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Introduction

The early moderns were greedy. They had a greed for land, for riches, and for worldly goods, tastes, and pleasures. This acquisitiveness was matched by an inquisitiveness: an incessant yearning for knowledge and for beauty, for the path either to salvation or utopia, but also for fresh ways of expressing themselves and articulating their place in the world. Some of this hunger was quite real; a feasting after the hardships of era-defining plague, pestilence, and famine. Others had not a growling belly but a mind whirring with curiosity, possibly stimulated by the receipt of new ideas or even newfound intoxicants. If there is a thread linking an adventurer like Hernán Cortés with a former slave like Malik Ambar or a shadowy figure like Himmat Bahadur, those Jain ascetics invited to the Mughal court with Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit delegations to the Forbidden City in Beijing, it was that they lived in a world with a culture of increasingly restless (and sometimes forced) mobility.[1]

Occurring by stages, 'Occidental breakout' began in the decades following the Black Death, hastening after Europeans 'discovered' the Americas and a direct maritime route to Asia in the 1490s. One consequence was the so-called 'Columbian Exchange' between the New and Old worlds, from which a form of capitalism gradually developed and spread across the globe in interaction with its regional or local cousins.[2] The period following the pestilence (pandemic?) of the Black Death and the cessation of Timur's world conquests, to the global warfare of the eighteenth century and the onset of the Industrial Revolution, witnessed the expanding scale and quickening pace of movement that both spurred and satisfied contemporaries' rapaciousness. This meant a gradual yet palpable breaking away from the past, a period with its own distinctive character even as it laid the foundations for modernity – a period we call the 'early modern'. Can we discern such a break in the historical experience of India's many peoples and the communities, societies, and states of which they were a part? Can we place India within the portrait of early modernity just sketched out? Such questions are the province of this book.

The research and writing of *India and the Early Modern World* coincided with a twenty-first century pandemic of truly global proportions – global in both the reach of a new virus and the ramifications of quarantines and lockdowns upon a planet and its peoples more connected than ever before. Our recent experience highlights how rapidly phenomena can be transmitted from one part of the world to others, how this can lead to broadly similar patterns of experience in far-flung locales, but also how phenomena and their effects can be transmuted as they travel across distances, and how the distinctiveness of local approaches and the specificity of place – whether in terms of demography, government, society, culture, and so forth – can mediate or inflect experiences and outcomes in different areas. Our recent troubles are testament, therefore, to the need for ‘global history’ approaches that identify connections and make comparisons a part of the examination of global phenomena, while being alert to the limits of connectivity, the enduring power of locality, and the role of ‘endogenous’ developments.

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[1] Faroqhi, *Travel*, offers a fabulously rich picture of employment and (im)mobility in the early modern Ottoman Empire. On the many motivations and pressures linked to the relocation of free and forced labour, see: Paquette, *Seaborne Empires*, 131-44. See, also: §5.2.

[2] On the 'Occidental breakout' of the Portuguese and Spanish into the Atlantic to Africa, the Americas, and Asia: Darwin, *Tamerlane*, 50-65, 97-99, where the author notes that the role of this development in the rise of Euro-American hegemony in the global system was not inevitable and immediate but came a few centuries later. See, also: Belich, 'Black Death'. Sussman, 'Black Death', argues that India was left relatively unscathed, despite being plugged into those maritime and terrestrial trade routes via which plague is thought to have passed across Eurasia.

Keeping all this in mind, this book examines India’s place within the set of shared experiences constitutive of early modernity, to identify how India was shaped by some of the same pressures of the period experienced elsewhere or else vitally contributed to those phenomena seen as its hallmarks.[3] At the same time, it contrasts aspects of India’s experience with those of other parts of the world, whether to bring to light how and why India’s experience was distinctive or to demonstrate the limits of shared experience and, ultimately, the limits of the global early modern world itself. With these goals in view, this chapter sets out the necessary context and conceptual frameworks for the rest of this book, starting with a description of the Indian political landscape in the century or so immediately following Timur’s invasion in 1398. What follows is a panoramic survey of the steadily expanding frontiers of state power over the varied landscapes of south Asia, culminating in the Mughal Empire and its successor states. For this process brought more and more Indians under kingly – or even imperial – authority, not to mention their yoking to the plough.

1.1. India after Timur: Indian States, c. 1400-c.1600

Also known as Temür, Timur-i Lang, ‘Timur the Lame’, and Tamerlane, Timur was born in the 1330s into a lesser clan of the Chagatai khanate, one of the four divisions of the erstwhile Mongol world empire of Chinggis or Genghis Khan (d. 1227). By 1370, he was master of the Chagatai khanate, and thus of Transoxiana (the area across the river Oxus). Timur’s conquest of central Eurasia was in motion from 1380, with present-day Iran and Iraq, the Caucasus and southern Russia brought under his rule. Timur also pushed further west and, in 1402, defeated the Ottomans and took the Ottoman ruler as his hostage, triggering the Ottoman interregnum and civil war that lasted until Mehmed I was crowned in 1413, by which time Timur himself was long dead.[4] Timur’s prospect had also extended southward to the Indian subcontinent’s great riches, a prize he had taken in 1398 after launching a devasting raid into north India. Some of the effects of Timur’s plunder raid were immediate, but others – such as state formation triggering a new political cycle (see: chapter 7) or a sharper articulation of identity spurring vernacularisation (chapter 9) – unfolded over the early modern centuries.[5]

1.1.1. Landscapes and Populations

Who did Timur have to defeat to take India’s riches? What did the political organisation of late medieval India look like? Today, in very remote pockets of the subcontinent, there remain peoples whose habitations may fall within the territorial boundaries of the nation-states of Afghanistan and Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, even though their lives and livelihoods are little affected by such sovereign authority. Their number are shrinking, however, as processes of bringing the land and its people under the jurisdiction of some or other state are still culminating, thanks to transport and communications technologies that have shrunk distance and made the state's surveillance and control more effective.[6] These processes quickened in the nineteenth century under the aegis of the colonial state but are centuries long and built upon much earlier foundations.

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[3] How the early modern world is conceived, and India situated within it in this book, owes something to pioneering approaches, e.g., Richards, ‘Early Modern India’. See, further: §11.2.

[4] Darwin, *Tamerlane*, 4-6.

[5] For a similar appreciation of Timur’s impact: Eaton, *Persianate Age*, 99-141, 217-24. See, also: Orsini and Sheikh, ‘Introduction’, 22-28, for a rich yet succinct overview of political change in north India after Timur’s invasion.

The Jats, for example, shifted at some time over the eleventh to sixteenth centuries from pastoralism to settled agriculture in Punjab, but tribal or pastoral societies quite probably constituted a far greater share of even the highly centralised Mughal Empire than courtiers and later historians have had us believe. Such groups were not remote or isolated, however, exhibiting varying degrees of nomadism or pastoralism versus settlement and differing degrees and kinds of interaction with areas and peoples more systematically under the yoke of a centralised state (e.g., exchanging forest or pastoral products for those of the plains, providing seasonal labour). Some were gradually 'absorbed' into settled agriculture, like the Jats, while others acquired landed status that they were able to pass on to their heirs (a process called 'Rajputisation' by one historian of north Indian society).[7] Up to the late eighteenth century, they maintained a broad range of relationships with the state, from integration to fierce resistance.[8] Thus, when we picture states and empires in pre-modern India or elsewhere, we ought to see the state not as shaded in solid red on the map, but as a lumpy entity with its power thicker in the agrarian heartlands and thinner or more contested – and its boundaries much blurrier – in forested, desert, or upland zones.[9]

