

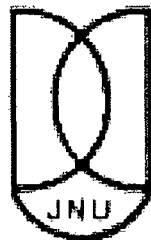
**RUSSIAN PERCEPTION'S OF INDIA FROM 15TH CENTURY TO
18TH CENTURY**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University

For the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Russian Perception’s of India from 15th Century to 18th Century” submitted by me for the reward of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.


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Maay, Babu, Bhaiya aur Banaa

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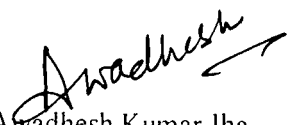

Awadhesh Kumar Jha

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

India was visited by travellers of different land during the pre-modern period. Almost each one of them had their personal experience recorded in their accounts which has been interpreted time and again by later scholars. No doubt the personal experiences of these foreign travellers were different from one another but historians of nineteenth and twentieth Century have often tried to see a pattern of Historical development in all those contemporary foreign travellers account, so that it could help in deeper understanding of the pre-modern Indian history in particular. It was during the time of colonial rule in India in the later 18th and early 19th Century that efforts were made by the British scholars to engage with the historical source of pre-modern India. Many historically authentic and contemporary indigenous and foreign sources were consulted and on the basis of which India's history was written. In this endeavour of writing India's history, the accounts of western travellers to India, were given more prominence than those other travellers who also had visited India during medieval period and observed India impartially and recorded them in their account. One of those neglected foreign travellers account in the scheme of colonial scholars were the accounts of Russian travellers who visited India during 15th to 18th Century. The western travellers have been found through their account of being too critical of India's socio-political and religious-cultural aspects of day to day life, while the Russian travellers tend to do effort to understand and appreciate the same. The reason behind such selection of sources by the British scholars is not difficult to understand, as the primary aim of colonial study of India's past was to establish the notion of uncivilized and barbarous India during pre colonial period, which could help British to establish empire in Indian subcontinent to civilize them, same as was the case with Africa where it was 'white men's burden' to civilize the people of Africa. These neglected accounts were also not taken into serious consideration by the historians of twentieth Century and they seemed to follow the same set of sources as were used by their predecessors. Recently there has been a new trend

wherein the non-conventional sources of history are seriously engaged with to have a better and holistic idea of India's pre-modern history. And this research is an addition to that new trend where it will engage with the Russian travellers account to understand the perception which Russian had about India at a particular time, and how it changed through changing times. Hence it necessary to learn medieval history from the prism of Russians who had their own view about contemporary India in the time and space they visited India. Echoing same sentiment, Ivan Minayev had suggested that the time had come to do away with the writing of India's history within the framework of some "grand theories and pre-built structures of some Western Scholars", and look into the alternatives, based on often regarded less important sources (Minayev 2010).

The first Russian who visited India was Afanasy Nikitin in 1468-69, much before the first Portuguese Vasco Da Gama landed in Calicut in 1498 (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984). However P M Kemp argues that Nikitin was not the first Russian to have come to India. There were number of slaves who must have come to India before Nikitin, though they do not have any account of their own. His argument is premised upon the notion that the Russian caravans were undertaking long journeys during the 15th Century (Kemp 1958: 30-31). Nikitin had recorded his Indian experience in a diary called "Voyages beyond three Seas". The account is available to us and is the first hand account by any Russian about India based on his personal experience. During 15th Century India had no direct relation with Russia, so Nikitin had not much idea about the commercial prospects which this subcontinent could provide to him. But he was advised by some of his Muslim friends for better prospects in India, and with this hope he landed in the Indian subcontinent. But he was dissatisfied with that advice, thus he recorded that "they talked about a multitude of goods, but it turned out that there is nothing for our land.....pepper and colouring are cheap but the duty is high" (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984).

To construct the history of India- Russia relation during the fifteenth Century, Nikitin's travelogue is an important source. The account is not lengthy, but short.

However it covers almost all aspects of India's pre-modern history, particularly of 15th Century that many new things can be added to the whole narrative of 15th Century India. Nikitin visited India with a commercial motive, but according to Minayev, this did not prove an impediment to his recording of those facets of Indian life which had no direct link with his profit consideration. Thus he recorded all those facets of socio- religious and politico-cultural aspects of 15th Century India with which he encountered with. For Minayev he was a genius who had recorded things which finds less mention in other contemporary sources like things such as what and how Indians ate? How they prayed to their gods? What they did with the relatives who die? How they dressed? How different was the standard of living between the rulers and the ruled? Etc (Minayev 2010).

It was N M Karamzin¹ who discovered the original manuscript of Nikitin, "Voyage Beyond the three Seas", in 1821. The discovered manuscript was not the original copy written by Nikitin himself, but the copies which were rewritten in the 16th and the 17th Century. Count Wielhorsky² translated this manuscript in to English in 1857. He has called the narrative of Nikitin as "an uncouth style of an enterprising but an uneducated man". Minayev considers Nikitin account as an original account based on his personal interaction with the natives, rather on hearsay. Thus what Nikitin had recorded was no less than the "prevailing reality" (Minayev 2010). P M Kemp praises Nikitin that he had written a factual, legible and descriptive account of India despite his not being a professional writer (Kemp 1958: 14-15)

¹ N. M Karamzin (1766-1826) was a Russia historian who was the founder of a new approach to national history, in which he popularized and romanticized the study of pasts. See P. M. Kemp, *Bharat-Rus: An introduction to Indo- Russian Contacts and Travels from Medieval Times to the October Revolution*, Delhi: Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, 1958

² See: *The travels of Athanasius Nikitin, a native of Tver, Translated from Russian with notes by Count Wielhorsky, late Secretary at the Russian Legation at the Court of St. James 's.* in R H Major (ed.) *India in the Fifteenth Century Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India in the Century proceeding the discovery of Cape of Good Hope from Latin, Persian, Russian and Italian Sources. Now first translated in to English.* London: Printed for Hakluyt Society, 1857.

Nikitin's account was discovered in 1821 by Karamzin, the first Russian version of the account was available in 1853 and the English translation in 1857, however it was not discussed widely among scholars and it remained less talked about for a considerable times. However during the 20th Century the developments at the world stage like cold war, India's emergence as a neutral power and growing people to people link between USSR and India made possible the renewed efforts of the Russian scholars to engage with Nikitin's account seriously. He was subsequently portrayed as the founder of the cultural contacts between India and Russia. He was compared with the travellers like Columbus and Magellan, and was made a figure of national importance. A statue of him was placed in his home town, Tver (Maxwell 2006: 247).

Though westerners can take pride in explaining their history of discoveries and search for a new world which commensurate with the end of 15th Century when the Portuguese reached India, the journey of Nikitin to India has shown that the merchants of Russia were able to accomplish their journey to Asia without much difficulty (Morris 1967: 502-508). Afanasy Nikitin was the son of Nikita, a merchant from the city of Tver, situated on the bank of River Volga. He started his journey in 1466, sailed through Volga River and reached Astrakhan. He then crossed the Caspian Sea through Baku and Derbent, travelled through Persia and reached Northern shore of Persian Gulf in 1469. Then he sailed to Muscat and after crossing the Arabian Sea reached Chaul³, now in Maharashtra in 1469. From the Persian Gulf the Nikitin's journey to India began on April 4, 1469 and it took him six weeks to reach Chaul (Dash 2002). Nikitin spent the Easter of 1469 in Hormuz, which falls on 2nd April in 1469, and started for India two days after that. The date is important to note the chronology of the sequence of events in the journey of Nikitin. The date becomes important also because the first translator of Nikitin's account in English, Wielhorsky, has given the date of Nikitin's stay in India from 1468-

³ Chaul is a former city of Portuguese India, now in ruins. It is located 60 km south of Mumbai, in Raigad District of Maharashtra state in western India. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaul*

1474, which is not true. The same date has been given by many scholars such as E. F. Oaten (Morris 1967: 502-508).

Nikitin account is conspicuously unusual in his openness in recording things with which he personally encountered with, such as the food habits of the Hindus and the Muslims, their dressing sense, the mode of prayer etc. It is also extraordinary in its attempt to mention the time duration between two important towns, between two important ports, goods available in each port and towns where he visited along with their price etc (Tillett 1966). The visit was also remarkable because of the time duration of four years which Nikitin was able to live in an alien land. And also the time in which he travelled i.e. 15th Century when such a long travel was unheard of. However the account of Nikitin did not answer much questions, like his own background, the circumstances that led him to undertake the journey, how and why his journey ended on India etc. These are the questions which is often a concern for research scholars, to understand the true nature of the journey beyond three seas (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

There is no any reference to India's direct contact with Russia in the 16th Century, but one. According to a literature in Russia, Nikonovaskaya chronicle, Mughal Emperor Babur was said to have sent his emissaries to the court of Russian prince, Ivan Ivanovich. His name was Khwaza Hussein, who came to the Prince court with a letter addressed to the prince and saying on behalf of Mughal emperor Babur, that the latter wanted a good and friendly relation with Russia. The Indian ruler also hoped to have more people to people contacts between Russia and India. There are two interpretation of this episode. one holds that Khwaza Hussein was speaking a lie and he just wanted to have a safe passage through the Russian empire so that he freely conducts his trading activities as he was a merchant. The other interpretation is that it might be that Babur had sent his Agent to the court of Russian prince to establish relation with the northern areas as he himself belonged to a region in Central Asia with whom Russians had relations in some form or the other (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984).

During the 17th and the 18th Century the Indian merchants acted as a link between the Russian and the Indian empire. The Indian merchants helped Russians to know and understand better about India. These merchants were in no way less capable and did not have low entrepreneur skill than any other merchants whose origin lay outside India. The Indian merchants were able to reach far off areas in search of better prospects for their trade. Be it Persia, regions of Central Asia, North Africa and South East Asia, the presence of Indian merchants could have been easily found. The Russian empire was not an exception for them as they have reached there during 17th Century and stayed in Astrakhan (Russian port city) and other cities of Russia for almost two centuries along with merchants from other lands. They were most prominent merchants in the city of Astrakhan. Important to note here is the point that these merchants were able to trade in far flung areas without the support of their home government as against the later European merchants who were often supported by the state to which they belonged to. Their importance in Russian empire had grown to such an extent that their support was sought by the Russian authorities to establish trade links with eastern states. To achieve this, the Russian tsar sent many emissaries from 1646 onwards with a list of instructions to the court of Indian ruler, although none succeeded except one. But the successes of Indian merchants were not taken positively by the native Russian merchants as well as the merchants of other lands operating in Astrakhan. Indian merchants were put in bad light in front of the Russian authority to the extent that the former had to quit trade in retail. With the increasing pressure from the Russian authority and the chaos in Iran (where there was a political crisis), Indian merchants had to shift to the profession of money lending to invest their capital (Gopal 1988).

The Indian merchants living in Astrakhan had their own colony comprising of their families only. This was called 'Indian House'. The Indian merchants were staying for many years in Astrakhan, generation after generation. Some of them who had no wife, therefore they married the local Tatars, and their Children were called 'Agryzhan'. In the process of their trading activities they brought news about routes to India, both land and the sea route. They also provided knowledge to the Russians about the goods available in

surplus as well as in scarcity which could help Russians to make a strategy to establish trading relation with India. The Indians living in the 'Indian House' were allowed to follow their own customs as well as the religious practices. Thus the information collected from the Indian merchants about the state of affairs in India and from the day to day life of Indian merchants living in Astrakhan in the 'Indian House' Russians was able to add to their knowledge of India, and this process continued over a period of close to two centuries (Gopal 1988).

Based on the information gathered from Indian merchants living in Astrakhan as well as from other sources, Russian tsar sent many emissaries to the court of Mughal Indian ruler since 1646, but none succeeded to reach Mughal ruler except one (Gopal 1988). There were many reasons for this such as harassment by the nomads of Kazan and Turkmens; the difficult terrain between the two lands; and most importantly the Iranian unwillingness to act as a link by providing access to their resources. In 1666-67 a Russian embassy under Muhammad Yusuf Kasimov was somehow able to reach Kabul, the frontier city of the Mughal Empire. But unfortunately he was not allowed to meet the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, firstly because the latter was not interested in establishing any relation with Russian empire at that time and second, Kasimov was carrying gifts for Aurangzeb worth 800 rubbles only (Levi 2007). Finally in 1695, Russian embassy under the head of Simon Malenki was able to reach Surat, and was allowed to meet with Aurangzeb, and lived for five years in India. But this meeting did not materialize in forming any favourable condition for establishment of trading relation between Russia and the Mughal India. Aurangzeb at that time was leading a campaign against the Marathas (Gopal 1988).

During the reign of Peter the great in the eighteenth Century efforts were renewed by the Russian authority to deepen the ties between Russia and Iran, and Russian activities in Central Asia increased. The main aim of Russia's active involvement in Central Asia was to have direct access to the Indian trade which was for them a profitable venture to invest in (Gommans 2007).

It has been documented that during the invasion of India by Nadir Shah there was a Russian spy in his camp who provided information about India to his Russian boss who was a Russian consul in Isfahan (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984). The Russian spy has described in detail the havoc created in Delhi on account of the invasion and the Mughal treasures the invaders received after that. The resident Indians living in Astrakhan were asked by the Russian authority to give information about India and to assist Russian merchants in establishing direct trade with India. One Indian merchant Marwari Barayev was asked by the Russian authority to help them in establishing a Russian East India Company, on the lines of Western nations East India Company, to secure some share in the profitable Indian trade. He was an important figure in Astrakhan who was involved in trading activities, in money lending as well as held property. The Russian source demonstrates that Marwari Barayev was converted to Christianity, whose name was changed to Petr Feodorov (Gopal 1988).

Whether he was converted out of his choice or he had no option but to convert, in order to sustain in an alien land, has not been documented in the Russian literature. It seems that he was from a mercantile community in Rajasthan (India) however his origin is not traced in the document.

The Russian tsar Mikhail Fedorovich issued an order in 1622 according to which nine Russian merchants were asked to go to Persia after crossing Caspian Sea, with Russian goods, whose expenses were to be borne by the tsar's treasury. Fedot Kotov was one among those nine merchants. He has written his experience of Persia in which he has given some information about India. The diary which he wrote is titled as 'The Journey to the Kingdom of Persia' and it was first discovered by M. P. Pogodin, who later published the same in the 'Journal of the Moscow Society for Russian History and Antiquities' in 1852. To Kemp, the journey of Kotov and his fellow companion was to know more about the Persian kingdom before establishing diplomatic relation by Russia with Persia. It was also aimed at knowing the routes to India to establish direct trading relation with the latter (Kotov 1959).

During the latter half of the eighteenth Century three Russian traveller- Filip Yefremov, Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev and Rafail Danibegov- visited India and note down their own experience based on their interactions with the people of India in their respective account (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984). The perception of these three Russian travellers about eighteenth Century India further helped in forming Russians image of India.

Fillip Yefremov began his journey from Russia, reached Central Asia amidst several ups and downs in his journey. He somehow reached western Tibet and then through Karakorum pass reached Kashmir, India. He was the first Russian to use that way signifying a new route which was hitherto unknown. His account gave valuable detail about Kashmir's language, literature, art and the religious beliefs along with the cultural context in which the city was interwoven. He also noted the gap between the masses and the privileged classes of Kashmir (Kodiyan 1998). Yefremov was made prisoner in 1774 by the Kirgiz and later he was sold to Bukhara where he served in their army. But, he managed to escape from Bukhara and reached India sometime around 1780-81, after crossing many difficult terrains like Kuen Kun and Karakorum Mountains. It was his army training which led his priority of noting all those topographical features of a land which can be of some use for any army personnel of some other land. He noted everything from the rivers, to the water supply and to things related with the geographical features of then India, however to Kemp's surprise, he passed Agra without even noticing Taj Mahal. It was 1786 the first edition of Yefremov's account 'The travels of Filip Yefremov' was published, however Yefremov himself came up with a new edition in 1794 disowning the first edition. Professor Peter Konduirov came up with a third edition in 1811. This edition was an addition to the second edition by Yefremov and included other things which Yefremov failed to accommodate in the second edition (Kemp 1959).

Yefremov started from Tibet on foot, but not on horse or oxen, to reach Kashmir as the route was not easy to travel because of steep lands and narrow roads. After he

reached Champa⁴, he became ill as he had to carry his luggage on his back. He was unable to move because of his illness; however he was helped to recover from his illness by a man from Kashmir whom he called a 'pious man'. He was later invited by an Armenian to come over dinner, knowing that Yefremov was a Russian, and offered latter the help to return to Russia. The Armenian gave Yefremov a letter addressed to a priest who resided in Lucknow. Yefremov reached luck now via Agra which was situated on the bank of river Yamuna and Shikohabad from where the English possession of India began.

On reaching Lucknow he delivered the letter to the priest who advised him to tell to the then Governor, Middletown, if asked, that the former knew 'Holsteinian Pastor' of St. Petersburg. He was also asked by the priest to tell to the Governor that he was a major with whom the priest was acquainted with and that he belonged to some noble family, a relative of count Chernuishev. The governor gave Yefremov a letter, after meeting him, addressed to his friend, Chambers, in Calcutta, asking him to help Yefremov to reach England (Yefremov, 1959).

He started his journey to Calcutta from Lucknow in an Indian cart driven by oxen over which umbrella was placed. Then through a boat he reached Allahabad which lie on the Yamuna river which flow a little later in to the river Ganga. Then he reached Banaras and then to Patna which was also called Azimabad. Through Munger he could reach Calcutta where he was happy to find Greeks and their monastery where he was received cordially and was given food. He was happy to be among the people following the same religion. Chamber declined to help Yefremov but when the latter offered to Chamber, the Arab boy whom he purchased, Chamber was ready to help him and gave to Yefremov the recommending letter addressed to the captain of a packet ship at the East India Company

⁴ Chamba is an ancient town in the Chamba district in the state of Himachal Pradesh, in northern India. Located at an altitude of 996 metres (3,268 ft) above mean sea level, the town is situated on the banks of the Ravi River (a major tributary of the Trans-Himalayan Indus River), at its confluence with the Sal River. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chamba,_Himachal_Pradesh

office, which was about to leave for England, along with 300 rupees; two dozen shirts of thin cotton and a suit of clothes. He reached England after a considerable journey where he met with the Russian diplomat who issued Yefremov Russian passport and was sent to St. Petersburg. Yefremov was later brought in front of the Russian empress who rewarded Yefremov with 300 roubles (Yefremov, 1959).

Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev was a Russian, who started his journey from England to India on February 12, 1785 in an East India Company ship and was able to reach the Indian city of Madras on the Coromandel Coast, also called Fort St. George on August 15, 1785 (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984). During his visit to England he happened to see the trading activities between India and Britain, which impressed him a lot. He thus decided to visit India to make Russians aware of it, so that they can learn something from India. He also wished that the interaction with Russians would help Indians as well to learn something from Russia (Kodiyar 1998). It was his personal urge to learn more about the tenants of Indian culture that brought him in India. Lebedev was a distinguished musician and artist from Yaroslav (Russia), who established in Calcutta the first European style theatre (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984).

The mayor of the city of Madras, Captain William Sydenham, invited Lebedev and received him cordially. On knowing that Lebedev was a musician the mayor hired him for two years to perform in the city on annual salary of two hundred pounds, apart from other benefits which he was supposed to get. Lebedev stayed for sometime at Madras but his desire to learn more and more about different aspects of Indian language and literature forced him to leave Madras for Bengal (Lebedev 1988: 251-252).

He refuted calling Indians, an Idolaters, as according to him they “recognize one true god, earlier than many Europeans kept Christ law, the only distinction being that they more or less retain pagan superstitions, which even today, not only with them alone, are no entirely cleared away”. He has further stated that “Indian manners and customs are not governed by any sort of superstitious legends, but are based on revelation and a prudential regard for rules”. He had denounced the British rule in India, calling them a

mercantile state that had devastated the Indian Economy and had eaten up the whole country (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984).

Rafail Danibegov was a Georgian resident when he was despatched on March 15 1795, by the Georgian king to India on state assignment. He was to deliver a letter of Patent detailing the grant of village of Lori (in Georgia) to an Armenian merchant residing in the Indian city of Madras, who used to send gifts to Georgian king. On arrival, Danibegov found the man dead, so he handed over the letter to his son (Danibegov 1959: 97). He stayed in India for some time and detailed about his experience in his account, 'A Journey to India'. The account was originally written in Georgian language until it was translated into Russian in 1811, when Georgia had already become the part of the Russian empire. He wished to pass on the information about India to his 'Russian fellow countrymen'. He has detailed in his account about the burial of St. Thomas, fruits of India, Shawls of Kashmir, British exploitation of the Indians and the subsequent resistance and revolts by the natives. He has accused colonial power of taking away the freedom of Indians in their own land by collecting taxes for the use of water of the sacred river Ganges (Kemp 1959).

Thus, the knowledge about India gained either by the accounts of individual Russian travellers visit to India or through information received from the Indian merchants living in Astrakhan, continued from the fifteenth to the eighteenth Century and in this process different Russian perception of India was built and as a result India was assigned different images by the Russians. The importance for us to know the Russians image of India during the 15th to the 18th Century lay in assessing the priority which Russians assigned to India with respect to their desire to establish diplomatic and other relations with India and also with respect to the growing East India Company economic and political fortunes in India and also to know how eager Russians were to acquire the share in the profitable Indian trade.

1.2 Review of Literature:

There are both primary and secondary literatures available on the Indo- Russian contacts between fifteenth and eighteenth Century. In the category of primary literatures are the accounts of Russian travellers who visited India during fifteenth to the eighteenth Century. We have the account of Afanasy Nikitin, "Voyages Beyond Three Seas", the fifteenth Century Russian traveller to India, which has been translated from Russian into English by Count Wielhorsky in 1857 with the title 'The travels of Athanasius Nikitin. a native of Twer'. There is another translation of Nikitin's account by Gregory Belkov, with the title '*The Journey Beyond three seas of Afanasij Nikitin in A.D. 1466-1472*'. Stepan Apresyan has translated the Nikitin's account for Raduga Publishers in 1985. Prof. Arun Mohanty has translated the Nikitin's account in 2010 in his translated book of Ivan Minayev- 'Old India: Notes on Afanasy Nikitin's "Voyage beyond the Three Seas"'. Thus we have in all four translated account of Nikitin. The earliest translation by Wielhorsky has some shortcomings in terms of the proper explanation of the terms used by Nikitin in his account. This translated account fails to place Nikitin's account in the definite historical locale and is criticized for certain omissions. Subsequent translations have tried to fill that gap; however more needs to be done to help upcoming scholars to understand pattern of Nikitin's knowledge about India.

