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Inverted 'History': Diplomacy, Modernity, Resilience

Deep K. DATTA-RAY*

RÉSUMÉ

Aujourd'hui, la théorie veut que la diplomatie européenne marque le début de la modernité et soit le moyen d'atteindre le prix suprême qu'est l'utopie. Elle est comprise comme signifiant l'unité, contre une origine anarchique. La marque du succès de cette lecture linéaire et binaire de la diplomatie est bien sûr l'assimilation des non-modernes. Toutefois, ce discours est sapé par le fait que la modernité s'abstienne de prendre en compte les archives coloniales. Celles-ci nous permettent de déterminer si la diplomatie moderne est réellement synonyme de diplomatie tout entière, en particulier dans les pays non-occidentaux. Cet article étudie le cas de la diplomatie indienne pré-coloniale et analyse ce qu'il se passa lorsque la diplomatie moderne européenne arriva en Inde. Celle-ci se trouva confrontée à une diplomatie proto-moderne, et s'attacha non pas à la contraindre à l'assimilation, mais plutôt à s'assembler à elle. Ceci donne une signification accrue aux façons de faire non-modernes, et réduit le temps dont la modernité dispose pour moderniser ses "autres," rendant ainsi contestable le fait que la diplomatie d'aujourd'hui serait équivalente à la diplomatie moderne.

Keywords: Diplomacy, Europe, modernity, India, resilience.

*There's very little on how today's world actually functions.
Instead there is the official story of modernisation
(Latour 2011).*

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Double inversion

'How *do* Indians conceptualise diplomacy?' appears at first glance a question incalculably complex or exceedingly naïve. The former because any answer worth its name must refer to an archive largely beyond retrieval. Naïve because of the discipline of orthodoxy which proclaims that the rationality of colonised society was erased, altered or incorporated upon contact with Europe (Behera). Retailled by liberals, Marxists and postcolonials alike,¹ its plausibility is preserved by a plethora of indubitably European practices that were irrefutably internationalised. Paramount is the diffusion of the nation-state and its engendering of diplomacy which is irrefutably European (Bull 1977, 316-317; Buzan 349-9). Vital to such articulations is the colonial archive, yet its eschewal insinuates "knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired" (Nietzsche 6). Indeed to penetrate the archive exposes European triumphalism as fiction and signals the deconstruction of shibboleths about Europe's relevance to the world.

The contention then is neither that Indians practice a variant of modern diplomacy, nor that its conceptualisations are misapplied to Indian diplomacy. Rather, it may be motivated by a rationality altogether alien to modernity making for only superficial similarities. The claim is furthered if the rationale for modern diplomacy and what it encountered are acknowledged. Doing so is appreciating that diplomacy is conflated with modern diplomacy, which descended from Christianity and bestowed its organising precept upon diplomacy: *anarchical-binarism*. It makes modern diplomacy instrumental: a function of linear time organised sequentially between an origin and an end, that is, 'history'. Purpose is then restricted to *progress-through-history* or the delivery of everyone from *anarchy* to its *binary* terminal, utopia. Inescapably there is violence, for *progress-through-history* assimilates modernity's 'others', hence modern diplomacy now is diplomacy. In pre-modern India, modernity's first agents were not Europeans but the Mughals for they shared in the

¹ More recently also by 'Global Historians' who, when attempting to be more than comparative, are old-hat in Indology (Prakash; O'Hanlon).

rationality inspired by Christianity, by being descended from another Abrahamic religion: Islam. It, like Christianity, is also activated by anarchical-binarism. However, *intercivilizational* contact (Nelson) with India's pre-modern rationality founded not on time but *time-in-space* and hence *contextual* attenuated Islam's 'history'. The pre-modern infiltrated space into Islam's 'history', thereby subverting the Mughals to make them Indo-Mughals. The result was the transformation of intra-Islamic diplomacy from one of predestination—the forwarding of Islam—to one possessing *judgement* which is why the Indo-Mughals acted in terms of their context to rebel against Islam.

