10. The Mythical Medieval
Periodisation, Historical Memory and the Imagination of the Indian Nation

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Introduction

This discussion is based on my experience of teaching medieval Indian history to undergraduates at the University of Delhi.[1] The classroom is a contested space, between a narrative produced by the discipline of history, i.e. by us, the historians, on the one hand, and an intuitive historical sensibility which the undergraduate students carry with them, on the other. This sensibility is inculcated by the history they study in school, hear from their families, see on TV and in cinema, read in literature, and interact with on social media. It draws upon diverse sources—the story of their own family, the devotion to a specific deity, the admiration for a historical figure, political propaganda, or their participation in community activities and collective experiences etc.

History has been at the heart of the making of the independent nation state of India. History writing, as the modern discipline that emerged in the European academies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was practised in colonial institutions and by colonial actors.[2] The first nationalist histories emerged in response to colonial historiography. They sought to recover both the glories and ignominies of the past for inspiration and as lessons. The nationalist histories were integral to the anti-colonial struggle and drew upon a spectrum of political imagination of the future of India. At the same time, the nationalist historiography was fundamentally shaped by the methodology, archives and taxonomies of the discipline of history, as it had emerged in Europe.[3] These histories, of the "traditional" model, as typified by Rüsen, followed

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1   The Undergraduate History syllabus of Delhi University can be found here: http://www.du.ac.in/du/uploads/Syllabus2016/20092016_Revi_BA_H.pdf, accessed October 27, 2018.
2   Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2015).
3   Cynthia Talbot, *The Last Hindu Emperor: Prithviraj Chauhan and the Indian Past, 1200–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), see the discussion by Justus Nipperdey in this volume.

the teleology of civilisational progress, which was, as the introduction to this volume notes, framed as the formation of the modern nation.[4] The *Eurochronological* schema of Ancient—Medieval—Modern was universally applied. In this schema, the 'Medieval' remained a fraught period.

'The Medieval' in India is a deeply contested historical period in the public imagination and in the politics of the country. In the schema of periodisation drawn up by colonial and nationalist historians, 'The Medieval' was seen to begin with the march of the armies of Mahmud of Ghazni and Mohammad Ghori into South Asia in the tenth century. In these histories, these military expeditions were identified with Muslim conquest of the region. This was both a historiographic device as well as characterisation in popular imagination, where the medieval is marked by the advent of Islam in the form of the Muslim conqueror.[5]

In the modern and contemporary politics of the Indian nation-state, this imagination of 'the Medieval' has emerged as a significant focus of mobilisation.[6] It has been characterised as a history of conflict between different communities, as a contest between the ancient Hindu civilisation and the Muslim invader/conqueror.[7] The debates between different political imaginations of 'the Medieval' play out in arenas including classrooms, on social media, on Twitter, to WhatsApp and beyond. They play out when *#RemoveMughalsfromHistory*[8] trends on Twitter, when new citizenship laws are introduced, and when the Taj Mahal is threatened with demolition.[9] This threat would be laughable if it did not evoke the actual demolition of the Babri Masjid—a mosque in Ayodhya, India, at a site believed by many Hindus to be the birthplace of Hindu deity Rama—in 1992.[10]

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4   Cf. the introduction by Thomas Maissen, Barbara Mittler, and Pierre Monnet and the essay by Jörn Rüsen in this volume.

5   There are different dates for this. Sindh's conquest by Muhmammad bin Qasim in the eight century is one historical moment. See the discussion in M. A. Asif, "Advent of Islam in South Asia: History of Pakistan," in *A History of Pakistan*, ed. Roger D. Long (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135–166 for a discussion on this. The other significant moments are the tenth- and eleventh-century military campaigns of Mahmud of Ghazni and the twelfth- and thirteenth-century military campaigns of Muhammad Ghori. See Finbarr Barry Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu-Muslim' Encounter* (Princeton: Oxford University Press, 2009).

6   Romila Thapar, "Politics and the rewriting of history in India," *Critical Quarterly* 47, no. 1–2 (2005): 195–203.

7   Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* (N. p., Independently Published, 2019).

8   https://twitter.com/search?q=%23removemughalsfromhistory&src=typd, accessed October 12, 2018.

9   https://indianexpress.com/article/what-is/what-is-tejo-mahalaya-controversy-taj-mahal-vinay-katiyar-bjp-4896716/, accessed October 12, 2018.

