

**THE INDIAN MERCHANT DIASPORA AND THE CROSS-
CULTURAL TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIA FROM SIXTEENTH TO
THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY**

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ROHAN



CENTRE FOR RUSSIAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

NEW DELHI – 110067

INDIA

2013



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

School of International Studies

New Delhi - 110067

Tel. : 2670 4365

Fax : (+91)-11-2674 1586

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies

Date: 15.07.2013

DECLARATION


I declare that this dissertation entitled "THE INDIAN MERCHANT DIASPORA AND THE CROSS-CULTURAL TRADE IN CENTRAL ASIA FROM SIXTEENTH TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY" submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.




ROHAN

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



PROF. ARUN MOHANTY
Chairperson, CRCAS



DR. RAJAN KUMAR
Supervisor

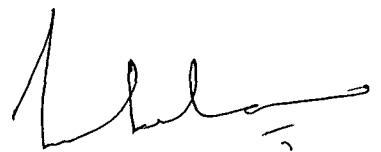
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Needless to say, any error in the dissertation is my own.



Rohan

Dedicated to

Mummy and Daddy

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA: *The Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl*

AN: *The Akbar Nama of Abul Fazl*

BECCAA-GOI: Banking Enquiry Committee for the Centrally Administered Areas, 1929-30, Government of India

BN: *Babur-nama of Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur*

FOEI-IBDCS/AQ: Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India. Compiled in the Intelligence Branch Division of the Chief Staff, Army Headquarters.

TAA: *Tarik-e 'Alamara-ye 'Abbasi or History of Shah 'Abbas the Great of Eskandar Beg Monhi*

TF: *Tarikh-i-Firishta of Muhammad Qasim Firishta*

TFS: *Tarikh-i- Firuz Shahi of Zia al-Din Barani*

TIFS: *Ta'rikh-i-Firuz Shahi of Shams Siraj 'Afif*

TJ: *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir*

TR: *Tarikh-i-Rashidi of Mirza Muhammad Haider*

TSS: *Tarikh –i Sher Shahi of 'Abbas Khan Sarwani*

TY: *Tarikh al-Yamini of Al-'Utbi*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The networks of trade and commerce have been a subject of inquiry for historians and scholars from various other disciplines. They have attempted to analyse the global trends of trade economy and the consequent effects on the cultural and social environment of states near and afar. The study of maritime trade, especially associated with the Indian Ocean has derived much of scholarly attention in the recent past, and that any profound study on the commercial activities of merchant moneylenders and financiers and caravan traders is done only in the larger context of their role in maritime trade. However, in the last two decades, the growing body of literature by scholars, who have shifted their attention from the activities of Europeans Sea-borne Empires active in Asia to the indigenous Asian commercial enterprise, has led to the possibility to study commercial contacts and commercial activities of the merchants both inside and outside the Indian sub-continent. It is in this regard that the present study seeks to analyse India's commercial relationship with Central Asia with the primary focus on the activities of Indian merchants who operated through the larger diaspora networks.

The present work titled 'The Indian Merchant Diaspora and Cross-Cultural Trade in Central Asia from Sixteenth to Early Nineteenth Century' intends to study several issues such as the emergence, economic functions, social organisation and decline of the Indian merchant diaspora across the greater part of Eurasia, which includes much of Russia, the Caucasus, Iran and Central Asia. Some significant questions which would be addressed in the following study are: what was the ethnic composition of the Indian merchant community which operated in the Indo-Turan-Central Asian overland trade route? Whether these merchants could be identified with the generic term 'Indian'? How far the merchant diaspora in general was different from other non-commercial diaspora communities across the world? What were the functions performed by the merchants in the Indo-Central Asian commercial relation? To what extent these in-migrant merchants gained favour from the host-society and what were the factors which accounted for their wider acceptance across the various urban centres and rural areas throughout this region? And finally, what were the factors that impacted the general shift and dispersion, sometimes leading to the decline of diaspora

at certain places, of the trading locations of these merchants in the early modern period?

In addition to addressing these questions it becomes pertinent to analyse the nature of the Indo-Turan-Central Asian trade in the early modern period. Thus, it becomes more important to illustrate the vitality and general characteristics of this commercial relationship between India and Central Asia. It is primarily due to the conspicuous presence of tens of thousands of Indian merchants living in Central Asia in various caravanserais alongside the trade routes. As we would see later (see section on Historiography) that the commercial relations between Central Asia and India in the early modern period has been viewed as a passive economic phase by a number of scholars. They have focussed on either the Central Asian commerce in relation to the greater global economy and Indian Oceanic trade or tried to portray the Russian expansionist policy in Central Asia in the positive light. However, it seems that the Central Asian commerce was equally competent with the ongoing maritime trade during that time, and that, it was a lucrative destination for trade for thousands of Indian and indigenous merchants throughout the early modern period. The recent studies which were conducted on the basis of various travel accounts and the personal experiences of the merchants themselves, accompanied by a vast source of information from the state chronicles of the Mughal, the Safavid and the Uzbek Empire provide ample evidences to justify this fact. In addition to the understanding of historiography, it is also important to define 'diaspora', 'cross-cultural trade' and the geographical setting in the context of this research.

This dissertation comprises of three chapters which separately deal with the various facets of this commercial enterprise beginning from the emergence of the diaspora in the sixteenth century to its decline in the nineteenth century. Also, the *modus operandi* of tens of thousands of merchants and the commodities of trade is also discussed at length in order to understand the changing dynamics of trade during the period of three and a half centuries. The attention would be primarily devoted to seek answers to the above-mentioned questions, in order to corroborate to the hypotheses that this research paper is intended to focus on. This brings us to the synopsis of the proposed central arguments that the present work aims to corroborate. The central hypotheses of the present work are: first, the cross-cultural trade became one of the most crucial factors in the peaceful establishment of the Indian merchant diaspora community in Central

Asia; second, Indo-Central Asian commercial relation transformed due to the increasing demand of Indian commodities in Russia, even during the politically turbulent Central Asia in 18th-19th century; third, the decline of this lucrative commercial relation between Central Asia and India and the dissolution of Indian merchant diaspora was primarily in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in Russia, and that, it not only shifted the balance of trade in the hands of Russian *gosti* (merchant elites)-industrialists, but also brought Tsarist Russia in direct conflict with Britain during the phase of colonization of Central Asia in the nineteenth century.

Defining 'Diaspora' and 'Cross-Cultural Trade'

The semantic domain of the word 'Diaspora' has come to include the words like, guest-worker, refugee, expatriate, immigrant, overseas community, ethnic community and exile community in recent years, which was once used to describe the dispersion of Jewish, Greek and Armenian communities (Tololyan 1991). Diaspora is broadly defined as the presence of a group of people outside their homeland. The broader utility of this term makes it a favourable subject for the scholars from various disciplines engaged in trans-national studies. As this definition virtually includes any group of individuals living beyond their homeland has two intrinsic fallacies. First, the magnitude of the group is not defined; and second, homeland is defined by the individuals themselves which in turn is a more amorphous concept and solely depends on how an individual perceives it. It is therefore important to draw a narrower definition of this term in the present context.

The term 'Cross-Cultural Trade' is used to describe the most common institutional form of trade settlement which develops in the cities outside their home community. It demands the commercialists to physically locate themselves as guests or aliens in another town which normally has a great value in the commercial life of the host society. Invariably these merchants had to engage themselves in learning the customs, foreign language and the commercial practices of their hosts (Curtin 1984). It is here that these merchants began to serve as cross-cultural brokers, encouraging and helping trade between the hosts and their native people who moved along with them to these trade route cities. The merchants who were involved in such commercial enterprise can be further categorised as: the merchants who went to these towns and stayed; and the merchants who regularly moved back and forth between their homeland and the trading towns. For certain, the number of settlements began to grow and became more

complex; meaning thereby that the merchants who operated in these cities maintained their diaspora communities across the trading routes and facilitated the commercial activities throughout the host society. Therefore, a two-way communication existed: first, the communication between the merchants of a common origin owing to the requirement for an inter-related net of a commercial network between various trade diaspora which was dispersed across the host society; and second, the communication which existed between the merchants and the host society itself, a process which was so continuous and symbiotic that the sharing of culture, tradition, and even the livelihood became a conspicuous outcome. It is in this context that the term 'diaspora' is intricately linked with the term 'cross-cultural trade' and thus forms the basis for our discussion.

The word 'diaspora' has been derived from the Greek term '*diaspeiro*'; where *dia* means 'over' and '*speiro*' means 'to sow by scattering or planting'. In the present context, the term refers to the presence of a number of Indian merchants who maintained their distinctive identity in foreign lands. It also implies that despite the presence of a number of merchants coming from diverse backgrounds, they shared a common national, religious or ethnic identity during their stay away from the homeland. A distinctive minority could only avoid assimilation with the host society if it is in continuous interaction with its homeland, use a specific common language, identify itself with a social-religious system quite different from the host society, maintain residence away from the host society and pursue commercial relations with similar geographically-dispersed communities. Nonetheless, the possibility of assimilation is always there, and in some cases, individuals left their community and adopted the culture of the host society with an aim to completely change their nationality as well as religion. In the present context, the community in question is able to maintain connections with its homeland besides maintaining an internal cohesiveness as an exclusive community where the host-society identifies them as cultural 'other'. The primary factor which led to the emergence of this community was promising recompense for labour and potential lucrative endeavours, involving the mediation of cross-cultural trade. The latter process required individuals to physically relocate themselves and participate in the linguistic and cultural arena of the host-society on a regular basis. Their success in turn determined the movement of people to similarly profitable locations and overtime it led to the formation of a merchant

diaspora: a network of inter-related communities established at strategic locations to cater to their specific types of commerce and trans-regional trade (Dobbin 1996).

A merchant diaspora is intrinsically different from other types of diasporas in many respects. It is characterised by a higher degree of mobility, better equipped communication between communities, and a higher degree of interaction with the indigenous population. Secondly, merchant diaspora is peopled by a rotating population; meaning thereby that the merchants stayed in these settlements for a specific period of time, only to be replaced by other merchant agents by their respective family firms once their contract was over, and that the population only constituted the male members. For certain, a gender specific population would have led to the possible intermingling of the merchant diaspora and the host-society eventually leading to the growth of the cross-cultural familial institution, quite exclusive to their commercial enterprise in Central Asia. As the discussion will unfold in the following chapters it would be possible to understand how a demographic adjustment between the sexes was achieved and what consequence did it bring in terms of structure and cultural effect in the broader historical development of these diasporas in Central Asia.

The second issue at large is the difficulty to analyse the various types of commercial endeavours which these diaspora merchants engaged in. It is due to the fact that these merchants conducted trade by maintaining a secretive attitude towards their commercial transactions and secondly their mobility made it further difficult to reach to a comprehensible conclusion about their presence in a specific region at specific time and space. The methodology used to study about these diaspora communities would therefore involve using temporal and spatial information available through various sources to investigate the development of diaspora and its transformation over a longer period of time. The present work will therefore, focus on the less studied dimension of the ethnic composition of the diaspora communities and their social composition around the institutions of Indian family firms. Also, no adequate attention has been given so far to study the historical processes which led to their emergence and decline of the diaspora. The magnitude and dispersion of these merchants are also not studied till date exclusively and therefore there has been a general understanding that the economy of the Central Asian region was in a phase of decadence, and that, the presence of any diaspora community has remained unappreciated.

The most striking variable in the present context is a wide range of possible relationships between trade community and host society, which can be typified as Cross-Cultural Trade. One relation existed between the rulers of the host society and the traders, where the former treated the latter as a pariah caste, whose presence was tolerated only because it was useful for the domestic economic machinery of the region. However, in another situation, the rulers were so close to these merchants that they were offered administrative posts during their stay. Besides, the state financed heavily in building caravanserais and highways to facilitate commercial activities across the Indo-Central Asian overland trade (AA 1997; TAA 1978). Therefore, the merchants were able to successfully establish themselves as autonomous, self-governing communities by being neutral toward all political authorities. This gave rise to the state-merchant relationship wherein the merchants also functioned as state agents in trade activities. This extra-commercial status was a significant characteristic of the merchant diaspora communities engaged in overland Indo-Central Asian trade. It seems that such a relation was a direct outcome of the balance of trade between the traders and their host societies, whereby the latter was always at the mercy of the former. Secondly, these merchants were specialists in commercial ventures, the outcome of a rigorous training that they underwent since their childhood, while the host society had class-stratifications or political divisions between the rulers and the ruled and thus constituted a 'whole society', with many occupations at its disposal (Curtin 1984). For certain, the merchants earned the respect of being a special class of professionals on the one hand, while on the other hand, they also earned the suspicion of the others who were engaged in the productive activities in the host society. Therefore, the merchant community had to maintain an exclusive professional relationship with the host society so that they do not interfere with the cultural and traditional practices of the latter, while maintaining their traditions and religious paraphernalia in close quarters within their settlements.

The second kind of relationship existed between the merchant settlements and between one another. The range of variation in this context is extremely wide. Sometimes the scattered settlements had no formal ties of any kind and the only formal tie that existed between them was religion, language and distant kinship. It could be argued here that the relation between various nodal settlements directly depended upon the relation between the host society and the merchants of a single node. For instance, the

celebration of Holi and Diwali by the merchants living in Bukhara was subjected to the mercy of the Muslim populace and the ruler, while at some places such religious celebrations were a regular feature of the society and the local administrative officials too visited the caravanserais as guests during that time (Forster 1970; Levi 2002). Similarly, at few places, idol worship was banned in public and it was carried in the close quarters of the caravanserais, while at other places, there were big temples built in the vicinity of the merchant settlements (Keppel 1827; Forster 1970; de Hell 1847; Pottinger 1816; Pallas 1802-3). It is here that the host society dominated in their relation with the merchants and that any kind of political relation between the two nodal settlements was indeed not tolerated, although their internal cohesiveness helped in conducting long distance trade with one another and likely promoted kin relationship of some sort.

Yet another dimension of the cross-cultural trade was the blending of cultures which this process promoted. Also, the merchants belonged to a plural society, where two or more cultures existed in junction with one another (Curtin 1984). In due course of time, cultural differences were expected to disappear; it was this process that a merchant trade diaspora engaged itself out of existence to be accepted by the host society. However, the resultant was extremely varied as few trade diaspora settlements hard pressed to protect the integrity of their culture while the other could not resist and got assimilated in the host culture. Therefore, the merchants who wanted to protect their culture developed an intricate system of social control by performing rites and religious paraphernalia, even though they had to follow a strict code of conduct ordered by the native rulers. Conversely, the speeding of the process of cultural blending happened with the emergence of the *agryzhan* community who were the progenies of the Indian merchants and their local woman wives from either the Tatar stock or Buddhist Kalmyks (Shastiko 1991; Kemp 1958; Gopal 1988). Instances pertaining to the conversion of these merchants as either Muslims or Christians are well reported too. Thus the process of cross-cultural trade is an important facet in order to understand the dynamics of Indo-Central Asian trade in the present context.

Historiography

The recent historiographical trend of the early modern overland-Asian trade can be broadly classified into: marginalisation and decline, and the role of trans-continental trade in relation to the European maritime trade. In the studies conducted prior to

1990s a general consensus was reached that Turan suffered from an economic crisis prior to the Russian colonisation of the region in the nineteenth century. However, there is no consensus regarding the period of the commencement of this crisis. Scholars like A. Askarov argued that at the end of the seventeenth century to the first half of the eighteenth century Turan underwent a phase of economic crisis (Markovits 2007). They attributed this crisis to the internal political struggles, weakened trade relations with other 'Eastern' countries, disrupted trade routes and diplomatic relations by foreign aggressions and most importantly due to the monopolisation of long distance trade by European sea-borne empires. Scholars further argued that the increasing European commercial activity in the Indian Ocean led to the economic decline of Turan's overland trade due to feudalisation, political conflict and de-urbanisation. Favouring this interpretation Yuri Bregel (1992) argued that the deepening economic and political crisis in Central Asia dates back to the beginning of 12th/18th century. He attributed the growing isolation of Central Asia from the main routes of commercial and cultural exchange and the declining international caravan trade through Asia as primary causes for this crisis (Bregel 1992). Samuel Adshead (1993) also argued that in the mid seventeenth century, the Central Asian civilisation underwent a transformation from an 'active' to a 'passive' phase. For him, the causes were the decline of military power and political stability, which in turn resulted to de-urbanisation, demographical losses, decrease in cultivable acreage and artistic and intellectual creativity. He too attributed this to the shift in importance of continental trade routes to European controlled maritime routes and thus argued that Central Asia was pushed to the periphery of the world economy and that any impact the world market exercised on Central Asia was 'indirect and oblique' during this time.

In *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Bertold Spuler (1970) maintained that the inability of the Uzbek Shibanid regime (1438-1599) to extend their control over Persia and major parts of the central Islamic lands led to its gradual isolation and consequent marginalisation in the wake of the discovery of the sea route to East Asia rendering the Silk Road increasingly superfluous. In addition, Vartan Gregorian (1969) argued that the rise and political dominance of the economically and culturally impeded Uzbeks in Central Asia and their control of northern Afghanistan inhibited the growth of international trade in both areas. Therefore, there seems to have been little change in the perception of early modern Central Asian polity since the early twentieth century,

when V. Bartol'd (1956) noted that 'in the nineteenth century, when Europe had definitely assumed cultural leadership, Turkestan stood lowest of all Muslim lands on all cultural scale'.

There are ample citations available supporting the notion of an economically isolated and culturally stagnated Turan. However, it seems that the debate was ideologically charged in joining as to whether or not the pre-colonial Turan had begun to display the characteristics consistent with the emergence of capitalism. The debate unfolded on whether the early modern period represented a phase of decline or renaissance for this region. Such an ethno-centric debate rejected any possibility of exploring the extent, both qualitative and quantitative, of historical developments which transformed the socio-economic landscape of early modern Turan. A close revision of the evidences suggest to the fact that the early modern Turan was responding to the changing global economic trends and was undergoing the process of economic realignment and growth in even some trans-regional trade relations. For certain, the result of this realignment was the replacement of previously held regions of central importance by newly emergent peripheral ones which restructured the dynamics of economic activity with the corresponding peripheral regions. The networks of trade and commerce shifted in the early modern period owing to several factors; however, the 'economic decadence' thesis does not hold much significance in the light of recent studies conducted in this region.

Historians arguing for the decline of Turan in this period have relied upon de-urbanisation as one of the primary socio-economic indicators. For instance, the Spanish ambassador Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (1859) who visited Samarqand at the height of its glory noted that:

'there was so great number of people brought to this city, from all parts, both men and women, that they are said to have amounted to one hundred and fifty thousand persons, of many nations... There was such a magnitude of these people that the city was not large enough to hold them.'

However, by 1831 the population of Samarqand reportedly dropped to a mere 8,000 to 10,000, while in the mid nineteenth century, the population of the other great Timurid capital, Herat, was only 9,000 (Burnes 1843; Vambery 1864). The de-urbanisation in Turan has been interpreted to suggest urban flight from economic hardship, political strife and nomadic raids (Beisembiev 1994). However, de-urbanisation is not necessarily an indicator of economic decline. It has been shown by scholars who have

tried to study the connection between the decay of large cities and economic decline. C.A. Bayly (1986) while referring to medieval Delhi and the other cities of north India noted that any connection between de-urbanisation and economic decline is quite uncertain, as it could also indicate better economic opportunities elsewhere and a higher standard of living for all involved. Similarly, the population living in Balkh simply relocated itself to the newly emerging centre of Mazar-i-Sharif. For certain, the invasion of Nadir Shah had a definite impact on the region but the de-urbanisation of Balkh may also be attributed to an increasing demand for horses from India during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the plausible reason for the population to shift from agricultural lands to pasture lands in the areas surrounding Balkh (McChesney 1991). There was a conspicuous shift in economic patterns throughout the urban centres of Turan, and therefore, the factors precipitating the early modern de-urbanisation beg further investigation. On similar lines, the emergence of the khanate of Khoqand has been interpreted to suggest the inability of the Bukharan khanate to maintain centralised control over the Ferghana Valley, illustrating political decline, economic isolation and growing feudalisation. However, a close scrutiny of the evidences suggests that the rise of Khoqand was due to an increased activity and agrarian investment in the Ferghana Valley. By the eighteenth century, the prosperity and economic growth in Tashkent and the Ferghana Valley attracted a large number of people to the khanate of Khoqand. Tashkent's pivotal role in mediating trade with Orenburg further attracted merchants and artisans from throughout the region and beyond, and by the mid nineteenth-century, Tashkent had risen from a regional town to a major commercial centre of 80,000 inhabitants. The economic growth in the region is further illustrated by the migration of Indian merchant communities to urban centres throughout the Ferghana Valley.

Turan benefited from its mediatory position between the ancient civilisations of China, India, the Middle East and Europe. However, the overland caravan network which linked these regions was never considered to have any significance in the global networks of trade and commerce. The only importance which was ascribed to the caravan trade route was that of the 'Silk Road' which often came to be used to explain the movement of silk and other luxury goods from China to the West. This conceptualisation fails to characterise several aspects of Turan's broader role in Eurasian overland commerce. First, Silk Road was not a pre-modern super highway,

and that, it took much more on the part of the Asian traders to move the Chinese goods to Europe. In fact, the overland Eurasian trade was a complex web of caravan routes connecting various urban centres spanning the entire Eurasian landmass, with Turan strategically located at the intersection of many of these routes. Second, caravan routes were not the only avenue by which the commodities were transported between the regions. Maritime trade routes were an equally important avenue for transportation of goods between two regions. However, the maritime trade had always been viewed as better organised and technically advanced than the overland transit trade, thanks to the participation of European sea-borne companies. As early as the 1920s, V.V. Bartol'd (1956) attributed the development of maritime trade by Western Europeans for the decline of the caravan trade and the consequent phase of political and cultural decadence in much of Muslim Asia during the eighteenth century. Almost fifty years later, Niels Steensgaard (1974) in his thesis 'The Asian Trade Revolution of the Seventeenth Century', argued that the English and the Dutch East Indian Companies exercised an advantage over indigenous competitors as they were able to internalise protection costs and enjoyed better technology and communication networks, providing the European with economic buffers not shared by Asian peddlers. He further argued that the Asian peddlers were able to compete with the European companies in the transportation of Asian commodities to Europe (Steensgaard 1974). He concluded that with the increase in the number of European ships in the Indian Oceanic zone the overland transit trade ceased abruptly to exist at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Steensgaard 1999). However, on a closer scrutiny of his thesis, it could be argued that his argument is explicitly restricted to the movement of goods bound for European markets and says nothing about a European monopoly of all Eurasian overland trade. Indeed, in the same thesis he acknowledged that Asian trade continued to be active throughout the seventeenth century, and by citing Dutch East India Company documents, he reports that, in the mid seventeenth century, some '25 – 30, 000 camel loads of cotton materials were imported annually by Persian from India'; and this was just a small fraction of the contemporary Eurasian caravan trade (Steensgaard 1974).

In his study on the decline of Silk Roads, Morris Rossabi (1990) accepts the notion of decline in Central Asia's caravan trade, although he attributes it not to European involvement in maritime trade but to the political disruptions and the socio-religious

changes which transformed the dynamics of economy challenging merchants to maintain the caravan trade. However, he also argues that the Central Asian caravan trade prospered in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Rossabi 1990). It was this time when the caravans travelled north through southern Siberia and northern Central Asia, as the Russian merchants dominated the trade, and with the help of the peddlers of Bukhara the revival of caravan commerce was possible (Rossabi 1990). Thus, despite his questionable acceptance of a general economic decline in early modern Turan an image emerges of East-West trans-continental overland trade routes functioning complementary to thriving maritime trade routes.

Samuel Adshad (1993) has offered a variant interpretation of the changing dynamics of the early modern Turan transit trade. Although he accepts the notion of a global 'seventeenth century general crisis', he argues that it was followed by eighteenth century expansion. He further argues that in the second half of the eighteenth century, the 'latitudinal' caravan trade was accompanied by an increase in the 'longitudinal' trade (Adshad 1993). Muzaffar Alam (1994) and Stephen Dale (1994) have independently demonstrated that India's north-western caravan routes continued to be active throughout the early modern era. Being revisionist, Stephen Dale (1994) has forcefully argued for the reconsideration of the 'peddling thesis', propounded by van Leur and extended by Neils Steensgaard. Similarly, scholars like Claude Markovits (2004) and Scott Levi (2007) have studied the overland commercial relation between Mughal, Uzbek, Safavid and Russian territories and successfully shown, with the help of quantitative and demographic data, that the Indian merchants continued to be an active community both as financiers and traders during sixteenth to the end of the nineteenth century. Referring to the lucrative Indo-Central Asian horse trade, Muzaffar Alam (1994) argued that the overland routes posed threat to the maritime route in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. In effect, scholars like Muzaffar Alam, Stephen Dale, Scott Levi and Claude Markovits have independently argued that the overland Eurasian trade not only flourished during the early modern period but also saw a conspicuous presence of various merchant communities, especially Indians, throughout the urban centres of Turan and Russia; thus providing an alternative view against the belief of economically decadent Central Asia in the early modern period. This dissertation seeks to answer those questions which are pivotal to understand the dynamics of the overland trade history of Central Asia in a broad framework. The

readers will find this paper both descriptive and analytical, providing a better understanding of 'The Indian Merchant Diaspora and the Cross-Cultural Trade from Sixteenth to the early Nineteenth Century.'

The Geographical Setting

The term Central Asia is commonly used today to refer to the region consisting of the ex-Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kirghizstan, and Kazakhstan. Although by some definition, it also includes the Xinjiang region of China, parts of northern Afghanistan and the larger stretches of southern Siberia. In the present context rather than superimposing a modern geo-political conceptualisation over a historic, cultural and political realm, an effort has been made here to introduce more precise terms for the contextualisation of the historical problematic.

The primary sources for the period under discussion refer to geographical conceptualisations other than territorially unstable political entities (for example, the khanates of Bukhara, Khiva and Khoqand), historically established regions (for example, Khurasan, Khwarezm, Ferghana and Badakhshan) or smaller divisions (for example, *tuman*, an administrative district constituting hundred villages). Scholars, both indigenous and external to the region, have categorised the region according to its characteristic geographical features; the more agricultural and sedentary civilisation delimited by the Qara Qum ('Black Sand') desert in the west, the Tien Shan mountains in the east, the Hindu Kush mountains in the south and the pastoral-nomadic Qipchaq steppe in the north from the neighbouring civilisations of India and Iran. Towards this end, these authors have used a number of designations, the most common being Turkestan, Ma wara' al- nahr and Turan. These terms carry different cultural and geographical connotations with them whose meanings have transformed markedly over the centuries. Hence, reaching to a workable definition for them is very complicated. It is therefore only logical to use the geographical terminology for the present study similar to that used today.

Ma wara' al- nahr comes from an Arabic term which means 'beyond the river', which in this case is the Amu Darya River. The Russian orientalist V.V. Bartol'd (1928) suggested that this term was coined specifically to refer to the region beyond the Amu Darya, the population of which was conquered by Arabs and subjected to Islam. The territory of Ma wara' al- nahr included the 'civilised' (i.e. 'Islamised') lands which



Map 1: General Map of Central Asia, 1500-1850

Source: Habib 2005

were largely confined to the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya river basin, the designation was commonly used in contradistinction to the non-Islamic pastoral nomadic steppe to the north, referred to as Turkestan. However, the pastoral nomadic feature of Turkestan changed during the nineteenth century Russian colonisation when the territories around Tashkent, Samarqand and the Ferghana valley came under the colonial administrative unit referred to as the Turkestan Krai. To avoid confusion, the designation 'Turkestan' will be restricted to the Russian colonial context.

In addition to the geographical peculiarity, the political condition of India, Turan and Iran exhibited significant differences. The political condition shaped the economic structure of these states so much so that, prior to the twentieth century the agriculturalists in Turan were conspicuously involved in grain production, whereas the Indian agriculturalists were able to produce cash crops like, sugarcane, cotton and indigo. Thus, the monetisation of economy led to the growth of sizeable pre-modern industrial productions in India, destined for both domestic and international markets, a significant part of which found its way to Iran, Turan and beyond.

The trans-regional relation between India and Central Asia was influenced by the Karakoram, Pamir and Hindu Kush mountain ranges. The geographical barriers, however, could not stop nomadic tribal groups like the Afghans and the Pashtuns to sustain commercial contacts by caravans through the accessible mountain passes. The journey through difficult terrain was one of the many problems which these merchants faced while their movement. Therefore, most of the movement of articles of trade was directed through Qandahar between India and Central Asia, which became the focal point of the Mughal-Safavid conflict in the later run. The caravans from the Indian side reached Qandahar through the Sanghar Pass, from where it reached Multan, or through Quetta (Baluchistan) and the Bolan Pass, from where it reached Shikarpur. The latter route became especially significant in the nineteenth century.* On the Iranian side the caravans reached Qandahar either traversing through the northern frontier of Herat and Meshed, where they conjoined with the caravan routes leading to Turan, or they followed a more southerly route to Kirman and on to Isfahan.† the merchants successfully overcame the geographical, political, cultural and religious barriers and continued to engage in a variety of commercial activities in the distant

* Refer to Map 2: North-West of India, Iran and Turan – Trade Routes, p. 78.

† Ibid.

markets of Central Asia and Russia through hundreds of diaspora settlements across the overland transit trade route in the early modern Eurasian history. This in itself is a testament to their successful organisation in homogenous, caste oriented family firms. They not only successfully adapted to the changing economic and political circumstances but relentlessly engaged in the quest for commercial opportunities in the host societies.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMPOSITION OF THE INDIAN MERCHANT DIASPORA

The overland Eurasian trade saw ubiquitous presence of the Indian merchant communities throughout the urban nodal centres and rural areas of commercial activity. The regular in-migration of Indian merchants belonging to various caste groups and religious affiliation is an important facet of this overland trading system. It is in this context that it becomes pertinent to analyse the composition of the various classes of merchants who participated from India in this overland transit trade circuit. In this chapter, the focus will be on important facets of the larger problematic; first, what was the ethnic and social composition of this Indian merchant community; and second, whether or not these merchants, who participated in this lucrative trade from having their bases in India, could be classified collectively as 'Indian'. This leads us to the second problematic that, which forms the second important section of this chapter, how were the merchant diasporas different from other diasporas. By the end of the chapter, we would be able to understand the various factors that were at work in the emergence and dispersion of the Indian merchant diaspora throughout Central Asian urban and rural centres, and that, what were the reasons for the sustenance of this lucrative trade for almost three centuries which further led to the extension of the Indian merchant diasporas even as far as the frontiers of Russian Empire.

There are numerous sources that shed light on the topics for the discussion in this chapter. Ranging from the Sultanate and Mughal chronicles of the court historians like, Shams Siraj 'Afif and Zia al-din Barani, Abul Fazl to the personal accounts of the Mughal emperors, like Babur and Jahangir, who came in direct contact of these merchant groups while maintaining their ancestry with Turan. Similarly, there are enough accounts available in the form of state chronicles, like Abu Bakr al-Narshakhi's *The History of Bukhara*, *waqfnama* and the judicial and administrative decrees from the region of the establishments of caravanserais in the Safavid and Uzbek states. For instance, the tenth century chronicle, *Hudud al-Alam* gives a candid and extensive account of the life and the condition of the Indian who resided in Bukhara. There are several such decrees, letters, *farmans* and petitions that are recorded in these chronicles which provide significant information about the patterns of commercial ventures in which these Indians were engaged in. Also, they mention

about the various other aspects of their lives while their stay in the region. Hafiz Tanish's *Sharafnama-i-Shahi* and a judicial document gazette *Majmu'a-i-watha'iq* are the most important sources that confirm the movement of these caravan traders from the cities of Multan, Peshawar, Sindh, Shikarpur, Deccan, Gujarat and various other part of the Indian sub-continent. The other major source for the discussion in this chapter, is the scores of accounts of free-travellers as well as state and company sponsored official-agents who give us a more extensive picture of the quantity and the level of dispersion of the Indian merchant diaspora throughout Central Asia. The accounts of Pietro Della Valle, Tavernier, Thevenot, Mohan Lal, Forster, Burnes and Sir Chardin are to name a few. Therefore, a number of primary sources would come in handy in order to analyse the formation of such a composite, yet diverse, merchant diaspora that served as catalysts of overland Eurasian trade in the long period of three and a half centuries in early modern period.

The regular flow of people and commodity between India and Turan and Iran (Central Asia and Persia), both along the overland and maritime trade routes, continued from the antiquity to the early modern period. The transmission of ideas, cultures, and commodities between India and Turan was carried uninterrupted by the merchant communities. For instance, the Buddhist literature and traditions were transmitted across the north Indian frontier to Turan during the Kushana period; the Indo-Buddhist legacy in Turan is still noticeable in archaeological remains of the stupas and Bodhisattva statues dispersed alongside the ancient caravan routes connecting the two regions (Wink 1990; Puri 1987).

The movement of people and commodities was a regular feature of the Indo-Turanian caravan overland routes throughout the medieval and the early modern periods. For instance, Yaqut al-Rumi (1179-1229), an Arab geographer, noted that a contemporary merchant from India kept his warehouses in Bulghar (situated on the Volga River), Khwarezm and Gujarat (Frye 1965). In a *waqfnama* dated 1326, Indians are referred along with Mongols, Turks and Tajiks as regular visitors to a *khanaqah* in Bukhara (Levi 2002). The same *waqfnama* mentions a place named 'Hill of the Indians' in Bukhara (Levi 2002). In the beginning of the fifteenth century, a Spanish ambassador to the court of Timur, mentioned about an Indian inhabitation in Samarqand, although he did not mention whether it was a merchant settlement or soldiers encampment (Gonzalez 1859; Manz 1989). However, the ambassador reports that goods from India

were available easily at Samarqand, and that the taxes levied on Indian merchants in Samarqand which comprised of a significant source of revenue for Timur (Gonzalez 1859).

A similar phenomenon is encountered in Balkh which is known to have shared a close commercial relation with India that it is referred to as 'the emporium of Hindustan' in the tenth century chronicle *Hudud al-'Alam* (Minorsky 1937) The Arab geographer reports that one of the Balkh's gates was named *bab-i hinduwan* ('Hinduwan Gate') and the city's major east-west thoroughfare was known as *saraq-i hinduwan* ('Hinduwan') (Mukhtarov 1993). Furthermore, the citadel of Balkh, the most prominent structure in the inner city, was known as *qal'a-i hinduwan* ('Hinduwan Fortress'), a name which was occasionally applied to the entire inner city (Mukhtarov 1993).

In order to explain the etymology of these names, several theories have been propounded. Considering the presence in Balkh of gates named *bab-i hinduwan* and *bab-i yahudan* ('Gate of the Jews'), and the presence of some two hundred Jewish families in the vicinity of the gate of the Jews, V.V Bartol'd (1984) concluded that, 'clearly these appellations point to quarters inhabited by Indian and Jewish merchants'. However, on the contrary, a twelfth century Arab geographer al-Sam'ani (d.1167), suggested that the etymology of *bab-i hinduwan* should be traced not to the presence of merchant community in its vicinity, but to the large number of Indian slaves settled in that quarter of that town (Mukhtarov 1993). Regarding the citadel, Hafiz Tanish mentions a legend traceable to Firdawsi's *Shahnama* that the *qul'a-i hinduwan* was named after the great number of Indian masons responsible for its construction, brought from India by the mythical Quiqubad's vice regent, Luhrasp (Levi 2007). Although, the date of the construction of the citadel is shrouded in obscurity, it suggests a significant Indian presence of some sort in Balkh prior to the eleventh century, long before Timur's invading army destroyed the *qul'a-i hinduwan* in 1369-70 (Mukhtarov 1993; Bartol'd 1984).