In the category of primary literature, it is necessary to include all 118 documents of the foreign department of Russia, which pertains to India during the 17th and 18th Century. Those 118 documents have been translated by Surendra Gopal in 1988 in his book 'Indians in Russia in the 17th and 18th Centuries'. These documents have been taken from two collections, Russko-Indiiskiye Otnosheniya, Volume 17th and Russko-Indiiskiye Otnosheniya Volume 18th published from Moscow in 1958 and 1965, respective. These accounts are of utmost importance for the research scholars working on India- Russia contacts during 17th and 18th Century, as it covers almost all aspects of connection between the two distant lands. Surendra Gopal has also translated the oral

testimony, given to the tsar of Russia by the Eighteenth Century Russian traveller Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev on his return from India.

The other primary source used in this research is the account of Eighteenth Century Russian traveller to India Philip Yefremov and Rafail Danibegov. Yefremov account "The Travels of Filip Yefremov" and the account of Danibegov "A journey to India" have been translated in to English from Russian by P. M. Kemp in his work "The Russian traveller to India and Persia". Accounts of one more Russian traveller Fedot Kotov, needs to be mentioned here. Kotov, did not visit India but Persia, however he gathered information about India in Persia and recorded the same in his account, 'The Journey to the Kingdom of Persia' and passed on the same to his Russian masters which contributed to the building of Russian perceptions about the idea of India.

Though secondary literatures are not many, but few which has dealt with the Russian travellers travelogues. P M Kemp has written a book in 1958, titled 'Bharat-Rus: An introduction to Indo- Russian Contacts and Travels from Medieval Times to the October Revolution' in which he has engaged with the Russian travellers account as well as other sources from 15th to 18th Century, however he misses out those valuable documents of the Russian foreign department pertaining to India and related with the activities of Indian residents in Astrakhan, which help Russian to add on their knowledge of India. Gail D. Lenhoff and Janet L. B. Martin; Mary Maxwell and P M Kemp has discussed the issue of conversion in the pre modern period in general and in the medieval Indian period in particular.

There is a debate among scholars regarding the conversion of Nikitin to the Islam. Whether Nikitin converted to Islam or not is a point of contest among scholars. The issue relates to the question of conversion in the pre-modern period by individuals staying in or visiting the other land. The question is whether the individuals like Nikitin in India as well as Indians living in Astrakhan during 17th and 18th Century converted out of their choice or out of some compulsion. Lenhoff and following him many scholars like Maxwell argue that Nikitin had to convert to Islam, in order to avoid situations in which

his commercial motive would be under attack, as he had confronted when he was asked by a noble of Bahamani Kingdom, either to convert or to perish. Surendra Gopal has illustrated incidences of conversion out of choice by the Indians living in Astrakhan (Russia). On the trade relation between India and Russia during 15th to 18th Century many scholars have written, like Scott Levi; Surendra Gopal; Jos Gommans; Stephen F. dale; Devendra Kaushik; P. M. Kemp, however an effort needs to be undertaken in order to put this relation in a definite historical locale, to understand in better terms the trading patten on a grand scale encompassing Russian, Persian and Indian empires together.

1.3 Religion and culture:

Nikitin has advised his fellow Russians to drop their religion in their own land before coming to India, as in India, the rulers, according to Nikitin, forced foreigners to convert to Islam. Whether Nikitin himself had to convert to Islam partly or fully is a debatable topic among scholars, however it needs to be researched what exactly was the situation in India, with respect to conversion in the medieval and pre modern period.

Nikitin observed about the Hindu religion that “altogether there are eighty four faiths in India and everyone believes in ‘But’ (idol); people of different faiths do not eat or drink together, nor do they intermarry; some eat mutton, fowl, fish and eggs, but none of these people ate beef. They don’t eat or drink with the Moslems”. Nikitin further noted “and they pray facing eastward in the Russian manner and when they sit down to take a meal some wash their hands and feet and also rinse their mouth”. Nikitin very carefully noticed the Hindu customs. “They used the cow dung as fuel to bake breads and cook their food and smear their faces, forehead and bodies with the ashes”. “Wherever I went” Afanasy Nikitin wrote, “I was followed by many people who wondered at me, a white man” (Nikitin 2010). For Kodiyan, it was the heavy costume of Nikitin which was a matter of curiosity for the Indians who usually were dressing as lightly as possible (Kodiyan 1998).

According to the Russian Foreign Department documents, Indians living in Astrakhan were permitted to cremate the body of the dead without any hindrance, outside the city to a definite place (obviously the Indian Hindus are talked about), however this was not liked by the local Russians in Astrakhan. The Russians complained to the Russian authority that “when they die, they do not bury their dead under the earth, instead they burn the bodies in fire and throw the body of the dead in the river and the remaining ashes are thrown in the air and from these much harm is done to men and families” (Gopal 1988). Kemp has argued that Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev, the eighteenth Century Russian traveller to India, while accounting his Indian experience had often used expressions like “just in the Europe” or “in the same way as we do”, that is why he can be considered as one among those forerunners of the theory of Comparativism, arising out of the enlightenment of the eighteenth Century, who argue for a common historical platform for both Asia and Europe. Lebedev considered “orthodox” Hindus the true believer of a single supreme deity, and whose religion started since the beginning of Human beings. The Hindus according to Lebedev had the knowledge of god from the very beginning of his/her life, but they showed their preference to “Revealed” religion rather than “Natural”. Thus Kemp argues that Hindus had their share of revealed truth, which did not need any other master to make them learn the ethics (Kemp 1958).

1.4 Polity and Society:

Ivan Minayev in his work *Old India: Notes on Afanasy Nikitin’s “Voyage beyond Three Seas”*, (ed.) by Eugenia Vanina & Irina Chelysheva and translated by Prof. Arun Mohanty, argued that Nikitin was surprised by the barely sufficient dress of the Indians: “people walk barefooted, head is not covered, breast is not covered, their hair plaited into one braid”. “Boys and girls”, Nikitin further noted, “walked naked up to the age of seven, and do not hide their shame”. This practise, argued Minayev, was not new in India during the fifteenth Century when Nikitin was encountering native Indians, as it was a practice among the lower classes to dress as such. Nikitin saw a big gap in the standard of living between the common people and the nobles (Minayev 2010). Nikitin was surprised

to that. "in India the village people are very poor. but the nobles are rich and sumptuous" which to G. Bongard-Levin and A. Vigasin was a bit exaggeration, but they also sees a sense of democratic tendency in Nikitin as the latter speaks about Russian nobles in the same language, the language of truth. "order reign in the Russian land" and that "there be justice there" (Bongard-Levin & Vigasin 1984)

Nikitin's stay in India (1468-1472), coincided with the Bahamani campaign against Vijayanagar. The campaign depleted the treasury of Bahamani Empire which demised subsequently. One of the documents in Surendra Gopal work details about the Russian knowledge of political situation in India during the time of Aurangzeb. Muhammad Yusuf Kasimov who was sent as a Russian envoy to the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb was not allowed to meet the latter and when Kasimov returned back to Moscow he stated to his master, the Russian tsar that "on the Indian soil there is a great war and anarchy. The Afghans are fighting against the Indian ruler whom they used to serve earlier. The Indian ruler has sent to the Afghans his heir apparent, many generals and a large number of forces but nothing has availed" (Gopal 1988).

1.5 Trade and Economy:

Since the time of early middle ages, both Russian and Indian goods and commodities were reaching each other's territory by various linkages, though there was no direct trade relation between the two lands. Russian goods such as furs, wax, honey, skins were available in the Northern Indian Region along with the Central Asian region. The list of Russian goods available in Northern India also included in later date's goods such as flax or linen, hunting dogs and horses for communication purposes. Russians in exchange bought Indian goods such as textile, silk, dyes, rice, spices, jewels etc (Kemp 1958). To this list Surendra Gopal has added few other items of exchange or say demand. Russian goods which were in demand in India were bird's feather, white fur coats and copper. On the other hand Russians needed Indian goods like calico, coarse calico, precious stones etc. (Gopal 1988).

Indian merchant Matwala and his colleague who went to Astrakhan, for trade is accounted to have said to the Russian foreign affairs officer, about the Russian goods which were important and sought after in Indian market. These goods include sables costing between 20 to 30 roubles per pair, broad cloths of different colour particularly of red and green, red yuft (Russian leather), fish bones, different size mirror, corals of red colour, Turkish Golden and Silvery Velvet.

Important to note here is the point that Indians as well as other foreign merchants living in Astrakhan were not allowed to trade in retail but in wholesale. According to the documents in the Russian foreign department Indian craftsmen were considered efficient therefore the Russian state ordered a merchant in Astrakhan to bring to Moscow Indian craftsmen who were capable of manufacturing and dyeing 'Kindyak' (a heavy cotton fabric, usually dyed in bright colours, particularly red, often used for outer garments) and other varieties of cotton textiles such as 'Byaz' (a fine cotton fabric woven in Persia).

1.6 Definition, Rationale and the Scope of the Research:

The history of Indo-Russian relations is an important area of study to know the genesis of a relation in which both India and Russia considers each other as a natural partner. This question is an under researched area. There is dearth of literature available to the question posed above and as far as Indian historians are concerned, not much attention has been paid by them in India to understand the various complexities of Russian history in general and history of Russia-India relations in particular. There are both primary and the secondary literatures available for this research proposal but the use of primary source for constructing the Russian perception of India has been minimal. We do find mention of Russian traveller's account in various secondary literatures but these references are in bits and pieces, and serious attempt has not been made to analyse Russian traveller's account holistically to arrive at a Russian knowledge India between fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. The urge to arrive at Russian perception of India from fifteenth Century onwards is important to know the subsequent Russian efforts in establishing friendly ties with India. The secondary literatures, as has been mentioned

above, have also failed to assess properly the significance of the Russian perception of Indian society, Economy and polity from the information gathered from the Indians living in Astrakhan during the 17th and the 18th Century. For the Russian perception and Image of India the account of Russian traveller Afanasy Nikitin, Fedot Koto, Philip Yefremov, Rafail Danibegov as well as that of Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev is important but, unfortunately these account have not been given due importance in constructing the Russian idea of India. The importance of understanding image formation either through visual perception of the travellers or by the information gathered from the Indians in Astrakhan is important to know the cultural contacts between India and Russia. Through these accounts and information's we would able to discern the impact of one's culture on the other and to know that how far Russians treated Indians as 'other'.

As far as the scope of this research is concerned, it intends, first to provide a definite pattern of the relations between Russia and India from fifteenth to the eighteenth Century and second it would provide new perspective to historians working on the medieval Indian history to understand holistically different aspects of India's socio-political and religious-cultural as well as economical trends and structure from Russians perspective. The proposed research would tried to provide answer to some of the unearthed complexities of Russo-India relations by answering questions like why Russia was not successful in establishing friendly ties with India during the sixteenth to eighteenth Century despite having first hand information about India through the account of Nikitin in the fifteenth Century. The importance of this research lay in its further use for the comparative study of history of India from different perspective, from fifteenth to the eighteenth Century.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How India was perceived in Russian literatures before Nikitin arrived in India in 1468?
2. What was Nikitin's Image of different aspects of socio- political and religious condition of the fifteenth Century India?

3. How the Indian traders living in Astrakhan during Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century helped Russians in building perception about Indian customs and beliefs?
4. What efforts did Russian's made to establish friendly ties with India and how far they were successful in this endeavour?
5. How eighteenth Century Indian polity, Economy, society and religion were perceived by Yefremov, Danibegov and Lebedev?
6. What were the change and/or continuity, if any, in the Russian idea of India from the fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century?
7. How far the different images assigned by Russian travellers to India, from the fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century helped Russian state in strengthening Indo- Russian relation?

1.8 Hypotheses:

1. The Russian perception of India as a country of inexhaustible wealth changed to an economically deficient land as a result of Afanasy Nikitin's visit to India in the fifteenth Century.
2. The fifteenth Century Russian image of Indian state based on theocracy changed to a Secular State after the visit of Russian travellers Lebedev, Danibegov and Yefremov, to India in the eighteenth Century.

1.9 Research Methods:

The proposed research is based on the primary as well as the secondary sources. The primary sources which has been used for this research is significant in answering some of the complex question of the history of the bilateral relation between India and Russia. Through the primary sources of the contemporary times an attempt is made to research the question of perception building and image formation through the accounts of travellers of Russia who travelled to India during the 15th to 18th Century. Secondary

sources are few but are helpful in finding answer to the research questions posed above. Since the aim of the research is to look into the question of building image formation, qualitative method of research is dominant in the proposed narrative. The proposed research is historical in nature as it deals with the definite time frame far away from the present. Thus the use of contemporary literature has made the research more authentic in constructing the image of a country during particular time frame. The proposed research has also used analytical as well as descriptive methods of research. An analysis has to be made of the account of the travellers and a valid description needs to be given of any terms or notions mentioned in the travelogues. In the research a comparative study of the perception and image from the fifteenth to the eighteenth Century has been given. The research is based on an inductive method as well. Each Russian traveller to India between fifteenth and the eighteenth Century had different images about India; this difference in their perception about India has been assessed to arrive at the general notion of India at the end of the eighteenth Century.

Chapters:

1. Introduction

This chapter has given a brief outline as well as the importance of the research question. Foreign travellers account helps a lot to comprehend better the histories of a country and in this regard the Indian history in general and Russian travellers in particular were no exception. Till now medieval and early modern history of India have been viewed thoroughly through the lens of foreign travellers of western Europe and in this process accounts of Russian travellers to India has not been given due importance. This research work has tried to place these Russian accounts its due place to understand the socio- economic and politico- religious connection between Russia and India during 15th to 18th Century.

2. Russian idea of India from earliest to the 15th Century

This chapter finds out the knowledge of India among Russians in the existing Russian literature till the fifteenth Century before Nikitin visited India and accounted his experiences. Till the 15th Century India was viewed as a land of inexhaustible wealth where everything was available and that too at cheap prices. Russian folktales had some similarities with Indian folktales, and there was reference of India's 'Varna' system in the Russian literature. As far as the knowledge about religion of Indians is concerned the Russians were of the view that Indians were mostly Christians who were baptised by St. Thomas, the disciple of Jesus Christ. They had the knowledge about 'Buddha', a man who renounced worldly affair on seeing the miseries of his fellow beings.

3. Religion and Culture

This chapter has dealt specifically with the Russian perception of the Indian religion and the way Indians conducted their life in day to day affairs from fifteenth to the eighteenth Century and had there been any change and/or continuity, if any in this. This chapter has looked into the customs of Indians in a particular historical locale and to see the change in the customs itself over a period. One of the important customs of Hindus which has find its place most of the times in the accounts of Russian travellers is cremating the body of the dead and then throwing it into the river. This ritual after death was hard for Russians to comprehend, something which they were completely unaware of. Then there was the question of conversion with which Nikitin himself encountered with, when he was asked to accept Islam or ruin. Conversion was not peculiar to Indian society only but there are documents that show that even the Indians living in Russia were converted out of their individual choice. These choices were often made on the basis of considered social and material benefits. The eighteenth Century picture of India's religion in general and conversion in particular was a changed one, as Russian travellers who visited India during the eighteenth Century were no longer forced to convert, and in India foreigners with different religious affiliations could sustain their life freely. And

moreover, the state or the people in the different institution of state did not force foreigners to convert or ruin.

4. Politics and Society

The nature of polity and the different aspects of Indian society from 15th to the 18th Century have been looked in to, in this chapter. Nikitin visited Bahamani Empire which was more like a feudal- military empire in which the authority was distributed along feudal hierarchy based on military power. There was a general weakness of Central power as each centre found it difficult to manage the state affairs as they moved away from the foci of power towards the periphery. The feudal lords were at war with each other so much so that foreign power found it easier to invade India. This had been witnessed during the invasion of Nadir shah when very few regional heads or feudal lords helped already weak Mughal Empire. During the 18th Century the Indian polity moved towards a change, as an effort was made from the British East India company empire to provide cohesion and stability. The society remained divided between haves and have not's, and the gap between them were huge.

5. Trade and Economy

This chapter deals with the economic relation between India and Russia during fifteenth to the eighteenth Century. It has also provided answer to the question that, how far the economic relations helped in forming a positive image of India for the Russians. This chapter has looked into the economic affairs of India during the time of Nikitin's visit. In which item India was deficient and in which item it was abundant. What were the prospects of land as well as sea bore trade. How far distant lands Indians could reach while trading and in search of more trade benefits? During 15th Century Nikitin had described about the goods India was in deficient as well as had plenty. Indian merchants could not cross the Persian and Russian empire and were not able to enter the west European market. This was because the home governments in India did not provide much help to these merchants as opposed to the merchants and trading companies of Western

Europe who were supported by their respective government. However Indians had reached Russian empire in Astrakhan and Indian Diaspora was working there. The same was the case in Iran. It was not the lack of enterprising skill of the Indians which did not allow them to go far of lands but the circumstance of the time in which the government of the day were least interested in supporting a merchants or a group of merchants to go on a long voyage to explore more markets to the benefits of the empire in general and its people in particular.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has concluded with the overall understanding of the proposed research questions, based on the findings of the research. In retrospect, what can be said is that the idea of India as a land of inexhaustible wealth was no more relevant once Nikitin visited India. He found that there was a general lack of goods and whatever was available was very expensive. The idea of India as a land where mostly people of Christian faith lived, whose forefathers were baptised by the famous disciple St. Thomas, when he came to India in early centuries, was also not in existence. The notion of forceful conversion also changed once Russian travellers came to visit India in 18th Century. A new image of India as a land of huge wealth also created by seeing the treasury of Mughal Empire by the Russian agent in the camp of nadir shah, during latter's raid of India. As regard the custom of Hindus in which the dead body were cremated remained, and to this was added the water pollution created out of this ritual. The list does not ends here but more to can be seen inside.

**CHAPTER TWO: RUSSIAN IDEA OF
INDIA FROM EARLIEST TO THE 15TH
CENTURY**

RUSSIAN IDEA OF INDIA FROM EARLIEST TO THE 15TH CENTURY

India was not discovered by the Russians; however it was the notion of different aspects of Indian culture and society which Russians received through various channels which had a lasting impact on the Russian mind. More the information about India entered Russia, the more Russians were eager to have direct relation with her, and finally first step was taken when the Mughal ruler Babur received the Russian emissary in 1698. It was nothing but a cultural backwardness on the part of India that various emissaries sent by Russian Tsar during 17th Century to India were not received by the Mughals. Though it was an official start of Russian relation with India, the relation was never cut off. To Russia, India was a land of fabulous wealth, held rich culture, possessed variety of birds and animals who could display unusual powers, where Brahmans were inhabiting who were men of piety, justice, blissful living and devotion to almighty etc (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 34-35). The medieval Indian scholars also held information about Russians, in fragments. Enumerating the qualities of his patron Shivaji, Bhushan Tripathi, the court poet of the former, accounted that the generosity of Shivaji, which was incomparable in that period, as was incomparable Russian physical strength in the medieval period (Vanina 1996: 158).

Before Afanasy Nikitin arrived in India there was no direct contact between India and Russia, as we do not have any account of pre Nikitin period (1468-1472) which can demonstrate the opposite. Despite the absence of direct contacts between India and Russia, Russians did have knowledge about India which they received from the translated version of Western, Eastern and Middle Eastern literatures. The reference about India in these literatures percolated deep into the Russian minds such that distinct features of India's customs, beliefs and culture can be seen in the Russian literature of ancient and medieval times particularly in the Russian folklore (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 07-08). A

17th Century document, now kept in 'Lenin Public Library', may be considered as the first Russian history of India. It describes about the political situation of ancient India, after the invasion of Alexander. It is written in the manuscript that after the fall of Indian ruler Porus, at the hands of Alexander, India did not have any Centralised polity. It was rather a deCentralised polity in which there were chiefs in pockets of Indian Territory and those chiefs were elected by the people of that area (Kemp 1958: 10-11).

It might be possible that this Russian manuscript is talking about the Indian period in ancient times when there were small states like 'Vaishali' where chiefs were elected by the people.

Information about Rus, reached India through various means and among those the Muslim invasion of India was an important one, as it created new avenues for cultural exchange between the two distant lands as well trade in slaves' occupied important place in this exchange. Apart from the Persian books written in India, the campaigns of Chingiz Khan and Timur to India provided some reference about Rus to Indians. The Volga region was an important centre of Islam since 10th Century whose traditions were handed over to Indians through indo-Persian literature.

Masud Sad Salman had written a Diwan in 1121 A.D. in which he gave reference to Rus, and according to it, the Russians were fair complexion people with redness on their face, who were white as opposite Africans who were Blacks. Similarly Tarikh-i-Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah had also given some reference of Russians in his Diwan. Thus it may be said that since Muslim invasion of India, Indians have knowledge of Russians in some form or the other. These Indians who had some knowledge about Russian were from class Indians who were knowledgeable and who had some access to literatures of high cultured sections of Indian society, thus for common mass Russia was still a distant concept. However Indian merchants from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Sind, and other parts of Northern India, as well as parts of Southern India, particularly Merchants from Kerala, who were going distant lands for trade must have passed on some information about the

Russians, their geographical locations and its trade, to fellow Indians which later on went on to popular perceptions (Kemp 1958: 34-35).

The information about India may have reached Rus through various means. one could be the reference of India in the books available in Russia or the other means could have been the contact of Russians with the Indians or both. Since there is no evidence of any Russian contacts with India, the knowledge about India must have disseminated and spread through books. Ancient Russian literatures do mention about India. Russians adopted the Christian religion during the 1st Century AD, after which Christian literatures of Greece and Bulgaria began to come in Rus in large numbers. These Christian literatures were translated in the Slavic language which provided information about different aspects of India. These information about India in the Christian literatures of Greece and Bulgaria had taken shape during the time of the Byzantium empire which in turn had taken from the writings of the 'church father' and from of the writings in classical antiquities by writers of late roman empire . In these literatures the stories, facts and legends from the Alexander campaign as well as writings pertaining to India of the ancient Greek traditions were included (Kemp 1958).