10 The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 was a significant moment in India's contemporary politics. There is a lot of literature, both in terms of reporting, political pamphlets as well as

The discussions in my classroom reflect these contesting imaginations of the Indian nation. In contemporary India, the public sphere has become increasingly *communalised*, marking the Muslim as the *Other*. In such times, contests over history no longer remain didactic or academic, but have acquired urgency and have real life implications.

Historians have made significant interventions in this political discourse. They have engaged with, critiqued, and challenged the communal discourse about history.[11] There is a large body of scholarship that ranges from presenting 'the Medieval' as a period of harmonious co-existence, to seeing it as a period of the formation of communities and community memories, and as a period of pluralities.[12]

There is a seeming contradiction between the history of 'the Medieval' produced by the academy and that which circulates in the popular domain. However, both of these are part of "the politics of time,"[13] where 'the Medieval' is more than just a term of chronological taxonomy. The question I want to tackle in this chapter is the following: does the history produced in the academia lend itself to the divisive discourse on 'the Medieval' in India?

In doing so, I want to highlight two aspects of Indian historiography: first, the place of conquest and violence in the delineation of 'the Medieval' and second, the visualisation of the 'Medieval' state. I will discuss the issue of violence only briefly and engage more extensively with the question of the state in historiographies of the medieval.

Nationalist history writing constructs India, as a historical entity, in two ways. One was temporal, reading India deep into the ancient past (as we discuss later in the chapter). The other was geographical: histories of diverse and different regions which constitute the modern nation-state, were subsumed within the history of India. Concomitantly, the categories of time—Ancient (up till the eighth century CE), Medieval (eighth to eighteenth century) and Modern (eight to twentieth century)—were used as pan-Indian periodisation. These histories of India, privileged empires based in the Indo-Gangetic plain as pan-Indian formations, and saw historical change from the vantage point of imperial centres. As a result, regions within the

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academic work on this event. I am here referring to only two works, which offer both information and a perspective on this event. Abdul G. Noorani, *The Babri Masjid Question, 1528–2003*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: Tulika, 2018); Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India* (London: Zed Books, 1993).

11   Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, and Harbans Mukhia, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969), Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

12   For a critical discussion on the emergence of secular histories see Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Predicament of Secular Histories," *Public Culture* 20, no. 1 (2007): 57–73.

13   I borrow this phrase from Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, (2002): x, 97–104.

nation have negotiated local memory and history with the wider frames of national histories. In this chapter, I examine the conflicts in historical memory by looking at the Mughal conquest of Kashmir in 1586 as a moment of change.

The Problem of 'the Medieval'

Most discussions around periodisation in Indian history begin with James Mill's tripartite division of Hindu—Muslim—British periods.[14] This classification was based on the nature of kingship. In this schema, the early historical past of the Indian subcontinent was declared to be Hindu. The Muslim period began with the establishment of the Sultanate in Delhi in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Through this presentation, Mill characterised India's pre-modern past in terms of religion. By contrast, British rule in the eighteenth century was presented in secular terms. The thrust of this periodisation was accompanied by the heft of colonial government—not just in how the administrators interacted with or administered the colony, but in terms of the organisation of the archives, the work of colonial departments like the Archaeological Survey, or other departments with the task of survey.

Nationalist historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries challenged Mill in particular, and colonial historiography in general.[15] The nationalist historiography was closely aligned with the project of the anti-imperialist struggle in India. It rejected the colonial tropes of India as a land with an unchanging past. Its quest for the glorious epochs in India's history was part of the project of creating a national identity. Over time, in the Nationalist and subsequently the Nationalist Marxist historiography,[16] the Hindu—Muslim—British schema was replaced by a new tripartite division of Ancient—Medieval—Modern. However, the new terminology did not fundamentally challenge the colonial delineation of periods in Indian history. Partha Chatterjee pointed out that while the nationalist historians challenged the Orientalist/colonial historiography, they framed their opposition and wrote their histories

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14   James Mill, *The History of British India*, 6 vols. (London: Baldwin, Cradoch, and Joy, 1826).

15   The nationalist historiography was closely aligned to the project of the anti-imperialist struggle to recover the history of India, it looked for glorious epochs as well as dark periods of its history. It rejected the colonial tropes of India as a land of unchanging past and a land with no sense of recording history. See, for example, Mohammad Habib's Presidential Address to the Indian History Congress, 1947.