The Emergence of Indian Merchant Diaspora

The merchants who were engaged in the commercial activities in the north-western frontier of India formed a composite class, although they belonged to different caste groups, and were identified by the generic term 'Indian'. Their classification as

'Indian' was primarily due to two reasons: first, the various European commercial enterprises that operated in the maritime circuit, and were seeking the services of these merchant communities identified them with this term. This was due to the fact that these merchant agents did not operate in any single market centre and their mobility was so high that a single merchant could be found in different cities at different times of the year. It seems plausible that these European trading officials found it simpler and more comprehensible to identify them with the region of their activity rather than the specific region of their origin. This fact is also testified by the various accounts of the company agents who extensively travelled throughout the Central Asian urban and rural centres and referred to them as 'Indian' merchants in their reports. Second, although these merchants belonged to different caste groups and operated through their caste based family-firms, which is discussed in details in the chapter further, they chose to settle in close proximity of the other fellow merchants from other caste in the caravanserais. Also, the commercial activity in which they were engaged in, demanded a close-knit relation between the merchants from the same region; as the other merchant communities, like the Armenian, Iranian and Bukharan merchants too maintained a similar kind of belongingness with their fellow merchants. It was the trading skills and the method of their commercial operation that bounded them in a single, yet composite, pool identified as 'Indian'. Yet another interesting facet is that there is no evidence available to suggest that there was a sense of competition among the fellow merchants from India. For certain, it suggests that the overland Eurasian trade was not only profitable sector for commercial ventures for various merchant firms but the vast expanse of Central Asia and the productive wealth of the land had remained untapped for centuries, reducing any possibility of conflicts of interest in trade and competing tendencies throughout the early modern period. The generic term 'Indian' was also referred in the geographical context so as to identify these merchants with their common place of origin. It is likely to be observed that these merchants were also identified as 'Multani' and 'Shikarpuri' during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries due to their formidable bases at these two important centres of their family firms. Thus, these Indian merchants were also categorised according to the specific regions of influence at different time and space. In effect, such a description attributed to these merchants seems correct, both in terms of the place of their origin and the common commercial techniques that they asserted to, and that in the present

context too the use of the term is done in accordance with the above-mentioned assertions.

The founder of the Mughal Empire, Babur (1483-1530), in his memoir noted that some 10-20,000 merchants from India travelled in caravans annually to Kabul where they met with other caravans coming from Badakhshan, Hisar, Balkh, Bukhara, Samarqand, Turikstan, Ferghana, and Kashghar (BN 1989). Writing at the end of the sixteenth century Hafiz Tanish reported that there were several caravans in Peshawar that came from Multan, Gujarat, Deccan, and other regions of India and that the caravaneers were transporting commodities destined for Turkestan, Khurasan and Ma wara'al-nahr (Levi 2008). Whether or not these merchants travelled onto Turan themselves or exchanged their commodities in the frontier marts of Afghanistan and returned to India; these sources do not demonstrate the existence of a diaspora of Indian merchants in Turan during the fifteenth century, in particular.

The presence of an Indian merchant diaspora in Turan is, however, testified by the account of Anthony Jenkinson (1886) who visited Bukhara in 1558-59. While his stay over Bukhara for just over three months, he reported that many Indians came from the distant regions of the Ganges plain and Bengal. He further noted that these merchants stayed in Turan for two or three years to conduct trade, especially during the annual trade fairs that held in Bukhara (Jenkinson 1886). Such active Indian merchant communities were also present in Samarqand and especially in Indian caravanserais in Tashkent and Bukhara (Levi 2002). The development of diaspora communities in the province of the Khanate of Bukhara in the sixteenth century was a result of a political and economic process, as the Bukharan ruler 'Abd Allah Khan II encouraged many Hindu merchants to settle as money-lenders in the money changing bazaars which he especially built in Bukhara and Samarqand for them (Moorcroft and Trebek 1971). The establishment of Mughal Empire in India and the Bukharan Khanate in Turan led to the emergence and development of the Indian merchant diaspora in conjunction with two historical processes. On the one hand, increasingly active Eurasian commercial markets saw the involvement of Indian merchants both inside and outside the Indian sub-continent, and a general intensification of Indo-Turanian cultural and economic contacts began to take shape by the end of the sixteenth century (Levi 2002). While on the other hand, various state owned investments were done in order to improve and maintain the caravan routes by Akbar (r. 1556-1605) and 'Abd Allah

Khan II (r. 1561/1583-1598) due to the growing European presence in the maritime routes which in turn compelled many native traders to move to these caravan routes (Levi 2002). These two historical processes enabled the intensification of the settlement of the Indian communities throughout the urban centres of Eurasia. As the number of the Indians who willingly wanted to invest their time and capital in commercial ventures throughout the diaspora increased, a number of Indian merchant diaspora came to develop in numerous urban centres and villages throughout Turan.

By the sixteenth century, Indian merchants proliferated in Turan and Iran and became the most prominent business class until the end of the nineteenth century. Their commercial relationship was augmented by the trade activities of thousands of Indian diaspora merchants that saw their presence in the distant markets of Afghanistan, Turan and Iran. Various Indian merchants also ventured to the Caucasus and the emerging markets of Russia where, for over two centuries, they maintained a diaspora community in Astrakhan, Russia's Caspian Sea port on the mouth of the Volga River (Levi 2002). In these three centuries the Indian merchants dominated this circuit of overland trade primarily because of the tightening European control over the major sea-routes in the western Indian Ocean. As the European presence increased in the maritime route in the Indian Ocean, the importance of overland caravan routes enhanced at the cost of the sea-routes and these routes favoured merchants from various parts of the Indian sub-continent to enter in the Central Asian trade circuit (Alam 1994). Punjabi Khattris, Afghan Pashtuns and Marwaris from Rajasthan were principal merchant groups who conducted business in Turan in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Armenian merchants were also an important trading group who transmitted through members of certain Afghan pastoral nomadic tribes, collectively designated as 'Powindas' (Banerji 2011; Levi 2008). The Hindu and Muslim-merchants from Multan were collectively identified as 'Multani'. The Muslim Multani merchants primarily constituted of a trading caste called Khojas and Bohras, a mixed Hindu-Muslim trading caste from Gujarat (Banerji 2011; Dale 1994). These merchants spent several years away from their homeland and families while they engaged in a variety of commercial activities and operated one of the most important merchant networks in early modern Eurasian history (Levi 2002). The maintenance of this diaspora for over three centuries is a testament to their successful organisation and their ability to quickly adapt to the changing politico-economic circumstances, their

quest for commercial opportunities, and the high value placed on their financial services by the state administrators of the host societies (Levi 2002).

The Extent and Diffusion of the Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora operated from the city of Multan, and later from Shikarpur from the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Their presence was most ubiquitous, if not conspicuous, in most of the urban centres across Turan and Central Asia that became the settling grounds for several hundred thousands of Indian merchants. The diasporas were of three categories: the primary ones were those that served as the settlement place for thousands of Indian merchants at a given point of time and place; the secondary diaspora developed in regional centres that normally lay in the connecting trade routes to the distant Eurasian markets; the tertiary diaspora communities developed around the agrarian countryside, comprising of just a few dozen of Indian merchants involved in investment capital and money-lending technologies. It is important to reiterate that the socio-political compulsion played a pivotal role in shaping the extent and diffusion of Indian merchants throughout Central Asia. The spatial and temporal articulations throughout this region also became important variables for the expansion of Indian merchant diaspora, since its inception in the mid sixteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, important trade routes saw the emergence of such Indian diaspora communities that were more populous, while the secondary trade routes saw the emergence of phalanges of such caravanserais that were to assist the uninterrupted supply of specific commodities to the major urban markets, while the countryside remained a place for capital investment for Indian merchant firms so as to earn more stipulated sum of profits and serve as the tertiary nodal centre for the dispersion of Indian merchant diaspora.

The cities of Iran attracted a great number of Indian merchants in the early years of the formation of the diaspora. By the second half of the sixteenth century, Qazvin (Safavid Iran's capital city from 1555 until 1598), Isfahan (capital after 1598) and Kashan became the major trade entrepôts frequented by the merchants of India (Jenkinson 1886; Savory 1980; Morgan 1988; Cartwright 1905; Della Valle 1989). Writing in 1637, Adam Olearius (1667) noted that the number of Indian merchants living in Isfahan was about twelve thousand. This is also maintained by the estimate of

Thevenot that, by the 1660s, there were some fifteen thousand Indian merchants in Isfahan alone (Keyvani 1982; Dale 1994). On the basis of these estimates Jean Chardin's (1686) assertion, thus, seems acceptable that, in the 1660s, "the total number of Indian merchants living in the Shah's province, collectively referred to as Multanis, was over twenty thousand".

The geographical location of Isfahan, that placed it at the intersection of the central overland caravan routes traversing Iran, made it a pivotal location for the growth of an impressive number of moneylenders and usurers in seventeenth century (Tavernier 1676; Keyvani 1982). Isfahan was located at such a strategic location that all the caravan goods from India to Levant passed through it, from where these goods were later taken to Europe and North Africa. Even the articles of trade between the Indian Ocean and the Caspian Sea were transported via Isfahan and Astrakhan, from where they were sent to Muscovy and Ukraine (Levi 2002). The Iranians endeavoured to monopolise the Caspian Sea lanes so as to procure maximum profit out of the Iranian-Russian trade relations. It was possible due to the shift in the overland trade route which now circumvented Ottoman territory owing to the recurrent periods of Ottoman-Russian or Safavid-Ottoman aggression. It was this factor that added to the commercial importance of Iranian capital city of Isfahan and the cities dotting the Caspian Sea coast, especially Shirwan and Gilan provinces; which became the most favoured locations for the settlement of a number of Indian diaspora communities, shortly after the Safavid's re-conquest of these provinces from the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the seventeenth century (Savory 1980; Struys 1684).

The Indian merchant settlement suffered heavy losses following the Ghilzai Afghan invasion of 1722, and their consequent occupation of much of Iran. However, much of the anti-Hindu activities began during the Afghan's expulsion from Iran by Nadir Shah Afshar (1736-47). Following the assassination of Nadir Shah in 1747, prosperity was restored by the founding of the Zand dynasty that reinstated the policy of tolerance towards the foreign merchants. George Forster (1970) reporting in the late eighteenth century, wrote that there were many Hindu merchants settled in the Iranian cities of Meshed, Yazd, Qazvin, and Kashan. It certainly suggests that a number of Indian merchant families came back to settle in the Iranian cities once peace was restored after a period of political turbulence.

It was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century that the Indian diaspora communities spread northward from Iranian centres, situated on the Gilan coastline in north-west Iran to parts of the Caucasus, which was under the control of Safavid Empire; mostly concentrating on the ports of the Caspian Sea coast. It seems that these merchants wanted to mediate in Russia's growing trade with the East and therefore, shifted their settlement location to benefit from it. It was this time when many Indian diaspora communities developed in the cities of Rasht, Shemakhi, Baku, Ardebil and Derbent (Curzon 1892; Struys 1684). By this time, the Indian merchant diaspora were concentrating their commercial activities in the trans-Caspian commerce with Astrakhan so as to extend their phalange in the new trading centres in the Russian territory.

The presence of Indian merchant community in Astrakhan from the first half of the seventeenth century encouraged Indians to trade in Russia. However, until the reign of Peter the Great (r. 1689-1725) the number of Indian merchants settled in Astrakhan never exceeded two hundred; a figure not accounting for the other two hundred merchants who annually visited Astrakhan, to and fro, from Iran and Bukhara (Levi 2002). There were other cities in Russian territory that saw the emergence of Indian merchant commercial activities until the first half of the nineteenth century. An active Indian merchant community existed in Kiziliar, a Caucasus city situated between Derbent and Astrakhan near the north-west coast of the Caspian Sea; a fact which is testified from the archival documents dating from 1738-1765 (Levi 2002). Indians are also documented as having purchased from the local residents Nogai (Tatar) slaves and immovable property, including shops, farm buildings, houses and courtyards; suggesting a rather permanent settlement of Indians in that city (Levi 2007). In the seventeenth century, Indian merchants were known to have been active in the city of Terek, an entrepot and customs station for merchants entering the Tsar's territory in the northern Caucasus. A considerable population of Indians were also documented to have travelled between Astrakhan and the central Siberian trade town of Krasnoiarsk, and to have travelled up the Volga River to Tsaritsyn, Saratov, Kazan and Nizhny Novgorod (where they participated in the annual fair), even going as far as Moscow and Yaroslavl', and later to Saint Petersburg (Gopal 1988; Shastiko 1991). In 1679, a group of Indians, Iranians, Armenians and Bukharan merchants were granted separate *dvor* in Moscow, and in a span of five years there were twenty-one Indian residents in

the city (Dale 1994). It seems that reaching Moscow was never their final aspiration, and so their number never greatly exceeded than the given figure. It is further testified by a letter, dated January 1723, where an Indian merchant Anburam Mulin requested permission from the Tsar for Indians in Russian territory to regularly extend their commercial activities to Archangel'sk, and from there to Germany and, via Siberia, to China (Levi 2002).

During 1680s and 1690s, the mobility of Indian, Iranian and Bukharan merchant communities were restricted to Astrakhan, hindering their ability to actively pursue commercial opportunities in other Russian urban and rural markets. The Indian, however, adapted quickly and continued their economic activities outside of Astrakhan by attracting individuals in need of loans from throughout the countryside. They could do so by establishing *commenda* agreement with Russian, Armenian, and local merchants that gave them opportunity to extend their commercial activities to those villages and town where they were not permitted to visit. In return, *commenda* partnership was sought for by the Armenian merchants. It was because of the fact that Armenians were familiar with the mechanics of the *commenda* (*mudaraba*, as they referred to it) contracts of long-distance trade through their own merchant diasporas, and that, they also enjoyed privileges of mobility not shared by other foreign merchant communities besides the freedom of exemption from certain taxes, which significantly lowered their transaction costs (Gopal 1986).

Indians in Russia functioned as important import-export agents. Despite political problems in Iran stemming from the Afghan invasions, in 1724, the Indians exported to Astrakhan goods worth nearly 100,000 rubles, over twice the value of the goods imported to this entrepot by Russian merchants (Gopal 1968). In 1725, this volume dropped significantly, although in that year a mere forty-seven Indian merchants were responsible for importing to Russia goods worth 35,659 rubles, still more than three times the value of the goods imported by forty-three Armenian merchants that year (Levi 2002). In 1722, Peter Henry Bruce (1783) noted that the Armenians were important participants in Astrakhan's trade with Persia and that they even had their own suburb in the city but, according to Bruce, "the Banyans without doubt contribute most of its [Astrakhan's] flourishing conditions". It was, possibly, because of this fact that Armenians were engaged in long-distance and trans-regional trade, whereas the Indians augmented their trade in moneylending ventures. The important commercial

position of Indian merchants in Astrakhan, therefore, cannot be undermined. Ozertskovsky reported that, of the three merchant communities active in Astrakhan at the beginning of nineteenth century, Russian merchants operated seventy-five shops, Armenians seventy-four and Indians operated seventy-eight shops (Druhe 1970). The overland trade passing through Afghanistan and Iran to Russia continued even throughout the politically turbulent eighteenth century. The political climate in Afghanistan and Iran had a major impact on the Indian trading activities in Russia during seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The most populous and active Indian merchant diaspora emerged in the towns of Afghanistan. Kabul hosted the largest Indian merchant community in Afghan territory. This was perhaps due to its central location on trade routes connecting India and Turan, and its status as a Mughal regional capital on India's north-west frontier. The pre-eminence of Hindu merchants in Kabul was so much so that it led the seventeenth century English diplomat Thomas Herbert (1677) to characterize the city's population as mostly Banias; further reporting, other than the two forts, those caravanserais were the only notable structures in this important commercial centre. Several decades later, in 1660s, Thevenot reported that there were many Hindu inhabitants in Kabul, and so there were many pagodas (temples) for them to worship (Sen 1949). Sir Alexander Burnes (1834) observed in Kabul no fewer than eight 'great houses of agency' which were operated by some three hundred families, presumably all men. An estimate of the actual size of the diaspora community in Kabul is not available, but it seems plausible to argue that Kabul was not only an important commercial centre but home to a considerable number of diaspora merchants.

Another large Indian diaspora node in Afghan-controlled territory was in Qalat, Baluchistan (an important city on the trade routes connecting Qandahar with Multan), Shikarpur and Indian ports to the south. Henry Pottinger (1816), at the beginning of the nineteenth century, left a detailed account of his impression of Qalat's Indian community:

'The Hindoos who reside at Kalat are principally mercantile speculators from the cities of Mooltan and Shikarpur, and are much respected both by the government and people in general: nor is any molestation offered to them in the free exercise of their religion. They do not, however, venture to bring their wives or female relations to this city, an unanswerable proof of their not themselves. Having that entire confidence in the good faith of the government, which its toleration, and the encouragement it holds forth to them to colonize here might seem to authorize. Their numbers are very considerable, as they

occupy between four and five hundred of the best houses within the city walls, and many of them are likewise extremely opulent... They have a pagoda and several Brahmins attached to it, who are maintained by voluntary contributions, and a duty which the Hindoos, by an ancient grant, are permitted to levy on goods entering the city; this is called Dhurum pysa or religious money...'

While traversing Afghanistan, Pottinger (1816) noted Hindu merchants conducting business in various town and villages; including Bela (on the northern bank of Purali River), Khojar (a place dominated by Multani and Shikarpuri Hindus, where the keys of the town gate was entrusted in the hands of their senior Brahman every night), Tuman (which had a very small community of only six Hindu shop-keepers and their families), Sistan (a province on the border with Iran) and Makan (a southern province on the coast of Arabian Sea). There are several sources that note the presence of Indian merchants in other important towns of Afghanistan including Qandahar (Hamilton 1727), Khail-I Akhund (Lal 1971), Faizabad, Taliqan, Khanabad, Tashkurgan (Khulum), Jalalabad, Maimana, Ghazni, La'lpura and Mazar-i-Sharif (Adamec 1972-85; Noelle 1997; Moorcroft and Trebek 1971; Bartol'd 1928). The population and wealth of this community is demonstrated from the fact that, in the mid-1830s, the Afghan leader Dost Muhammad (r. 1826-39, 1843-63) raised nearly 500,000 rupees for his military by taking loans from Hindu and Muslim merchants and collecting *jizya* from Hindus in Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad (Noelle 1997).

An interesting addition in the activity of Indian merchants came in the Afghanistan's city of Herat, where they were given important administrative positions in the government. In addition to that they were granted the right to farm all the taxes in the district of their control (Ferrier 1976). Moorcroft and Trebek (1971) mention the activities of Atma Ram, a Hindu native of Peshawar who served as the Diwanbegi (a high ranking officer of the state) to the Afghan ruler Mir Murad Beg, and Atma Ram's deputy, a Hindu custom officer named Bysakhi Ram. They further reported that Atma Ram purchased the privilege to collect taxes on the Kabul-Bukhara caravan trade route for an annual payment of 25,000 rupees (Moorcroft and Trebek 1971). In fact, by the late-1830s the caravan traffic was deemed to be more valuable and the price of this privilege was raised to 40,000 rupees (Curzon 1892; Noelle 1997). In addition to dominating the taxation of the Indo-Turanian transit trade through Afghanistan and nearly monopolising Afghanistan's trade with Yarkand, Atma Ram provides a rare example of a Hindu official in an Islamic administration whose influence was so great

that he was even allowed to own a considerable retinue of Muslim slaves (Moorcroft and Trebek 1971).

The Hindu commercial influence was so much so that a secular court was set up in Kabul for mediating all disputes of a commercial nature. This tribunal, functioned as a *panchayat*, founded by Amir 'Abd al-Rahman (r. 1890-1901), who appointed four Muslim and three Hindu magistrates, all of whom were identified as influential and trustworthy merchants (Levi 2002).

Like Afghanistan, the Indian merchants were active in Turan. The focal point of their activity was Bukhara. In the sixteenth century, there were Indian communities in Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent, Termiz, Shabarghan, Baghlan, Ghuri, Aibek, Taliqan, Qunduz, Badakhshan, Balkh, Nesf [Qarshi], and Shahr-i Sabz (Levi 2002). An exact estimate of the number of Indian merchants living in Turan is not available; however, various sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries report that the population of Indian merchant in the urban and rural centres in Turan was no less than Afghanistan (Lal 1971; Vambery 1864; Harlan 1939; Olufsen 1911). Although, there is no such evidence to suggest that the Indians in Turan were active in government administration, as was the case in Afghanistan. There was a pervasive dispersion of Indian merchants in the cities of villages of Bukharan Amirate and the Turkestan Krai where they conducted commercial activities. Moreover, in the neighbouring Turkestan Krai, there were Indian communities in the towns and hinterlands, dispersed throughout the Ferghana, the Samarqand and the Syr Darya Oblast's (district) (Kaushik 1985). In the Samarqand Oblast' Indians lived in the cities of Samarqand, Khojent, Jizak and Kattakurgan, and in the villages of Uzensakan and Paishambe (Kaushik 1985). In the Syr Darya Oblast' the Indians were dispersed in Chimkent, Tashkent and Auleata, alongside the villages of Merk, Chinaz, Toitepa, Zengiata, Ablik and Telau (Kaushik 1985). In Ferghana the urban centres of Chust, Old Margilan, Khoqand, Skobelev (Ferghana city), Osh, Andijan and Namangan, as well as the villages including Kishlak, Khoqan, Chimion, Khojevat, Aul, Kuba, Ichkurgan, Yengi Kurgan and Rishtan saw a significant presence of Indians (Kaushik 1985). Indians have been known to live in Zakaspiiski and Semirechinski Oblasts, and also in Vernyi (Alma Ata), Tokmak, and Kopal (on the border of Xinjiang, China) (Kaushik 1985). There were several other places too that saw the emergence of Indian merchant



Map 2: Primary and Secondary Diaspora Nodes

Source : Levi 2002

diaspora in Turan, over the course of time, several diaspora became non-existent in dozens of rural and urban settlements, while new emerged and got extended.

It should be noted that, although Indian merchants are known to have maintained commercial connections in Khiva and Urgench and to have travelled through the Khivan Khanate on their way between Bukhara and Astrakhan, especially during the mid-eighteenth century turmoil in Iran; however, it does not appear that any Indian diaspora community developed in that region (Gopal 1986). This aberration was due to the unpredictable commercial condition fostered by the notoriously xenophobic and predatory Khivan Khans and probably also to a rather poor demand for loans and credit in Khwarezm due to Khanate's limited agricultural and village-industrial production (Levi 2002). Eighteenth century was a period of political disturbance in this region; more due to the Afghan invasion which in turn led to the emergence of different Khanates whose political-administrative structure were more like semi-nomadic tribes. These khanates were in continuous conflict with each other to extend their authority in the region, with an aim to control the lucrative Indo-Turanian-Russian caravan trade route which passed through it. This phase, thus, saw changing frontiers of these khanates on a regular basis, where few khanates declined, others flourished and expanded. This practice not only led to near absence of the Indian merchant diaspora, but also changed the dynamics of trade between India and Russia in the nineteenth century. The subsequent changes in the Russian colonial administrative policy in Turkestan Krai led to considerable decline in the number of Indian by 1870s. And just in over two decades the population of the Indians in the Russian-controlled areas dropped from 3000 to less than 1000 (Dale 1994; Levi 2002).

Merchant Identity in Diaspora

The Indian merchant community was multi-ethnic, but a dominant position was held by Indian merchant-moneylenders identified as 'Multanis' (Dale 1994). During the early modern era the term Multan (or Multanistan) referred to a flourishing province situated between the Punjab and Sindh in the north and south respectively. The prosperity of Multan was due to its function as an important outpost for the caravan traders who traversed Afghanistan through the Khyber Pass (travelling through Kabul), the Gumal Pass (travelling through Ghazni, south of Kabul), and either the Bolan or Sanghar Passes (both of which connected Indian cities with Qandahar, the

most important commercial centre in southern Afghanistan) (Dale 1994). These trade routes facilitated caravan trade between a number of India's north western urban centres and distant markets in Iran and Turan. Furthermore, Multan also prospered from being a riverine city that facilitated the movement of goods down the Indus to the Arabian Sea port of Lahori Bandar and Thatta. It was also an important agricultural centre, renowned for its cotton and silk production and textile industry, besides being a distribution centre for horses, sugar, indigo, corn, tobacco, oranges and palms (Habib 1986; Lal 1971). Several Arab geographers like Mas'udi, Istakhri, ibn Hawqal, Maqdisi and al-Biruni reported Multan as an important overland trade centre that joined major Central Asian trading entrepôts like Khurasan, Zabulistan and Sijistan (or Sistan) (Wink 1990; Dasti 1990). Referring to an eighteenth century lexicon *Bahar-i 'Ajam*, Irfan Habib (1964) argues that the term 'Multani' came to denote all the Hindu merchants in Central Asia and Persia because the Indians who lived in those regions originated in Multan.

Multanis came to be identified as important financiers and trans-regional commercial agents during the time of the establishment of Delhi Sultante (TFS 1860-62). The early fourteenth century source mentions the Multanis in conjunction with *sudagars* (large scale merchants) and *sahs* (large scale Hindu moneylenders) (TFS 1860-62).

However, these Multani merchants had not begun to establish diaspora communities until the mid sixteenth century in Turan. The sources dating back to 1559 and 1561 provide the earliest evidence of Multanis in Central Asia, which recount the enterprise of two Muslim individuals, Baba Multani ibn Ali and Maulana 'Omar Multani ibn Maulana 'Abd al-Wahab Multani, both of whom held immovable property in Bukhara (Jenkinson 1886). Some thirty years later, the judicial sources narrate the activities of many Muslim Multanis associated as financiers to the textile production houses of Samarqand, led by Janab Darya Khan Multani ibn Janab Sheikh Sa'adi Multani (Majmu'a i watha'iq: Document No. 608 (fol.182a-b, 187b, 189a-b)). In addition to that, in 1617 Portuguese traveller Pietro Della Valle (1989) reported that a portion of the Multani population of Isfahan (the capital of Safavid Iran) was Muslim, an observation that was also reported by a Russian merchant Fedor Kotov in 1623 (Kemp 1959) and Adam Olearius in 1637 (1667). In the 1660s, Sir John Chardin (1686) reported that the total number of Multani Indians settled in the Shah's territory was

over twenty thousand, while Englebart Kaempfer estimated the population of Multanis in Isfahan alone to be ten thousand in 1684-85 (Dale 1994).

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Indian merchants spread from Iran northward through the Caucasus and into neighbouring Russia, establishing a rather significant diaspora community in Astrakhan, the Russia Caspian Sea port on the mouth of the Volga River and a Russian possession since 1554 (Levi 2002). The Indian merchants residing in Astrakhan maintained trade relations with other Indian communities in Daghestan (in the north-eastern Caucasus), Shirwan (in south-eastern Transcaucasia, modern Azerbaijan) and numerous cities on the southern coast of Caspian Sea (Dale 1994). The earliest record of Indian merchants in Astrakhan that identifies them as Multanis belongs to the 1670s. It seems that such attribution was due to the referencing of the Indian merchants in the seventeenth century Russian official records which defined their ethnic composition and their region of origin than anything else. On the basis of the 1747 Russian census of Astrakhan's Indian *dvor* (literally a 'courtyard' but more like a caravanserai), Dale (1994) demonstrates that nearly all Indian merchants residing in Astrakhan at that time either came from the city of Multan or from villages from its vicinity. Writing in 1794, Peter Pallas (1802-3) mentioned about the Hindu religious practices of idol worship that was carried in Astrakhan by the Indian merchants of Multanistan. In 1797, Count Evan Potocki noted that the Indian *dvor* was home to some sixty seven individuals as Multanis and subjects of the Afghan ruler (Druhe 1970):

Multanis, therefore, emerged as a premier merchant group enjoying several centuries of economic prosperity during the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal periods. Their prosperity was due to their efforts in establishing diaspora communities in a number of locations in Iran and Turan that not only saw a stupendous growth of the population of the Multani merchants living in Central Asia but also gave them an edge over other merchant communities in the overland caravan transit-trade circuit beyond the frontiers of north-western India.

Religious and Community Identity of the Merchants

The designation of the Indian merchants as 'Multanis' was identifiable with the geographical origin of the diaspora, but sources pertaining to that period remained silent about the ethnic composition in terms of the religious or caste identity of the

merchants. It has been argued that the Muslim Multani merchants who settled in the early stages of the emergence of diaspora in Turan where Hindu merchants, who forgo their faith and converted to Islam and married into the local communities so as to settle permanently in Turan (Alam 1994). However, such inferences are exceptions rather than the rule. Both Hindu and Muslim merchants from Multan were identified as 'Multanis', regardless of their religious or caste identity. There are ample sources that show the presence of Muslim Multani merchants in the early stage of diaspora formation as well. As already mentioned above, two Muslim Multani merchants had ownership of immovable property in Bukhara. Also, the judicial decree of the sixteenth century, *Majmu'a i watha'iq* (Document No. 608 (fol. 182b), Document No. 638 (fol.187b), Document No. 641 (fol.189a), Document No. 643 (fol.189b)) reports about the activity of several Muslim Multanis engaged in textile trade in Samarqand; of which Darya Khan, the leader of these merchants in textile industry, is mentioned in eight entries of the decree. Around 1617, a considerable population of Muslim Multani merchants was also present in Isfahan (Della Valle 1989), an observation that was repeated by Fedor Kotov in 1623 (Kemp 1959) and Adam Olearius in 1637 (1667).

The pastoral Afghan tribal nomads engaged in Central Asian trade was collectively designated as Powindas in the British textual sources who were reported to occupy the region eastward from Ghazni to the Indus and traversed the pastures between the Indus and the Oxus Rivers (Burnes 1834). The Powindas chiefly belonged to the Ghilzai and Lodhi tribes, of which the Lohanis, the Nasirs, and the Niyazi were the most significant subgroups in one classification and the Suleiman Khel, Nasar and Kharoti were the principal subgroups in another classification (Gommans 1991; Banerji 2011). They were active in the caravan route and generally traded with the help of camels, mules, ponies, donkeys and bullocks linking Turan with North India and Afghanistan. These Lohanis, who were also designated as Indo-Afghans or Muslim Multanis, were functionally the most significant trading group involved throughout the Indo-Turanian commercial trade routes. The Powindas, on the other hand, were semi-nomadic merchants and non-nomadic moneylenders, who were on a constant move between Turan, Afghanistan and northern India in search of pasture lands (Wink 2001). These Powindas were definitely not Hindus by faith. Upon their settlement as a pastoral community at the crossroads of the trading routes, they became associated with Islam

(Levi 2008). Captain Robinson (1934), in his exhaustive monograph, noted that Powindas were those nomadic tribes who were settled in southern Afghanistan, Baluchistan and southern Punjab, while they were referred to as *Kuchi* in northern and north-eastern Afghanistan. The Pashto speaking *Kuchis* was often used as a generic connotation for the trading tribes of that region, as the word *Kuchi* literally meant nomad in Persian. Similarly, the term Powinda came from the Persian word *parwanda* (a bale of merchandise), from the Persian verb *pawidan* (to wander), or from the Pashtu root verb *powal* (to graze flocks by moving them around in search of pasture) (Robinson 1934). The Powinda tribes changed their settlements according to the seasons. During summers, they preferred to live near the banks of river and settled near the salt range to the upper Indus in the tents called *kezhdai*, made of a coarse goat hair fabric (Banerji 2011). During winters, their encampments were known as *melagahs*, usually located on wasteland belonging to the villagers near the mouths of the passes which made their movement easy towards Punjab or Multan (Banerji 2011). Powinda tribe grew in considerable numbers in the city of Dera Ismail Khan by the seventeenth century. Their geographical positioning of their settlement on the crossroads of overland caravan route gave them the opportunity to be closely associated with the merchandise which was transported through various trading arteries between India and Turan.

A significant number of Muslim Multanis therefore, were ethnically Indo-Afghani merchants who belonged to the nomadic Afghan tribe known as the Lohani (or Lohana or Luharni) (Wink 1990; Durrani 1990; Dale 1994). Like Powindas, the Lohanis were engaged in the trans-regional trade in the north-western parts of India. They earned a prominent position in the transportation of bulk commodities between north India and Turan (Khazanov 1994; Pandey 1992; Ray 1984). Their area of influence and control over transit trade in bulk commodities stretched from Astrakhan, Khiva, Bukhara and Balkh to as far as Calcutta by 1751 (Levi 2002). Babur (BN 1989) refers about Khwaja Khizr Lohani as “a well known and respected Afghan merchant”, and it is likely that many of the 10-20,000 Indian merchants mentioned by Babur annually travelling to Kabul were Lohani Powindas (Dale 1994). Writing in the mid-nineteenth century, Mohan Lal (1971) reports that Lohani and Shikarpuris dominated the mediatory trade between Bukhara and Multan, and that, were it not for these merchants, Multan “would not become the rival of the markets of Hindusthan, the

Panjab, and Khorasan". Sir Alexander Burnes (1843) also reports about the dominant position that these Lohani merchants possessed in terms of the movement of goods in and out of India's north-west frontier:

'the merchants, who carry on the trade from India to Cabool. are principally Lohanee Afghans. whose country lies westward of the river, between Dera Ismael Khan and Cabool; and they now make an annual journey to and from these places. bringing with them the productions of Afghanistan, and taking back those of India and Europe being a pastoral race. They are their own carriers: and being brave, they require no protection but their arm... Lohanees pass into India. and even to Calcutta and Bombay.'

The Indo-Afghan Powinda tribesmen were an important functionary in the Indo-Turanian trans-regional trade. However, neither the Lohanis nor the Powindas maintained their ethnic component while residing in the diaspora, and that their ethnicity was never of primary importance in their commercial enterprise. A vast majority of the diaspora comprised of Hindu merchants who belonged to various mercantile-oriented caste engaged in trans-regional trade, brokering or moneylending activities, and who, in some accounts, are collectively referred to as 'Banias', a designation derived from the Sanskrit lexicon *vanijya*, meaning 'trade' (Ibbetson 1916).

Later half of the nineteenth century literatures refer 'Banias' as a specific caste, however, the earlier literature have used this term more generally to denote individual, or group of individuals, who were engaged in trade and commerce (Russell 1916; Timberg 1978). Their trading networks went across several commercial centres throughout Gujarat, Sindh, Punjab, Rajasthan and the Indus basin, but Multan was the primary nodal point in their north-western commercial enterprise. Thus, in the 1660s, a French geographer and traveller Jean de Thevenot observed that, although the political elite and the majority of population of Multan is Muslim, "it contains a great many Banias also, for Multan is their chief rendezvous for trading in Persia..." (Sen 1949). In 1676 Tavernier (1676), likewise noted that "Multan is the place from whence all the Banias migrate who come to trade in Persia, where they follow the same occupation as the Jews ... and they surpass them in their usury". It seems plausible that the inability of European travellers in understanding the complexities of the Indian social system led them to refer to all the non-Muslim Indian merchants residing in Multan with their widespread occupational term 'Banias'.

The most interesting though, rare observation made by Thevenot was that “at Multan there is another sort of gentiles whom they call Catry. That town is properly their country and from thence they spread to all over the Indies” (Sen 1949). Here he was referring to the Hindu Khatri caste, which was for long considered to be among the most prominent early modern Indian merchant communities. Partly because of the Mughal patronage due to their mediatory role in the trans-regional trade, it seems plausible to suggest that many of the Multanis and Baniyas referred to in the historical accounts can more specifically be categorised as Khatri (Alam 1994). Dale (1994) located Khatri in the late seventeenth century Astrakhan and, in the 1830s the former governor of Bombay and a British imperial proconsul, Mountstuart Elphinstone (1839), was informed that Khatri were still highly involved in India’s trans-regional commerce and maintained communities throughout Afghanistan and as far as Astrakhan.