Around 1400, some areas remained either uninhabited and unsettled, or else settled but not subject to a larger political authority than that of a local clan or tribe or other collectivity. They were most likely to be found beyond the desert frontier or forest line.[10] There was far more jungle to be found in 1400 than 1600 or 1800 or the present day due to the steady clearing of the land to make way for subsistence and then commercial agriculture, and the deforestation of land for its timber and other natural resources – processes that are also centuries-long and were accelerating in the early modern period (see: §5.1). Or, to put it differently, as little as 20 or 30 per cent of the land in south and southeast Asia was settled and densely populated at the beginning of the sixteenth century; people lived surrounded by swathes of forest, as they did in other parts of Afro-Eurasia, too.[11] Jungle can still be found in the uplands of the northeast and the centre of the Indian peninsula – even as vast tracts have been steadily cleared to make way for tea gardens and plantations – but was once also found in parts of Punjab in the northwest, such as the Lakhi Jungle.[12] Upland pastures and deserts were likewise beyond the pale of populous settlement. Unlike jungle, however, deserts have become larger in consequence of environmental change and ecologically-deleterious alterations to land use. Desertification can also be linked to the mobility of India's great rivers. For instance, the Indus was very susceptible to changes in its major tributaries, most especially the highly mobile Sutlej, which shifted several times during the early modern period, once or twice swerving through the parched lands of Bikaner and reaching the sea at its own mouth.[13] The Thar, India's largest desert, is spread over Rajasthan and parts of the present-day provinces of Gujarat, Haryana, and Punjab. Those peoples who lived in these environments – forests, uplands and deserts – by necessity travelled to larger centres of populations for trade, exchanging the specialist productions from their locales with those of plains societies.[14]

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[6] Scott, *Art*, with a statement about the role of technology on xii.

[7] Kolff, *Naukar*, 71-74.

[8] Singh, 'Conformity and Conflict'; Alam, *Crisis*, 140.

[9] Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 21.

[10] Habib, *Agrarian System*, 1-24, for a rich survey of the variety of settled landscapes and the incursion of settlements into scrublands and jungles. Valuable insight into the 'politics of wildness' can be found in: Skaria, 'Being *Jangli*'. See, also: Singh, 'Forests'; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*.

[11] Wink, *Indo-Islamic World*, 38.

[12] Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 76, 80.

[13] Lally, *India and the Silk Roads*, 32-33.

Map 1A
India

For the most part, settled populations were found in the plains where seasonal rains were supplemented by river water that could be channelled into irrigation canals, thereby making cultivation possible over a large area through the year, an additional benefit being the rich alluvium brought down from the uplands. Forming the northern limit of the Indian subcontinent, the Karakoram range and the Himalayas are the source of two of India's great river systems (see: Map 1A). Draining into the Arabian Sea and the western Indian Ocean is the Indus, whose tributaries – the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej – give the region its name, Punjab (lit. 'five rivers'). Draining into the Bay of Bengal and the eastern Indian Ocean are the Yamuna and the Ganges, their confluence at Allahabad/Prayagraj being a sacred centre holy to Hindus, and which are joined by numerous other tributaries to form one of the most fertile and densely populated parts of India. Already major capitals by the Middle Ages, Delhi and Agra had grown beside the Yamuna, a testament to its strategic importance. From their headwaters in the upland peninsular spine known as the Western Ghats, the Godavari, Krishna, and Kaveri rivers each flow into the Bay of Bengal. Separating these northern and southern rivers is the Narmada, which originates in the central Indian plateau and which is often taken as a kind of dividing line between north and south India.

1.1.2. North India: the Delhi Sultanate and its Successors

Generally, population density increased downstream, and was greatest on the fertile deltas. Greater densities made it easier for rulers to tax the populace and thereby raise revenues to build the edifice of state power – a bureaucracy, a military, and a political centre or capital, which often played home to the royal court. Thus, while a few villages or a larger area of countryside and town might be under the authority of a local ruler, whether a strongman or large landlord, such men might be incorporated within a kingdom or a hereditary royal dynasty, in turn. Around 1400, there were two important polities whose authority was larger still in the sense of wielding authority over hereditary dynasties and kingdoms. In the north, was the Delhi Sultanate, the collective name for five successive dynasties from the early thirteenth to the early sixteenth centuries whose rulers for the most part made Delhi their capital: the Mamluk, Khalaji, Tughlaq, Sayyid, and Lodi dynasties (Map 1B). Under the Tughluq ruler, Alauddin Khalji, campaigns into peninsular India expanded the reach of Sultanate authority to its greatest extent by the mid-fourteenth century, but at some cost. The Tughluq polity steadily became more territorially compact, while its military power was so depleted that barely 10,000 cavalrymen were mustered in defence against Timur's devasting invasion in 1398. Timur sacked the capital, seizing its valuable hordes and impoverishing north India. The Tughluq state survived until c. 1412 and was succeeded in Delhi by the rule of the Sayyids (1414-51) and then the Lodis (1451-1526).[15]

Map 1B
The Delhi Sultanate: Lodi Rule on the Eve of the Mughal Conquest

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[14] The fear of mobile peoples who lived in these spaces, but migrated seasonally for trade with plains societies, sharpened after the Indian Rebellion, accelerating the (forced) settlement of such groups and the control of their homelands; see: Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam, eds., *Society and Circulation*.

[15] Kumar, 'Delhi Sultanate' is an excellent primer. See, also: Asher and Talbot, *India*, 40-53.

Before Timur's invasion, a number of regional kingdoms were already starting to make their appearance, often at the expense of the Delhi Sultanate, and often owing a debt to mobile Sufi leaders and footloose Muslim diasporas.[16] After Timur left, this process reached its climax, for the Bengal, Gujarat, Jaunpur, and Malwa sultanates had all come into being. Bengal's distance from Delhi and its landscape of thick jungle and manifold intersecting rivers meant the Delhi sultans faced the perennial difficulty of maintaining their control, especially when the officers appointed to rule on their behalf began asserting their independent authority; so came to be the Ilyas Shahi dynasty (1342-1493, with a brief interregnum in the early fifteenth century). By the late fifteenth century, the Hussain Shahi dynasty (1493-1538) had taken control.[17] Gujarat was another seaboard state, although a little closer to Delhi than Bengal. It also seceded from Tughluq rule relatively unchallenged, with Zafar Khan assuming the title of Muzaffar Khan in 1407. His grandson and successor founded the city of Ahmedabad in 1411, with the dynasty's rule lasting until 1573 despite numerous challenging from neighbouring polities and the Portuguese, who first landed on India's western coast in 1498.[18]

Jaunpur lay between the realm of the Delhi Sultanate and Bengal, and its rulers – the Sharqi dynasty – broke ties with Delhi in 1396, prior to Timur's campaign. Jaunpur territory was former crown land, so that its existence represented a grave material loss to the Tughluq and Sayyid rulers. Sikandar Lodi sacked Jaunpur and effectively extinguished Sharqi authority in 1494.[19] Malwa, in central India, was another polity established by an erstwhile Tughluq officer who severed his allegiance to the centre. It bordered the authority of the Bahmani sultanate in the Deccan, Gujarat, and Mewar (Udaipur).[20] Mewar deserves special mention, being one of the pre-eminent Rajput kingdoms and because it lay in southeastern Rajasthan on strategic routes to Delhi and the Ganges as well as Gujarat and its ports. Its rise took place under Rana Kumbha (r. 1433-68) – leader of the Sisodias, one of the most prestigious Rajput lineages – who fought the Gujarat and Malwa rulers to carve out his territory. Its other neighbours included the powerful Rajput states of Marwar (Jodhpur) and Amber (Jaipur), established by the Rathores and Kacchwahas; like the Sisodiyas, theirs were ruling lineages of some pedigree by the post-Timurid period.[21]

1.1.3. South India: Vijayanagara and the Deccan Sultanates

Many of these changes were prefigured in south India, specifically the area known as the Deccan. This is often a fairly broad category, used to describe lands south of the Vindhya range or the Narmada river up to the banks of the Kaveri, within which the modern-day states of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa form an intermediate zone of sorts, separating everything to its south from the Indus and Gangetic valley zones of the north. Of course, this is a northerner's perspective; a narrower or more specific usage confines itself to the plateau extending over the south and west of the Indian peninsula containing the Krishna and Godavari river basins (and thus excluding the Carnatic), while other uses of 'Deccan' and 'Deccani' revolve not around terrain but the identities of people found in the south (described below).[22] The massive yet short-lived expansion of the Tughluq sultanate in the early fourteenth century involved the southward march of its armies and the conquest of parts of the Deccan. Alauddin

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[16] Digby, 'Before Timur Came'. See, also: §3.1.1.
[17] Eaton, *Bengal Frontier*, 32-70.
[18] Sheikh, *Forging*; Balachandran, *Narrative Pasts*.
[19] Asher and Talbot, *India*, 112-13.
[20] Ibid, 113-15.
[21] Ibid, 115-16.
[22] Sohoni, *Deccan Sultanate*, 1-8.

