



Research Article

Gokula Jat and the Politics of Peasant Mobilization In Mughal Mathura

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Abstract

This study reconstructs Gokula's role in seventeenth century Mathura to argue that Jat agrarian Mobilization emerged from intersecting trajectories of migration, land tenure struggle and local leadership rather than from a singular religious cause. Drawing on migration histories, Khap institutions and evidence of semi-egalitarian chiefdoms, it situates Gokula and successors such as Churaman within a brokerage model of peasant leadership in which leaders combined military service, land claims and ritual claims to status to negotiate with Mughal and Rajput authorities. Temple interventions under Aurangzeb are treated as politically contingent acts that acquired religious salience in popular memory but were embedded in fiscal and factional logics; religion thus operated as an idiom layered over disputes about revenue, tenure and authority. Rebel strategy depended on fortified centres, heterogeneous recruitment (ascetics, Afghan mercenaries, allied communities) and opportunistic bargaining, generating effective short-term control yet leaving movements vulnerable to coordinated counteroffensives and mercenary fragility. The aftermath shows oscillation between fealty and autonomy, memory of repression informing later extraction and brokerage practices, and eventual translation of peasant repertoires into caste associations and kisan organisations in adjacent regions. Overall, the analysis reframes Jat Mobilization as embedded in imperial political economy, emphasizing brokerage, institutionally grounded caste claims and symbolic legitimations rather than a simple religious or zamindar revolt.

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INTRODUCTION

Framing Gokula Jat and Peasant Mobilization in Mughal North India

Situating Gokula Jat within longer trajectories of Jat history and Mobilization requires a concise framing of ethnogenesis debates, a north western pastoral-agrarian background, and the capacities for collective organisation that made peasant Mobilization possible. The category Jat is historically complex and contested: nineteenth century efforts to trace a singular origin, whether to puranic Jatharas, Rajput or Gujjar lineages, or to Shaivite hair myths, rely on philological analogies and retrospective religious idioms that often function as charters for contemporary identity rather than as straightforward historical testimony; critics have emphasised the speculative character of these accounts and discontinuities in the documentary record (Malik, 2017, p. 6).

More directly relevant for Gokula are sources that place Jats as mobile, militarised pastoralists who moved into settled agrarian roles across the northwest. Early inscriptions and medieval narratives indicate Jat political presence before the Mughal period and describe settlements and social organisation along the Indus and in Punjab and Sind, with a combination of herding, cultivation and localized leadership rather than rigid hierarchical caste stratification. The Chachnama and later Persian chroniclers situate Jat groups along the Indus, in the Salt Range and adjacent regions, producing a consistent picture of a northwest homeland from which later movements and Mobilizations could emerge (Malik, 2017, p. 9).

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Jats appear in Mughal and regional records not only as rebels but as political actors who negotiated with imperial and princely powers, shifting between roles as challengers and as incorporated allies. Archival materials reveal exchanges of gifts, *nazars* and ceremonial reception between Jat leaders and neighbouring courts, indicating that Jat elites were embedded in circuits of patronage even as they sustained oppositional dynamics; they thus constructed flexible strategies of alliance and defiance responsive to local and imperial pressures (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2).

This combined framing, scepticism toward singular origin myths, attention to a northwest pastoral-agrarian formation, and recognition of sustained collective and elite organisational capacities, provides the necessary background for analysing Gokula's peasant Mobilization as part of longer patterns of Jat social and political Mobilization rather than as an isolated episode.

Mughal Mathura and the Agrarian Context

Understanding agrarian conditions in seventeenth century Mathura requires situating local peasant communities, including Jats, within longer patterns of migration, social classification and economic transition. Evidence for Jat movements from north western homelands into the Upper Gangetic Doab indicates that by the mid twelfth century these groups had begun to appear in the region, with eastward migration from south east Punjab toward the Gangetic valley continuing into the early sixteenth century. The narratives generated by Khap and Sarva Khap Panchayats of the Meerut division, which

incorporate records of meetings, royal firmans and private papers, suggest processes of settlement and expansion that ultimately rendered Jats "peasants par excellence" by the sixteenth century, even though historians have expressed doubts about the authenticity and organisation of these materials. (Malik, 2017, p. 11) This pattern of gradual agrarianisation, migration followed by settlement and increasing cultivation, provides the essential backdrop for later Mobilization around land, revenue and local authority in Mughal Mathura.

Accounts that mark Jats' earlier association with pastoral mobility are important not because they locate a single origin but because they explain enduring features of social organisation: semi-egalitarian leadership, kin-based cohesion, and flexible livelihood strategies that combined herding with increasingly sedentary cultivation. When Alberuni later classified Jats as Sudras and "low" people despite their growing economic and military strength by the eleventh century, he exposed a disjuncture between ritual status and material advancement that would continue to shape their position in agrarian hierarchies. (Malik, 2017, p. 11) Such a legacy, semi-egalitarian pastoral traditions reconfigured through settlement and agricultural production, helpfully illuminates why Jat communities in the Doab could sustain collective action over land and revenue grievances.

Long-distance movements and episodes of forced displacement documented in connections between the Persian Gulf, Asia Minor and north western India point to repeated resettlement of populations often described collectively as Jats; deportations and military incursions by figures like Bahram Gor, Mahmud Ghazni, Seljuk and Ottoman conquests, and Timur's campaigns contributed to a history of exposure to external extraction and recruitment. (Malik, 2017, p. 5) These recurrent dislocations, alongside local processes of agrarianisation, informed collective memories of domination and resistance that shaped responses to Mughal fiscal and administrative demands in Mathura.