Aroras, a sub-caste of Khatri, were known to control the finance of much of the commerce of India with Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Tibet during the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (Jain 1929). Denzil Ibbetson (1916) argued that Arora-Khatri inhabited Multan and Dearjat and were involved throughout Afghanistan and Turan in various forms of commercial activities. Regarding their participation in the diaspóra, British ethnographer George Campbell, in the nineteenth century noted that:

‘besides monopolising the trade of Punjab and the greater part of Afghanistan, and doing a good deal beyond those limits, they [Khatri] are in the Punjab the chief civil administrators, and have almost all literate work in their hands... Even under Mahomedan rulers in the west they have risen to high administrative posts... No village can get on without the Khatri who keeps the accounts. does the banking business, and buys and sells the grain. They seem, too, to get on with the people better than most trades and usurers of this kind... I do not know the exact limits of the Khatri occupation to the West, but certainly in all Estearn Afghanistan they seem to be just as much a part of the established community as they are in the Punjab. They find their way far into Central Asia... They are the only Hindus known in Central Asia. In the Punjab they are so numerous that cannot all be rich and mercantile; and many of them hold land, cultivate, take service and follow various avocations.’ (Russell 1916)

It is apparent that Khatri constituted an important element of the ethnic composition in diaspora. However they were not the only Hindu community to establish themselves in Central Asia. Despite their participation in occupations similar to those of the Baniya’s, Khatri were considered to be Kshtriyas, the second highest varna in the

Indian social hierarchy, below only to the Brahmans. Baniyas, on the other hand, were generally associated with either the Vaisya class, the third highest position, or with communities affiliated with the commercial oriented Jain religion (Russell 1916).

Yet another component of the Indian merchant community was identified as 'Marwari'. The designation indicates their relationship with the urban centres of Marwar and, considering the predominance of Jain merchants in the region, it may be suggested that many of Marwari merchants were likely to have been adherers of Jain faith (Russell 1916; Sharma 1984; Weber 1992; Jain 1929). Marwaris mainly operated in the domestic markets prior to the seventeenth century and hence their active presence in the diaspora can only be seen after the late seventeenth century. Their presence in Astrakhan only came to be seen from the early eighteenth century. Interestingly the great Indian family firm, the *Jagatseth* House, originated in Marwar and operated under the direction of the acknowledged leader of the Jain Oswal caste. This firm emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century and following its move to Bengal (first to Murshidabad and then to Dhaka), rose to commercial prominence at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It is roughly at the same time that an individual identified as 'Marwari Barayev' ('Great Marwaris') appears in the archival documents from Astrakhan (Gopal 1988). This individual was certainly the leader of the Jaina community in Astrakhan at that time, a conclusion equally applicable to another individual with a similar name who lived in Khojand, in the Ferghana Valley some 150 years later (Levi 2002).

In Astrakhan, Marwaris participated in money lending ventures and long distance trade. Much of their trade was conducted by means of *commenda* partnerships (various types of trade agreements between partners supplying capital and labour). Their partners were located in a number of Iranian cities dotting the shores of the Caspian Sea, situated on the trade route connecting Astrakhan Bandar' Abbas. Travelling in the late eighteenth century, George Forster (1970) came across approximately one hundred families of Indian merchants identified as being from Multan and Jaisalmer, in the Iranian town of Tarshish (Kashmar, located some three hundred kilometres south-west of Meshed). A significant number of Marwari merchants resided in the Indian diaspora communities in several part of Turan (Kaushik 1985). Thus apart from Hindus and Muslims, the Indian diaspora in Turan also comprised of merchants from

Jain communities, although it must be acknowledged that the religion of the Mrawari merchants is not specifically mentioned in the sources

The archival sources from Astrakhan dating to the Russian colonial period demonstrate even greater ethnic diversity among the Indian diaspora communities. Russian historian G.L. Dmitriev suggested that the majority of Indians present in Turan were Bhatias and Lohano, merchant sub-castes associated with Banias of Sindh, especially the area around Multan, since the seventh century (Levi 2002). Bhatia caste members were associated with the north-west frontier town of Dera Ismail Khan and have known to have travelled to Kabul, Bukhara and even as far as Arabia in the nineteenth century (Russell 1916). The Lohano (different from the Lohanis) are believed to have their origin from a place named Lohanpur in Multan, from where they had migrated to different parts of Baluchistan, Afghanistan and the Eastern parts of Central Asia (Burton 1851). The Lohano, a sub-caste of the Banias, were rumoured to have fractured into fifty divisions and subdivisions on the basis of their differentiated occupation between *Amils* or government servants, *Sahukars* or merchants, *Hathwara* or shop keepers or *Pokhwaras* or agriculturalists (Burton 1851). Dera Ismail Khan was geographically a pivotal centre for carrying out trade as it served as the winter headquarters of the Powinda nomads and its convenient location on the west bank of the Indus River, approximately hundred kilometres north-west of Multan, near the Gomal Pass.

Members belonging to the Sikh community also had routes in the Khatri caste (Alam 1994) and their participation in Indo-Turanian trade was facilitated by the location of the Sikh capital at Amritsar, situated some thirty kilometres east of Lahore on trade routes leading through the Khyber Pass to Turan. Muslim Khojas and members of the mixed Hindu-Muslim trading caste from Gujarat, the Bohras were also active in Indo-Turanian commerce and therefore, comprised a portion of the Indian diaspora population in Central Asia (Ibbetson 1916). Yet another Muslim commercial caste engaged in Indo-Turanian commerce was the Parachas, a name derived from the Persian word *parcha*, denoting 'cloth', the chief article of trade in which they traded (Ibbetson 1916). They inhabited the area around the north-west frontier of Rawalpindi and to the north-west in Attock and Peshawar, from where they conducted 'an extensive trade with the cities of central Asia chiefly in cloth, silk, indigo and tea' (Ibbetson 1916). The Russian archival documents maintains that the Indian merchants

in Turan originated from areas including Multan, Shikarpur, Peshawar, Lahore, Haripur, Ludhiana, Amritsar, and the urban centres of Kashmir, distant cities of Delhi, Allahabad and Bombay (Levi 2002; Dale 1994).

Changing Identity of Indian Merchants: From Multanis to Shikarpuri

By the early nineteenth century, the Indian diaspora communities in Central Asia came to be known as Shikarpuri. This happened due to a combination of factors that led to the decline of Multan as the financial capital of north-west India, on the one hand and corresponding rise of Shikarpur on the other hand (Jain 1929). During the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal period, Multan was characterised as a city of political, strategic and economic importance which fostered the patronage of this city as an important frontier politico-economic centre (Dasti 1990). During the Mughal era it also served as a mint town and gained favours for being an important agricultural and manufacturing production centre of cotton textiles, destined to be exported to a number of Central Asian nodal markets where there was a considerable population of Multani merchant community agents. However, the prosperity of the city was threatened and almost came to a verge of decline due to the political exigency which developed during the later part of the Mughal administration in the north-west frontier. Its diminishing importance may be traced back to the period when the Mughal occupied Qandahar, a coveted military outpost and the most important commercial centre on the Indo-Iranian caravan routes (Levi 2002). The advantageous position which Multan possessed was furthermore challenged in the second half of the seventeenth century due to the silting and the shifting of the Indus River, a development which denied merchants access to the important riverine routes of commerce customarily used to transport merchandise from Multan to the Arabian Sea ports of Thatta and Lahori Bandar (Tavernier 1676; Singh 1991). However, the merchant families who inhabited the city of Multan did not relocate themselves to Qandahar, as the latter suffered from a rather turbulent political climate throughout this period. It was this time when Qandahar perpetually became a contesting ground for both the Mughals and the Safavids, resulting in the complete siege of the city for more than fifteen times and changing hands of political authority on a dozen of separate occasions (Islam 1970). Thus, even during the time of Mughal control over

Qandahar, Indian merchants chose to keep their central offices in the markets of Multan.

Throughout the eighteenth century Multan continued to serve as the primary commercial centre in the north-west India, remaining unaffected even during Nadir Shah's (1739) invasion of the Mughal Empire. The eighteenth century was a phase of crisis for the Mughal Empire as it not only marked the decentralisation of Mughal authority and the emergence of autonomous principalities but largely due to the economic decadence that furthermore aggravated the decline of urban and commercial centres in the absence of any political security and state patronage. Between 1749 and 1849 Multan suffered from a series of Afghan, Maratha, Sikh and British invasions and occupations, reducing it from a position among the greatest early modern global money markets and commercial centres to a regional trading town (Khan 1983).

In the politically turbulent conditions the Multani financial houses chose to relocate to Shikarpur, a smaller city in the neighbouring province of Sindh. The geographical location of Shikarpur became the major reason for the paramount importance for the relocation of merchant family firms from Multan to Shikarpur. The city's location was near the river Indus and was situated south-west of Multan, and therefore offered access to the Indian Ocean ports besides overland Bolan Pass route to Qandahar, from where caravan traffic could continue westward to Iran or northward to Turan. In addition to that, this region had heavy population of Lohanis who participated in Indo-Turanian borders themselves. Lastly, the decision of migration from Multan to Shikarpur was also encouraged by the latter's prosperity under the eighteenth century Pathan Sadozai dynasty and the achievements of the Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747-73) who, by 1768, had extended his northern border as far as the Amu Darya (Lal 1971).

Travelling through north-west India, during 1820s and 30s, Charles Masson (1844) reports that Shikarpur was a very wealthy city and that its principal citizens were Hindu bankers and moneylenders who maintained close commercial connections with their subordinate agents dispersed throughout Iran and Turan. Summarising the Multani firm's migration to Shikarpur Masson (1844) suggests that,

'as the city [Shikarpur] is not understood to be one of great antiquity, it is possible that the influx of Hindus to it is not of very distant date, and that it was occasioned by the fluctuations of political power. As the existence of some great centre of monetary transactions, in this part of the world, was always

indispensable for the facilities of the commerce carried on in it, it is not unlikely, looking at the facts within our knowledge connected with the condition at the adjacent country during the last two centuries, that Multan preceded Shikarpur as the great money mart, and that from it the Hindus removed, converting the insignificant village of the chace [hinterland] into a city of the first rate and consequence.'

Masson (1844) referred Shikarpur as 'the great money mart of Central Asia' and, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, sources repeatedly refer to Shikarpuri merchants as the dominant agents in the Indian diaspora (Ullah 1843; Montgomery 1862; Ferrier 1976; Lal 1971; Schuyler 1877). In 1831 Alexander Burnes (1834) observed that Shikarpuris even had agents in Multan and that he met "forty Shroffs, (money changers) chiefly natives of Shikarpur" in that city.

By the nineteenth century, Shikarpur had emerged as the financial capital of north-western India, however Multan, Lahore, Amritsar and other large cities continued to function as nodal centres for the transportation of commodities from north-west India. Multan is said to have decreased in trade since it fell into the hands of the Sikhs, yet there were numerous bankers and manufacturers of silk and cotton goods who continued to engage in foreign trade while staying in that region (Masson 1844). Indeed the trade of Multan declined following Sikh domination, but it quickly reclaimed its position as a commercial centre, although it could not remain the distinctive centre of India's great family firms (Levi 2002). Mohan Lal (1971) reported that 'Shikarpur cannot rival Bahawalpur, Multan and Dera Ghazi Khan in commerce, but it is inhabited by people who conduct a prosperous trade in Afghanistan, Turkistan, Khorasan and parts of Persia. It has no manufacture of any description, but it derives its distinction solely from its situation in the midst of the commercial routes'. However Mohan Lal (1971) gave an unsurpassable account of the bazaars of Shikarpur which in no way suggests that Shikarpur was just yet another transit centre in the overland Indo-Turanian caravan route. Mohan Lal (1971) describes bazaars of Shikarpur as:

'I feasted my eyes with the beauty of the bazar at Shikarpur. After passing through lanes closely peopled, I stepped into the large bazar, and found it full. There was no shop in which I did not observe half a dozen Khatri merchants... such was the briskness of trade going on in the bazar... It occurred to me that the reason why Shikarpur surpasses Amritsar in wealth is, that its inhabitants, who are for the most part Khatri, have spread themselves in almost all the regions of Central Asia, whence they returned loaded with gains to their families at Shikarpur. There is not so much commerce carried on at Shikarpur, I believe, as in Multan and Amritsar, but you will see all the shopkeepers writing

Hoondees, or bills of exchange, which you can take in the name of their agents at Bombay, Sindh, the Panjab, Khorasan, Afghannistan, part of Persia, and Russia.'

The members of the Shikarpuri financial houses acted as agents and were dispersed throughout major and minor urban centres including the agrarian hinterlands, across North India, in Iran and Turan. Mohan Lal (1971) places them in "Haidarabad, Bombay, Jaipur, Bahawalpur, Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Dera Ismail Khan, Amritsar, Peshawar, Kabul, Qunduz, Khulum, Balk, Bokhara, Mashad, Herat, Sistan, Candahar, & c. & c". Burnes (1834) gave a more detailed list in which he included "Muscat, Bundar, Abbass [sic], Heeman, Leia, Palee, Koondooz, Yezd, Meshid, Astracan, Bokhara, Samarcand, Kokan, Kelat, Yarkund, Dera Ghazee Khan, Sulzwar, Beecaneer, Candahar, Guzni, Cabool, Peshawur, Dera Ismael Khan, Mooltan, Mirzapoor, Ooch, Bhawulpuoor, Bukkur, Umritsir, Hydrabad [Deccan], Jeypoor, Khooloom, Calcutta, Jaysulmeer, Mandivee, Hydrabad [Sinde], Kurachee, and Bombay". These were only few of the several urban centres that were served by the Indian merchant moneylenders during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

Life and the Condition of Indian Merchants in the Diaspora

Since the beginning of the sixteenth century, that also marked the establishment of diaspora communities in Turan, a subtle social distinction existed between Indian Hindu and Muslim merchants. Such a distinction was manifested in their living standards and the arrangement of their everyday practices in the various caravanserais throughout Turan and Central Asia. The Indian Muslim merchants who were active in the diaspora chose to stay among their co-religionists in common caravanserais, whereas the Hindu merchants dominated and even went forward to purchase their own specific caravanserais (Levi 2002). The caravanserai in Astrakhan was plausibly inhabited by the Hindu and the Jain merchants, exclusively; while the few Indian Muslims who came to reside in Astrakhan chose to live with fellow Muslim merchants usually in the Bukharan caravanserais (Levi 2002).

The institution of *Agrizhan*, a specifically Indo-Tatar suburb of Astrakhan, was an exception this dichotomy. Etymologically, the word is of Tatar origin *oglu*, meaning son although it was applied to all the offspring's of Indian-Tatar unions (Shastiko 1991; Kemp 1958; Dale 1994). It seems plausible that the emergence of this suburb was a product of the growing number of such unions in the eighteenth century. Some

Indians may have decided to leave the diaspora and subsequently have got married with Tatar women in order to claim Russian citizenship, with an aim to permanently settle in Astrakhan. The account of Nikolai Ozertskovsky, a Russian traveller in the early nineteenth century, gives a different picture of the emergence of *agrizhan* population in Astrakhan. According to him, “when the Tatars are unable to pay the usurious rates of interest to the Indian merchants they often pay by handing over their wives to these merchants. Once a child is born out of their union the Tatar women normally beget their offspring who finally land up residing in *agrizhan* community” (Druhe 1970).

The *agrizhan* children were raised as Muslims and, after several generations, eventually blended in with the Tatar community. This process was not yet complete by the 1840s when Xavier Hommaire de Hell (1847) visited Astrakhan and made the following report on the *agrizhan* community:

‘The Indians who were formerly rather numerous in this city, have long since abandoned the trade for which they frequented it, and none of them but a few priests who are detained by interminable lawsuits. But from the old intercourse between the Hindus and the Kalmucks [indigenous Turko-Mongol people] has sprung a half-breed now numbering several hundred individuals, improperly designated Tatars ... They serve as porters, waggoners, or sailors, as occasion may require, and shrink from no kind of employment however laborious. Their white felt hats, with broad brims and pointed conical crowns, their tall figures, and bold, cheerful countenances, give them a considerable degree of resemblance to the Spanish Muleteers ...’

On many occasions, the Indian merchants that visited Turan were Gumashtas (agents) of the great financial houses operating from Multan, and they worked, maintained and lived in the dormitory-style quarters in caravanserais. There was yet another component of the Indian diaspora that preferred to reside in the neighbourhoods of early modern Turan centres. As already mentioned, by the mid sixteenth century Muslim Multanis are documented as owning immovable property in Bukhara even as early as the reign of Imam Quli Khan (r. 1611-1642). These individuals owned commercial and residential property and were engaged in more long term business ventures than the caravanserai dwellers. It has been suggested that some of these Indian Muslim merchants even invested in the community (Levi 2002). For instance one of the Indian merchants identified as Badr al-Din Ayulab financed the construction of a *madrasa* in Bukhara (Levi 2002). On similar lines, a Dutch traveller John Struys (1684), in the late seventeenth century, reported that a wealthy Indian

merchant named Aga Riza, financed the construction of a mosque in Shiraz. The same individual is also reported to have invested a large sum of money to erect a tomb for him in the vicinity of the mosque, suggesting that he may have permanently migrated to Iran (Struys 1684).

It has been argued that Indian merchants had a tendency to live in close proximity with their co-dwellers in an attempt to create a self defence system which may have become necessary due to a fear of 'feudal arbitrariness' in the years preceding Russian colonisation (Levi 2002). However, the existence of Indian quarters that was already in existence during the first half of the seventeenth century also shared the same tradition of establishing residences near each other. Indians generally lived in close proximity to their community because they had a strong sense of community consciousness and also shared a fear of common criminal activities (Levi 2002). It is though reasonable to conclude that by living in the same vicinity the Indians were better able to protect themselves. However, it also seems plausible that as these Indians in question were generally wealthy merchants, they preferred to settle around a similar kind of neighbourhood that was either involved in similar economic activities or were at par in terms of economic standing with them (Elphinstone 1839).

The caravanserai was generally located in the vicinity of the main urban market centres. The vast majority was of the Hindu merchant in Indian caravanserais. These dormitory style quarters corresponded to the standard architectural styles of the region and era, and the Indians maintained a covert exterior with no external markings to draw attention to the tenant's cultural and religious uniqueness (Jenkinson 1886). The Russian traveller Nikolai Ozertskovsky reported that the quarters of Indians inside the *dvor* in Astrakhan were rather secluded equipped only with windows opening through the internal courtyard and small openings in the ceilings, presumably for ventilation and to allow sunlight to enter (Druhe 1970). The German traveller, Max von Albrecht, who visited an Indian caravanserai in Bukhara in the 1880s, reported that the internal walls were whitewashed and decorated with paintings that were specifically Indian in character (Levi 2002). Apart from the Indian merchants the caravanserais were also known to have housed Indian cooks and bakers, barbers, jewellers, book binders, clothiers, servants and retail shops where the Indians acquired much of their necessary goods from other Indians. Interestingly, within the Indian caravanserais, Indians were exempt from many legal restrictions which applied to the general Turanian populace.

For instance, visitors to the caravanserais testify that while alcohol and tobacco was prohibited in Bukhara, smoking and drinking was allowed inside these caravanserais (Lal 1971).

Hindus had freedom to practice their religious traditions but in only a few locations throughout the diaspora were they allowed to construct temples. Hindu merchants therefore had special rooms in their quarters that functioned as religious libraries and places of worship. Such makeshift temple-rooms in Indian caravanserais were to be found in Bukhara, Tashkent, Khoqand and Qarshi. These rooms generally had small altar surrounded by stone figures of Hindu deities, although in the recently established caravanserai of Khoqand there was a large image of Vishnu kept in an armoire (Levi 2002). An English traveller, Henry Lansdell (1885) reported in 1880s that the temple room in a Hindu caravansearais in Bukhara had carpets and included “a looking-glass ... a musical box, a lectern, and a cupboard with books”. From one of the temple rooms of a much older Hindu caravanserai in Tashkent an ancient icon of Kali, one *arshin* (approximately seventy one centimetres) tall by three quarters *arshin* wide, was found, which was reportedly brought from Banaras (Levi 2002). Dmitriev argues that the conservative religious climate in Turan compelled its rulers to forbid Hindus to construct temples (Dale 1994).

At few places Hindu merchants were allowed to outwardly practice their religious traditions. For instance social climate for Hindus in Kabul was rather tolerant. Kabul was one of those few cities where Hindus could comfortably relocate their families and, as Mohan Lal (1971) reports; there was a ‘magnificent’ Hindu temple known as Gorakh Nath, in nearby Jalalabad, on the caravan route between Kabul and Peshawar, west of the Khyber Pass. Hindus also enjoyed considerable religious liberty in Iran. At the end of the seventeenth century, John Fryer (1912-15) recorded the existence of two Hindu temples in the village of Naoband, in close vicinity north-east of Bandar ‘Abbas, where Hindus were also allowed to publicly celebrate their festivals. There was a famous Hindu temple in Baku, an important commercial centre on the Russo-Iranian trade routes crossing the Caspian Sea, and the location of a rather considerable Hindu diaspora community (Forster 1970). The popularity of this temple was so much so that it drew regular pilgrims from India. In 1784, George Forster (1970) was accompanied by five other Hindu travellers to Baku, of which he identified two of those Hindus as Multani merchants and the other three as mendicants on a religious

pilgrimage. Travelling in 1824, George Keppel (1827) on a similar route through Baku, on his way to Astrakhan, makes a detailed description of the still-active Hindu temple.

This temple was associated with fire worship and therefore, it was a pilgrim of high repute for the Hindus. In fact this temple was located in the vicinity of liquid petroleum deposits, thus making it a natural fire worship shrine, which was generally regarded as a divine occurrence on earth. It was due to this fact that it attracted many Hindu pilgrims on a regular basis, annually. The popularity of this fire temple can be testified by many accounts of travellers of that time (TJ 1989; Pottinger 1816; Burnes 1834).

The Hindu merchants in Astrakhan also had a small temple for worship. This temple was a more permanent structure located in the interior of spacious Indian *dvor*, than those of Turanian communities. It remained to serve Hindu merchant diaspora until the nineteenth century. The English traveller, George Forster (1970) who visited Astrakhan in 1784 testifies to that fact and reports that these Indians had freedom to perform their religious rites that often attracted the curiosity of the Christian and the Muslim communities who lived in the vicinity of Hindu caravanserai. Almost a decade later, Peter Pallas (1802-3) travelled through Astrakhan and left a detailed description of the Hindu's religious practices at this temple, complete with a lithograph and a sketch of various Hindu icons located in the altar. Unlike Turan, the Hindus in Astrakhan were allowed to march *en masse* in the evening to the banks of the Volga River for their daily rituals (Pallas 1802-3).

Religious ceremonies throughout the diaspora were overseen by Brahmins, commonly referred to as *pirzadas* by Muslims of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries (Keppel 1827; Forster 1970; de Hell 1847; Pottinger 1816; Pallas 1802-3). The Russian colonial administrative records mention a *pirzada* living in Tashkent named Missar Amanomal and two in the Ferghana Valley, one of whom lived in old Margilan in the 1880s, and the other, identified as Tulsamala Sabraj, whose report indicates that he came to Namangan in 1907 to serve as the priest in the prayer room of the Hindu devotees (Levi 2002). While on commercial expeditions the Indian merchants travelled with an entourage of hired workmen which also sometimes included Brahmins. This is suggested by an early eighteenth century Russian archival document regarding the request for permission of an Indian merchant, identified as

Matu Danilev, to travel from Moscow to St. Petersburg with his workmen and a 'priest' named Balaram (Levi 2002).

These Brahmans were contracted for a stipulated period of time to serve in a specific diaspora community to cater to the religious needs of the Gumashtas (agents) by their firm directors, who stayed in Multan. These Brahmans were recruited much like the merchants themselves as they were replaced by other recruits, once their contractual period was over. This system in operation is confirmed by the application of Brahman Baba Nachal Das(ov)'s application to Russian colonial authorities to establish residence in the Ferghana Valley, in which he also declared his intension to replace another priest, named Ibkmala Harirama, who would return to India upon his arrival (Gopal 1988). These Brahman families were dependent upon the stipend that was given by the Indian merchants for their livelihood, for that they didn't participate in commercial activities themselves. Therefore, reporting in the 1660s, Thevenot maintains that, "although the Hindus in Qandahar did not have a public temple, their assemblies for religion are kept in a private house, under the direction of a *Bramen*, whom they entertained for performing their ceremonies" (Sen 1949).

The outward practice of religious traditions varied according to the political condition of the region. In the late seventeenth century, the Hindu community of Shemakhi (the capital city of Iran's north-western province of Shirwan and an important commercial centre on the Caucasian trade routes to Astrakhan), was harbouring an aversions to the killing of animals so great that they were reported to offer money to the local hunters to go home without killing any animal (Struys 1684; Forster 1970; Kinneir 1813). In 1617, Pietro Della Valle (1989) reported that Indians in Iran were so averse to the slaughtering of a cow that their commercial contracts were invariably sworn on the life of one. In 1797, Count Jean (Evan) Potocki noted that the Astrakhan Indian community had a major component of Vishnu devotees who did not eat beef, fed stray dogs, and frequently bought caged birds for the sole purpose of setting them free (Druhe 1970). A devout majority of the Vaishnavite identity of the Hindus in the diaspora is also supported by the observation of Colonel James Todd (1920) who reported that the Nathdwara temple in the Mewar region of India annually received donations from the foreign communities, including the Indian merchant community of Astrakhan.

On the contrary, there are accounts to suggest that in some Hindu diaspora communities the religious traditions were not diligently observed by the merchants. Henry Pottinger (1816) gives an account of the Hindu community of Qalat, south-east of Qandahar in Baluchistan, who by no means followed Hindu traditional practices, and “happily ate flesh meat, wore caps made of Bokhara skins and drank out of leathern bags”:

Even in Turan, Hindus were generally permitted to celebrate their religious festivals. For instance, several nineteenth century sources described the Hindu community’s celebrations of Diwali and Holi in Turan. During the celebrations of festivals they abstained from drinking alcohol, maintained a strictly vegetarian diet, and illuminated caravanserais with petroleum lamps, and hired singers, musicians and dancers to perform devotional songs (Levi 2002). Important administrative officials were invited as guests to visit caravanserais during the time of festivity. A Russian traveller, N. Likoshin in 1896 observed that the festival of Holi in Tashkent was celebrated with drinking of alcohol and such celebration occasionally went out of control (Levi 2002). One such instance happened on March 9, 1879 when during the celebration in the Hindu community in Khoqand the situation went out of control and it finally the matter reached to the local court (Levi 2002).

The celebration of these festivals was also allowed in the city of Bukhara with Muslim majority. The celebration of the Holi festival was very popular in Bukhara, as during this time the farmers brought their cows to the nearby caravanserais so that the Hindus could sprinkle them with dry red dye and pray near them. In return, the Indians fed the cow with cottonseed, an unusual delicacy for the animal. Diwali was also documented as having been celebrated in Bukhara and it was popularly referred to as the ‘Festival of Lights’ (Levi 2002).

Majority of the India merchants who lived in the caravanserais acted as agents for the firm directors who stayed in the major urban cities of North India. After the expiration of their contractual period, they were replaced by another set of agents and they returned to their homes. As they served only for a limited number of years abroad, only a small percentage of the diaspora population died outside of India. To cremate the dead, the diaspora Hindus tried to acquire permission from the authority to conduct ritual cremations. Writing in the mid seventeenth century, Adam Olearius (1667) noted that the Indian diaspora community in Isfahan were able to acquire a special

decree from the Tsar in 1683, granting them the right to cremate their dead in Astrakhan, although only at a predetermined location outside of the city. However, the Russian population expressed disgust at the thought of human ashes being scattered in the air and water. Dale (1994) suggests that these objections were motivated by the Russian merchants, jealous of the commercial privileges and freedom from certain taxes enjoyed by the Indians. An interesting account is provided by Potocki who reports that following these cremation ceremonies the ashes of the deceased were returned back to India (Druhe 1970).

In 1671, John Struys (1684) witnessed cremation ceremonies in Shemakhi where he reported of a rare instance of *sati*. In 1722, a British military officer Peter Henry Bruce (1783) travelled to Astrakhan and witnessed another *sati* ceremony. Following these two instances, *sati* was not allowed as a practice in majority of the Hindu diaspora community.

The tradition of cremating the dead was occasionally allowed in Turan. Captain I.V. Vitkevich, who was in Bukhara from November 1835 to April 1836, reported that Indians were forbidden to burn their dead (Levi 2002). In the Turkistan Krai, cremation was only allowed after acquiring permission from the Tsarist administration. The state approval and protection was required as the indigenous population might violently interfere with the cremation ceremonies.

The duration of their stay in the diaspora averaged approximately eight years (Dale 1994). In some places, like Herat, they lived for more than thirty years (Jakovlev 1823). Despite their rather lengthy tenure abroad, the community was almost exclusively male (Ferrier 1976). This was not surprising as this was the dominant gender dynamic throughout the diaspora, but, it was a source of confusion for Ferrier as one of the Hindu claimed to have a fifteen year old son by his wife, whom he had not seen for twenty years (Ferrier 1976). However, this was possible due to a tradition common among Indian diaspora merchants and their wives which allowed them to start a family while separated. This tradition gave a rare insight into the cultural methods used by the families of Indian merchants to adapt to the lengthy periods of time that men were away from home. It therefore seems plausible, just as there are accounts of Indian merchants in the diaspora enjoying the company of concubines, female slaves and even local wives; some of their wives also had extra marital

relations and apparently even had the social latitude to become pregnant without drawing undesirable attention (Levi 2002).

Indians in the diaspora were constantly engaged in the commercial relations with members of the local population as well as with each other. The disputes that occurred between the Indians and the local population were mediated by local legal administrations. The most important aspect of their community organisation was during the time of disputes between two Indians, wherein they were encouraged to mediate legal disputes in their internal commercial affairs based on their own traditions (Dale 1994; Alam 1994). In Turan this communal legal system was styled around the Turkic tradition of *aqsaqal* (the 'white beard' or the acknowledged elder of the community) (Kaushik 1985; Moorcroft and Trebek 1971). A Bukharan *farman* probably dating from the seventeenth century, declares that:

'Regarding the Hindus who live in the territories of Bukhara, Balkh, Badakhshan, Qunduz, Taliqan, Aibek, Ghuri, Baghlan, Shabarghan, Termiz, Samarqand, Nesf [Qarshi], Kish, Shahr-i Sabz, and wherever else they may live: whoever knows the *aqsaqal* must obey and respect him as he is working for their best interest.' (Levi 2002)

The individual *aqsaqals* were probably the most senior family firm agents, more experienced than the other agents and vested with more legal authority by the firm directors. These *aqsaqals* had two primary functions: first, they functioned as a mediator between the Bukharan government administration and the specific Indian communities, for which he was responsible. Second, apart from serving the interests of the Indian merchants he was responsible for administering their communities on behalf of the Bukharan rulers; by even performing the duty of maintaining a census so that the administration could collect the appropriate taxes. However, the Bukharan administration had an officer appointed to watch over the Indian diaspora communities, which is identified in the later sources as the *yasavul-i hindu* (Indian guardian), possibly to keep a check and balance on the *aqsaqals* and assisting him in the collection of debts from the defaulters. Sadr al Din 'Aini suggests that the Bukharan Amir had several such agents who observed the commercial activities of the Hindus and reported back to the administration, especially in regard to any illegal or unreported activities in which they might be engaged (Levi 2002).

The freedom to enjoy cultural, traditional and religious paraphernalia was only allowed within the confines of the caravanserais, and that they were supposed to obey

certain social restrictions when in public. For instance, the Hindus were forbidden to own Muslim slaves, to ride on horseback in town, and they had to dress in a distinctive style so that they could be easily distinguished from the Muslims. F. M. Bailey (1946) reported that they were required to wear short, tight fitting, single-coloured (usually black) *chapans* (a long and flowing outer robe) with minimal pattern and, whereas the fashion was to fasten one's *chapan* with a sash, Hindus and Jews were allowed to tie their clothes with only one hemp rope. He further suggests that this was to ensure that Hindus and Jews did not carry concealed weapons in their sashes, such as knives and pistols, as was common practice among the Bukharans at that time (Bailey 1946). Furthermore, the Hindus were instructed to wear distinctive square hats, tight *shalwar* (pants), leather shoes, and a distinctive hair style, cutting hair only from their forehead and gathering the rest in knots which fell to their shoulders, whereas Muslim men generally kept their heads tonsured (Lal 1971).

Marriage was also an important issue, if the Hindus wished to marry any Bukharan women, for which they had to inform the ruler and convert to Islam before they were granted the permission to marry (Lal 1971). Generally, instances of Hindu's conversion to Islam in Turan were infrequent; however, isolated instances of conversion to Christianity in Russia are more clearly documented (Gopal 1988). The social pressure was rather put by the co-Indian merchants to dissuade their compatriots from renouncing their ancestral religion. For instance, a group of Hindus in Moscow forcible tries to remove one of their colleagues, identified as 'Jukki', to Astrakhan, who expressed his desire to convert to Christianity (Levi 2002).

Despite a negative perception of the local people for the Indians, and the social restrictions forced on them, Hindus in the diaspora enjoyed the state's protection. This facilitated Indians to successfully establish themselves in urban and rural markets and, despite their rotating population, maintain a continual presence in many of these locations for several centuries while concomitantly expanding the diaspora into new territories (Levi 2002). Despite their unpopularity, the regional elites protected these Hindu moneylenders which enabled them to enjoy monopoly over the commercial activities in Turan until the nineteenth century. General Josiah Harlan's (1939) report also acknowledged that these Indian merchants formed an indispensable component of the population and all financial activities were entrusted to their management. Writing in the 1860s, Arminius Vambery (1864) noted that "there was no market or even a

village in the Bukharan Amirate where a Hindoo merchant could not be found, as they were ready to act as usurer too and wonderfully kept all the management of money into their hands". The state protected the Hindu moneylenders because they provided a considerable source of income in return, and brought important and otherwise unobtainable financial services to Turan's urban centre and countryside. Even those Indian moneylenders spent a large part of their year travelling to other urban centres and rural markets, where they acted as investment capital providers to the agriculturalists and the village industrialists ('handicraft producers')(Levi 2002). This facilitated the initiation of industrial and agricultural production in even those regions in Turan that were very far flung from the administrations control. In few instances, Indians provided cash and took a portion of the final production in return, which they then sold in the wholesale markets or at a retail outlet. In other cases, they supplied village industrialists and agriculturalists with the necessary articles for production with the mutual understanding that the crop or the finished product would be sold only to them, in part or in whole, on a fixed date, at a previously agreed upon price (*Majmu'a-i-watha'iq* Document 641 (fol. 189a)). In all these situations Hindu merchants functioned as an important mediatory class between the unit of production and the point of sale; for which they earned the protection of the local administration because of their ability to bring to Turan much needed investment capital and adept economic services.

Conclusion

The regular movement of people and commodities between India and Central Asia had been a well organised for millennia. The Indian merchants were generally designated as 'Multanis' due to their affiliation to that province. However the Indian merchant diaspora was multi-ethnic in nature and they belonged to various caste groups of the Indian social hierarchy. They belonged to four religions namely: Hinduism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism and interacted well with the host societies. They were engaged in various commercial activities throughout Turan and Central Asia. The life and the condition in the diaspora varied according to the socio-political reality of different provinces that also affected the spatial and temporal dynamics of the diaspora. At few places these merchants were allowed to outwardly express their cultural and religious identities while certain regions opposed to the same. There is no uniformity in he way

the host societies behaved with the Indian merchant communities, however their money lending activities and their business acumen was maintained homogeneously in all the regions of Turan and Central Asia. That made the Indian merchants most ubiquitous if not conspicuous element in the activities related to investment capital, rural-credit operations and trans-regional trade. The socio-economic importance of these diasporas declined owing to the changing political climate in Turan and Russian controlled regions. However these merchants continued to function in their unique role in the economies of their host societies through the periods of growth, crisis and transformation until the nineteenth century. With the help of firsthand accounts one can venture to estimate the exact number of Indian merchants involved in the Eurasian diaspora from the beginning of the sixteenth century up to the end of the nineteenth century to have been perhaps somewhere between thirty thousand to forty thousand.

The unique system of *commenda* in trade oriented partnerships brought Indian diaspora closer to the other existing diasporas involved in Eurasian trade. Similarly the tradition of *aqsaqal* developed as a unique system of local legal administration that institutionalised these Indian communities with the host societies. The system of regular rotation of *gumashtas* (agents) made communication effective and the growth of Indian family forms more sporadic in nature. However the presence of only male population in these communities also increased the possibility of the intermingling of these Indian merchants with the women of the host societies; an outcome of which was the emergence of the institution of *agrizhan*.

