

Osamu Kondo, *The Early Modern Monarchism in Mughal India with a Bibliographical Survey*

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The author of the book under review, Osamu Kondo, is a well-known historian specializing in the history of Mughal India. He has so far published several books in Japanese on various topics pertaining to Mughal India. The book under review, however, is the first book published by him in English, consisting of the following 7 chapters and 2 appendices.

- Chapter I : Geographical Image of India at the Time of Akbar
- Chapter II : Abu'l Fazl's Conception of Kingship
- Chapter III : Diplomats under Akbar with Special Reference to Mughal Royal Edicts
- Chapter IV : Religion and Culture in Mughal India
- Chapter V : A Wealthy Jain Merchant of Ahmedabad and the Mughal Authorities
- Chapter VI : Commerce and Industry in Mughal India, with Special Reference to Gujarat
- Chapter VII : Japan and the Indian Ocean at the time of the Mughal Empire
- Appendix I : The Feudal Social Formation in Indian History
- Appendix II : A Bibliographical Survey of Source Materials for Mughal India

Thus the scope of the book is quite wide and diversified. For example, the theme of Chapter III is diplomatics in relation with Mughal India. Diplomats is an academic discipline to textually analyze historical documents: how was a document created, what was the means of transmission of documents, etc. This field is rather undeveloped in the historiography of India in general. Thus Chapter III is a unique contribution in the field of historical studies of Mughal India.

The focal point of the book, however, is the concept of 'early modern' period in Indian history characterized by the 'early modern monarchism' and development of commerce and foreign or long-distance trade.

As regards the periodization of Indian history, the author (Osamu Kondo) argues that 'most historians would object to placing the Mughal

era within the medieval period' in conventional periodization of ancient, medieval and modern. Instead of this three-tiered conventional periodization, he proposes the five-tiered periodization consisting of ancient, medieval, early modern, modern and contemporary. Then he says that 'if one applies this five-tiered framework, then it is safe to say that the Mughal era lies squarely in the early modern period of Indian history' (Preface, p. v).

Thus the first problem is whether the application of the concept of 'early modern' to Indian history is relevant or not. It depends on the specific attributes of the 'early modern' period that the author has in mind. The problem is also related to the 'social formation theory'. He argues as follows: 'From the standpoint of social formation theory, an early modern society connotes a late medieval society' (Preface, p. v): 'However, from a perspective based on social formation theory, the early modern age is positioned in the last stage of a feudal society...' (p. 42).

It is certain that in the conventional periodization of ancient, medieval and modern that was formed in European historiography, the medieval period is characterized by feudalism or feudal social formation. Then so far as the social formation is concerned, the Mughal period is to be placed in the medieval (feudal) era. It means that according to the author, the social formation in Mughal India was not different from that of the society preceding Mughal period, that is to say, feudalism. Then what is the merit to apply the concept of the 'early modern' to Mughal India?

Setting this problem aside for the time being, the next problem is the attribute of the 'early modern' period in Indian history that the author has in mind. He takes up the 'early modern monarchism' and the development of commerce and foreign trade as the most conspicuous features of the 'early modern' period in Indian history.

As regards the 'early modern monarchism', the author tries to extract the concept of the divine right of Mughal kingship from Abu'l Fazl's *Ā'in-i Akbarī* and *Akbar Nāma* (Chapter II). After citing various passages that he considers to show the concept of the divine right of kings from the two books, he indicates the following four points (pp. 58-62).

1. The emperor is the guiding leader of the spiritual world as well as the secular world.
2. The authority of the emperor is granted by God.
3. The emperor has such endowments as insight, benevolence, generosity, etc.
4. The emperor is the guard of the world.

Amongst these four points, the most relevant to the concept of divine right of kings is point 2. To testify the point, the author quotes from *Ā'in-i Akbarī* such passages as follows: 'The authority of the emperor (pādshāhī)

is a ray emitted by the unrivaled God and it is a light from the sun that shines upon the world.... The capable hand is granted directly from God, without any intermediaries to the supreme one (emperor) ...' (p. 51).

Thus it can be safely assumed that Abu'l Fazl had an intention to deify Akbar. It must be examined, however, whether Abu'l Fazl intended to deify all Mughal kings or kings in general depending on the concept of divine right of kings. It seems to be difficult to exclude the possibility that for Abu'l Fazl Akbar was the exceptional emperor to whom only he assumed God granted the divine right. In other words, either such passages from *Ā'in-i Akbarī* as cited above indicate that Abu'l Fazl had the general concept of divine right of kings or these passages only show a sort of Akbar worship of Abu'l Fazl.

The next problem is the development of commerce and foreign trade in Mughal India which the author assumes to have been the conspicuous feature of the 'early modern' period in Indian history. The problem is discussed in Chapters V and VI, focusing mainly on Gujarat.

In Chapter V, he tries to trace the career of Shāntidās Javahiri, using *farmāns* and *nishāns* issued by Mughal emperors and high officials in relation with Shāntidās. Shāntidās was a wealthy Jain jeweller-cum-banker, living in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. He financed not only Mughal emperors but also the English East India Company. At the same time, he was the leader of Jain community in Gujarat and *nagarshet* of Ahmedabad. In Surat also, there were similar Jain traders such as Virji Vora. Their existence testifies to the prosperous commerce and foreign trade in Mughal India. In Chapter VI, the author briefly surveys the markets and trade routes, system of remittance, textile manufacture in Gujarat, and overseas trade in Surat.

It is without doubt that the market economy developed tremendously in Mughal India. Not only domestic markets but also foreign markets for Indian merchandises extended, mainly through the activities of East India Companies. It may be characterized as the early modern phenomenon at the level of world history.

Returning to the problem of periodization of Indian history again, the author seems to try to apply the concept of absolutism in European historiography to Mughal India. He writes that Abu'l Fazl's concept of kingship 'is similar to the theory of the divine right of kings of early modern Europe' (p. 59). In Preface, he refers to 'the absolute authority wielded by (Mughal) monarchs' and continues as follows: 'In order to rule over this financially prosperous great (Mughal) empire, the monarch stood at the head of and exerted control over a vast military and a well-developed bureaucratic machine (p. v).'

The triad of the concept of divine right of kings, bureaucracy, and standing army is surely assumed to be the fundamental attribute of absolutism in European historiography. The author seems to try to find

the same triad in Mughal India. He may have Elisabeth I or Louis XIV in mind while dealing with Akbar. It may be the reason why he put Mughal India in the 'early modern' period, though he acknowledges that from 'the standpoint of social formation theory, an early modern society connotes a late medieval society'. However, he does not discuss the bureaucracy and army system of Mughal India in this book. Then it is problematic to analogize the regime of Mughal India with absolutism in European historiography, depending only on the seeming similarity of the concept of divine right of kings. Further it should be examined whether the concept of absolutism is sufficiently general theoretical framework applicable to the history of other regimes in non-European regions.

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