16   From the 1930s, there were further shifts in history writing with the emergence of the Nationalist–Marxist school of historiography. It was not a homogenous group of historians. This history writing was marked by the influence of Marxist conception of history and a greater interest in the economic and social processes of change. However, the frame of reference remained the nation.

within the same categories and discourse of colonial modernity and Enlightenment rationality.[17] In this historiography, up till the 1960s, the start of the medieval period was considered to be 1200, with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

From about the 1970s, there was a shift and greater emphasis was placed on the study of socio-economic transformations as the basis of marking change in historical periods. The eighth to the thirteenth centuries were designated the 'feudal age.' The debates around 'feudalism' in Indian history were couched in the specifically Marxist terms of historical materialism.[18] At the same time, the period was seen as one of decline and its descriptions drew upon the terms of European historiography which saw socio-economic stagnation as a consequence of feudalism. This element was then included in the category of 'The Medieval.'[19] Since the 1980s, there has been a shift in the study of this period. It has emerged as a site of nuanced historiographical debates and, accordingly, has been termed the 'Early Medieval.'[20]

The periodisation debates in Indian history were closely tied to the making and imagining of the nation. In multiple discussions, Romila Thapar has pointed out, that in colonial and Orientalist writings, the 'Hindu' period represented the 'autochthonous ancient' stretching eternally into the past.[21] This understanding established the 'Hindu' as the original inhabitant of India.[22] It implied that the Indian nation, with a set of original inhabitants, was constituted in this ancient past.[23] Gyan Prakash argued that the nationalist historians established India as an *active subject*, as opposed to the passivity attributed to it by Orientalist writings. But they "[…] assumed that India was

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17 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

18 Harbans Mukhia, 'Was There Feudalism in Indian History?', in *State in India, 1000–1700*, ed. Hermann Kulke (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

19 Ram S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* (New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers, 1965); Dwijendra N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order* (Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

20 Brajadulal D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jha, *Feudal Order* (see note 19); Upinder Singh, ed., *Rethinking Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011).

21 The use of the term 'Hindu' itself is misleading. In modern and contemporary India, especially after the exercise of the census began in the late nineteenth century, it has emerged as a signifier of religious identity. However, there is considerable debate among historians about whether there ever was a single 'Hinduism.' Even today, the term does not stand for a monolithic or uniform religious identity, with a clear set of doctrines or practices. For a brief survey see David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (1999), 630–659; Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001).

22 Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1989): 209–231; Bhattacharya, "Predicament" (see note 12).

23 Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities?" (see note 22).

an undivided entity, which had held a sovereign and unitary will that was expressed in history… India was given an ontological presence prior to and independent of its representations."[24] This schema of periodisation reinforced the idea of ancient/Hindu India as a coherent temporal, spatial and social entity.

So, how was the historical transition from the Ancient to the Medieval or from the Early Medieval into the Medieval envisioned? The answer is that there was, and still is, no concept for a transition; there isn't really a shift into 'The Medieval.'[25] Instead, it arrives in India's written history as a watershed moment, heralded by invasions and military conquests: Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh in the eighth century,[26] the Ghaznavid invasions of the eleventh century, the Ghorid campaigns of the twelfth century, culminating in the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the thirteenth century.[27] The history of over two centuries is collapsed into one historical moment of invasion and violence and with it the Muslim presence in South Asia is woven into one inextricable strand.[28] The foundations of 'The Medieval,' in historiography, were to be seen in the act of conquest and the resulting violence.

Further, this intertwining remained deeply embedded in nationalist imagination and history writing, replaying the same tropes in the discussions of subsequent conquests. As Shahid Amin points out, "Medieval Muslim warfare and rule, c. 1000 onwards, has understandably been the object of considerable narrative anxiety from the nineteenth century to the present… for at its heart is the issue of the pre-colonial conquest of the subcontinent—and of its consequences. How different was this medieval 'Muslim' India of Turkish Sultans and Mughal padshahs from the conquest and colonisation of India by industrial Britain?"[29]

There is an old debate around *Muslim conquest/ Turkish Invasions* in Indian history. Recent historiography, notably the works of Romila Thapar, Brajadul Chattopadhyaya, Finbarr Flood, Manan Ahmed Asif and Shahid Amin have critiqued the

24   Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990), 390–391.