The community consciousness amongst the members of the Indian merchant diaspora was prevalent that made them settle in the close vicinity, leading to the growth of caravanserais in a number of rural and urban centres across Turan and Central Asia. They tried to maintain their religious traditions by not showing their faith outwardly and therefore had small rooms in their dormitory style quarters for the purpose of worshipping their deities. It was only the case in those provinces where they were they were not allowed outwardly to express their religious faith. There were several such instances where the Indian merchants converted either to Islam or Christianity, with an aim to settle in these foreign territories permanently. Nonetheless, majority of the Indian merchants throughout the diaspora were religiously involved in the economic endeavours and made trade lucrative even at the time of political turbulence. These merchant communities operated along their caste groups to further the growth and

development of family firms through the various institutions that were put in place. Also they had to deal with other merchant communities and peacefully co-exist with them in the host society. Both these factors became important factors for the beginning of the cross-cultural trade between various merchant communities, forming a web of overland commercial circuits; the consolidation of which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. Also, the nature of their trade, mode of the circulation of commodities in Eurasia and the engagement of these merchant family firms in various commercial activities will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

INDO-CENTRAL ASIAN TRADE IN EARLY MODERN PERIOD, 1600-1800

In the first chapter the discussion centred on the emergence and the extent of the dispersion of Indian diaspora community throughout the urban and rural centres of Central Asia. The various factors which led to the growth and peaceful development of these communities were related to the various commercial activities which these merchants performed in the early modern period. A network of inter-related communities were established in locations strategic to their engagement in specific types of commerce and trans-regional trade demanding regular participation in the cultural and linguistic arena of the host-societies; a process that they continued to carry out by constantly relocating physically and shifting their portfolios as the society demanded. It was this factor which made these merchant communities such an intrinsic part of the host society that their services brought them state security, favour and acceptability throughout the region. Thus, it would be important to understand the facets of ever changing merchant-state relationship which also accounted for the general acceptability of these Indian traders in the host-society. This would, therefore, lead us to the discussion on the nature and the commodities of trade which maintained the flow of capital, credit and people in the Indo-Turan-Central Asia trading circuit. Also, it would become pertinent to analyse the various commercial activities in which these merchants were engaged into viz-a-viz rural moneylending credit system, urban money brokers, and wholesalers at the conjunction of rural and urban marts and as caravaneers who brought goods to and fro from Indian markets. The dynamics of trade and the role of Indian merchants, and the commodities that maintained the flow of trade across the Indo-Turan-Central Asia trading network will be the center of discussion in this chapter.

There are numerous sources that shed light on the topics for the discussion in this chapter. Ranging from the Sultanate and the Mughal chronicles of the court historians like, Zia al-din Barani and Abul Fazl to the personal accounts of the Mughal rulers, like Babur and Jahangir, who came in direct contact of these merchant groups while maintaining their ancestry with Turan. Similarly, there are enough accounts available in the form of *waqfnama* and judicial and administrative decrees from the region of the establishments of caravanserais in the Safavid and Uzbek states. For instance, the tenth

century chronicle *Hudud al-Alam*, gives a candid and extensive account of the life and the condition of the Indians who resided in Bukhara. There are several such decrees, letters, *farmans* and petitions that are recorded in these chronicles which provide significant information about the patterns of commercial ventures in which these Indians were engaged in. Hafiz Tanish's *Sharafnama-i-Shahi* and a judicial document gazette *Majmu'a-i-watha'iq* are the most important sources that confirm the movement of these caravan traders from the cities of Multan, Peshawar, Sindh, Shikarpur, Deccan, Gujarat and various other parts of the Indian sub-continent. The other major source for the discussion in this chapter is the scores of travel accounts of free-travellers as well as state and company sponsored official-agents who provide us a more extensive picture of the quantity and the level of dispersion of the Indian merchant diaspora throughout Central Asia. The accounts of Pietro Della Valle, Tavernier, Thevenot, Mohan Lal, George Forster, Alexander Burnes and Sir Chardin are to name a few. Therefore, a number of primary sources would come in handy in order to analyse the formation of such a composite, yet diverse, merchant diaspora that served as catalysts in the overland Eurasian trade for three and a half centuries.

There are several primary sources that give us a candid account of the flow of commodities and the dynamics of trade which was carried on to the Central Asian markets to the Indian subcontinent. In this regard, once again, the chronicles from the Sultanate to the Mughal period are of great importance. Besides the accounts of Barani and Abul Fazl, the chronicle of Firishta, personal memoir of Jahangir and Nizamud-Din-Ahmad's *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* provide us with extensive information about the list of the commodities which were exported not only to the Central Asian markets but also imported for the ruling elite and the common populace of India. 'Abbas Khan Sarwani's *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* is an important source for the understanding of the constructions that were done with the help of state finances in order to improve the secure passage of merchants traversing through the highways which connected India to Turan and Central Asia. Regarding the money lending activities, these sources are equally important and a complete account of the various methods and facets of the credit system could be conferred from the chronicle of Ali Muhammad Khan's *Mirat-i-Ahmadi* and Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*. Several volumes of the English Factory Records compiled by William Foster are equally important to understand the nature and dynamics of overland Eurasian trade. Similarly, the state

chronicles of the Safavid and the Uzbek Empire give us ample evidences to testify the reports that were provided by the Indian chroniclers in different periods of time. A significant number of travel accounts, almost thirty of them, are also significant in developing the understanding of the dynamics of trade and the considerable presence of the Indian merchant communities in the urban and the rural centres of Turan and Central Asia. Therefore, a number of primary sources would come in handy in order to analyse the nature and dynamics of this transit trade and various roles that these merchants played in the commercial centres of Central Asia, including both urban markets and rural-agricultural and – industrial areas.

The Rise of Indian Moneylending Institutions

The moneylending institution was identified with homogeneous caste-based merchant family firms. These firms came to control large amounts of capital, venturing in various kinds of commercial activities both inside and outside the Indian subcontinent. However, the historical circumstances surrounding their rise and development have been a matter of debate in the academic circle. Initiating this debate, Karen Leonard (1979) suggested that from 1650-1750 the decentralisation of the Mughal Empire was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the involvement of indigenous banking households in state finances, which she referred to as 'Great Firms'. She further argued that these firms were the primary functionary in the Mughal revenue collection system who consequently usurped considerable political power in the process (Leonard 1979). She maintained that the decline of the Mughal Empire was directly related to the shifting loyalty and financial services of these firms away from the Mughal establishment toward the Mughal successor states (Leonard 1979).

Adding to this debate, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and C.A. Bayly (1988) argue that a high degree of monetisation, indigenous trade networks, and the well established accounting technology and system of extending credit had emerged well before the eighteenth century and was utilised by the indigenous financial firms. They attribute the emergence of these indigenous banking firms to the development of a 'portfolio capitalist' (an economic arena in which Indian entrepreneurs actively diversify their economic interests) political economy in the sixteenth century north India (Subrahmanyam and Bayly 1988). The emergence of the Multani family firm had

already taken place by the thirteenth century. By then they were identified as large-scale institutionalised moneylenders and long distance traders.

The growth of cash economy in India was responsible for the emergence of an extensive moneylending institution. With the opening of Indian maritime trade routes the monetisation of economy grew at a faster pace. The periods of invasions also helped in the institutionalisation of the monetary system, as the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire were realms of monetary economy. With a common monetary economy, across the length and breadth of the Indian subcontinent, it was easier to maintain intensive commercial ties both with indigenous and foreign partners. The flow of cash even reached to the villages and there was a significant development of village markets near the trade routes which acted as marts for specific commodities and thus, attracted buyers from near and afar (Haider 2002; Foster 1906-27; Bhandari 2006). The flow of precious metals due to the lucrative maritime seaborne trade in India further quickened the process of minting of coins. All these factors were concomitant with the strengthening of the Indian economy as it fused the agrarian production and the urban production together in one realm of trading activity.

The second policy responsible for the rise of moneylending institution was the growth of the *iqta* system of revenue collection throughout much of the Islamic world, including India. The intermediary financiers became an important functionary with the establishment of the *iqta* system. It was because of the harsh realities of the system that the *iqtadars* constantly juggled in order to pay their armies and pay back to the state treasury on time, for which they sought to take up advances from these intermediary financiers; which Barani identifies as 'Multanis and Sahs' in his writing (TFS 1860-62). During the early years of Delhi Sultanate, a number of multi-ethnic merchant moneylending communities were perhaps uniformly referred to as 'Multanis'. It was probably due to the migration of many Indian merchant families to that city so as to capitalise from both maritime as well as overland trading activities.

It was the result of the prosperity under the Mughal regime that these Multani merchants emerged as the dominant merchant community in Indo-Turanian-Central Asian trade. This prosperity was not sudden but was a consequence of a gradual process of expanding economic endeavours on the part of the European companies. The involvement of European countries in the spice trade created new commercial opportunities which demanded expertise to control a more complex cash nexus

between agricultural producers and state treasury on the one hand and the urban production and long distance international markets. Besides, the influx of the silver from the newly discovered mines of America led to an uninterrupted supply of bullion in India. Subsequently these intermediary finances grew from revenue collectors to reliable managers of cash and credit supply.

The Nature and Function of Indian Family Firms

From sixteenth to the nineteenth century, financial firms controlled large amounts of capital reserves and financed diverse commercial ventures. Their function as merchants and bankers was often overlapping. In other words, they maintained diverse portfolios of both moneylender and trader. The difference between a *sarraḥ* (literally moneychanger, although their function was also of a moneylender) and a *tajir* (pl. *tujjar*, a large-scale merchant) was obscured during this period. *Tujjar* were primarily interested in long distance trade involving large-scale commercial exchange of commodities, and thus they were not frequently involved in lending money, whereas *sarraḥs* were primarily interested in the business of changing and lending money for interest, although they may have invested in long distance trade. Both were important agents in the movement of commodities between regions, as the former was engaged in carrying out trans-regional trade at a much higher scale while the latter maintained the cash nexus at the domestic level.

In the Indian context, the *sarraḥ* was closely related to the *seth* (*sahu*). They were known to capitalise through moneylending activities, while also providing a number of important banking services to a wide variety of clients. Their commercial activities were so similar that the European observers often categorised them both as 'bankers' (Tavernier 1676). Yet another similarity between them was their affiliation with the family firms. This enabled them to utilise the financial technologies to transfer capital in ways less risky and more convenient than the transfer of cash or valuable commodities directly from one end to another. The difference between these two categories of moneylenders lay in the focus of their respective commercial interests: *seths* tended to combine their moneylending and credit business with retail and wholesale trade in urban markets and investments in industrial production whereas *sarraḥs* were famous for their reserves of capital wealth with which they used to

advance loans and exchange currencies of various kinds (Richards 1981, 1993; Jain 1929).

With the rise of family firms, the accounting skills and commercial technologies too developed. *Hundis* became an important mean for transferring large amounts to capital from one place to another. A *hundi* was 'a written draft – usually unconditional – issued by an individual guaranteeing to pay a certain sum of money, after a specified time or on demand, to the person named therein'; and it was especially well known as an important financial tool of India's *sarrafs* and *seths* (Jain 1929). Because of the importance of *hundis* in the transfer of capital between India and distant diaspora communities, it is worthwhile to elaborate on their system of operation. First, it is important to note that *hundis* and 'bills of exchange' did not function in exactly the same way. The basic difference was that bills of exchange were by definition, written against commercial goods and unconditionally cashable whereas there were all together eight varieties of *hundis*, some of which were cashable only under specified conditions and all of which were accepted, or rejected on the basis of the reputation of the financial houses from where they were issued (Jain 1929). Generally, *hundis* were written as a promise of payment by a particular firm either upon presentation at a predetermined destination (*darshani*, 'site' or demand bills) or after a specified time (*muddati*, 'deferred' or usance bills) (Jain 1929).

Also, *hundis* were fully sellable, making them a negotiable medium between reputable merchants, particularly as a tool for remitting payment for goods received or in the movement of capital between the central offices of financial houses, and their agents in distant locations. *Hundis* were a secure medium for money transfer, as even after the destruction or misplacement of a *hundi* by a holder he did not suffer a financial loss; instead, the issuance and the value of *hundi* could be confirmed and paid in full by the holder. It also served as a convenient medium to take out short term loans and a profitable investment for individuals as one could buy them with cash at a discounted price, usually from 2 to 2.5 per cent, to account for interest, insurance or any other costs (Habib 1964; Kulkarni 1973). Richard Burton (1851) described *hundis* as "rude instrument with which the Shikarpuri Rothschild works", as 'a short document, in the usual execrable stenography, laboriously scribbled upon a square scrap of flimsy bank-note paper,' and couched in the following form:

True is the diety Shri!

To the worthy in every respect. May you ever be in good health! May you always be fortunate! Our Brother Jesumal.

From Shikarpur, written by Kisordas; read his compliments!

And further, sir, this Hundi of one thousand rupees I have written on you in numerals and in letters, Rs. 1000, and the half, which is five hundred, of which the double is one thousand complete: dated this... of the month... in the Era of Vikramaditya, to be paid after a term of... days to the bearer at Kabul'; the money to be of the currency of the place. In the year of Vikramaditya, etc., etc.,

'This document contains marks which effectually prevent forgery; they are known only to the writer and to his correspondents. You may imagine, Mr. John Bull, how useful are a few bits of such paper, when you are riding through a region where to produce a single gold coin would be the best way of ensuring sudden death.' (Burton 1851)

For certain, this technology served as an important tool for movement of capital between the central offices of family firms in India (especially Multan and Shikarpur) and their agents in Turan and other diasporic nodes. For instance, in the 1830s Alexander Burnes (1834) cashed a *hundi* in Kabul for five thousand rupees, for which the Kabuli agent offered to issue additional *hundis* cashable at their offices in Nizhny Nobgorod, Astrakhan or Bukhara.

The last points of contact in the long chain of family firm's agents were the *dallals* and *baqqals*. The *dallals* were market brokers who were engaged in the transfer of large amounts of bulk goods from production centres to market wholesalers. The *baqqals* (in Iran this term was used for those who sold vegetables in the marketplace) were designated as a type of *mahajan* whose commercial activities specifically focussed on the grain trade (Richards 1981, 1993; Habib 1963; Qaisar 1974; Jain 1929). Although, they did not frequently dealt in *hundis*, yet they extended commercial credit and production materials to their clients, for example, giving seed or livestock to agriculturalists and raw cotton to weavers. They are also known to have purchased finished harvests, either against outstanding debt or for cash, to distant urban markets for sale. The primary means by which such itinerant commodities were sold, was by contracting *banjaras*, who focussed on trans-regional transportation of goods such as grain, cotton, sugar and salt (Grover 1966). By providing loans to rural elites, the

baqqals operated in the system of cash nexus, moving capital and commodities urban centres and village, thereby enabling their administration to more easily collect tax demands in cash. Mountstuart Elphinstone (1839) reported that there were many Hindus who were engaged in Afghanistan as gold smiths, grain sellers, merchants, bankers and brokers, and that, there was not even a single village without a family who was involved in trade and acted as accountant and money changer. The Multani family firm's maintained the biggest traders in cloth, precious metals and grains, and that they maintained diverse interest portfolios (Jain 1929). An official record demonstrates that these firms were engaged in trans-regional trade beyond the north-west frontiers of India (BECCAA-GOI 1930). According to this report, "some fifty Shikarpuri families of Peshawar dominated India's trans-Khyber trade", and that, all of them were associated with Naraindas Chelaram's firm of Multan (BECCAA-GOI 1930).

It seems plausible that few Indian family firms specialised in a specific commercial activity, though they maintained diverse portfolios and got involved in other commercial activities as and when required. For instance, the Multani merchants during the thirteenth century acted as state agents who were charged with importing goods to Delhi only for the consumption by the nobility of the Delhi Sultanate, while simultaneously functioning as a source of investment, capital and credit for both the nobility and the rural population (Levi 2002). In order to maximise their profit, these Indian agents mixed trade and banking activities in Afghan territory (Elphinstone 1839). The official record noted that most of the indigenous Indian bankers combined banking services with trade in piece goods, grain, sugar and cotton (BECCAA-GOI 1930).

It is therefore not surprising that, while some of the firm's agents conducted large-scale export and import commerce in Surat, Qandahar, Isfahan, Bandar 'Abbas and Astrakhan (historical sources refer to them as *tujjar*), their associates were simultaneously working as moneylenders (*seths/sahus* or *sarrafs*, depending upon whether their specialisation was in trade or money changing) in urban areas. Meanwhile, the other agents (mahajans) of the firm were established in countless villages and advanced various sorts of credit to agriculturalists and village handicraft production houses. In return for this credit, a share of the finished product or harvest, commonly grain, was returned to the village merchant moneylender (*baqqal*). The

moneylender would then arrange for this commodity to be transferred to another associate (with the help of banjaras) most likely another creditor who functioned as a commodity broker (*dallal*) who distributed the agricultural production to wholesalers in urban centres (Jain 1929). Due to their important intermediary function these Indian firm agents had congenial relations with government administrations in India, Afghanistan, Turan, Safavid Iran and Russia.

Indian Family Firms and the Flow of Capital and Credit in Turan

The family firms operated as homogenous caste based institutions. The familial orientation of the agents of the family firms was affiliated to a common socio-religious-legal system which ensured a degree of trust within the firm. This trust was due to the ability of the directors of the firms who threatened their agents with extra legal penalties, which ensured good conduct and loyalty of these agents towards the firm. Therefore the agents were the greatest 'tangible asset' of Indian family firm (Rudner 1994). A better working of a family firm also earned them respect and reputation as a credit worthy institution. It was this factor on which the prosperity of a firm hinged. It seems plausible that as the Indian merchant diaspora in Central Asia was exclusively male; the firm watched over the families in order to ensure rightful conduct and loyalty of their agents while they were abroad and had large sums of firm's capital in their possession.

The agents underwent rigorous training from their early childhood before they were sent into the diaspora with a substantial amount of capital-as loan (Jain 1929). Generally, these agents did not keep cash with them; rather they invested it on a specific commodity which was highly valued in certain markets of Central Asia. It is probably due to this reason that most of the accounts of Iran referred Multanis as cloth merchants, in the beginning of the sixteenth century (Jenkinson 1886). Upon their arrival in the caravanserai, agents began to sell the articles which their family firms had entrusted on them. It was crucial for the merchants to sell a portion of their material wealth to begin with commercial operations, in the first place. However, the sum accumulated from the sale of the goods was reinvested in other commercial activities, more commonly in interest fetching, yet secure, moneylending ventures. This is to argue that these agents did not take the capital back to the caravanserai rather they invested it in various financial enterprises until they finally returned back

home. It was this skill of earning and reinvesting the capital that they were trained in during their apprenticeship.

Indian merchants granted various kinds of loans to their Turanian clients. The industrial or agricultural credits formed a major part of the loan, while the other part constituted cash loans, differing basically in interest rates in accordance with varying schedules of repayment (Levi 2002). Due to higher risk involved in agricultural ventures, the rural credit investment constituted very rewarding enterprise for the Indian moneylenders. Agricultural loans were advanced prior to the sowing season and were given in kind or cash, and the cumulative principal amount and the interest incurred were collected during the time of the harvest. These loans were available at the rates between 25-100 per cent of the capital amount, to be repaid before the end of the growing season (Jain 1929). The Indian agents were more attracted to rural markets for extending their services in agricultural loans rather than that of a loan against collateral (loan taken against property whose value often exceeded the borrowed amount). It was primarily because of the fact that the interest gained was respectively higher, due to the higher risk involved in extending unsecured loans, and the term of the contracted loan was either six months or less, depending upon the period of growing season; providing the agents an opportunity to invest the retrieved capital (principal amount plus interest) for the rest of the year in other commercial ventures with a promising profit in hand. Similarly, the Indian agents extended the loans to village industrialists also. The expected quantum of industrial production made the latter a more secure loan than the former, and thus, the industrial production loans, were extended at considerably less interest rate than the agricultural loans (Levi 2002). In both types of loans a lump sum payment amount was fixed prior to the signing of contract, which was remitted upon the harvesting of crops and completion of the final product, respectively. This gave merchants enough time to fix for the transport of these products to the markets for sale and predicting the profit margin before going into another such contract. In any case, the profit margin was so great that these Indian merchants were continuously engaged in the rural areas as capital investors throughout the year.

The late eighteenth century judicial record gives an insight about the relationship between the Indian merchants and the industrialists in Multan. The judicial record, *Majmu'a-i-watha'iq*, refers to the activity of a textile wholesale merchant named

Darya Khan Multani in Samarqand from 13 October 1589 to 22 November 1590. The eight entries of the judicial record gives a descriptive account of the loan contracts of Darya Khan with a lone Turanian raw material supplier for the production as well as with the number of Indian merchants who were relocated to Samarqand to supervise textile production. These Indians were collectively identified as Multanis “with an exception of a cloth printer from Lahore, identified as Lahori Chitgar, son of Lalu” (Gopal 1992; Alam 1994). Darya Khan gained from his position between the raw material producers and finished textiles retailers. He established a unique system in which he bought raw materials from Turan, and made it into finished products with the help of more skilled Indian textiles industry (Dale 1994). The Indian textile production technology was used to make the finished products which involved textile production by the indigenous labour under the supervision of Indian *ustads* (master craftsmen) in Turan. Once the product was ready, it was sold in the local markets. With the use of this technology Indian merchants, like Darya Khan, were able to eliminate transportation costs, and reduce, their production expense, and the risk involved in the importation of the textile was also taken care off. It is important to reiterate the fact that the loan for the production of the raw material was also provided by the Indian agents who were stationed in villages and served as seasonal agricultural loan creditors. With this they were able to manage a profit from both ends, as on the one hand they provided loans either in cash or in kind, but in this case by giving cotton seeds to the farmers to cultivate, for which they received a fixed portion of the harvest, in cotton. Also, the rest of the portion of the harvest was purchased by these Indian agents who were into wholesale trading. It was this system through which Darya Khan earned his profits and became an important textile merchant in Turan by the sixteenth century. The profit making was furthered by using the indigenous labour force which lowered the production cost considerably as there was no transportation cost involved. In addition, as the judicial record suggests, Darya Khan also operated in the system of lending money on both ends; he lent money to indigenous raw material acquisition agents, who promised him to give high quality wool in seven months time, while on the other hand, he lent money raw materials and money to the supervisors of his textile production units, who likewise, provided him finished goods in return, within a stipulated time period. Such a system of trade must have been very lucrative as it gave merchants like Darya Khan an opportunity to quadruple their profits by, at first investing only the initial amount and the merchant’s intelligent circulation of the same

and thereafter benefiting from the returns of the investment. Interestingly the method used by Darya Khan to guarantee safe return of his loans was also unique as it involved a co-signatory other than the signature of the client. In a recorded agreement, raw material acquisition agent of Darya Khan, "Mulla Hussain, son of Mulla Hassan, acknowledged that he had to repay Darya Khan a large quantity of white wool; and enlisted a co-signatory to ensure payment should he default" (*Majmu'a-i-watha'iq* Document No. 641 (fol. 189a)). In another entry, a person named Ustad Hussain, son of Piranan, declared that "he owed ninety pieces of cloth to Darya Khan and in collateral gave him an Indian slave"; the document stipulated that the slave would be sent back to his former owner only upon the payment of his debts (*Majmu'a-i-watha'iq* Document No. 643 (fol. 189b)).

The loans in cash were usually extended at low interest rates; however it depended upon security and the level of risk involved. In India, loans in cash were extended at an interest rate of between 8 and 37.5 per cent, accounted annually (Jain 1929). A loan made against sufficient collateral was extended at a rate as low as 7.5 per cent per annum, on a standard pawn contract (a loan extended against an item higher in value than the loan amount) (Jain 1929). The most preferred loan contract which the Indians used in Turan was referred to as *kist*, or *rehti* (a term used commonly by the Rehtis - another term denoting the Bohras). Under this loan system, a loan was advanced in the multiples of tens which was then repaid in twelve instalments at 10 per cent interest rate calculated on the principal sum (Levi-2002). The greatest advantage of this loan system was that payments were made weekly which enabled the moneylenders to extend the returned sum as loans to new clients, and earn more interest income. These Indian diaspora merchants were continuously involved in putting their capital to work in interest earning ventures.

Apart from extending loans, the agents also had to ensure that the recipient of loan had a regular earning and was therefore not likely to default in repaying on time. However a regular income group was a rare phenomenon in a politically turbulent region like Turan and with a presence of a nomadic population in Central Asia. Therefore, these agents rather preferred to ensure the ability of their debtors to repay loans by commonly restricting the amount advanced to relatively small amounts, generally between ten and twenty *tanga* (Levi 2002). During the period of stay, (which was generally two to three years) an agent was able to quadruple their initial capital

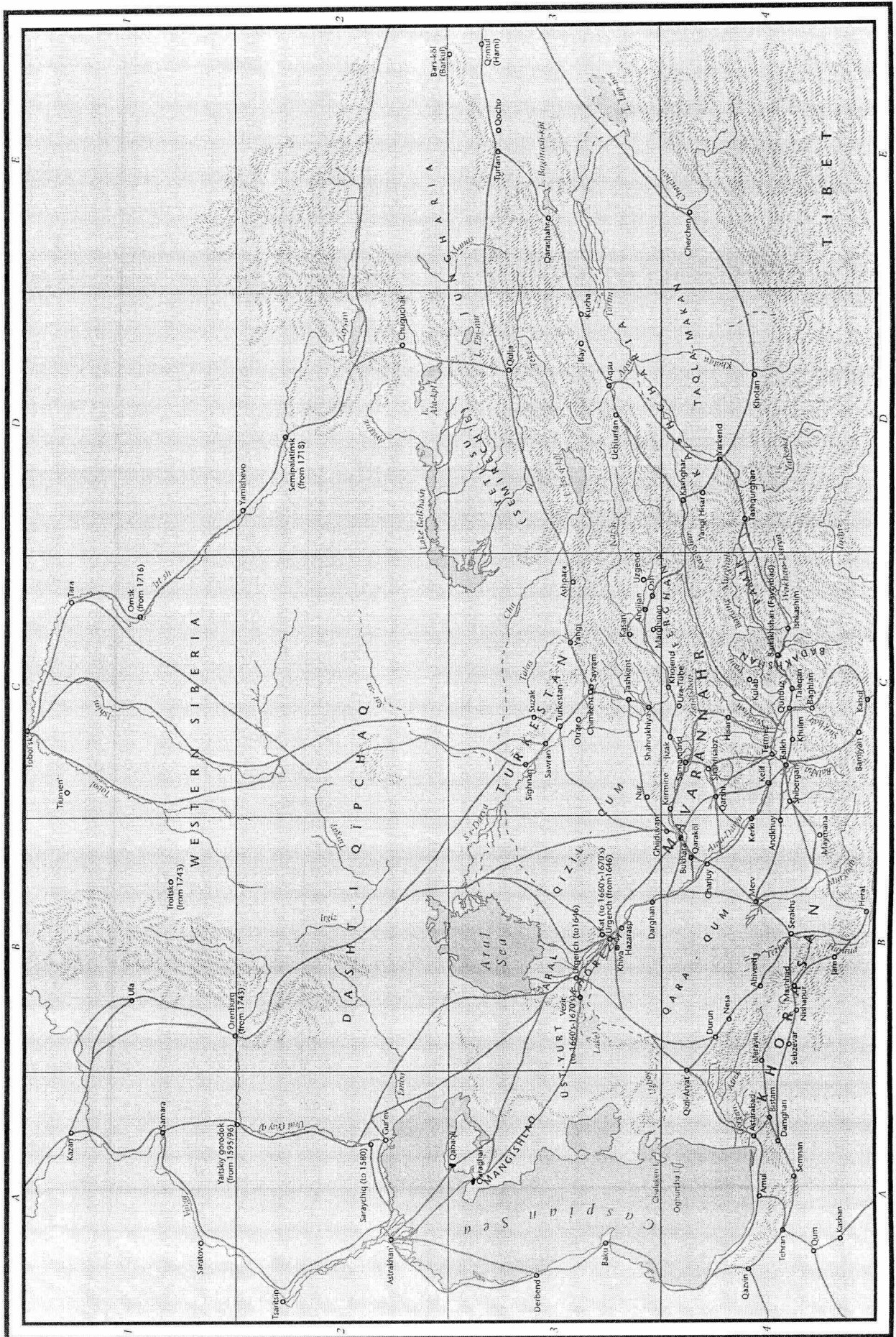
investment (Levi 2002). A Russian traveller Arandarnko, calculated that 266 Indians who lived in Samarqand *otedel* (area) of the Zarafshan Oblast (district) during the 1870s each earned an average of 1700 rubles per year amounting to a total of 452,200 rubles (Levi 2002). Almost six years prior to the liquidation of their business in Turkistan Krai, the roughly 375 Indians operating Zarafshan Oblast earned a total of 3,225,000 rubles which they reportedly transported to India in the form of Russian gold (Levi 2002). During their stay, the Indian agents were expected to keep a detailed account of their cash loans, credit loans, receipts and advances in their advance books which they presented to their auditors of their family firms immediately upon their arrival home (Jain 1929). The majority of the earnings went to the firm as the training of the agent, the initial investments in taking care of the family of the agents in their absence and assuming a larger part of the merchandise risk, rested on them. In return, for their services the agents were able to earn a sizeable sum of capital in a rather short time, nonetheless. This motivated many individuals to make repeated ventures into the diaspora, only with the consideration of the family firms upon whom the revision or abrogation of the contract with a particular agent rested.

Positioning Turan in the Wider Transcontinental Trade

Turan benefitted from its advantageous geographical location between Middle East, Europe, India and China. In the early modern period the Eurasian economy, predominantly a caravan trade economy, served as the most important phalange of the world economic system. The overland caravan route which was generally identified as the 'Silk Road' placed Turan at an important mediatory position wherein several nomadic establishments benefitted from taxing merchants passing through their territory. However the 'Silk Road' was not only meant for the transfer of silk or other luxury goods from China to the west via Turan, rather there were several aspects that inclusively made the Eurasian economy lucrative. In the first place Eurasian trade route was a set of complex and interchangeable web of several trade caravan routes spanning the entire Eurasian landmass, with Turan strategically locally at the intersection of the majority of them (Levi 2002). The quantum, frequency and the direction of the traffic of trade depended upon several factors like the condition of the regional economy, political stability, security and the cost of the transportation, climate, demography and technological changes. The transportation of luxurious

goods, like silk also constituted a portion of trading commodities but their value and quantity was much less than that of the bulk commodities and bullion that passed along the Eurasian commercial arteries (Levi 2002).

One of the major characteristics of the early modern trading system was the prominence of maritime trade routes over the overland trade. Scholars have attributed eighteenth century as a period of political and economic decadence for Muslim Asia due to the development of maritime routes controlled by Western Europe (Bartol'd 1956). It has been argued that the European companies like the Dutch and the East India Companies had better communication networks and technological skills which made Asian peddlers incompetent in the transportation of Asian commodities to Europe (Steensgaard 1974). This had a profound effect on the caravan trade that subsequently declined by the seventeenth century as the epicentre of the Western European market had shifted from Mediterranean (Levant) to Atlantic (London) (Steensgaard 1974). By the seventeenth century, the European ships had completely swept away the caravan trade (Steensgaard 1999). However, Steensgaard (1999) did not seem to argue that the European companies had monopoly over the Eurasian overland trade rather he maintains that the movements of the goods to Europe were explicitly carried through the European sea-borne empires. It could be asserted because Steensgaard (1999) himself acknowledges that the Asian trade continued to be active throughout the seventeenth century, and he cites Dutch East India Company documents which report that, in the mid seventeenth century, some '25 - 30,000 camel loads of cotton material were imported annually by Persia from India'; and this was only a small fraction of the total Eurasian caravan trade. It is now an accepted assertion that the European companies did not bring an end to the Eurasian caravan trade, at least in regard to China and Russia, rather it was the political, religious and the social changes of the time that led to economic pressures on the merchants who intended to carry on caravan trade (Rossabi 1990). The Central Asian caravan trade revived in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries between Southern Siberia and Northern Central Asia with the help of peddlers from Bukhara and Russian merchants (Rossabi 1990). This was indicative of the fact that caravan trade continued in those regions which were free from political turmoil and provided a predictable environment for the merchants to conduct their trade.



Map 3: Primary and Secondary Trade Routes in Central Asia 17th - 18th Century
 Source : Bregel 2003

A notion of a global 'Seventeenth Century General Crisis' has been propounded by many scholars who argue that the changing dynamics of the world economic system led to a general crisis in the 'Silk Road' trade route which was followed by an increase in commercial traffic in the latter half of the eighteenth century, generally regarded as a 'Phase of Expansion' (Adshead 1993; Parker and Lesley 1997). The revival of trade also saw an increased commercial traffic along the Central Asian trade routes, placing Turan at their inter-junctions in the second half the eighteenth century (Adshead 1993). However, his conclusion that the revival took place in the eighteenth century is not proper because the sources both the travelogues and administrative records prior to the eighteenth century give impressive account of transit-caravan trade, of which Turan and Central Asia were intrinsic parts. There are scholars who argue therefore, that the India's north-western caravan trade continued to be active throughout the early modern era (Alam 1994). Muzaffar Alam (1994) argues that the political hostility did not interrupt the overland commercial relations and the trade continued between the Mughals, Uzbeks and Safavid territories. He further argues that the overland caravan trade route not only competed successfully with the maritime route, but also seems to have posed a kind of threat to it (Alam 1994). Englishman Richard Steel travelling in 1615, reported that the Safavid-Portuguese wars had pushed that portion of India's trade with Iran which previously passed through the port of Hormuz to the caravan routes passing through Qandahar (Steel and Crowther 1905). According to Steel (1905), "the Merchants of India assemble at Lahore, and invest a great part of their monies in Commodities, and joyne themselves in Caravans to passe the Mountaines of Candahar into Persia, by which way is generally reported to passe twelve or fourteen thousand Camels lading, whereas heretofore scarsly passed three thousand, the rest going by the way of Ormuz".

In order to control European monopoly over maritime trade, the Mughal and Safavid rulers promoted overland trade by providing security and profit to the caravan trade. Qandahar gained considerably from its strategic location and emerged an important entrepot during the seventeenth century between the Mughal and Safavid markets. Regarding Qandahar, Thevenot noted that "the trade that it had with Persia, the Country of the Uzbeks and Indies, makes it very rich; and for all the Provinces is so little, it heretofore yielded the Mogul betwixt fourteen and fifteen Millions a year" (Sen 1949). It was perhaps due to the profit oriented nature of Qandahar that it became

a region for political conflict between Mughals and the Safavids on a dozen of occasions (Islam 1970). Niels Steensgaard (1999) argued that although the caravan journey between Isfahan and Lahore was arduous and almost took between five or six months, it was still *cheaper* than the maritime transport and, from the turn of the seventeenth century, it benefitted from the opening of a new road connecting Agra and Lahore with Isfahan through Qandahar. The overland trade routes through Qandahar were heavily travelled from the sixteenth century onwards, especially when maritime disturbances compelled merchants to shift their mode of transport from ships to camels (Steensgaard 1999). These routes served as conduit for a considerable amount of Indian merchandise, majorly cotton textiles and indigo, which were transported to Iran and Near Eastern markets in return for silver, much of which had been brought to Iran from Europe to be exchanged for Iranian silk (Steensgaard 1999; Mathee 1999; McCabe 1999).

The caravan trade constituted for a large portion of commodity transfer between Mughal and Ottoman empires, throughout the early modern period. In order to emphasize the uninterrupted nature of this trading practice, Gilles Veinstein (1999) contends that the movement of large quantities of Indian textiles to Ottoman markets was a 'constant of Ottoman history' even into the nineteenth century, and that the textiles constituted 92 per cent of the total Indian merchandise brought to Levant, that, at the close of the eighteenth century, the annual consumption of Indian textiles in the markets of Istanbul alone valued at some 15 million French francs, and that the overland and maritime routes were used in conjunction with each other for this trade. This conclusion is supported by the estimate of the English East India Company agent Sir Josiah Child who reported in 1690 that there was five times more Indian textiles transported to the Ottoman Empire by Asian merchants using the overland routes from Basra and the Red Sea than was transported by the Dutch and the British (Veinstein 1999).