Debates among philologists, ethnologists and anthropologists over Jat origins, Scythian, Indo-Aryan or linked to puranic Jatharas, underscore the limits of linguistic or racial explanations for concrete agrarian structures; their primary analytic value lies in showing how myths and origin stories function as charters validating contemporary claims to land and status within local agrarian orders. (Malik, 2017, p. 3). For the present enquiry, then, attention to migration into the Doab, processes of agrarianisation, and the persistence of semi-egalitarian social forms provides the most direct insight into the agrarian setting within which Gokula's Mobilization in Mathura unfolded.

Gokula Jat, Zamindari Authority, and Local Leadership

Locating Gokula within zamindari structures first requires attention to how Jat communities came to occupy the agrarian space of the Upper Gangetic Doab as "peasants par excellence" by the sixteenth century. Narratives produced by Khap and Sarva Khap Panchayats of the Meerut division, based on minutes, royal firmans and private papers, describe eastward migration from south east Punjab into the Gangetic valley from

the twelfth to the early sixteenth century and portray Jats consolidating their position as a peasant community over a long durée. (Malik, 2017, p. 11) While these accounts require caution regarding authenticity, they indicate that by Gokula's Mobilization Jat leaders operated in a milieu where their caste held recognised stakes in landholding, local arbitration and collective decision making, anchored in Khap institutions and claims validated through myth and tradition. (Malik, 2017, p. 11). Earlier sources are suggestive of the social form that underpinned such authority: Chachnama reports Jat settlements along the Indus divided into western, eastern and steppe groups with chiefs, elders and Rana but "no distinction of high and low among them," implying an egalitarian or semi-egalitarian chieftdom structure. (Malik, 2017, p. 9) Alberuni's eleventh-century classification of Jats as Sudras and "low" people, despite their economic and military strength and intermarriage with Yadus among thirty six royal races, highlights a recurrent disjuncture between ritual status and material power. (Malik, 2017, p. 11) These elements sketch a pattern in which Jat leaders emerged from communities combining relatively horizontal internal relations with military experience and regional mobility, yet were marked as ritually subordinate within broader hierarchies. (Malik, 2017, p. 9).

Comparative examples from later Mughal and post-Mughal contexts show how Jat elites exercised leadership under agrarian stress and jagirdari dominance, capacities relevant to understanding Gokula's authority in Mathura. Studies of twentieth-century Rajasthan illustrate the institutional resources, panchayats, reform societies and Kisan Sabhas, that Jat leaders deployed to contest landlord power, maintain cohesion and reconfigure rural authority, though the precise twentieth-century details lie beyond Gokula's period. (Sisson, 1969, p. 6). Work on Jat relations with Jaipur in the eighteenth century further illuminates the political idiom in which leadership like Gokula's can be situated: Jaipur archives show cordial relations with figures such as Surajmal, Badan Singh and others, with exchanges of gifts, ceremonial receptions and patronage integrating Jat chiefs into elite circuits rather than leaving them wholly external to state structures (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2). Analysis of these materials emphasises that Jat leaders moved between roles as faithful feudatories and autonomous negotiators, creating a "rebellious dynamic" by constructing alliances and exploiting opportunities when imperial attention was elsewhere (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2). Episodes such as Churaman's shifting service and Raja Ram's levying of fees near Agra after Gokula's execution exemplify a leadership style combining local coercive power, wider martial networks and strategic use of state resources.

Taken together, these strands indicate that by the later seventeenth century Jat leaders in regions contiguous with Mathura operated through layered roles, as zamindars, military entrepreneurs and brokers in imperial and regional politics, drawing on Khap-based peasant authority, semi-egalitarian community structures, and idioms of noble status and alliance with Mughal, Rajput and Jaipur elites. This composite repertoire shaped the context for Gokula's Mobilization against agrarian exactions and imperial agents.

From Agrarian Grievance to Collective Mobilization

Tracing the movement from agrarian complaint to collective action in the Jat countryside requires recognising the long history of extraction and displacement that framed rural expectations of rule. Several westward deportations of populations collectively described as Jats, following Bahram Gor's movement of Kerks, Sangars and Jats from the Persian Gulf to Asia Minor and later in the wake of Mahmud Ghazni, Seljuk and Ottoman conquests, and Timur's ravages, demonstrate repeated experiences of coercive relocation and external control over productive communities. (Malik, 2017, p. 5) These episodes, while not occurring in Mathura itself, establish a background of imperial coercion that shaped later perceptions of Mughal authority in north India. Alongside this coercive history, early evidence situates Jats firmly within agrarian structures: a sixth century inscription referring to Raja Jit Salindra as ruler of Punjab, Malwa and parts of Rajasthan, and indications of Jat power along the Indus and into Multan, show longstanding combinations of land control and political authority. The eighth century Chachnama portrays Jat settlements on both banks of the Indus, western, eastern and steppe groups, whose social organisation was "egalitarian or semi egalitarian," with chiefs and elders but "no distinction of high and low among them," and whose main occupation was cattle herding supplemented by other work. (Malik, 2017, p. 9) When Alberuni later classified Jats as "cattle owners and low Sudra people" despite their economic and military strength, he highlighted a gap between ritual status and material position that would have shaped perceptions of agrarian impositions. (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2; Malik, 2017, p. 11)