The Abrahamic genealogy of intra-Islamic diplomacy made for easy comprehension by the agents of the second coming of modernity: the British. Not having undergone intercivilisational contact of the sort that put the Indo into Indo-Mughal, the British carried a far more potent modernity which erased the Indo-Mughal's contextual rationality. Or so we are told, for this narrative survives by ignoring the records of the diplomats who, it is claimed, disseminated modernity (Watson; Der Derian 1987[I]). Ironically, their practices undermine every conception of a modernised globe because, paradoxically, modernity's agents sought not to impose their 'history', but *tessellated* into what was encountered and did so enthusiastically till at least 1717.

The archive divulges then a double inversion of 'history', in turn revealing the pre-modern's *resilience* not as recently discovered in neoliberal states seeking to coerce their populations into believing the disastrousness of the world and its constant bearing as the key to success. Patently pre-moderns lacked such power and so the durability of their resilience is located in a societal rationality by definition prior to government and its calculations, security or otherwise (Brassett). It is precisely this pre-modern resiliency that compresses the assimilative phase to between sometime after 1717 and prior to 1947. Resilience, in combination with the limited time available for assimilation along with elisions is what renews the pre-modern's significance today. This is reinforced by the paradox within modernity: its diplomats sought tessellation but nonetheless 'othered' the Indo-Mughals. This suggests the British too were mutating into

moderns when they encountered a rationality that had already subverted modernity. The British's own becoming however entails a caveat. The diplomacy presented is of British ambassadors, however they were not the first Europeans to negotiate with the Indo-Mughals, but having invented the modern state and international system were at the leading edge of modernity (Teschke). It is therefore they who would transmit authentic modernity, a contention substantiated by their being the first Europeans to negotiate successfully with the Indo-Mughal Emperor.

Modern diplomacy

Descended from Christianity, modern diplomacy replicates its central precepts: *anarchy* and *binarism*. They determine diplomacy's purpose: deliverance from anarchy to a utopian end. This linear process is 'history'. Its ambition bestows virtue while generating violence for the former engenders *progress-through-history* or the assimilation of modernity's 'others' whose very resistance certifies modern diplomacy's victory. What this amounts to is the making of an instrumental subject incapable of *judgement*, for the Messianic vision that is 'history' denies legitimate temporal action, as actors are trapped in time. In short, the subject and its diplomacy are rendered automatons.

That today's diplomacy cannot be anything but modern diplomacy is obvious in the unabashed equating of diplomacy with the mediation of estrangement (Der Derian 1987[I, II]). The birth of diplomacy followed the estrangement of states from Christendom which gave rise to an international diplomatic system and the Third World's revolt against Western 'Lordship' precipitated the transformation of diplomacy into a truly global system (Der Derian 1987[I], 23). The first moment came to pass because modern diplomacy is lodged in the rationality of the Old and New Testament whereby man was at one with God, but alienated upon being cast out of Eden. Christ arrived as mediator between man and God and legitimized the Papacy in medieval Europe. The Papacy in turn unified medieval Europeans intellectually, because they believed in Christ. However, the Reformation marked the demise of the *miracle of*

faith and the growth of politics. The cost of the rise of states was the Papacy's decline which necessitated a new mediating figure: the modern diplomatic system. It was regularised by the Treaty of Westphalia but its novelty was a façade, for replicated were Christianity's purpose and means. Westphalia's aim remained unity but now between people divided by politics. As for means, there was an intellectual contract no less incredible than the *miracle of faith* for now the self-delusion was that unity could be founded on the basis of real national borders (Der Derian 1987[1]). This absurdity was apparently internationalised during colonialism because to challenge it, the colonised had to participate in Western diplomacy (Der Derian 2001). And so, the seminal authors of diplomacy are all from Christian societies (Sharp). They have to be, because 'the modern world system ... came into being in the Italian peninsula and reached its full expression in Europe' and diplomatic theory, "appeared at the same time" (Berridge 1-2).

