

embracing life as it presented itself to them” (p. 97) calls for an alternate reading that can claim that these children did not see the stark opposition between *manush* and *khatni* that the elite discourse produced for them; *khatni* was constitutive of their life and humanness.

Focused on postcolonial legislation, chapters 4 and 5 explore the uneven responses of children to the question of their rights. Their forays with local vendors and their complicity with the police in dealing with critical situations demonstrate the farcical nature of children’s rights and their infringement. Chapter 4 offers an astute analysis of what constitutes “responsibility” for street children. Instead of posing “responsibility” as an antidote to children’s rights, particularly for the child laborers, Balagopalan argues that children are both capable of and obliged to handle responsibility—the networks of trust and noncontractual exchanges that they carve with local authorities explain their simultaneous risk of being exploited and being taken care of (p. 133). The examination of the Right to Education Act (2009) in chapter 5 further reveals the fraught relationship between working lives of children and state-run educational institutions. Claiming that not all agency has to be individuated, Balagopalan asserts that for understanding marginal children, their agential practices need to be examined in their embeddedness in kinship networks and affective community ties.

Ironically, a book so rich in theories elides questions of gender, caste, and religious specificities. Balagopalan’s children are predominantly Muslim males, and the caste backgrounds of others are not mentioned. Her subjects provided ample scope to explore connections between caste, religion, and gender and poverty in a specific spatio-temporal context. Responsibility, which Balagopalan explains as “a key element of non-sovereign subject formation” (p. 185), is constitutive of gender roles and expectations that characterize trajectories of male and female children. An attention to girl-children and their absence in public space would have shed light on different cultures of childhood. A treasure trove of child-related policies and an empathetic appraisal of street children, *Inhabiting “Childhood”* ought to enlighten both specialist and nonspecialist readers. However, its dense, jargonistic narrative sometimes tends to minimize that pleasure.

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A Short History of the Mughal Empire. By MICHAEL FISHER. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015. 256 pp. ISBN: 9781848858725 (cloth, also available in paper).
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Professor Michael Fisher’s *A Short History of the Mughal Empire* comes in the publisher I.B. Tauris’s intended series of “edgy” (read argumentative and analytical) introductory texts for university students and general readers alike. To both introduce a subject and explore the limits of previous historiography is a daunting task for any historian, and the task is made all the more difficult with the abundance of recent scholarship on the Mughals. We can now (soberly) label an American School of Mughal Studies—founded and propagated by scholars such as John F. Richards, Stephen F. Dale, and André Wink in the 1970s and 1980s. With the arrival of Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam in the early 2000s, a range of exciting and innovative new scholarship on the

Mughal empire has arrived from US-based scholars like Munis Faruqui, Lisa Balabanlilar, A. Azfar Moin, Ali Anooshahr, Rajeev Kinra, and Audrey Truschke, and much more is on the horizon. These new histories, led by Alam and Subrahmanyam themselves, have opened up cultural, social, and intellectual history as dominant frameworks for thinking about political lives in South Asia in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. These scholars foreground the discovery of new sources, sub-imperial subjects, analytically diverse approaches, and a critical attention to undermining the colonial and nationalist frameworks of thinking about South Asian pasts along sectarian grounds. The fruits of some of this scholarship are summarized in this survey textbook.

Fisher argues that the Mughal empire emerged from a “dense,” dynamic,” and “uneven” process and was “never an indigenous national empire” (p. 3). The themes of both dynamism and indigeneity follow through in the ten substantive chapters, which are grouped under regnal rulers, with Akbar (1542–1605) as the centralizing force for both the Mughal imperium and the book’s structure. The chapters focus heavily on detailing political history, with various thematic discussions interlaced. Fisher is successful in laying out wider perspectives—geographical or structural—at the beginning and end of each chapter, which likely would help the undergraduate reader summarize or digest the wealth of information contained within. The best example is the chapter titled “Emperor Akbar Makes Himself the Center of the Mughal Empire,” which begins with an arresting *mise-en-scène* from Akbar’s youth, continues with an engaging reading of secondary scholarship and primary sources to lay out Akbar’s “personal power” (p. 83) and his military-fiscalist and military-administrative networks, and concludes with his marital practices and the details of his “vast women-centered world” (p. 92). In twenty pages, Fisher illustrates Akbar’s strategic rule via judicious use of primary quotations and helps the reader construct a theoretical framework for understanding this particular king. Some of the other chapters—particularly on Jahangir and Shahjahan—are much in this vein. Less successful are the chapters on Babur, Akbar, and Alamgir’s wars, which—overabundant with names and places—are likely to overwhelm the general reader.