Within the Upper Gangetic Doab, Khap and Sarva Khap Panchayat narratives describe eastward migration into the Gangetic valley between the twelfth and early sixteenth centuries and by the sixteenth century characterise Jats as "peasants par excellence." (Malik, 2017, p. 11) Even allowing for doubts about the records' arrangement, by Gokula's time Jats contiguous with Mathura understood themselves as agrarian stakeholders with collective institutions of arbitration and decision making. Myths of origin, whether linking Jats to puranic Jatharas, to Shiva's matted locks, or to Rajput-Gujjar unions, functioned as charters validating land claims and social status rather than reliable genealogies, and thus provided ideological resources through which grievances could be framed as violations of a morally sanctioned order. (Malik, 2017, p. 6; 2017, p. 7) Analysis of such myths shows how grievances about land and status could be moralised and politicised. (Malik, 2017, p. 5)

Later peasant movements in Rajasthan offer briefer but instructive parallels about mechanisms of organisation. In Jodhpur, unrest over forced labour, rents and insecure tenancy produced the Marwar Kisan Sabha, which under Baldev Ram Mirdha converted informal representation into a political organisation that redefined rural relations, held cohesion, and fed into land reform and Congress structures. In Shekhawati, Arya Samaj missionaries, educational societies and Jat Panchayats fostered kisan organisations that confronted Rajput power and altered Jat status. (Sisson, 1969, p. 7) These cases illustrate concrete mechanisms, articulation of grievances

through caste and peasant institutions, organisational consolidation, and linkage to wider political arenas, by which local complaints could become sustained Mobilization.

The political repertoire available to Jat leaders in the Braj-Jaipur corridor further clarifies the transition from grievance to Mobilization. Jaipur archive evidence on the Dastur Komwar Jat cautions against portraying Jat rebels simply as zamindars: records indicate cordial relations with Surajmal, Badan Singh, Partap Singh and Khema Jat, including exchanges of gifts, nazars and ceremonial receptions that signified elite noble treatment. At the same time, Jat leaders "created a rebellious dynamic" by constructing alliances with other challengers, negotiating power with Mughal and Rajput authorities, and shifting between roles as loyal feudatories when imperial wars were distant and autonomous actors when conflicts approached their localities. Incidents such as Churaman's desertion of Sayyid Hussain Khan to cooperate with Jai Singh, his employment in Mathura, and Raja Ram's ability around Agra to exact fees in vengeance for Gokula's execution show that Mobilization depended on combining local coercive capacity, broader networks of martial support, and strategic use of state resources. (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2)

Taken together, these strands indicate that agrarian grievances in the Jat countryside did not automatically produce revolt. When such grievances were embedded in long experiences of extraction and displacement, validated by mythic charters of status, structured through semi-egalitarian community institutions, and channelled by leaders skilled in negotiation and alliance building, they could be transformed into collective Mobilization that challenged Mughal and Rajput authority in regions including Mathura.

Religion, Community, and Symbolic Politics in Mathura Religious Landscape of Mathura

Accounts of Mughal policy towards temples and Hindu religious institutions allow a partial reconstruction of the sacred environment in which Mobilization around Gokula unfolded. Jadunath Sarkar's influential narrative presents Aurangzeb's reign from its outset as marked by systematic temple desecration: he is said to have banned new shrine construction and ordered demolitions to curb Hindu preaching and practice. Sarkar attributes to Aurangzeb a comprehensive order in the twelfth regnal year directing governors to destroy temples and highlights cases such as Somnath, the Vishvanath temple in Banaras, and the Keshav Rai temple in Mathura. Mathura, as Krishna's birthplace on the Agra-Delhi route, is portrayed as especially provocative to Mughal sensibilities; Sarkar even links Aurangzeb's 1670 Ramadan resolve to destroy its principal temple and to rename the city Islamabad, with officials charged to report on demolitions across regions including Gujarat, Banaras, Mathura, Bengal, Orissa, Amber and the Deccan. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 6)

Later historians have qualified this picture. Athar Zaman and Mujeeb Ahmad argue that temple destruction must be seen within a broader political culture in which attacks on temples, by Muslim and Hindu rulers alike, could serve varied aims: asserting political supremacy, legitimising succession, extracting fiscal advantage or displaying religious difference.

Drawing on Romila Thapar and other cases of premodern Hindu temple plunder, they stress that modern memory selectively foregrounds Muslim desecrations while neglecting earlier Hindu ones. In their view, Aurangzeb's orders were often politically contingent, frequently linked to rebellion or specific local circumstances, and embedded in competitive state formation rather than reducible to unmediated bigotry. They cite instances where Aurangzeb granted lands to non-Muslim shrines, refused demolitions after conquest (as in Jaipur, 1681), limited demolitions to particular locales (Mathura, Banaras, Thatta, Multan) and even oversaw temple foundations or inscriptions in some regions. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8)

Within this contested field, Mathura occupies a charged position as both a major Vaishnava centre and a recurrent example in narratives of Mughal temple policy. Sarkar-style accounts link systematic destruction and symbolic remaking of urban space to broader claims that Aurangzeb's religio-political stance alienated groups such as Jats, Sikhs and Satnamis, thereby undermining imperial loyalty. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 6) Revisionist readings, by contrast, emphasise that governance combined episodes of harsh intervention with protection or indifference toward Hindu shrines, and that imperial decisions were shaped by calculations about Rajput and Maratha relations and factional Muslim politics. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8)