What however makes for, and is entailed by, modern diplomacy, which according to moderns, is diplomacy? The answer in terms of *rationality* arises from the established conflation of modern diplomacy as the West's culture (Bull 1977, 39). Valorized as an "elite culture, comprising the common intellectual culture of modernity", it forms a "*corpus Christianorum* bound by the laws of Christ" (Bull 1984, 122; Wight 128). The acknowledged Christian core inadvertently permits conceptual unpacking. Disclosed are two debilitating assumptions: *anarchy* and *binarism*. The former makes modern diplomacy a function of the denial of unity and codes violence in as a presumption. Hence the dominant trope for diplomacy is anarchy, "the central fact of the international system and the starting place for theorizing about it" (Bull 1966, 35). The violence coded into modernity by anarchy is made pernicious by binarism, which gears modernity in two ways. The first is to seek an end diametrically opposite to the origin: a utopian terminal point. This makes for a linear understanding of time, that is, 'history', and it confines diplomacy's purpose to progress-through-history where all must travel from the beginning that is anarchy and at the end: utopia. Progress-through-history too descends from Christianity. Progress, the word itself, derives from the Christian *profectus*, understood as the perfection of the soul, that is, unity with

God (Koselleck 235). Progress then is aspirational, one-way, and the beginning sets the aim (O'Hagan 126-9). Simultaneously, binarism also accounts for the virtue that modernity ascribes itself and its construction of the 'other'. Virtue is assured to moderns for modernity leads us out of anarchy. The process necessitates the erection of subjects requiring salvation, that is, modernity's 'others' who must of course be the opposite of moderns. Hence Hegel wrote "as soon as he [a European] crosses the Indus, he encounters the most repellent characteristics, pervading every single feature of society" (Hegel 173).

Anarchy and binarism fabricate instrumental subjects incapable of judgement. This is because the world is understood as anarchical at inception and brimming with irreconcilably alienated actors in opposition and it makes modern diplomacy's purpose the replication of Christianity's purpose: the pursuit of unity via a delusive faith. A utopian end is necessarily attained violently, via assimilation into modernity's subjectivity. The coming of modernity makes subjects whose conceptual realm is thus curtailed, for modernity in seizing responsibility and bestowing legitimacy simultaneously denies it to individuals. To be a diplomat then, is to resonate to a tune set by Europe, and the refrain is violence, produced by anarchy, organized binarily and waged by modernity to assimilate its 'others', that is, non-moderns, to realise a unified modern society.

A doxology, modernity's violence can never be satiated for utopia is patently unrealisable. Moreover, modernity's duality generates a perennial fear of being assimilated. Salvation demands that modernity continuously fortify not just diplomacy, but entire populations. There is the insistence, mostly shrilly articulated by recent converts, that the rest of the non-West has also converted (Gaonkar 14; Chakrabarty xxi, xx). Meanwhile for older denizens of modernity, its minimal tolerable role is miscegenation with other cultures (Taylor 169, 173; van der Veer 3-8). Yet modernity's invention of 'cultural diversity' highlights a tacit admission that the world remains conspicuously non-modern (Luhmann 151). The invention is incontrovertibly rear-guard, signalling an intellectual impasse exemplified by Sumit Ganguly whose totalizing rationality of 'realism' to explain Indians and Pakistanis counters his simultaneous claim that they possess alternate rationalities (Ganguly). Evidently

modernity as a metric for analysis is nothing more than camouflage for its failure to assimilate. It is to bypass this that modern diplomacy has been outlined, for the purpose is to not assimilate *à la* Ganguly, but diagnose what happened when modernity met its 'other'.

Subverting modernity

Verifying if diplomacy is modern diplomacy entails identifying the others' rationale for diplomacy. To do so at the moment the British began to negotiate with the Emperor is to delineate the rationality of the Indo-Mughal state. Arising from another Abrahamic religion, Islam, linearity is intrinsic and spatiality was silenced. At inception then, Islam is identical to European modernity in its propagation of history-making for instrumental people. However, Islam's silence about matters temporal engendered its infiltration and subversion. Preceding the Islamic influx into South Asia, the agent was the *Mahabharata (Mb)*. Its penetration was palpable in the state becoming *contextual* and hence capable of judgement. The overturning of 'history's' instrumentality to create a subject incommensurable within Abrahamic religion is, in short, what authorizes the success of the pre-modern.