Bahman Shah (d. 1358) revolted against his Tughluq master and carved-out the Bahmani Sultanate from some of the Tughluq lands in the Deccan. This was an instance of something larger: as the control and influence of the Delhi sultans over the south waned, those regional kingdoms that had been flattened by the armies from the north began re-emerging, while entirely new states also took shape around the mid-fourteenth century. Of the latter, the most significant was the Vijayanagara Empire (Map 1C), a collective term for the rule by four successive dynasties – the Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, and Aravidu houses – from the 1330s to the 1640s, their capital for the most part at the new capital at Vijayanagara (lit. 'City of Victory').[23]

Map 1C
Vijayanagara at its Zenith

Initially, the Sangama dynasty expanded their authority fairly slowly and steadily from the kingdom established by the Sangama brothers, Harihara I (r. 1336-56) and Bukka Raya I (r. 1356-77), with members of the extended family exercising their own personal authority over the constituent parts of the Vijayanagara polity. These domains, extending from the central and southern parts of present-day Karnataka to the southern part of Andhra Pradesh, were rapidly enlarged in the first half of the fifteenth century by Devaraya II (r. 1432-46); Sangama rule then stretched from coast to coast. The Vijayanagara Empire thus became the largest polity ever created in south India, extending over most of the peninsula south of the Tungabhadra river. This expansion brought its rulers into conflict with the Bahmani sultans, whose sway was to the north of the Krishna river. There were three areas of conflict between these states: the Raichur *doab* (a term for the area between two rivers, the Tungabhadra and Krishna, in this case), the fertile Krishna-Godavari river delta, and the western coast and its ports (from whence rulers secured supplies of warhorses from Arabia, Persia, and central Asia).[24]

Only when Devaraya II welcomed military entrepreneurs skilled in cavalry warfare could the Vijayanagara state compete effectively with their neighbour. That said, Devaraya II's successors struggled to compete with both the Bahmani sultans and the Gajapati rulers of a growing kingdom founded in the 1430s in what is today northeastern Andhra and southern Orissa; each made considerable gains at the expense of the Vijayanagara Empire. The result was the deposition of the Sangamas by the short-lived Saluva dynasty (1485-1505), and then of the latter by the Tuluvas. The second Tuluva king, Krishnadeva Raya (r. 1509-29), worked to consolidate the state, reconquer lost territories, and expand the empire, making it the preeminent power in the south. Alongside defeat of the Gajapatis, the Tuluva rulers were buoyed by the shattering of the Bahmani Sultanate into a number of new successor states over the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, often under the aegis of the kingdom's own governors and ministers.[25]

Map 1D
The Deccan Sultanates and the Nayaka Kingdoms

These states were centred on Khandesh (ruled by a dynasty that became known as the Faruqi Khans) and Berar (the Imad Shahis) in the north of the Deccan; Ahmadnagar (under the Nizam Shahis) to the west; Bidar (the Baridis) on the central plateau; Bijapur (under the Adil

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[23] Michell, *Southern India*, 9-16.

[24] Although it now seems a little dated, Stein's *Vijayanagara* remains a reliable guide and is still much-cited.

[25] Eaton, *Eight Indian Lives*, 78-104, offers a compact yet colourful survey of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Vijayanagara. Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, 'Ideologies', 210-225, examines Krishnadeva Raya's imperial ideology.

Shahis) in the southern Deccan; and Golkonda (the Qutb Shahis) in the eastern Deccan. They are collectively known as the ‘Deccan Sultanates’ (Map 1D).[26] They were competitive, for each sought (unsuccessfully) to enlarge its authority over the entire Deccan, save for their collaboration in 1565 against the Vijayanagara Empire.[27] The Aravidu family ruled in the name of the Tuluva kings from the 1540s until 1565, when Tuluva defeat by the combined forces of the Deccan Sultanates at the Battle of Talikota allowed the Aravidus to seize power. They were able to cling onto power for less than a century, although ruling a far more compact state. A raft of new kingdoms emerged in the Vijayanagara Empire’s place, described as its successor states because of the continuities between old and new.[28] These were the *nayaka* states (i.e., those led by *nayaks* – governors or lords), notable among which were Mysore, Madurai, Ikkeri, Ramnad, and Tanjavur (Map 1D). They survived until around the late seventeenth century, when many were absorbed either by the Deccan Sultanates or else a little later by the expanding Mughal and Maratha empires.[29]

Despite centuries of rule by the Muslim lineages of the Delhi and Deccan sultanates, the population of the south – like that of the north – was predominately what we would call ‘Hindu’ (**2.1**). *Dakhni* (Deccani) is the name given to Muslims belonging to those conquest groups who migrated from central Asia and Iran first to north India and then further south.[30] (Dakhni also refers to the regional language that developed in this period; see: §9.2.2). *Ghariban* (‘foreigners’) denoted even newer Muslim emigrants from Iran and the Arab and Turkish lands under the control of the Ottoman Empire.[31] They migrated because of the opportunities for mercenary or bureaucratic service, and because of the demand for litterateurs and learned (religious) men, engineers, artists, and workmen, contributing tremendously to the dynamism of early modern south Indian states in return.[32] To their number can be added the group known as *Habshis*: Africans from the east coast (present-day Ethiopia and Somalia), mostly shipped as military slaves, of whom some attained independence and even great power, office, and status, such as Malik Ambar. Alongside Hindus, the Dakhnis and Habshis formed the political and social elite of south India, whose existence was succoured by agrarian surplus produced by the bulk of the population, notably cotton, millet, rice, and sugar, as well as other valuable crops such as indigo and pepper.

1.2. Timur *Redux*: Mughal Rule to c. 1707

1.2.1. Climate and the Little Ice Age

Geography and environmental factors have been important to the scholarship of André Wink, Jos Gommans, and others shaping what has been presented so far in this chapter and what follows in the rest of this book.[33] ‘Natural’ factors play an important part in explaining not only the expansion of the agrarian frontier (chapter 5) and the elaboration of the state’s revenuebureaucratic apparatus, which permitted greater centralisation (chapter 7). They also explain the interaction between the settled and mobile worlds of the wet and dry zones, which were implicated in everything from the pattern of trade to the siting of capital cities and the character of urbanism (chapter 4), the production of hard power or violence (chapter 6), and ultimately the nature and dynamics of the state in south Asia. Not only did geography, environment, and climate give form over a millennium or so to what Wink calls the 'Indo-Islamic world'; short-term fluctuations in each of these factors during the early modern period engendered some of those phenomena and developments that mark out this era as distinctive (§5.1).

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[26] Michell and Zebrowski, *Deccan Sultanates*, 8-18, offers a digestible guide. For a recent, rich analysis: Fischel, *Local States.*

[27] Fischel, *Local States*, 83-85.

[28] See, for example: Bes, ‘Sultan’, for analysis of continuities relating to dress and statecraft.

