



5. Indigenous Banking, Credit Networks, and Commercial Expansion in Mughal India: A Historical Study

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Abstract

The Mughal Empire (1526–1707) represented one of the most commercially integrated economies of early modern Asia, supported by expanding monetisation, urbanisation, regional markets, and participation in Indian Ocean trade networks. While previous scholarship has extensively examined Mughal agrarian systems, imperial revenue structures, textile production, and European commercial expansion, the financial institutions that sustained commercial exchange remain comparatively understudied. This review critically examines the role of indigenous banking institutions, merchant credit networks, and financial instruments in facilitating trade during the Mughal period. Drawing upon major historical monographs and peer-reviewed studies, the paper analyses the functioning of Sarrafs (money changers and bankers), hundis (bills of exchange), merchant-financier networks, and the relationship between commercial capital and the Mughal state. The review argues that Mughal trade expansion was not solely dependent on commodity production or imperial regulation but was sustained by sophisticated financial mechanisms based on trust, reputation, and institutionalised credit practices. Indigenous financial actors performed multiple banking functions, including currency exchange, bullion management, credit provision, deposit handling, and long-distance money transfer. The study further highlights significant historiographical gaps, particularly the limited quantitative reconstruction of credit networks, insufficient comparative analysis with contemporary global financial systems, and inadequate application of digital historical methods. By positioning Mughal financial institutions within broader debates on early modern capitalism and global economic history, this review demonstrates the importance of indigenous banking systems in understanding the commercial foundations of Mughal India.

Keywords: Mughal Empire; indigenous banking; credit networks; hundi; Sarraf; merchant capital; economic history; Indian Ocean trade

Introduction

The economic history of Mughal India has traditionally been examined through the interconnected themes of agrarian production, imperial revenue extraction, urban development, textile manufacturing, and overseas commerce. Historians have demonstrated that between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, India emerged as one of the major centres of early modern global production and trade, particularly in textiles, agricultural commodities, and manufactured goods (Chaudhuri, 1985; Habib, 1999). However, commercial expansion required financial mechanisms capable of transferring capital, managing risks, providing credit, and facilitating transactions across vast geographical distances.

Unlike modern economies with formal banking corporations and central financial institutions, Mughal India relied upon a complex network of indigenous financial intermediaries. These included money changers, merchant bankers, brokers, and community-based financiers who developed sophisticated systems of credit and exchange. Among these institutions, the *Sarrafs* occupied a particularly important position because they operated simultaneously within the monetary and credit spheres of the economy. They assessed coins, exchanged currencies, provided loans, maintained accounts, and facilitated payments through instruments such as *hundis* (Haider, 2019).

The importance of these institutions challenges earlier interpretations that associated financial modernity primarily with European colonial intervention. Recent economic history has increasingly demonstrated that South Asian merchants possessed advanced commercial practices before European political dominance. Indian merchants participated actively in regional and international trade networks, supported by indigenous financial arrangements that enabled capital circulation across inland and maritime spaces (Chaudhuri, 1985; Subrahmanyam, 1990).

The Mughal financial system was therefore characterised by a relationship between three major elements: commercial exchange, credit networks → institutional trust

Trade depended not only on the availability of goods but also on the ability of merchants to obtain capital, transfer funds securely, and maintain confidence among geographically separated economic actors.

Despite their importance, indigenous financial institutions remain less explored compared with other aspects of Mughal economic history. Existing scholarship has produced important studies on taxation, agrarian relations, and maritime commerce, but the institutional history of banking, credit, and financial intermediaries remains fragmented. This review addresses this gap by synthesising existing scholarship on Mughal financial systems and identifying future directions for research.

Literature Review

Scholarship on Mughal economic history initially focused mainly on agrarian production, taxation, and state administration. Moreland (1923) provided an early account of economic conditions under the Mughals, while Habib (1999) demonstrated the importance of monetisation, revenue collection, and market development within the Mughal economy. These studies established the broader economic setting in which commercial and financial institutions operated.

Later research shifted attention toward merchants, trade networks, and commercial organisation. Chaudhuri (1985) showed that Indian merchants participated actively in extensive Indian Ocean trading networks connecting South Asia with the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and Southeast Asia. Subrahmanyam (1990) similarly emphasized the interaction between merchants, political authority, and regional markets, challenging interpretations that treated Indian merchants merely as intermediaries for European companies.