The European maritime sea-borne empires were continuously looking for viability of expanding their commercial activities to these overland caravan trade routes (McChesney 1996). This was in itself a testimony of the importance of caravan trade routes and its contribution to the overland transit trade in the Eurasian economy. During the seventeenth century the English East India Company engaged in several diplomatic agreements with Armenian merchant community in New Julfa; contracting

the Armenians to give up Indian goods by land routes and redirecting it to the company ships, and in return Armenian were to receive a share in the Company's trading privileges (Ferrier 1973). It is worth noting that neither did the Armenians nor the English remained faithful to the agreements, and the Armenian merchants continued transporting goods between India and Iran until the end of the eighteenth century (Levi 2002). Furthermore, the Eurasian economy also felt the effect of the changing early modern global economic trends. By the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, agriculturalist in Bukhara and Balkh started cultivating tobacco, a 'New World' crop (McChesney 1996). Russia traveller Nikolai Khanikoff (1845), who visited Bukhara in 1840s, reported that annually three or four caravans from Meshed to Bukhara reached via Kabul, Herat and Kashmir. In his account he gives a list of the Indian commodities that these caravans stocked in Bukharan markets, which included shawls, dyes (especially indigo), medicines, and various Indian textiles (especially muslin) (Khanikoff 1845). The Indian medicines were considered a dear good and were priced high in the markets of medieval Russia (Kemp 1958). Largely owing to the state support the caravan trade between India, Iran and Turan continued throughout early modern period with only brief interruptions.

The Contours of Overland Trade with the Changing State Policies of the Mughals, Uzbeks and Safavids

The Mughals, Safavids and the Uzbeks made considerable investments on their part to improve the commercial infrastructure of the trans-regional trade routes. These three regimes gained a lot from the economic activities along these trade routes and therefore they provided privileges, like security to these merchants to continue their commercial activities in a conducive climate. Even before the coming of the Mughals into the political scene of the Indian subcontinent, the sultan of Delhi made special efforts to maintain a positive climate for trans-regional trade. Both Iltutmish and Balban made special efforts to suppress predatory tribal groups that were hindering commercial traffic along the caravan routes (Wink 1990). A number of measures were taken in trade routes which involved clearing paths through forests, planting trees so as to provide shades for travellers, constructing caravanserais, digging wells and protecting travellers from highway plunderers. These ventures promoted a process of urbanisation in Punjab, Multan, Sindh and the adjacent areas north of Delhi. Yet

another significant development in this period was what Alam (1994) calls a 'mercantile culture' in north-west India, which represented commerce minded Sikh religion and the increasing prosperity of the Khatri merchants, an important component in the Indian merchant diaspora and the Sikh religion (McLeod 1976). During the reign of Sher Shah Suri (r. 1540-1555) construction of the Rohtas fort on the road to Khurasan was financed in order to facilitate the pacification of the Ghakkars, a tribal group occupying the Salt Range that had been disrupting the trade routes between Lhore and the Khyber Pass (TSS 1964; Deloche 1993). Sher Shah is also reported to have constructed thousands of miles of roads, both sides of which were reported to have been adorned with shady fruit trees, 'so travellers might travel under the shade while hot winds blew' (TSS 1964). He also commissioned the construction of seventy hundred caravanserais along the caravan routes which were located just six to seven kilometres (2 *kurohs*) from each other and equipped with services for both Muslim and Hindu travellers (TSS 1964). He introduced a policy by which *muqaddams* (village revenue officers) were made responsible for any uncovered merchandise stolen by robbers (TSS 1964). In order to promote safe commerce Sher Shah ensured that the *muqaddams* in whose jurisdiction the thieves and the robbers were found were to put to death (TSS 1964). Such a strict policy ensured that the local administration was not involved in protecting or giving shelter to thieves and robbers of the highway routes. Construction of new routes of commerce and communication was one of the defining characteristics of the Mughal economic policies. Nocolao Manucci (1913) noted that, 'since the time of Humayun many more *saraes* have been built upon the royal highways throughout the realm, from one end of it to the other. In the late sixteenth century, *Ain-i-Akbari* (1997) records as many as seven routes that were frequented by travellers between Turan and Kabul and five routes which were commonly used for transport between Kabul and 'Hindustan', the most favoured of which was the route which passed through the Khyber Pass. The reason for the preference of this particular route was due to the ostentatious investment done by Mughal emperor Akbar in improving the road through the Khyber Pass to facilitate the use of wheeled vehicles (AA 1997). Apart from the ruling elites of the time the merchant groups themselves invested capital in improving the commercial infrastructure of the overland trade routes. For instance in the seventeenth century the French traveller Thevenot noted that the Indian merchants in Kabul were actively engaged in financing the digging of wells and construction of caravanserai along trade

routes (Sen 1949). Mohal Lal (1971) also reports of a Hindu merchant in Iran during the reign of Shah 'Abbas who earned the goodwill of travellers for constructing a bridge in north-eastern Iran near Meshed.

The effort of the Mughal emperor Akbar to protect the trade through the north-western passages dates to early years of his reign. Just two years after his accession to the Mughal throne, in 1557-58, Akbar strategically occupied the north-western cities of Multan and Lahore and constructed forts, such as the one at Attock, and network of small forts, called *thanas* throughout the north-west frontier (Levi 2002). During the regnal years of Akbar, collective efforts were made to improve Indo-Iranian trade. The caravan merchants *en route* to Qandahar were being harassed by Afghan and Baluch tribesmen, Akbar unleashed the Mughal army on these pastoralists, tens of thousands of whom were killed or enslaved or enslaved and exported for sale in foreign markets (Richards 1993). Akbar was known as a ruler who followed the policy of appeasement to negotiate with different groups by giving them important political positions in his administration. On similar lines, Akbar was able to negotiate with pastoral tribes by offering them economic incentives, granting clan leaders administrative posts or even taking them hostage 'to ensure good behaviour on the part of their followers' (Richards 1993). To foster a favourable climate for an uninterrupted communication through the highway routes the Mughals enlisted bands of highway police, *rahdars*, to patrol their roads and ensure the safety of the travellers (Levi 2002).

The Safavids, like the Mughals, employed *rahdars* to patrol their commercial arteries and, according to the reports of several travel accounts, merchants who were robbed in Safavid territory were given recompense from the governor of the province in which the crime occurred, and it was the duty of the state administrators to find the assailants or repay the merchants for his losses (Chardin 1686; Tavernier 1676; Burton 1993; Matthee 1999). Rudolph Matthee (1999) further argues that the merchants in Safavid Iran could generally count on the judicial system for the reliable dispensation of justice. Burton (1993) makes an interesting comparison between the impressive commercial infrastructure of the caravan route network in Mughal India and Safavid Iran and argues that the roads in the Safavid province were much safer than those in India. She attributes this to the higher taxes levied on the merchants who used the Safavid roads, which was used by the government to provide road security and theft insurance (Burton 1993). Even the merchant appreciated the services provided the

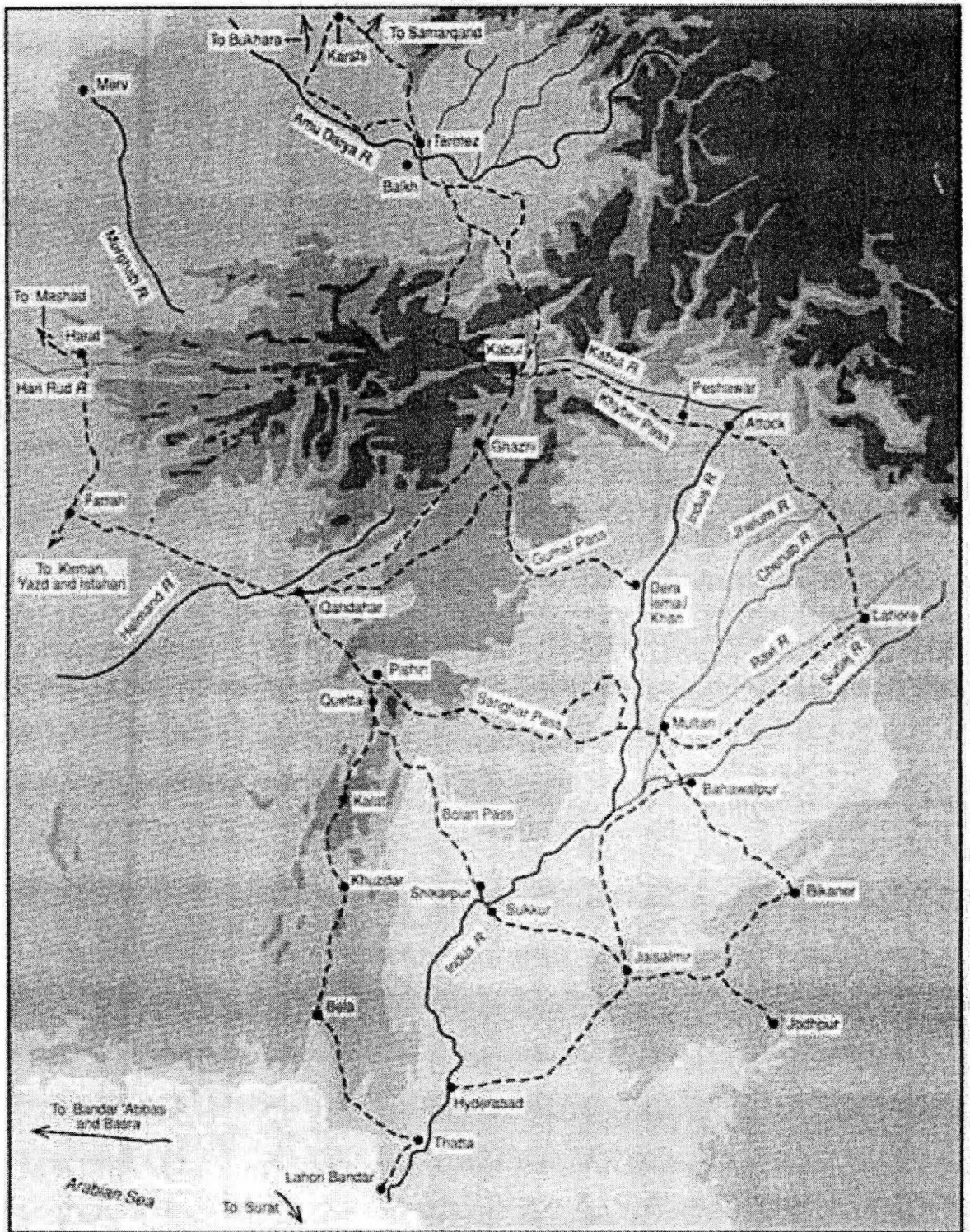
Safavid administration and paid the taxes on time and without any complaint (Levi 2002).

The state administrations financed the construction the caravanserais along the highway trade routes and provided security to the caravaneers in return for a better economic return. The merchants on the other hand enjoyed the services of the states and transported both cheap and dear goods in bulk that served both the elite and the commoners of these regions. In other words the relation between state and mercantile elite was symbiotic which fostered a healthy economy in a positive commercial climate; meaning thereby, even during the periods of economic and political crisis a conscious effort was made by the ruling administrators to keep the trading networks secure as far as possible. Burton (1993) maintains that even when the political relations between the neighbouring governments were tense, they continued to share information about road safety and the merchants were allowed the cross the political boundaries with ease. Thus, despite political rivalries, such as between Sunni Uzbeks and Shi'a Safavids, at the close of the sixteenth century, as the Uzbek and the Safavid army were in a continuous political struggle over the province of Khurasan, the Bukharan merchants were still conducting business in Kashan (Burton 1993). Similarly, Dale (1994) notes that in late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, both Akbar and Shah 'Abbas I made mutual efforts to increase protection along caravan routes and financed caravanserais and bridge construction in order to create an improved climate for overland commerce. The state chronicler during the reign of Shah 'Abbas I reported that 'the greater part of governing is the preservation of stability within the kingdom and security on the roads (TAA 1978). During the regnal year of Shah 'Abbas I a total number of 999 caravanserais were constructed; however it seems plausible that many caravanserais that were either built before or after his reign was also attributed to Shah 'Abbas (Mathee 1999). Akbar likewise constructed many caravanserais and the construction of a bridge over the Indus River below his fort at Attock, begun in 1588, most certainly facilitated an increased the caravan traffic through India's north-west frontier (AN 1998).

The Safavids like the Mughals also constructed caravanserais at convenient location along the trade routes. A number of such buildings were constructed during the regnal years of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1587-1629) and Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1642-1666) (Mathee 1999). The Iranian caravanserais were two storeys high, square in circumference and

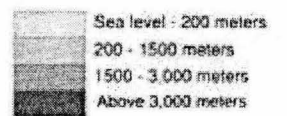
equipped with a pool in the courtyard (Levi 2002). On a payment of an entrance fee and a small daily fee, a merchant was provided with a private room (generally eight square foot in dimension) with a fire place and rooms for their servants (Levi 2002). The caretakers of the caravanserai were responsible for collecting sales taxes and for supervising sales to make sure that all the commerce was conducted within the legal parameters set by the Shah (Burton 1993; Tavernier 1676). These caretakers were reported to have been occasionally overtaxed or otherwise cheated merchants for their own benefit, but they were also held responsible for all the thefts and losses that occurred within their caravanserais (Burton 1993; Tavernier 1676). In the accounts of Niccolao Manucci (1913) Indian caravanserais are reported to have been more numerous and spacious than those in Iran. About the construction of the Indian caravanserais he reports that they resembled fortresses more than hostels; constructed of brick with a grand entrance gate and so spacious that some could even house as many as ten thousand travellers, including their pack animals and carts (Manucci 1913). Manucci further reports that the in-charges of these massive institutions were held responsible for stolen goods, and that robbery was an offence punishable by execution.

It was due to the policies adopted by 'Abd Allah Khan that the commercial climate of Turan saw marked improvement. A trader himself, he granted a tax free status to a number of influential merchants, implemented a number of monetary reforms and financed a number of commercial institutions in Bukharan Khanate, including caravanserais and a bazaar exclusively for the moneychangers (*taq-i sarrafan*) (Burton 1993). Russian traveller Mukminova in the 1570s noted that, as Akbar's armies occupied Badakshan and the Uzbeks did the same in neighbouring Balkh, there was considerable construction of new caravanserais and bazaars with shades along the road between Samarqand and Bukhara (Levi 2002). The rulers of Bukhara were less successful than 'Abd Allah Khan in maintaining similar monetary policies, however few notables Ashtar Khanid *khans* like Imam Quli (r. 1611-1641), 'Abd al- 'Aziz (r. 1645-1681) and Subhan Quli (r. 1681-1702) also attempted to maintain open routes for trader (Burton 1993). During the seventeenth century imperial letters were exchanged between empires which appealed to ensure safety of roads for the merchants. In several letters the Bukharan *khans* sent request to the Mughals on behalf



Map 4: North West of India, Iran and Turan - Trade Routes

Source: Dale 1994



of the merchants and other travellers making an expedition to India most commonly for the purchase of textiles (Levi 2002).

Jahangir (r. 1605-1627) implemented a number of aggressive policies to attract merchants from Turan and Iran soon after ascending the throne in 1605, after the death of Akbar. These included the abolition of the port dues, *tamgha* (a commercial tax of 205 per cent applied to goods in transit) and, in Kabul province, the highly profitable dues on manufactured articles and the *zakat*, the proceeds from which were, by Islamic tradition, reserved for the poor (TJ 1989). Like Akbar, Jahangir too ordered the construction of more caravanserais at isolated locations along trade routes (Burton 1993).

Known as a ruler of grand architectural ventures, such as the Taj Mahal, these taxes, were reintroduced in the reign of Shah Jahan (r. 1628-1658) (Moosvi 1985; Foltz 1998; Richards 1993; Burton 1993). The revival of these taxes certainly had a negative effect on trans-regional commerce, but it is worth noting that following Shah Jahan's highly disruptive Balkh campaign (1646-47), former relations between the Mughals and the Uzbeks was quickly revived when, in the 1650s, the new ruler of Bukhara 'Abd al 'Aziz Khan (r. 1645-1681), sent an ambassador to India (Levi 2002). In his letter to Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1659-1707), 'Abd al 'Aziz suggested that, Uzbeks were looking forward towards a mutual relationship of protection which had been followed earlier, and that sending of messengers and goods on both sides should be followed as a practice (Levi 2002).

During the regnal year of Aurangzeb (r. 1659-1707) the commercial climate improved once again. He began with reintroducing the policies which were in place during the time of his great-grandfather's reign. Burton (1993) contends that during the early years of his reign he abolished the *hasil* (market tax) and the *rahdari* tax (transit tax between the provinces). In the later years of his reign he eliminated or decreased several other taxes. However, in 1672, with the Afridi Afghans rebellion against Aurangzeb's authority the Khyber Pass remained closed for almost two years, until finally the rebellion was crushed by the Mughal army under the leadership of Aurangzeb. Just to ensure that such an event did not recur he left Amir Khan as the new governor in Kabul. Amir Khan followed the policy of appeasement by dispensing large grants to the pastoralists to purchase the safety of caravan traders travelling through the Afghan mountain passes. According to J.F. Richards (1993), the policy of

Amir Khan proved to so successful that no rebellion took place during the two decades of his governorship at Kabul.

Commodities of Trade

The archival sources are not profound in providing reliable statistics with regard to the general magnitude of the commodity that were traded between Indo-Turanian-Central Asian overland commerce. However the availability of materials on European trade with regard to the maritime sea-borne trade provides an understanding about the commodities that were of general importance in the early modern period. Synthesising the data available from the European sources and with the help of additional research by a number of scholars, one could arrive at more comprehensive understanding of the overland trading activities and the commodities of exchange during the early modern period.

India is known to be a region of agricultural surplus. In relation to the present work cotton production in India was of immense importance. The regions like the Coromandel Coast, Gujarat, Bengal and Punjab were the major centres of textile production and known to have sustained thousands of artisans in this industry. During the early modern Asian trade Indian cotton was considered a dear product and therefore every market around the world was stocked with India's textile surplus. These included linen, silk, muslin, chintz, calico and piece goods which were available in the global market centres at a comparatively low prices (Steensgaard 1999). The demand of Indian-textiles was so much so that despite the rather sizeable silk industry of early modern Turan, Bukharan merchants were reported to have imported considerable quantities of Indian silk (Burton 1993; Matthee 1999). The Russian dignitary Boris Pazukhin in 1671 reported to Tsar Alexis Michailovich (r. 1645-1676) that the Bukharan silk production was insufficient even to satisfy the domestic demand (Clarke 1977). Tavernier (1676) also noted that 'the merchants of Tartary' objected to the efforts of the Dutch to export more than 6, 000 to 7, 000 bales of silk from India, as 'these merchants took as much as the Dutch'.

There was always a dearth of bullion (silver and gold) in India. This was due to the fact that India had very few gold and silver deposits, a deficit which gave foreign merchant's premium purchasing power in Indian markets (Levi 2002). Thus, in exchange for textiles, spices and other Indian agricultural and industrial products,

merchants from across the world flooded Indian markets with *dinars, tangas, ducats, guilders, reals, franks, rixdollars* (reichsthalers) and other varieties of coins, all of which were re-minted into rupees (Villar 1976). Or, in the words of Manucci (1913):

'It ought to be remembered that whole of the merchandise which is exported from the Mogul kingdom comes from four kinds of plants – that is to say, the shrub that produces the cotton from which a large quantity of cloth coarse and fine, is made. These cotton goods are exported to Europe, Persia, Arabia, and other quarters of the world. The second is the plant which produces indigo. The third is the one from which comes opium of which a large amount is used on the Java coast. The fourth is the mulberry-tree on which their silk-worms are fed, and, as it may be said that commodity (silk) is grown on those trees. For the export of all this merchandise, Europeans and other traders bring much silver to India.'

From 1600 to 1800 one third of the silver produced in America found its way to Asia to pay for European imports (Furber 1976). The absorption of precious metals was one of the most conspicuous features of Indian foreign commerce owing to the narrow limits the Indian markets which only served 'numerically unimportant upper classes' (Moreland 1923). The Shikarpuri merchants and their *gumasthas* who dealt in *hundis* in Turkistan and Xinjiang overwhelmingly garnered in bullion which was in turn remitted in Sind, 'where there was a thriving market for Central Asian gold coins' (Markovits 2004).

The Safavid Iran which enjoyed a positive trade balance with the neighbouring regions of Russia and Ottoman Turkey suffered heavily from a constant effluence of bullion to India (Steensgaard 1999; Mathee 1999; McCabe 1999). The Safavid Shahs prohibited the export of bullion from Iran under penalty of death; however there are various references to the efforts made by the merchants to circumvent these restrictions in their trade with India (Steel and Crowther 1905; Tavernier 1676; Keyvani 1982). In this context, the mid- seventeenth century French traveller Francois Bernier (1891) noted that, "it should not escape notice that gold and silver after circulating in every other quarters of the globe come at length to be swallowed up or lost in some measure, in Hindustan".

General Itineraries and Commodities of the Indo-Turanaian Caravan Trade

Indo-Turanian circuit saw a huge demand of commodities which were either dear in the Indian market or were high in demand in Turanian markets. Textiles and slaves were always sought for in the Turanian markets while there was a huge demand of war

horses in Indian markets. In addition there were several other itineraries which were in demand and furthered the importance of the commercial bonds between early modern India and Turan. Large-scale production and exportation of indigo complemented the demand of Indian textiles throughout the early modern Asia and Europe (Naqvi 1974; Bernier 1891). The demand for indigo saw a stupendous increase in the seventeenth century and Bengal became one of the regions from where indigo was exported to the global markets of the world. However, the 'Bayana' variety, produced near Agra and some of its varieties in Gujarat, was reputed as the best indigo varieties, which were produced in India (Pelsaert 1925; Singh 1991; Richards 1993). Lahore was also an important centre of indigo production and was famous for its distinct for its 'Lahori' variety of indigo. Despite being an indigo production centre Lahore is reported to have actually developed into an international 'clearing house' for the indigo from Agra because of its demand in caravan trade market from Iran and Turan (Naqvi 1974; Singh 1991). In 1611 an English traveller reported that in markets of Samarqand the only variety of indigo which was available came from Agra (Burton 1993). Indian merchant diaspora was not the only community which was engaged in indigo trade. Besides them the Armenian merchants also transported indigo via the overland trade and operated through their diaspora network which was centred the New Julfa suburb of Isfahan – it was from here that the Indian indigo was sent to the markets of Levant, Caucasus and Russia (Pelsaert 1925; Naqvi 1974; McCabe 1999). Burton (1993) also contends that out of the numerous varieties of dyes imported from India to Iran, indigo was most in demand for most domestic use and for further trade onto Russian markets.

Sugar was yet another important commodity for trade in large quantities. Even prior to the sixteenth century sugar was exported both raw and refined from India to Turan (BN 1989). Sugar was one of the principal cash crops which were produced in north India alongside cotton and indigo (Naqvi 1974). The two major centres of sugar production were Lahore, reputed to have produced a very high quality variety, and Delhi, famous for its refined sugars (Naqvi 1974). Sugar was such a common good for the households that its reference of exportation via overland routes are rather scarce. However, the encouragement for its production by the Mughal rulers, as well as the engagement of Indian, Iranian merchants and the Dutch and the English East India Companies seems to suggest that Indian sugar continued to enjoy a constant demand

in markets beyond India's north-west frontiers throughout early modern era (Chaudhuri 1985).

The other commodities which were regularly exported to the distant markets of the early modern Turan included spices, specifically pepper, nutmeg, mace, cinnamon, cloves and ginger, besides the medicinal herbs, jewellery, precious stones, weaponry and ornate tents made from Indian cotton cloth, to be used the mobile campaigning armies (BN 1989; Burton 1993). The Russian official P. I. Demezov who went on an official deputation, in 1833-34, from his post in the Russian frontier town of Orenburg to Bukhara left a detailed account of the Indian commodities available in the Bukharan market (Levi 2002). He reported that besides sugar, indigo and an impressive variety of textiles of both Indian and English origin, the Bukharan market was overflowed with the supply of Indian ammonia, a number of herbs, *heena* and other dyes, and Hyderabadian carnelian (Levi 2002). He further noted that the Indian rice which was considered to be of higher quality than the Bukharan variety was also available besides the Indian indigo in the caravanserais of Qandahar, Ghazni, Kabul, Qunduz, Balkh, Andkhui, Qarshi, Maimana, Shabarghan, Bukhara and Khiva, and that they were brought to these locations primarily by Lohani Afghans (Levi 2002); a fact that was also reported by Mohan Lal (1971) in his account while travelling through Bukhara in the eighteenth century. Demezov concluded with the remark that in return for these goods the Indian merchants were interested in only gold, and when that was not available they preferred silver (Levi 2002).

The Indian varieties of tea also constituted in the list of the commodities to be exported from India to Bukhara and other major centres of Turan and Central Asia. In the 1840s, Mohan Lal (1971) noted that he transported to Bukhara via the overland routes traversing Khulum. Later in the nineteenth century, in 1869, another Russian author reported that the Indian tea was transported from Bombay up the Indus River to Peshawar and from there by caravans via Kabul, Balkh, Qarshi and Bukhara to Tashkent (Levi 2002). Only a few years later, a British traveller made a significant observation that because of the breakdown in the trade relations with China, nearly five million pounds of tea (constituting roughly 10,000 camel loads of tea) was transported annually from India to Bukhara (Taylor 1881). At the close of the nineteenth century the volume of tea export dropped formidably down, however according to the figures presented by Rasul'-Zade, Bukhara was still importing more

than three millions of tea annually during this time (Levi 2002). The Indian wholesale tea merchants, almost seventy registered shops, enjoyed monopoly over the tea trade in the Bukharan Kahanate even by the beginning of twentieth century (Levi 2002).

There were a number of commodities which were imported from Turan to the Indian markets; a large amount of which constituted of fruits, both fresh and dry. The chronicles dating Mughal period give a detailed description about the import of fruits of beyond the north-west frontier of India. Akbar is said to have arranged regular supply of melons, apples and pears from Samarqand in the summer months, and melons from Badakhshan in the winter; which was arranged for him by a group of Bukharan merchants (AA 1997). The imports of fruits to India increased dramatically in the wake of Mughal conquest of Kabul, Qandahar and Kashmir, during the reign of Akbar (AA 1997). The *Ain-i-Akbari* (1997) gives a list of various varieties of fruits and nuts were imported from Turan, which included two varieties of melons, Samarqandi apples, quinces, guavas, dates, two varieties off raisins, plums, dried apricots, fig, jujubes, almonds, pistachios, and hazelnuts. Abul Fazl (1997) writes, Akbar 'looks upon fruits as one of the gifts of the Creator and pays much attention to them'; it for that reason that Akbar took pain in settling fruit growers from Iran and Turan in his Empire. He further reports that these fruit growers enjoyed great success, but their efforts to reproduce the same high quality fruits of Turan in India were futile, as neither the Indian climate nor the soil were congenial for the Turanian vines and trees. Therefore the Indian market had to rely upon caravan traders, especially Bukharan merchants, for regular supplies of fresh and dried fruits and nuts. Such was the demand of Turanian fruits in the Indian market that no chronicle escapes due mention of them. For instance, Bernier (1891) in the seventeenth century records that "*Hindoustan* consumes an immense quantity of fresh fruit from *Samarkand, Bali* [Balkh], *Persia, and Bocara*; such as apples, melons, grapes and pears, eaten at *Dehli* and purchased at a very high price nearly the whole winter: - and likewise dried fruit, such as pistachio, almonds, and various other small nuts, raisins, plums, and apricots, which maybe procured the whole year round ...". Only after few years Manucci (1907-8) noted that shortly after the accession to the throne, Aurangzeb received an ambassador of Subhan Quli Khan in Balkh who came with one hundred camels loaded with fresh fruit (melon, apples, pears, pomegranates and seedless grapes) and one hundred camels loaded with dry fruits (Bukharan pulms, apricots, and a number of

varieties of raisins and nuts). Due to various state policies of Mughals and Uzbeks to safeguard the lanes of overland caravan circuit the import of these fruits were available in the southern markets of Deccan peninsula which continued well into the nineteenth century (Alam 1994; Noelle 1997).

Conversely, the Turanian silk enjoyed a considerable demand in the Indian markets. Jenkinson (1886) notes that the Indian merchants diaspora in Bukhara commonly purchased leather ('redde hides'), slaves and horses which they in turn exported to India. Fur, especially sable, was yet another product from the pastoral-nomadic steppe which was brought to Bukhara from Siberia and Muscovy, to be further transported to Indian markets. Camels were also a praised commodity for trade to India, which were reputed for carrying over 50 per cent more bulk than the Indian breeds (Levi 2002). Luxury goods such as rubies and other precious stones, hunting birds (falcons) and dogs, and Chinese porcelain were important constituents in the list of the itineraries which were imported from Turan to be sold at a dear price in Indian markets (Burton 1993). And finally, it was the paper produced in Bukhara, Balkh and especially Samarqand, reputedly of the finest quality and enjoyed great global demand, which was high in demand in India. The papers were available in different colours and patterns, some of which were even marbled or speckled with silver, although the best was silvery white. It is noteworthy to mention that a common ingredient in the paper production was cotton, usually recycled from old shirts and rags; a commodity which was imported by Turan from India on a regular basis. It seems therefore, that some of the textile houses in India which were below standard also had buyers in Turan for producing paper, only to be re-exported to the Indian markets in this new form.

Horse Trade

The early modern period in the history Asia was marked by the emergence of empires with centralised system of administration. The nobility under the Mughals constituted of Turanians, Iranians and Sheikhjadas functioned as administrators in different provinces of the empire; where they were granted *jagirs* in lieu of salary. The nobles were supposed to keep standing army whose payment was made from their respective *jagirs*. The war-horses therefore, constituted the most important commodity for trade by the inner Asian pastoral nomads to the Indian markets; as they were sought for by the administrative officials as well as *sawars* (cavalrymen) on a regular basis. Horse

breeding was the primary occupation for a number of pastoral nomadic groups of Turan and Central Asia, as it served as means of transport, food as well as the source of prospering pastoral economy. Horses were central to the lives of these pastoralists and they were skilled horse-riders since their childhood. Horses were not just yet another animal for them; rather it was a symbol of wealth and prosperity, so much so was its value that the effluence of a tribe was measured by the size of its herds, not by the reserves of precious metals that they possessed. For pastoralists, horse was the primary currency in their commercial exchanges with the sedentary people, for which they acquired agricultural and necessary industrial products not available in the steppes (Khazanov 1994; Khazanov and Wink 2001).

The horses from steppe were high in demand throughout the global markets for their known stamina and strength. Gommans (1995) argues that even during the epic period of Indian history the *Mahabharata* associates the pastoral people living beyond the northwest frontier of India with horses, referring them as *asvaka* (horsefolk). While traversing through the northwest frontier of India in the mid-fourteenth century, Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta (1953) noted that the steppe people from around Asaq Azaf in southern Russia, the territory of the Mongol Golden Horde at that time, made their living by raising large number of horses. In his account, he reports that horses could be purchased in the steppe at a very reasonable price of fifty or sixty *dirhams*, equal to about one Moroccan *dinar*. The nomad tribal people of Turkestan even claimed to have owned several thousand horses. Regarding the horse trade Ibn Battuta (1953) reports that:

'These horses are exported to India [in droves], each one numbering six thousand or more or less ... When they reach the land of Sind with their horses, they feed them with forage, because the vegetation of the land of Sind does not take the place of barley, and the greater part of the horses die or are stolen. They are taxed on them in the land of Sind [at the rate of] seven silver dinars a horse, at a place called Sahashnaqar, and pay a further tax in Multan, the capital of the land of Sind... In spite of this, there remains a handsome profit for the traders, for they sell the cheapest of them in the land of India for a hundred silver dinars (the exchange value of which in Moroccan gold is twenty-five *dinars*), and often sell them for twice or three times as much. The good horses are worth five hundred [silver] *dinars* or more.'

Just by taking into account his report, one can surmise that the profit which these nomads earned could have been around 2500 per cent of their initial investments, although this does not account the considerable losses which they suffered due to theft and starvation. Gommans (1995) argues that due to the high profits involved several

Afghan confederacies also began to participate in this lucrative trade as mediatory merchants; including the Lodis (1451-1526), Suris (1540-1555) and the eighteenth century Durranis. They however did not monopolise the horse trade, but to ensure their position in the commercial exchange of horses they carved out their states along the trade routes to Central Asia (Gommans 1995). In 1558, Anthony Jenkinson (1886) made a very insightful observation that the Indian merchants who were set to return home after their service as agents of Indian family firms in Turan and Central Asia was over, likely invested their capital in horses to be sold in the Indian markets. This guaranteed them safe transfer of capital in kind besides a promising profit.

There were several routes through which the horses were exported from Central Asia to India, besides the regular route via the Hindukush mountain passes. In the thirteenth century, prior to Ibn Battuta's report of horse trade to India, Marco Polo (1903) reported that the Malabar rulers annually received shipments of as many as 10, 000 horses, for which they reportedly spent 2.2 million *dinars*. During his visit in 1442, 'Abu al- Razzaq Samarqandi (1857) noted the Persian Gulf port of Hormuz, also referred to as 'Daralaman' ('The Abode of Security'), to have been an important horse market and an international entrepot that attracted merchants from throughout Egypt, Syria, Rome, Fars, Azerbaijan, Khurasan, Turan, Turkestan, the Dasti-i Qipchaq, India, China, and port cities throughout the Indian Ocean. Just after few years, in 1466, the Russian traveller Afanasii Nikitin (1857) referred to the port of Hormuz as "a vast emporium of all the world". Nikitin stayed for most part of his travel in the capital city of Bahmanid Sultanate, Bidar and noted that the markets were full of foreign breed horses, and that they were brought in large numbers from Arabia, Khurasan and Turkestan. The number of horses imported would be large, as during the time of important military engagements the Bahmanid Sultanate was able to raise a standing army of cavalrymen to 5, 00,000 (Nikitin 1857).

Therefore the horses that were brought to India fell into two categories: the *Bahri*, Iranian or Arabian horses brought by sea (*bahr*), and *Turki*, those brought overland from Inner Asia (Levi 2002). Because of their celebrated strength and stamina, better availability and relatively low price, *Turki* horses enjoyed greater popularity than *Bahri* horses and comprised majority of the Indian equestrian population (Manucci 1913; Moosvi 1987). The bulk of the *Turki* horses were supplied by the pastoral nomads in the Kalmuk and Qazaq steppes of southern Russia and from the Afghan

Turkestan (Gommans 1995). A significant number of horses were still taken to India from Iran, generally from the regions of Dashtestan, Kazarun and Shiraz (Gommans 1995; Polo 1903). The demand for Central Asian horses was maintained in Indian markets well into the nineteenth century which were transported from Iran via the caravan routes traversing Qandahar and the maritime routes through Surat (Waring 1807). The demand for *Turki* horses increased since the sixteenth century, whence Babur reported that 7,000 to 10,000 horses were annually taken to Kabul for sale in Indian markets (BN 1989). In the seventeenth century, Francois Bernier (1891) estimated that over 25,000 horses were annually brought to India from the Uzbek territory, and additional numbers were brought overland from Iran traversing Qandahar and from Iran and Africa by sea-route. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier and Jean de Thevenot placed the figure higher and independently suggested that Uzbek merchants brought over 60,000 horses per year to Kabul (Tavernier 1676; Sen 1949). The highest estimate was suggested by Niccolo Manucci (1913) in the latter half of the seventeenth century, that over 1,00,000 horses were annually brought to India from Balkh, Bukhara and Kabul, with some 12,000 going directly into emperor Aurangzeb's stables.