Fisher suggests that organizing the book by regnal succession allows the reader to follow the imperial sources, and there is much sense in that argument. However, the consequence of that decision is that military and political teleology becomes the hegemonic engine for narrative movement in the text. Fisher’s Mughal rulers have to continuously contend with the distant future of their inevitable fall even as they proclaim policies and build structures that are meant to be ever-lasting. A fruitful comparison is to the textbooks on the Mughals written in the recent past: Annemarie Schimmel’s *Im reich der großmoguln: Geschichte, kunst, kultur* (The empire of the great Mughals: History, art, culture) and Harbans Mukhia’s *The Mughals of India*.¹ Both of these textbooks restrict the political temporality to an opening chapter or two and focus the rest of the book on thematic issues such as “Religion,” “Household,” “Etiquette,” or “Folklore.” The reader is thus able to think broadly and across the various Mughal formations with attentive details to the histories of previously subsumed subjects such as gender or the subaltern. While Fisher is able to bring these issues to bear in his text, they remain at the margins of the text. The choice forces the reader to contend, without help from the author, with certain questions: What constituted “Indian” across this time and space? What, if anything,

¹Annemarie Schimmel, *Im reich der großmoguln: Geschichte, kunst, kultur* (Munich: Beck, 2000; in English: *The Empire of the Great Mughals: History, Art and Culture* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004); Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004).

can be labeled the Mughal political theory? What role did “contingency” play in Mughal governance? What of this is the result of recent advancements in the scholarship? In short, the structure of the book hinders the reader’s ability to grasp what is, what changes, and what remains across a wide swath of history and historiography.

A general reader looking for a cogent overview of the political history of early modern South Asia with ample documentation from Mughal primary texts would benefit from *A Short History of the Mughal Empire*. However, scholarship is consistently evolving in thinking of Mughal imperial formation with an emphasis on cultural or sacral power, borderland spaces, and subaltern perspectives, and this volume does not fully represent that evolution.

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Visions of Development: Films Division of India and the Imagination of Progress, 1948–75. By PETER SUTORIS. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. xxvi, 225 pp. ISBN: 9780190608323 (paper).
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Peter Sutoris’s *Visions of Development* offers a superbly researched picture of the history of the workings of the Films Division, India’s state-run documentary films unit. Sutoris draws on official correspondence, memoirs, and interviews with veteran and contemporary filmmakers as well as civil servants who worked in the Films Division. A fascinating picture emerges of the “production pipeline” within the Films Division that reliably delivered state-produced documentary films (as compulsory screening, no less) to commercial theaters across the country for nearly four decades after India’s independence. This valuable institutional history comprises the first part of this three-part book.

The topics of these films showcased the agendas of the elitist, top-down, Nehruvian developmental policies on subjects such as family planning, industrial modernization, and the “upliftment” of Adivasis, as well as, significantly, “acceptable behavior” (p. 99) or the “blueprints for ethical citizenship” (p. 102), including such topics as honesty, selfishness, and thrift. These films were didactic in tone, frequently Orientalizing, and incapable of creating space for criticisms of statist policies. Both live action and animation (useful for its presumed universalism in a country with vast regional and linguistic differences), the films made “the state visible to its citizens,” observes Sutoris (p. 8). Exemplarity was the point and goal of these films (also in evidence in the frequent use of reenactments and dramatizations). All these features were legacies of the output of the pre-independence Information Films of India, established by the British in India for documentary films.

Despite these highly codified features, Sutoris’s research shows that three distinct groups of actors (political elites, civil servants, and filmmakers) with increasingly competing agendas, created the spaces for less programmatic filmmaking to emerge. The Films Division’s documentary filmmakers—both the conventional ones and the “outliers” who rode the experimental wave of the 1960s—were familiar with other iconic tendencies in cinematic modernism: Dziga Vertov, the French New Wave, cinema vérité. Their global interests open a window to a transnational lens through which to view not just statist