25   See, for example, Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927) which brings ancient India to an end with the Gupta empire. Also see the discussion in Ram Sharan Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society: A Study in Feudalisation* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2001): 15–17.

26   Manan Ahmed Asif, *The Book of Conquest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

27   ABM Habibullah, *The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India,* 2nd. ed. (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1967); Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, ed., *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, vol. 5–7 (Bombay: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957).

28   I am glossing over many of the critiques of this periodisation, notably on the use of the terms Hindu, Muslim, India as terms signifying a unitary or homogenous identity.

29   Shahid Amin, *Conquest and Community: The Afterlife of Warrior Saint Ghazi Miyan* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2015), 3.

older historiography and have opened up the period, as well as history writing, to newer questions.[30]

While there is a large body of rich scholarship on the relationship between history writing, community identities, communalism and the question of violence, I will not discuss this in detail in this chapter, but instead will focus on the second major characteristic of the historiography of 'The Medieval,' the question of 'state.' Much of the history writing on South Asia is focused on the study of state structures. The medieval states are imagined as centralized, hegemonic structures, where power flows out from the person of the king and the court. The historiography around these states highlights the bureaucratic and military organisation. It identifies revenue collection—a system for the collection and redistribution, primarily of surplus agrarian production—as central to the nature and character of these states. Beyond the structures of administration, there is a discussion on the political cultures of these states, articulated in different *theories of sovereignty*. The historiography of the centralized state, as Farhat Hasan has noted, is emphatically nationalist, conflating 'The Medieval' and early modern structures with the modern nation.[31]

In the remainder of this chapter, I will look at the conceptualization of the centralized empires from their margins, specifically from Kashmir. I will explore how the historiography of this region on the frontier—of the medieval north Indian states as well as the modern Indian nation—engaged with periodisation in history in relation and in response to the centralized state model.

The Medieval State as a Behemoth

The history of medieval north India is primarily told through two major state formations of the Indo Gangetic plain: the Delhi Sultanate [1200–1526 CE] and the Mughal Empire [1526–1857 CE]. The dominant historiography on these states has focussed on institutions and structures of governance. Pouchepadass characterised the historiography as "[…] old perspective of classical political geography which dealt with rather

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30 Romila Thapar, Somnatha: *Many Voices of History* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2004); Brajadulal D. Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the other? Sanskrit sources and the Muslims* (eighth to fourteenth century) (Delhi: Manohar, 1998); Finbarr B. Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval 'Hindu—Muslim' Encounter* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010); Amin, *Conquest* (see note 29); Asif, *Book* (see note 26).

31 See Farhat Hasan *Paper, Performance, and the State: Social Change and Political Culture in Mughal India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

simply defined categories of state, population, territory and resources [...]."[32] In this historiography, these states were described as structures where absolute power rested in the hands of the *Sultan/Padshah* and the nobility,[33] with complex bureaucratic structures, even though the Mughal state developed a more sophisticated administration.[34] These states collected surplus agrarian production from the peasantry, through a set of intermediaries. In both these states, the court was the locus of political culture, which was articulated through urban construction, public works and literary production. History writing about these states outlined these institutional structures as well as different theories of kingship. In this historiography, the theories of kingship were a functional part of the state structure, rather like revenue administration, which served to create legitimacy of rule.[35] Pouchepadass pointed out that, "[...] the crucial factor is the extent to which it [the territorial state] has been able to transmute a power

32 Jacques Pouchepadass, "Itinerant Kings and Touring Officials," in *Society and Circulation, Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750–1950*, eds. Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (Delhi: Anthem Press, 2006), 240–274, here at 241.

33 The word nobility is used interchangeably for the ruling classes/groups in these states. Sunil Kumar discusses the implications of such usage in "Bandagi and Naukri: Studying Transitions in Political Culture and Service in North Indian Sultanates, Thirteenth to Sixteenth Centuries," in *After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth Century North India*, eds. Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014): 60–110.

34 William H. Moreland, *Agrarian System of Moslem India*, repr. (Delhi: Kanti Publications, 1988, first published 1929).