[29] Michell, *Southern India*, 16-22, for a concise guide. See, also: Fischel, *Local States*, 192-235; Narayana Rao and Subrahmanyam, ‘Ideologies’, 225-32.

[30] Eaton, *Eight Indian Lives*, especially 67-70, on the shifting meanings of *Dakhni*. For more detail: Fischel, *Local States*, especially 70-74.

[31] For a useful, critical discussion of the terms used to describe this group, see: Fischel, ‘Ghariban’.

[32] Overton, ed., *Iran*, contains a rich survey of the topic.

[33] See, most recently: Wink, *Indo-Islamic World*, for a synthesis putting historical geography centre-stage. Other references follow throughout this book.

Across the northern hemisphere, climatic cooling and heating interacted with other environmental factors to shape broadly common patterns of change in agrarian life. A jump-start to agrarian expansion due to favourable climate in the ninth to thirteenth centuries was followed by a highly variable period of more adverse weather (including cooling or drying), then a milder, slightly more agriculturally propitious period up to the late sixteenth century. After this warming and plenty came cooling and upheaval linked to volcanic mega eruptions (as in 1580, 1586, and 1593 in Indonesia and Peru, and then through the latter half of the next century), which had their own cooling effects but also contributed to more severe El Niño events.[34] The combination of volcanic activity, weather events related to the North Atlantic Oscillation and El Niño Southern Oscillation, and changes in the sun's energy output gave rise to the so-called early modern Little Ice Age. This disturbed farming from the 1560s or 1570s and most markedly – but in two phases – in the decades either side of the mid-seventeenth century before, finally, another mild and productive period commenced from about the second-quarter of the eighteenth century.[35] The bleaker periods saw reduced agricultural production but also epidemics, in turn creating social dislocation and political crisis. The impacts of the turbulence in the seventeenth century were formerly described by some European historians such as Geoffrey Parker as a 'general crisis' in which poor harvests and popular hardship triggered unrest and social disorder leading to the toppling of political regimes and even regicide.

Using fresh scientific data and evidence from outside Europe, Parker has not only resuscitated his much-debated thesis of a European 'general crisis'; he enlarges it into a 'global crisis' afflicting the northern hemisphere from England to China.[36] But nowhere was the suffering as severe or prolonged, nor the landscape so deeply scarred as in parts of the Ottoman Empire. The empire's semi-arid expanses were far more vulnerable to even slight environmental change, so that the combination of fierce cold and the worst drought in six centuries with the demands of a state at war helped unleash a crisis of such severity that it would take a century or so to recover, according to recent work by Sam White.[37] Belying the general pattern, in other words, were numerous conjunctural factors that shaped different regions' or states' varied experience of climatic upheaval. Mughal India, too, has been drawn into this analysis, not least because of the devastating famines of the 1630s, which hit Gujarat especially hard. In contrast to their counterparts in other parts of the world, however, the Mughal dynasty came out largely unscathed.[38]

1.2.2. The 'Great Mughals'

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[34] Jenkins, *Climate, Catastrophe, and Faith*, 90.

[35] Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, vol. i, 103, 106.

[36] Parker, *Global Crisis*.

[37] White, *Climate of Rebellion*, which is richer and more complex than can be adequately summarised here.

[38] Richards, 'Seventeenth-Century Crisis', engages with the first iteration of the 'general crisis' thesis and opens a special issue of the journal on the topic also spanning southeast Asia. This is not too dissimilar from Parker's subsequent treatment of these same regions in *Global Crisis*, 115-51, 399-420, 484-506.

But who were the Mughals? – and why are they important? The first Mughal was Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur (1483-1530), who was born in central Asia and was a fifth-generation patrilineal descendant of Timur and a fifteenth-generation matrilineal descendant of Chinggis Khan. By the time Babur came into the world, Timur's empire had fragmented, with fighting among Timurid and Mongol kin to wrest a larger domain for themselves. Babur entered the fray aged eleven. Ten years later and already something of a vagabond, he was driven out of his homeland in the Fergana Valley, seizing the Timurid outpost of Kabul in 1504, which provided him and his growing band of followers a secure base and considerable military resources. In the 1520s, they began regular raids in Punjab as Babur's attention turned to the larger prize of north India, also known as Hindustan. Invited by the Afghan rulers of Punjab to invade, Babur fought and defeated the last of the Lodi sultans in 1526, inaugurating Mughal rule over India.[39]

The Mughal Emperors, 1526-1748

Babur, r. 1526-30
Humayun, first r. 1530-40

interregnum under Sher Shah Suri

Humayun, second r. 1555-56
Akbar, r. 1556-1605
Jahangir, r. 1605-27
Shah Jahan, r. 1628-58
Aurangzeb, r. 1658-1707
Bahadur Shah, r. 1707-12
Jahandar Shah, r. 1712-13
Farrukhsiyar, r. 1713-19
Rafi' ul-Daula, r. 1719
Rafi' ul-Darjat, r. 1719
Muhammad Shah, r. 1719-48

Mughal line continues to 1858

Although the Mughals exploited their Timurid inheritance in time (§8.1), Babur had hesitations about deriving his legitimacy from such credentials on account of his numerous Timurid relatives – who had helped with the conquest (*mulkgirlik*) or were subsequently invited to help him pacify Hindustan – standing ready to seize all or part of his new domain for themselves.[40] Stretching from present-day Afghanistan to the north Indian plain, the early Mughal state was of a very different form to that of the 'classical age' of the late sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century (§7.1). It was yet to be consolidated and rather fragile, being vulnerable to challengers from within as well as the vestiges of Lodi authority across the north, with taxation and administrative arrangements being rudimentary, so we can debate whether and to what extent it could be termed an empire at the time of Babur's death in 1530.[41] All these challenges came to the fore during the reign of Babur's son and successor, Humayun. His time on the throne was cleft by a period in exile at the Safavid court in Iran having been defeated by Sher Shah Suri, who had risen to power via military service to the nascent Mughal dynasty.[42] Humayun's first reign was from 1530 to 1540, returning to India to defeat the Sher Shah's heir in 1555. Upon his death in 1556, the throne passed to his adolescent son, Akbar, with government in the hands of regents until 1560.

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[39] Dale, *Babur*, 100-208. Here, see also: Digby, 'Before Timur Came', 314.

[40] For a history of the Mughals steeped in the Timurid ideological, institutional, and technological inheritance, see: Wink, *Indo-Islamic*, 136-59.

[41] See, usefully: Dale, *Babur*, 177-92.

Map 1E
The Mughal Empire at Akbar's death, 1605

Before 1560, Akbar's reign was concerned with defeating the remaining claimants of the Sur dynasty, reconquering territory in the Lahore to Jaunpur imperial heartland, and expansion into central India. Upon reaching his majority, Akbar began a period of sustained expansion, first into Malwa in 1561, which lay north of the Vindhyas, and then into the present-day regions of Odisha in 1564 and Rajasthan toward the end of the decade. In the early 1570s, the conquests of Gujarat and Bengal extended the empire's frontier to the shores of the western and eastern Indian Ocean regions, bringing key ports and their wealth into the Mughals' ambit (Map 1E). Meanwhile, a period of administrative reform was underway, supporting the consolidation and better integration of newly conquered lands. Although there were important developments in the Mughal state under his son and successor, Jahangir (r. 1605-28), the next moment of significant territorial expansion came in 1636 during the reign of Akbar's grandson, Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58), with the absorption of the erstwhile Ahmadnagar Sultanate into the Mughal domains.