More recent studies have highlighted the significance of indigenous banking institutions. Haider (2019) showed that *Sarrafs* performed functions extending beyond money changing,

including credit provision, remittance, deposit handling, and commercial finance. The *hundi* was another important instrument that facilitated long-distance payment and reduced the risks associated with transporting metallic currency (Habib, 1972). Such systems depended heavily on reputation, trust, and established merchant relationships.

Existing scholarship therefore demonstrates that Mughal commerce was supported by sophisticated financial networks rather than by commodity exchange alone. However, research remains fragmented, particularly regarding regional differences, quantitative estimates of credit flows, the role of lesser-known merchant groups, and comparative analysis with other early modern financial systems. These limitations provide the basis for the present review.

Indigenous Banking Institutions and the Sarraf System

The financial organisation of Mughal India was supported by a network of indigenous banking institutions in which *Sarrafs* (money changers and bankers) occupied a central position. Unlike modern banking institutions, Mughal financial systems operated through private commercial networks based on trust, reputation, and specialised knowledge of currencies and exchange practices. The expansion of monetised transactions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created a growing demand for intermediaries capable of assessing coins, facilitating exchange, and providing credit services (Habib, 1999).

The role of *Sarrafs* extended far beyond simple currency exchange. They were involved in coin authentication, bullion trade, money transfer, lending, and management of credit transactions. Haider (2019) explains that Mughal exchange systems consisted of interconnected cash and credit spheres, where *Sarrafs* operated within both domains by managing metallic currency as well as credit instruments. Their expertise in determining the weight and purity of coins helped maintain confidence in commercial transactions across regions where multiple currencies circulated.

The importance of *Sarrafs* was particularly visible in major commercial centres such as Surat, Ahmedabad, Agra, and other urban markets. In these locations, they acted as financial intermediaries between merchants, state officials, and local communities. Their ability to exchange different currencies and provide liquidity reduced transaction barriers in a diverse monetary environment. For merchants engaged in long-distance trade, these services were essential because physical movement of large quantities of coins involved significant risks and costs (Chaudhuri, 1985).

A major contribution of the *Sarraf* system was its integration with credit networks. By accepting deposits and issuing financial instruments such as *hundis*, *Sarrafs* enabled merchants to transfer money between distant locations without transporting bullion. Such practices demonstrate that Mughal India possessed sophisticated financial mechanisms based on institutional trust and commercial reputation rather than formal banking structures (Habib, 1972; Haider, 2019).

The relationship between the Mughal state and *Sarrafs* was also significant. Although the imperial administration maintained its own fiscal machinery, it often depended on experienced financial specialists for currency management, revenue transfers, and bullion transactions. This interaction illustrates that Mughal finance developed through cooperation between state

institutions and private commercial actors rather than through complete state control of financial activities (Alam & Subrahmanyam, 1998).

Despite their importance, the study of *Sarrafs* remains limited compared with research on Mughal taxation and trade commodities. Existing scholarship has established their importance as financial intermediaries, but further research is required to examine regional variations, the scale of their operations, and their connections with merchant communities across South Asia. Understanding the *Sarraf* system provides important insights into the institutional foundations that supported Mughal commercial expansion.

Hundi Networks and Credit Mobility in Mughal India

The *hundi* system represented one of the most important indigenous financial mechanisms supporting commercial activity in Mughal India. Functioning as a bill of exchange, the *hundi* enabled merchants to transfer money, extend credit, and settle payments across distant regions without the physical movement of coins. In an economy where long-distance trade involved significant risks related to transportation, theft, and currency variation, *hundis* provided a secure and efficient method of financial transfer (Habib, 1972).

The expansion of Mughal markets and increasing monetisation during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries created greater demand for flexible credit instruments. Merchants involved in inland and overseas trade frequently relied on *hundi* networks operated by bankers and *Sarrafs*. These instruments connected commercial centres such as Surat, Ahmedabad, Agra, Lahore, and Patna, allowing merchants to deposit money at one location and receive payment at another through trusted financial intermediaries (Chaudhuri, 1985).

Unlike formal banking systems based on central regulation, the effectiveness of the *hundi* system depended on social trust, reputation, and established commercial relationships. The credibility of the issuing merchant or banker determined whether a *hundi* would be accepted across different markets. This demonstrates that Mughal financial practices were deeply embedded within social and professional networks rather than operating solely through legal institutions (Bayly, 1983).

