i Chingiz ta Tashkeel-i Daulat-i Timur* (*History of the Mughuls from the Invasion of Chingiz to the Formation of the Timuride State*), Tehran, 1365 H./1987AD. Brief discussions of Chingiz's attacks and his descendants' rule and Timur's invasion and Timuride regime in Iran occur in David Morgan, *The Mongols*, Oxford, 1990, chapters 5 and 6, and Karim Najafi Barzegar, *Mughal Iranian Relations during the Sixteenth Century*, New Delhi, 2000, chapter 1.

ive lines from them ethnically and linguistically. They often perceived the 'Mughals', with the grand exception of Chingiz himself, as barbarians. These other groups were Turkis, Uzbegs, Uighurs, Kirghizes, Kazaks, Kipchaks, Keraits and Naimans, often with as many mixed lineages, shared culture and faiths as those whose distinction was asserted in conflict with their neighbours. Babur in his extensive and detailed memoirs in his native Turki language *Tuzuk-i Baburi* (*Babur Nama* in English translation) almost always speaks of them as if they were 'the other', and rather derisively. Comments like, '[M]ischief and devastation must always be expected from the Mughul horde' are scattered in the book. The dynasty in India proudly traced its lineage from both Chingiz and Timur, the former as ancestor of Babur's mother and the latter as the paternal progenitor, initially with greater emphasis on Chingiz, later on Timur. In Babur's home in Uzbekistan, the dynasty proclaimed its identity as Chaghtais, descended from Chaghta, son of Chingiz, 'Mughal' par excellence. A history of the dynasty in India down to the early eighteenth century was written, with the title *Tazkirat al-Salatin-i Chaghta*, 'Chronicles of the Chaghtai Sultans'. There were other histories, too, with similar titles, such as *Tarikh-i Khandan-i Timuriyya*, 'The History of the Timuride Family', although the latter title was perhaps given in the eighteenth century to a text written anonymously in the sixteenth, commissioned by Emperor Akbar. But it is hard to come across a book with the title 'A History of the Mughal State or the Mughal Dynasty' in Persian, the official court language. In all official records the family tree of the dynasty took the origin back to Timur through the paternal stem. Abul Fazl, the remarkable historian of the sixteenth century, also sought to give the family supernatural ancestry by tracing the tree to a central Asian female figure, Alanquwa, a royal widow impregnated by the rays of the Sun.[2]

This official avoidance of 'Mughal' for the imperial dynasty did not, however, come in the way of its popular nomenclature as such, even while it retained some of its ambiguity. As early as 1538, the text of conversations of a Sufi saint, Abdul Quddus Ganguhi, compiled by his son and spiritual successor, makes perhaps the first use of the term for Babur and his soldiers – a mere 12 years after the founding of the Mughal

2 The notion of conception without the intervention of human agency is common to several civilizations. In the Hindu epic *Mahabharat* Kunti is similarly impregnated by the Sun and gives birth to Karna from her ear. She, however, fears for her reputation as an unwed mother and, placing the infant in a wooden box, lets it float in a river. Karna grows up to be a legendary warrior waging war upon her other sons. The Japanese Emperor and the Inca ruler in Peru both claimed descent from the Sun, although the claims are not mediated through legendary birth. The whole of Christian faith is of course based upon the Immaculate Conception of Jesus Christ's mother.

rule in India – although the use is made in an Afghan milieu that was hostile to the Mughals.[3] A few other sixteenth-century texts also employ the term for some of the nobles, and at times implicitly for the regime generally, but not for the ruling dynasty.[4] There is even an inscription dated 1537–38 at a building in Hissar in the modern state of Haryana where a 'soldier martyred in Gujarat' is referred to as Mughal, responsible for the building's construction.[5] But it is the chronicle of the eighteenth century historian Khafi Khan that puts the issue in perspective. 'Although it is from the reign of the dweller in paradise Emperor Akbar that the term Mughal came into common use for the Turks and Tajiks of Ajam (non-Arab territories), indeed even for the Syeds of Iran and Turan, in reality the word is truly valid only for the tribe of Turks who had descended from Mughal Khan … through Chingiz Khan, Hulaku, Chaghta and Amir Timur.'[6] However, the European travellers were under no obligation to be sensitive to the nuances of the term, and knew the dynasty as Mughal anyway, spelt by them variously. Ralph Fitch, one of the earliest Englishmen to travel to India between 1583 and 1591, merrily refers to the 'Great Mogor, which is the King of Agra and Delli'.[7] Edward Terry, his compatriot in India between 1616 and 1619, has a lovely bloomer on it: for him, 'Mogoll means "a circumcised man, and therefore he is called the Great Mogoll as much as to say: *the Chiefe of the Circumcision*".'[8] Sir Thomas Roe, James I's (and England's) first ambassador to India, in his *Journal* covering 1615 to 1619 forever refers to Jahangir as 'the Mogull' or 'the Great Mogull'.[9] The classic accounts of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries India by the French doctor François Bernier and the Italian pretender-doctor Niccolao Manucci both