The transmogrification of the state's rationality is apparent along two vectors. The 'vertical dimension of Islamic thought ... made for the overpowering dependence on the Creator'. It is this that accounts for the Mughal's complicity in Christianity's linear binary time because every instant of man's world is determined by God, the creator. The entire process ends with *Judgment Day*—making for a binary relationship between origins and ends. Furthermore, Islam like Christianity makes the origin divine. In colouring the origin in a particular way, Islamic time is made sacrosanct because it is divine. This is why 'a self-consistent world in space and time, working harmoniously, is only an appearance. The one true actor is God alone ... human life becomes subordinate to Allāh, and natural causes give way to divine will' (Böwering 62, 57-8, 60). In short, Islam forfeits space, as is done in Christianity.

This 'vertical dimension' is palpable in the *Ain-I Akbari*, or the mode of Akbar's governance, written by the *Mir Munshi*, preeminent

Minister, *Sheikh* Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak. He explains that the Emperor worshipped the sun as the visible representative of God because the Mughal's Islamic roots privileged a linear hierarchy with God at the top (Allámi Preface). Like Christianity, this constricted diplomacy to God's time and resulted in progress-through-history or the assimilation of all others to His rationality. Moreover, this instrumentality also sought to overcome something analogous to anarchy (*jahiliya*). In combination, albeit motivated by another divinity, this made for a very Christian epiphany: Islam's accession, the conversion of its 'others', the beginning of 'history', which amounts to the creation of a new subject, as in Christianity. In contradistinction to the 'vertical dimension', Islam is unable to account for the complexity of space. This, Islam's horizontal dimension, means that though intent on disseminating itself, Islam is silent on how to do so. In other words, the purpose is to realise Islam, but how to do so is left unrevealed. Islam's reticence had two unforeseen consequences: the infiltration of the concept of space which, by subverting Islam, transformed the Mughals into Indo-Mughals.

The first consequence was Akbar modifying his conception of time, rather than that of an entire society's. This cannot be excused as innovative instrumentality, that is, acculturation by other means. Rather Akbar was becoming something incommensurable within Abrahamic religion and it was due to the infiltration of space into his, and hence his state's, rationale. Akbar equated himself with God. In doing so, he fundamentally overruled Islam by refuting its 'history'. The most potent expression of this rescission was replacing the legend *Huw al-Ghani* (He is Rich) at the top of imperial documents with *Allah-o-Akbar*. This was a deliberate play Akbar made on his name. *Allah-o-Akbar* means 'God is Great' or, as is more likely, 'Akbar is God'. So it was that Akbar abandoned 'even the slightest pretence of being ... mindful of Islamic religious opinion' (Faruqui 2005, 518). Akbar had forged a state in an occupied space that forced its way into his time.

Akbar's spatial turn undermining Islam was enhanced by Abu'l Fazl. He distanced the Empire from Islam's 'history' by repudiating Islam's self-ascribed divinity. Abu'l Fazl replaced the traditional dichotomy of Islam against its 'others' with *sulh kul* or 'harmony' and

'absolute peace'. This was done by highlighting Akbar's common humanity alongside his faith and in doing so the received notion of historical time was inverted. For him it became uncertain in origin, though the goal of utopia remained (Mukhia 5). Abu'l Fazl thus legitimised Akbar's replacing of God and in doing so opened the possibility of man acting independently of God. That neither was able to equate all men with God and so delete Islam's terminal point ultimately arose from an intellectual limitation imposed upon them by Islam's hierarchy. This was perhaps a practical rather than intellectual matter. For Akbar only a royal person could become God, and perhaps of all royals only he. Nevertheless Akbar's state travelled considerably intellectually and independently of instrumentality.

The momentousness of the spatial turn gives pause, for it made for something incommensurable within the confines of Abrahamic religion: the creation of a subject not beholden to the divine, a subject capable of judgement, that is, a legitimately capable and responsible actor. Such an actor is impossible in traditions arising from Abrahamic religion for it only sanctions divinely ordained practice. Akbar however was on the road to a new subjectivity made possible only by his exposure to a rationality cognisant of not just time, but also space. That such a rationality is inexplicable in Islamic terms is why what occurred was a subversion of Islam by the infiltration of space. The means was the insinuation of a pre-modern rationality. One of its repositories is the *Mb*, a text familiar to Muslims since at least the 11th century, and translated by Akbar (Reinaud 17-29; Ernst). Moreover, it continues to be used by Indian diplomats to order themselves today (Datta-Ray 2014, 254-261). A first glimpse of how the *Mb* is distinct from Abrahamic religions is the text's moral: *context dependent action* or what the text calls, *dharma*. There is an interrelated category: *highest-dharma* or the super-moral. For instance, non-violence and non-cruelty are both amongst the *highest-dharma*, which means that *context dependent action* cannot be the moral. Of the fifty-four instances in the *Mb*, the tally of the different excellences said to be the *highest-dharma* includes more than 25 categories and numerous sub-categories, including individual *dharms*. This is not a quagmire of contradiction for if *dharma* is *context dependent action*, then *highest-dharma* is knowing that that is