As Bijapur had swallowed up Bidar, and Golkonda had annexed parts of the waning Vijayanagara state, there remained only two powerful obstacles to Mughal domination over the Deccan. A treaty recognising Mughal supremacy was signed by the Adil Shahs of Bijapur and Qutb Shahs of Golkonda, but the Deccan was not pacified, for much of the countryside was outside either sultanate or Mughal control, creating a further obstacle to Mughal dominance by providing a space for the rise of a new power – the Marathas. The Deccan campaigns were headed by Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) – first as a prince, then as Mughal *padshah* or emperor – who moved his capital to the southern city of Aurangabad in 1681 and defeated the Bijapur and Golkonda armies later in that decade. The empire now obtained its greatest extent (Map 1F). Yet, it bears remembering that some conflicts produced very limited gains for the Mughals or even led to their defeat, and that a number of more or less independent kingdoms held out behind the lines of mountains and forests, more or less alluding Mughal power, including Kuch Bihar, Kamrup, Assam, Arakan, large parts of Ajmer province, as well as Orissa and central India (§6.2, §6.4.2).[43]

Map 1F
The Mughal Empire at Aurangzeb's death, 1707

1.2.3. The Marathas and Late Mughal India

Other than the Mughals' fiercest rivals, it bears asking: who were the Marathas? At the start of the seventeenth century, the Maratha leadership probably belonged to what was no more than one of many peasant-warrior groupings. In return for service to the Ahmadnagar sultan, the Marathas had acquired landed rights by the time of Maloji, who became an aide to the *de facto* ruler and was rewarded with an estate that subsequently passed to his son, Shahji. Shahji, however, served several masters: the Ahmadnagar sultan, the Mughal emperor for a time, and eventually the Bijapur sultan.[44] The eclipse of Bijapur power and the advance of the Mughal armies around the mid-seventeenth century established the context for Shahji's son, Shivaji, to make an independent bid for power. One source of Maratha-Mughal hostilities was the Mughal court's failure to incorporate Shivaji as a noble in the later 1660s. This was not because his claims were grandiose and of dubious legitimacy, but because Mughal elites saw him as merely a petty *zamindar* (landlord or landed gentry). Having steadily expanded into the space between the erstwhile Ahmadnagar and Bijapur sultanates, and consolidate the administration and military, Shivaji determined in the early 1670s that he should be crowned and invested as a Hindu king (§2.1.2).[45]

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[42] Asher and Talbot, *India*, 142-46.
[43] Habib, *Agrarian System*, 228-29.
[44] Gordon, *Marathas*, 41-58.

Aurangzeb's prolonged campaigning in the Deccan from the 1680s pitted the Mughals against Shivaji's successors, whose success or failure altered partly with the changing allegiance of local elite groups, while the toll of fighting and raiding on the land and its people was immense. A turning-point came following Aurangzeb's death in 1707. On the one hand, were difficulties faced on the ground, in the Deccan itself, where the Mughals struggled to maintain their grasp while the Marathas asserted their claims over various lands south of the Tapti river. On the other hand, political intrigue within the Mughal court erupted following the death of Aurangzeb's successor, Bahadur Shah I (r. 1707-12). Mughal succession had hitherto been an open contest, usually fought between rival claimants when one or other of the imperial princes felt conditions were ripe to launch their bid for the throne (§7.3.1). Prince Salim had launched a rebellion against Akbar in 1599, later ascending as Jahangir (his regnal name, meaning 'world seizer' or 'conqueror'), shortly afterwards facing a rebellion from his own son, Prince Khusrau, who was captured and blinded in 1607 to thwart his ambitions once and for all. Prince Khurram fought a war of succession upon Jahangir's death in 1627, ascending as Shah Jahan ('king of the world'), but a dramatic contest for the throne began a few decades later, resulting in the emperor's forced abdication and imprisonment in Agra, before the victor – Alamgir I, more commonly known as Aurangzeb – ascended the throne.

The war of succession after Bahadur Shah's death was among the last, however, for his successor, Jahandar Shah (r. 1712-13), was overthrown in a matter of months. Pulling the strings were the infamous Sayyid brothers, who effectively finished the open-ended system of succession by installing Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713-19) and a sequence of other puppet rulers before Muhammad Shah I (r. 1719/20-48) took his place on the throne. These factional contests were the context to the Marathas' demands finally being ratified in 1719 by one of the Sayyid brothers' emperors in Delhi. That said, as much as such recognition cemented the Marathas' rising power *outwardly*, it was also possible because of a change *inside* the Maratha state or *swarajya* (a term the Marathas used widely to describe their independent sovereignty or rule). It was not the Maratha king himself, but his *peshwa* (akin to a prime minister), who led the armies and brokered the deals. In the decades that followed, the *peshwas* became the *de facto* rulers of the Maratha domains, even as they came to share power with key Maratha chiefs, namely those of the Gaekwad, Holkar, and Scindia dynasties.[46] The *peshwas'* achievements were many. They included alliance-building and securing the loyalty of military leaders as well as literate elites, the latter to staff an increasingly streamlined bureaucracy; improving the region's relatively poor banking and credit facilities, thereby supporting the expansion of trade and the economy as a whole, shoring up the treasury, in turn; and continued territorial expansion, making the Maratha Empire the pre-eminent Indian power by the end of the period examined in this book (Map 1G), even protecting the Mughal emperor against invading forces in the 1750s.[47]

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[45] Ibid, 59-90.

[46] Ibid, 91-113.

[47] Ibid, 113-53, as well as 178-95, for a critical discussion of 'empire' and other concepts as descriptors of the Maratha polity.

Map 1G
The Maratha and other Mughal 'Successor States', c. 1760

The period from Akbar's reaching his majority in 1560 to Aurangzeb's death in 1707 witnessed the steady expansion of the Mughal imperium to its greatest extent and an efflorescence in the arts and intellectual life, culture and the economy. Often termed a 'golden age' or what Stephen F. Dale has called a 'Timurid renaissance', and granted the lion's share of scholars' attention, the unwarranted implication is that the subsequent period was one of dullness if not decline (the notion of 'decline' having been roundly dismissed thanks to work produced in the past forty years or so; §7.4).[48] Borrowing from Ottoman history, we might be slightly better off if we identify and describe the 1560-1707 period as the Mughal 'classical age'. It was a time which saw many of those institutions associated with Mughal rule come into being, including those later adapted or reformulated (sometimes by the Mughals' successors) as the Mughal state was itself transformed. Of course, we can only make use of the term with the weighty caveat that Mughal institutions probably never acquired a 'classical' form, given their constant flux, not to mention their variation across the non-homogenous political topography of the Mughal imperium,.[49] What also bears mentioning is that the period between the late classical age and the era of the 'colonial transition' was marked by the establishment and/or expansion of a number of states, many of a 'regional' character and often seen as successors to the Mughal imperium because they exhibited continuities with Mughal institutions and practices. Some were formed by erstwhile Mughal governors (e.g., Bengal, Awadh, Hyderabad; see: Map 1G), others by the Mughals' rivals (e.g., the Marathas), while others still were kingdoms that had been incorporated into the Mughal imperium (i.e., the Rajput states, like Mewar).

1.3. Early Modern Empires and Globalisation

The Mughal Empire was not the only by-product of the fragmentation of Timur's imperial domains. On its western fringe, Ottoman expansion resumed: the conquest of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453 and the conquest of Red Sea trading ports and the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina in 1517 were pivotal moments in the transition of a 'frontier principality' into a 'world empire'.[50] Safavid Iran was another successor state to Timur's short-lived empire.[51] Some, like the rulers of Muscovy – a sometime tributary state of the Mongol 'Golden Horde' – also benefited from the political ferment. After 1580, they broke out of Muscovy's core and rapidly expanded across the steppe to the shores of the Caspian, even reaching the Pacific by 1639 (see: Map 1H).[52]

A related process was the spread of Islam (chapter 3), for the rulers of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires were all Muslims. The expansion and consolidation of their domains not only helped to create states of a greater degree of centralisation than had been seen before (see: chapter 7, especially §7.5), but also helped to bring the languages, culture, and sciences of the Islamic world deeper into Eurasian societies (chapters 9 and 10). At the same time, Islam was spreading into sub-Saharan Africa and across the seas to southeast Asia, so that the Persianate cosmopolis was imbricated in the Afro-Eurasian and Indian Ocean worlds. This dynamism in the 'Orient' not only puts the late medieval Occidental breakout into perspective; it also reminds us of the many frameworks through which we should view the history of early modern India.