Apart from the insatiable demand arising due to the politico-military condition of Indian empires for the Central Asian horses, the other reason was the comparatively poor quality of Indian horse breeds. The situation could be best explained in the words of John F. Richards (1993) that the Mughal military required 'standard Central Asian or Persian breeds – not the scrub mounts of the subcontinent'. The climatic condition of the Indian sub-continent proved to be detrimental for any efforts taken for the breeding of horses in India. The extremely hot climate was unbearable for these horses and led to pre-mature deaths. Also, in India the best soil was kept for irrigation which left very few irrigated pasturelands that had grasses with high nutrient content, beneficial for the up-keep of horses. Gommans (1995) argues that irrigated pastureland was rare, and also the extreme difference between the rainy and dry season made the soil at one time swampy, and hard, parched and cracked at the other which resulted in rapid growth of grasses in the fields during the rains followed by a subsequent dryness making them unsuitable for pasture at the end of the year. In India these horses were fed a variety of grains (wheat, barley, gram etc.), unlike Inner Asian steppe where they fed on hay or broad-leaf grasses, sometimes mixed with clarified butter or brown sugar to fatten the animal and improve its outward appearance; but it is likely that this diet

had an adverse effect on their health often inflicting liver damage. In this regard, Marco Polo (1903) noted that out of 10,000 horses imported to Malabar only hundred of them remained alive by the end of the year because 'for these people do not know in the least how to treat a horse'. Gommans (1995) further argues that due to the poor dietary practices, non-availability of irrigated pasture lands coupled with the insufficient exercise owing to prolonged summer made the Indian mares infertile, further decreasing the possibility for the procreation of a bred indigenous stock.

The average time span for the replacement of the entire horse stock in India was seven to eight years. It was due to the military campaigns which took place throughout the year. The eighteenth century marked a phase of political instability soon after the death of Aurangzeb (d. 1707) resulting in the rise of several principalities in the regions of Awadh, Bengal, Bundelkhand, Rohilkhand and Hyderabad. The rise of new imperial houses furthered the possibility of military conflicts and in return intensified the demand for more war horses throughout the year. The horse trade had become so extensive in the eighteenth century that it led to the rise of Indo-Afghan Durrani confederacy to monopolise this profitable commercial exchange. Gommans (1995) estimates that during the eighteenth century the total number of horses, at any given time, was between 4,00,000 to 8,00,000. On the basis on this estimate, Gommans (1995) calculated the annual value of overland horse trade to be around twenty million rupees, amounting to be three times more than Bengal's annual export to Europe by English and Dutch Companies together. Although the estimation is based on limited evidence, however one can surmise that the volume of trade, particularly horse trade, which was conducted over the caravan routes connecting India and Central Asia, was not undermined by the political conflicts rather the magnitude turned out to be higher than the maritime strength of English and Dutch companies, put together. It was not until the nineteenth century pacification of the sub-continent under British domination that demands for this commodity subsided and the flow of horses to India diminished (Levi 2002).

The importance of horse trade shifted the dynamics and polarity of commerce towards Central Asia. In other words, the idea that India was the natural sink of bullion needs further revision, as in this case the balance of trade was in favour of Central Asia and thus, the flow of bullion ultimately reached there. The numismatic evidence too suggests a significant presence of Indian currency in central Asia (Richards 1993;

Burton 1993). It is to be noted that the *Turki* horses were exchanged for Mughal mints, and the Indian merchant diaspora in Turan remitted vast amounts of wealth to India (Levi 2002). In addition to that, it is important to reiterate the fact that rather than exporting Indian articles to purchase horses, the Indian merchants preferred to settle their accounts in Turan and transport their wealth back to India by investing in horses so that they could earn huge profit while safely transferring their earned capital in kind (Jenkinson 1886).

The Slave Trade

There was a high demand of slaves in the markets of Turan since the ancient times which continued well into the seventeenth century. Alongside Russians, Qalmaqs, non-Sunni Afghans, and the principally Shi'a Iranians, Hindus were vital constituent of the slave markets of Turan. The movement of slaves from India to Turan predates the emergence of Indian merchant communities in Central Asia. The Ghaznavid and the Ghurid invasions of north India during the medieval period included slave raidings, and sources from the eleventh century give account of the exportation of tens of thousands of enslaved Indian captives to be sold at the slave markets in Inner Asia (Wink 1990; Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982). Also, a Bukharan *waqfnama* of 1326 enlists several Indian slaves alongside other slaves from various other regions of Asia (Levi 2002). A document dated 1489, records the existence of the Indian slaves in an estate near Bukhara, as agricultural labourers and artisans (Levi 2002). An interesting account of Shibani Khan's campaign against the Qazaq Tanish Sultan informs us about the Hindu slaves among pastoral groups of Turkestan. It informs that,

'in the winter of 1509-10, a fourteen-year-old Indian slave escaped from his cruel master in a Qazaq *qishlaq* (winter encampment) near the city of Turkestan and, while wandering through the steppe, he fortuitously came across the encampment of Shibani Khan and informed the Uzbeks of the location of the enemy Qazaq *qishlaq*. This enabled the Uzbek defeat of Tanish Sultan's forces, for which the slave earned the favour of Shaibani Khan, who renamed him 'Khush Khabar' ('Good News')' (Levi 2002).

The wealthy households in Turan kept slaves for either maintaining gardens or cultivating the lands (Jenkinson 1886). Apart from the urban centres of Bukhara and Samarqand; slaves were also seen in the rural areas where they were engaged as plantation labours or cultivators of land or animal grazers. A large number of slaves were also used as soldiers, brick factory workers, maintaining irrigation canals and skilled construction engineers (after training). The seventeenth century *Matlab al-*

talibin records that one Naqshbandi Sufi leader (a Juybari Sheikh) owned over 500 slaves, 40 of whom were trained poets while the others were agricultural labourers, livestock watchmen, and carpenters (Levi 2002). The skilled labourers were always sought for, so much so was their requirement that after every political invasion the skilled artisans were relocated by their new masters in their territories. Similarly during the sack of Delhi by Timur in the fourteenth century the skilled artists were put in bondage and taken to Turan; upon their arrival he reserved the skilled Indian masons for himself which were then employed in Bibi Khanum mosque's construction, in his capital city of Samarqand. Even today, the Bibi Khanum complex is the largest magnificent religious building in the erstwhile Soviet Central Asia (Levi 2002). The young female slaves were likewise sold at a higher price than the skilled construction engineers (Levi 2002).

The Turko-Afghan invaders forcibly re-located a large number of Indian slaves beyond the north-west frontiers in the medieval period. This was in addition to the constant exportation of slaves by caravaneers, who either bought them out rightly or received them in exchange for other valuable articles in India, such as war-horses (Alam 1994; Gopal 1992). Writing in 1581, Father Antonio Monserrate (1922), the Portuguese Jesuit missionary, *en route* from Lahore to Kabul, reported that one of the tribes in Punjab, identified as 'Gaccares' (Ghakkars), "had made trading of slaves for horses such a regular practice that they had been even associated with the proverb, 'Slaves from India, horses from Parthia'".

On occasions, when the Mughal army failed or aborted the annexation of the regions beyond the north-west territory the soldiers were captured by the rival Central Asian armies and were taken to the Turanian slave markets. On such instance followed after Shah Jahan abandoned the annexation of Balkh in 1646-7; while many soldiers were captured by Uzbek army and send to the slave markets of Samarqand, Turkestan and Tashkent for sale (Foltz 1996). It seems that this unique event in the history of the region led to a significant increase of Indians in Turan. An assumption that could be derived out of the fact that, while in 1589, "a thirty-three-year old Indian slave in good health was sold in Samarqand for 225 tangas"; however, after the withdrawal of the Mughal army in 1647, the Turanian slave markets were so flooded with the Indian slaves that their price dropped to 84 tangas or even less (Levi 2002).

Sending gifts by rulers to other ruler was a practice that was followed uninterruptedly during the early modern period. It almost became part and parcel of the foreign policy which the rulers adopted either make peace at borders or to ensure safe overland caravan trade. Among the gifts that were sent to rulers, skilled slaves and young women slaves constituted a significant part. For instance, among the gifts that was sent to Bukharan ruler 'Abd Allah Khan II by Mughal emperor Akbar, included four slaves skilled at masonry. Following this practice, Shah Jahan sent a hundred Indian slaves to the Astrakhanid rulers Nadir Muhammad and Imam Quli Khan. Also, the Indian merchants brought several slaves to the diaspora only to be sold in the Turanian markets at a dear price. Sometimes the Indian merchant on their way to India were also captured forcibly and sold in the slave markets in Turan, however such events seldom happened (Alam 1994; Gopal 1992).

The Indians were considered to be non-believers by the Muslim societies and this turned out to be a significant factor in their capture and conversion as slaves. Also the Turko-Afghan invasions were regarded as Islamic expansion in the sub-continent of *kafirs*, though the Hindus were believed to be the people with a book. The chronicles of that period try to explain these invasions in the light of religious endeavours of the Central Asian rulers. For instance, the event of the Ghaznavid capture of Thanesar in 1014 AD is thus reported by Firishta:

'the army of Islam brought to Ghazna about 2, 00,000 captives, and much wealth, so that the capital appeared like an Indian city, no soldier of the camp being without wealth, or without many slaves' (TF 1908).

In addition to this, 'Al- Utbi (1847) in *Tarikh-al Yamini* maintained that by the end of the twelfth expedition of Mahmud of Ghazna (1018-19) in India, he returned with a large number of slaves which were sold at a throw away price of two to ten dirhams each; such a low price pulled merchants from distant cities to purchase them. Irfan Habib (1984) argues that, as a part of expansionist policy the Turko-Afghan armies abducted large number of slaves, especially Hindus. Thus, in the beginning of fourteenth century, Delhi Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji owned 50,000 slaves and later Sultan Firuz Tughluq owned 1,80,000 slaves, 1,200 of whom were skilled-artisans (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982). Although, the reign of Akbar saw the prohibition of enslaving Hindus, his efforts were only temporarily successful (AN 1998). In the seventeenth century, Dutch traveller Francisco Palsaert (1978) reported that the Mughal governor of Kalpi and Kher, an Uzbek noble named 'Abd Allah Khan Firuz

Jang, subjugated the local rebels by beheading their leaders and enslaving their women, children and daughters, who exceeded 2,00,000 in number. These numbers provided by the chroniclers seems exaggerated, but it is reasonable to believe that such estimate could have been reached over the years.

In the eighteenth century, the export of Indian slaves declined considerably and the slave markets in Khiva and Bukhara began to be out stocked by the Iranian slaves. Bukhara still served as the entrepot for slave trade accounting for 1,00,000 slaves throughout the khanate, 20,000 of whom lived in the Bukharan city, itself (Montgomery 1862). Muzaffar Alam (1994) argues that the decline in the number of Indian slaves was due to both social and economic factors, as the textile export grew manifold, it did not remain profitable to trade in slaves for *Turki* horses by the Indian merchants. However, such an assertion does not explain, why merchants would have stopped exporting slaves, as they very well could have traded in both textiles and slaves simultaneously. Also, the balance of trade, as argued by Jos Gommans, (1995) which it was in favour of Turan due to their monopoly over horse trade, could have been easily broken. It seems plausible, however, that in the eighteenth century with the rise of independent principalities, the demand for slaves would have increased in India, and also, the exportation of slaves would have become expensive as they now had to pay toll taxes for passing through a number of principalities. The demand for slaves still continued in Turan whose fulfilment came from the rise of Iranian slave trade by the eighteenth century. However, the supply of Afghan and Indian slaves to the Bukharan slave market did not decline completely. The sale of Indian slaves, however, continued well into the nineteenth century (Levi 2002). On the basis of Turgun Faiziev findings from several records of the nineteenth century, Scott C. Levi (2002) opines that there was still considerable presence of Indian slaves in Bukhara who were identified as 'Hindus' and 'Chitari' (Chitral). The nineteenth century account of Josiah Harlan (1939) noted that the Afghan ruler Murad Beg organised frequent raids for the procurement of slaves from Kunduz into Chitral, which were later sold in Bukharan markets. The profit to be made from slave trade was so huge that "Murad Beg reportedly asked his subjects to pay their taxes in slaves"; a demand which led to intensified feuds, wars and numerous raids for the procurement of slaves (Levi 2002). Perhaps such regular raids proved to be detrimental for the merchants and

the state governments had to take extra efforts so as to secure the various arteries of transit circuit.

Trade of Cotton Textiles

The medieval and early modern periods saw significant technological advancements in the production technologies (Habib 1980). The other significant features around this period were expansion in terms of population, economic potential, and agricultural and industrial production (Habib 1980). Irfan Habib (1984) estimates that the population of India in 1600 A.D was 150 million and, despite several famines and disease, it roughly increased to 200 million by 1800 A.D, out of which 85 per cent lived in the rural areas. And the agricultural and industrial production increased, the cotton textile production turned out in unsurpassed quantities for serving both the domestic and foreign markets (Richards 1993; Naqvi 1974; Raychaudhuri 1982). The policy of the Mughals ensured that more farmers were motivated to cultivate cash crops like cotton, indigo and sugarcane so that the heavy demand for finished industrial products from both domestic and foreign markets is met (Richards 1993; Grover 1966). The importance of Indian cotton textile production in the pre-Industrial Revolution era is best explained in the words of K. N. Chaudhuri (1974), "before the discovery of machine spinning and weaving in Britain in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Indian sub-continent was probably the world's greatest producer of cotton textiles".

During the early modern period various varieties of cotton textiles were produced in India. The number of varieties was so bewildering that just in the first ten years of English factory records; Tapan Raychaudhuri (1982) identified as many as 150 designations of different cotton textiles. The varieties of cotton textiles are so numerous that they have to be categorised into piece-goods (ready-made articles), muslins, and calico; the latter two differing in that muslin is notably thinner than calico. These could be further sub-divided into several hundreds of categories based on the city or village of their origin, the quality of fabric, and whether or not the cotton had been bleached or otherwise treated or dyed. Several varieties of chintz are found mentioned in the sources in reference to painted or printed Indian calico.

In the pre-Industrial revolution period the Indian cotton textiles was stocked all over the markets of the world due to their quality and price. Also the favourable climate of India and the natural riverine networks provided extensive production of cotton easier

to supply in abundance. K. N. Chaudhuri (1974) argues that the production of textiles from cotton took place throughout the Indian sub-continent by several thousand skilled weavers whose labour costs added very little to the final price of the commodity. The advancement in the Indian textile production industry was further facilitated by the availability of relatively inexpensive dyes and several other skilled labourers engaged in other aspects of textile production at a comparatively low remuneration. These included skilled agriculturalists who produced fine cotton crops; spinners who processed the fine cotton bales into cotton fibres of various varieties of thread qualities; and cloth printers who dyed these threads from which various types of textile products could be produced. Thus, in the seventeenth century Sir John Chardin (1927) noted that, although the Iranians produced some cheap cotton, they had no motivation to expand their textile industry into finer qualities as they would not be able to match with the Indian standards both in quality as well price.

The actual magnitude of the actual cotton textile production is hard to estimate, however, it is generally accepted that on an average a piece of finished cloth measured just over ten square yards, and that on an average early modern household weaver annually produced as much as 1,600 yards of cloth, and that the weavers and the other labourers involved in textile production were located in urban centres and rural areas across the entire sub-continent (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982; Richard 1993; Brenning 1986; Naqvi 1974). In reference to the dispersion of weaver household throughout the sub-continent, Hamida Khatoon Naqvi (1974) notes that, 'no city, town, *paraganah*, *casbah* or village seems to have been devoid of this industry'. The cotton textiles production for foreign markets came from one of four regions: Coromandel Coast, Bengal, the Punjab and Sind, and Gujarat (Raychaudhuri and Habib 1982). According to Joseph Brenning's (1986) estimates, in 1682 the combined British and Dutch export from north-Coromandel alone were in excess of 9 million yards of cloth.

However, this impressive figure was far less than compared to the amount of cloth exported by the indigenous merchants during the same time (Levi 2002). During the period from sixteenth to eighteenth century, neither European nor Asian merchants enjoyed an inherent advantage but the vast share of commerce remained in the hands of Asian merchants who were engaged in both maritime and overland trade (Chaudhuri and Morineau 1999). Even when the Dutch and English demand for Indian textiles increased manifold at the end of the seventeenth century – with just the

English cloth exports in 1684 exceeding 18 million yards – the English and Dutch together employed less than 10 per cent of the ‘full-time weavers and other workers in the textile sector of Bengal’ (Richards 1993; Prakash 1985; Chaudhuri 1974).

The Arabian sea-port of Thatta emerged as an important commercial and textile production centre in the medieval and early modern Sind, it was only after the shift of capital to Hyderabad in the late-eighteenth century that led to the rise of port of Karachi as the most important centre for textile products. Henry Pottinger’s (1816) report of 1809, suggests that when Nadir Shah travelled through the Arabian port of Thatta in 1742, there were said to have been 40,000 cotton weavers operating in that city alone. The textiles exported through north-western mountain passes were mostly produced in the Punjab region, major industrial centre during the Mughal period where thousands of weavers were engaged in the production of specialised cotton cloth for various markets of Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond (Richards 1993). During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, urbanisation took place throughout the north-west India and various towns developed in the province of Punjab, such as Lahore, Bajwara, Batala, Machhiwara, Samana, and Sialkot, began to specialise in textile production (Bayly 1990; Alam 1994). The cotton production in Punjab region was not abundant so the raw materials were regularly exported from as far as south India by the assistance of Banjara caravans (Levi 2002). These Banjara caravaneers also supplied the commercial centres of the Punjab with finished textile from other regions of India, and it was probably through their mediation that, in the late-seventeenth century, a particular shipment of Gujarati cloth was carried to the northwest frontier from where it was further transported on to Qarshi (Levi 2002).

Turan’s reliance on Indian textiles was analogous to India’s dependence on Turanian horses. Although cotton production did take place in Turan, but it never constituted a significant export commodity until the second half of the nineteenth century (Burton 1993). It was due to this fact that Turan was heavily dependent on the export of textiles from India throughout the early modern period. Arminius Vambery (1864) notes that the Turanian irrigation networks was so great that it could produce abundant fruits and crops, yet the indigenous cotton textiles were overpriced and was of poor quality. In 1639, some 20-25,000 camels annually brought Indian goods, mostly Indian textiles, from Qandahar to Isfahan, and the Dutch report that a few years later 25-30,000 camel loads of cotton textiles were annually brought to Iranian markets

from India (Steensgaard 1999). However, it should be stressed that the supply of cotton textiles to Turan was often supplemented by the maritime traders through the ports of the north-west frontiers. Considering this and considering the load that a camel carried on an average (400-500 pounds), one can conclude that Turan annually received well over 500 tons of Indian textiles, amounting to be more than 72 million yards of cloth for both domestic use and to be further transported on to markets in Turan, Russia and Levant (Dale 1994; Steensgaard 1974).

The Indian merchant diaspora active in Central Asia were also involved in textiles trade, contributing to their value in the eyes of the ruling administrators of their host societies. For instance, in 1618, an English traveller who visited Iran reported that the Banias are the chief merchant community who bring linen from India of all sorts and prices to this country, a commodity that the people of 'this country cannot live without, except the people should go naked' (Steensgaard 1999). Raphael du Mans, who spent his life in Iran from 1644 till his death in 1696, reported to King Louis XVI that the premier cloth merchants in Iran were the Hindu merchants from Multan (Levi 2002). Burton (1993) argues that cotton textiles were one such commodity which was regularly exported to Bukhara from Iran, of which a considerable portion was Indian in origin and part of well established Indo-Iranian transit trade.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Turan was heavily dependent on regular supply of cotton textiles from India in the early modern period. White cloth was included in the list of goods that were transported through Kabul to the markets of Turan by Babur in 1504-5 (BN 1989). In 1558, Anthony Jenkinson (1886) noted that there was large number of Indian merchants in Bukhara who were engaged in white cloth. An Indian merchant identified as Tangri Berdi, who died in Samarqand in 1589, is known to have possessed 429 pieces of stripped Indian cloth which he included in his will (Levi 2002). In 1639, Henry Bornford (1912) visited Punjab and noted that the cotton production of the surrounding areas was largely transported to the markets of Lahore, where "they are bought by Wousbecks [Uzbeks] or Tatars" and was transported through Kabul into their areas. The chintz produced in the town of Samana was bought by Persian and Armenian merchants who directly transported it to Isfahan via Qandahar (Bornford 1912). In 1671 Pazukhin noted that the cloths were the primary commodities which were in demand in the markets of Khiva (Clarke 1977).

Several diplomatic letters were sent by Bukharan *khans* to Indian rulers on behalf of Bukharan and other merchants travelling to India for the uninterrupted purchase of textiles. It was a regular practice to be found in the seventeenth century. One such letter which was probably sent by 'Abd al-'Aziz to Aurangzeb appealed for mutual commercial exchanges explaining that, 'at this time textiles are difficult to find in the boundaries of Bukhara' (Levi 2002). In another letter to Shah Jahan, written by a merchant identified as Khwaja Awaz, requested for the permission of to annually send agents between Balkh and Kabul, offering to supply Kabul with fruits, horses and camels in return for Indian cloth (Levi 2002). Several Indian finished products were available in the markets of Turan which included turbans, napkins, handkerchiefs, robes, towels, Banarasi wraps, silk brocade, and Kashmiri shawls, besides huge quantities of linen, muslin, calico and chintz of various qualities, printed patterns and price (Jenkinson 1886; Burton 1993). It was a general practice to send gifts to the neighbouring rulers so as to ensure safety at the frontiers and maintain diplomatic relations. Probably such gifts also meant setting of alliances which may be required to undermine common enemy. For instance, in 1620-21 Mughal emperor Jahangir sent a letter to the third Juibari sheikh, Taj al-Din Hassan, in which he announced a gift of cotton cloth of worth 50,000 khani to the sheikh and other goods sent to Bukhara with the Mughal ambassador Mir Baraka (Burton 1993). Such gift were either distributed by the recipient to his subordinates or warehoused for distribution, or sold at an advantageous time. For instance, in 1639 Shah Jahan sent 600 pieces of red calico to Balkh through his ambassador, and the same year the Astrakhanid ruler of Balkh, Nadir Muhammad is reported to have distributed 100 Indian turbans and pieces of *qutnaya*, a Daccan stripped cloth made of cotton and silk blend to the attendees of a banquet in the honour of his brother, Imam Quli Khan (Burton 1993). Conversely there is no such evidence to suggest that Turanian textiles were sent as gifts to India by the rulers of that time, suggesting that the Turanian cotton production was not enough for even serving the domestic demands and were of poor quality (Jenkinson 1886).

The Bukharan traders were actively involved in the exportation of raw cotton, cotton thread, and various types of cotton textiles and piece goods besides the Indian cotton textiles through overland trade route. Except the Indian cotton textiles, which were bought completely in the Bukharan markets, the remaining raw materials were exported to the pastoralists and the urban market in Siberia and Muscovy (Burton

1993). An individual Bukharan merchant annually imported thousands of pieces of cotton cloth to the markets of Muscovy, and that was the single most important commodity exported from Bukhara to Siberia (Burton 1993). It seems plausible that a large quantity of the textiles which was considered to be 'Bukharan' and was exported to Muscovy and Siberia was in reality either produced in India or produced in Bukhara from Indian cotton thread.

Conclusion

The Indian merchant family firms operated through thousands of agents who were engaged in commercial activities throughout the Indo-Turanian commercial urban and rural centres. The emergence of Indian merchant diaspora can be traced back to the sixteenth century. The emergence of these firms was due to a series of historical processes spanning the medieval period. The most important process was the monetisation of economy in India with the establishment of new administrative structures under the newly found Turko-Afghan Empire and the revenue system which further led to the maximisation of revenue collection in cash. These developments fostered the emergence of groups of merchant financiers who were engaged as intermediaries between the agrarian production centres and the state treasury apparatus. The Multani merchants were widely known for their business acumen and with the growth of the credit system in the Indian subcontinent; they too diversified their commercial ventures by expanding their nature of activity, and by locating their agents to various commercial centres and hinterland beyond the north-west frontiers of the subcontinent. In the sixteenth century the Multani merchants were noted to have lived in diaspora communities in Bukhara, Samarqand and Qazvin, whereas in the seventeenth century the Indian diaspora had reached even as far as Moscow. With the help of their commercial ventures in the village-industrial production activities these merchants were able to earn a huge sum of profit which they intended use in expanding their portfolios as traders in cotton textiles, horses, fruits, sugar, indigo, and slaves. Due to their impressive ability to diversify their commercial ventures, even attending to the needs of the rural agricultural and industrial investment capital, they earned respect in the host societies and enjoyed protection of the state even to the end of the nineteenth century.

The European maritime trade contributed to the growth and development of Indian family firms by injecting bullion into the Indian economy which in turn motivated the merchants to venture in overland trade and in expanding diaporas across the cities and villages in Central Asia. By virtue of their position these merchants were able to earn favours from the Mughal, Safavid and Uzbek states, at large. These states followed the policy of encouragement by actively financing the building of roads and caravanserais to improve trans-regional trade in the Indo-Turanian-Russian caravan trade circuit. As the Indian diaspora communities enjoyed the support of Uzbek and the Safavid states, the Armenians and the Bukharans were given support in the Mughal India. Horses and fruits were annually transported from Turan to Indian markets for which Mughal rulers personally saw that the Bukharan and the Armenian merchants are provided state security so that they could import their supply at a regular basis. Similarly, slaves and textiles were the two most important commodities which were sought for by the states in Central Asia. This unique relationship which conjoined the states, and the merchants, both indigenous and foreign into one string of commercial enterprise encouraged the growth of cross cultural trade, meaning thereby the overland caravan trade flourished due to a unique bond which developed between merchants from various diasporic communities on the one hand and the state on the other. Besides being agents to their family firms, these merchants were also engaged in commercial activities as agents of the state. The relation between the state and the merchants was so strong that the policies, which were made, aimed to favour the merchants in particular. There were several such instances when the merchants were recruited as state administrators, in Mughal as well as Uzbek and Safavid provinces, which not only saw the growth and development of this lucrative trade but also encouraged sharing of a common culture between distant regions across separate ruling elites. The growth of cross-cultural trade earmarked a significant process of commodity exchange which continued well into the nineteenth century, and even flourishing under the regulation of the European companies.

CHAPTER 4

DECLINE OF CENTRAL ASIAN TRADE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the previous chapters the discussion centred on the emergence of Indian merchant communities across Central Asia and the articles of commodities which were of significance in the overland caravan trade route. The period from sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century saw considerable growth and development in terms of both the number of Indian merchants involved in this lucrative trade and the significant position which they held in the state sponsored overland trade. The transformation in the global trends of economy also played a significant role in restructuring the dynamics of Central Asian trade which affected both the state and the mediatory merchants, at large. The end of the nineteenth century therefore, marked a significant change in the dynamics of overland trade as it saw a further extension into the newly developed military-commercial fort cities on the Russian frontier such as Astrakhan and Archangel'sk. The problematic that this chapter would try to analyse is regarding the various factors which played a pivotal role in the shifting of trade to the Russian market towns, by compromising the earlier held dominant position in the western trading towns of western Turan. Also, this chapter would try to hypothesise that: first, Indo-Central Asian commercial relations transformed as Russian demands for Indian commodities increased during the politically turbulent 18th-19th century; and second, the decline of this lucrative commercial relation, which took place at the close of the nineteenth century, was due to the open contestation of this region between English East India Company and Tsarist Russia in the wake of Industrial Revolution and heated contestation of 'Great Game'.

The primary sources which provide us with enriching information about the life and condition of the people around this time, and the political and economic condition which shaped the dynamics of trade could be categorised as: first, the archival sources pertaining to the official decrees, letters and petitions which were found in the Foreign Customs and Trade Department of Astrakhan and Orenburg; second, the secret official reports of the British agents of the East India Company's Foreign Department who were engaged in espionage throughout Central Asia and frontier towns of Russia, many of whom were Indian merchants themselves ; and third, are the travelogues of the British administrative officials like George Curzon, Anthony Jenkinson et al., and

other travellers from around the world who have given a very informative account of both economic and political condition of Central Asia. Apart from the above mentioned sources, the state memoirs of Mughals pertaining to the regnal year of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb provide details of the *farmans* which were issued to the Russian embassies who had come to pursue the emperors to sign treaties for establishing a direct diplomatic-commercial link with Russia. The various sale deeds and the list of the commodities which is available to us through the custom office's records also provide us with ample information about the price, volume and varieties of various commodities which were in demand in newly founded commercial ventures in the Russian towns. Finally, regarding the decline of the Indian diaspora community from the nineteenth century one has to categorically rely upon the census reports from various Central Asian towns which were conducted by the Russian administration since late eighteenth century. The corroboration of the same evidence could also be found in the official accounts of the British agents, such as F.M. Bailey, Capt. Clarke, George Curzon et al., who mentioned in length about the corresponding decline of the Indian diaspora community from Central Asia by enlisting the number of merchants that they came across to meet in their long stay of over two to five years.

The colonisation of Central Asia by the Tsarist Russia from one end and the British endeavour to invade and monopolise the Central Asian trade from the other end proved fatal for the Indian commercial communities to conduct their trade; and eventually the transformation of the Central Asian commerce led to the decline of Indian merchant diaspora by the nineteenth century. There were several factors which played pivotal role in the decline of commercial activities of the Indian merchant family firms in greater part of Central Asia. On the one hand, these merchant families had lost patronage from the declining Mughal Empire, while on the other hand, the British hegemony over the money and credit system in India had finally led to the replacement of these merchant communities by the British agents/factors. Also the attitude of the Russian state changed towards the Central Asian commerce and they made extra efforts to make their presence felt in the Central Asian market hubs by participating directly in the trading activities, including directly dealing in the urban and rural moneylending and credit system. It was also a period which saw the emergence of Armenian merchant diaspora as the most conspicuous trading community in Central Asia, while the Iranian, Turanian and the Indian mediatory

merchants lost state protection considerably. However, in the early seventeenth century the Indo-Turanian commerce witnessed transformation which in turn led to the extension of Indian merchant diaspora in the newly emerging towns of the Russian province. During the seventeenth century, there was a considerable growth in Indo-Russian commercial relations but this transformation in commercial activity did not continue for long owing to industrialisation in Russia and British usurpation of the transit trade in Central Asia, removing Indians from the commercial scene, finally leading to the end of Indian diaspora by the nineteenth century.

The Indian merchant diaspora was engaged in commercial activities in the markets of Turan and Central Asia throughout the sixteenth century. The Russians did not participate in the commercial exchanges primarily due to the fear of being robbed in the markets of Caucasus and Iran, therefore the Iranian, Bukharan and Khivan merchants were engaged in supplying the Indian commodities to the Russian and the Tatar merchants. The Indian merchants came in direct contact with the Russian merchants for the first time during the seventeenth century with the development of a network of Indian communities between the Persian Gulf and Astrakhan. On the part of the Russians, the commercial relation with the east intensified considerably following the annexation of Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556 by Tsar Ivan IV ('the Terrible', r. 1533-1584) (Banerji 2011). The port of Astrakhan which was located on the Volga's Caspian estuary functioned as one of Russia's two most important links with the outside world; the other being the port of Archangel'sk located in the Russian Arctic (Dale 1994). The port of Astrakhan was seen as a direct access to Asian commodities, especially Indian textiles and dyes, to augment the Russian customs revenue and to acquire silver for its currency (Dale 1994). In order to derive a significant economic benefit, the Russians invited Indian and other Asian merchant communities to settle and trade in the city by sending through dispatches of commercial-diplomatic missions to the Mughal court, and to Iran and Uzbek khanates of Turan (Dale 1994). As far as the relations with Russians were concerned, the Russian government were only moderately successful in attaining their economic goals, while the Indian merchants were able to take advantage of the Russian annexation of Astrakhan and subsequent opening of that city to expand mercantile activities into Southern Russia which was to see the presence of the last Indian merchant diaspora in the early modern period.

The attempts of the Russians to establish a more active position in the Asian trading circuit only began during the reign of Peter I ('the Great', r. 1689-1725) who tried to establish his suzerainty in the Central Asian khanates. He made cautious attempts in making Russian advancement in the steppe by establishing the 'Orenburg line', a military cum trading fort across the Qipchaq steppe, in the early eighteenth century. This led to the diversion of the overland Eurasian trading circuit from Astrakhan, situated on the north coast of the Caspian Sea, to the newly established Russian frontier cities of Orenburg, Omsk, Petropavlovsk and other fort towns (Gommans 1991). Consequently, many Asian merchants redirected their economic activity from Astrakhan to the newly established market towns on the Russian frontier. This fostered a fundamental shift in the dynamics of the overland Eurasian networks; as the southward expansion of the Russians through the steppe was accompanied by the British advance in the north-western frontier province of Punjab and Afghanistan resulting in the contest between the two colonial powers (Levi 2002). Although there was a constant ongoing rivalry between Russia and Great Britain and that a number of Indian merchants were dispersed throughout the Turkistan Krai as British spies in the nineteenth century, the Russians policy was not directed to counter the British espionage. Rather the Russian colonial administration focussed on growing their control in the Central Asian economy by strategically undermining the moneylending activities of the Indian merchants in the colonial period. The Russian advance in the Inner Asia and the British usurpation in the Central Asian trade finally led to the decline of the Indian merchant diaspora from this lucrative trade network by the nineteenth century.

Indo-Russian Relations: Setting and Early Development

The process of colonisation of Central Asia by the Tsarist Russia began well into the sixteenth century. The Russian administration, in the wake of the political developments of the sixteenth century, tried to promote trade with its Muslim rulers. This consequently led to the Russian control over Kazan by 1552 and Astrakhan khanate in 1556. On the other end, the Cossacks had taken control over the area around Orenburg by 1574, and by the end of the sixteenth century Russian territory extended till the Khanate of Sibir (Dale 1994; Levi 2002; Banerji 2011). In effect, the territorial expansion of the Russian empire also brought about significant commercial

opportunities for the Russian merchants, in particular and other merchant communities, in general. However it is important to note that it was from this time that one could see the involvement of British to access this lucrative trade by establishing Company firms so as to reduce the importance of Portuguese trade enterprise in the global market. This seems apparent as by 1555 the English Privy Council had formally granted a charter to a group of English merchants, including Anthony Jenkinson, to form the Russia Company (or the Muscovy Company) in an effort to access the India trade without engaging the Portuguese (Willan 1956). This project, however failed because the Portuguese were no longer a threat and the English shifted their priority to the strengthening of the English East India Company; finally leading to the disbandment of the Muscovy Company in 1623 (Willan 1956). However, Philip D. Curtin (1984) argues that one of the primary goals of this company was to tap the Russian market, but the ultimate destination was India – to reach it through Central Asia and Afghanistan nonetheless the sixteenth century saw the bulk of Russia's Asiatic trade to be conducted with the help of Asian merchants traversing Astrakhan.

The control over Astrakhan proved rewarding for the Russians as it provided direct communication with Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Iran across the Kazak steppe, established Muscovy as the power centre, provided the Tsar with control over the trading waterways of the Volga and Kama River, and with access to the Caspian Sea (Banerji 2011). All these factors immensely improved Russia's trade relations with its southern and eastern neighbours. Prior to the annexation of Astrakhan, the Russian merchants and travellers avoided traversing through the dangerous and unsecured region of the Caucasus. Athanasius Nikitin of Twer (1857) while travelling through Astrakhan almost hundred years prior to its annexation reported of being shot at and robbed by official there. He also reported that a part of his group was likewise robbed in Daghestan by Kaitak tribesmen (Nikitin 1857). Almost century and a half-later, Fedor Kotov while travelling from Astrakhan to Iran noted that the Caspian coastline was largely unsecure and dangerous, and that the port cities which were safeguarded charged an excessive duty for providing protection (Kemp 1958). The Russian merchants therefore preferred to restrict their trading activities only through few convenient maritime routes which were defended by the state well into the eighteenth century. It was largely due to these reasons that the annexation of Astrakhan bore more fruits to the Russian trading enterprise and also with the establishment of other

fortification along the lower Volga at Samara, Tsaritsin and Saratov the Russian participation in the Eurasian trade grew considerably (Martin 1985).

Russians tried to gain from their advantageous position throughout the sixteenth and the seventeenth century by taking efforts to develop the trans-Caspian trade with Iran. For instance, during the reign of the famous Iranian ruler Shah 'Abbas I, in 1589, a Russian embassy was sent to his court appealing for free commercial incentives, including free trade privileges in Russia to the Iranian merchants (Mathee 1999). This newly developed diplomatic relation between Russia and Iran was further consolidated by efforts of private Iranian and Armenian traders who made repeated ventures across the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea in commercial exchanges of Iranian commodities, especially silk to the Russian markets in the subsequent years (Mathee 1999).