The role of *Sarrafs* was particularly significant in maintaining *hundi* networks. As financial intermediaries, they issued, discounted, and redeemed bills of exchange while also maintaining accounts for merchants. Haider (2019) argues that Mughal financial exchange consisted of interconnected cash and credit systems, where *Sarrafs* facilitated transactions through both metallic currency and credit instruments. Their activities allowed merchants to overcome geographical barriers and maintain liquidity within expanding commercial networks.

The *hundi* system also contributed to the functioning of the Mughal state. Provincial revenue transfers, commercial payments, and financial transactions could be facilitated through these credit mechanisms, reducing dependence on the physical transportation of bullion. This relationship illustrates the interaction between imperial administration and private financial networks, where state institutions benefited from the expertise and infrastructure developed by indigenous bankers (Alam & Subrahmanyam, 1998).

Although the *hundi* system demonstrates a high degree of financial sophistication, existing scholarship has largely examined it through qualitative historical evidence. Further research

using quantitative methods and network analysis could provide deeper insights into the scale of *hundi* circulation, regional variations, and the role of specific merchant communities in sustaining these financial networks. Understanding *hundi* networks is therefore essential for recognising Mughal India's contribution to the development of early modern financial systems.

Merchant Communities and Commercial Capital in Mughal India

Merchant communities formed the backbone of Mughal commercial activity by providing capital, organising trade networks, and facilitating the movement of goods across regional and international markets. Rather than functioning as passive intermediaries between producers and foreign traders, indigenous merchants actively controlled commercial operations through investment, credit arrangements, and long-distance trading networks. Historians have increasingly emphasised that Mughal commerce depended on the interaction between merchant capital, financial institutions, and social networks based on trust and reputation (Chaudhuri, 1985; Subrahmanyam, 1990).

Gujarati merchants were among the most influential commercial groups during the Mughal period. Ports such as Surat and Cambay connected inland production centres with the wider Indian Ocean economy, linking Indian merchants with markets in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and Southeast Asia. These merchants participated in textile exports, commodity exchange, shipping, and financial activities, often relying on indigenous credit mechanisms such as *hundis* to support long-distance transactions (Chaudhuri, 1985). The commercial success of Gujarati merchants demonstrates the importance of regional trading communities in integrating local economies with global markets.

In northern and western India, merchant groups such as Baniyas and Marwaris developed extensive financial networks that combined trade, money lending, and banking activities. These communities operated through kinship and social connections, enabling them to mobilise capital and establish commercial links across distant regions. Bayly (1983) highlighted that merchant networks in South Asia were deeply embedded in social structures, where community-based trust served as an important mechanism for reducing financial risks and maintaining economic cooperation.

Multani merchants also played a significant role in connecting Mughal India with Central Asian and West Asian markets. Their activities demonstrate that overland trade routes remained important alongside maritime commerce. Through caravan networks, credit arrangements, and partnerships, these merchants facilitated the movement of commodities and capital across political boundaries (Subrahmanyam, 1990).

The relationship between merchant communities and financial institutions was highly interconnected. Merchants depended on *Sarrafs* and bankers for currency exchange, credit provision, and payment transfers, while bankers relied on merchant networks for commercial opportunities. This interaction created a flexible financial environment where economic activity was supported by cooperation between different commercial groups (Haider, 2019).

Despite significant scholarship on major merchant communities, several aspects remain insufficiently explored. Existing studies often focus on prominent trading centres and elite merchants, while smaller regional traders, rural credit networks, and the role of marginalised

groups in commercial finance remain less understood. Future research integrating archival sources with digital network analysis could provide a more comprehensive understanding of merchant capital and financial connectivity in Mughal India.

Relationship Between the Mughal State and Financial Networks

The Mughal state maintained an extensive fiscal system, but its financial operations also depended on private bankers, merchants, and *Sarrafs*. These financial intermediaries assisted in currency exchange, money transfer, credit provision, and the movement of commercial capital. Haider (2019) shows that *Sarrafs* served not only merchants but also the state and members of the ruling elite, indicating close interaction between imperial finance and private banking networks.

The extent of this dependence has generated an important historiographical debate. Leonard (1979) argued that major indigenous banking firms became closely connected with Mughal nobles and state officials and that changes in their political and financial support during the eighteenth century contributed to transformations in imperial power. Richards (1981), however, questioned explanations that placed excessive emphasis on banking firms and argued that Mughal fiscal difficulties must also be understood in relation to wider problems of imperial revenue, military expenditure, and declining resource flows to the central administration.

