

Project Title: Sovereignty, Sunni Legalism, and the Religious Culture of the Mughal Empire (c.1640–c. 1680)

Abstract

My research examines the nature and structure of Islamicate sovereignty in the seventeenth century Mughal Empire in South Asia. I will develop a historical narrative on the rise of Sunni legalist discourse, which led to jurisprudential reforms and the compilation of the imperial legal code, *Al-fatawa al-'alamgiriyya* or “The Institutions of the World Conqueror” in the 1660s. Legal reform rationalized civil law for different religious subject populations like Hindus, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. Questioning the prevalent historiographical position, which attributes these changes to the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb's (r. 1658–1707) “Islamic orthodoxy” and conservative policies, I hypothesize instead that the political rivalries between Sunni legal authorities, networks, and institutions played a significant role in pushing for state intervention. The systematization of law for the first time transformed the Mughal State from a more flexible Turko-Persian entity it inherited from the Delhi Sultanate into a regionalized empire under greater centralized control. Examining a large corpus of Persian and Arabic legal and political texts, which have been understudied, I wish to demonstrate how the Mughal polity increasingly constituted itself as a “body- politic” in Islamic jurisprudential terms. My study offers a regional history of legal cultures in three provinces, Lahore, Kashmir, and Bihar, to illustrate the conflicts, differences, and particularities of local legal systems within the Mughal Empire. I also critically reassess the status and characteristics of early modern Islamic law through the comparative legal history of Mughal and Ottoman States, which shared similar features. My research will also explore the posterity of Aurangzeb's code, Mughal jurisprudential reforms, and early modern legal treatises as they formed the basis for colonial modes of governance of Muslim communities and “Anglo-Mohammedan” civil law in nineteenth century British India.