The main topic of discussion amongst Christian writers about Indians was her wonders, her people, the Brahmans and their pious character, and the conversion of Indians by St Thomas into Christianity. These information along with that related to Indian trade links with Greek-Roman empires, the Kushana empire; Gondophernes and his conversion, as well as trade though Arabian Sea and Red Sea, reached first to Byzantium and then to Rus

2.2 Indians and Russians: The first encounter

Despite the absence of direct relation between India and Russia before 15th Century, we find indirect references pertaining to trade relation between Russia and India in the writings of Arab scholars of 9th and 10th Century (Levin & Vigin 1984). While with India, Kievan Rus had no direct trade relations however Indian goods were reaching

Rus in the 8th -9th centuries with the help of intermediaries such as Khazaras and Bulgars of the Volga regions (Kemp 1958: 31-32). Indian and Russian merchants are believed to have first encountered in the capital city of Kazar, Atil, which was situated at the mouth of Volga River. This encounter of Indian and Russian is attested by an Arab Geographer and a traveller, Ibn Fakdan, who was on a trip to Volga in 921-922. At Volga he saw both Indian merchant from Sind and the ruler of Volga, Bulgaria, were living together. Both Indians and Russian merchants had established their respective colony in the Volga region by 10th Century (Levin & Vigin 1984). By the end of 10th Century Russian merchants had built their residence in the capital city of Khazzaria, Itil; where they met with merchants of other lands such as India, Balkh, Khwarazam etc. (Kemp 1958: 07-08). The Russians were selling slaves to Indians during 10th-13th Century. These slaves were collected from the plunders and raids by the Russian prince. These slaves were first exported to Greece through Itil and Bulgar and then from here it was exported to India, Central Asia and Iran (Kemp 1958: 31-32).

2.3 Early exchanges between Indian and Russian

During early medieval period Russian goods such as furs, wax, honey and skins were exported to Central Asia and from then on to Northern India. To this list of Russian goods known in India and Central Asia few other goods were also included such as Linen and Flax as well as wheat. In India, Russian goods which were in demand were hunting dogs and horses, fire arms and hawks. Ivory of walrus of Russia was also in demand in India although Indian ivory was also comparable in quality of that of the Russian ivory. Indian goods which were in demand in Russia were common goods such as textiles, silk, dyes, rice and spices as well as luxury goods such as jewels. It is interesting to note that in Russian vocabulary we find some names pertaining to trade terms of India. Indian medicines and its names for different items were known in Russian vocabulary. The composition of famous medicines of Russia had Indian names, and sometimes these medicines were bought by Russians from merchants of different lands trading in Russia, only to export it to Western Europe (Kemp 1958: 38-39).

Russian metal wares were famous in the middle age amongst the traders trading on the Volga regions. These metals were exported via Volga to Central Asia, then via Caspian Sea to Persia and then to India. In the verses of the famous poet from Lahore, Masud sad Salman (11th-12th Centuries), it is mentioned that the warriors of nobles of India were wearing helmets made up from chains came from Russia. Even Amir Khusrau and other Indo-Persian literature of medieval India have mentioned about the blades of the swords from Russia which were easily bend to double without break. The steppe lands of Russia beyond Volga River were famous for horses which was a continuous item of import for Indian rulers and chiefs. The merchants in Russia who were involved in exporting Russian horses to India through Persia or through Central Asia to India, were able to do so despite high tariffs and difficult terrain because they make huge profits out of this business. The horses were sent in a large convoy which held close to six thousand horses in one trip. This huge number of horses was supplied by individual merchants according to their capacity and once horses were collected to export to India, they were sent to Multan through Hormuz, via sea and from Multan they went on through land to the destination. Indian goods under luxury items category were able to get in to Russia through Caspian Sea since fifteenth Century, or even earlier. These Indian goods included dyes, spices, camphor, musk, rhubarb, soap, sugar, and precious stones (Kemp 1958: 09-10)

Times Past, a Russian journal has mentioned about the existence during the 10th Century of a trade route, via Volga and Caspian Sea to India from Central Asia. It has been argued by some Arab geographers that Russians were on good terms, in trade and others, with Khazars, and the latter has been identified as Indians by some other Arab scholars. The Arab geographers, such as Al- Bakri had gone further and argued that “They (the Russians) have customs like those of the Indians” (Levin & Vigasin 1984)

2.4 India's Inexhaustible Wealth

“The story of India the Rich’ was one of the popular book in Russia on India during 11th-12th Century, which contains the famous ballad of Dyuk Stepanovich.

According to the Russian legend, an Indian ruler, Stepanovich had gone to Kiev to meet its prince. The Kievan prince received him cordially and took all care of Stepanovich. On knowing few things about India from Stepanovich, the Russian prince became more eager to know about Indian wealth and its richness. All of this was explained to him by Stepanovich. In the book the Indian prince is described in all possible goodness, like attractive, fabulous, friendly and charitable, as opposed to earlier image of a negative character assigned in the folk poetry of earlier date in Russia (Kemp 1958: 01-02) According to the ballad, the Indian prince was allowed to trade in Kievan Rus, free of custom duties which many scholars says was true as far as Indian traders were concerned. (Kemp 1958: 4-5)

After knowing much about India, the perception which emerged about India was a land of plenty where there was an abundance of everything. Then after India was assigned soubriquets like “land of plenty and splendour”; “rich” or “bounteous”. Whether this privilege to Indian traders by the Kievan Rus was true or not may be debated but one needs to understand the connection between the image of India’s inexhaustible wealth and the subsequent freedom of Indian traders to trade custom free. It is possible that the prince of Kievan Rus might have thought of benefitting from the wealth of India through giving more access to Russian markets to Indian merchants.

Sometimes the Russian folk literatures made comparison between the two lands of India and Russia in terms of magnificence and glories. It was said that the Indian roads were beautiful and attractive as it were tiled with costly woods and some of them were even covered with sophisticated crimson cloths. It might be possible that the story of a traveller that the people of Hormuz covered their roads with a carpet to do away with high-wind dust was assigned to India. It is also written in the folk poetry that the roads in India were always clean as the sweepers were readily available all the time to clean it. However in Rus, according to the literature, it was only mud all along the way. It was said that the coarse bread which Russian prince ate was not eatable and the rough Vodka

of Rus was undrinkable. The Indian horses were far better in terms of its effectiveness as compared to the Russian horses (Kemp 1958: 03-04).

According to the ballad of Stepanovich, an agent was sent in India by the Kievan prince to verify the authenticity of the tale of India which was said by the Dyuk himself to the prince. The agent went to India and on his return explained that "... India lies there before them all shining in gold; here they have places made of white marbles; here they have columns cast out of metal; and the roofs are gilded with gold..." The agent further stressed that the Indian ruler held the largest in the world catalogue in his storehouse. to the extent that for any number of clerks working for forty years, it was not possible to create that much amount of records as was there in India. According to the agent, the amount of ink and the number of pages used by the Indian clerks for the Indian prince inventory, would not be bought even the Russian capital. Kiev was sold for money (Kemp 1958: 4-5).

2.5 The Indian Religion, its Culture and St. Thomas

India was mentioned in the mythical literatures of Russia, which gets inducted in the popular perceptions in the later literatures of Greek orthodox Slavs. Literatures pertaining to India and related to the Indian saints and hermits were translated and spread in Russia during 12th -13th centuries, foremost amongst them was the 'The acts of St. Thomas in India'. This book, 'The acts of St. Thomas in India' was translated from Greeks via Serbo-Slavonic in the 13th Century. These literatures helped to make it a common perception that it was in India that there lie a Christian empire, who were converted in to Christianity by St. Thomas, and which was different from the western tradition of Christianity. It was only because of this idea that India was a Christian land, that the famous Russian folk epic of Dyuk Stepanovich, the mother of the Indian ruler Dyuk Stepanovich was described as a Christian. This perception about India was different and in contrast to the earlier perception in the Russian folk poetry in which Indians were considered as Muslims or Pagans. (Kemp 1958: 09-10)

Illarion, the head of the Christian church of Kievan Rus wrote the first book in Russian with a reference of India in 11th Century, titled, 'The Sermon on Law and Grace'. The disciple of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas, converted the Indians in to Christian religion. That India was baptised by the disciple of Christ. The then Indian ruler Gondohermes was also converted in to Christianity by St. Thomas, and the latter had built a palace for the Indian ruler. One of the ancient accounts in Russia, 'the Chronicle of times past' mentions that the limits of the earth was wide as it was distributed in the form of nations all over the world as far as from Persia to India. The account mentions about the manners and customs of the Indians, particularly that of Brahmans (or Shramanas, as they were sometimes referred to). These Indians are described as possessing high virtue and full of piety. They did not eat meat, nor did they drink wine and also did not do any harm to anyone. Similarly the 'Chronographia' of John Malalas also talks about the piousness of Indian Brahmans as possessing good qualities (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 1-15)

During the medieval period, the Russians had no first hand information about India. Whatever knowledge they had about India was based on the Greeco-Roman literatures. Thus they formed their own image of India, and in this process various qualities associated with people not of India but some other land were attached to Indians. The people whose many righteous qualities were attached to Indians by the medieval Russian scholars were Christians; therefore it is argued that there was a 'Christianization of Indian Image'. All the Russian knowledge about India was provided a Christian flavour, and this knowledge was assigned to the Old Testament tradition of the Christians (Levin & Vigasin 1984)

Stephanites and Ihnelates were the two works which appeared in Rus during the 15th Century in which Indian stories included in the Indian Panchtantra were discussed. Panchatantra was translated from Sanskrit in to Pehlevi language for the first time by the Iranian, Sassanid emperor Khusro Anushirvan. From Pehlevi it was translated to Arabic, then to Greek language, and finally to South Slav in the fifteenth Century. The work was considered as an important book which could help people in correcting ills of life, i.e.

they could make their life better. It was “an essay on vital matters set forth in parables, by an Indian philosopher on the inspiration of his emperor.” The Russian version was engaging as well as instructive literature. Sometimes even the substances of the stories were changed to include things related with Christianity and to deplore greed and also to honour “those who suffered for Christ sake” were included in it (Levin & Vigasin 1984)

The Indians were not clear about the religion which Russians followed during the medieval period before Nikitin’s visits to India. Some believed that Russians were following Islam while for others they were Christians, and still for others they were Pagans. Confusion in this regard continued until Nikitin’s visit to India. The idea that they were Muslims was reinforced with Nikitin’s preference for calling himself a Muslim name as well as dressing predominantly in Muslim cloths, though he was doing out of a reason. Secondly the Russian Tsar always chose Muslim subjects of Russia as emissaries to the eastern lands. Shah Nawaz Khan had to say empathically in his work *Mirat-i-Aftab Nama* that Russians were Christians, showing that some doubt was still persisting among Indians about Russians religion. Murtaza Hussain’s work in the 13th Century, *Hadiqat ul Aqualim*, argued that the Russians were Muslims but were pork eaters. Different information about Russians and their religion kept on floating in the Indian minds, but ultimately it was the direct contact as in the case of Nikitin as well as information gathered from the west European trading companies that the Russians became clearer to them (Kemp 1958: 36-35).

2.6 The Wonders of India: Birds and Animals

The Indian prince, Prester John is alleged to have written a letter to the Greek ruler, Manuel Comenus, describing about the wonders of India. This letter was translated in to Russian in 13th Century which provided new impetus to the Russian understanding of India. The Russian version of the letter is titled as ‘The story of the Indian kingdom: of the great and famous state and all its wonders’. The letter has described about the wealth of India, where lived a wonderful bird who built her nest on the fifteenth Oak trees, where there were “wild elephants, unicorns, and aurochs with golden horns, camels and

all kind of ferocious beasts.” The letter alleged that in India people had six arms, had eyes in their chest and were winged; the river flow through the paradise, pepper grew in large volume, precious stones called emerald were found in abundance, there was plenty of everything and interestingly no thief and envious persons was found. A Palace was built exactly on the design of the Palace built by St. Thomas for Gondophernes (Levin & Vigasin 1984).

‘The story of the Phoenix’, was the work of Clement of Alexandria in 2nd -3rd Century, in which one can find the description of Indian birds and animals (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 14-15). The narrative of ‘The Story of the Phoenix’ goes like this, that there was a wonderful bird in India called, Phoenix, who lived in the “sun-city” (Heliopolis). The bird was able to live its life without consuming any food for close to five hundred years and dies only on the orders of the priests of the city (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 15-16) The book also contains some information about the Buddhism religion in India and in Bactria (including the territory of present day Tajikistan). Indian birds and animals were considered strange in the literature of Byzantium Empire and this notion penetrated in to Russia too. Apart from this work there were other works pertaining to India of early days which appeared in Russia. Some of them were the ‘Books of six Days’ of Basil the “Great” and the ‘Six Days of Ioannes’, by Exarch of Bulgaria (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 14-15). In ‘Physiologus’ we find amazing tales; of an “ant-lion” from India, which was half lion and half ant; of the Indian kite which helped in getting the “quick- birth” stone to reduce the pain of child-birth; of the legendary bird Ostrich from India; of the Indian stone, used by doctor to cure the pregnant mother etc. Whatever be the source and authenticity of these story related to India were, the important point is that it tells us about the wonders of India and her birds and animals, such as one horned rhinoceros & wild boar elephants as well as the advanced state of Indian medicine sector (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 15-16).

2.7 The Indian Society and the Brahmans

The reference of India's Varna system in which there is hymns related to the 'Purushshukta' is mentioned in the Russian book of religious nature called Dove-book (also called, Golubinaya Kniga in Russian). The book details about the origin of people of different strata of Russian society. Taking the same line of explanation as has been done in the Indian mythological Hindu tradition, it is argued in the Russian Dove Book that the rulers of Rus had emerged from the head of the Adam same as Brahmans of India did emerge from the head of 'Brahma'-the creator. Similarly the Russian nobles are said to be emerged from the sacred body of the Adam, same as in Indian case in which the Kshatriya were believed to have emerged from the shoulder of the 'Brahma'- the creator. Russian orthodox peasants were said to be originated from the feet of the Adam, same as 'Vaishya' of Hindu tradition were said to have originated from the feet of 'Brahma'. The information about Indian Varna system and the four fold division of society had reached Russia through various means, particularly from the intermediary literature of East as well as the west and also with the help of Iranian Machineans, Christian Heretics of first Century AD, through Byzantine literature and Bulgarian Bogomils (Levin & Vigasin 1984). It is interesting to note that the Russians were adopting Indian traditions, though it is the mythical customs, with less difficulty. The reason behind this is not too far to understand, as they were able to do so because the Slav-Russian population and the Aryans of India, had very close and long lasting ethnic, cultural and linguistic relations (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 17).

Apart from Dove-Book, other Russian religious account also mentions about India and the Indians. Indians, particularly the Brahmans were considered as a "blessed" people, and this notion was taken from the Byzantine and Old Bulgarian literatures of 10th to 13th Century. According to the narrative of 'The Narrative of Macarius of Rome', has explained about the blessed men of India who were living in a cave situated next to paradise, and they went naked, and had white hairs. The source for this narrative must have been the literatures of the late Greeco-Roman period with a description of

Brahmanas. The 'Narrative of Methodious of Patara' also gives information about the blessed Indians as well as the Romance of Alexander the Great, in India during his campaign. Yefrosin was a Russian writer of 15th Century who had composed 'A narrative of Rahmans and their amazing Life' in which he clearly explained the Piety of the Brahmanas (or Rahmans, as they were called) and their non greedy character. This he wrote at a time when Russian society was stuck with new malady, in which there was a constant dispute of the property of the religious institutions out of Russians greed. According to Yefrosin, Brahmanas had "neither iron nor temples, nor gold nor wine, they eat no meat and have no ruler, no buying, they live naked, eat a few vegetables, drink sweet water, ardently believe in god and pray continuously". Brahmanas devotion to god and their fasts for its cause was so popular in Russia that there was a common saying amongst Russians that, "Russians fast like Brahmanas. The 'Brahmanas' were associated with the righteousness quality of a human being (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 18-19)

2.8 Gautama Buddha and the Indian Polity

The work of 12th Century, 'The Romance of Barlaam and Joasaph' contains information about the Indian prince who had left all his worldly possession on seeing the miseries of his fellow being. He was Gautama Buddha, and his life has been clearly dealt in the account. It is the biography of Buddha, and the term 'Joasaph' of the title of the book, had come from the word "Bodhisattva" of the Buddhist tradition. Both Joasaph and Barlam was canonised through this literature, and the book argued for why and how there was a transformation in the life of Buddha. According to a poem based on the story of Buddha, once an Indian ruler, Gautama, accidentally met with the "blind, leprous and toothless venerable old man", and on knowing the miseries of that man, and knowing that every human had to suffer in some form or other, he decided to discard the established norms of society and put on a robe and went on to forests, never to return again to his palace. On a question as to why he was abandoning the worldly possession, he replied that, he was doing so for the eternal kingdom (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 16-17)

The Russian version of 'The story of Alexandria' which deals with the Alexander campaign in India appeared in Rus in 11th-12th Century. The book describes in detail about the Alexander campaign in India; his battle with the Indian ruler Porus; his interaction with the Indian Brahmans and other ascetics etc. The 15th Century version of 'The story of Alexandria' has included some more wonders of India, like that of an ant which could drag a horse, of people of India who had six legs and six arms etc.; that Brahmans lived in the middle of the ocean very close to angels and they were receiving the bliss of the God directly, that's why they were free from doing any sins, they were called "Naked-Sages" who had control over their passions (Levin & Vigasin 1984: 20-21)

In the Deccan literature, we find reference of 'Rus', in 1350, in the verses of Isami's Futuh as-Salatin. The 16th Century literature, Haft Iqlim of Amin Ahmad Razi has discussed about the people of Slavic origin in great detail. It talks about their customs, religion and trading activities and the Russian items in which they traded such as Russian Skins, Flax and linen. Haft Iqlim was completed in India by Razi, in which he had said that few Russians during the medieval period had adopted the Islam religion. Ghazi Malik (or Mohammad bin Tughlaq) of Tughlaq dynasty of Delhi Sultanate defeated Khusrau Khan of Khalji dynasty of the Delhi sultanate with the help of Russian soldiers. The Russian soldiers in the army of the sultans of Delhi may have been slaves or fugitives from Tatars, or the Muslim converts, who fought for defending the cause of Islam and to restore Muslim kingdom. Amir Khusrau has mentioned about the Russian soldiers in hi Tughlaq Nama, he said that "his (Gazi Malik's) army was small, not big but very skilful and experienced. The horsemen were mostly from the upper regions. They were neither Indians nor Hindus (but) heroes of the Turks and Mongols, Greeks and Russians. Like a gyrfalcon in the battle of hens" (Kemp 1958: 35-36).

2.9 Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be said that the discussion in Russia about India before fifteenth Century included topics such as the nature of Indian polity during the time of

Alexander's invasion in India as well as afterwards; the religion of Indians after St. Thomas baptised the whole of India as well as the then Indian ruler Gondophernes (as it was believed); about the pious Brahmans and their noble behaviour; the slave trade; the caste System of India; trade and commercial exchange between India and Russia; items or goods in demand in each land etc.

2.9.1 Religion and Culture

The popular perception about Indian religion in Russia was that, till the first Century A.D. India was a land of pagans, but it was St. Thomas- the pious Christian, who went to India in the 1st Century A.D. and baptised Indians and converted them in to Christianity. Thomas also converted the then Indian ruler Gondophernes in to Christianity and later built palace for the Indian ruler. Since there was no direct contact between Russia and India, some scholars believe that in Russia, it was "Christianization of Indian image" that was done.

Russians had knowledge about the Indian prince who abjured his throne and became an ascetic after seeing the miseries of an old human being. He was Gautama Buddha. It was also believed by the Russians that India was a land of wonderful things, in which birds with unusual and unheard characteristics lived, and animals such as wild boar elephants, one horned rhinoceros, unicorns, camels and ferocious beasts were found here. The ferocious beast were half lion and half human, the idea about whom must have taken from the episode of Hindu mythical literature related to Prahalad and Hiranyakashyap, in which the lord Vishnu had to come to earth from heaven to kill Hiranyakashyap- the demon, who was disturbing the pious devotee Prahalad. It was believed that the Indian people had six arms and eyes in their chest. The description seems more close to the Hindu god Hanuman who had the same attributes.

2.9.2 Polity and Society

It was believed that in India plenty of gold were found which were used to decorate the palaces of the prince, made of white marbles. Despite this enormous wealth neither thieves nor envious persons were found in India. Heavy metals were used to build the palaces and roofs were adorned with gold. The Indian prince Dyuk Stepanovich administrative structure, as has been recorded in Russian ballads was most extensive. The presence of such a large inventory imply that the prince had maximum control of his empire, and it was more of a Centralised character as the kingdom or empire over which he was ruling was able to collect that much of revenue necessary to maintain the then largest inventory in the world and to maintain that number of clerks necessary to maintain such a large indexing. This shows nothing but the excess of wealth possessed by the prince himself through various means, otherwise he would not have been able to maintain such a large set up and could not have used that much of ink required for writing those directories.

The Indian society was divided in to four parts. The four fold division of Indian society comprises Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The Brahmans or the learned class originated from the head of the creator, Brahma. The Kshatriya or the noble class originated from the shoulder or the body of the creator. Vaishya originated from the thigh and Shudra from the feet of the Brahma. The Indian customs particularly that related with the Brahmans were very much talked about in Russia. The Brahmans were believed to be the men of high virtue, who possessed good qualities and were full of piety. The Brahmans did not do harm to any of the creatures and did neither eat meat nor drink wine. The Brahmans were blessed people, who had no greed left. Every righteous quality was attached to Brahmans, who were always devoted to god and their fast for god was so popular in Russia that Russians used to say that he or she fasts like Brahmans.

2.9.3 Trade and Economy

Though formal encounter between Russian and Indian did happen much later however Indian goods were reaching Russian territory through intermediary markets as well as merchants. According to one source, Indian and Russian merchants were living together in Volga regions in 10th Century, which was their first encounter. After merchants of India and Russia encountered each other in Volga region, it was the turn of Russian slaves who began to enter Indian territories. Russian slave were brought to India. Indian sultans during Delhi Sultanate had Russian slaves in their armies. At one instance it is mentioned that Muhamad bin Tughlaq of Tughlaq dynasty defeated Khusrau Khan of Khalji dynasty with the help of Russian slaves as army men.

The Russian goods which were reaching India and were in demand here were items such as furs, wax, honey, skins, linen, Flax and wheat. Russian metal wares, Russian horses found in the steppe area as well as the tusk of Walrus were also in demand in Indian market. The medieval Indian scholar Amir Khusrau has mentioned about the blades made in Russia, which were so flexible that it could be bent in to two fold without any break in it. The Indian goods which were in reaching Russian markets were Indian spices, textiles, silk, dyes, rice, musk, sugar, camphor, rhubarb, precious metals, jewelleries and medicines. India was a land of plenty where spices such as pepper grew in bulk and precious stones such as emerald were found in abundance. The Indian medicine was in an advanced position than the contemporary other lands. India was considered to be a land of inexhaustible wealth, where everything was available in plenty. The abundance of everything in India made the Indian prince more generous and charitable.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGION AND CULTURE

RELIGION AND CULTURE

3.1.1 The Religious- Cultural niceties of 15th Century India

When any traveller visits an alien land, he carries along with him a baggage of his cultural settings from where he belongs to. Thus it is often seen that the prejudice of the traveller gets reflected in his account. The same happened with western travellers to India, as and when they encountered with Indians they called the latter backward, uncivilized and barbarous. This does not hold true with Nikitin. Nikitin encountered Indians and recorded about them as he saw, without putting their cultural settings in negative light, and without asserting superiority of Russians.