35 Major works on the history of the Delhi Sultanate are, for example: Mohammad Habib and Khaliq A. Nizami, *Comprehensive History of India*, vol. 5 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1970); a large part of Mohammad Habib's body of work; Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); a number of articles by Irfan Habib; Sunil Kumar, *The Emergence of Delhi Sultanate* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007); Sunil Kumar, *The Present in Delhi's Past* (New Delhi: Three Essays Press, 2002). Historiography on the Mughal state is vast so I will selectively name the major works: Jadunath Sarkar's corpus of work; Ibn Hasan, *The Central Structure of the Mughal Empire* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, first published 1936); Parmatma Saran, *The Provincial Government of the Mughals* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1973); Ram P. Tripathi, *Rise and Fall of Mughal Empire* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1956); Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Iqtidar A. Khan, *Gunpowder and Firearms: Warfare in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Harbans Mukhia, *Historians and Historiography During the Reign of Akbar* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1976); Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Mughal State, 1526–1750* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire c. 1595: A Statistical Study* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016); John F. Richards, *Mughals in Golconda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); Muzaffar Alam, *Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013, first published 2001); Stephen Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City of Mughal India, 1639–1739* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); M. Athar Ali, *Apparatus of the Empire: Awards, Ranks, Offices and Titles of Mughal Nobility, 1574–1768* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985).

initially exercised through the use (or effective threat) of physical force into an authority rooted in the dominant ideology, a legal right to enforce obedience based on the inner consent of the subjects […] whose norms have been widely internalized."[36]

Much of the medieval historiography remains focused on imperial formations, with an emphasis on the person of the emperor and the court. This perspective assumes the empire to be a cohesive whole, where the will of the centre is implemented through the institutions of governance. For example, historians of the Mughal Empire have been engaged in a long-running debate on the nature of the state.[37] Though they viewed the Mughal state from a multiplicity of perspectives, these historians were all united in their concern with a state as defined by its imperial centre and characterised through the political structures of administration and of the imperial court. It built an identity for a historical period through a political formation. However, it did not address the diversity, of peoples, regions and historical processes which were part of these imperial formations. This preoccupation with the ruling elite has wider consequences for the popular understanding of the medieval period of Indian history.

The state-centred historiography of medieval north India segues from the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal empire, stretching from the twelfth to the eighteenth century, almost presenting the two as stages in the development of the same political structure, it establishes structural continuities and traces the evolution of administrative institutions from the Sultanate to the Mughal state. These institutions are presented as normative structures and their evolution through the practice of governance and participation of different groups of people—the administrators, local power holders, peasants etc.—is seen as peripheral to the practice of governance.

The historiographical preoccupation with imperial centres also dictates the nature of the archive for writing the histories of the medieval state. These histories ascribe a privileged status to the courtly Persianate texts as the primary archival material for the study of the medieval. For the study of the Mughal empire historians primarily use courtly texts in Persian—*Tawarikh* (histories), *Insha* (epistles), *Tabaqat* (biographical literature), *Tazkirat* (biographical literature), *Akhlaq* (moral norms and code of ethics), *Adab* (literature)—alongside literary productions, *safarnama* (travel literature), and documents from the Mughal chancellery as the primary archives. The visual archives of the courtly arts and architecture are seen as the supplementary archive. This textual corpus was produced largely in the court or in conjunction with it and reinforced the state-centric preoccupation of the histories of the period. Further, by focussing

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36 Pouchepadass, "Itinerant," (see note 32), 241.
37 See Kulke, 1995; Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Alam and Subrahmanyam, Introduction to the *Mughal State* (see note 35); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "The Mughal state—Structure or process? Reflections on recent western historiography," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 29, no. 3 (1992), 291–321.

on Persianate archival material, they under-represent the polyglot nature and diverse social character of the medieval states. While new work has now started to break this hold, the medieval historiography of North India has favoured Indo-Persianate literary material.

The conflation of the Sultanate and the Mughal state flows from, or allows for, another kind of conflation. Both of these states were ruled by Muslim kings. In treating the Sultanate and the Mughal empire as a continuous entity, historians have favoured the origins of the ruling groups of the Sultanate and the Mughal empire—as conquerors, central Asians, Muslims. An equivalence is thus drawn between the origins of the lineages of these kings in central and West Asia and their Muslimness. In this, academic histories and popular politics come together. As Asif argues, while looking at conquest and origins in South Asian historiography: "what remained unexamined was the centrality of the origins narrative—naturalness with which 'Muslims' remained outsiders."[38] As a result, the engagement of these states with their spatial location and historical contexts is overlooked. In the history writing, states like the Mughal empire bore, "[…] very little relationship to their Indic predecessors."[39] This is inscribed into historiography by use of the term 'Indo–Islamic states' to refer to the Delhi Sultanates and the Mughal Empire.