Russian merchants too ventured in the Russo-Iranian trading circuit however their number was insignificant in comparison to the other merchant communities. Generally speaking, the trade between Russia and Iran was monopolised by the merchants from Iran, Bukhara and Khiva who in turn supplied commodities to the Russian and Tatar merchants to be sold at the market towns at Muscovy (Burton 1993). The Armenian merchants had an advantageous position in the Russian section of the Russo-Iranian trade after 1667 when Tsar Aleksii Michailovich granted one of the Armenian commercial organisations monopoly over the transportation of Iranian silk into Muscovy and its sale throughout the country (Burton 1993). The political developments and the securitisation of the Russian controlled Caspian Sea port towns encouraged the Indian merchants to pursue commercial ventures, and engage in regular contact with the Russians for the first time and develop a chain of diaspora communities from the port of Hormuz (Persian Gulf) to Astrakhan by the second half of the sixteenth century. It was rather a diplomatic move on the part of the Russian to court Indians and other merchants in order to use their commercial connections to strengthen Russian economy, consolidate state power and build a stable Russian market following the period of 'Time of Trouble' (the chaotic three decades of the reign of Ivan the Terrible from 1584-1613) (Blum 1961). The need to re-build Russia after the Time of Trouble was deeply felt by the newly established Romanov dynasty under Mikhail Romanov, yet the most important underlying reason for courting the Indian and other merchant communities was the inability and unwillingness of the

Russian merchants to trade outside the Russian provinces in sufficient numbers (Dale 1994).

In this regard, it is important mentioning that at the turn of the seventeenth century the number of most influential Russian merchants totalled only 300, and that they only traded in Muscovy (Bushkovitch 1980; Lyaschenko 1949). These men were members of three state-affiliated corporation firms, namely *gosti*, the *gostinaia sotnia* and the *sukhonaia sotnia* (Baron 1973). They functioned as Muscovite's state commercial and financial service class and their position was synonymous with the urban landed gentry in the service of the state (Baron 1973). Apart from their engagement in trading activities, they also functioned as tax collectors, financial advisors and bureaucrats (Dale 1994). They shared such an important position in the state apparatus that out of these merchants eight *gosti* were appointed among fifty members as chancellery secretaries during the century (Hellie 1971; Baron 1973). Due to the inability of these merchants to venture out of the Russian territory in trading activities, it made them financially weak in due course of time. Also, their political position gave them opportunity to manoeuvre government policies to meet their own needs. It is likely that these merchants exerted pressure on the government to enact such measures that would restrict the activities of the foreign merchants in the internal markets of Russia. Presumably, these merchants were well aware that they were incapable of competing with their foreign counter parts and therefore throughout the seventeenth century there was an ongoing struggle in Muscovy regarding the commercial policy (Bushkovitch 1980). Thus, a clash of interest was quite visible in the Russia's economic policy setting, as on the one hand state welcomed the foreign merchants in order to achieve their fiscal and monetary goals while on the other hand the Russian *gosti* prevented every attempt to allow free movement and commercial ventures of foreign merchants within the country's internal markets (Dale 1994).

The annexation of Astrakhan in 1556 by the Russians altered the trading pattern from the south to the north axis. Russia's principal trading partner, which was the Ottoman Empire before 1556, became Iran and Turan and secondarily India. In the pre-colonisation period the Russian markets had a conspicuous presence of Indian commodities, despite the absence of Indian diaspora nodes within its frontiers. The archival records of Astrakhan dating 1615, mentions that a Russian merchant transported Indian cloth valued at over 380 rubles to the Tsarist court (Levi 2002). In

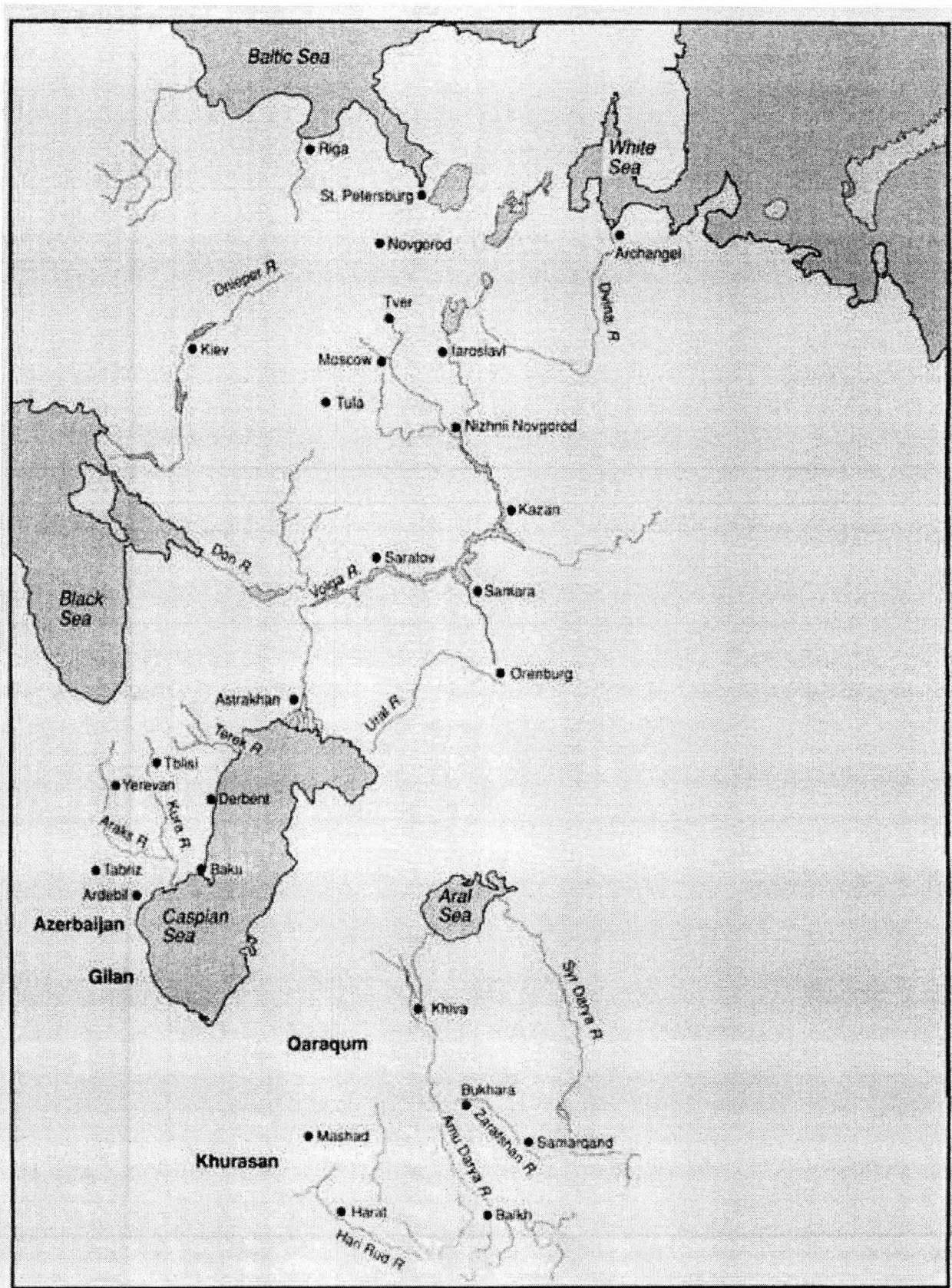
terms of cost and volume the Indian cotton and silk textiles, as well as Iranian and Central Asian textile products of a lower quality represented the most important Asian imports through Astrakhan, although the horses from Iran and Turan sometimes also entered the country via this route (Dale 1994). Other documents pertaining to the same period records a considerable demand on the part of the Russians for importing Indian textiles throughout the seventeenth century, as there were several official letters which were sent from Muscovy to the governor of Astrakhan to invite Indian weavers to Russia in order to learn from them and train the indigenous Russian artisans in the Indian textile production techniques (Kemp 1958). The Indian merchants were hostile towards the Indian weavers because their recruitment as trainers for Russian artisans would have led to improvement of Russian textile production which would have in turn decreased the demand for Indian textile imports. It seems equally plausible that the resentment was more profound because these Indian weavers might have been employed by merchant-moneylenders to operate textile production centres in Astrakhan, finally deserting their Indian employers in favour of the Russian invitation to train and supervise the Russian textile production (Levi 2002).

The earliest evidence which suggests the Indian migration from Iran and the Caucasus to Astrakhan does not date before 1615-16, however there is no such evidence to show a considerable Indian presence in the city before the first quarter of the seventeenth century (Dale 1994). It seems plausible that the Indian diaspora expanded from the surrounding diasporic nodes as it would have been easy to send few assistants to visit Astrakhan first so as to explore the various new commercial possibilities. Also, it was this time when the Safavids, under the ruler-ship of Shah 'Abbas exercised greater control over the Araks-Kura doab in the eastern Caucasus, a region closer to Astrakhan. Therefore it also seems probable that few Indian merchants would have reached Astrakhan as agents of Iranian based firms during this period. Thus, the possibility of the presence of Indian merchants around 1615-16 is likely to be a rather close approximation, as it is also confirmed by a testimony of an Indian merchant identified as Sutur, for in a petition dated 1648 he claimed to have been paying taxes in Astrakhan for past twenty five years, placing him in Astrakhan already in 1623 (Dale 1994; Levi 2002).

David Druhe (1970) argues that there was already a considerable number of Indians in Astrakhan by 1625, and that a serai was constructed for their settlement. Stephen Dale

(1994) argues that the initial settlement of the Indians in Astrakhan began to grow rapidly during the 1620s and that the Moscow official instructed their subordinates stationed at Astrakhan to create more favourable trading conditions for eastern merchants to enter the city and move upstream along the Volga to Kazan and other cities without interruption. The Russian administration desperately needed to redevelop their economy after a substantial loss following the Time of Trouble, a situation which was further intensified by the closure of the Baltic ports to Russian trade. The Russian officials took great care for encouraging the Asian traders to come and trade in Astrakhan. Their policies were directly responsible for the emergence of a sizeable Indian mercantile community in Astrakhan which was reported in the official letters of Sutur, who wrote in 1648. For certain, the Indians were well established in 1636 when Adam Olearius (1967) noted that both Indians and Iranians traded in their own markets in the city of Astrakhan. However, the presence of Indian traders in Russia was officially recorded for the first time only in August 1638 (Levi 2002). First such official reference comes from a letter to Tsar Michael Fedorovich (r. 1613-1645) in which the military commander of Kazan reported that two Indian merchants, identified as 'Kishniachka Moltaev' and 'Mollachka Sedukov', had come with an embassy from the Safavid Shah Safi I, and that, among other goods, they brought with them over 6,000 pieces of cotton cloth (Levi 2002). A similar document from the same year, but from a later date, mentions about two other Indians who travelled from Astrakhan to Muscovy with over 5,000 pieces of cotton cloth, for which they paid taxes amounting to 183 rubles, 9 altin and 2 den'gi (Levi 2002).

The official documents from Astrakhan mentions about the Indian merchant Sutur not until February 1641 (Levi 2002). With regard to the existence of Indian mercantile community, a conclusion can be drawn from one of his letters to the Russian authorities wherein he asked for permission to construct a *gostiny dvor*, literally 'guest house', a kind of residential bazaar for the Indians living in Astrakhan (Dale 1994). The encouraging attitude of the Russian administration can be acknowledged from the fact that one such building was constructed in 1649 and the census held in the same year reveals that this new building housed twenty six long time Indian merchant residents of the city (Dale 1994). The letters addressed by Sutur to the Russian administration not only gives us an insight about his own business practices and a general expansion of the growth of Indian commerce in Russia but also provides



Map 5: Trade Routes in Russia

Source: Dale 1994

ample information about the initial policies of the Russian administration to strengthen Indo-Russian diplomatic-commercial relations. With regard to the initiation of Indo-Russian diplomatic-commercial relations, a diplomatic letter was drafted by Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich (r. 1645-1676) which demonstrates the clear intension of the Russians to establish a formal link with the Mughal Empire so as to ensure an uninterrupted import of Indian commodities to the Russian markets without conceding any unnecessary difficulty. This letter, written in both Russian and Tatar, was sent through a Russian ambassador to the Mughal court of Shah Jahan (Levi 2002). However neither Shah Jahan nor any successive Mughal emperor found it necessary or beneficial to establish any formal diplomatic relation with Russia, yet the Russians continued with their policy to welcome the Indian merchants to their territory during the seventeenth century (Levi 2002). For a brief period Sutur came back to India via Iran and returned again to Russia in 1647. During his stay in India he described Russia as a promising territory for extending commercial ventures, and while his return to Astrakhan in 1647 he came with twenty five Indian merchants with Indian commodities of such a worth that they had to pay 4,000 rubles only in taxes (Levi 2002). He wrote a number of letters addressed to the Tsar from 1647 to 1658 concerning his personal grievances owing to commercial disputes and bureaucratic problems. In one of the petitions, Sutur pleaded for the dismissal of a troublesome Astrakhanid official and that he wanted to create better business conditions for other merchants like him (Dale 1994). It was obvious that Sutur was a very influential merchant whose services were even sought by the Russian administration in order to improve the movement of people and commodities in Astrakhan. In one such instance, Sutur was interviewed by the Russian Foreign Chancellery in Muscovy to seek his personal advice so as to improve and increase the number of Indian traders in Russia (Dale 1994; Levi 2002). It was after his advice that the Russian government ordered for the construction of guest-house in Astrakhan which was completed in 1649. When asked about the condition of the Indian merchants in the Safavid's dominion market cities so as to make policy adjustments to encourage merchants from Iran to settle in Astrakhan, he mentioned that:

'the Shah takes much in customs from them ... and each person the Shahs provinces steals from the Indians... and the khans and all the court people call them to dine ... and they do not care that many Indians in the Shah's cities live in desperate situations.' (Dale 1994)

He further mentioned that the Russian officials were just and considerate of Indian merchant's welfare and that the condition of Indians in Russia was much better off (Dale 1994). As evidence to the Russian treatment of the Indian merchants he reported that the merchants had complete freedom to travel and trade from Astrakhan to Kazan up to Muscovy; an experience which reflected the official directives of the 1620s regarding the fair treatment of the 'Eastern merchants' (Dale 1994). He further reported that there were no extraordinary exactions extorted from the merchants except the charges payable at the custom houses throughout Russia, with only exception of an Astrakhan Turk, who was employed as translator by the Russian authorities, identified as 'Devlet-Aliia-abiz'^{*}, whose action compelled Suttur to write some of his petitions addressed to the Tsar (Levi 2002; Dale 1994). Demonstrating his good faith to the Indian merchants, the Tsar immediately suspended the Khivan interpreter and exiled him to Kazan. The accessibility to the various market towns of Russia and the ability to easily travel throughout Russia further resulted in the increase of the Indian merchants to move from Iran to Russia. Apart from the Indian diaspora in Astrakhan and Muscovy a small community of Indians was reported to have been established in 1650 in Yaroslav, where they were engaged in cotton and silk textiles, about two-third of which were reportedly Indian in origin (Levi 2002). There was a subtle response towards the experience of Suttur by the Russian officials who tried to ensure better commercial climate so that many merchants trading in Iran moved to Astrakhan, proportionally raising the Russian customs receipts.

The year 1647 marked the end of the first phase of Russia's commercial policy towards Indian merchants which was quite ambiguous and largely passive in their welcome. Also a second phase of Russia's commercial policy began wherein two major developments took place: first, the Russian ruler took direct initiative to establish contact with the Mughal rulers and merchants by sending the first diplomatic-commercial relation to India; second, there was a constant campaign going on by the Russian merchants to limit the freedom and the ability of foreign merchants including Indians to compete in the Russian markets. From 1646-1695 four missions were dispatched to India by the Muscovite bureaucracy in order to extend the invitation to the Mughal ruler and the Indian traders to trade in Russia. The first

^{*} The name of the translator is also given as Devlet 'Ali, a functional equivalent to the 'dragomans' of the Ottoman empire. (Dale 1994)

mission was headed in 1646 by Indian merchants who were engaged in the commercial ventures and moneylending activities in Kazan and Astrakhan (Dale 1994). The second mission was also headed by the Indian merchants who by themselves expressed their desire to go for a second mission in an official petition to the Tsar in 1651, in which:

‘the merchants and the trading people humbly asked the reigning Tsar and Prince of all the Russias Alexei Mikhailovich [for permission] to depart India for trading purposes and to send the Qizilbash Shah State Letter about that so that he would allow the gosti and trading people to go to India.’ (Dale 1994)

Two Russian merchants, identified as Rodion Nikitich Kushnikov and Ivan Nikitich Derevenskii, were also granted permission to travel to India with the Indian merchants (Levi 2002). The second mission also turned out to be a failure like the first one, as on the orders to Shah ‘Abbas II they were asked to go back to Russia from the borders of the Safavid Empire (Levi 2002). It happened probably because of the diplomatic conflict between Iran and Russia on sharing a common sphere of influence in the Caucasus (Levi 2002). Yet another reason was a similar kind of a diplomatic conflict between Iran and India on the issue of their constant clash for control over Qandahar (Druhe 1970).

Following the failure of the first two missions due to the political exigencies, Tsar Aleksei Michailovich sent two more missions to the Mughal court himself (Shastiko 1992; Druhe 1970). In 1670 Pazukhin brothers travelled to Bukhara, where it divided into three separate missions (Levi 2002). The first phalange of the three missions was successfully carried out by the two Pazukhin brothers who stayed in Bukhara and were able to negotiate a treaty with the Bukharan government so as to allow the Russian merchants to trade in their province. The second part of the third mission was led by Nikita Medvedev who travelled to Balkh and was able to pursue Subhan Quli Khan to allow the Russian trade missions to pass through his territory to India with all necessary protection. The last of the three missions was carried out by Semen Ismail who was charged with the task of travelling to the Mughal capital and investigate Indo-Russian commercial prospects; however after he reached Kabul, he was denied entry into the Mughal dominion as a Russian ambassador. Rather, to his surprise he was offered a position of a *mansabdar* of 500 *zat*, which he accepted and earned considerable wealth in Mughal’s employ (Levi 2002). In effect, this mission was also a failure because it could not garner the fruitful outcome which the Russians were

looking for. The efforts to establish diplomatic and trade relations with the Mughal continued even after the failure of this mission and, in 1671, when a Bukharan ambassador came to Moscow, identified as Mulla Farukh, he was questioned regarding the available Indian goods in the markets of Bukhara and about the direct routes which could directly lead to India. With enough information handy, the Russian Tsar sent yet another mission under the leadership of Muhammad Yusuf Kasimov, a Kazan Tatar, in 1676-77, who travelled through Kiva, Bukhara, Qarshi and Balkh and finally arrived at the gateway city of the Mughal Empire, Kabul (Kemp 1958; Druhe 1970). Like other ambassadors of Russian Tsar, Kasimov was also denied entry into the court of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and the possibility of a diplomatic treaty failed. The failure of any negotiation was primarily due to the fact that Aurangzeb was quite unhappy from the Tsar's request that the Russians wanted to exchange their goods for Indian silver, which was also in great demand in Russian territory at that time. However, Dale (1994) argues that Aurangzeb's unwillingness to allow entry to Kasimov into the Mughal territory was due to the ongoing conflict between Mughals and Afghans at that time which might have made his travel unsafe in the region.

The prime movers of the Indian missions were merchants, despite that fact they functioned as emissaries of the Russian Tsar. The diplomatic instruction which they carried along with them was basically state propaganda which included a number of titles of the Tsar at length and the extent of his sovereign territory, sometimes exaggerated and alluding*. These missions were taken very seriously by the Russian state as these envoys were commanded to follow strict standards of conduct – in one of the letters they were urged not to drink excessively, and to follow detailed protocols for contacting Mughal officials (Dale 1994). Every mission was given diplomatic, commercial and intelligence gathering tasks, which show that the Tsar had set more ambitious goals for their commercial relations with India. Yet another aspect of these missions was the goods that they carried alongside to India. In 1646, the leaders of the first mission were specifically instructed to withdraw 3-4,000 rubles worth of goods from the state treasury with the purpose to sell in India (Dale 1994). Although we do not have the list of commodities that was sent in the first mission but, it is for certain that two commodities which were sent to India in 1651 among the other commodities were 'Tvercopper' and 'Sable pelts' (Dale 1994). Before sending their third mission

* The letter included Siberia, a fur rich region, as a part of Russian possession even when it was not annexed by the Russian army. (Dale 1994)

the Russian officials sought out the advice of the Bukharan ambassador and on that basis sent goods with the Indian mission which included sables, broadcloth, coral, leather, and mirrors worth 800 rubles, although a single sable pelt was worth 600 rubles of that amount (Dale 1994). This list of commodities was also prepared after the advice of various Indian merchants residing in Moscow, as they reported that:

'In the Indian state the highest demand for Russian goods is for high-priced sables – 10, 20, 30 rubles a pair, good red broad cloth and green broad cloth, red leather, walrus teeth, coral, large middle sized and small mirrors, gold and silver velvet and Turkish velvet and if honouring gifts are sent to the Indian ruler then the above mentioned goods [should be sent]; other Russian goods are not much used in India. And it will be best of all and most gratifying to the Indian rulers [if the tsar] allows to be sent gyrfalcons and hawks. And the Indian rulers love Borzoi dogs.' (Dale 1994)

This report was useful in a sense that it made clear to the Russian officials that all the Russian goods which could be sold in India were luxury products and that there would only be a limited demand for Russian goods in the Indian markets to be bought by only the Mughal elites.

Among all the missions, only two successfully reached India though they were not able to pursue the Mughal emperor to negotiate a treaty with the Russian state. In both of these missions the envoy was ordered to make a list of variety of information which included: emperor's religions and that of his subjects, whether religious building were constructed from wood or of stone, the extent of the Mughal Empire and the extent of the Mughal emperors suzerainty over other provincial kingdoms, the size of the Mughal army, including specifics of cavalry and infantry, the construction of the towns, the population, whether or not western India was under Mughal's control and how many ships came to trade via the 'German Sea' (Dale 1994). In addition to this, the emissaries were ordered to find out information regarding the following subjects: the demand, supply and prices of the local products, the presence of Germans and other European merchants in India, what kind of German, Russian and European goods were preferred by the Indians, the value of the custom duties and what were the best land and sea routes to India (Dale 1994). They also sought to find out whether the wide varieties of cotton and silk textiles, precious stone, 'vegetables' and spices could be purchased in the country (Dale 1994). These elaborate instructions given to the emissaries to find out specific details about particular products clearly indicate to the fact that the Russian merchants already had a considerable knowledge about the Indian commodities which had been imported in Russia via Astrakhan. Also, the Russians

who were engaged in the trading activity at the northern frontier of the Russian province were also familiar with certain Indian products as the English and the Dutch ships which arrived in the port-town of Archangel'sk carried East Indian goods (Dale 1994). The leaders of the mission were also instructed to pursue Shah Jahan to send a diplomatic and-commercial embassy to Moscow. In order to appease and ensure that the Mughal ruler reciprocates to persuasion of these emissaries, the Tsar offered that if the mission to Russia, initiated by the Mughal state, would be accompanied by merchants then they would be allowed to trade duty free throughout the country (Dale 1994). For certain, if this offer would have been accepted then it would have deeply angered the Russian merchants, who were constantly demanding to impose restrictions on foreign merchants to safeguard their own interests by limiting their access to the internal markets of Russia.

The second mission reached to India at the time when Aurangzeb was the crown ruler of the Mughal state. As already discussed, the Russian ambassador Kasimov was unable to negotiate a treaty with Aurangzeb as the former's request of trading in Russian goods in exchange for Indian silver was heavily criticised by the latter. It is important to mention that the specific request by Tsar to the Aurangzeb was, he should send 2-3,000 puds (72,000-1,08,000 lbs) of silver annually with ambassadors or merchants for which the Indian would be offered sable and ermine pelts, skins, broadcloth and other goods which are abundant in Russia (Dale 1994). The second specific request which he made to Aurangzeb indicated the condition and skills of Russian artisans, at large, for he asked for sending experience Indian stone masons to Russia (Dale 1994). For certain, the fame of Indian craftsmen, especially stone masons came to be known to the Russians by travelling through Samarkand, capital of Turan, which was said to be constructed by the abducted Indian artisans during the time of Timur (BN 1989).

Although, the first three missions to India completely failed to reach to the Mughal court; they certainly revealed not only about the elaborate diplomatic preparations which were taken up by the Tsar but also about the nature of the Russian economic policy. The first two missions were sent via Iran. The first mission was sent at the time when Safavids and Mughals were engaged in constant quarrel over Qandahar. The second mission never advanced beyond north-western Iran because most of the goods that the emissaries were carrying were extorted, plundered or allowed to be extorted

by the Safavid provincial officials in Ardebil, the site of the dynasty's original *khanqah* (religious hospice) and also an important commercial city near Caspian Sea (Dale 1994) The third mission also failed because it was commissioned at that time when the overland trade route near the north-west frontier of India was disrupted due to Afghan-Mughal war (Dale 1994). The only apparent significance of these three missions was the fact that the Russians were now aware of the politico-geographical condition of Central Asia and was able to justify the Russian expansion in that region owing to the greater commercial prospects which they witnessed while traversing through Iran and Turan.

During the 1640s, the Russian merchants, from the elite *gosti* to peasant traders actively lobbied to limit the commercial privileges of foreign merchants (Vernadsky 1972; Dale 1994). The anxiety of the Russian merchants could be testified by the report of a Croatian catholic missionary Iurii Krizanic who arrived in the Ukraine province of Russia in 1659 (Vernadsky 1972). He noted that:

'Under the guise of commerce, the foreigners reduce us to extreme impoverishment. Here in Russia (except for the tsar's treasury), one cannot see or hear riches anywhere; instead there is wretched, empty-handed poverty everywhere. All the wealth of this realm... are carried away by foreign tradesmen or thieves... foreign tradesmen... rake in all the wealth and products of this land for themselves... They travel freely throughout the land and buy our goods at lowest prices; while they bring to us many useless but expensive foreign wares... And finally, being sly, they cheat our tradesmen out of large sums of money.' (Vernadsky 1972)

In the beginning these merchants made a formal complaint mainly against the European traders who were active in considerable number in Archangel'sk, Moscow and northern Russia in 1646. The members of the state guild corporations complained about the English factors that had enjoyed privileges for free trade since the formation of the Muscovy Company since the mid sixteenth century (Vernadsky 1972). Due to the political position that these elite *gosti* enjoyed, their complaint was taken affirmatively by the Tsar who in turn abolished free trade privilege for all Europeans and cancelled all the other special privileges for the English. Subsequently, these English factors were expelled from the interiors of the Russian province and were ordered to confine their activities at the border towns such as Archangel'sk (Vernadsky 1972; Hittle 1979). In 1665 a regulation was passed which forbade all foreigners of Astrakhan to reside and conduct trade in Moscow. The death of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich in 1667 marked a conspicuous change in the internal policy

pertaining to the commercial regulation in Russia. First, the attempts to establish diplomatic relations with the Mughals were kept on hold. Second, the reigns of Tsar Fedor II (r. 1676-1682) and Tsarevna Sophia* (r. 1682-1689) were periods of less ambitious political and economic restructuring. The bureaucracy grew stronger in these periods and the elite gosti who were positioned in important administrative positions tried to use a period of weak political authority to their own advantage. Therefore in 1667 the New Trade Regulations were instituted which essentially restricted foreign merchants to border cities, prohibited their export of precious metals, and allowed them to trade only with Russian wholesale merchants (Hittle 1979). The only merchant community that was exempted from these restrictions was the community of the Armenian merchants. The other foreign merchants, including the Indians, were only permitted to proceed beyond Archangel'sk and Astrakhan only if they paid double the usual custom duties, meaning thereby that foreigners were paying almost 16 per cent as duties on goods for taking it into the interiors (Hittle 1979). However, Baikova argues that the Indians who took goods to Moscow paid 25 per cent of the total value of their goods as taxes by the time they were finally sold; out of which 10 per cent was paid at the custom house for entering into Astrakhan, 10 per cent for travelling to Moscow and 5 per cent for selling their goods independently in Moscow (Dale 1994). The Russian mercantilist† foreign policy was further strengthened by forbidding the foreigner merchants from purchasing gold or silver from Russia for exportation (Hittle 1979; Dale 1994).

The New Trade Regulations was intended to restrict Asian mercantile activity in Astrakhan but it could not inhibit the expansion of Indian merchant diaspora in that city. Between 1670s and 1680s the number of Indians in Astrakhan increased by four times as compared to the 1647 census figures (Dale 1994). The foreign merchants didn't face any insuperable impediment in conducting business in the Volga basin or even in Muscovy. It was because of the fact that the regulations were difficult to be enforced, as among other restrictions the foreigners were also prohibited from trading among themselves. Such was the plight of the enforcement agencies (local administration and central bureaucracy) that even after a century of the passing of these regulations they were not able to stop Indian merchants from purchasing Russian

* She served as regent for her young brother Peter and Ivan.

† The term 'mercantilism' has a variety of meanings, but the meaning which is of paramount importance is that it implies a defence against others; above all it is the means to self-defence. (Braudel 1982)

currency and smuggling it out of the country (Dale 1994). Like the Armenian merchants, the Indians also received special exemptions to trade freely in the interiors of Russia. This had become a regular practice rather than being an exception. The reason put forth by the Russian Customs Department in 1678 to completely exempt from the New Trade Regulations was that 'their payments enriched the treasury' (Dale 1994). This was the primary reason for welcoming the Indian merchants to Astrakhan and the cities in the Upper Volga basin at the first place, which also became a compelling justification for issuing passes to Indians which exempted them from the newly formed regulations of 1667. Without doubt the members of the three merchant corporations made repeated protests against the exemption of Indians from the regulation and more than one 160 gosti signed a 1684 petition to show their disapproval to such exemptions (Dale 1994). It seemed that by this time the concentration of elite merchants to peasant traders singled out to be against the privileged position of the Indian merchants in Russia. The rebuttal by the Indian merchants was through writing a petition wherein they reiterated to the authorities that Russia derived 'great profits' from their presence in the Russian markets, and that they particularly twice the usual customs duties. They claimed that in the year 1666 they paid 24,000 rubles as custom duties on goods worth 80,000 rubles which they had brought to Moscow (Dale 1994). If these figures were accurate then it explains why the Russian customs officials were encouraging the Indian traders by issuing them passes. Although in return, the Russian merchants challenged the accuracy of these figures in their 1684 petition (Dale 1994).

In what seems to be the plausible sequence of events which unfolded since the signing of the 1684 petition by the Russian merchants against the exemptions to the Indian merchants, Dale's analysis is worth mentioning:

'... Russian authorities responded to the 1684 petition by reiterating the restrictions on foreign merchants that were included in the New Trade Regulations – and then largely refusing to enforce them. A year later 'foreigners' again were told that they were prohibited from trading in the 'upper [Volga] cities of Kazan, Simbirsk, Saratov and Tsaritsin', but five years later when Peter the Great assumed direct control of the Muscovite state he acted to increase foreign trade by encouraging foreign merchants to trade inside Russia.' (Dale 1994)

After experiencing a period of two subsequent regnal periods of commercial restrictions the commercial ventures of Indians in Russia again revived in 1689 under the sovereign Tsar Peter I (r. 1689-1725), who in turn wanted to make Russia an

international power. In 1696 Peter visited Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and England and became impressed by the development of these western countries. His focus became more western centric and he began to consolidate Russia's position in Europe through reforms, modernisation, strengthening his military capabilities and the acquisition of Baltic sea-ports. However, for the present discussion, his activity in Asia holds more importance than his achievements in Europe. By 1720s, Indian were able to get permission from the government, through a petition, to extend their commercial trips to the important Baltic ports of Riga, and to the newly established capital of St. Petersburg by Peter the Great, and to be allowed to pass through Russia so as to reach to the trading marts of Western Europe and to China via Russia's Siberian territories (Dale 1994). During the reign of Peter the Great the Indian merchants were able to disperse their diaphora community as far as into the rich markets of Western Europe due to the encouraging policies formulated under the reign of Peter the Great.

The Russian Expansion into the Central Asia

Attempts to establish a direct line of trade with India began once again during the reign of Tsar Peter I. It seems that while his visit to Western Europe he was astonished to see the prosperity and development that the Indian Ocean maritime trade had brought to these nations. This must have determined Peter I to access this wealth for his own country. With this goal in mind he sent an embassy to the Mughal court under the leadership of Semen Malen'kii in 1694 (Levi 2002). This mission travelled across the Caspian Sea and Iran and reached Bandar 'Abbas from where they took an Indian ship to sail to the Mughal port of Surat (Druhe 1970). Unlike other missions, this mission was successful in receiving welcome by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, although he ultimately failed to persuade the emperor to establish an Indo-Russian diplomatic agreement (Levi 2002). Semen Malen'kii was granted a *farman* by Aurangzeb enabling him to trade and travel throughout the Mughal India without paying any custom duty, and he was even given an elephant to be delivered to Peter I (Levi 2002). On January 22, 1701 Semen Malen'kii departed from Surat on two ships and before reaching Iran was robbed twice by Arab pirates incurring loss of over 18,000 rubles, a figure presumably including the value of the elephant (Druhe 1970; d'

Encausse 1994). The first hand report of this mission never reached Peter I as Semen Malen'kii died just before reaching the Russian territory.

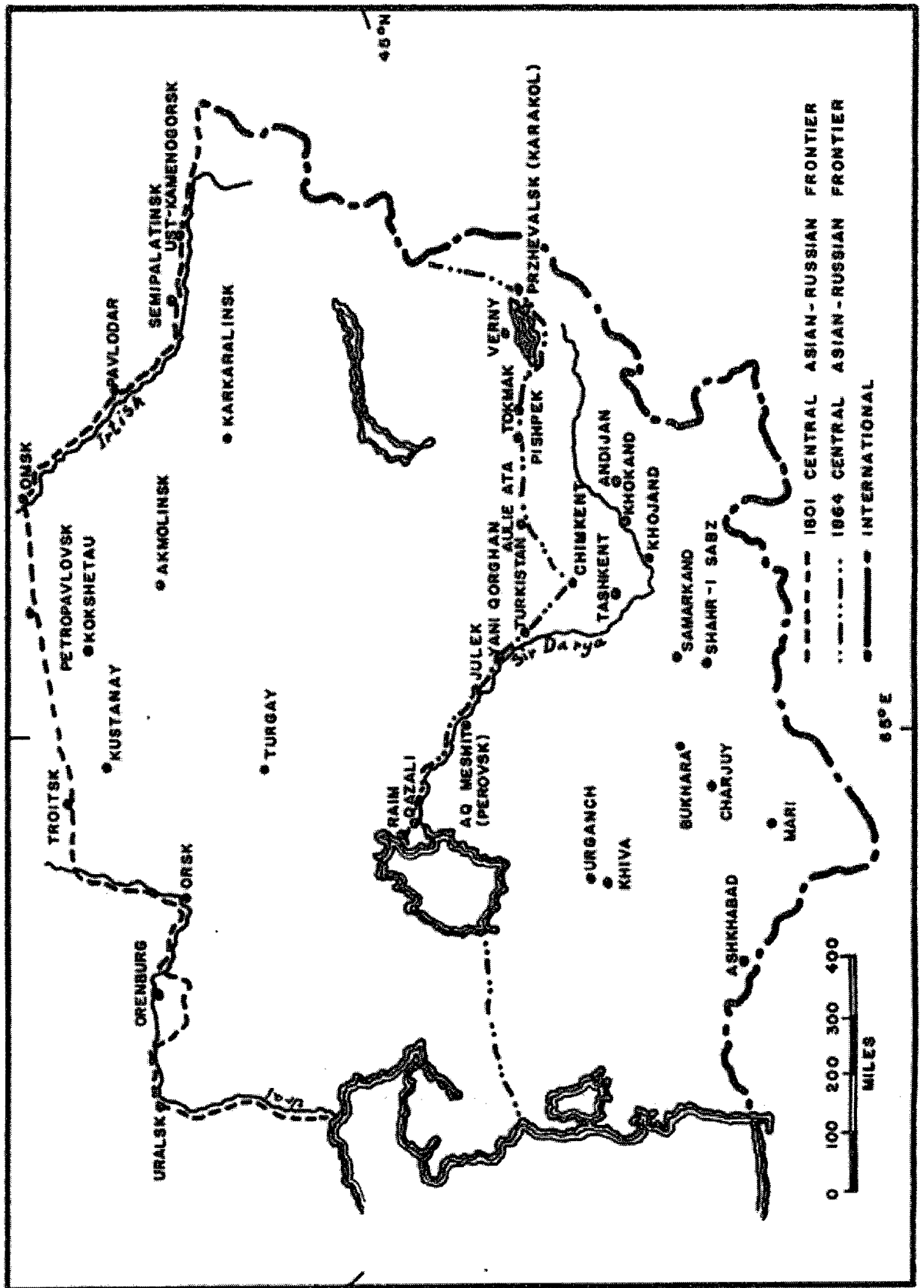
Peter's I interest in opening direct trade with India was further demonstrated by his expansionist policy in Central Asia. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Russian army was able to gain control of most of the part in Siberia and by 1715-1717 Peter began with an ambitious plan to add the Khanates of Yarkand, Khiva and finally Bukhara into the Russian dominion, 'diplomatically if possible, military if necessary' (Levi 2002). This plan was practically enforced in the late 1715 when Peter ordered a small army of 2450 soldiers under the commandship of Colonel Ivan Buchholts (Druhe 1970). They were sent with specific orders to cross Siberia, enter Xinjiang and conquer the khanate of Yarkand (Druhe 1970). The band of soldiers were successful in travelling across much of Siberia and they even managed to establish a new distant Russian fort on Lake Yeimal, from where they were intended to continue to Yarkand (Druhe 1970). However, this short venture turned out to be a disappointment as the Russian troops were decimated by Qalmaq nomads – they were compelled to abandon the newly established fort on Lake Yeinal and only 700 soldiers survived to retreat and establish another fort in Omsk in 1716 (Khodarkovsky 1992).