the way to act in whatever situation one is in, and recognizing that situation within an ontology that admits virtually endless variation and deferral in matters of formulating and approaching 'the highest' (Hiltebeitel 208).

In the *Mb* then, *dharma* enables *highest-dharma*. In putting them forward in combination what is constructed is the *dharma*-complex or 'a theory of moral behaviour' (Matilal 50). In other words, the *Mb*'s moral is that all contexts generate their own truth, which in turn is the truth. This of course rides on recognising not just time, but time-in-space, or context. The consequence of a rationality unencumbered by anarchical-binarism is judgement, for time-in-space permits actors to truly take possession of their actions.

Islam's silence along with what was encountered in the conquered lands set the Mughals on a trajectory that resulted in them becoming Indo-Mughals and it is this that demonstrates the *Mb*'s resiliency. Exemplary was what Akbar and his *Mir Munshi* initiated, for they moved the Empire towards the *Mb*'s rationality by subverting Islam (Khan 82-92; Rizvi 2-22). It marked the creation of a new subject: God's man became a God-man and his descendants ruled in his mould for the next 150 years. For instance sovereignty, according to Akbar's son, Jahangir, was a 'gift of God', not necessarily given to enforce God's law but rather to 'ensure the contentment of the world' (Faruqi 520; Nizami 174). Such deviant ideas express the addition of space to Islamic time and are scattered throughout the *Tuzuk* document of Jahangir's reign and other sources (Jahangir 15). It is this prevalence that confirms that the Indo modified the Mughals to make for the *raison d'État* of the Indo-Mughal state.

The new subjectivity of the Indo-Mughal state made for diplomatic possibilities that were intolerable within Islam. Liberated from the instrumentality of Islamic 'history', practice became context sensitive making for what was inconceivable earlier: judgement. The extent of the subversion of 'history' by contextualism is apparent in changes to intra-Islamic diplomacy. Its techniques, developed by the Islamic world to organise and further anarchical-binarism, that is Islam, continued to be used by the Indo-Mughals. They however harnessed it to an alternate rationality to refute Islamic time. In short,

a diplomacy determined by 'history' was liberated by space and used against 'history'.

This is exemplified by the superseding of 'history' by context or the undoing of history's result: Islamic solidarity. Instead of fostering it, Indo-Mughals allied with the denizens of *jahiliya* against Islam. This is evident in relations with the Ottomans, who in the 16th century were a peer-Empire. Emperor Humayun converted the chance arrival of Admiral Sidi Ali Reïs to a means for establishing relations by making him transport a letter to the Ottoman Sultan (Reïs Chapter VIII; Farooqi 16-17). The death of Humayun put an end to diplomacy, but the possibility was renewed by his successor's conquest in 1573 of Gujarat. With it, Akbar now controlled the religiously significant sea-route to Mecca. At stake had been a symbol of Islamic solidarity, the *Hajj*, but the toil of conquest to further solidarity was to be invalidated by context.

The practical instigation was the imperial household's women's *Hajj* from October 1576 to 1581 (Fazl Chapter XXVII, LXVII). In West Asia, the Indo-Mughal women's manners, comportment and largesse infuriated and scandalised their hosts who condemned the visitors as violators of *Sharia*. So righteous was their indignation that the Ottomans swiftly ordered the Indo-Mughals to be returned home (Basvekalet Arsivi vol. 39, 160). "Akbar's religious attitude [had] scandalised the whole world of Islam" and, it would seem, so too did his women (Farooqi 20). The women obviously exceeded Islam's confines, but so did their state, for its response to its women's treatment was to challenge Islamic solidarity. Akbar's subsequent actions are defined by a new hostility towards the Ottomans. He stopped sending charity, stopped the *Hajj* caravans and terminated relations with the Sharifs of Mecca (who had acted upon Sultan's orders to expel the Indo-Mughals). Indeed, so incensed was Akbar that he contemplated an anti-Ottoman alliance with the Portuguese, despatching a diplomatic mission in 1582 to realise it (Monserrate 159, 163, 172). This was no empty threat. News of the overture prompted the Ottoman Sultan to immediately redeploy twenty galleys (Basvekalet Arsivi vol. 62, 205). The extent of Akbar's fury may be gauged by his putting the Ottoman ambassador in chains and then banishing him, for nothing more than a perception of arrogance of the