Since the late 1990s, there has been a regional turn in the historiography of India, which has allowed for a decentring of the historian's gaze and has broadened the focus from purely political to socio-economic themes. This emergent trend has also placed the shifts in languages, literature, religion, cultural forms at the centre of history writing.[40] However, the imperial centre still dominates the historical imagination.

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38 Asif, *Book* (see note 26), 5.
39 Asif, *Book* (see note 26), 5.
40 This is now a rich corpus of historiography. A really small selection on new kinds of work: Brajadul Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, *The Changing Gaze: Regions and the Constructions of Early India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013); Carla Sinopoli, 'From the Lion Throne: Political and Social Dynamics of the Vijayanagar Empire,' *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 43, no. 3 (2000), 364–398, Philip Wagoner and Richard Eaton, *Power, Memory, Architecture: Contested Sites on India's Deccan Plateau, 1300–1600* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014); Samira Sheikh, *Forging a Region: Sultans, Traders, and Pilgrims in Gujarat, 1200–1500* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010); Aditya Behl and Wendy Doniger, *Love's subtle magic: An Indian Islamic literary tradition, 1379–1545* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), Pankaj Jha, *A Political History of Literature* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019).

The Region in the Meta-Schemes of Periodisation

The historiography focused on the imperial centre has determined how histories are written in, and about, different regions of South Asia. In this section I will look at issues of periodisation in the regions and the relationship between the imperial centre and regional history from the vantage point of the region of Kashmir in the sixteenth century.

In modern Kashmiri historiography, the question of periodisation is quite complicated. Until the 1970s, the histories of Kashmir were divided into the Hindu-Muslim and the Dogra period.[41] It is during the 1980s that the terms of periodisation in Kashmiri history writing shifted to the Ancient, Medieval and Modern. In these changing terminologies, the Kashmiri historians followed the wider trends in Indian academies. But this change did not suggest a rethinking of these categories. In Kashmiri historiography, the ancient, sanskritic and the Hindu remain interlinked. For example, Kalhana's *Rajatarangini*, a Sanskrit text, remains the most important source for the ancient history of Kashmir. However, the text was compiled in the twelfth century and was deeply embedded in its temporal location.[42]

In contemporary Kashmiri histories, the medieval begins with the accession of Rinchin in 1320 CE. A seventeenth century history from Kashmir, *Baharistan i Shahi*, narrates the story of Rinchin. Rinchin was a Bhautta prince, an immigrant from Tibet, who converted to Islam and adopted the title of Sultan.[43] Though the fourteenth century saw many significant changes in the polity of Kashmir, histories from the period do not suggest that Rinchin's accession represent anything more than a dynastic shift. However, in modern histories of Kashmir, the medieval in Kashmir continued to be coeval with Muslim kingship, beginning with Rinchin's accession to the throne, and with his conversion to Islam. The Medieval in Kashmiri history began when the king assumed the title of Sultan.

In Kashmiri historiography, the Sultanates [1320–1540, 1540–1586] and the Mughal rule [1586–1752] comprised the medieval centuries. The Afghan [1752–1819] and the Sikh rule [1819–1846] are presented as a period of transition. Dogra rule [1846–1948] marked the beginning of the modern. In writing the histories of the region, Kashmiri historians conformed to the wider schema of periodisation across Indian history, even if they did not correspond to significant moments of historical change in the region.

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41 For a discussion on the Dogra period with the political and intellectual history of Kashmir see Mridu Rai, *Hindu rulers, Muslim subjects: Islam, rights, and the history of Kashmir* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2004); Chitralekha Zutshi, *Kashmir's Contested Pasts* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

42 Whitney Cox, "Literary register and historical consciousness in Kalhaṇa: A hypothesis," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no. 2 (2013): 131–160; Shonaleeka Kaul, *The Making of Early Kashmir: Landscape and Identity in the Rajatarangini* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018).