3 Rukn al-Din, *Lataif-i Quddusi*, Delhi, 1311 H./AD 1894: 64, 68. The conversations were compiled a year after the saint's death.

4 Such as Shaikh Rizq al-Allah Mushtaqi, *Waqiat-i Mushtaqi*, ed. I. A. Siddiqui, Rampur, 2002: 142, 245; Arif Qandahari, *Tarikh-i Akbari*, ed. Haji Syed Muin al-Din Nadwi et al., Rampur, 1962: 53, 185, 218.

5 *Epigraphica Indica*, II: 428. I am grateful to Professor Irfan Habib for bringing this inscription to my notice.

6 Khafi Khan, *Muntakhab al-Lubab*, ed. Maulvi Khair al-Din Ahmad and Maulvi Ghulam Qadir, Part I, Calcutta, 1869: 4. He makes some comments on Mughal and his brother Tatar's history and observes that Mughal became Khan only on ascending the throne, ibid.: 3.

7 William Foster, ed., *Early Travels in India, 1583–1619*, Delhi, 1999 (first pub. 1921): 13.

8 Ibid.: 325. The editor notes that '[T]he same statement is made by Salbank' (*Letters Received*, vol. vi, p. 184), by Roe (*Embassy*, p. 312) and by Bluteau (*Vocabulario*, 1712–21), and cautiously adds that 'there is no ground for it', ibid.

9 William Foster, ed., *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India 1615–1619*, New Delhi, 1990 (first pub. 1926): *passim*.

have Mughal in the titles, although the Persian language histories written in the court still avoided its use for the dynasty. That 'Mughal' was a term best avoided for the Indian rulers had reached Russia, too. When Peter I of Russia (r. 1682–1725) was preparing to send an embassy to Aurangzeb, he made enquiries among Indian merchants in Astrakhan regarding the appropriate mode of address for the Indian Emperor. Was it 'Mughal' or 'Shah'? He wasn't sure. The headman of the Indian traders gave him to understand that the Indian Emperor might resent 'Mughal' and that it was used wrongly by Europeans alone. He suggested Shahinshah instead.[10] By and by, however, 'Mughal' earned respect, dignity and, not least, pride, in its Indian association.

The perspective that informs this book seems to have grown along the expanding landscape of the writing of the history of medieval India, witness to radical changes in recent decades. Let me elaborate this somewhat by going back to the beginning.

The form in which the writing of history came to medieval India owes much to Arab-Islamic and Mongol-Persian traditions. With the birth of Islam, Arab historiography came to acquire a very strict adherence to the chronological sequence of events and a concept of world history.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was familiar with the tradition of genealogy and with the notion of the chronological order of events, even as uncertainty and confusion marked its practice at times. The *hijri* era firmed up the chronological base of all narratives. The boundaries between the eschatological and the historical time in Islam had been blurred too, since the birth of Islam as both a religion and a historical event could be precisely dated, as had been the case with early and medieval Christianity.

However, the complexity of time could never be reduced to simplicity. Thus we should expect to encounter several visions of time, rather than a single one. Its linearity from Creation to the Day of Judgement, inherited from Christianity, was one significant facet; the periodic appearance of prophets underlining temporal cyclicity was the other, although paradoxically this cyclicity is brought to a terminal point with the appearance of Muhammad. Indeed, on the one hand, the tradition of genealogy itself reinforces linear time, even as on the other, its extension to dynastic history implicitly replicates cyclicity again, with dynasties displacing one another in a cycle, as in the work of some landmark historians like Ibn Khaldun.

Understandably, there are several strands of the notion of eschatological time in Islam. If one strand emphasizes the eternity of cosmic time sans interruption, another views it as an infinite juxtaposition of

10 Eugenia Vanina, 'India: The Whole and Its Parts in Historical Perspective', *The Indian Historical Review*, vol. 28, 1–2, 2001: 93, n.26.

finite moments. The Quran itself envisages both eschatological and earthly time, one day of the former being equivalent to 1,000 years of the latter. This enabled historians such as Tabari to calculate the age of the universe at 14,000 earthly years, equally divided between Creation and the birth of Adam, and from Adam to the Coming of the Hour.