This debate suggests that the relationship between the Mughal state and financial institutions should not be interpreted simply as state control over merchants or merchant control over the state. Instead, the evidence points to a mutually dependent system in which imperial administration generated demand for financial services while bankers benefited from state patronage and expanding commercial activity. The interaction between political authority and private finance therefore represents an important institutional foundation of Mughal economic organisation.

Mughal Finance and Global Commercial Networks

The commercial economy of Mughal India was closely connected with wider regional and intercontinental trade systems. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Indian merchants, ports, and production centres participated in an extensive commercial zone extending from the eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, Southeast Asia, and the South China Sea. Chaudhuri (1985) places India within this broader Indian Ocean commercial system and argues that Asian maritime trade was sustained by long-established networks of merchants, ports, caravan routes, and market exchange well before European political dominance. Mughal India therefore needs to be understood not as an isolated imperial economy but as a major node within a highly connected early modern trading world.

The strength of India's position within these networks was closely related to its export-oriented production. Indian cotton textiles, raw silk, indigo, and other commodities were in considerable demand in Asian and European markets. Prakash (1998) demonstrates that European commercial enterprises entered an already developed trading environment in which Indian goods were extensively exchanged across both intra-Asian and Euro-Asian markets. The English and Dutch East India Companies, as well as Portuguese and private European traders, increasingly purchased Indian commodities for redistribution not only to Europe but also to

other Asian markets. Consequently, European commercial expansion in India should not be interpreted as the simple creation of new trade networks; rather, European companies became participants in and gradually reshaped pre-existing systems of Asian commerce.

One of the most significant consequences of this international demand was the large inflow of precious metals into Mughal India. Prakash (1998) identifies the bullion-based character of early modern Euro-Asian trade as a defining feature of the period. European merchants faced difficulty in supplying goods that could generate sufficient demand in Asian markets and therefore relied heavily on imports of precious metals, particularly silver, to finance their purchases. This pattern complemented older trading relationships between India and West Asia, where Indian textiles were frequently exchanged for bullion. Prakash notes that the Red Sea port of Mocha occupied an important position in this flow of precious metals into Mughal commercial circuits.

The influx of silver had implications that extended beyond overseas commerce. It influenced the monetary economy of Mughal India by expanding the availability of coin and contributing to broader processes of monetisation. Moosvi (2008) devotes substantial attention to the relationship among silver inflows, money supply, prices, taxation, and revenue extraction, demonstrating that international trade interacted directly with domestic fiscal and monetary structures. The penetration of silver into the Mughal economy was therefore not merely a consequence of foreign trade; it also affected state revenue mechanisms, market transactions, and the circulation of currency within inland regions.

This interaction between external commerce and the internal economy was particularly evident at major port cities such as Surat. Surat emerged during the seventeenth century as an important maritime centre linking Gujarat and the Mughal hinterland with the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and other parts of the Indian Ocean. Moosvi's work includes detailed studies of Mughal shipping at Surat, mercantile communities, and the economic relationship between Gujarat's ports and their hinterlands, indicating that maritime commerce was sustained by extensive inland connections rather than functioning as an isolated coastal activity (Moosvi, 2008).

The relationship between coastal and inland trade is important for understanding the role of finance. Commodities intended for export had to be purchased from producers, transported through regional markets, and assembled at ports, requiring substantial flows of working capital. Financial intermediaries such as *Sarrafs*, bankers, brokers, and merchant firms helped bridge these stages by providing credit, remittance services, and currency exchange. Haider (2019) describes the Mughal exchange economy in terms of interconnected spheres of cash and credit and shows that *Sarrafs* served merchants, the state, village communities, and members of the ruling elite. Their role illustrates how overseas commerce was connected with internal financial institutions rather than being dependent solely on European capital.

Prakash (1998) similarly emphasizes that the Mughal economy witnessed the growth of banking firms operating across different parts of the empire and using sophisticated credit instruments. This point is particularly important for evaluating older interpretations of European commercial influence. European companies possessed large corporate structures and overseas capital, but they frequently operated within an indigenous financial environment that

already contained mechanisms for credit, money transfer, and settlement of commercial obligations. The expansion of European trade therefore did not immediately replace Indian financial institutions; instead, European companies interacted with existing bankers, brokers, merchants, and credit networks.

A wider regional perspective also demonstrates that maritime and overland commerce were interconnected. Chaudhuri (1985) treats caravan trade as an important complement to Indian Ocean commerce, while Subrahmanyam (1990) explicitly examines the relationship between coastal trade, overland exchange, ports, merchant networks, and political structures. His analysis challenges both the assumption that overseas demand alone drove pre-colonial economic growth and the opposite view that external trade was insignificant compared with the large internal economy. Instead, he emphasises interaction between internal and external commercial processes (Subrahmanyam, 1990).