plenipotentiary's part (Monserrate 205). It marked how incendiary the notion of space had become.

Self-inverted modernity

Into this fatally disrupted modernity emerged the British. After several abortive attempts to negotiate with the Indo-Mughals and marked by their being treated as equals, a new method was adopted. Throwing modernity's doxology into disarray, moderns today conveniently overlook it for what the British sought was not assimilation: rather they tessellated into Indo-Mughal diplomacy in 1717. However, British modernity's propensity to do so had never been checked as it had never been exposed in the manner of the Mughals to alternate rationalities of the sort ensconced in the *Mb*. The result was an unshakeable prejudice that shaped every interaction, fostered a massive campaign of bribery, and blinded them to their context. In short, the shared Abrahamic origins of the Indo-Mughals and British permitted the latter to both slip into the former, and simultaneously misunderstand them. What the tessellation of 1717 also ensures is the shrinkage of the time available for the pre-modern's conversion to a maximum of 230 years.

In 1714, John Surman's Embassy travelled to Delhi to acquire a Mughal document—*firman*—establishing the right to tax thirty-eight villages in Bengal. A supplicatory power wanted from the Emperor a document valid throughout his realm, indicating that the purpose was not to impose codes by erasing what was encountered. Rather, the harbingers of modernity sought to insert themselves into the Empire's legality. Patently they also knew Indo-Mughal norms well, for nothing but a *firman* would do. Tessellation was not just theoretical, but realised in very real terms: British diplomats put themselves in the care of those allied to Indo-Mughals, and indeed to Indo-Mughals themselves. The British willingly ceded control to an Armenian who handed them over to an Indo-Mughal: Khan Dauran, who became 'the main instrument of our affairs' wrote Surman (Surman 13, 46-47, 50).

The desire to tessellate was undone by modernity's logic of 'othering'. It inexorably propelled the British into believing that the Indo-Mughals were necessarily debased; the practical expression of

this belief was corruption. The decisive undermining of the mission from its very inception by 'othering' became apparent within days of arriving in Delhi. Surman records that he met 'his Majesty', refers to Khan Dauran as their 'Patron', and most intriguingly reports: "We are Assured by our friends that the Vizier is only titular, the Executive power lying Chiefly in the other; So that," he explained to his superiors in Calcutta, "what we are now about to do, is Entirely our Interest. For which reason Agreed that we first visit Khan Dauran; next, the Vizier; and Last of all Tuccurrub Caun" (Surman 48). This deviation was due to Khan Dauran having won Surman's confidence by apparently ensuring the Emperor received them, being able to convince the latter to break with protocol. It was a decision fuelled by the prejudice that the semantics of a debased Court was deviancy.

In submitting their petition, the British further deviated from protocol though they were intent on tessellating. On Khan Dauran's instructions, in August 1715 the petition for the Emperor was prepared in Persian, not English, along with a sizeable 'gift'. Nowhere in the diary is it indicated that local usage was perceived as degrading. Protocol required the petition be handed to the Vizier, who would forward it to the Emperor. The British instead chose to deliberately give the petition to Khan Dauran, who, as a deputy *bakshi* or treasury officer, was far below the Vizier. The petition was promptly returned, with a note that treasury officials examine it. For the first time Surman's diary indicates a hint of displeasure with his advisors. He complained, "for altho' our affairs are fallen into the Patronage of one of the most able men in this Court to dispatch them if He pleases, yet his dilatory method of proceeding is such as must make us pursue our designs with patience". Tellingly, Surman was also informed that Khan Dauran required further gifts (Surman 59, 77-80).