Even so, time had one indisputable break, i.e. before and after the rise of Islam in history and in theology. Before the birth of Islam, time was marked by *jahiliya*, ignorance or savagery, itself not one uninterrupted temporal unit, for periodic amelioration marked its flow with the descent of prophets sent by God; but the descent of the last prophet, Muhammad, makes that definitive break with the past, with *jahiliya*. Hence the one paradigmatic periodization in history centred on the *hijri* era vertically dividing the two ages.

Barring this one mega change, however, even as difference of phenomena over time is recognized by historians, it is not extended to the cognition of change. The inevitable link that post-Enlightenment European thought establishes between linearity of time and change, which is tantamount to an inner movement – progress – seems to break down here. The notion of historical periodization, underlining recognizable successive transformations, is absent from nearly all strands of Islamic historiography.

The terminal prophethood of Muhammad also gave reason for the Arab-Islamic historians to conceptualize world history. Since God's ultimate truth had been revealed through Muhammad, the truth must erase all remnants of untruth, infidelity, *kufr*, from the world before the Day of Judgement (*hashr)*, and Islam must prevail wherever humanity existed. This reasoning led to the conceptualization of the world's history into a single unit by early Arab historians. Al-Yaqubi (d. *c*.897) and al-Masudi (d. 956) are the acknowledged pioneers in this endeavour and it reaches its high water mark in Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century.

On the other hand, this expansive scale of history also circumscribed the two basic constituents of a historiographical exercise, i.e., notions of time and space, which were now entirely drawn from the Islamic framework. The world of which most Muslim historians wrote history was the world inhabited by their co-religionists, and history began in that world a few odd years before the arrival of Islam there, as if to explain the arrival. There were very significant exceptions, of course, especially in Iran and India during the later centuries; but the predominant presence remained a reflex of the Islamic paradigm. The near universal use of the *hijri* era by them reinforced the presence.

So too in India during its medieval centuries. With the very outstanding exception of Abul Fazl, courtier and historian of Emperor Akbar

(r.1556–1605), almost all other historians stuck to the *hijri* era and constituted their chronicles as the history of Muslim ruling dynasties in India. Barring Abul Fazl, they show profound ignorance and very little interest in the history of the region prior to the arrival of Islam. It is as if the prior history comprised the era of *jahiliya*, best ignored. The historians were not all uniformly orthodox practitioners of Islam; indeed, they reflected varying shades of commitment to it, from the 'liberal' Nizam al-Din Ahmad, Akbar's army's paymaster, *Bakhshi*, and Shah Jahan's historian Abdul Hamid Lahori, to Mulla Abdul Qadir Badauni, Imam of Wednesday's prayers at Akbar's court. Badauni was bitter on account of the rise of his one-time friend Abul Fazl to great heights in imperial favour, while he was stranded at near the starting point, and agonized by what he perceived as violent onslaughts by Akbar, backed by his enormous imperial power, on the most sacred tenets of Islam. He wrote his three-volume *Muntakhab al-Tawarikh* ('Elect among Histories') in secret, as a counterpoint to Abul Fazl's heretical *Akbar Nama*, composed under imperial commission and patronage. Driven by the need to seek Akbar's bounty and seething with rage at the desecration of Islam, Badauni let out his rage in the book. No such rage drove other historians. Yet, across the spectrum of historians, the paradigm of Islam remained dominant.

However, they made one extremely important departure, which implicates the segregation of history from theology. If theology perceived historical events as a patterned unfolding of divine will, medieval Indian historians did not perceive any grand pattern in history, nor did they envisage historical events as manifestations of God's will. On the contrary.

The historians of medieval India whose works we have inherited were all courtiers. As such, their horizon of what constituted historical events rarely extended beyond the court. They were primarily concerned with the accession of rulers, their battles, conquests and defeats, the administrative measures they adopted, the conduct of factions within the court, and so on. Often the historians, as courtiers, were themselves party to one or another faction, or were at the least sympathetic to one or another faction. They were thus eyewitness to, when not active participants in, the events they narrated. As such they were frequently aware of the motives that drove nobles or princes or, for that matter, denizens of the harem, to undertake an action that would enter their chronicles. For them, historical events were enacted through the medium of human volition.

Even the format of the narrative reinforces this assumption. The narrative follows the dynastic framework, derived from the Persian historiographical tradition, broken down to regnal units, with the reign