Afanasy Nikitin had come to India in 1468 and stayed here for four years. In those four years which he spent in India, he encountered with many things and recorded them in his account, "Voyages beyond three Seas". He has recorded everything he encountered with and gave his own impression of 15th Century India. Unlike contemporary western travellers to India, Nikitin recorded about the Indian religion and custom as he saw, without adding his own prejudice to it and without portraying Indian customs in negative light.

Before analysing the religious-cultural aspects of 15th Century India, it is necessary to evaluate Nikitin's account in the background of the local situation prevailing in Russia from where Nikitin had come. Nikitin had come from Tver, Russia where the fanatical church and superstitious beliefs created by them had important role to play in the day to day life of Russians. Despite this Nikitin's account is devoid of any prejudice against those religious practices of alien land with which he was completely unaware of. The account can be considered as one of the early secular books, as secular elements began to be included in other contemporary literatures (Kemp 1958: 16-18).

In Junar, Nikitin encountered with the dilemma of converting to Islam, which he has accounted in detail in his travelogue "Voyage beyond three seas". He was asked to choose between accepting conversion to Islam or fine of one thousand gold coins in addition to the loss of stallion which he brought to India to sell and to make profit (Maxwell, 2006: 245-246). Nikitin has brought a stallion with him to earn some extra money by selling it in the Indian market, as he learnt that good variety of horses were in great demand in India because of its unavailability there. But Nikitin was unfortunate when his stallion was taken away from him by Asad Khan who was the commander of Junar, as the latter was impressed by the quality of Nikitin's stallion. On knowing that Nikitin was not a Muslim but a Russian, Asad Khan ordered Nikitin to convert to Islam, if the latter wanted his stallion back. Asad Khan also promised to reward Nikitin with one thousand gold pieces on accepting the faith of the commander. Failing to do so Asad Khan said that not only the stallion of Nikitin would not be returned but Nikitin would be penalized to pay one thousand gold pieces to the noble, for not following the order. The commander also set a time limit to accomplish the order, which was four days, and coincidentally that time limit ended on the "Saviours day, which was the last day of the fasts of assumption of the Most Holy Virgin" (Nikitin 1857: 11-12). Nikitin was disturbed with his encounter with Asad Khan and wondered what to do next. He was chalking out plans to get out of this trouble and in this process the final day had arrived.

On the final day when the time limit set by Asad Khan was to expire, a man called Mahmud from Khorasan came to Junar. Nikitin called on Mahmud, and requested him to talk to Asad Khan on his behalf. Mahmud rode into the city of Junar and met the commander. "The Lord took pity on Nikitin and did not let him perish in an alien land of infidels" (Nikitin 1857: 11-12). Nikitin was saved and was also given back his Stallion. Nikitin was also allowed to continue with his own religion, and was exempted to pay one thousand pieces of gold. Finally Nikitin had to sell his stallion at Bidar that did not fetch him a handsome amount which he hoped for. Disturbed by this incident Nikitin advised his fellow followers of the Christian faith in Russia to abjure their faith and adopt the faith of Muslims i.e. Islam before entering into the land of India (Nikitin 1950: 16-17).

After some time during his journey in India, Malik Khan also forced Nikitin to convert to the Islam, and abjure the Christian religion. But Nikitin was able to convince Malik Khan. not to force him to accept Islam (Nikitin 1950: 44).

Nikitin perceived that foreigners were forcefully converted to Islam in India Thus for Nikitin, it was a general rule that foreigners coming to India were forced to convert, if the visitors wants to live a happy life in India. that's why he advised his fellow Russians to invoke Islam before entering India.

3.1.2 The Conversion debate of fifteenth Century India

Nikitin's episode with Asad Khan on the question of conversion to Islam illustrates that in the pre-modern societies particularly in India. conversion was often to be chosen as a choice between financial benefits and ruin. This also points to the issue. whether the choice of individuals to upgrade spiritual happiness did matter while opting for conversion to Islam. Nikitin's account also brings forth the greater effort for Islamization on a wider scale as well as the conversion on the trade routes of fifteenth Century. Till now scholars have focussed much of their attention to the mass conversion during the pre modern period which was both on account of individual urge as well as the material inducements along with the promise of social and political upward mobility. Not much attention has been given to analyse the individual choice of conversion, either out of individual urge for spiritual upliftment, or by force. or else by benefits in different forms. This gap has been fulfilled by individual accounts of contemporary period such as that of Nikitin, which provides opportunities for historians to contextualise the whole issue of conversion on individual scale and finally to see pattern of mass conversion in the pre modern period. This individual study would also help to understand the cultural assimilation of different groups in a definite historical locale over a period of time. The individual case study would also help scholars to clearly demarcate between conversions to Islam out of the motives of material gains, out of spiritual upliftment and out of secular considerations.

However, Richard Bulliet advises not to rely on the individual account of travellers as far as the information about conversion in the pre modern period is concerned, simply because for him they are mostly inaccurate in a sense that they are either biased or totally concocted. For Jerry Bentley, travel accounts are problematic in nature. He believes in the notion of conversion through social assimilation which constituted high percentage of total social conversions (Maxwell, 2006: 245-248).

The scholars of 15th Century, has engaged with the problematic of Nikitin's conversion to Islam in India, however there is no unanimity among them. The debate is on Nikitin's conversion to Islam, partly or fully. Some of them argue that he converted only partly, for others he converted fully and still for others he never converted to Islam.

According to Alexander V. Riasanovsky, Nikitin was a devout Christian who began and ended his account with a religious prayer. It is interesting to note here that the account ended in a Muslim prayer rather than a Christian one. Despite losing the religious books which he brought on his journey, he always tried to remember sacred days of his religion. At one instance while celebrating Easter in India, he fasted and feasted with Muslims, but did not change his religion. Despite encountering people of other religion and of other land, Nikitin never showed any signs of bigotry through his account (Riasanovsky 1961).

Nikitin was in an alien land, India, where out of compulsion he had to travel as a Muslim after he had encountered Asad Khan in Junar. He used languages other than Russian in his account, such as Arabic, Persian, and Turkish to provide information to its readers. He might have used foreign language to show to its Russian readers samples of foreign language and since he had to portray himself as a Muslim, therefore he used some Muslim prayers and text and incorporated them in his account (Kemp 1958: 18-19).

According to Marry J. Maxwell, Nikitin had to convert to Islam partly and this conversion took place in stages and in degrees. He did not find any problem in Persia while following his religious beliefs but he had to confront in India a different situation in

which he found himself in isolation. Instead of converting to the polytheistic religion of Hindus, monotheistic rule of Islam attracted him, and through this religion he could also fulfil his desire and requirement of communal worship. He started with adopting Muslim dress then language and finally the religion itself. He finally began practicing Muslim religious practices. As far as the material and other benefits attached with conversion to Islam is concerned it is known that Muslims in India during the fifteenth Century were the privileged class and were in higher position. They were well established in every walk of life whether it was politics, society and Economy. Since Nikitin had commercial motives to earn more and more benefits, then aligning and partnership with Muslims was more beneficial for him. Thus he went for conversion (Maxwell 2006: 264-266).

All non Muslims in the Bahamani Kingdom during the fifteenth Century had to pay Jizya that was one more reason that he opted for Islam. He was upset that “All toll free goods are for the Muslim land only..... But we (Russians) shall not be allowed to take our goods free of toll. And the toll is high.” It was known to Nikitin that while returning to Russia from India, he had to pay additional taxes on the mid way ports of Aden and Hormuz, since he was a non Muslim and the ports were controlled by Muslims (Maxwell: 2006: 253-254).

Nikitin maintained a Muslim appearance by clothing when he met with native Hindus at Bidar. Thus he had to reveal his identity as a Russian, and said to them his Muslim name, Khoja Yusuf Khorasani. With Clothing according to K N Chaudhury⁵ was attached social identity of an individual in 15th Century India. He followed the religious practices of Ramadan. His main concern was to maintain his monotheistic beliefs and practices than anything else. Interestingly he had used creolized Arabic not Russian while writing his prayers in his account (Maxwell 2006: 256-257).

⁵ K N Chaudhury, *Asia Before Europe: Economy and civilization of Indian Ocean from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 156

Gail Lenhoff argued in 1979 that “Afanasy Nikitin did not keep the faith, but converted to Islam”⁶ which the Russian scholar J. S. Lure, rejected as groundless. However certain things point in affirmation to Nikitin’s conversion, though partly, to Islam. These were Nikitin’s encounter with Asad Khan and Malik Khan and the subsequent pressure built upon him, material benefits he thought he would get in terms of better prospects for more profits in a land where Muslims as a class were dominant in every sphere, Nikitin thought it wise to convert partly(Maxwell: 2006: 253-254).

B. A. Uspenskij considers that it was the impure land of India itself which was responsible for Nikitin’s unusual behaviours; otherwise he was a true orthodox Christian who believed in one god and showed his respect wherever required. For A. I. Klivanov Nikitin’s unusual foreign passages in his account suggest that he was a follower of those heretics who did not believe in the trinity of god and who were in turn inspired by Jews. J. S. Lure rejected the heretic’s theory and suggested that Nikitin was a true follower of monotheistic beliefs who considered other monotheistic religion as equally true (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

When Nikitin was in Bidar, he met with the native Hindu population with whom Nikitin became familiar to such an extent that he revealed his true religion to them, that he was a Russian and a believer of Jesus Christ. That he was not a Muslim, as appeared from his cloths, but a Christian. That he his original name was Afanasy Nikitin not the Muslim name Khoja Yusuf Khorasani. He became so intimate to them that Hindus from then on did not keep secret anything from Nikitin like their food habits, commercial skills, religious practices and prayers and most importantly their wives which they otherwise hide from foreigners or strangers (Nikitin 1857:15-16).

Nikitin revealed to the Hindus in Bidar that he was not a Muslim but a Christian. That to Lenhoff & Martin meant that till then Nikitin was hiding this fact from people

⁶ Lenhoff, “Beyond Three Seas,” p. 434.

whom he met on his journey after an encounter with Asad Khan. If it was so then what made him more open to Hindus and reveal to them that he was not a Muslim as he appeared to be. They also questioned the Christian credentials of Nikitin as he had opted for “Khoja” and “Khorasani”⁷ as a title in his name which to these scholars means any non Indian Muslims who had visited to Mecca. Therefore Lenhoff and Martin suspects that Nikitin had also made a trip to Mecca, which means he had converted to Islam (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

Nikitin had advised his fellow Russians to invoke Mohammed before coming to India as to ensure financial benefits it was necessary to do so. This may be considered as a general advice by Nikitin to Russian merchants who could think of going the Nikitin had gone. After encountering with Asad Khan Nikitin maintained Muslim identity through his cloths, his talks and through invoking Muslim prayers wherever needed. Nikitin had by now convinced that in Bahamani kingdom where all the privileged class who controlled the wealth were Muslims it was necessary to maintain such appearance as this could ensure for him lesser financial burden as Hindus and Christians in India were subjected to greater financial burden through taxation which Muslims were exempted from. He thought it was necessary to be in tune with the social class who controlled majority of economic resources and who were mostly Muslims. Through this harsh reality of forceful conversion with which he personally encountered with either he was making a serious critique of the situation wherein non Muslims in India were subjected to go through or it may be that he was equally considering the idea of invoking Islam so that he could also earn more profits as other Muslims were making. Nikitin was upset for not able to observe religious feasts and fasts of his own religion, and slowly he was unable to grasp on his own religion (Lenhoff & Martin 1989)

⁷ Most of the nobles in the Bahamani Kingdom were men from Khorasan, a province in Iran. This group also included men from Afghanistan, Turkey and non Indian Muslims who were part of the administrative structure of the Bahamanids. Thus Nikitin tried to associate himself with them so as to escape any difficulties further. In S. M. Ikram Muslim civilization in India, Ed. by Ainslee T. Embrie, New York 1964, pp. 109-111

In the year 1470, coincidentally the festival of Lent of the orthodox Christian and the festival of Ramadan of Muslims fall on the same date i.e. 4th March. The festival of lent in 1470 continued for forty eight days while Ramadan continue for almost one month, and in 1470 it went until 2nd April. During lent it was required by the observer of orthodox Christian faith that they should refrain from eating meat as well as the dairy products, fish, sugar and certain kind of oil. For Muslims, during Ramadan one should just not eat during daytime, and they can eat anything in night. What Nikitin did in 1470 was that he combined both the orthodox requirement of his own religion to abstain from meat and Ramadan requirement of not having food in daytime. He fasted during daytime along with Muslims and refrained from taking meat and other items forbidden in orthodox Christian religion during night. Fasting in Ramadan was just one of the necessities for him which he had to do. He also did the other requirements to be a Muslim. This includes using “Khoja” in his name, which means he had made a journey to Mecca. He advised in his account to his Russian fellow, not to go to Mecca as Christians would be forcefully converted there. He also believed in other principles to become a Muslim that “there was no god but Allah, and Prophet Mohammed is the apostle of God. It is necessary to analyse the prayers in Nikitin’s account. There are eleven prayers in Nikitin’s account addressed to god. The first and only one prayer which is a short prayer is addressed to Christ, in Slavic Church, which a Russian orthodox Christian was required as per the then dominant discourse of orthodox Christian religion. The three prayers are in mixture of Slavic church and Creolized Arabic. The remaining seven prayers are in completely in creolized Arabic. One of his Creolized Arabic prayer is “Allah exists, Allah, Thou art the merciful, Thou! Oh, Thou, Allah” The other prayer in Creolized Arabic reads “I pray to God that He will protect me, Allah is Lord; Allah is just; Allah, oh Thou. Allah is great; Allah is merciful; Allah is munificent; Allah is the merciful God; Allah is the munificent God. Thou art the only God” (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

To J. S. Lure, the prayers were unbiased in terms of its lingo and substance, and Nikitin did not convert to Islam but he was simply portraying himself in an environment

where that was needed. That it was a practical decision to behave in a manner which served his interest, but in reality he was a true orthodox Christian. Lure further comments that Nikitin actually was going through a mental exercise in which he was trying to find out whether any monotheistic religion could have the monopoly of knowing truth. But he finally concluded that only sincere prayers do matter not the particular religion. Had it been the case of "peculiar monotheistic syncretism" with Nikitin, then he would have edited his own text as this was considered a heresy in his native place, but he did not do so and he was frank in writing everything without distorting facts. Moreover to become a Muslim, one was supposed to go through the rite of circumcision, which Nikitin had not gone. And for Muslims, one who had not gone through this rite, how can they accept him to be a true Muslim. And most importantly Nikitin going through this rite would not have been tolerated in his native land, as this was considered an act of apostasy for which Nikitin would have executed, which Nikitin was well aware of as a resident of Tver (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

The reasoning of J. S. Lure is based on incongruous and uncorroborated supposition and it is simply erroneous. Nikitin continued writing prayers in Creolized Arabic even when he was out of the danger of Muslim environment in Smolensk, where he died. There is a debate among scholars on medieval India over the conversion to Islam. The argument that conversion to Islam was made through violence and circumcision has been portrayed by Hindus through their accounts during 19th and 20th Century. Muslim scholars of the period do not point toward conversion through circumcision. There is evidence of forceful conversion in early medieval India, given by Murray Titus, when Mohammed Kasim began invasion of India with violent conversion of the Brahmins of Debul in 711 A.D. Moreover it was not necessary to go through the rite of circumcision to be converted to Islam, as according to Richard Bulliet "Conversion to Islam in the Middle Ages was somewhat different from conversion to other religions. There was, for example, no rite comparable to baptism. The verb 'aslama' meaning 'he submitted [to God],' is used to describe the procedure of becoming a Muslim, but where the verb occurs, there is no elaboration to indicate the real content of the act. Religious

treatises speak of the simple utterance of the confession of faith, the Shabada, as the defining characteristic of adherence to Islam". Bulliet further noted, while "circumcision was unquestionably performed in at least some instances . . . it is rarely mentioned". Even Niccolo de Conti, who visited India from 1419 A.D. to 1444 A.D., in his confession that he was forced to convert in India did not mention circumcision, which points to the fact, according to Bulliet that in medieval India conversion was a trouble-free and easy phenomena. The conversion was simply an individual phenomenon in which the newly converted individual finds himself attached to a new religious community, leaving the old one. Then the identity of that individual becomes synonymous to the new religious community, which means that the social identity of an individual was decided by his religious identity (Lenhoff & Martin 1989)

The final prayer by which Nikitin concluded his account is written in Creolized Arabic which is, "The Lord knows the rest. Allah, our protector, the all-knowing. Amen. In the name of Allah, the compassionate and merciful. Allah is great! Benevolent Lord! [There is no God] except Allah! God is great! Jesus is the spirit of Allah. Peace is upon him. Allah is great. Ah. There is no other God except Allah. Allah is our protector. Praise is to Allah. Thanks God, the one who opens [the way]. In the name of Allah the compassionate and merciful. This is my solemn oath: there is no other God than He". This leaves no one in doubt about the state of his mind who had thanked "Allah" for helping him reach his native land. No other text of Medieval Russia ends with Muslim prayers, thus it was unprecedented, and therefore Nikitin wrote this passage in foreign language so as not to get deciphered by his contemporary people. Thus it is no body's guess that he converted to Islam, and abandoned his religion (Lenhoff & Martin 1989)

3.1.3 The Hindu Religion and the Idol worship

The Hindus believed in the cult of Adam⁸ and worship idols which they believed were members of Adam's race. Each creeds in Hinduism, which were eighty four in numbers believed in idol worshipping. Persons of different creeds did not eat, drink or marry together. Most of them were vegetarian while non vegetarians ate meat, egg and fish but none of them ate beef (Nikitin 1857: 16).

Nikitin was talking about caste system in India, in which members of upper caste did neither marry nor eat with people of lower caste. Upper caste people, even now in some places in India do not drink water touched by people of lower caste, though untouchability is illegal now in India. Hindus consider cow sacred, so they did not eat beef, though this sacredness is not uniform as people of different caste in Hinduism ate beef.'

On a high altitude, was situated the Hindus sacred religious place which was their Jerusalem, as was Mecca to Muslims and Jerusalem to Christians. The place was called 'Parvata'⁹ by Hindus, which Nikitin called as an "idol house" or 'Bootkhana', as there were kept many idols worshipped by the Hindus. It took one month for Nikitin and his Hindu companions to reach 'Parvata' where a fair was held every year¹⁰ for five days. The architecture of the idol house was magnificent and the buildings were made up of stones. On the walls of these buildings were carved the deeds of gods. The area of this place was around half the size of Nikitin's native place Tver. The Hindu were depicted

⁸There was no cult of Adam among Hindus. Possibly Nikitin had heard the name of Atman, believed to be the Supreme soul by the Hindus. Perhaps it was Manu, the Indic name of the first name. Gregory Belkov, as 'The Journey beyond three seas of Afanasii Nikitin in A.D. 1466-1472'. M.A. Thesis, Canada, the University of British Columbia.

⁹ Parvata or Sri parvat is now more generally known as Sri Sailam. Sri Sailam is situated in the Kurnool District of Andhra Pradesh, India.

¹⁰ Sri Sailam has been deserted since 1565, when the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar was destroyed by the Muslims.

through the idols in different forms like gods completely in human form; gods with human body but elephant nose; gods with human body with monkey face whose tail was rising above him, and god depicted as a ferocious beast (Nikitin 1950: 28).

According to the Hindu religion, the complete human form could have been the lord Shiva or the lord Vishnu, the god with elephant nose could be the lord Ganesha, the god with monkey face may had been the lord Hanuman, and the god as ferocious beast could have been the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as 'Narasinh Avatar' who was half lion and half man and who had come to earth to free the world from the tyranny of the demon Hiranyakashyap.

3.1.4 Tradition of organising fairs at famous religious Centres

At Parvata was held a fair every year for five days in which people from every corner of the India came, to worship their gods and his doings depicted through the idols and to celebrate. The number of people who visited this place was twenty millions per year which went on sometimes to hundred millions. People come here and travel in this area in a cart driven by ox, on whose neck there were three hundred bells tied. The Hindus called ox their "father" while they called cow their "mother". People who visited this place shave their head and beard in a ritual and they had to pay as a mark of respect for god, one silver coin i.e. one tenth of a Tanga if they have visited by foot and four silver coins were charged from those who had visited this place by horse (Nikitin 1950: 29). The idols were sometime completely naked while some of them were half covered (Nikitin 1857: 17). In front of a god was carved in black stone a huge ox whose hoof was kissed by the worshippers who then scatter flowers on idol (Nikitin 1950: 30).

Nikitin had found similarity between the Russian and the Indian mode of prayer, as both of them prayed in same manner. They prayed in eastern direction with their folded hands which they put on their head after raising them in air. One more ways of prayer of the Hindus was lying down on the floor with folder hand and face facing the ground but not similar to the Russians mode of prayer. It was interesting for Nikitin to

find that Hindu gods were always kept in eastern directions and the rooms in which they were kept had no doors and that too in eastern direction (Nikitin 1857: 17-18).

There was a bird in fifteenth Century India which was considered ominous as if that bird which flies in night sits on anybody's house then the member of that family who own that house was certain to die. Attempts to kill that bird were in vain as it flashed fire from her beak (Nikitin 1857:13-14). Snakes as long as fourteen feet crawling on the streets of Bidar was common scene, and there was a monkey prince in Bidar who had a huge army of monkey and all of them lived in the forest (Nikitin 1950: 21-22).

As far as Nikitin's observation about the bird is concerned, this is a superstition which is prevalent even today in some quarters of India. As the superstitions have its own course of events and history, this one is no exception, thus this superstition might have come down to us from that period in which Nikitin visited India or may be much before. The information in Nikitin's account about the monkeys seems not to be a fact of the day but a deduction from the popular perception amongst natives drawn from the myths and legends as the Epic Ramayana tells us that Sugriv who helped the god Rama during the latter's war with Ravana, was a monkey who had several monkeys in his army

When a Hindu died, his/hr body were burnt and not buried, then after the ashes were thrown into the water. There were people in 15th Century India who used to rub the ashes of the dung cake on their faces, on their bodies and made various images¹¹ like that of animals out of those ashes on their faces. The cow dung was also used as a fuel to prepare food in the families (Nikitin 1857).

The practice of cremating the dead body is still prevalent in Hindu custom, and after cremation, the remaining ashes are thrown into the rivers, which is a major cause of pollution in today's India too.