These competing interpretations matter directly for studies of peasant Mobilization in Mathura: temple demolition and the symbolic remaking of sacred urban space can be read either as primary religious provocation or as politically instrumental acts that acquired religious meaning in later memory. Critics like Sarkar and L. P. Sharma link the reversal of Akbar's *sulh i kul*, reduced Hindu participation in administration, and temple policy to growing resentment and imperial decline, while Zaman and Ahmad contend such portrayals overstate exclusion, noting continued Hindu presence among mansabdars, rapid modification of an order restricting Hindu clerks in 1671, pensioned redeployments of dismissed painters, and the politicised timing of *jizya* reimposition and abolition to meet specific military and factional needs. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 5) (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 12) (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8; 2023, p. 12) Together these debates suggest the religious environment confronting Jat peasants in Mathura cannot be reduced to unilateral persecution but was constituted by intersecting practices of temple management, fiscal policy and symbolic acts whose meanings remain contested.

Imperial Religious Policies and Local Perceptions

Interpretations of Aurangzeb's religio political measures are central to understanding how imperial policy could be perceived in regions such as Mathura as either targeted religious aggression or politically contingent statecraft. Jadunath Sarkar's account, as presented by Athar Zaman and Mujeeb Ahmad, depicts Aurangzeb's rule as marked by early and systematic temple desecration, citing orders to demolish temples in the twelfth regnal year and specific attacks on Somnath, the Vishvanath temple at Banaras and the Keshav Rai temple in Mathura, together with measures to monitor temple demolition across provinces (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 6). In

this framing, imperial policy appears as a broad assault on Hindu sacred space, readily intelligible by affected communities as deliberate religious provocation. (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 6)

Zaman and Ahmad, however, offer a sustained critique of this nationalist paradigm, arguing that many historians have exaggerated Aurangzeb's religious bigotry and made temple destruction a primary explanation for Mughal decline (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 7; 2023, p. 2). Drawing on Romila Thapar, they stress that temple attacks long predated Muslim rule and featured in a wider political culture in which both Hindu and Muslim rulers demolished or looted temples to assert authority, legitimise succession, or extract revenue (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8). Within this framework, many demolitions attributed to Aurangzeb are presented as context specific, often connected to rebellion or local disputes (for example over Brahmans teaching Hindu theology to mixed audiences at Mathura and Banaras), rather than as indiscriminate assaults on Hindu worship (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8; 2023, p. 7).

Evidence adduced by Zaman and Ahmad also points to protective or neutral aspects of imperial policy: Shah Jahan's orders to preserve temples in parts of the Deccan, Aurangzeb's sparing of temples in heavily Hindu regions, the emperor's refusal to raze temples in Jaipur despite advice to do so, and continued grants to some non-Muslim shrines, including a Sikh site at Dehradun; inscriptions even record some temple construction during his reign (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 8). Satish Chandra's assessment similarly finds no evidence for wholesale royal orders to demolish temples in Aurangzeb's first year and situates later actions at Banaras and Mathura within specific concerns about mixed teaching and political stability (Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 7).

These contrasting positions shape how imperial religious policy might have been perceived locally. Narratives emphasising sweeping bans, large-scale destruction and city renaming provide a framework in which Jat peasants and other Mathura communities could plausibly interpret Mughal acts as direct persecution. The revisionist reading, by contrast, highlights conditional, instrumental temple interventions, continuing patronage of some non-Muslim sites, and a shared temple-centred political culture, suggesting contemporaries may at times have understood Mughal measures as transactional and context specific. Consequently, local perceptions in Mathura were likely mediated by particular episodes, such as the destruction of Keshav Rai, by patterns of land grants and protection, and by the memory frameworks through which later historians and communities reconstructed Aurangzeb's reign.

Networks of Caste, Kinship, and Military Service Caste Structures and Rural Hierarchies

Patterns of caste and rural hierarchy relevant to Jat Mobilization around figures such as Gokula can be approached through two connected bodies of evidence: long-term reconstructions of Jat social position and twentieth-century studies of Jat-dominated peasant politics in Rajputana. Both sets foreground Jats as numerically significant rural communities embedded in stratified agrarian orders structured by caste distinctions and jagirdari power. Sisson's analysis of peasant movements in

Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner explicitly identifies Jats as "traditionally tenant farmers" and "the largest single caste" in these states, while Rajputs appear as "the traditional landed aristocracy," concentrated especially in jagirdari estates. This configuration produced local hierarchies in which Jats were predominant in village society yet subordinated to Rajput landlords through tenancy relations, rent demands and obligations to perform labour; peasant agitation was often most intense where jagirdari extraction was greatest, suggesting that Jat numerical dominance combined with jagirdari pressure to produce recurring rural contestation. (Sisson, 1969, p. 3) Within this structure, Jats occupied an intermediate position: neither landless labourers nor high aristocracy, but tenant cultivators whose capacity to organise caste associations and kisan sabhas gave them leverage in reconfiguring rural power. Evidence from Shekhawati clarifies how such organisations emerged within Thikanas and large jagirs and were "parochial" in scope, reflecting the segmental organisation of traditional authority; Jat Panchayats and Kisan Sabhas there explicitly aimed "at changing the social and economic status of the Jats by a direct confrontation with Rajput power," even as they drew support from educational societies and Arya Samaj missionaries that reshaped intra-caste norms and aspirations. (Sisson, 1969, p. 7) Rajputana variations confirm the general model rather than contradict it. In Jodhpur, for example, selective state representation and access to schools, hostels and state service posts provided channels of upward mobility for some Jats while leaving the underlying jagirdari-based hierarchy intact; Marwar Kisan Sabha retained a caste basis and confronted jagirdari excesses within those constraints. (Sisson, 1969, p. 5) In Bikaner, more progressive land settlement and tenancy reforms moderated jagirdari autonomy and contained some peasant protest, yet important Jat families still obtained education and administrative posts while lower-status Jats entered police and revenue services, indicating internal stratification within the caste linked to state structures. Jat leaders later converted this positioned advantage into broader political influence through roles in Pradesh Congress Committees and multi-caste coalitions when institutional openings appeared. (Sisson, 1969, p. 10; 1969, p. 11) Over the long term, these Rajputana cases demonstrate a recurring pattern: Jats, as the largest rural caste, were embedded in hierarchies defined by jagirdari tenure, Rajput aristocratic dominance and differentiated access to state offices, while internally developing elite and non-elite strata through education and organisation. (Sisson, 1969, p. 3; 1969, p. 5; 1969, p. 7; 1969, p. 10) Set against theories that myths can function as "charters of validation" for present social arrangements, these findings suggest that caste structures and rural hierarchies both constrained and enabled Jat Mobilization, shaping how grievances were articulated and how leadership figures such as Gokula might emerge within seventeenth-century Mathura's agrarian society, as outlined in next section.

Non-Jat Participation and Alliances

Non-Jat participation in Jat-centered Mobilization around figures such as Gokula must be reconstructed from limited but suggestive evidence on alliances and support networks. A key strand concerns how Jat elites in the Braj-Amber-Jaipur

corridor drew on non-Jat martial groups and ascetic fighters when contesting Mughal and Rajput authority. A detailed study based on the Dastur Komwar Jat emphasises that Jat leaders operated within a wider field of negotiation and alliance rather than as isolated zamindars. In describing Churaman's career, the author highlights his recruitment of non-Jat ascetic and professional fighters, notably approximately 12,000 Sanyasi combatants in his stronghold, and Afghan soldiers hired from Shahjahanpur and Bareilly at about three rupees per day, together with support from Mewatis. This composite military force cannot be reduced to a single caste base and indicates that Jat leadership could integrate other socially and regionally distinct groups into its networks. Churaman's capacity to shift patrons and retain autonomy in Mathura rested in part on command over heterogeneous manpower: Sanyasis, Afghan mercenaries and Mewati supporters provided a flexible, non-Jat augmentation to Jat villagers and militias. The recruitment of fighters drawn from deprived communities and professional warrior groups suggests agrarian grievances in Braj could be articulated in ways that resonated beyond Jat society, enabling broader coalitions against what is described as an "exploitative state." Non-Jat participation is likewise evident when, in 1716, Churaman's stronghold is reported to have contained sizeable bodies of Sanyasi fighters and Afghans alongside Jat villagers and Mewati backing, a composition portrayed as joining Jat leaders in resistance to imperial and Rajput interventions (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2).

Broader political participation by non-Jat castes appears in later Rajputana peasant movements, which, though chronologically remote, illuminate patterns of coalition building. In Shekhawati, educational societies and Arya Samaj missionaries from Mahajan and other communities supported Jat schools, while organisations such as the Rajputana Education Society, the Marwar Relief Society and the Birla Education Trust helped sponsor institutions for peasant castes. These activities involved donors and activists from non-Jat groups and facilitated multi-caste coalitions like the AJGAR Sabha, explicitly linking Ahirs, Jats, Gujjars and Rajputs (Sisson, 1969, p. 7). In Bikaner, important Jat families accessed education and state posts and lower-status Jats entered police and revenue services alongside members of other communities; later, Jat leaders participated in governing multi-caste coalitions within District Congress Committees (Sisson, 1969, p. 10; 1969, p. 11). Together, the cases of Churaman and these later movements indicate that Jat-centred Mobilization repeatedly intersected with wider networks of ascetic fighters, mercenaries, regional supporters and reformist or educational elites, producing cross-caste alliances that underpinned sustained peasant resistance.

Tilpat, Rebel Strategy, and Limits of Mobilization

Tilpat as a fortified Jat stronghold in the Braj region is best understood through how rebel strategy combined negotiated access to imperial resources, heterogeneous recruitment, and opportunistic alignment with Rajput actors, while ultimately confronting structural limits of Mobilization. The career of Churaman, operating around Mathura and Thune after Gokula's execution, exemplifies this repertoire. When Jai Singh occupied