This interpretation is important because Mughal participation in global commerce depended on the integration of several economic levels. Rural producers and artisans supplied commodities; inland merchants aggregated them; credit networks financed circulation; transport systems linked production centres with ports; and maritime merchants transferred goods to overseas markets. External commerce therefore operated through a layered commercial structure rather than through ports alone. The Mughal economy's global connections were consequently sustained by interaction among production, transportation, finance, political authority, and merchant organisation (Chaudhuri, 1985; Prakash, 1998; Subrahmanyam, 1990).

At the same time, the literature cautions against describing this process simply as "globalisation" in a modern sense. Chaudhuri (1985) identifies substantial commercial integration across Asia but also stresses the historically specific institutional characteristics of Asian commercial capitalism. Likewise, Subrahmanyam (1990) demonstrates that long-distance trade operated within particular political and regional contexts rather than within a single unified market. These perspectives suggest that Mughal commercial integration was extensive but uneven, shaped by local institutions, merchant communities, political conditions, and differences between maritime and inland regions.

The literature also reveals an important historiographical shift regarding European influence. Earlier colonial narratives often portrayed European trading companies as agents that introduced superior commercial and financial practices into an economically static Indian environment. In contrast, later scholarship indicates that European traders encountered highly developed systems of production, trade, banking, and credit. Prakash (1998) argues that the commercial encounter between European enterprises and the Indian economy remained largely market-driven before the consolidation of colonial political power in the later eighteenth century. This distinction is important because it separates the commercial interaction of the Mughal period from the coercive structures that characterised later colonial trade.

Thus, the integration of Mughal India into global commerce should be interpreted as a process supported by both external demand and indigenous institutional capacity. Foreign demand for Indian commodities generated bullion inflows and expanded commercial opportunities, but

these flows could not have been sustained without domestic networks of merchants, bankers, *Sarrafs*, brokers, transporters, and credit instruments. The evidence therefore challenges interpretations that assign primary agency either exclusively to European companies or exclusively to the Mughal state. Commercial expansion was instead the result of interaction between global market demand and indigenous financial and mercantile structures.

Critical Synthesis: Financial Networks and the Commercial Foundations of Mughal India

The review of existing scholarship demonstrates that the commercial strength of Mughal India was supported by a complex financial ecosystem rather than by trade in commodities alone. While earlier interpretations of Mughal economic history focused primarily on agrarian production, taxation, and imperial administration, recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of financial institutions, merchant networks, and credit mechanisms in sustaining commercial expansion. The evidence from studies on *Sarrafs*, *hundis*, merchant communities, and Indian Ocean commerce suggests that Mughal economic organisation was based on the interaction between political authority, market institutions, and socially embedded financial networks (Habib, 1999; Chaudhuri, 1985).

A central argument emerging from the literature is that indigenous financial institutions performed many functions associated with modern banking systems, although they operated through different institutional arrangements. The activities of *Sarrafs* demonstrate that financial expertise in Mughal India extended beyond currency exchange to include credit provision, deposit management, bullion transactions, and money transfers. These institutions allowed merchants to overcome geographical barriers and maintain liquidity across expanding commercial spaces (Haider, 2019). Unlike formal banking systems based on central regulation, Mughal financial practices depended heavily on trust, reputation, and long-established commercial relationships.

The *hundi* system further illustrates the sophistication of Mughal financial organisation. By enabling merchants to transfer value without physically transporting coins, *hundis* reduced transaction costs and security risks associated with long-distance trade. Their effectiveness depended on networks of bankers and merchants who maintained credibility across different regions. This indicates that financial trust functioned as a form of economic capital, allowing commercial actors to conduct transactions beyond the limitations of physical currency movement (Habib, 1972).

The literature also challenges the assumption that European companies introduced advanced commercial practices into India. Studies of Indian Ocean trade and European commercial activity demonstrate that European merchants entered an already established economic environment characterised by developed systems of production, trade, and finance (Chaudhuri, 1985; Prakash, 1998). European companies often relied upon indigenous merchants, brokers, and financiers for procurement, credit, currency exchange, and local market access. Therefore, the relationship between European and Indian commercial actors was not simply one of replacement but rather one of interaction and adaptation.