¹¹ The cast marks were worn on twelve regions of the body, the most prominent being on the forehead, from the hairline down between the eyebrows.

3.1.4 The Religious-Cultural conduct of Indians in Astrakhan: The Russian perceptions

Russians came in contact with Indians residing in Astrakhan during 17th and 18th Century which helped them to be familiar with the different aspects of Indian religion and culture. Conversion was not uncommon in Russian territory, as many Indians living in Astrakhan converted to the Orthodox Christian religion, with the permission of the Russian state for which the state looked after their well being. The reasons behind those conversions of foreigners in Russian empire differed from individual to individual, but mostly they were induced by the economic and social benefits bestowed as a result of conversion.

For private reasons, an Indian merchant residing in Astrakhan petitioned to Russian state to go to St. Petersburg along with his priest Balram, which he was allowed. An Indian merchant Matu Danilev was allowed to go to St. Petersburg without goods for trade, along with his priest Balram and other colleagues for personal reason¹² (Gopal 1988: 146- 168). An Indian trader named Aluddin, son of Ayub, had come to Balkh for trade in 1643. He traded in Balkh for two years and while he was returning home he was arrested by Bukharans with which stated, his pathetic life. Ultimately he managed to reach Astrakhan and petitioned to the Russian authority to allow him to convert to Christianity as he did not want to remain in his old faith. He was converted to the Christian religion and was sent to the 'Amanat House'¹³. He was to be served food and other essential items in the 'Amanat house' at the expense of State which was to be recorded (Gopal 1988: 63-65). In a petition to the Russian Tsar Prince Aleksei Mikhailovich on 7th November 1675, an Indian resident of Astrakhan, Jukka requested the Russian authority to allow him to become Slavic Christian, as he had completed the

¹². This information gives us the benign nature of the Russian state which does not interfere with foreigners personal religious matters.

¹³ This was an Indian house made particularly for Indian residents in Astrakhan. See, Surendra Gopal, Indians in Russia in the 17th and 18th Century.

pre requirement, as had been ordered, of spending at least six weeks in Spaskii monastery (Gopal 1988: 96). Nerotam was an Indian Hindu residing in Astrakhan who wanted to convert to the orthodox Christianity. He was initiated to the new faith and was given material assistance from the state, as he had asked for it. He was sent to Nevskii Monastery where he was kept for some time to learn tenants of his new religion, where he was give a new name, Feodor (Gopal: 167-168).

Ram Chand residing in Astrakhan had asked the Russian authority to allow him to cremate the body of his deceased kin, which he was allowed, but out of the city's boundary at a designated place. The guards at the Indian house were asked not to make any trouble in taking out the dead body (Gopal 1988: 110). Indians who were cremating the dead body were not liked by the Russians in Astrakhan. They complained to the Russian authority that these Indian Hindus were causing much damage to the inhabitants by burning the deceased body and not burying it. Hindus burnt their kin's departed body and threw them in the river, and the remaining ashes were thrown in the air. They should not be allowed to execute their illegal Hindu customs, as they showed disrespect to the Christian religion (Gopal 1988: 114-115).

There was a magnificent mosque in Soltaniyeh, Persia, in which the remains of Sultan Muhammad and his son were kept. In that mosque the grills fitted to it was brought from India as a tribute of seven years from the Indian ruler by the Shah of Persia^{14 15} (Kotov 1959: 12-13).

Indians followed different religion; some of them were Muslims, while others were those for whom sun was an important god therefore they prayed to it every day as

¹⁴ According to Abdullah Chagatai of Lahore, a great authority on Muslim monuments. The tomb of Khan Jahan Telangani at Nizamuddin (Delhi) was an exact copy of this one at Soltaniyeh. See P M Kemp, Russian travellers, to India and Persia, Delhi: Jeewan Prakashan.

¹⁵ Telangani was the prime minister or Wazir of Delhi Sultanate during Feroz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88). He died in 1369. Ibid. Kemp...

the sun rises. Some of the Indians covered their face with yellow colours from forehead to the nose. Indians did not bury their dead, instead burn them and the ashes were thrown in the air. They considered that the custom of burning the dead was to help the deceased one to reach to the heaven and not the hell. These Indians were Krishna devotees who were weak and dark and whose personality was not sturdy (Kotov 1959: 36-37).

3.1.5 The Religious & Cultural milieu of the 18th Century India

3.1.5.1 People, Religion, Customs, and Indian cities

Philip Yefremov had observed that religion of the country of Tibet came from Hindustan, whose inhabitants were regarded as the ancient peoples, who communicated laws, science and arts to the greater part of Asia. Hindustan gave to Tibet their first knowledge of monastic rule, and India introduced in Tibet her religion in half a Century after the birth of Christ. Up to that time the Tibetans were of the Shaman belief, found at that time among the savage people of northern Asia. The religion of the Indians, which perhaps very long ago diverged from the ancient Brahmin religion, got its present form through a combination with Shamanism and the various notions of its followers. The proof that Lama Religion originated from India was seen in many of the rituals and mythological teachings, differing little from the Brahmanism. Certain similarities between devotional books by which religious services were conducted in Tibet or those written in the sacred or Sanskrit language also clearly shows that the law of the Lama came from that of Brahmins. This doctrine has been spread over large parts of Asia besides Tibet, especially in China (Yefremov 1959: 76-77).

In Delhi, mosques were made of stone and were magnificent although the Indian temples were simple. Many of the Indians were of the Muslim faith or the idolatrous, but there was also a section of them who were Christians. A very considerable number deified the sun, moon, stars, cows, idols and other things and make offerings to them three times a month. Sun worshippers waded into the river up to their knees when the sun rose and recite a prayer gazing at it and splashing water towards it; sometimes they

looked at it, pray and throw some earth three times. The cow worshippers neither kill her for food nor ate beef at all, but keep cattle only for the sake of milk and butter; when a cow dies they remove the skin and make shoes of it. If a person of some other creed intends to kill one they redeem it and if they have no means to buy it, they weep. The worshippers of idols and demons placed them for the most parts at cross roads. They mark out a circle beside the river for the family, plaster it with cow dung, thinned with water and put a cauldron in the centre: as soon as this place dries they all sit round on the line and cooked their food, using the same dung instead of wood fuel, and when the food was cooked they eat it and they go to the idols and pour butter or colour dissolved in water or sometimes only water over their heads. The food was cooked in the same way as in the home. If anybody comes in to ask something while the food is being cooked he renders their food unclean: they gave it away to the stranger demanding what it has cost them in money. In case of non payment the court itself will order that person to pay if the stranger knows this custom. They bum the bodies of the dead besides a river and then sweep the bones and the ashes in to the water. It sometimes happens that they may bring the sick man who is scarcely able to move or speak to the river and place him on the ground beside the water. An old man or it may be the wife, son or other relative takes hold of the sick man's head and repeatedly souses it until he gasps, after which they push him right into the water. When the water rises with the sea tide the bodies float on its surface and with the ebb they are carried by the current down to the sea (Yefremov 1959: 85-89).

Rafail Danibegov started his journey in India, and went to Mannar, where he saw that instead of all wise creator of all creatures, the inhabitants of the city of Mannar, situated on the shores of the Indian Ocean, worshipped cow and water. They walked without putting slippers, counting it in their ignorance that it was an unforgivable sin to wear the hide of beasts on their feet. Thanks to their strong constitution that very many of them live to a great age. They did not kill any animals for food, regarded them as similar to themselves, and therefore to use them as food would, according to their ideas, be the same as eating human flesh. Hence fruit and vegetables constituted their sole diet.

Pondicherry was formerly in the possession of French but was held by the English. It was built on the plans of European towns. A fair part of the residents were French who were called permanent or old population. The natural inhabitants of Pondicherry were neither Muslims nor Christians, but heathen (Danibegov 1959: 103-104).

In the famous city of madras the European Christian lived nearest to the sea shore, while in the centre of the city lived the natives who in general were black skinned and idol worshippers. On the side towards the sea this town had a very fine fortress which the inhabitants called fort St. George. Here it was very common to chew a leaf called 'Pan' in local language, so much so that the whole day it was not out of their mouth. This leaf when it was chewed up turned to a deep crimson dye, so that the one who use it had their lips and the whole mouth stained crimson as though with blood. It grew in great quantities in Madras and was reckoned among the most ordinary plants; it had rather a pleasant smell. Notwithstanding how this herb was, the English collected a duty on it from the inhabitants amounting to half a million. The inhabitants entertained foreign visitors with nothing so much as this leaf. The climate in madras was so hot that the whole year round the inhabitants wore no cloths except of the thinnest cloth and that only in times of bad weather. Three Versts¹⁶ from madras was the tomb of holy apostle Thomas, and six Versts from there was the hermitage of this apostle, where a monastery had been built with a very fine church (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

In Patna, there was a custom- a cruel custom- with regard to the sick and infirm of both sexes and all ages, that if the priests say from their observations of them that such people were near death, they placed them in a coffin and carry them to river Ganges, where having carried them up to their knees in to the water they repeatedly pour water in

¹⁶ One Versts equals to 3500 English feet.

to their mouths and forced them to pronounce the words Krishna- Narain, i.e. lord god. When one of these people dies, then after placing his body for a short time on a small fire they throw it in to the river. Should it happens that he regains his health strength, the priest declares him to be a wicked man displeasing to god; thus he was deprived to live in the town and were compelled to move to a village specially made for such wretches on the either side of the Ganges. This village was called "Murdon Ki Gaon" i.e. the village of the dead. The English collected no taxes from the inhabitants of this village, for accordance with the custom of Indians; they reckon them among the dead (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

The climate of Banaras was better than that of Calcutta: therefore there were very may great old people in the city. The city was very fine and had in it many remarkable and magnificent buildings. It was regarded as a secret city, and for these very reason rich men among the Indians who had stepped in to their old age left home leaving all their kith and kin, but a small amount of money to sustain till they die in the city. The superstition had reached to such an extreme that according to a belief, if anyone died in this city then he or she was believed to be free from all the torments in the next world which he might otherwise have been obliged to endure. All the inhabitants of Banaras were idol worshippers. They held the cow in great honour: they even rub their faces with cow's urine and cleansed defiled vessels with it (Danibegov 1959: 113-114).

Whenever an idol worshipper died, they had to be burn at a specified place. According to their cruel customs the wives of the deceased men had also to be burnt along with her dead husband. It was said that the wives were doing this out of their love for their husband. In this way the innocent victims (wife of the deceased husband) were burnt alive. The people standing around the funeral pyre then begin playing various instruments until they- the deceased husband and the live wives- are reduced to ashes. However the wife of the deceased husbands was not forced to perform this rite along with her husband. She can choose to remain alive in the interest of her children and the inheritance left by her husband. Her relatives and friends even persuade her to remain

alive, but once she has decided to lie beside her deceased husband on the funeral pyre than she cannot quit otherwise the watchers around her threaten her death by sword; in which case the wretched women would not escape, being regarded as unworthy to live (Danibegov 1959: 117-118).

3.1.6 Music, Drama, Language

Gerasim Stepanovich Lebedev, the Russian traveller who visited India in the 2nd half of the 18th Century established the first European style theatre in Calcutta. In the year 1789, Lebedev applied for space for his theatre, but he had to wait till two years, as could not find any pundit or interpreter who could explain the Sanskrit alphabet which was used for the Bengali Language, otherwise called Prakrit or Braz Bhasa. At a point when Lebedev was planning to drop his plan altogether he met with a school master, Shri Golak Nath Das who was skilled in both the Bengali language and the mixed (Jargon) Hindustani dialects grammatically. Das also understood very well the 'sacred' Sanskrit language. Coincidentally Das was no less interested in learning music from Lebedev as latter was interested in learning Hindustani language from Das. The most common spoken language of East India was mixed Hindustani language. The Hindustani common dialects proceeded from the Bengali and Devanagari. The pundits and the Brahmins were so selfish and cautious that they did not pass on Sanskrit alphabets and grammars to others. Sanskrit was the golden master key to that invaluable treasurer of eastern sciences and knowledge. After learning both the Bengali language and the mixed Hindustani, Lebedev translated two English dramatic pieces, the Disguise and the love. When it comes to the preference in watching drama, Indians preferred mimicry and drollery to plain, grave solid sense, however purely expressed (Lebedev 1988: 253-255)

3.2 Conclusion

Through the individual accounts of travellers in fifteenth Century, particularly of Nikitin's, scholars have tried to look into the larger issue of conversion on a wider scale in pre-modern period. Gail Lenhoff was the first scholar to question the narrative of

Nikitin as a pious Christian all throughout his journey in India. He has argued in 1979 that Nikitin did not keep his faith but converted to Islam. He gave few reasons for his proposition such as: Nikitin met Hindus at Bidar and revealed to them that he was not a Muslim but a Christian from Russia. That means till then he was hiding the fact that he was a Christian. Secondly, Nikitin called himself Khoja Yusuf Khorasani, a name which he adopted in India, which was used by non-Muslim who had visited Mecca. Thirdly, he fasted with Muslims during the month of Ramadan. In 1470 the Christian festival of Lent and the Muslim festival of Ramadan fell on same day. Nikitin abstained from taking meat, as required in Lent and taking food in daytime, as required in Ramadan. Fourthly out of the eleven prayers addressed to god in Nikitin's account, only first prayer which is a short prayer is addressed to Christ in Slavic church as required in those days narrative by any pious Christians. the three prayers are a mixture of Slavic and Arabic language, and the remaining seven prayers are in creolised Arabic. Fifthly the last prayer in the account which is a long one is dedicated to 'Allah' in which Nikitin thanked him for making it possible that he reached Russian land. In it he called 'Allah' the only god, and Jesus as the apostle of 'Allah'.

J S Lure contradicts Lenhoff, and argued that the prayers of Nikitin does not reveal that he actually converted to Islam, as he was simply portraying himself as a Muslim to sustain his life and fortunes for which he came to India. He was a true orthodox Christian and remained so. Nikitin was just trying to find that whether the monotheistic Islam claims the same truth as his own Christian religion claims to. Further, it can be said that had Nikitin been converted then he would have edited his text in order to get away from the wrath of his own people as in his native place it was heresy to praise other religion but he did not do so. Last but not the least, to become Muslim one needed to go through the rite of circumcision, but Nikitin never went through this rite. To this Lenhoff argued that in medieval India circumcision was not a requirement to become a Muslim, as conversion was a simple process.

However, according to Riasanovsky, fasts and feast with Muslims does not amount to Nikitin's conversion to Islam. He was simply celebrating his own religious fast along with the Muslims. P M Kemp argues that by wearing Muslim cloths Nikitin was simply trying to avoid situations like what he faced when he met Asad Khan and Malik Khan. Kemp also does not see any sign of bigotry in Nikitin's account. For him it was one of the first secular books.

Conversion was not unknown in Russian lands as the Indians living in Astrakhan during 17th and 18th Century converted to the orthodox Christian religion out of material benefits as well as out of their spiritual consideration, but they were never forced to convert, as against in India where Nikitin was forced to convert. The Hindus living in astrakhan did not burn the dead but cremate it and the remaining ashes were thrown in water which created pollution, which Russians took note of and subsequently complained against this rite of Hindus to Russian authority. The Hindu believed that the cremation of dead bodies would lead the dead to reach heaven directly not hell. Here again the superstition of Hindu beliefs is revealed where in the goodness of heaven and the toughness of hell is stressed. The Hindus covered their faces with the ashes of dung cake and make different images on their bodies using those ashes.

Indian society was divided on the basis of religion as well as caste lines. One caste within Hinduism did not marry or eat with other caste of the same religion. Hindus were both vegetarian as well as non vegetarians but they did not eat beef. The Hindu temples were magnificent in architecture and the religious buildings were made up of stones. The religious places of Hindu emerged as a commercial centre where people came for veneration as well as to exchange goods on offer in the market. Cart driven by oxen were important mode of transport in 15th Century India. The Hindu considered cow as sacred and called her their mother while oxen were called father. The Hindu god were always place in the eastern direction and the mode of Hindu prayer was same as that of Russians as both prayed in eastern direction with folded hands raising them in air and on their forehead. The Hindus were superstitious people, as they considered a particular bird

sitting on the roof as a symbol of inauspiciousness as if it sits on somebody's roof then the owner of the house was bound to die. Snakes up to fourteen feet used to crawl on the streets of Bidar. The Hindus did not bury dead but cremate it and the remaining ashes after cremation were thrown in the water bodies.

The custom of sati was prevalent in India in which it was customary for the wives to sit along with her deceased husband on the funeral pyre and loose life. Though it was not a mandatory custom for wives as there were people whose work was to convince her not to do the custom in their children's interest but once the wife had decided to do the rite then she had no option to retreat.

The city of Madras was known for betel leaf (also called Paan), as it grew in abundance here. The leaf had become a part of people's life and they kept on chewing it every time that their mouth look likes a stained crimson like blood, although the leaf had a pleasant smell. They greeted their guests with this leaf which was so important that British government levied tax on it which amounted to half a million to British. The people of Mannar worshipped cow and water. They did not wear slippers made out of the skins of animals and were vegetarians as they believed that eating animals flesh was like eating human flesh, that's why fruits and vegetables constituted their staple diet.

The Buddhism originated in India and was introduced in Tibet by the Indians. This religion was founded as a result of separation from the ancient Brahmanism. Buddhism was later introduced in other parts of Asia. Delhi had a composite culture in which people from different religion lived and celebrated according to their customs. There were temples, mosques as well as churches to venerate their respective gods. There were people in Delhi who deified the natural things like sun moon and water, and then venerated them. Hindus did not eat beef as they worshipped cow. The Hindus did not bury but cremate the dead body and before cremation they wash dead bodies in water bodies. The Indian custom of throwing the remaining ashes of burnt dead bodies in to the water caused so much damage to the water bodies that it was unsafe to consume.

In Bengal Sanskrit language was considered as a sacred language and whose use was limited to few privileged section of society. These privileged class, were Pundits and Brahmins who did not pass on their knowledge about the Sanskrit which they spoke was mixed Hindustani language. Bengali and Devanagari was the language in general as well as the literatures in Sanskrit language in particularly. Knowing Sanskrit language was important for the masses because it was in this language that the treasure of knowledge of the east was written. For the common mass the major language common base on which this mixed Hindustani language of east India evolved.

CHAPTER 4: POLITY AND SOCIETY

POLITY AND SOCIETY

4.1.1 The 15th Century Indian Socio-Political Environment

Nikitin's account, 'Voyage Beyond three seas' is an informative document which gives an in depth understanding of different aspects of the 15th Century India from religious to social to political to cultural. He had travelled three seas, the Caspian Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Black Sea, on his journey to India. Nikitin's effort to reach India becomes interesting also because he came to India not as a representative of State of Kievan Rus but as a private individual merchant who had wished to earn some profit and to learn new routes to East. The time and the distance he covered show his enterprising as well as the courageous personality. He reached India in 1469, twenty nine years before Vasco Da Gama, the most talked about Portuguese traveller who had visited to India in 1498 (Riasanovsky 1961).

When Nikitin arrived in the Bahamani Kingdom- one of the successor state of the fourteenth Century Tughlaq dynasty of Delhi Sultanate- Muhammad Shah 3rd was the ruler of the Kingdom, but Nikitin mistakenly understood him to be the overlord of all the Muslim rulers in India. Mahmud Gavan, a noble of the Kingdom, was very powerful. Foreign Muslims were the most privileged class in the Bahamani Kingdoms as they occupied almost all the important decision making positions of the kingdom. This privileged class had come to India from Khorasan. Asad- Khan¹⁷ was a tributary of Mahmud Gavan, who lived at Junar. He was the commander of Junar and its forts. Junar fort was situated on the "stony hill" to which it was difficult to reach as the passage to it was narrow (Nikitin 1950). Mahmud Gavan was in turn a powerful noble under the emperor Nizam Shah Bahamani (1461-1463) and his successor Mohammed Shah 3rd

¹⁷Asad khan was the commander of Junar and its forts. See Gregory Belkov, *The Journey Beyond three seas of Afanasij Nikitin in A.D. 1466-1472*, M.A. Thesis, Britain: The University of British Columbia. P. 12

(1463-1482) of the Bahamani kingdom (Oaten 1991). The number of fiefs which Asad Khan controlled and maintained was seven while Mahmud Gavan held twenty fiefs. Under his command, Asad Khan held many able armed men, fine soldiers-from Khorasan, Arabia, Turkmen country and Chagatai- and elephants, who helped him to defeat his enemies also called 'Kafirs', most of the time (Nikitin 1950).

Nikitin's visit to the Bahamani Kingdom, one of the largest kingdoms of the 15th Century India was important in many respects. His account provides us the campaign of Bahamani sultan Muhammad shah 3rd against the mighty Vijayanagar Empire. Many scholars of medieval India argue that this campaign of Bahamani kingdom against Vijayanagar Empire was the turning point in the Bahamani history as it started the process of Bahamani decline. The argument is based on the Muslim historical sources of the period, as there is a dearth of Hindu historical records. The account of Nikitin fills this gap very well. His account gives in great detail the display of pomp and splendour by the sultan himself as well as by the nobles of Bahamani kingdom. Sometimes the description of Bahamani sultan and his nobles, such as the parades, processions as well as their ride for war, for pleasure and for prayer, by Nikitin, raises a question whether a romanticized version of Bahamani kingdom could be better than Nikitin's one (Riasanovsky 1961)

Nikitin mistakenly observed that Bidar was the capital of Muslim India, but it was only the capital of Bahamani Empire. Kulbarga had been the first of the Bahamani capitals, from 1347 to 1429. Thereafter it was at Bidar, also called Muhammadabad (Morris 1967: 502-508). The city of Bidar was very large and in this city many people of privileged class lived. These nobles were from Khorasan and held all the important positions in the kingdom. The sultan Muhammad Shah 3rd, of Bahamani kingdom was a young man of only twenty years, who was also from Khorasan (Nikitin 1857: 14-15). The Bahaman's, extended their power over the Central Deccan, between the Krishna, Godavari, and Tapti rivers. From the south, the Bahamani kingdom had to confront the powerful Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, as the latter keep on attacking the former.

Nikitin was at Bidar when the Bahamani had attacked Vijayanagar Empire. Though Nikitin's assertion that he was a witness to the attack of Bahamans on Vijayanagar is not believed by many scholars except P M Kemp, however it cannot be denied his presence at Bidar, and that he might have learnt about the battle from the locals of Bidar. The battle as has been described by Nikitin was on high scale where there was a huge deployment of armed forces from both sides (Morris 1967: 502-508).

The sultan and his nobles maintained a huge number of armed forces under their command. The sultan maintained approximately three Lakhs armed men. While his nobles maintained armed men of different numbers, such as Mahmud Gavan maintained two Lakhs armed men; Malik Khan maintained one lakh; Kharat Khan kept twenty thousand; and many other khans who maintained ten thousand armed men (Nikitin 1857: 14-15).