Amber and expelled the local *faujdar* Sayyid Hussain Khan, Bahadur Shah sent reinforcements; Hussain Khan in turn paid Churaman to raise troops. Churaman assembled a sizeable force, advanced to Narnaul where Hussain Khan had taken refuge, and was then courted by Jai Singh, who offered to remove Churaman's local rival Jai Tar Singh if Churaman abandoned Hussain Khan and cooperated with Amber. Churaman accepted, deserted Hussain Khan, remained at a distance from both powers while consolidating forces drawn from Mughal pay, and eventually entered Jai Singh's service to operate in the Mathura region. This sequence shows Jat leaders using imperial funds to assemble followers, exploiting rivalries between Mughal and Kachhwaha authorities to secure local advantage, and treating forts like Thune or Tilpat not as isolated redoubts but as nodal points in shifting tripartite relations among Jat chiefs, Mughal officers and Rajput rulers. (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2) Mobilization around these strongholds required broadening the social base of armed resistance beyond Jat peasants. Churaman reportedly drew "other deprived communities" into his camp, recruited Sanyasis and other professional fighters, and hired Afghan mercenaries from Shahjahanpur and Bareilly at daily wages, while securing Mewati support. By 1716 Churaman's stronghold reportedly contained nearly 12,000 professional Sanyasi fighters alongside Afghan mercenaries, a composite garrison that reveals deliberate alliance building across caste and community lines. Such multi-community military labour, assembled through monetary incentives and shared grievances, strengthened immediate defensive capacity but introduced new vulnerabilities: mercenary loyalty proved fragile and recruitment depended on external channels. (Choudhary, 2013, p. 9) Another strategic dimension was the capacity to tax movement and assert coercive control over surrounding territory. Around Agra, Raja Ram's authority grew to the point that "no one could pass without paying a fee to Raja Ram, who was bent upon avenging the execution of Gokula," converting grief over Gokula's death into routine extraction on routes near the city. Yet this visibility also exposed limits: as Jat chiefs extended fiscal and coercive claims over key communication routes, they invited coordinated imperial and Rajput responses, as in Jai Singh's determination to raze Thune. The broader pattern is of a rebellious dynamic sustained through alliances and negotiation rather than a unified, enduring peasant polity. Jats acted as faithful feudatories when imperial wars lay elsewhere, and as autonomous challengers when conflicts struck their localities. This oscillation limited consolidation: reliance on imperial funds, shifting allegiances, and heterogeneous military labour enabled impressive short-term gains but constrained the formation of durable supra-local institutions able to survive sustained punitive expeditions. In short, Churaman and Raja Ram demonstrate that fort-centred Mobilization around Thune and Tilpat combined negotiated resource extraction, multi-community recruitment and targeted coercion, effective in contesting Mughal and Kachhwaha authority in the short term, yet structurally vulnerable to large-scale counterattack and the absence of a stable, overarching organisation.

Aftermath, Memory, and Longer-Term Rural Politics

Reflections on Jat agency after Aurangzeb indicate that suppression of early revolts did not end Jat engagement with regional power but reconfigured it into a recurrent oscillation between negotiation, alliance and selective confrontation. Rather than a linear zamindari rebellion from Gokula to Surajmal, the evidence shows Jat leaders alternating between collaboration and resistance with imperial and Rajput actors, acting as "faithful feudatories" when conflicts lay elsewhere and contesting authority when local interests or shifts in the balance of power demanded it. This pragmatism, visible in careers like Churaman's, who moved between Mughal paymasters and Jai Singh, and in Raja Ram's use of memory of Gokula's execution to justify routine extraction, suggests that memories of repression were mobilised tactically rather than producing a continuous insurgent tradition. Vengeance and the memory of punishment thus became embedded in everyday practices of control and extraction, not simply the basis for perpetual revolt (Choudhary, 2013, p. 2).

Over the long term this recalibrated repertoire fed into broader forms of rural politics. By the twentieth century Jats, though often tenant farmers under Rajput jagirdars, emerged as a major caste able to organise caste associations and kisan sabhas (Sisson, 1969, p. 2). In Marwar the Marwar Kisan Sabha (1946) under Baldev Ram Mirdha institutionalised earlier informal representation, channelled agrarian grievances into land reform agendas and merged with the Congress on the eve of elections (Sisson, 1969, p. 6). Comparable processes in Shekhawati, from Arya Samaj-backed education to Jat Panchayats and experiments in inter-caste coalitions such as AJGAR, illustrate efforts to convert shared agrarian experience into organised politics (Sisson, 1969, p. 7). At the same time, leaders who entered Praja Mandal and Congress structures, exemplified by Sardar Harlal Singh, show how some Jat elites were absorbed into constitutional politics while others remained peripheral (Sisson, 1969, p. 9).

Contrasting princely responses, such as proactive reforms in Bikaner that mitigated jagirdari excesses and facilitated Jat access to state employment, underline that Mobilization took multiple forms: confrontation, institutional incorporation, and elite co-option (Sisson, 1969, p. 10). Read together, these cases indicate that the aftermath of seventeenth-eighteenth century revolts did not produce a simple heroic or continuous insurgency. Instead, memories of coercion and vengeance were woven into flexible strategies of alliance, resource extraction and institutional participation, producing a spectrum of rural politics from fort-based resistance to organised kisan sabhas and party politics.

Comparative Perspectives on Peasant Mobilization in Mughal India

Comparative discussion of peasant Mobilization under Mughal rule can be grounded in the contrast between Jat centred movements and other agrarian protests where Jats formed the largest rural caste under jagirdari regimes. In Rajasthan, Jats appear as "traditionally tenant farmers" and "the largest single caste" in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Bikaner, positioned against Rajputs as "the traditional landed aristocracy," particularly in

areas under jagirdari tenure rather than direct royal administration. (Sisson, 1969, p. 3) This configuration produced intense peasant movements in which Jats, though not landless, mobilised as tenants against landlords, a pattern that helps explain Jat Mobilization in Mathura, where zamindari and imperial extraction similarly structured grievances.