However, the existing historiography also reveals tensions regarding the relationship between the Mughal state and private financial actors. Some scholars have emphasised the importance

of merchant-bankers and large financial firms in supporting imperial administration and shaping political developments (Leonard, 1979). Others have argued that explanations based primarily on merchant influence overlook broader structural issues affecting Mughal fiscal and political stability (Richards, 1981). This debate highlights the need to examine state and market institutions as interconnected rather than as separate spheres.

Another important finding from the literature is the regional diversity of Mughal financial systems. Commercial practices differed significantly between maritime centres such as Surat, inland markets such as Agra and Lahore, and production regions such as Bengal and Gujarat. While some regions developed strong connections with overseas commerce, others were primarily integrated through inland exchange networks. Future research should therefore avoid treating Mughal finance as a uniform system and instead examine regional variations in banking practices, merchant organisation, and credit circulation.

Despite substantial advances in understanding Mughal commercial history, several limitations remain. First, existing research is largely qualitative and lacks systematic quantitative analysis of financial transactions, credit volumes, and merchant capital. Second, while major merchant groups and trading centres have received considerable attention, smaller financiers, regional traders, and local credit networks remain understudied. Third, digital approaches such as GIS mapping and social network analysis have rarely been applied to reconstruct Mughal financial connections.

Overall, the literature suggests that Mughal India possessed a highly developed commercial and financial structure supported by indigenous institutions. The economy functioned through a combination of imperial authority, merchant enterprise, financial expertise, and social trust. Understanding these networks provides a more balanced interpretation of early modern Indian economic history and challenges narratives that associate financial sophistication exclusively with European influence.

Conclusion

The present review demonstrates that the commercial success of Mughal India was sustained by a sophisticated financial infrastructure based on indigenous banking institutions, merchant networks, and credit mechanisms. While earlier interpretations of Mughal economic history largely concentrated on agrarian production, taxation, and imperial administration, recent scholarship highlights the importance of financial intermediaries and market institutions in enabling commercial expansion. The evidence reviewed in this paper indicates that Mughal trade was supported by a complex interaction between currency circulation, credit systems, merchant capital, and institutional trust (Habib, 1999; Chaudhuri, 1985).

The role of *Sarrafs* illustrates the advanced nature of Mughal financial practices. These money changers and bankers operated at the intersection of cash and credit economies, performing functions including currency assessment, bullion exchange, lending, and financial transfers. Their activities demonstrate that Mughal India possessed specialised financial actors capable of managing monetary diversity and supporting commercial transactions across regional boundaries (Haider, 2019). Similarly, the *hundi* system represented an important mechanism

of financial mobility, allowing merchants and state officials to transfer funds securely without the physical movement of large quantities of coin (Habib, 1972).

The review also highlights that merchant communities were central actors in sustaining Mughal commerce. Gujarati, Marwari, Multani, and other trading groups developed extensive commercial networks that connected inland production regions with maritime ports and international markets. These networks functioned through social trust, reputation, and community-based cooperation, demonstrating that economic exchange in Mughal India was deeply embedded within social institutions rather than operating only through formal regulations (Bayly, 1983; Subrahmanyam, 1990).

The relationship between Mughal finance and global commerce further challenges older interpretations that presented European companies as the primary agents of commercial development in India. Existing scholarship shows that European trading companies entered a commercially developed environment where indigenous merchants, bankers, and credit institutions already played important roles. European participation expanded existing trade opportunities but initially operated through established Indian financial and commercial systems (Chaudhuri, 1985; Prakash, 1998).

However, the review also identifies significant limitations in current scholarship. Although historians have provided detailed qualitative accounts of Mughal financial institutions, systematic quantitative studies of credit circulation, banking operations, interest rates, and regional financial variations remain limited. The geographical concentration of research on major centres such as Surat, Gujarat, and Bengal has also resulted in insufficient understanding of smaller regional markets and local financial networks. Future studies integrating archival research with digital humanities approaches, including GIS mapping and network analysis, could provide new insights into the structure and scale of Mughal financial connectivity.

Overall, the evidence suggests that Mughal India possessed a highly developed commercial economy supported by indigenous financial institutions and merchant networks. Rather than viewing banking and credit systems as colonial introductions, the Mughal case demonstrates the existence of complex pre-colonial financial practices based on trust, expertise, and institutional cooperation. A deeper understanding of these systems contributes not only to Indian economic history but also to broader discussions on early modern global commerce, financial innovation, and the evolution of market institutions.

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