43 Anonymous, *Baharistan i Shahi*, British Library MS OR 16,706.

A discordant note on the issue of periodisation was struck by Ishaq Khan, who pointed out that, "any generalisation [in demarcating phases in Indian history] covering the entire subcontinent or even its greater part is bound to be misleading and arbitrary."[44]

He asked,

> […] although scholars have very ably tried to clarify the concept and content of medievalism, the problem remains as to when, why and how the medieval period ends in Indian history. True that the advent of the British in Bengal is generally seen as marking the beginning of the modern period in Indian history […] the British rule on the sub-continent did not come into being concurrently […] the fact that the British conquests of Bengal did not 'atomise' India is amply borne out by Kashmir which remained medieval as late as the beginning of the present century.[45]

Ishaq Khan made the argument that the period beginning in 1846, marked by the accession of the Dogras as the kings of Kashmir, saw the beginning of an age of 'Feudalism' in Kashmir. The Dogra rulers had established a new system of agrarian exploitation, where the new polity combined political authority with economic power more fully. In this period, through the practice of *begar*, or forced labour, the peasants were reduced to the status of serfs.

Ishaq Khan pointed out that though in other parts of the subcontinent, "the forces of change were moving towards modernity, Kashmir had taken a step back and feudal relations were becoming stronger."[46] In turn, he argued, that since feudalism was a characteristic of 'The Medieval,' in the nineteenth century, Kashmir was still in a 'medieval' period.

Ishaq Khan's characterisation of the nineteenth century in Kashmir as 'medieval' drew an equivalence between feudal and backward, and between medieval and feudal. While critically engaging with the practices of periodisation in Indian history, he was drawing conclusions from what Kathleen Davis called the "globalised history of the medieval."[47] This was not just a description of a period, Ishaq Khan was also making a political claim.

Ishaq Khan's argument about periodisation was a politically transformative one. It was also an argument made from the very specific position in the politics of Kashmir in the 1980s. He placed the 'modern' in Kashmir's history well into the first half of

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44 Muhammad I. Khan, *Perspectives on Kashmir: Historical Dimensions* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 1983), 67.

45 Khan, *Perspectives* (see note 44), 67.

46 Khan, *Perspectives* (see note 44), 67–68.

47 Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 5.

the twentieth century, with the emergence of a commercialised middle class, of po-
litical movements like the shawl merchants' protest and the secularised politics of the
National Conference. In Ishaq Khan's narrative of the 1980s, Sheikh Abdullah was
the figure of emergent modernity in Kashmir. But in doing so, Ishaq Khan smoothed
out the complex relationships between the local historical personages, processes, on
the one hand and colonial modernity on the other.

As we can see from the foregoing discussion, three different schemata of divid-
ing historical time co-exist in Kashmiri history writing. One marks historical change
through influential events, most often through military conquest. The second follows
the tripartite schema of Hindu—Muslim—Modern or Ancient—Medieval—Modern.
The third schema, espoused by Mohammad Ishaq Khan, identifies different epochs
through a set of characteristics. Khan goes against the general norms of history writing,
and suggests that history does not always chronicle a forward or a linear movement,
or the teleology of 'the' civilisational progress. He uses the terms 'feudal' or 'dark
age' as a political condemnation. In doing so, he borrows from a pre-given notion of
backwardness associated with the feudal and its characterisation as a dark age.

Kashmir and the Mughal Empire

The historian of medieval or early modern Kashmir writes the history of the region,
all the while negotiating with a wider history of the Indian nation. Kashmir was
conquered by the Mughal armies in the closing years of the 1580s. With its conquest,
the region became a province of the Mughal Empire. In the historiography which
highlights the imperial centre, the historical processes of the local and the regional are
rendered invisible. Concomitantly, the history of the sixteenth century in Kashmir is
bound up with the teleology of Mughal conquest.

Abul Fazl, the chronicler of Akbar's reign [1556–1605] and the author of the
Akbarnama and the *Ain i Akbari*, wrote that the victorious standards of the Mughal
army were planted in Srinagar, Kashmir in 1586, and with it Mughal rule was estab-
lished in the region.[48] In the historiography of the Mughal Empire, this event usually
merits only a brief mention, if at all. In Kashmiri historiography, on the other hand,
this becomes a watershed moment. And like that other watershed moment of South
Asian history, that is, the Ghaznavid and Ghorid invasions, it is heralded by the march
of armies and military conquest.

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48   Abul Fazl Allami, *The Akbarnama of Abul Fazl*, vol. 3, trans. Henry Beveridge (Delhi: Low Price
     Publication, 1988, first published 1902–1939).