Organisation and strategy in Shekhawati show one model linking agrarian discontent with caste reform and external ideological inputs. Early protest phases emphasised internal social reform within the Jat community, influenced by Arya Samaj missionaries and supported by educational societies and Mahajan-funded trusts such as the Rajputana Education Society and the Birla Education Trust. Kisan Sabhas and Jat Panchayats formed in the 1930s within Thikanas and large jagirs with a parochial, segmental scope but an explicit aim of confronting Rajput power to improve Jat social and economic status. (Sisson, 1969, p. 7) Compared with the Braj revolts anchored in fortified centres like Thune or Tilpat, this Rajputana pattern shows how Jat grievances were converted into durable associations that combined educational and reformist agendas with caste-based political protest.

Jodhpur offers a second model in which institutional representation and state employment mediated Mobilization. Sisson notes that Jodhpuri Jats, while predominantly tenant farmers under jagirdari tenure, had "institutional representation in the state government," and that figures such as Baldev Ram Mirdha could secure schools, hostels and posts in police and revenue services for Jats and other peasant castes. (Sisson, 1969, p. 5) Agrarian unrest in the 1940s over tenancy insecurity, rents and ancillary taxes nonetheless produced conflicts with jagirdars and led to formation of the Marwar Kisan Sabha in 1946, which transformed informal representations into a self-conscious peasant organisation; under Mirdha its leadership maintained cohesion, distributed authority among younger leaders and eventually participated in land reform before merging into Congress structures. (Sisson, 1969, p. 6) In contrast to seventeenth-century Braj, where Jat leaders such as Churaman extracted resources by taxing roads near Agra and negotiated fluidly with Mughal and Rajput patrons, the Marwar case illustrates a later stage in which tenant grievances were channelled through constitutionally oriented organisations embedded in party politics.

Shekhawati further demonstrates how links to urban Praja Mandals and nationalist networks reconfigured Mobilization: debates over whether Praja Mandal aims matched kisan concerns, and the role of leaders like Sardar Harlal Singh as Praja Mandal president, show that alliances with multi-caste urban bodies could translate village protest into party influence, while those rejecting such ties were disadvantaged after independence, producing intra-caste cleavages. (Sisson, 1969, p. 9) By contrast, Braj-Mathura movements around Gokula lacked comparable institutional channels and negotiated chiefly through personal ties with Mughal and Kachhwaha elites rather than formal parties.

Across these regions a common element is the use of myth and tradition to legitimate Mobilization: myths serve as "charters of validation" sanctioning present claims, including kinship and social status. (Malik, 2017, p. 5) In Rajputana, reformist and

educational initiatives among Jats drew on notions of caste dignity and historical peasant identity when confronting Rajput landlords, while in Braj memories of Gokula's execution framed Raja Ram's imposition of transit fees as vengeance.(Choudhary, 2013, p. 2) Together, these cases suggest Jat peasant Mobilization under Mughal and princely regimes operated through varying mixes of agrarian grievances, caste structures, alliance strategies and symbolic repertoires, with later Rajputana movements offering a comparative lens on the more fluid, fort-centred resistance seen in Mathura.

Historiographical Debates and Interpretive Frameworks

Interpretations of Gokula's Mobilization and the Braj rebellions are bound up with wider debates about Aurangzeb's religio-political policies and Jat social history. Historians diverge over whether Aurangzeb's reign marks a decisive religious rupture or whether fiscal, administrative and political stresses better explain imperial decline and rural resistance.(LODH, 2019, p. 3; Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 5) Jadunath Sarkar epitomises the former view, reading Aurangzeb's alleged fanaticism and temple policy as central to imperial decay: in Sarkar's account temple destruction and the reimposition of *jizya* humiliated Hindus and provoked groups such as the Jats to revolt on principally religious grounds, with Mathura singled out as a focal case and Aurangzeb's meditation in 1670 presented as a turning point.(Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 5; 2023, p. 6; 2023, p. 9; 2023, p. 125) By contrast, Zaman and Ahmad, drawing on Romila Thapar, challenge a teleological, nationalist reading that treats temple desecration as a master cause of decline; they place Aurangzeb's temple interventions in a longue durée South Asian practice of using sacred sites for political ends and stress local motives (for example, concerns about Brahmans teaching Muslim children) alongside fiscal and elite bargaining such as halting taxes, reimposing and later abolishing *jizya*, and securing ulama support amid conflicts with Rajputs and Marathas.(Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 9; 2023, p. 6; 2023, p. 4; 2023, p. 8) Sayan Lodh similarly nuances the picture: he highlights competing readings of Aurangzeb as intolerant versus constrained ruler and emphasises structural crises, jagirdari breakdown, agrarian strain, costly Maratha wars, weakened provincial governance and succession problems, that make rural revolts intelligible as part of systemic stress rather than solely religious movements.(LODH, 2019, p. 5; 2019, p. 7) (LODH, 2019, p. 5) Debates over Jat origins and status further shape how historians model Mobilization. Malik rejects speculative philological links tying Jats to puranic constructs or to Rajput-Gujjar unions, privileging material and textual evidence, inscriptions of sixth-century Jit rulers, accounts like the Chachnama and Alberuni's observations, and Khap Panchayat migration narratives, that show evolving pastoral, military and agrarian roles and portray myths as legitimating present social positions rather than as literal origins.(Malik, 2017, p. 3; 2017, p. 7; 2017, p. 9; 2017, p. 11; 2017, p. 5) This rejection of timeless origin myths directs attention to historically specific trajectories and semi-egalitarian community structures within which leaders operated. Choudhary complements this by warning against reducing Jat rebels to mere zamindars: sources such as the Dastur Komwar

Jat reveal patterns of negotiation, alliance-building and oscillation between loyal feudatory status and autonomous challenge.(Choudhary, 2013, p. 2) Together these frameworks produce a synthetic interpretive stance: Braj Mobilization under Gokula cannot be read as either a straightforward religious uprising or a simple economic riot, but as contingent action at the intersection of contested readings of Aurangzeb's policies, long-term debates about Jat identity and status, and evidence for flexible, alliance-based rural politics.