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[48] Dale, 'Legacy'. As for the dominance of the Akbar and Aurangzeb period, we might note the recent volume by Koch and Anooshahr, eds., *Mughal Empire*, which very valuably spotlights the Jahangiri and Shah Jahani eras – so often nested or skimmed over – within the classical age at large. By examining the decades either side of Aurangzeb's death, however, Kaicker's *King* breaks out of the confines of the classical age or the separation of the seventeenth century empire from that of the eighteenth century.

[49] Here, I take my cue from the incisive critique of Ottoman historiography advanced in Hathaway, 'Periodisation'.

[50] See: Goffman, *Ottoman Empire*.

[51] Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 82.

[52] Ibid, 65-72.

Map 1H
Early Modern World Empires

1.3.1. Situating Early Modern India

India's so-called 'Persianate age', as so magisterially surveyed by Richard M. Eaton, began centuries before the period studied in this book.[53] 'Persianate' in this and other scholars' usage refers to the ascendance of Persian as a language, becoming a lingua franca and obtaining a hegemony in literary and other kinds of knowledge production by the early modern period across a terrain stretching from the Balkans to Bengal and even to the Malay world.[54] 'Persianate' refers to more than language, however, and signals the dominance of (evolving, never static) cultural forms: arts, architecture, literature and literary forms, material culture, but also cuisine, dress, deportment, style, statecraft. These were transmitted in Persian texts and oral traditions, and via the peregrinations or migration of people from other parts of the Persophone world, especially (post-)Timurid Iran and central Asia.[55] Even the Vijayanagara Empire – still too often narrowly described as 'Hindu', as if this was a mutually exclusive cultural identity – was part of the Persianate world to a degree, such was the influence of Persianate culture.[56]

It was difficult to make a living in the parched lands of Iran and Iberia or the harsh and rugged Scottish Highlands. The inhabitants of these regions thus sought migrated to prosperous lands of opportunities like India and the New World.[57] The migration of Iranians (or Iranis, in Indian sources) was thus but one part of the larger transfer of population from poorer regions around the globe and was one factor in the steady increase in 'cross-cultural' migration from c. 1500 until the great migration boom after c. 1850. It was also one aspect of the larger kinetic culture of early modern times, other manifestations of which included the movement of courts, the circulation of itinerants and holy men, or the march of armies over ever greater expanses.[58] That said, it bears emphasising that those Basques and Scots who entered foreign service (military, commercial) or else settled in as distant locales as north America, the Baltic, and east-central Europe nowhere engendered anything like the so-called 'Persianate world', rendering the latter all the more remarkable and important.[59]

Though not an actors' category, contemporaries were aware of Persianate influences. For their part, Indians seldom expressed disgust toward the *ghariban* and more often emulated and interacted with new constructs and concepts, as we shall see. The reverse was not always the case: even two-and-a-half centuries of Mughal rule was insufficient to minimise the shock and horror some Persophone immigrants felt upon setting foot on Indian soil, to say nothing of the fear and loathing reported by those venturing beyond the fringe of the *Dar-al Islam* or Muslim world.[60] India was hardly a 'periphery', however, for it vitally shaped the 'Persianate cosmopolis' and was one of its centres, probably the preeminent one outside Iran, especially in the early modern centuries studied in this book. Reflexively, the Persianate world/cosmopolis is an important framework within which to situate and thereby better understand early modern India, even as we need to be aware of the limits of the 'Persianate' and ought not ignore competing, complementary, or overlapping but not quite equivalent constructs (e.g., the Sanskrit or the Arabic cosmopolis; see: §9.1).[61] Persian was used in what had become the predominately Muslim societies and states of western Asia, so that its spread was entangled with the spread not only of Islam, but of 'Islamicate' culture and learning even more broadly.

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[53] Eaton, *Persianate Age*.

[54] On this last, see: Subrahmanyam, *Tagus to the Ganges*, 76.

[55] On the migration of Iranian specialists directly to the late medieval and early modern Deccan: Eaton, *Eight Indian Lives*, 59-63, 99-102.

[56] Eaton, *Persianate Age*, 16.

[57] On the push-pull factors, itineraries, networks, and 'culture' underpinning early modern Persianate mobilities/circulation, see: Flatt, *Living Well*, 74-119.

[58] Lucasen and Lucasen, 'Mobility Transition Revisited', on cross-cultural migration in Europe, western Russia, and the Ottoman lands. Evidence of the wider kinetic culture can be found throughout this book.

[59] See: Miller, *Urban Societies*, 52, 69-71; Belich, 'Black Death', 101-02.

A word is due about the terms 'Islamicate' and 'Indic'. The former is a neologism coined by the late Marshall G.S. Hodgson and widely used nowadays. It does not refer to the 'world of Islam' or the influence of Islam as a religion. Instead, scholars use it to refer to the swathes of Afro-Eurasia under Muslim rule and its influences, be they upon art, architecture, language, literature, culture, and the sciences.[62] By the same turn, the term 'Indic' refers to Indian learning and norms 'beyond Hindu doctrine or practice'.[63] Both terms point to 'a repertoire of language and behaviour, knowledge and power,' shaping lived experience beyond the world of religious doxa or practice, David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence propose, and neither Islamicate nor Indic 'denotes simply bounded groups self-defined as Muslim or Hindu.'[64]

Why have these terms obtained such currency among historians of premodern south Asia?[65] As we shall see in the next two chapters, what seem to us like primordial identities – such as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' or even 'Indian' – were in actual fact little felt and of lesser importance in premodern south Asia.[66] It might be easy for us to slip Hindu for India/Indian and of Turk or Muslim for foreign/foreigner for the sake of convenience when talking about medieval or early modern south Asia, but this was seldom how contemporaries categorised self and other. Islam and Muslim culture became thoroughly indigenised within India, furthermore, both through their adjustment to the Indian environment and because of the engagement of non-Muslims with ideas, languages, traditions, and technologies brought by Muslims to the Indian subcontinent – an exchange and interplay that we shall explore throughout this book.[67] Consequently, we find many lineaments of premodern identity and loyalty, some mutually exclusive but others capable of overlapping, so that one's sense of self and other could well be complex and even fluid. Take, for instance, the conscious 'code-switching' between stitched clothes (Islamicate) and draped cloth (Indic) at the Vijayanagara and Maratha courts depending on the kind of business being conducted and the sort of image the ruler wanted to outwardly project.[68]

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[60] Alam and Subrahmanyam, *Indo-Persian Travels*, 131, 159-242.

[61] The following are valuable essays exploring the ideas and concepts described here and examined more fully in Amanat, 'Remembering the Persianate'; Green, 'Introduction'; Eaton, 'Persian Cosmopolis', which usefully notes the overlap and tension between 'Persianate' and 'Islamicate'.

[62] Gilmartin and Lawrence, 'Introduction', 2.

[63] Ibid, 2.

[64] Ibid, 2.

[65] Hodgson's differentiation of Islam from Islamdom and the Islamicate is not without its critics, such as: Ahmed, *What is Islam*, especially 157-75.

[66] Compare this with, say, the situation in the Ottoman lands by the late fifteenth century: Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 60-64.

[67] See, further: Alam, *Languages*.

[68] See: Lally, 'Fashion'.