The narrative of Mughal conquest marks it as the foundation of a fundamental shift in Kashmir's history. It erases all other histories of Kashmir in the sixteenth century—the political processes, the shifting social equations, the new political spheres that were emerging out of strife etc. To reference my earlier discussion, this narrative takes the agency for their history out of Kashmiri hands.

Further, for the historians of Kashmir, since the 1920s, the Mughal conquest has posed a dilemma. While the Mughal armies came to Kashmir as foreign conquerors, and brought the region under their yoke, Mughal rule brought with it peace and prosperity, the shawl industry and wondrous gardens.[49]

The sixteenth century chronicles and other texts from the Mughal court carried descriptions of the provinces of the empire. They narrated the processes of conquest and establishment of imperial authority in the newly conquered regions and brought them within the imperial ecumene. In the texts from the Mughal court, Kashmir was presented as passive recipient of imperial authority.[50]

It is testimony to the hegemonic character of the imperial state that even today, it is difficult to move away from the frames of reference created within imperial textual traditions. As a result, the history of Kashmir in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was completely subsumed within the history of the Mughal empire. Its history was told through the actions of the reigning Mughal emperors and provincial governors. It was represented as a site of imperial action and intervention: it was conquered, its land was assessed for revenue, its landscape was shaped into gardens. It was the recipient of royal charity, royal justice and royal grace. Kashmir became the object of the royal gaze, a destination for royal sojourns.

The discussion on Kashmir's conquest by the Mughal armies and its annexation into the Mughal empire replicate the dominant historiography on 'The Medieval.' It maps historical change through the movement of the armies and measures it in the terms of the imperial formations. In doing so, it reduces the history of the period to the actions of a 'foreign' empire and places it at a distance from the history of the people of the region. 'The Medieval' becomes the period of rule by forces that are always 'outsiders.'

In South Asia, the trope of the loss of independence thus invokes the entire history of colonial subjugation. In Kashmir, the historical sensibility of loss of independence is a powerful political statement. But what the Kashmiri historians are lamenting is not just the loss of independence, but even more so, the loss of their history.

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49   Prem N. Bazaz, *Kashmir in the Crucible* (Delhi: Pamposh Publication, 1967); Prithivi M. K. Bamzai, *Cultural and Political History of Kashmir* (New Delhi: MD Publications, 1994); Ghulam M. D. Sufi, *Kashir: Being a History of Kashmir from the Earliest Times to Our Own*, 2 vols. (Srinagar: Light & Life Publishers, 1949).

50   See, for example, discussions in Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* on the province of Kashmir.

Conclusion

Periodisation is not "[…] simply the drawing of an arbitrary line through time."[51] It is, as Davis says,"a fundamental political technique"[52]. The majoritarian politics of India today asks who is an Indian, seeking a continuity between Hindu identity and the early history of the subcontinent.[53] It identifies 'the Muslim' as a foreigner, descendant of those who rode into India as a part of invading armies and who never became one with the soil. 'The Medieval,' in this imagination, is a dark age in Indian history. It is seen as a period of violence and oppression.

In this chapter, I have set out to discuss two main features of medieval historiography of India: first, the characterisation of 'The Medieval' in history writing, especially the emphasis on centralized state structures and warfare, dovetails into the popular imagination of the period. The emphasis on war assigns violence the position of a force of historical change. Second, the preoccupation with centralized state formations, where the past is defined through the lives of kings, the ruling elite or bureaucratic structures. This accentuates the distance between rulers and ruled. This example has shown how the histories of empires sit uneasily over popularly constituted national histories and collective memories. As long as periodisation, as a heurisitic practice, continues to be directed by our location, viz. what constitutes the modern, 'The Medieval' in Indian history will continue to be defined by the politics of the nation.

51   Davis, *Periodization* (see note 47), 3.
52   Davis, *Periodization* (see note 47), 3.
53   "130 crore Indians are Hindu society: Mohan Bhagwat," *Hindu today*, December 25, 2019, https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/130-crore-indians-are-hindu-society-mohan-bhagwat/article30397898.ece, accessed April 26, 2020; Ashish Pandey, "For Sangh, all 130 crore Indians are Hindus, says RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat," *India Today*, December 26, 2019, https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/for-rss-all-130-crore-indians-are-hindus-says-mohan-bhagwat-1631485-2019-12-26, accessed April 26, 2020.