Theoretical Extensions and Broader Implications

Analytical reflection on Jat Mobilization around Braj and Mathura points to general theoretical tools, myths as legitimating charters, caste institutions, and brokerage practices, rather than phenomena confined to a single revolt. Malik's account that origin narratives serve as "charters of validation" stresses that such myths primarily sanction present social arrangements, legitimising kinship and status instead of providing literal histories.(Malik, 2017, p. 5) Generalising this, when leaders like Gokula or Churaman framed claims to land or authority they drew on symbolic repertoires, descent from Shiva's *jata*, puranic Jatharas, or ancient tribal genealogies, which stabilised collective identity and recast resistance as defence of a morally ordered past rather than only reaction to immediate exactions. (Malik, 2017, p. 6; 2017, p. 7; 2017, p. 5) Sisson's longue durée study of Jat movements in Rajputana shows how these symbolic resources intersect with caste organisational forms: traditionally tenant Jats developed caste associations and Kisan Sabhas that later became vehicles of party politics, retaining a caste core while recruiting reformist allies and forming multi caste coalitions such as the AJGAR Sabha.(Sisson, 1969, p. 3; 1969, p. 7) This trajectory from fort centred rebellion in Braj to kisan association politics in Rajputana indicates that semi-egalitarian rural communities with strong internal cohesion can rework Mobilization repertoires as institutional opportunities shift, moving from armed confrontation to electoral competition while preserving caste solidarities.(Sisson, 1969, p. 3; 1969, p. 7) Choudhary's reading of the Dastur Komwar Jat emphasises negotiation and alliance: Jaipur sources reveal ceremonial exchanges, gift giving and patronage circuits in which Jat elites were treated as nobles, even as they alternated between loyal feudatories and autonomous challengers by forging tactical alliances.(Choudhary, 2013, p. 2) The resulting brokerage role casts peasant elites as mediators between village and state rather than as simple outsiders, so Mobilization around Braj strongholds like Thune or Tilpat is better seen as embedded in imperial political economy.(Choudhary, 2013, p. 2) This brokerage perspective problematises explanations that privilege religious policy as the primary cause of revolt. Zaman and Ahmad critique nationalist portrayals of Aurangzeb that foreground temple destruction, *jizya* and Hindu dismissals, arguing these measures functioned as contingent instruments for mobilising orthodox support and managing broader conflicts.(Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 2; 2023, p. 9) Lodh similarly contrasts interpretations of Aurangzeb as a "stern Puritan" with readings that stress structural crises such as jagirdari breakdown, agrarian strain and protracted Maratha

wars.(LODH, 2019, p. 5) Coupled with evidence that temple attacks often predate Muslim rule and served pragmatic aims of supremacy and resource appropriation, the implication is that religion operated as a mobilising idiom layered over political and fiscal disputes rather than as a lone causal axis.(Zaman & Ahmad, 2023, p. 4; 2023, p. 8) Finally, Rajputana materials point to a longer continuum from early modern rural movements to modern party politics. In Shekhawati, debates among Jat elites over collaboration with urban Praja Mandals and the absorption of leaders like Sardar Harlal Singh into Congress created enduring intra-caste cleavages that structured electoral competition.(Sisson, 1969, p. 9) High Jat representation among candidates and top vote getters in the first general elections suggests that longstanding caste Mobilization around agrarian concerns could be translated into parliamentary representation once institutions permitted it.(Sisson, 1969, p. 12) The theoretical extension is that seventeenth-century peasant Mobilization in Mughal Mathura sits on a longer arc: communities contest imperial extraction through forts and armed bands, reinvent collective organisations under princely and colonial rule, and eventually articulate interests in party politics , continuously relying on mythic charters, caste solidarities and brokerage strategies that persist across regimes.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that Gokula's uprising and wider Jat peasant Mobilization in Mughal Mathura emerged from layered, long-term processes rather than from a single cause. Pastoral-to-agrarian transitions and settlement in the Upper Doab created a peasant base whose semi-egalitarian social relations were institutionalised through Khap structures. Contested imperial religious policies and episodes of shrine intervention acquired political salience because religious idioms functioned as charters for land and status claims, yet many such interventions were contextually contingent and embedded in fiscal and factional politics. Brokerage-style leadership linked kinship legitimacy and mythic claims to practical strategies: forts served as centres of control, mercenary and ascetic recruits diversified military manpower, and negotiated bargains with Mughal and Rajput actors converted agrarian grievance into collective action. These practices produced effective short-term regimes of extraction and resistance while limiting durable supra-local institutions, rendering movements vulnerable to coordinated counter-offensives.

Over time those repertoires of alliance, memory of repression, and Khap-mediated solidarity were reworked into kisan associations and political brokerage that connected rural communities to princely and colonial structures. The trajectory from fort-centred revolt in Braj to caste associations and electoral politics in adjacent regions underscores continuity in the use of mythic legitimations, caste organisation, and brokerage strategies across regimes. Reading Gokula and his successors through this lens situates Jat Mobilization within imperial political economy and institutional practice rather than as a simple religious or zamindar revolt, and highlights how episodic violence and negotiated accommodation together shaped longer-term rural politics.

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