Long before the craze for porcelain and armorial ware in eighteenth-century Europe, Timurid elites collected and displayed Chinese porcelain, sometimes in dedicated *chini-khanas* ('house of china' or 'china rooms'), pointing to the imbrication of the Persianate and Indo-Islamicate worlds with the Eurasian and Indian Ocean arenas.[69] Like the former, these terrestrial and/or maritime spaces of circulation and interaction also antedated the early modern period, even as their evolution entered a new phase after c. 1400 or c. 1500. Mughal imperial aspirations often returned to the dynasty's homeland in the continental interior of Eurasia – disastrously so, in the case of the wars of the 1640s and 1650s. Despite the Delhi Sultans' and Mughals' failure to politically knit central and south Asia together in a lasting way, India remained closely connected to the states and societies of Eurasian continental interior thanks to the routine movements of pastoralists and merchants, diplomats and holy men, and so forth, all the way through the early modern period.[70] During the fifteenth century, there seems to have been a revival in maritime trade as well as a reorientation, with India arguably moving to the centre of what historians call the 'Indian Ocean world'.[71] This concept is used in the sense of the 'greater Indian Ocean' or 'maritime Afro-Asia', made up of the seas and the ocean and their coastlines, but also their hinterlands and the deep interior.[72] Thus, when Vasco da Gama and his fellow Europeans arrived in Asian waters via the Cape of Good Hope for the first time at the end of the fifteenth century, they faced a very well-connected and competitive trading environment.

1.3.2. Occidental Breakout and Seaborne Empires

The Iberian powers sponsored the Occidental breakout that was well in motion by the post-Black Death era. Under the patronage of Henry the Navigator (1394-1460), Portuguese mariners ventured along the north and west African coasts, paving the way for Vasco da Gama's famous voyage of 1497-1499. The Portuguese monarchy made handsome profits from the spice trade because of its near monopoly over the Cape route in the sixteenth century – only a *near* monopoly, because merchants from other European nations began to try their hand at Euro-Asian trade by the late sixteenth century. On the heels of an Englishman landing in Asian waters via the Cape route in 1592 and a Dutchman following in 1595, a spate of rival companies – each competing for the profits from Euro-Asian trade – came into being. These companies helped to share the very high risks associated with the dangerous oceanic voyage, yet too much competition undercut profits, thereby undercutting the viability of trade.

Thus, merchants realised that some form of monopoly granted by their respective governments was necessary to support their enterprise, and so the East India Company (EIC) was granted its charter by the English monarch in 1600 and the Dutch Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) established as a merger of rival interests in 1602. At first, the VOC and EIC struggled to break into the competitive world of intra-Asian trade, which was critical to the procurement of those spices found across Asia and desired by European consumers. They had to compete with the Portuguese, who held something of a first-mover advantage given their relationships with Asian rulers and merchants as well as knowledge of routes, marketplaces, and procurement networks. In time, the Dutch would attain pre-eminence in Euro-Asian trade, this position subsequently superseded by the English company, even as it veered from one cash crisis to another, although no single European organisation dominated intra-Asian trade, such was its enormity.[73]

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[69] Chida-Rizvi, '*Chini-khana*'.

[70] Lally, *Silk Roads*.

[71] See, for instance: Palat, *Indian Ocean World-Economy*, 162-64.

[72] Vink, 'New Thalassology', 53.

Gabriel Paquette has recently made compatible two seemingly contradictory issues regarding the 'seaborne empires' of the early modern Spanish and Portuguese, the Dutch, French, and British (Map 1H). On the one hand, each of these powers were rather peripheral *within* Europe before they began 'metamorphosing into seaborne empires', yet also 'appear to be secondary and rather faltering actors' when viewed 'in the unfolding global drama of power' shaped by such massive empires as the 'Ottoman, Qing, Mughal, Romanov, Kongolese, Aztec, and Inca, among others'.[74] On the other hand, the period from approximately 1620 to 1820 saw the 'explosive expansion of European influence – through trade, conquest, and occupation – at the expense of non-European empires, whether judged by control over territory, trade, or preservation of political sovereignty'. It was often propelled by the rivalry and competition among the seaborne empires, especially in the wake of the Reformation, sometimes even in the face of criticism, staunch resistance, and subversion at home and abroad.[75]

This was possible, he reconciles, because 'the commodities [including slaves], precious metals, and capital accumulated in the extra-European world helped to transform formerly marginal enclaves into epicentres of geopolitical power', seldom because of the vision or capabilities of Europeans alone, and more often in collaboration with non-European elites acting in pursuit of their own interests and via institutions they had created (particularly legal and administrative ones).[76] Thus, we cannot understand the newfound hegemony exercised by western European states by the end of the early modern period without understanding their imbrication within extra-European developments and, vice versa, it is revealing to look at the contributions of places like India to the evolving global system. Let us probe this final point some more.

Among the impacts of the expansion of Euro-Asian trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the pumping of liquidity into the Indian Ocean world – especially India and China – in exchange for Asian goods. The wider impacts were numerous, even if they were felt more acutely in certain places (e.g., ports, court centres) than others, and even if we should be careful not to overstate the size and resultant significance of pre-modern Euro-Asian trade.[77] To preview a few of those effects examined in this book, we find evidence of: widening money usage and greater commercialisation of economic activity, the circulation and development of knowledge over larger distances and with increased velocity, cross-cultural and artistic exchange, and diplomacy and rivalry between royal courts both in proximity or at a great remoteness from one another (chapters 5, 8, 9, 10). The greater enrichment of the already prosperous Mughal state spurred the deeper involvement of political elites in commerce, at the same time making India a more appealing proposition for would-be rulers, whether originating from the subcontinent or abroad, as we shall see.

1.3.3. Tribal Breakout and the Eurasian Revolution

1717 represented a landmark moment in two respects. First, because the Mughal emperor, Farrukhsiyar (r. 1713-19), signed the *farman* – a document that stipulated the EIC's trading privileges – exempting the Company from payment of all customs and transit duties in return for a nominal fee of 3,000 rupees. There was a massive expansion of EIC trade in consequence, which soon surpassed that of the VOC. Second, because Murshid Quli Khan was effectively establishing his personal control over the province of Bengal, though remaining a tributary satrap or *nawab*. The succession of his son-in-law in 1727 marked the creation of a hereditary dynasty typical of the kind also coming into being in such Mughal satrapies as Awadh and Hyderabad as part and parcel with the decentralisation of imperial government. The Company's interest in textiles had brought its merchants to Bengal, and since the privileges granted in 1717 deepened its commercial activities – and political interests – in that province, so the one development would be affected by the other.

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[73] Chaudhury, 'International Trade'. For a subtle evaluation of this overarching trend from the VOC's perspective: Gaastra, 'Dutch Response'. On the Company's teetering financial position, see: Wilson, *India Conquered*, 1-81.

[74] Paquette, *Seaborne Empires*, 8, for citation, and 31-37

[75] Ibid, 8, for citation, 26-27, 47-96, on competition and expansion, and 180-206, on critique and resistance.

[76] Ibid, 8, for citation, and 38-41, 174-71. A forensic account of the excruciating process of network-building by Europeans with Mughal nobles in pursuit of a *farman* (writ) to trade can be found in: Siebertz, '*Farman* from Shah Jahan'.

[77] See, for instance: de Vries, 'Limits of Globalisation'.