Surman's consternation suggests that the treasury's response was perplexing. This is mainly explained by his incapacity to realise that he had failed because he had attempted to short-circuit the Empire's established procedures. Moreover, the treasury dissimulated its rejection by prevaricating and feigning ignorance. For instance, to the key British demand that they "pay no Custom, in Indostan, in Suratt Excepted" was ignored. On other points the treasury stated that either it had no knowledge of matters and that the British provide further

details or that they were beyond the treasury's jurisdiction (Surman 60, 81). The nature of the response however does not account for Surman leaving unconsidered the possibility that what was required was to transcend his rationality. Instead he fell back upon it and commented that more gifts were required. In January 1716 the petition was formally rejected by the Emperor: after all, in diplomatic matters, the bureaucracy's advice mattered. A second petition was drawn up and sent to Khan Dauran for presentation. Though accompanied by bribes, the primary demand for a *firman*, Surman informed his superiors, "By a mistake ... was omitted." It could have been bureaucratic incompetence; tellingly the diary does not dwell upon what was the most important demand, specifically requiring the Emperor's sanction. It is therefore likely that the omission was deliberate, a means for the Court minions Surman engaged, to mask their inability to meet requests above their pay-grade (Surman 83-84, 91). Testimony to the power of modernity to constrict and misdirect actions is that eight months after their arrival, Khan Dauran's influence remained paramount. Surman recorded, "we were resolved not to goe to the Vizier ... as Khan Dauran himself directed." Instead the British paid visits to several minor officials such as the Vizier's younger brother's deputy (Surman 50, 101, 54).

Failure loomed and the Embassy began to fester; yet not once did Surman think contextually to contemplate that his practice was at fault. Instead, Surman kept to viewing the Court as corrupt and sought Khan Dauran. He sought refuge in dissimulation: "put in mind of our Petition, He (Khan Dauran) surprizingly asked what Petition? Have not I done all your business ... This strange forgetfulness made us in very pathetick terms inquire ... what we might expect after so many promises of having our business effected." Surman undoubtedly was in a poor state. He had put himself in the hands of Indo-Mughals to become a part of the pre-existing structure, but to no avail. At any rate, Surman submitted the petition a second time to the Emperor, hoping that 'a little bribery' would speed it along. Though rejected in March 1716, Surman was instructed to submit it to the Vizier. Despite this, the British clung to their preconception that the court was debauched and that bribery was the ticket to a *firman* (Surman 98-100).

The Embassy responded to the second failure by mounting what was possibly South Asia's first comprehensive campaign of bribery because Surman sought to comprehensively buy out everyone connected with granting the *firman* (Surman 111). This broke with Indo-Mughal traditions of choice gifts symbolising the giver's munificence and so offers an approximation of the cost of prejudice (Eaton; Buckler; Gordon). Contextualising the bribes in their own time and ours is aided by the central imperial vaults containing some 240 million rupees during 1707-09 (Richards, 629). In 2014, India's forex reserves were approximately USD 290 billion (The Hindu, 18 January 2014). One official received Rs. 10,000. It was 0.004 per cent of the 1707-09 treasury, or USD 1.16 billion of today's forex reserves. That was just one bribe. Nevertheless, on 22 July 1716 the British were granted not a *firman* but a *Husbul Hoocum*, an order, which would not convince independent minded governors. It precisely marked the British discovery that they had been comprehensively deceived because the treasury was no more favourably disposed than earlier. At his wit's end, Surman threatened to leave Delhi, and even contemplated visiting the Vizier (Surman 114,124, 152). This was a moment of judgement, for it signified Surman could learn from his context. No doubt the moment was aided by the sense of disgust at the lack of progress that is palpable in the diary, however what won was Surman's rationality.