The natives of the land, primarily the locals, were not allowed the privileged position in the administrative structure of the kingdom; however they were inducted into the states army as an infantry, as they could move swiftly, and were sent to the forefront in the battlefield with sword in one hand the shield in another. There were other infantry who carried bows and arrows on the battlefield, and were seated on the back of an elephant along with the trained gunners as elephants were also used on a wider scale in the battlefield. Swords of different sizes were tied to the trunk of elephant so that they can be used in the battlefield, if the need arose. The nobles however were seated on the horseback, and were behind the infantry and elephants in the battlefield (Nikitin: 1950: 19-20).

The sultan went for the hunt only on Tuesday and on Thursday and the event was not a small affair but the power, pomp and show of the Sultan were shown considerably. Sultan generally went for hunting along with his mother and his chief queen. While going for the hunt sultan used to place himself in the middle of the long stretch of men on the road. In the front were one hundred horsemen, one hundred dancers, three hundred common horses in golden clothing, one hundred monkeys and one hundred concubines

(all foreigners). Then the sultan followed along with his mother and lady. Behind him there were ten thousand men on horseback, fifty thousand men on foot and two hundred elephants adorned in gilded armour (Nikitin 1857: 14-15). The army during the campaign consisted of three hundred ordinary horses, many foot soldiers and almost fifty elephants on whose back were seated four ordinary men who were almost naked but a small cloth on their waist. These men had to guide and control the animals. Behind the elephants were women on foot, largely uncovered, who carried water to be used subsequently for drinking and washing by men and women, travelling along with them in the front (Nikitin 1950: 51, Nikitin 1857: 27).

The sultan celebrated the Muslim festival, Qurban Bairam¹⁸, and went on for a pleasure ride along with a large number of people. These included twenty high viziers of the sultan, three hundred elephants armed with steel, warriors with gun. The sultan sat in a howdahs (carriage positioned at the back of the elephant), decorated with gold and jewels. In this howdah were also seated six men armed with guns and harquebus¹⁹. On the large elephant these armed men were twelve in numbers. On each elephants large banners were placed. On the tusk of elephant large swords were tied while on the trunks of the elephants huge iron weights were tied. A man with iron hook sat on the head of the elephants that guided and controlled the animal. There were also one thousand ordinary horses in gold trappings, one hundred camels with torchbearers, three hundred trumpeters, three hundred dancers, and three hundred concubines (Nikitin 1950).

¹⁸ Bairam or Qurbam Bairam is a Turkish term for the Eid festival. Minayev, 2010, p.83

¹⁹Harquebus was the first gun fired from the shoulder, a smoothbore matchlock with a stock resembling that of a rifle. The harquebus was invented in Spain in the mid-15th Century. It was often fired from a support, against which the recoil was transferred from a hook on the gun. Its name seems to derive from German words meaning "hooked gun." The bore varied, and its effective range was less than 650 feet (200 m). The harquebus was superseded by the larger musket in the mid-16th Century. www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/255834/harquebus

The sultan wore a coat adorned with jewels and a diamond was placed on his helmet. His armaments were in gold and were decorated with jewels. In front of the Sultan were “Kafirs” (non- Muslims) with umbrella, and many others on foot. Just behind the Sultan was a trained elephant that ensured that no one comes near to the Sultan. The noble, Mahmud Gavan sat in a golden litter and above that was a silken canopy topped with gold. He was followed by four horses, harnessed with gold. Around him were large number of people, each armed with bows and arrows or with sword and shield. Men were half naked but their genitals were completely covered (Nikitin 1950: 47).

The Bahamani sultan’s palace was a huge building with seven gates and at every gate there were hundred guards each, along with one hundred Muslim scribes at each gate (Nikitin 1857: 14-15). These Muslim scribes had the duty of maintaining the record of everyone going in and out of the palace. Most important fact was that foreigners were not allowed to enter the palace which was a huge town in itself from inside. The town and the palace of sultan were wonderful as every stone of the palace was well carved and gilded with gold. The people in the town were skilled, manifested in the beautiful ornamentation of the palace. Within the palace there was several court of justice. The town of Bidar was guarded, the whole night, by a group of one thousand trained Kotwals²⁰ (Nikitin 1950: 24-25).

The nobles in the Bahamani kingdom led luxurious life while the common men living in the countryside were in miserable condition. When these nobles moved from one place to another on casual day then there went along with them large number of armed forces as well as the general populace. Some armed men who accompanied these nobles, went on foot while others on the horseback. Even the musician and the torchbearers accompanied the group. These men were armed fully with the existing arms and each carried a light with them (Nikitin 1950).

²⁰ Kotwal was the chief of police or magistrate of a city. During the second half of the fifteenth Century the ‘Kotwal’ of Bidar was one of the chief ministers of the Sultan and commanded the troops stationed in Bidar. Opp. Cit. Gregory Belkov.

Nikitin considered Russian land as the best place on the planet earth. However he was upset over the state of affairs in his native land Rus, where the lords were not just rulers, and there was no justice in Russian land. Thus he prayed to god that they must do something to put things in order, so that justice prevails in Russia (Nikitin 1950: 48).

Mahmud Gavan with an army of two hundred thousand men, one hundred elephants and three hundred camels, attacked the two Indian towns²¹. It was besieged for almost two years by the army of Mahmud Gavan. He captured seven princes from these two towns along with their treasury which contained load of precious stones, of diamonds and of other valuable goods. After successful campaign Mahmud Gavan reached Bidar²² on the day of Kurban Bairam²³, which coincided with the St. Peter's Day according to Russian calendar. The sultan sent ten viziers to receive Mahmud Gavan at a distance of ten Kovs²⁴. Each vizier was at the head of ten thousand troops and ten elephants in armour (Nikitin 1950:49, Nikitin 1857: 26).

At the court of Mahmud Gavan, five hundred people sat down to dine everyday but only three Viziers, each of them held fifty men and a hundred vessel noble, had the privilege to sit along with Gavan on the same table to dine with him. Mahmud Gavan held two thousand horse in his stables of which one thousand horses were always ready to go for any assignment of war. He also had one hundred elephants. His palace was guarded by one hundred armed men, twenty trumpeters and ten torch men, while ten

²¹ The pirates of this region situated south of Dhabol (presently in the Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra in India), in the Vijayanagar Empire inflicted much loss to the merchants of Bahamani dynasty. Ibid.

²² He reached Bidar in 1471. The sultan Muhammad 3rd and his mother were delighted by the brilliant success of Mahmud Gavan, and conferred new titles on him. Ibid.

²³ Kurban Bayram, is an important religious holiday celebrated by Druze and Muslims worldwide to honour the willingness of the prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) to sacrifice his young first-born son Ismā'īl (Ishmael) as an act of submission to God's command and his son's acceptance to being sacrificed, before God intervened to provide Abraham with a Lamb to sacrifice instead. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eid_al-Adha

²⁴ One 'Kovs' equalled ten Versts. "The Versts of the 17th Century was 700 Sazhens or 1.49 km as against the 500 Sazhens or 1.06 km it became at the time of Peter the Great" en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Versts

large kettledrums attended by two men were struck alternatively by them throughout the night at every hour (Nikitin 1950: 50).

The Hindu ruler of Southern Orissa had died, and he was succeeded by his son, Mangal who refused to pay tribute to the Bahamani kingdom and revolted. To curb this revolt the three nobles of Bahamani kingdom Nizam-ul Mulk, Malik Khan and Farat Khan were sent. These nobles defeated Mangal and reinstated the deceased ruler's cousin Hambar on the throne and the tribute was restored. The Bahamani kingdom now extended from 'sea to sea' (Belkov 1950:12). They brought a hundred thousand soldiers and fifty elephants from their enemies. They also captured an immense quantity of sapphires and diamonds and presented it to Mahmud Gavan. Gavan later ordered artisans not to sell those items to the merchants and keep it with them (Nikitin 1950: 51).

4.1.3 Bahamani Campaign against Vijayanagar

Mahmud Gavan left Bidar with an army of fifty thousand to conquer the 'Indian' kingdom²⁵ on the anniversary of Shaikh Ala ud- Din. The sultan had added additional fifty thousand men of his own army along with three viziers and their thirty thousand men, one hundred elephants with howdahs on it, and in each howdah were present four men armed with harquebus's. At the command of this large army Mahmud Gavan went forth to conquer 'the great Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar'²⁶. After eight months the sultan also left Bidar to join Mahmud Gavan in the campaign against the Hindu kingdom. The sultan army consisted of twenty Muslim and six Indian²⁷ viziers, one hundred

²⁵ When a revolt broke out in southern Orissa, the Rajas of the Belgaum and Bankapur, instigated by Virupaksha, of Vijayanagar, attempted to regain the port of Goa. Muhammad 3rd and Mahmud Gavan led the attack against the allies of Vijayanagar.

²⁶ There are no historical records of an attack by Bahamani sultan against the city of Vijayanagar during the time Nikitin was in India. However Nikitin was in Gulbarga, the headquarters at the time, and was in good position to know the aim of the campaign. Possibly the difficulty of capturing Belgaum and the death of the queen mother during the siege discouraged the continuation of the campaign. Opp. Cit. Belkov, 1950, P. 12

²⁷ Ibid., When Nikitin said Indian, he meant Hindus, who were not the rulers. Pp 12-13

thousand horses, two hundred thousand foot soldiers, three hundred elephants with howdahs all in armour and one hundred savage beasts²⁸ each was in two chains. The brother of sultan, who was also accompanying in the campaign against Vijayanagar Empire, held a hundred thousand cavalry man, one hundred thousand infantry and one hundred elephants equipped with armour. Malik Khan was at the command of twenty thousand cavalrymen, sixty thousand infantry and twenty elephants, all in armour. Bidar khan joined the campaign with thirty thousand cavalry men, Vizier khan joined with fifteen thousand cavalrymen, thirty thousand infantry and fifteen elephant in armour. Kotwal Khan held fifteen thousand cavalry men, forty thousand infantry and ten elephants. With each vizier there went forth ten thousand troops and there were also viziers who joined the campaign with fifteen thousand cavalryman and twenty thousand infantrymen. With an Indian autonomous ruler there went forth twenty thousand cavalrymen and hundred thousand infantrymen and forty elephants in armour, and each elephant carried four men armed with harquebus in the howdahs. Such was the strength of the Muslim Sultan of India; however he became angry with the Indian ruler because few came forth to help him in the campaign. But Bahamani campaign was not successful as they could besiege only one Indian city and much of their treasury was spent and many of their soldiers perished, because the Indian sultan Kadam²⁹ was very powerful (Nikitin 1950: 52-54).

The sultan 'Kadam'³⁰ resided at the mountain of Vijayanagar and did possess a huge army. The prince of Vijayanagar had three thousand elephants, and one hundred thousand soldiers. This vast city was great and was surrounded by three ravines and a river flowed deep into the city. The city was a wonderful place suitable for everything as

²⁸ Ibid., The savage beasts were lions and leopards, both of which were plenty in south India. Pp. 12

²⁹ Ibid., The name Kadam was not the proper name of the Vijayanagar ruler, nor was it used for title of any king of Vijayanagar. Pp. 12-13

³⁰ Kadam or Kadamba reminds of the name of another South Indian dynasty; its domains however were not a part of the Vijayanagar Empire. Opp. Cit. Minayev, 2010. P. 124

at one side was a dense forest while on the other was a valley. A road was going right in the middle of the city but it was difficult to understand the right direction. The army of the Bahamani Sultan besieged the city for almost a month and people of the city died of thirst and many died of hunger. An Indian city was captured by Mahmud Gavan who took it by force³¹. He assaulted the city day and night for twenty days during which his army neither drank nor ate. They besieged the city with canon. They slaughtered twenty thousand men and women and they took twenty thousand prisoners, big and small and sold the prisoners, some at ten 'Tangas'³² a head and some at five Tangas and children at two Tangas each. But the winners were disappointed, as there was no treasury, they did not, however capture the citadel³³. Surrounded by the three forts, and intersected by a river made the city a wonderful place. There was a road laid right through the town. The town was situated on a high mountain with the ravines below which made the town impossible to capture or enter by force (Nikitin 1950: 53-55).

The town was finally attacked to capture, by Melikh Khan Khoda who fought day and night against the Hindu sultan and besieged the town for one month in which many people of the Vijayanagar lost their lives on account of shortage of water and food. The army of the Bidar sultan also suffered heavy loss; five thousand of their best soldiers lost their life. After the capture of the Vijayanagar town, there followed a huge massacre in which heads of the twenty thousand natives of the city, both men and women, were

³¹ Ibid. Both the description of the city and its capture suggests Belgaum rather than Vijayanagar. Pp. 12-14

³² A Silver Coin used during the later half of the fifteenth Century. Major. R. H. (1857) (ed.) *India in the Fifteenth Century Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India in the Century proceeding the discovery of Cape of Good Hope from Latin, Persian, Russian and Italian Sources*. London: Printed for Hakluyt Society.

³³ When only the citadel remained in his hands. Birkana the raja of Belgaum, escaped from the stronghold, and appeared in the Muslim camp in disguise. When he was led to the tent of Muhammad 3rd he revealed his identity and begged for mercy. His life was spared and Belgaum was given to Mahmud Gavan whose fief it adjoined. At this pint news reached Muhammad that his mother had died in Bidar. He news grieved the sultan and he returned to Deccan to stay with Mahmud Gavan while the body was being prepared for burial.

chopped off, twenty thousand of them, both old and young were made prisoners, who were later sold at a price of ten 'Tankas' per head for the young prisoners, five 'Tankas' for the old ones while children were sold at two 'Tankas' per head. The treasury of the Vijayanagar was found empty; therefore the victors abandoned the town (Nikitin 1950: 54-56).

4.1.4 The 15th Century Indian Society: People, Dress, Eating Habits, Customs and Slaves

At Chaul³⁴, Indian people, were interested in and eager to talk with foreigners and follow a white men (like Nikitin, a white), which was because the natives themselves were black. Indian women did not cover their breast, and put their hair into one tail and had thick bellies. The Indian women bear children on a year basis, and that was why these women had, many children (Nikitin 1857: 09-10).

Princes and nobles wore costly garments of Silk, on both upper and lower part of the body. The Prince³⁵ wore a cloth on their head³⁶ and around their hips and also around their shoulders. Sometimes these nobles also put trousers, shirts and the coat. The servants of the prince or the nobles wore cloth around their hips and carried a shield and sword in their hands. Some of the servants also carried spear and knife while some others carried bows and arrows in their hands (Nikitin 1950: 11-12). The servants had strong body but had no choice left but to remain half naked and barefooted. The women servants

³⁴ Chaul is a former city of Portuguese India, now in ruins. It is located 60 km south of Mumbai, in Raigad District of Maharashtra state in western India. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chaul*

³⁵ Nikitin had used the word 'Kniaz' which is a Russian word for prince or chief, Wielhorsky, Count (1857), 'The travels of Athanasius Nikitin, a native of Twer' in R H Major (ed.) *India in the Fifteenth Century Being a Collection of Narratives of Voyages to India in the Century proceeding the discovery of Cape of Good Hope from Latin, Persian, Russian and Italian Sources*, London; Printed for Hakluyt Society.

³⁶ Ibid., Nikitin had used the word 'Fata' which meant a large silk garment wore in Russia by the women of the lower classes, round the head or over the upper part of the body. p. 09

of the nobles were also not fully covered and were half naked. Boys and girls till the age of seven did not cover their shame, and were half naked and barefooted (Nikitin 1950).

Slaves were sold and bought, who were 'black-people' probably from southern tribes of Dravidian origin or low caste Hindus (Morris 1967: 502-508). Asad Khan, despite having good elephants and horses', rode on men, which indicates the existence of slavery in the area where Nikitin visited, as he has also mentioned that, Asad Khan, possessed good number of slaves. These slaves were brought from Khorasan and regions around it in Indian ships and were traded like an object. He has also mentioned about the slaves being sold and bought in the market of Bidar. It was not only men who were sold and bought in the market of Bidar but women slaves were also in great demand (Nikitin 1857). The women slaves were very cheap and were easily available. These women slaves were of little worth as they were available on payment of just two silver coins. for a beautiful women slave one had to spend just four silver coins, and if anyone was ready to pay five silver coins then he would get one beautiful women slave as well as a dark women slave. Slaves, particularly the women slaves were wicked and cheaters who often poisoned their masters and destroy them (Nikitin 1950: 33).

Whether this was common with all the women slaves or not is not clearly mentioned by Nikitin. One can perceive that there was always an effort by the slaves whether male or female, to get themselves free from the bondage of slavery imposed upon them by one means or other. And in this effort sometimes these slaves had to resort to unfair means like poisoning their masters and destroy them.

The Hindus did not eat meat, cow flesh, chicken, and mutton. But there were very many numbers of swine. They depended for food on Indian corn, carrots with oil and different herbs. The men neither ate along with their wives nor with any other men on regular day, but alone. These Hindus while on travelling always carried an earthen pot which they used for preparing food and always made sure that no Muslim touch or see their food or the pot in which food was supposed to be cooked. These Hindus take their meals twice a day and did not eat in night. They ate by their hand, and knife was not in

use. They sit down to eat, and before eating they always washed their hands and feet and rinsed their mouth. These Hindus always ate by their right hand and does not touch anything of the food by their left hand. They did not drink wine and did not eat or drink with the Muslims (Nikitin 1857; 17).

The land of Bidar was heavily populated. The people of the countryside were very poor and lived a miserable life, while the nobles of the Bahamani Dynasty enjoyed a luxurious life. When women's were confined in the house because of their pregnancy, their husband helped them and acted as a midwife. When there was birth of a son then he was to be given a name by his father while on the birth of a daughter, the duty of naming girl child was of her mother. The Hindus called the bull their father and the cow their mother; and from their excreta they make dung cakes which were used by them for baking bread and boiling food (Nikitin 1950).

There were inns at different places in India during the 15th Century for foreigners to take rest. The foreigners were served food prepared by the landlady (who could have been the owner of the inn, if it was privately owned and controlled or a representative of the state, if it was under state's control), who also slept with the foreign guests. This was because there was a general liking among these ladies of the inns towards the white men from the foreign lands as in India men were of dark complexion (Nikitin 1950).

It might be possible that Nikitin happened to witness this with himself which could not be generalized as has been done by Nikitin, since no other source of the contemporary period suggests the same.

4.1.5 Russian Knowledge of India from Indian Diaspora in Russia during 17th and 18th Century.

On 21 July 1646, a letter was sent by the Russian Tsar Aleksii Mikhailovich to the Mughal emperor in India. The Indian ruler was addressed as, "to our brother, the great ruler seated on the great throne, his majesty Shah Jahan, the ruler of India and all eastern

countries". Because of the "great" distance no formal relation was established between India and Russia, and no ambassador was sent to each other country. Having learnt that the Indian ruler Shahjahan was in friendly terms with the commander of Persian and Shirvan lands, 'Shah Abbas the Great', the Russian Tsar desired to establish the similar great and pleasant relationship and love and correspondence with India. The Russian agents who were carrying the letter were Mikit Syroezhin and Vasil Tushkanov. The Indian ruler was asked to send his agents to Russia with whom Russian Tsar could send to Shahjahan whatever was famous in Russian land, and for that they would not be charged. The Tsar also specified that since there was no correspondence between the two countries the Russians did not know how to address the Indian ruler, thus they addressed the latter in the similar way as they addressed their neighbouring kingdom, therefore Shahjahan was requested to send through his agent, the real title by which Shahjahan would like to be addressed further (Gopal 1988: 24-26).

The Russian agents who were required to carry the letter of Russian Tsar to Shahjahan were instructed to behave in a particular way and to gather as much information as possible about India. They were instructed to find out the religion of the ruler; the faith of the ruled; their place of worship; the materials (whether wood or stone) used in constructing the place of worship as well as in building the palace; the number of cities in the empire; similarity between the Indian ruler and Shah Abbas the great in constructing cities; houses of nobles and officials of the empire; feudatories of the Shahjahan; their faith and the mode of tribute by those feudatories to Shahjahan; population of the empire; control of Shahjahan over western India which was adjacent to the Iranian kingdom; trading activities of the Germans; Indian towns to which Germans came in for trade; were these towns under Shahjahan?; kingdom with which Shahjahan was in friendly relation and with which to war?; strength of Shahjahan army; number of infantry and cavalry; the strength of naval power of Shahjahan and his naval warships; types of guns he had; mode of fighting of the Shahjahan army; about armour of the Army, spiked helmet and iron caps, etc. The agents were instructed to note down all these

information in great secret and were asked to return to Russia through the same route they had to take to reach India (Gopal 1988: 26-28).

On 31 May, 1651, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich sent a letter to Shahjahan to establish diplomatic relation with India. The agents, Rodion and Ivan Mikitin were asked to go to Iran first, where they had to get a letter of consensus from Shah Abbas declaring that the latter also wished a good diplomatic relation between Russia and India. They were instructed not to give the letter of intent for friendship to the 'Khans' and 'Sultans' of Shahjahan if they asked for it. After meeting with Shahjahan Russian agents were required to hand over the letter to him written in Russian. If there would be no translator available in the court of Shahjahan then letter was to be handed over another letter written in Tatar Language. Then they were asked to give to Shahjahan, presents (gifts) worth 300 to 400 roubles, presented by the tsar. After that the letter of Shah Abbas was to be given to Shah Jahan. If anything against the Indian ruler was found then that should be noted down. Once the agents were able to meet Shahjahan than they had to show their desire to establish friendly relation with India same as Indians had with Shah Abbas of Persia. If Shahjahan asked about the relation of Russian with their neighbouring countries then the agents were instructed to say that with the Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich Turkish Sultan Ibrahim Beg and the kings of Denmark, France, England and Holland had friendly and loving relations. The Tsar was also in friendly terms with Shah Abbas of Persia, with Yan Kazimer- the king of Poland and Lithuania and with the ruler of Crimea, Islam Gir. Russians were mistaken and considered Lahore as the capital of Mughal Empire (Gopal 1988: 36-42).