1739 also represented a turning-point. Over a decade earlier, 'tribal breakout' in the Safavid-Mughal borderlands triggered a chain reaction that led to the toppling of Safavid rule. Inexperienced, the new rulers of Iran were soon overthrown by Nadir Shah Afshar (d. 1747), who placed an heir of the Safavid house on the throne as his puppet before taking the throne in his own right in 1736. With the support of his general, Ahmad Shah Durrani, and the latter's Afghan kinsmen and followers, Nadir Shah marched from Iran to the north Indian plain in 1739, where they defeated the Mughal armies, entered Delhi (Shahjahanabad), and sequestered vast amounts of treasure and other valuables as booty. It was made possible by the acquiescence of certain Mughal elites, who cooperated in their own self-interest with the invading forces, even as Delhi's commoners rose up in defiance and rebellion.[78] Following his master's assassination in 1747, Ahmad Shah Durrani united several Pashtun tribes and sought (successfully) to create a new kingdom spanning what is today eastern Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and north India. Thus, he launched several campaigns in close succession into Mughal territory from 1747, resulting in the expansion of the Durrani state and its enrichment through the seizure of Mughal wealth and revenue-yielding lands.[79]

1757 was an especially momentous year. Moving from the northwest, Ahmad Shah Durrani's forces made their way to the Mughal capital at Delhi, where the emperor suffered the further humiliation of being publicly proclaimed a subordinate of the Afghan leader. News of yet another assault on the Mughal capital soon reached the ears of Company grandees at Fort William, Calcutta. The Company already stood accused by the Bengal *nawab* of abrogating the terms – and spirit – of its 1717 *farman*, especially on account of its militarism and commercial aggression. The Bengal *nawab* proposed a negotiated solution, was rebuffed, and thus seized the EIC's base in Calcutta. Humiliated and angered, the Company enjoined the Jagat Seth – a banker often described as the Rothschild of India – and others with their own interests at stake into a plot to remove the *nawab* and replace him with a Bengali general who had defected and aligned himself with the British.

The Company defeated the Bengal *nawab* at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, received a few territories around Fort William in return, and succeeded in placing a puppet ruler on the throne. In 1765, the Company fought the combined forces of the Mughal Empire and the Bengal and Awadh *nawabs* at Buxar. This should also be seen against the backdrop of the Company's participation in the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-47) and then the Seven Years' War (1756-63), for the English and French – while attempting to 'destroy each others' trade and political influence on the southern (Coromandel) coast' – became embroiled in the conflicts of Indian rulers, effectively turning them into proxy wars.[80] More significantly, the Company's victories in 1757 and 1765 formed the prelude to its massive expansion up the

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[78] Kaicker, *The King*, 20-21. See, also: §4.2.4.

[79] See: Lally, 'Beyond "Tribal Breakout"' which argues for this process being more of a 'break-in'. Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, offers the best study of Durrani imperialism. See, also: Gommans, *Indo-Afghan*, 112, for the relationship of Mughal decentralisation to the slave and horse trades.

[80] Bayly, *Indian Society*, 45, for the citation, and especially 45-68, for further details of what is described here.

Gangetic valley and across north India, with parallel expansion being launched from bases in the south (Madras) and west (Bombay). The victory over the Marathas in 1818 made the EIC the most important political power on the Indian subcontinent.

What is revealed by recounting these events? In the first place, it shows how phenomena and processes, actors and networks that were local, regional, and even global in scope either shaped or served as a backdrop to key transitions in early modern India. For its part, the expansion of the East India Company's territorial power on the Indian subcontinent was part of a larger phenomenon, what John Darwin has termed the 'Eurasian Revolution' of the 1750s to the 1830s. This, he argues, was actually constituted of an interrelated, threefold revolution: one in geopolitics, involving the massive global expansion of Britain's empire, and latterly those of France and Russia; one in economics, resulting in the Great Divergence between the living standards of the industrialising northwest European states and other parts of the world; and a cultural one. This last revolved around a developing sense of the moral and intellectual superiority of Euro-American peoples, who saw it as their role to champion 'liberty' and nurture 'progress' elsewhere in the world, whether by conquest and colonisation or otherwise.[81] It must be emphasised, however, that India had a special part to play in these developments: the conquest of India was the fulcrum of the spread of British hegemony in the Indian Ocean world as it was turned into a 'British lake', while India's technical expertise – as much as its raw materials or the availability of a vast market – were integral to British industrialisation.[82] In such respects, India played a key part in shaping local, even trans-regional and often global developments, as much as it was impacted by them.

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'We must generate better integrated, multidisciplinary historical research in early modern south Asia (not Mughal India),' Richards stated forcefully in 1997, 'in which scholars move seamlessly between the particulars of local and regional histories to broader south Asian and world description and analysis.'[83] A quarter-century hence, *India and the Early Modern World* strives to do precisely that. Arranged thematically, rather than taking the state as its framework or fixating on individuals, the following chapters explore the centuries after Timur left.[84] Our focus rests not merely on one or other kingdom or empire (e.g., the Mughal Empire), or even on one or other formation (e.g. the Persianate world), but instead spans as much of the subcontinent as possible, at the same time linking or comparing Indian developments to those around the globe, except where they are so distinctive as to merit attention in their own right. We turn, in the next two chapters, to what people believed and how this was changing in interaction with shifting social and moral ideas, as well as the power of increasingly centralised states whose rulers claimed universal authority. Chapters 4 and 5 then examine everyday life. We begin by looking at where and how people lived and the character of an urban-centred lifestyle that was coming in to being, driven by steady urbanisation. This last was closely linked to the deeper and wider commercialisation of the economy, which was one of the most obvious symptoms of early modernity and is thus among the subjects of the chapter on capitalism and markets, on how people's material lives and economic relationships were changing in the period.

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[81] Darwin, *Tamerlane*, 160-217.

[82] Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*. On the role of Indian knowledge in British textile manufacture (albeit to printing and design rather than to the mechanisation of fabrication): Riello, 'Asian Knowledge'.

[83] Richards, 'Early Modern India', 209.

[84] The approach of this book is informed by O'Hanlon's critique in 'Cultural Pluralism' of what were then recent treatments of early modern India.

There were markets for violence, too, and so chapter 6 explores their origins and how Indian rulers ‘transacted’ with the pools of men ready to take arms for the defence and enlargement of their kingdoms, while being attentive to the environmental and cultural dimensions of early modern (organised) conflict and considering the relationship between warfare and state centralisation. The overarching concern of this and the following two chapters is with power, whether of warbands and pastoralists, of kings and courtiers, or of texts and images. How the state functioned and was experienced – especially via bureaucratic and legal institutions – is the subject of chapter 7, which is careful to contrast ideals with realities and considers transitions from one early modern regime to another, for this reveals a subtler picture of politics and the nature of power relations between the monarchical centre and its provinces/provincial actors than has long been supposed. How kings and their trusted courtiers fabricated the royal or imperial image has been one of the most popular subjects of all those examined in this book. Chapter 8 examines kingly (self-)presentation through the interplay of various strategies and media (e.g., diplomatic communications, dynastic histories and genealogies, artworks, rituals, the built environment) with their various audiences and arenas. Connected with rival royal centres like never before, early modern kingly identities converged in significant respects yet also became distinctive, as evinced by the eschatological and universalist themes discernible in monarchical claims to authority or even the fascination with the globe as a motif.

Cultural and intellectual life are the subjects of the final chapters. Cosmopolitan languages like Persian and Sanskrit and the high styles of the Mughal arts not only flourished in early modern times, but also supported a seemingly contrary development, namely the development of vernaculars, examined in chapter 9. The vernacular did not quite become the ‘national’ in south Asia, as was the case elsewhere in the world toward the end of our period, and this had important implications for the relationship between knowledge production and state power on the eve of the colonial conquest. Thus, chapter 10 examines who (and how) one received an education; the kinds of knowledge production and their registers extant in early modern India; how these were changing via interaction with other traditions (whether Indian, from the Islamic world, or elsewhere); and who was excluded from higher learning or else has been ignored by historians despite being highly knowledgeable (women, most especially). *India and the Early Modern World* consistently and explicitly makes use of a period label that has become mainstream since its advent in the 1970s and yet remains much contested by some Indian historians even today. We ought usefully think *with* ‘early modernity’ and see what this does for Indian history, the concluding chapter argues by reflecting upon material presented throughout this book, and at the same time valuably bring into view what the Indian subcontinent offers to globally minded historians of the period after Timur left and before the colonial transition.