It was only relieved by the emergence of another context: Surat. The Governor wrote to the Emperor that trade would suffer as the British were discontented and threatening to withdraw. The Emperor read the letter and within days, Khan Dauran, who had been ignoring requests for an audience, granted one. Presumably, the Emperor had instructed the Vizier to look into the matter for the Embassy records a few days later, "Visited the Grand Vizier" (Surman 131). Perhaps Surman was embarrassed at making much of the visit, since he had so assiduously avoided the Vizier. A month later, on 9 November, it also records that the Armenian who introduced them to Khan Dauran "confessed, that the Seaw [required for the *firmans*] cannot be given, without our petitions First going to the Vizier." Having been told that the most rewarding course for action was to keep to the Court's standard operating practices, the British rapidly changed tack. The

magnitude of the change is apparent in the nonchalant way in which it is recorded: "The Phirds (*firmans*) were all carried to the Grand Vizier from the Duanny, who Ordered the Duan Colsa to carry them immediately to the King and get them Signed, which was done accordingly." Surman kept to this profoundly off the cuff style, recording their success by only writing: "For the Vizier as is usuall making a mark to petition, so his Majesty Signed his Assent to all that those papers contained" (Surman 140). What delivered success then was the case of Surat. It directly affected the Emperor, so he took matters into his own hands and advised the British to follow established forms. Having followed them, the Emperor was in a position to respond to the British, and he did so positively.

The British succeeded in tessellating, but their prejudice continued. Right to the end, Surman was totally unable to transcend his rationality and learn in context, despite all that had passed. The Emperor, having benefited from the British doctor, was loath to see him go. Inexplicably Surman sought Khan Dauran's help, which again proved ineffectual. The Vizier intervened and secured their exit (Surman, 198-201). This final phase reiterates how in practice modernity was incapable of transcending its 'history', escaping from 'othering', noting space and thereby learning in context. Nevertheless, in seeking to tessellate into their 'other', modernity's diplomats expose the *truth* retailed by one and all is at best a lie, till 1717.

Sly modernity

Unmistakably the denial of the pre-modern's significance rides on a falsification for what is claimed is 'history' or modernity's progress as a relentless consumption of linear time. After all, what came to pass till 1717 was a double reversal of modernity. First there was the infiltration of space into Islam to make the Mughals into Indo-Mughals or subjects capable of judgement who transformed intra-Islamic diplomacy. Instrumental by definition, intra-Islamic diplomacy had but one purpose devolved from the divine and that was to further 'history', that is, Islam. Judging in context, the Indo-Mughals refuted 'history'. The second coming of modernity sought not assimilation, but tessellation. Indeed, modernity's desire in 1717 was

self-effacement and it continued till at least 1764 with the passing of the *diwani* (the right to tax) for Bengal to the British. However the very manner of its passing—the *diwani* was seized after battle—suggests that the inexorable logic of consumption underpinning modernity was mounting. Surman's 'othering' or misunderstanding in binary terms and his repeated inability to learn in context then was symptomatic of the assimilation built into modernity. In other words, Surman's mission was a primer for assimilation at a later date.

Nonetheless the *diwani's* seizure cannot deny either the sanctity of what modernity encountered, nor its uncommon resilience. The pre-modern had already converted modernity, and did again, formally till at least 1764. All the seizure of the *diwani* does, then, is shrink the historical time available to modernity for its self-professed victory against its 'other' to between Surman's tessellation and Indian independence or the *diwani's* seizure and independence, that is, a window between 230 and 183 years. In that time the diplomacy of a people occupying a landmass greater than today's India, highly fertile and supporting a population nearly three times as dense as Western Europe's is supposed to have been converted in terms of rationality (Goldwijk). This is to say nothing of modernity's inexperience of the ways of its 'other' or modernity's intellectual finitudes, tantalisingly on display in the concept of 'cultural diversity'. It recognises the inability of 'history' to account, but its continuing usage exposes an intellectual impasse as the failure of modernization.

In other words, there is modernity's slyness, the shrinking of time available to modernity to reorder a relatively massive population and its intellectual disarray both generally and specifically pertaining to Indian diplomacy *today*. They combine to render modernity's claims about how far it has progressed-through-history at best *indeterminate*. Compounding this is the demonstrated resilience of the pre-modern till at least 1764. Despite all of this, the claim being made is a modest one. It is not that today's diplomatic rationality can be derived directly or legitimately from pre-colonial India, only that the relationship cannot at the same time be ignored. The inheritance may be a 'bastard' one, but the possibility of its alterity makes requisite examination in terms of the present and in a manner unencumbered by modernity's 'history' (Datta-Ray 2015).

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