There is a reference of Central Asian campaign of Mughal ruler Shahjahan during 1646-47. The Indian king came in the vicinity of the city of the Balkh. At this time in Bukhara lived the father of the present shah of Bukhara, Nadir shah. Nadir shah, on seeing the might of the Indian ruler, deserted his city and went to mountains. The Indian king captured the city of Balkh with its suburbs and it was under him for a year and half. In the war the Indian ruler used canons and guns and other fire arms. And the then ruler

of Bukhara, Oblazy seeing that the Indian king had taken Balkh together with its neighbourhood and that his father had fled to the mountains, collected one lakh eighty thousand soldiers and took back Balkh from the Indian ruler. The Indian ruler returned (Gopal 1988: 53-54)

The Russian Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich sent his emissaries, to Indian ruler Aurangzeb on 28 February 1675. The Indian king was addressed as the overlord of all eastern countries with whose kingdom Russian empire could not forge friendly relations due to great distance. The tsar wanted to establish the same degree of friendship love and correspondence as he had with the great Shah Suleiman and other great kings. Mohammad Yusuf Kasimov was chosen as agent along with the scribe Ivan to carry the friendship letter of the Russian Tsar to the Indian kingdom. The letter further requested Aurangzeb not to be angry if he was not addressed properly as may be addressed by themselves or by their neighbours, as Russians did not know the exact title. They would rather rectify it when they become familiar with this. For presenting to the Indian ruler Aurangzeb, goods worth 300 rouble comprising of leather, mirrors and corals were bought by the Russian foreign department to be sent along with the letter by Kasimov (Gopal 1988:81-84).

The Russian agent Kasimov returned to Russian empire from the city of Kabul between 24 May and 1 June 1677, without meeting the Indian ruler as he was not allowed to meet with Aurangzeb. After Kasimov returned Russia he stated that he was told that since the time of Timur till the time Kasimov was sent to India no Russian agent had been sent to the Indian kingdom because of the large distance and that the religion of the Indian ruler was different from that of the Russian tsar, so there was no need to have good or friendly relation with the Russian empire. Kasimov was told by the Mughal officials in Kabul to accept the lordship of Aurangzeb as had been done by another agent of Russia 'Sneka' who had come few years before Kasimov. The former was given command of five hundred men and was serving the Indian lord happily. But Kasimov said that he was not a traitor as was the case with 'Sneka' and he would not do so. The

goods worth 300 roubles which the Russian Tsar had sent with the agent to present it to Aurangzeb was sold by the Kasimov in Kabul and from that he purchased Russian prisoners of war from Khiva. Kasimov described after return that "on the Indian soil there was great war and anarchy. The Afghans were fighting against the Indian ruler whom they used to serve earlier³⁷. The Afghans lived in mountains and strongly fortified places. The Indian ruler had sent against the Afghans his heir-apparent, many generals and a large number of forces but nothing has availed (Gopal 1988: 88 and 129-135).

In 1695, Semen Malenki was sent as a Russian agent to Indian kingdom by the Russian tsar. He was carrying a letter of proposal by the Tsar for friendship with Aurangzeb. He was carrying goods bought from the royal treasury which was to be sold in India and Indian goods were to be bought from there. The goods which he brought from Russia were: red yuft, hides, bones of fishes etc. The Indian ruler was requested not to collect custom duty from Malenki which the Russian Tsar promised to reciprocate when Indian merchants went to Russia. On receiving the letter, Aurangzeb ordered the Mughal officials not to collect custom duty from Malenki and he was allowed to move freely in the Mughal Empire. Later Malenki was able to meet Aurangzeb at Burhanpur in latter's camp. Aurangzeb according to Malenki was little less than one hundred years old. He had four princes; he put on white dress made of fine cotton Muslin. He put on white turban on his head; he was carried to the mosque by eight persons on Wednesday and Friday. From the camp Semen went to Agra. The city had stone houses and three walls. In the fort there was royal palace, mosque and offices. There were residential quarters in the town. Round the city a trench had been dug up and filled with water in which there were tortoise and fish in plenty. The local currency was of silver and was called a rupee and was equal to 13 'Altyns'³⁸ and 2 'Dengas'³⁹ (Around 40 Kopeks). They were more

³⁷ Aurangzeb was then waging war with the tribesmen on the north- western frontier of India.

³⁸ Altyn is a historical Russian currency meaning "six", since it was worth 6 of 1/2 dengas (six halves), equivalent to three kopek silver, then copper, a small value coin. Altyn coins were minted from 1654 under Alexis I, under Peter I as silver coins from 1704 to 1718, and under Nicholas I as copper coins with a

valuable than the copper coins and were equal in weight to the Russian silver coin 'Poltinka'. The Indian people were quiet, friendly, and clever and honest in trade. They desired for more trade in hide and yuft. From Astrakhan to India, there was a land route but he who had never travelled by that route did not know about it. That route lie through the Bukharan territory but they did not know the names of the city through which it run. In the village Khurja, (in Uttar Pradesh) indigo was produced and was sold at the rate of 18 or 20 roubles for 60 pounds. Malenki returned home after five years stay in India but did not reach his home town as he died at Shemakha (Gopal 1988: 136-141).

An order was issued by peter Ist to Lieutenant A. I. Kozhin to go to India through the rivers as far as possible and then to take land routes if required. He was asked to note down all the rivers, lakes and riverines along with land routes falling on the way to India. He was asked to return Russia through the same route which he undertakes to reach India. He was asked to purchase from the Mughal India large number of big birds of different types such as Strusov, Kazeariusov, and others, and small birds of different breeds and also big and small animals and bring them to Russia with great care. A letter was sent by the Tsar Peter the Great addressed to the Mughal ruler Jahandar Shah⁴⁰. The Mughal emperor was requested to allow Russian trader to trade in the Mughal India freely without paying custom duties. Mughal ruler was asked to place his requirement before the Russian trader for any Russian goods which was to the much liking of the Mughal ruler (Gopal 1988: 143-146).

value of three kopeks from 1839. Production of three kopek coins was discontinued in 1991. A kopek is analogous to a Western penny. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altyn

³⁹ A denga was a Russian monetary unit with a value latterly equal to ½ kopeck (100 kopecks = 1 Russian ruble). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denga

⁴⁰ The letter is dated in the title as 18 may 1716 when Farrukhhsiyar was the Mughal emperor. Jahandar Shah was the Mughal ruler during 1712-1713; The Russian ruler could not have correct information about the names of the Mughal rulers because of absence of proper communications. (Gopal, 1988)

4.1.6 Nadir Shah Invasion and the Mughal response

The implication of knowing Nadir Shah Invasion of India to this research lies in the fact that there was a Russian spy in the camp of Nadir Shah, who informed all details about India at that point of time to his boss in Isfahan who was a Russian Consul at Isfahan. He detailed to his boss the political and social structure of India during the invasion. From his information much about the Mughal treasury is also known. Here our aim is to learn about India during first half of 18th Century from Russian perspectives.

Russian Consul to Persia, I. Kalushkin had sent reports between 1736 and 1740 to the Russian board of foreign affairs concerning the relation between Persia and India, about the invasion of India by Nadir Shah. Kalushkin had his correspondent in the camp of Nadir shah who sent information to the Russian consul regularly, about the political situation in India during the period of Nadir shah Indian invasion. Nadir shah decided to send an expedition to India to siege Kandahar under the command of Pirmamet khan and would later join him. The Mughal ruler sent to the Nadir shah an ambassador with presents in 7 packs. Nadir shah put two conditions to avert the invasion. First was to return to Persia the descendents of 12 thousand Iranian soldiers who were given by Shah Tahmasp 1st to Humayun when the latter was in trouble⁴¹. Secondly Nadir Shah wanted the Indian ruler to pay him the expenses, the sum of 1, 20,000 roubles, which were then incurred in connection with the (recruitment of) soldiers and their arrangements. The Shah told the Mughal ambassador that if the Mughal government failed to meet these two demands, he would force them (the Mughal) to accept them through the use of his armed might's. The Mughal did not comply with Nadir's demand, which left for Nadir Shah no option but to invade India, and thus he left for Sind which lies between Multan and Baluchistan. Within few days border Indian city of Kaznin was captured, many houses were destroyed and many Indians were taken prisoners. After that, the younger son of

⁴¹ Humayun was ousted from the throne of Delhi by Sher Shah Suri in 1540. Humayun then took refuge in the court of the Persian Shah Tahmasp. At that time the Persian shah helped Humayun with a number of soldiers to regain the lost territory of India which latter did in 1555 (Gopal, 1988)

Nadir shah proceeded to conquer Kabul with 12000 men. On the capture of Kandahar, Nadir shah tortured Husain khan and other important people until they revealed the place where they had hidden their wealth. The soldiers were rewarded for the success, as they were given 3 roubles to 500 Roubles based on their ranks. Up to Kandahar, Nadir shah had destroyed everything; he had not left a stone standing upon a stone. Kali Khan was appointed as the commander of Kandahar and was given 6000 Afghan soldiers as well as an equal, number of Persian soldiers. Nadir shah farmed out the income of Kandahar to Kali khan for a sum of 1, 20,000 roubles. Kabul surrendered to Nadir shah without much difficulty and it was placed under the charge of Maer khan to establish order and to extract money. Then the Shah along with his army marched towards Mughal capital Delhi (Gopal 1988: 183-192).

There was a great discord among the chiefs of the Mughal ruler as the chiefs were not obedient to the Mughal ruler. In order to prevent a joint opposition, Nadir Shah intended to win over different chiefs individually and for this purpose he sent to India 25 individuals. In case this does not succeed, he did not intend to go far. He was then to destroy Multan and Kabul and return to Isfahan (Gopal 1988: 183-192).

But the war could not be averted and it did happen between the armies of Nadir Shah and the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. The Indian ruler had 5000 war elephants and an unknown number of soldiers in readiness of the coming battle. Several times the Indian ruler collected his army in order to give battle but every time the soldiers left saying that they would give battle when nadir Shah would cross the river. From this it is clear that the army was not obedient to the Mughal ruler, who was very young. In the battle with Nadir Shah, the Mughal ruler surrendered his sovereignty over the cities of Jigan, Derin, Kaznin, Kabul, Jubani, Kolmanin and Jalalabad. The Mughal ruler promised to send tribute to Nadir Shah, however Nadir Shah expressed his intention to march directly towards the Indian capital Shahjahanabad and entrusted the affairs of Persia to his son Raza-Kuli Mirza (Gopal 1988: 183-192).

From the circumstances it was clear that the Shah would not meet with any resistance anywhere in India. The army of Nadir Shah appeared in a state of ferment. The shah had fixed the wages of the soldiers at the rate of 120 roubles per year. The soldiers had to maintain two horses out of it. During inspection if any soldier was found wanting, he was ordered to fall out and was killed. The soldiers complained that they could not maintain two horses out of the stipulated wages and hence almost each of them was under a debt of 200 roubles (Gopal 1988: 183-192).

Persian army invaded India in 1738-39, but was shocked to see the strength of the Mughal army, and subsequently Nadir Shah and following him all the generals and soldiers lost all the hopes of success against the enemy. They already considered themselves as prisoners. The Mughal army consisted of very good cavalry and well armed soldiers numbering about three hundred thousand. Of this only a small section numbering about fifty thousand first launched a mighty attack on Persians who were forced to retire from the field. The Mughal ruler with his chief army stood a little away from the scene fortified with his canons, numbering more than one thousand. The canons fired continuously on the Persian camps and it was believed that the Mughal ruler intended to weaken Persian by this method and thereafter would attack with all his strength. However, in reality what followed was different. On the third day of the battle it was observed that a large number of Indian soldiers were on moving which the Persians could not understand. These soldiers were moving from place to place along with their horses, causing extreme confusion among the Indian army. The Indian ruler then stood before the army to find out the cause of confusion but he could not. He failed to stem the confusion. As the time was very short, he quickly mounted a horse and fled shouting to the right wing. Before the army could turn, the Persians attacked them from two sides and the battle continued for three hours continuously and Nadir Shah moved to those places where the Mughal were offering stiff resistance so that he could encourage his soldiers. The Persians, when they saw that their ruler was not afraid of losing his life in the battlefield, became bold. They decided either to win or die. They threw their guns and engaged the Mughal army in hand to hand fighting. As a result the Mughal army began to

lose heart and was eventually routed. The field was left to the Persians. The Persians however still expected a far more serious attack by the Indians. However to everyone's surprise, the Mughal ruler along with his sons, his rajas and ministers came to Persian camp and declared him to be the prisoner of Nadir Shah. Nadir Shah then got up from his place, embraced the Mughal ruler and received him. He spoke that he did not want to imprison such a great monarch and considered him to be his brother. He seated the Indian ruler on his left side and then kept him in his camp for three or four days and bestowed upon him all the honour due to a monarch. Nadir Shah took under his control the Mughal artillery. The majority of Indian soldiers had fled away and the rest gave themselves up as prisoners. Then both, Nadir Shah and the Mughal ruler entered the capital city, Shahjahanabad, where the former spent two months. Nadir Shah entrusted his ministers, Maer Khan and Mehdi Khan with the task of collecting precious stones. Both these officers spent their day in selecting the best quality and highly expensive precious stones. It might be said that none of the Persian rulers had ever seen or had ever heard of so much of wealth. The human mind simply wonders at seeing the throne of the Mughal, which Nadir Shah had seized as soon as he arrived in the capital city. The throne was decorated with the precious stones such as diamonds, sapphires, rubies, emerald, etc., of unheard sizes. The Persian ministers, officers and even the humblest soldiers reaped a good deal of profit. However such a great victory is assigned to the decree of the god and not to the bravery of the Persian arms (Gopal 1988: 183-192).

As soon as Nadir Shah entered the palace of the Indian Mughal, he took under his charge all the rooms of the Indian treasury, harbouring uncounted treasure without any delay and placed his guard over them. Eight persons were selected to collect and evaluate the precious stones. The spy of Russian consul to Persia was one among them. The invaluable treasure would not be found anywhere in the world. The Mughal treasury had only precious stones- diamonds, ruby, sapphires, emerald etc in sixty chests. Besides that there were precious stones adorned in gold, for example, in sables, daggers, shields, signets, crown of turbans, horse fears, kettle-drums, stools and many other things

weighing 320 Poods⁴² (Approximately 5241 Kilogram), packed in 21 packs. Current coins, both in gold and silver were not found in great quantities. Especially the throne of the Mughal which had two peacocks on both the sides and many other curious things attracts attention. It was a remarkable thing for it was fully made of gold and ornamented with diamonds, sapphires, and emeralds. It might be not less than 120 Poods in weight and had to be carried on by eight camels. The stones studded in the throne could not be counted. Those eight persons who were assigned to evaluate the price of the Mughal treasure gathered 200 diamonds from the throne, each of which weighed from 16 to 18 Zolotniks⁴³. Besides this there were diamonds of different sizes and none of them was less than 1 Zolotniks. They together weighed 30 Poods (Approximately 491 Kilogram). There were so many pearls that it could not be counted. Yellow and blue sapphires were also studded to the throne which weighed between 80 and 100 Zolotniks. There were several sapphires, each weighing 10 Zolotniks, though they were not very bright. Nadir shah carried the treasurer along with him while leaving Shahjahanabad (Gopal 1988: 196-198).

4.1.7 The 18th Century India in Russian traveller's account

Ladakh was situated besides a river on a high slope. The buildings of Ladakh were made from local stones, and these were joined by muds. Ladakh was approximately half the Bukhara's size, and was inhabited mostly by the Kashmiri people. The ruler, also called 'Rajah' of the independent state of Tibet also lived there, where there were mosques and trade done by locals was flourishing (Yefremov 1959: 79). Kashmir was ruled by Timur Shah Durrani, who did not live in Kashmir, but Kabul, at a distance

⁴² Pood is a unit of mass. It is approximately 16.38 kilograms. It was used in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pood

⁴³ A zolotnik was a small Russian unit of weight, equal to 4.2658 grams. Used from the 10th to 20th centuries, its name is derived from the Russian word *zoloto*, meaning gold. It is therefore related to the words gold and yellow. As a unit, the zolotnik was the standard for silver manufacture, much as the troy ounce is currently used for gold and other precious metals. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zolotnik

which took seven days to reach there. Durrani's governor, Hadji Karim Dad Khan lived Kashmir. Chenab, with a width of 60 Sazhen⁴⁴, was a significant river in Kashmir, flowing between Kashmir and India (Yefremov 1959: 82-83). In Kashmir, both Hindus and Muslims resided, who were dull and weak as well as poor. Poor people ate mostly boiled millet, oil and greens, while rich sections take milk tea with butter in addition to usual diet. The kingdom in Kabul, under whose possession this city belonged, governed this city through a governor. The city was one hundred kilometre in length and forty kilometres in breath. The climate of Kashmir as well as its water was suitable for human existence. The city was bounded by mountains, therefore nothing much was grown in lands. The British could not conquer this city though they had a long desire to do so (Danibegov 1959: 118-119).

The inhabitants of Kashmir, who were approximately 25000 in numbers, were fair faced, tall, thin and frail, and they were afraid of cold. To protect from cold, Kashmiri people carried hot coals along with them. Cloths made by themselves in their home were used as cloths. They mostly ate rice in which they put garlic and cow's butter. Their houses were built on two floors and made of light planks, caulked with hemp and thatched with straw (Yefremov 1959: 81-82). One of the laws of the Kashmir was that, when a thief was caught for the first time they cut off their right hand; if he is taken a second time, they slash his belly, put him on camel and exhibit him to all the people in the bazaar; when he dies, they hang him in ropes on the bridge (Danibegov 1959: 119).

The rulers of Punjab, which included cities like Amritsar, Phillaur, Patiala and Camal, were known as 'Sardars'. India lie south of Punjab. Delhi was the capital city of India which was devastated during the Nadir Shah invasion as well as by other internecine war. Kazan was half of the city of Delhi, which had double the number of

⁴⁴ A unit of length formerly used in Russia, equal to seven feet. en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Sazhen

inhabitants of former. The buildings in Delhi were mostly of stones though there were houses made of muds also. The people of Delhi were fragile and fearful (Yefremov 1959: 84-86)

The city of Calcutta which was the political centre of British empire in India, was one- second the size of Delhi where lived people of different lands like British, Greeks, as well as the indigenous Indians. There was a large Greek monastery along with many mosques as well as lots of temples. River Ganges south of which lay Calcutta was a big river which ends in the sea and from the sea the distance to Calcutta was close to thirty Versts⁴⁵. The beauty and the magnificence of the city of Calcutta were such that the city was called second London by the British. Serampore which was located around twenty kilometres from Calcutta was a famous centre of trade and this centre which was earlier under Denmark was occupied by British. The earlier Nawab of Bengal lived in Murshidabad, which was approximately 150 kilometres from Calcutta, and he received an annual sum of money from the British company in India (Yefremov 1959: 90 & 104-105).

Calcutta was the principal city of whole Mughal- Empire, but the Mughal emperor himself resided in Delhi (Lebedev 1988: 252). Lebedev had started a theatre in Calcutta but, one after another problem in successfully conducting the play caused by his own employee, he had to shut down the theatre. He went to the court for justice against those employees of his undertaking who did not comply with the contract between them and Lebedev, but it was of no relief to him. He commented that it seems that the court systems were more merciful to the offenders only and not to the victims (Lebedev 1988: 257-258).

⁴⁵ A verst is an obsolete Russian unit of length. It is defined as being 500 Sazhen long, which makes a verst equal to 1.0668 kilometres (0.6629 miles; 3,500 feet). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verst

The climate of Calcutta was excessively hot and the water here was very bad. For that reason during the rains which the people set out large tubs to collect the rain water, to use it for drinking. Perhaps the water here would be suitable for use too, but it is as much as the Indian custom to throw dead bodies into the water after burning them a little in fire. The water has a nasty stench from the bodies decomposing in it and therefore it is not used for any purpose at all. The Indians and Muslims, who were the real inhabitants of this place, lived only on rice and fish, bread was not eaten at all. Here they spoke the same language as in the state of Bengal (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

Azimabad or Patna was located on the bank of river Ganges. The climate here was very good. Well water was used for consumption as the river water was not good for anything because the dead bodies thrown in to it made it foul-smelling and harmful. The foundation of this city was laid by some Indian prince called Azim Khan, that's why the town was called Azimabad.

At Lucknow resided a Nawab whose annual income was close to twenty million rupees. He however had to send a fixed sum of money to the British government, as the latter was the real ruler of the region. The English troops amounting to two thousand were placed besides Lucknow, which the Nawab was aware of. The English troops were stationed in Kanpur as well. Kanpur had a good number of forts, and it was a port city in which many ships arrived. Farrukhabad was another Indian town, inhabited by both Hindus and Muslims whose Nawab was subdued by the British easily, and subsequently it became under British possession only that its Nawab had to be paid sixteen hundred rupees per month as a pension. At Meerut as well the British stationed its troops which was fairly in good numbers (Danibegov 1959: 113-114).

Delhi which was the capital of India was built by Shahjahan, an Indian king. The city had many buildings of huge sizes and large number of mosques. Shahjahan also built a red fort by polished red stone whose finishing was so great that no cracks could be found in it. The king resided in the fort, whose palace was decorated fully with gold and other precious stones. Besides the fort lie the famous mosques, Jama Masjid, which was

adorned with gold and precious stones. It was so skilfully designed that it was visible from ten kilometres. The fort was later captured by British, and the king was placed in the fort on a monthly pension of ten thousand rupees (Danibegov 1959: 114-115).

The people of India were black in complexion because of the intense heat. They were lazy as well as aesthetic. The male did not cover the whole body but were half naked. However they wrap their body sometimes with the Kashmiri Shawls. The common language of education was Arabic, while for trading purposes Gujarati language was preferred. The gap between the poor and the rich was clearly visible, as the rich lady wore necklaces made of pearls in their necks as well as the rings in ears, in nose, on hands, in fingers and on arms. The people owned a number of slaves to perform certain jobs. The rich lady rode on elephants in a box, adorned with all precious stones and decorated with jewels, while the ordinary women who did not possess any jewels or precious stones, rode on 'Palki' which was a box of one fourth of arshins⁴⁶ high, whose length was two arshins while its width was one and a half arshins (Yefremov 1959: 87-88).

The British had army of one lakh fifty thousand, comprising both Indian troops called 'blacks' as well as foreign troops, called 'Whites'. The Indians in the British army were competitively efficient with the foreigner troops. The monthly salary of black troops as well as that of whites one was same, each getting seven rupees. The whites got additional beefs and wine. The salary of captains was two hundred and fifty rupees, salary of secretary was two thousand rupees, the governor received ten thousand rupees and the surgeon received two thousand rupees. The troops of the army received thirty rupees a month along with the money for upkeep of horses (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

⁴⁶ The basic unit is the Russian cubit, called arshins, which has been in use since the 16th Century. It was standardized by Peter the Great in the 18th Century to measure exactly twenty-eight English inches. It was abandoned in 1924 when the Soviet Union adopted the metric system. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obsolete_Russian_units_of_measurement

4.2 Conclusion

The Bahamani polity was of feudal character in which the ruler's strength depended upon the military strength of his nobles as well as on the other powerful provincial chiefs who held a number of fiefs under their control. The ruler as well as most of the nobles of the kingdom was from Khorasan. The slaves from Khorasan, Arabia, Turkmen country and Chagatai constituted the major chunk of army men and fine soldiers of the kingdom. The nobles from Khorasan, who were Muslims, held all important positions in the Bahamani kingdom administrative structure. The ordinary men of the kingdom, such as the native Indians were inducted in the army of the sultan and his nobles and that too in the lower position of the hierarchy, as soldiers in the infantry.