The second expedition was planned to subjugate Khiva which turned out to be even a greater disaster than the first. Khiva was situated at a strategic location between the Indo-Russian direct overland trade links. It was due to this fact that Peter I wanted to subjugate Khiva in its second expedition in Central Asia. The failure of this expedition was due to the misconception of the time that the Amu Darya was connected to the rivers in India and by engineering to re-route the river from Khiva to Caspian Sea Russia could easily establish a riverine commercial route between Astrakhan and India (Druhe 1970). The official account of that time suggests that both Khiva and Bukhara *per se* were insignificant as they had no natural products and were poverty ridden regions, yet they were of extreme importance because they were direct channels of trade with other Asiatic countries, especially India (Druhe 1970). The opportunity to gain control in Central Asia finally came along by the appeal made by Khivan *khan* who asked for Russian assistant to pacify his Turkoman neighbours. In reply, Peter placed 3, 000 troops under the leadership of Prince Aleksander Bekovich Cherkassy and dispatched them to Khiva in 1717 (Druhe 1970). The Russian troops finally

reached Khiva in the mid-August of 1717 braving several Turkman raids and scorching heat through the desert. Considering the willingness of the Khivans put their state under Russian protection, Peter predicted that this mission would be able achieve its goal without using force (Levi 2002). However, Prince Bekovich found upon his arrival that the ruler who sent the letter was already dead and he was succeeded by a new khivan ruler, Ghazi Sher Khan, who viewed the arrival of Russian forces in Khiva quite differently than his predecessor (Levi 2002; Druhe 1970). In effect, this mission proved to be a catastrophe; the Russian soldiers were slaughtered, Bekovich was killed, and his head was sent to Bukhara (Levi 2002; Druhe 1970).

These failed missions marked the beginning of the long process of Russian expansionism in Central Asia. Despite several efforts the Russians were unable to establish control over Yarkand, Khiva and Bukhara in the eighteenth century, yet they underlined for more calculated and careful attempts on the part of successive Tsars for expansion to the southern and eastern regions of Central Asia. The first important project that was taken up by the Russian administration was the establishment of a number of forts along the Irtysh River in Siberia (Levi 2002). Just after the Bekovich mission, Russian frontier in the east was extended from the fort of Omsk to the new built fort of Semipalatinsk in 1718 (Druhe 1970). By 1720, the Russian frontier extended further east and reached up to the newly built fort of Ust-Kamenogorsk (d'Encausse 1994).

The Russian expansionist policy in Central Asia was presumably possible in the wake of Ghilzai Afghan invasion of Iran. To avoid invasion, Iran allied with Russia and offered Peter an opportunity to redirect his commercial aspirations in Central Asia, while on the other hand the Russians took advantage of their consolidated position in Central Asia to compete with European companies who were engaged in the lucrative Indian Ocean trade. Learning from his previous experiences in dealing with the rulers of Central Asia, Peter occupied the northern Iranian provinces of Daghestan, Gilan, Mazandaran, and Astarabad in 1722-23. However, a decade later, in 1732, the Russian empress Anna was forced to return all of the Iran's northern territories to Nadir Shah. The brunt of the invasion of Nadir Shah was directly felt by the Russian commercial enterprise in Astrakhan due to severe operations inflicted by Nadir Shah upon the Indian and Armenian diaspora communities. Under such situations the Russians redirected themselves towards the overland routes to Bukhara and Khiva.



Map 6: Russian Frontiers in Central Asia
 Source: Allworth 1994

Subsequently, a number of additional forts were constructed along the Ural River augmenting the already established forts along the Irtysh River. These forts served two purposes: first, they served as military and diplomatic outposts in order to pacify the nomadic tribal group who lived near the Russian frontier and offer protection to the Russian merchants (Bodger 1991; Olcott 1987); second, in due course of time these forts were developed into important trading entrepôts, attracting large number of caravan traders from the neighbouring cities such as Bukhara and Khiva (Burton 1993). In 1735 a fort was established at Orsk, which was called the Orenburg fort until 1743, when a new Orenburg fort was built roughly 200 kilometres to the west (d'Encausse 1994). In addition, a new fort was established at Troitsk, and in 1752 a fort was added at Petropavlovsk, which closed the existing gap between Troitsk and Omsk (d'Encausse 1994). A Russian military fort was built in 1763 by Empress Catherine II, which was equipped with a customs office on the bank of the Siberian River Bukhtarma, a tributary of the Irtysh, in order to facilitate Russian trade with the countries to the south and, through them, with India (Levi 2002). In order to promote traders to visit this location she ordered the officials to publicise that the merchants can freely trade without paying any tax for the next ten years (Levi 2002).

The establishment of trading forts had a considerable impact on Eurasian trade routes which is quite visible by the eighteenth century transformations in the network of Indian diaspora merchant communities engaged in Indo-Russian commerce. During the course of the eighteenth century Orenburg was publicised as a more important trading entrepôt than Astrakhan. Consequently the Indian diaspora merchants settled in Astrakhan moved to the newly established city of Orenburg, leaving Astrakhan abandoned. Even those Indian merchants who continued to conduct trans-regional trade operations in Astrakhan increasingly did so via the overland trade routes traversing Turan (Dale 1994).

The Orenburg Dispatch Department situated in the Orenburg fort issued summon for an Indian merchant to be brought from Astrakhan for an interview in 1735, the year when the Orenburg fort was established (Dale 1994). The head of the Astrakhan's Marwari community, identified as 'Marwari Baraev' ('Great Marwari'), was taken to Orenburg where he informed the Russian officials about the overland and maritime route which were used by the Indian merchants to visit Russia (Levi 2002). He further reported that the annual movement of Indian merchants from Iran to Astrakhan had

been reduced from 200 to 80 in the recent years because of the aggressive policies of Nadir Shah in Iran. He suggested that with the establishment of the new Orenburg fort the Russians could expect around 600 Indian merchants every year from Bukhara to this town (Levi 2002). It seems plausible that the Russians invitation to trade in Orenburg gave encouragements to the Indian merchants in politically disturbed climate of Iran to trade and settle in this fortified town. And in a short span of time there was an apparent shift in trade from the Iran-Caspian-Astrakhan line to the overland trade routes through Central Asia to Orenburg. The Russian census conducted in Astrakhan clearly illustrates that the number of Indian communities dwindled from 209 in 1725 to 51 in 1747, the year Nadir Shah was assassinated (Dale 1994).

By the mid eighteenth century the Russian officials made concerted efforts to improve commercial relations with India via the overland trade routes through Orenburg. In 1745, a Bukharan merchant, Imnazar Maksutov in his letter informed the officials stationed at Orenburg that, as instructed, he did everything possible to motivate not only Bukharan traders but also the Indian merchants to participate in the Orenburg Fair (Levi 2002). On his persuasion a number of Indians went to Bukhara with about 60 camels with goods worth 3,00,000 rubles (Levi 2002). For certain, these trade fairs which were organised in Orenburg gave impetus to the Russian economy and so a number of new trade fairs were organised in other fort cities at the Russian frontier. For instance, in 1750 a new trade fair was opened in Troitsk with prices listed in both rubles and rupees, suggesting the policy of encouragement on the part of the Russians to engage the Indian merchant diaspora in these fairs in a regular basis (Levi 2002). The prices were likewise quoted on both currencies in Orenburg too (Gommans 1995). To encourage the Indian traders in the Russian market towns the governor of Orenburg sent a proposal to the Russian Senate Collegiums of Foreign Affairs to establish a commercial Orenburg Company to trade with the Central Asian Khanates and India, which was subsequently endorsed by the department in 1751. Travelling in the 1770s in India a French traveller Komte de Modave came across 300 hundred Gujarati families who were preparing to migrate to Orenburg (Levi 2002).

Throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries the Bukharan merchants were engaged as mediatory traders who travelled to India and purchases goods to be sold by their agents in Orenburg (Druhe 1970). The to and fro journey

from Peshawar to Orenburg almost took 90 to 110 days; from Peshawar to Bukhara forty five days and the journey from Bukhara to Orenburg took another forty five to sixty day, depending upon the political condition in Central Asia (Druhe 1970). The presence of Bukharan traders was pivotal in the revival of the Russian economy, and therefore Russians sent eleven embassies to Bukhara between 1762 and 1819 in order to gain direct access with the Bukharan merchants to Astrakhan (Kemp 1958; Burton 1993). The Khanates also saw a conspicuous growth in trade with the newly established commercial activity between Bukhara and Russia, which is illustrated by the 1813 report of an Indian traveller Mir Izzet Ullah who observed that almost 4,000 to 5,000 camels transported goods between Bukhara and Russia travelling through the caravan route annually, supplying Russia with cotton textiles and yarn, and in return imported manufactured items, products of the steppe and precious metals (Ullah 1843; Lal 1971). In other words, the trade between Bukhara and Russia facilitated a favourable balance of trade for the Central Asian Khanates with Russia well until the early nineteenth century. The balance of trade only shifted by the mid nineteenth century when the dynamics of production changed in Russia owing to the industrial revolution. Audrey Burton (1993) argues that the Bukharans were the primary suppliers of cotton and silk textiles, dyes and horses to Russia, and in exchange they brought with them Russian *yuft* (treated leather hide), woollen textiles, manufactured goods and furs. It is noteworthy to stress that Russia's primary imports from Bukharan merchants were cotton and dyes, including large amounts of indigo well until the nineteenth century, suggesting that Indo-Russian commercial relationship was maintained and mediated through Turan, refuting the assertion that Turan was undergoing a phase of decadence in this period. Hence, it becomes pertinent to discuss about the motivating factors which led Russians to bypass the services of these mediatory merchants and directly participate in commercial activities with India in the nineteenth century.

Indo-Russian Commercial Transformation in the Nineteenth Century

The Indian cotton textiles constituted one of the most important commodities to be imported to the Russian markets throughout the early modern period. However the period from 1780-1830 marked the spread of Industrial Revolution across much of Europe and North America, leading to the realignment of global trade relations,

involving the collapse of the long established markets and the corresponding rise of new ones at their place (Bayly 1989). Among the various commercial realignments which took place in this period, the most profound one was that of the cotton textile trade between India and Britain. After undergoing a phase of Industrial Revolution the British textile industry had grown to such an extent that by the end of the eighteenth century over half of its domestic production was exported to the foreign markets, resulting in a reversal of trade relationship between India and Britain. In consequence, India suffered its first negative balance of trade in textiles in 1816 and in 1824 India was reported to have imported 1 million yards of cloth from Great Britain and 1837 the volume of import had exceeded 64 million yards (Bayly 1989; Stearns 1993; Frank 1998). In effect, by the second half of the nineteenth century the long established industries of India and North Africa had been replaced by the British textile industry. This transformation was so profound that the British textile production was done in the distant production centres based in India, Egypt and North America to meet the demands on time. The British textile industry had effectively monopolised the trade due to low production cost involved owing to the wave of industrialisation which enabled them to import raw cotton from India, clean it, spin it into yarn, weave it into cotton cloth and export it back to Indian markets for sale at prices low enough to compete favourably with cotton textiles produced in India (Levi 2002).

The beginning of Industrial Revolution in Russia began with the textile industry, though a few decades later than Great Britain. By the 1830s, the Russian mills began spinning their own cotton yarn, eventually leading to the quick development of the textile industry as the most important element of the Russian economy (Blackwell 1968). The mechanisation of Russian textile mills further increased in the 1840s with the British sanction to export spinning machines to Russian mills. It eventually led to the growth of some of the biggest textile factories in the world in Moscow and St. Petersburg by 1850s (Blackwell 1968). According to an estimate the annual worth of the cotton textile production in Russia in the 1860s had reached up to 77 million rubles and the Russian cotton spinning industry was ranked sixth in the world (Blackwell 1968). This process naturally had brought down the volume of Indian textile imports of the finished textile, and conversely increased the Russian textile exports to the neighbouring regions. However, the Industrial Revolution concomitantly created even a greater demand in Russia for a regular and inexpensive supply of raw cotton from

the cotton producing regions. The demand for inexpensive raw cotton was fulfilled by the British textile mills directly from their agents in India, but the Russians were not so fortunate. John Briggs (1840) argues that 1817 to 1834 the annual cotton exports from India to England and China averaged over 77 million pounds per year, and in one year it even exceeded to 139 million pounds. It was here that the Russians were forced to rely upon a series of merchant-middleman for their supplies of raw cotton the price of which consistently increased as it moved from hand to hand. The regular supply of raw cotton was brought by the caravan traders who were once involved in the supplies of necessary commodities especially finished textiles to Russian markets. However, already in 1819 the Orenburg custom's records show that Bukharan merchants brought to Russia 16,813 puds (over 6,00,000 pounds) of raw cotton and 18,928 puds (6,80,000 pounds) of cotton yarn annually. In the pre-Industrialisation phase the Bukharan merchants exported around 97 puds of stripped cotton cloth, 20,410 pieces of white cotton cloth, 1,51,600 pieces of printed cotton cloth and 2,404 pieces of designed cotton cloth; suggesting that there was already a demand for finished textiles in Russia prior to the nineteenth century.

Average Russian Raw Cotton Imports, 1793-1834

YEAR	QUANTITY (in puds)	WEIGHT (in pounds)
1793-1795	9616	346, 176
1800-1814	50, 615	1, 822, 140
1814-1824	55, 113	1, 984, 068
1824-1834	100, 266	3, 609, 576

*Source: Liusternik 1958

Average Russian Dye Imports (in Puds), 1800-1834

YEAR	INDIGO	COCHINEAL	MADDER ROOT	TOTAL VALUE (in rubles)
1800-1814	9261	1006	26, 443	379,069
1814-1824	15, 448	1276	38, 872	1, 205, 220
1824-1834	20, 876	3080	55, 225	1, 905, 238

*Source: Liusternik 1966

The Russian dependence on these middlemen-merchants for the regular supply of raw cotton and dyes continued throughout the eighteenth century and the fluctuation of the price which dwindled in accordance with the value fixed by the middlemen compelled the Russian administration to look for alternatives to bypass them for which they established a number of state controlled trading companies and invested hugely to make the overland route between Orenburg and India safer for the Indian merchants. For certain, the balance of trade lay in the hands of the rulers to whom these merchant-middlemen paid their allegiance, who operated in the overland caravan trade routes and controlled the prices according to their whims and fancies. This pertinently made Russian administration to direct their trade with India circumventing these middlemen and in their quest made numerous, but unsuccessful, attempts to establish diplomatic relations. However, in 1800 the Department of Manufacturers and Trade of Ministry of Finances of Russia developed a special Russian Company in Orenburg with the sole purpose to trade with Asian merchants in order to establish direct link with India as soon as possible. Yet another trading company was founded in 1823 in Orenburg with the initial investment of 6 million rubles to conduct regular trade with Bukhara and eventually establish direct commerce with India. The failure of these companies at the outset was due to the political disturbances which had become a regular feature in the steppe by interposing nomadic tribes. This directly affected commercial relations with Central Asian Khanates and in turn led to subsequent decline of these trading companies. One could view that the construction of many Russian forts was aimed at extending their control into the steppe so that they could achieve direct commercial links with India, and also the consequential subjugation of the nomadic tribes and the Khivan Khanate which were situated between the direct line of contact with the silk route.

Conversely, a different wave was approaching from the other end towards the Central Asian regions, as by 1840s the British had already begun to consolidate their position in the north-western frontiers of India, consequently leading to an end of transportation of Indian raw cotton to Russian markets via the overland caravan routes. The British hegemony was so devastating for the Russian markets that only 5 per cent of the raw cotton import could reach through the steppe into the Russian market by 1840s. The demand for raw cotton now shifted to the cotton production units in the Khanates of Bukhara and Khoqand. For certain, the quality of cotton was less

impressive than the Indian variety of cotton, which is even testified by Arminius Vambery (1864) who in the 1860s reported that reported about a Bukharan merchant named Nazir Khairulla Khan that he told the British that cotton had become the most important article of production the Bukharan Khanate as the annual cotton exports from Bukhara itself is worth 1 million rupees. Thus, there was a conspicuous shift in the commercial activity in the mid nineteenth century and the balance of trade was in the hands of Central Asian Khanates as they were regarded as the primary suppliers of raw cotton to the Russian markets in Orenburg and Troitsk.

The Russian annexation of the Central Asian region cannot be ascertained to any single factor. The negative impact on the ability of Russian textiles to compete in the international markets, owing to the British restrictions on the exportation of Indian raw cotton definitely contributed to the Russian motivation to expand their empire into the Central Asian land. Secondly, the breaking of the American Civil War 1861-1865 motivated the Russian industrialists to press Tsar to colonise Central Asia to look for uninterrupted supplies of raw cotton (Geyer 1997). It is in this light that one could understand the Russian expansionist policy which began in the wake of 1864 when the Russian army extended into the southern steppe and annexed the Khanate of Khoqand, establishing their control beyond Verni (Alma Ata) to the cities of Turkistan and Chimkent (d'Encausse 1994; Becker 1968). In June 1865 Tashkent was conquered under the commandship of General Cherniaev, and it was made a part of Tsarist Empire formally in August 1866, and within one year, on November 7, 1867, Konstantin von Kaufman was appointed as the Governor General of the newly established Turkistan Krai. After his arrival he signed a treaty with Khoqand which placed Ferghana Valley under Russian economic control and the Russian troops annexed the regions of Eastern Bukhara including towns such as Jizak and Samarqand, the region which was renamed as Zarafshan Oblast' in 1872. In 1873 the Khivan *khan* signed a treaty with Russia which reduced Khiva to the status of a Russian protectorate and, three years later the Khanate of Khoqand was dissolved and was renamed the Ferghana Oblast'. The annexation of the Turkoman territory began in 1877 and after its complete annexation in 1884 it was renamed as the Zakaspiiskii (trans-Caspian) Oblast'.

It seems apparent that these annexations brought the Russian industrialists considerable benefit as they were able to extend the cotton production centres across

the newly colonised territories. The Russian interest in expanding cotton production is also demonstrated by the establishment of cotton plantations in the vicinity of Samarqand in 1877 (d' Encausse 1994).

The End of the Indian Merchant Diaspora

The annexation of Tashkent in June 1865 proved catastrophic for several thousand Indian merchants living in its territory. For three centuries, the Indian community was considered to be a significant feature of the Muslim society, but for the Russian administration they were no more than moneylenders who were an economic threat whose banking and usury activities were contrary to the interests of the population of Turkistan Krai. As early as April 1866, Emperor Alexander II (r. 1855-1881) ordered a decree limiting the interest rates which could be charged by Indians in Turkistan and mandated that all the loan agreements between Indian moneylenders and the indigenous population must comply with the laws of the Turkistan Krai and notarised in colonial court, not by *qadis* (Kurat 1970). The Indians bypassed the interest cap by inserting an ambiguously worded interest provision and obtaining court approval for their loans, which led to further legislations aimed at abridging the Indian activity (Banerji 2011). Thus, a new law was instituted under which the Indian merchant had to renew their passports annually but this also deemed inadequate.

Yet another reason for the passing of such legislations was the fact that by the mid nineteenth century there was a conspicuous attempt by the British and the Russian empire to gain control in Central Asia and in this heating moment of 'Great Game' it was expected from the Russian administration to evict the Indian diaspora community from their territory who were by and large the subjects of the British colonial empire. Also, the Indian community was considered to be a exploitative merchant group whose particular concern was to maximise their ownership of cultivable agricultural land which they had acquired a collateral for loans. Rather than evicting them the state administration organised a Russian colonial banking system so as to replace them as the sole sources of credit. In 1877 General Ivanov, the head of Zarafshan Oblast' in Turkistan and General Kaufman, Governor General of Turkistan Krai decided to outlaw the possibility of owning agricultural lands by Indians in these new territories (Forsyth 1870). The reason why the colonial administration was so afraid by the ownership of land by Indians was due to the fact that there was a possibility of the

emergence of a class of landless poor which would in turn become burden for the administration. In September 1877 many radical measures were taken to stop the land ownership by the Indians which included forbidding Indians to purchase land, giving loans as land as collateral or even rent land (Curzon 1892). By the November 1877 a circular #8560 was published in order to safeguard the indigenous population from the exploits of Indian merchant community and was eventually approved after the signing of this order by the Tsar's military minister. Once this directive was given the force of law many Indian merchants came in agitation against it and filed a number of petitions pleading to be able to retrieve the money which they had already given to the indigenous population against collateral. However, the Russian administration passed yet another order to curb the moneylending activities of the Indian agents leaving them no option but to migrate to either their homeland or anywhere outside the Russian frontier. The General order of Kaufman of June 5, 1878 thus merits full quotation:

'Whereas the Hindus secure large amounts of interest by lending money to the people of Turkistan on leases of property; and whereas the inhabitants of the country who are traders or cultivators of land, will be reduced to poverty and be ruined if this illicit practice is allowed to continue; and whereas innumerable pieces of land have come under the proprietary possession of the Hindus because of the penury of the cultivators and their encumbrances under large debts, the Governor General's attention has been directed to put a stop to the losses thus sustained by the people...

Article 1 No person of the Hindu class can purchase land or house property in the Turkish dominions, (and) no subject of Turkistan is at liberty to receive loans of money from, and to transfer land or house property in an illegal manner to Hindus.

Article 2 Any Hindu who has come to proprietary possession of any land, whether by succession, mortgage or open purchase, should sell that property in the hands of the people of the country within six months.

Article 3 The Hindus are prohibited to obtain possession of land belonging to any person, either by loan or purchase.

Article 4 The Muhammadan subjects of Turkistan are prohibited to sell any land or house property to Hindus through indebtedness notwithstanding such a course may be warranted by the provisions or the law.

Article 5 If the Mohamman be indebted to a Hindu and might have transferred any of his immovable property to his creditor in connection to his debt, he can now re-purchase the property by paying through the authorities one-third of the price to the Hindu.' (Banerji 2011)

It seems evident that the prime concern of the Russian administration was that the agricultural land must be brought in control of the indigenous population so that they could extend cotton plantation in most of the agricultural regions as well as collect revenue by levying taxes directly through their administrative officials. It was this aim

which they wanted to achieve by tightening their economic control over Turkistan Krai and by developing a network of banking and credit system without having any association with Indian moneylenders. Within two decades of the publication of the #8560 circular the number of Indians in the Turkistan Krai dropped to less than 1, 000, as roughly two-third of the entire population had returned back to India. (Dale 1994; Levi 2002). By 1881 Russia finally took her first step towards closing of the Central Asian markets to England by charging heavy duties on the Indian commodities which reached to the trading marts of inner Asia. The volume of trade declined by over 5 per cent in weight in 1881-1884 and eventually disappeared after the coming of the railways which gave Russian goods an advantage over Anglo-Indian goods in Turkistan (Becker 1968). By the end of the nineteenth century the Indian diaspora community across Central Asia and Russia was reduced to a residual state, with only concentrations left in Bukhara and Ferghana Valley. In 1919 the British officer F.M. Bailey (1946) visited Bukhara and recorded presence of only twenty five Shikarpuri merchants. And finally in the general census of 1926 the remaining thirty seven merchants of Indian origin who continued to live in Central Asia were registered as permanent citizens of Central Asian republics.

Conclusion

Russia began to establish direct commercial relations with India since the beginning of the seventeenth century by inviting the Indian merchant to settle and extend their diaspora in Astrakhan. Several diplomatic missions were taken up by Peter the Great who wanted to establish a direct Indo-Russian commercial relation throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Facing the brunt of the politically turbulent Central Asian Khanates and the constant nomadic raids it was desirable for the Russians to militarise the overland trade by establishing forts at the south-western frontier with a dual purpose of providing both military as well as commercial assistance. The two major reasons which enabled Russians to establish several such forts were: first, constant nomadic raids on the Russian caravans and the inability of the merchants to operate in Asian markets; and second, to effectively operate even in such a politically turbulent condition a constant dependence on middlemen - Asian caravan traders and European companies sporadically increased. This problem was further aggravated after the industrialisation of the Russian textile mills in the early

nineteenth century which gave the Russian government a motivation for implementing more aggressive policies in Central Asia.

In the post Industrial revolution phase the Russian textile mills marked a significant increase in textile production and in turn a corresponding increases in the demand for raw cotton and dyes. The changing global economy and the balance of trade gave industrially equipped Russians as well as British the vantage to reverse the balance of trade and confine India as a recipient of the textile products rather than exporters of indigenous textile goods. In other words for Russians India was now a market from where they could receive raw materials for their textile mills which were working in full swing since the early nineteenth century. It was due to this fact that by 1821 cotton textile became an important Russian import from Central Asia. However, it was also due to the restriction which was put on the exportation of the raw cotton by the Indian merchants for their sale through the overland trade route by the British.

The attempts made by the Russians to establish a direct trade link with India deemed crucial for the success of the Russian textile industry which was also the prime factor for the emergent Russian-British rivalry in the nineteenth century. The Russians rectified their dependence on Indian raw cotton by transforming the major regions of Central Asia into massive cotton plantation region. This process had already begun in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth century to focus on cotton at the expense of grains and other food stuff.

In retrospect, therefore, the decline of Central Asian transit trade in Indian cotton and cotton textiles was the first two factors which resulted in a considerable decrease of the Indian presence in Central Asia. Second most important factor was the various policies that were implemented after the annexation of Tashkent in 1865 with an aim to end the monopoly of the Indian moneylenders and gaining control of vast agricultural lands which these Indian moneylenders had possessed due to the incompetence of the indigenous population in paying their debts on time. Finally, the Russian usurpation of the Indian led banking system in Central Asia further separated India and Central Asia during the period of Russian and English colonial dominations. By the end of the nineteenth century the Indian diaspora had completely declined and the overland Indo-Central Asian trade which was once lucrative decimated into the ruins, marking an end to the most dynamic element of the history of Eurasian trade.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the less well known movement of Indian merchants to Central Asia and their role in the foreign society. The focus of this dissertation was to analyse the Indian merchant diaspora communities which were spread in the cities and villages beyond the north-western frontiers since the mid-sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that they comprised the most important component of the early modern Indo-Central Asian trade relations. Therefore, at its core, the study was aimed to explore the emergence, socio-economic operations, and the decline of the merchant diaspora in Indo-Central Asian overland trade. Some of the significant questions that were addressed in this study were: what was the ethnic composition of the Indian merchant community which operated in the Indo-Turan-Central Asian overland trade route? Whether or not these merchants could be identified by the generic term 'Indian'? How far the merchant diaspora in general was different from other non-commercial diaspora communities across the world? What were the functions performed by the merchants in the Indo-Central Asian commercial relation? To what extent these in-migrant merchants gained favour from the host-society and what were the factors which accounted for their wider acceptance across the various urban centres and rural areas throughout this region? And finally, what were the factors which impacted the general shift and dispersion, sometimes leading to the decline of diaspora at certain places, of the trading locations of these merchants in the early modern period?

In an attempt to answer the above mentioned questions this dissertation was burdened with either the corroboration or falsification of three hypotheses. Through the chapters an attempt has been made to analyse the conditions which may have either direct or indirect concern with the problematic of this discussion. The central hypotheses of the present work was, therefore: first, the cross-cultural trade became one the most crucial factors in the peaceful establishment of diaspora of the Indian merchants in Central Asia; second, Indo-Central Asian commercial relations transformed as Russian demands for Indian commodities increased during the politically turbulent Central Asia 18th-19th century; third, the decline of this lucrative commercial relation between Central Asia and India, and the dissolution merchant diaspora of the Indians was

primarily in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution in Russia that not only shifted the balance of trade in the hands of Russian *gosti* (merchant elites) - industrialists but also brought Tsarist Russia in direct conflict with Britain during the phase of colonization of Central Asia in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation, at its core facilitates an improved understanding of the social organisation and the economic function of the merchants extended throughout Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, the Caucasus, cities on the bank of the Volga River, Muscovy and St. Petersburg. The aim of this study is to advance the progress in the field of early modern economic history, especially emphasising on the overland commercial activities in Central Asia which has remained in a rudimentary stage. Both qualitative and quantitative understanding regarding the subject has come down to us from various primary and secondary sources, mentioned at length in the chapters. On their basis this dissertation is positioned in contradiction to the widely accepted notion of a 'passive' Central Asian economy.

The primary factors which contributed to the emergence of Indian diaspora was the effort of the Delhi Sultanate to encourage the monetisation of the economy in order to facilitate the collection of revenue in cash. Paying the revenue in cash meant that, the farmers had to sell their agricultural surplus in markets. The conversion of agricultural surplus into cash was done by the merchants on whom the state relied upon in the absence of any commercial banking system. It therefore, created new opportunities for the Indian merchants as the circulation of token money throughout the urban and rural markets demanded on the part of the merchants to expand their phalanges across the length and breadth of the subcontinent. The merchants from Multan were already active in the thirteenth century as moneylenders and traders. They began to operate in trans-regional trade networks through the family firms beyond the north-western frontier of the subcontinent by the mid sixteenth century. They settled in a number of nodal locations near the cities along the trade routes and developed a unique diaspora community in caravanserais.

As we discussed in chapter two, the merchant diaspora communities in Central Asia majorly consisted of Hindu population, it is noteworthy that they faced no problem in maintaining their portfolios in the technically unprotected Islamic land. Rather, they were widely accepted and were provided state security in carrying their commercial activities in Central Asia. Besides that their fortitude, commercial connections and

technical skills were considered commodities unto themselves. The complex credit system which these Indian merchants were engaged in encouraged the ruling elites of the host societies to monetise their rural economies too. By maintaining a cash nexus in the countryside, the Indian merchants promoted the collection of tax revenues in cash which not only marked revival of the Central Asian economy, but made the overland trans-regional trade competent with the ongoing maritime trade. Also, various institutions were established by these merchants, which explain their internal cohesiveness as well as their relation with the host society; giving an exclusive example of the prevalent cross-cultural trade during the early modern period

The business acumen of the Indian merchants exhibited significant differences from their contemporary diaspora organisations. To reiterate, the Indian merchant agents followed a rigorous period of training and apprenticeship, and capitalised on a specific article of trade, especially cotton cloth, which could give them initial capital to expand their commercial portfolios. These merchants acted as traders, bankers, brokers and money changers, as well as financiers to the rural credit and industrial production system. The Muslim and the Christian merchants were prohibited due to doctrinal or legal sanctions for lending money for interest, while the Indian merchants were able to capitalise by deliberately engaging themselves in high interest money lending ventures whose primary goal was to accumulate profit from interest, not trade. This explains how the Indian merchants came to dominate this crucial sector of Central Asian economy. One can conclude that the Indian merchants were not bound by any social compulsion or rule which applied to indigenous merchants (prohibition on usury) which in turn gave Indians access to vast reserves of untapped capital wealth, and thus, they exercised an advantageous position in the foreign markets throughout Central Asia.

The Central Asian economy transformed in the wake of Russian colonial expansion in the region. It earmarked an important historical phenomenon as it led to the ejection and the consequent decline of the diaspora of the Indian merchants in Central Asia. The medieval practice of operating credit and moneylending systems by private individuals was replaced by a direct control by the state in the rural credit system and banking sector under the Russian domination. The imposition of a state banking system under the Russian colonial period diverted the cash nexus in the hands of the state for the first time in Central Asia, leading to the effective expulsion of the Indians

from their central role from the rural credit system. Trade reversals were associated with the industrial revolution and the British usurpation of the overland trade in Indian cotton. All those factors led to the removal of Indians who were the most important component in the commercial activities and, in a few decades the Indian diaspora in Central Asia came to an abrupt end.

The three chapters exclusively deal with above-mentioned questions, at the core, and try to highlight, both descriptively and analytically, the emergence and dispersion of the Indian merchants until the decline of the diaspora at the close of the nineteenth century. The social organisation, cultural and religious paraphernalia are also discussed at length besides the economic functions performed by these merchants, in order to understand the premise on which the hypotheses are set to be tested. In retrospect, it can be said that the central hypotheses of the present work stand corroborated.

APPENDIX: COINAGE, EQUIVALENCIES AND MEASUREMENTS

Coinage

Mughal India (1594-1605)

Gold mohur = 10.9g

Silver rupee = 11.6g

Copper dam = 20.9g

1595	1 muhr = 9 rupees
	1 rupee = 100 dams
1695	1 muhr = 13.25 rupees
	1 rupees = 205.02 or 222 dams

Source: Habib, Irfan (1987), 'A System of Trimetallism in the Age of the Silver Influx on the Mughul Monetary System', in J.F. Richards (ed) *The Imperial Monetary System of Mughal India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Safavid Iran (1588-1629)

Gold 'Abbasi = 9.33g

Silver 'Abbasi = 7.77 to 9.33g

Copper 'Abbasi – a local currency varied with location

Source: Borgomale, H.L. Rabino di (1951), *Coins, Medal and Seals of the Shahs of Iran, 1500-1941*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Uzbeks

Silver tanka-i shahrukhi of Shibanids = 6g

Silver tanka-i shahrukhi of Janids (Astrakhanid) = 4.25g

Source: Lowick, N.M (1966), 'Shaybanid Silver Coins', *The Numismatic Chronicle*, 7(6): 251-330.

Tsarist Russia (1613-1696)

Silver kopek (1613-45) = 48g

Silver kopek (1645-96) = 40-46g

Source: Mel'nikova, A.S (1989), *Russkie monety ot Ivana Groznogo do Petra Pervogo*, Moscow: Finance and Statistics.

Equivalencies

'Abbasi – one 'Abbasi = 1s 4d (English) (1677)

one 'Abbasi = 1 Reichsthaler (1638-73)

Tuman – one Tuman = 24 rupees (1694)

One Tuman = 50 'Abbasis (1664-67)

Source: Borgomale, H.L. Rabino di (1951), *Coins, Medal and Seals of the Shahs of Iran, 1500-1941*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rupee – one rupee = 13 altin and 2 dengis or 40 kopeks (1695-99)

Source: Dale, Stephen F (1994), *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600-1750*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

MEASUREMENTS

1 pud = 30 pounds

11bs = 2.47 kgs

1 pound = 0.5 or 0.9 kg

1 lbs = 5.33 yards

**Source:* John Briggs 1840

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