**Historiographies on the Nature of the Mughal State**

**COLONIALSIST HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Historians have given different interpretations for explaining the nature of the Mughal state.Some of the imperialist theorists projected pre-British India to be a static entity and argued that it is only with the coming of the British that India witnessed dynamic buoyancy in the socio- economic and political spheres. They propounded the theory of Oriental Despotism to characterise the pre British Indian states wherein he saw the Indian rulers functioning as despots besides rendering them an effeminate character.

**MARX’S MODEL OF AMP (Asiatic mode of production)**

This theory was followed by Marx’s model of Asiatic mode of production which propounded a highly state-deterministic theory and argued that state in pre British India was extremely exploitative and left no surplus with its subjects. As result there was no scope for class formation leading to any class struggle in India. He saw the village communities in India to be egalitarian in nature. However, this proposition had its own flaws as Mughal society was an extremely differentiated society, with great levels of urbanisation and huge development of trade and commerce. This theory too characterised the Mughal state as a despotic state.

**ALIGARH SCHOOL**

Starting in the early 1900s, waves of Indian nationalist historians began to contest different elements within this colonial historiography. By far the most signiﬁcant challenge came from successive generations of often Marxist-oriented historians based at Aligarh Muslim University like Irfan Habib, Athar Ali, Noman Ahmad Siddiqi, Iqtidar Alam Khan, ShireenMoosvi. Between the 1940s and the 1980s, the “Aligarh School” developed a powerful counterview of the Mughal Empire. Largely focusing their attention on Mughal administrative institutions, these scholars asserted that the Mughal Empire was – not unlike a modern state – a highly centralized, systematized, and stable entity. The force ofthisargumentwas suchthatthestrengthofMughal administrative institutions now became the starting point for most discussions (and explanations) of imperial successes and failures. Religion was largely discounted as a factor in the Mughal collapse. By the early 1960s, the Aligarh view of the Mughal Empire was widely accepted within and outside India.

From the 1970s onward, however, debates about the nature of empire in India took on new life thanks to a fresh cluster of historians. They questioned the Aligarh School’s exalted view of imperial institutions, arguing that the diffuse and fractured manner in which early modern societies functioned resisted the possibility of strong centralized institutions,notonly in Indiabut also inotherparts of theearlymodern world.

THUS EMERGED VIEWS LIKE

**PATRIMONIAL- BUREAUCRATIC STATE**

Stephen Blake analyses the Mughal state as a patrimonial bureaucratic empire. This concept is borrowed from Weber and applied to the Mughal state. This postulate is based on the premise that in small states, the ruler governed as if it was his patrimony or household realm. With the expansion of territory and emergence of large states a bureaucracy has to be recruited for effective governance. This was the basis of patrimonial bureaucratic empire. However, the focus still remained on the state’s structure, devoiding any role to human agency, models like these ignore processes of change integral to Mughal structure.

In late 1980’s Andre wink in his study stressed on understanding the processes that went into state formation. He pointed out the significance of processes of alliance making and alliance breaking in the formation of early modern states.

Besides, gift exchanges, matrimonial alliances, feast activities and other informal networks of negotiations, conflicts began to be increasingly viewed as crucial activities to reproduce state. BUT the issue with processual understanding was its de-privileging of state’s coercive apparatus or rather its absolute faith in human agency. Such an understanding however appears to be flawed as state and its institutions have great constraining abilities.

What emerged by the late 1990s however was a new perspective, one that considered the Mughal Empire less as a “medieval road-roller,” to quote Sanjay Subrahmanyam, and more as a spider’s web in which strands were strong in some places and weak in others, shedding light on the need to account for regional phenomena caught between the various strands. According to this interpretation, the empire hung loosely over Indian society, exerting only a ﬂeeting impact on local societies, local landed elites (Zamindars), and everyday life.

Against this backdrop, there has been a renewed push to comprehend the sources of Mughal power beyond its administrative, military, and ﬁscal institutions. Farhat Hasan’s State and Locality in Mughal India is of special note. Even though expressing discontent with the ﬁscal or military prisms through which most studies of the Mughal state are conducted, Hasan is determined to not “de-privilege” the state. State and Locality offers four particularly valuable insights:

(i) The Mughal state could not simply command obedience, but had to “manufacture” it by implanting itself within local political, social, and economic networks of power;

(ii) besides collecting taxes, the Mughal state also contributed and garnered support by offering security and playing a key role in redistributing monetary and social resources among the most powerful elements in Indian society;

(iii) The Mughal state was continuously being moulded and constrained by the society that it ostensibly governed; and

(iv) The Mughal state was a dynamic and continuously evolving entity quite unlike the static and stable creation that emerges from Mughal imperial sources or most modern accounts of the empire.

In 1990’s early modern historians Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramanyam even before Hasan had put out a call for scholarship on state formation in South Asia that took on its “evolution over time” and “variation over space. This has been realised in recent works on the Mughals. Munis d faruqui’s work on the role of princely households in Mughal state formation is one of them. It highlights a different understanding of how state formation took place in Mughal India.

Conclusion

From the above debate one can clearly discern that the discussion of nature of the Mughal state has been a widely contested theme among historians. While it is impossible to hold one view as representing the true picture, one can definitely say, that the recent studies on Mughal state formation have complicated our understanding on the theme. However this has also helped in providing a more nuanced understanding of the nature of Mughal state.