The Bahamanids sultan did not miss opportunity to show their power and splendour to the people, even when it was a less important event such as going for the hunting. He was going for the hunt with all possible army men whom he possessed, just to show his kingdom's powerful status and to infuse a sense of fear among the masses. The message was clear, i.e. to tell to the commoners that the kingdom cannot be challenged by any means thus they (masses) did not have option but to keep being ruled by Bahamanids and pay revenue on time. Even on the eve of celebrating Muslim festivals (as the Bahamanids were Muslims), the sultan did not miss to show his strength. The Bahamanids army were using the then latest guns, like harquebus whose range was approximately two hundred metres. The palace of the sultan was magnificent which was decorated and gilded with gold. But foreigners were not allowed to enter the palace of sultan in Bidar in which there were seven gates and at every gate there were one hundred scribes to enter those coming in and out of the palace. The importance of this information lies in telling the amount of treasury and resources possessed by the Bahamanids.

There was a big gap in the Indian society between the nobles of the Bahamani kingdom and the common masses. The former lived in luxury while the latter lived in miseries. It was not that the Russian society was not unjust, but the gap was not big in India.

Bahamanids attacked Vijayanagar empire- the only Hindu empire of the region- in which he was promised by several Indian autonomous chiefs to help them but none of their help except one came forth. Many scholars argue that the attack on Vijayanagar Empire by the Bahamanids initiated a process of decline for the latter. In the battle which followed, Bahamanids defeated the Vijayanagar prince and captured the city of Vijayanagar, where approximately twenty thousand men and women were slaughtered and the same number were made slaves, who were later sold at a low price of five to ten Tankas per head.

The Indians had a fascination with the foreigners, particularly those who were of fair complexion as the Indians were of dark complexion. In India people did not cover the whole body but some parts only. Even the women did not cover her breast fully and bore children every year. The prince wore costly cloths made of silk and other expensive fabrics and covered their whole body while the common mass had on their body just the minimum cloth to cover them that too not fully. Boys and girls till the age of seven did not cover their private parts and remained naked

Native Indians were also sold and bought as slaves. They were probably the tribes from south India. These slaves were in addition to the foreign slaves from Khorasan, Arabia etc. In the markets of Bidar not just the men slaves but women slaves were also bought and sold. Women slaves were cheaper than the male slaves. An average looking women slaves were available on payment of just two silver coins only, while for beautiful women slaves, the cost was four silver coins. If one could pay five silver coins, then he could get a beautiful as well as an average looking woman slaves both.

The Hindus and the Muslims did not dine together. The Hindus did not eat beef while the Muslims did not eat pork. Hindus were both vegetarians as well as non vegetarians. The Hindu men did not eat with their wives but alone and always ate with their right hand and that too after cleaning their hands and feet and rinsing their mouth. The Hindus did not allow Muslims to touch or see their food; otherwise they considered it as impure.

The name of a new born male child in the family was given by his father while it was mother's duty to give name to her daughter. The cow was held sacred by the Hindus and they called her their 'mother', while bull was called father by Hindus. The dung cakes of cow were used as fuel to bake food by the Hindus.

The lady of the inn, placed to take care of the travellers, traders and merchants coming to inns for rest on their journey, sleeps with the foreigners as they had an immense liking for the white foreigners.

In the 17th Century there was no direct relation between India and Russia, so Russians did know just the names of the Indian rulers, like in 1646 it was known to Russians that Mughal ruler Shahjahan was ruling over India but Russians did not know more than that, such as how to address the Mughal ruler. This information along with others was needed to be collected by the Russian agent who was sent in 1646 by the Russian tsar to Mughal India. The Russian agent was asked to return through the same route by which he went to India. The Russians held knowledge about the Balkh campaign of Shahjahan in which he was able to capture Balkh but later on lost it.

The Russian tsar was not aware of the title of Aurangzeb, but knew the name of the Mughal ruler who was ruling over India. It was known to the tsar that Russian goods such as leather, mirrors and corals were in demand in India, that's why the Russian agent with these items worth three hundred roubles was sent to the court of Aurangzeb's court with an intention to establish formal relation. But unfortunately the Russian agent Kasimov was not allowed to meet Aurangzeb and he was sent back from Kabul itself. Around 1677 Kasimov returned to Russian territory and informed that the Mughals were engaged in a great war with the Afghans on the North West frontier. The Afghans who were fighting Mughals were earlier serving Mughal Empire. At this time Aurangzeb was busy in waging war against the tribesmen of North West frontier.

Finally in 1695 Russian agent, Kasimov was allowed to enter the Mughal Empire and from whom no import duties were collected from him on the order of Aurangzeb.

Kasimov had brought with him Russian goods such as red yuft, hides, bones of fishes etc. The Indian rupee in silver was equivalent to forty Kopeks. Kasimov later met with Aurangzeb in Burhanpur when latter was campaigning in the Deccan. Aurangzeb at that time was close to hundred years old and he had four princes. Aurangzeb put on white dress made of fine cotton Muslin. He put on white turban on his head; he was carried to the mosque by eight persons on Wednesday and Friday.

Nadir shah invaded India because the Mughal rulers did not comply with his terms and conditions set by the former. The terms were first, the return to Nadir Shah all the descendants of twelve thousand soldiers which the Iranian ruler Shah Tahmasp 1st had given to Humayun during latter troubled times to re conquer his lost Indian territory. The second was return to Shah of one lakh twenty thousand roubles incurred for the purpose of raising those soldiers. Mughals did not comply and thus subsequently Nadir Shah attacked India. After initial successes such as conquest of Kandahar, Kabul, nadir showed his foresightedness and sent to India twenty five agents to talk to individual Indian chiefs for help against the Mughals. Nadir shah planned that if the help of these chiefs did not materialized then he would not move. But he moved on and in the battle with the Mughals defeated them. Whether nadir's desire of getting help from Indian chiefs was fulfilled or not is not accounted, but one thing is clear that there was a great conflict between Mughal rulers and the chiefs of the emerging provincial state in 18th Century. Moreover the Mughal army was not obedient which led to their defeat.

After the victory over Mughals, nadir shah took hold of Mughal treasury, which was full of wealth to the extent that it was unheard in anywhere in the world. The Mughal throne also called the peacock throne was approximately 1965 Kilogram in which two peacocks were placed on each side of the throne, was decorated and gilded with precious stones like emerald, sapphires, rubies and diamonds of unheard sizes. The diamonds weighing 491 kilogram was studded in the throne. The precious stones were kept in sixty chests. Yellow and blue sapphires weighing 426 gram was also studded with the throne. Then there were precious stones adorned in gold in different items such as in sables,

daggers, shields, signets, crown of turbans, horse fears, kettle-drums, stools and many other things weighing 320 Poods⁴⁷ (Approximately 5241 Kilogram), packed in 21 packs. While leaving Shahjahanabad, Nadir shah carried the entire treasury, mentioned above, along with him to Persia. Kashmir was colder than rest of India and to protect from cold the people of Kashmir used cloths made by them only. They ate mixture of rice, butter and cow`s fat.

⁴⁷ Pood is a unit of mass. It is approximately 16.38 kilograms. It was used in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pood

CHAPTER FIVE: TRADE AND ECONOMY

TRADE AND ECONOMY

5.1.1 Indian Economy of the 15th Century.

The account of Nikitin has to be studied on two levels. At one he accounted the trouble he confronted with when he was forcefully asked to convert to Islam in India, while on the other level he records all necessary details which future Russian merchants would need to have, before undertaking journey on trade routes to India. It details about the trade routes to India and markets in between, famous port city lying on the trade route, the goods on offer in each of these markets and port cities, and most importantly the time taken to reach at next market from the previous one through a particular means of transport. The most important contribution of Nikitin in the fifteenth Century trade and commerce was that he was the first Russian who had accounted for the well established trade route from Russia to India, a part of which or the whole route, was frequently travelled by merchants from different lands such as Indians, Persians, Armenians as well as Russians (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

Nikitin had undertaken a journey to India through various markets in between to learn and disseminate to his fellow Russians, information about the goods on offer in different markets on the route he followed. He wanted to tell to his Russian masters about the possibility of trade benefits in goods not known in Russia. Keeping this in mind he recorded not only the name of the goods on offer in different markets and their prices but also the number of days required to reach from one market to another, so that the future Russian merchants or traders could consider all aspects before undertaking journey for trade in India as well as to other markets (Riasanovsky 1961).

Afanasy Nikitin had come to India in a 'Tava' (Ship), through Indian Ocean. He was carrying a stallion (a male horse which has not been castrated) with him. He wanted to sell the horse and earn some profit. He was more concerned with finding new routes to

India so that it could benefit his countrymen. He was a private trader not a state representative, as against the western European travellers who had their respective states support behind them. He was aiming simply at opening new prospects for trade relations between India and Russia, and had no intention of establishing territorial imprints in India unlike British, French and Dutch travellers (Kemp 1958: 26-29). According to Lenhoff and Martin, "Nikitin's journey may be understood to be the result of a combination of discrete decisions, each of which led him simply to the next market. That series of decisions took him on a journey along a known and well-travelled trade route from Baku across Iran through Chapakur, Sari, Amol, Rei, Kashan, Yezd, Lar, Bender, Hormuz, and finally Muscat and India" (Lenhoff & Martin 1989).

For many scholars, Afanasy Nikitin was not just a merchant who had come to India for commercial benefit, however many scholars have considered him as visionary man with some futuristic plan for his native land. According to I. I. Sreznevskij, "However brief the notes left by Nikitin may be, we can nevertheless judge him by his writings to be a remarkable fifteenth-Century Russian man. . . an Orthodox Christian, a patriot. . .worldly wise, yet well-read, and in addition an inquisitive observer". Nikitin was on an expedition for trade and despite being attacked and losing belongings, he continued his journey. He himself writes that "Whoever had something left in Rus returned to Rus; whoever had debts in Rus followed his nose" (Lenhoff & Martin 1989)

Nikitin was surprised to see the big gap in the standard of living between the Muslim nobles of Bahamani kingdom and the common population. It was not that the Bahaman Economy was not advancing, since he has mentioned about the growing trade and commerce within the kingdom such as in Bidar where he saw commercial activities going on in which items such as Silk, brocades, horses and others were on sale (Morris 1967: 502-508). Kemp showed his curiousness and wanted to know that whether Nikitin was comparing Indian poverty with the Russian one, and if he was doing so then, according to Kemp, Nikitin's argument that Indian poor had low level of living was a significant argument. Poor's and beggars eager to take entry into the Sultan's palace for

want of some material benefits was a daily sight. It was not only that the commodities in the market that were cheap, but the lives of human being were also cheap. For example, both men and women slaves were cheap in India which Nikitin did not see in his native land, as in Rus women slaves could fetch more money than in India (Kemp 1958: 23-25). The demand for slaves in India was high, as according to one of the traveller to India, Frederich, ships with less than 20 horses had to pay 8% import duty while entering Goa, while Ships with 20 or more Horses were allowed to enter import free (Minayev 2010).

Nikitin did not find goods in India suitable for the land of Russia, as everything available in the Indian markets were meant for Indians only. Whatever goods which could be of some use to Nikitin were expensive. All goods which were cheap, such as indigo and pepper, was meant for the Muslim country. The Muslim men who advised him to come to India for trade were absolutely wrong, and they deceived him. The Muslims had not to pay the tariffs while bringing goods through the sea, while for others like Nikitin the tariff was high (Nikitin 1950: 17-18). Nikitin was unhappy to see that “All toll free goods are for the Muslim land only..... But we (Russians) shall not be allowed to take our goods free of toll. And the toll is high” (Maxwell 2006: 253-254). Nikitin was probably concerned about buying luxurious goods so that he could sell it in the European markets, as the Indian goods which could not fetch him huge money were already available in Persia which was very near to his place. Thus he was disappointed to see the goods offered in the Indian market (Kemp 1958: 25-26).

The port city of Hormuz was an important trading centre in the fifteenth Century where ships loaded with goods from different parts of the world came for exchanging with other goods. Indian ships with goods such as spices, silk, precious stones, gold and elephants bone were reaching in Hormuz to exchange goods not available in India. One of these items was the efficient horse which Indians had to import from Hormuz as well as from other ports of Arabian Sea. Nikitin had also bought a stallion as he knew that horse were expensive in India because of the dearth of high breed horse. Nikitin reached

Cambay, Gujarat which was an independent Muslim province ruled by Mohammed Shah Beghara was ruling in Ahmadabad (1459-1511).

Gujarat was famous for Paint and Lac while for carnelian one needed to go Cambay, the famous port city. According to Nikitin, "Cambay is a harbour from where ships sail all over Indian Sea, and it is rich in goods; Alacha, Taffeta, Coarse Cloth and Indigo are always made there, and also Lac, Cornelian and Salt" (Minayev 2010)

From Chaul Nikitin went on to Junar, which lies today on the Western Ghats near Bombay⁴⁸. Junar according to Nikitin was built 'on a rocky island, not built by man but created by God', and the passage to reach there was very narrow to the extent that at a time only one person could walk on that road. This is probably an allusion to the early Buddhist cave sanctuaries, inhabited by monks in the first centuries A.D. of which Junar has about 150, cut out of the flat-lying Deccan rocks along the ragged exposed edge of the Ghats escarpment. The long up-hill climb Nikitin refers to may be the climb up the Ghats, certainly a day-long affair even on horseback. The caves at Junar are similar in structure to those at world-renowned Ajanta, where the paintings have attracted many visitors; Junar had far more caves, though few paintings (Morris 1967: 502-508).

He reached Junar during the onset of Monsoon season, early in June. He lived there for two months and during that period it was raining all the time, and every where there was mud water (Nikitin 1950: 13-14). In Junar crops such as wheat, peas and vegetables were sown in the Rabi season, and the natives of Junar were very skilled in making of wine as well as its preservation (Nikitin 1950: 24-25). People of Junar made wine out of huge nuts in a vessel; they made malt brew from palm bark. Horses were feed on peas, Khichri- made from boiling rice, sugar and oil: and rice cakes (Nikitin 1950: 13-14).

⁴⁸ Junnar is a city with thousands of years of history in the Pune district of the Indian state of Maharashtra. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junnar

Nikitin had brought a stallion with him to India to earn profit by selling it here, as he learnt that in India there was a dearth of fine horses, because in India buffaloes and oxen were bred but not horses. The buffalos and oxen were used by the people as a means of transporting goods from one place to another, and also for riding. Till Nikitin reached Junar, the stallion costs him one hundred roubles. At Junar Nikitin stayed two months to 'winter', as he puts it; this is obviously a reference to the monsoon season, with its rains which preclude all travel by road and forced him to remain in one place. During this time he was able to observe some details of the everyday life of the peasant, details which serve to remind us how little peasant agriculture in India changes with time. Ploughing, sowing of rice, wheat and millets in the busy few weeks after the break of the monsoon, the preparation of home-made alcohols, and the feeding of the animals. He left Junar on Assumption Day, August 15; this was apparently before he intended, if we remember that the summer monsoon continues through September and that the condition of the roads would still be bad in August. It seems that he hurried to leave the town after an incident in which he temporarily lost his horse to the local overlord; the latter discovered that he was a Russian (and therefore not Muslim) and tried to force him to adopt Mohammedanism, threatening a fine and the non return of his horse if he did not do so. He was only freed through the intercession of a friend, probably the Khorasani (north Persian) Mohammed. Here the position of Nikitin in Indian society appears; he is taken by most to be a Central Asian (or Khorasani) merchant, of which there were many in India at the time; as such he was accepted, since these merchants were Muslims (Morris 1967: 502-508).

Nikitin left the city of Junar for Bidar which was the Capital and the largest city of the Bahamani Dynasty. In Bidar, Nikitin saw trade in horses, in goods and in brocades, in slaves, in silk etc. apart from Indian good and edible fruits, but there was nothing to buy for Nikitin to be taken back to his native land Rus. People of Bidar were black in complexion and women prostitutes were easily found. Robberies were rampant, people lied too much and they held magical powers. People had poison with them with which they kill their masters (Nikitin 1950: 18-19).

Nikitin brought a Stallion to India to sell it here, because there was a dearth of fine horses in India as only ox and buffalos were bred here but not the horses, and this cost him one hundred roubles. Nikitin sold his stallion at Bidar, and received sixty eight 'Futuns'⁴⁹. The amount included the cost of Stallion as well as the expenditure which Nikitin incurred in one year on account of feeding the horse (Nikitin 1950: 24-25). Apparently he had met with some financial success in Persia, for he was able to pay one hundred roubles for passage to India for himself and a stallion. For centuries, merchants brought horses to Hormuz and delivered them across the Indian Ocean to the armies of various Indian states⁵⁰ (Maxwell 2006: 250).

Nikitin reached Bidar, and saw brisk trading activities there. Trade in every item which was Indian in origin was done. He was very upset to see that there were no goods available which could be used by the Russians. He had mentioned about Indian goods like horses of Indian origin, silk, and other merchandise. Slaves were also bought and sold in the market of Bidar. Nikitin has talked about the pirates on the sea as well, who for Nikitin were neither Muslims nor Christians but were idol worshippers they were stone worshippers, who prayed to idols and were ignorant about the Christ (Nikitin 1950: 17-18).

What exactly was the source for this particular comment of Nikitin has not been mentioned, however he was making this comment probably because either he had confronted with the pirates who were idol worshippers and did not know Christ, or he had learnt it from the people around him whom he met on his journey to India or he had heard this from the natives.

⁴⁹ 'Futun' was a south Indian coin of gold or silver varying in value with locality.

⁵⁰ Marco Polo too commented on the difficulty of breeding and feeding horses in India's climate. Marco Polo, *Travels*, trans. Robert Latham (London: Penguin Book, 1958) p. 264.

At some distance from Bidar, there held a fair every year in the memory of a venerated saint of India. Shaikh Ala-ud-din⁵¹, where a bazaar was held once in a year, where people from every corner of India came for trade. The fair was held for ten days, and everything available in and around the Bahamani dynasty was brought for sale. In the year when Nikitin was present in the fair, he mentioned that approximately twenty thousand horses from Bidar were brought for sale in this fair. This fair was the best fair of the time in India. In the fair everything was sold and bought in the name of the saint whose fete fell on the Russian festival of the protection of the holy virgin. (Nikitin 1950)

The time taken through the sea has been also mentioned by Nikitin. From Hormuz to Calicut it took ten days, from Calicut to Diu it took six days, four days it took from Gujarat to Cambay, from Cambay to Chaul twelve days and from Chaul to Dhabol the time taken was six days (Nikitin 1950: 34-35). Dhabol was the last seaport according to Nikitin, in Hindustan belonging to the Muslims⁵². In this port all coastal peoples of India and Ethiopia gathered. It was an extensive seaport, where horses were brought for sale from Mysore, Egypt, Arabia, Khorasan, Turkestan and Isfahan. It took almost one month of walk on land for anyone to reach Bidar or Gulbarga from Dhabol seaport (Nikitin 1857: 34-35). It took twenty five days from Dhabol to reach Calicut, fifteen days from Calicut to Ceylon, all by sea route (Nikitin 1950: 34-35).

Cambay port was considered as one of the most important port of the Indian Ocean. It was a manufacturing place where every sorts of goods were manufactured, like Talach⁵³ (Long Gown, made from half cotton and half silk), damask, khan⁵⁴, Kiota

⁵¹ According to Nikitin the tomb of Shaikh Ala-ud din was located at Aland near Gulbarga. This may be the tomb of Shaikh- Ala-ud din Ahmad, Sultan of Deccan, who died in 1458. Opp. Cit. Gregory Belkov.

⁵² The coast south of Dhabol was under the Raja of Vijayanagar and independent Indian Rajas, Goa being the chief port of Vijayanagar. Between 1469 and 1472, Mahmud Gavan engaged in a difficult campaign, to reduce to obedience the rajas of Khelna, Sangameshwar, and other districts whose pirates fleets had infested much loss on Muslim merchants and pilgrims. After taking these ports Mahmud Gavan besieged and captured Goa. His reception in Bidar after these exploits was described by Nikitin.

⁵³ Also called Alaca. A cloth made from twisted cotton and silk thread. Opp. Cit. Belkov, 1950.

(blankets), agate etc. This place was famous for indigo, the blue stone colour (Nikitin 1857: 19-20). Apart from indigo, in Cambay Lac, salt and Cornelian were also produced (Nikitin 1950: 36).

Calicut port, for Nikitin was the port for whole Indian Ocean. It was very difficult for the Ships to pass through this port, as the sea passage through this port was notorious for the presence of pirates, thus whosoever wanted to pass through this passage must ask god to help them out. In Calicut pepper, ginger, Indian peas, colour plants, muskets, cloves, cinnamon, aromatic roots, and almost all other spices were produced. Everything else apart from spices was cheap and servants and maids in the city were very cordial. Slaves and slave women in Calicut were very beautiful but black (Nikitin 1950: 37-38).

Ceylon was also an important seaport on the Indian Ocean. On the height of the mountain at Ceylon was found the foot of Adam⁵⁵. And in the vicinity of this Adam Peak, was found precious stones, Rubies, Crystal, White Agate, Resin, Beryl and Emery Stones⁵⁶. Elephants and Ostriches were found there. Elephants were sold on the basis of size while ostriches were sold on the basis of weight (Nikitin 1950: 38, Nikitin 1857: 20).

In Pegu, there lied an important port, in which lived a considerable population of Indian Dervishes⁵⁷. Precious stones, sapphires and rubies were produced in Pegu which were sold by these Indian Dervishes (Nikitin 1950: 39-40).

Diamonds were found in the old and new mines of Raichur . A “Pocka”⁵⁸ of average diamond was sold for five roubles, while a very good diamond was sold for ten

⁵⁴ A short of Satin from China, Opp. Cit. Wielhorsky

⁵⁵ This is called Adam's Peak.

⁵⁶ A type of stone used for finishing precious stones.

⁵⁷ Buddhist Monks

roubles. A Pocka of new diamond was sold for five “Keni”⁵⁹. A Black diamond was sold for four to six “Keni”. But a white diamond was sold for one “Tanga”. Diamonds were found in the mines on the mountain. These mines of mountain were sold and the prices were decided by the equality of diamond assumed to be present in the said mines. For example, the mines containing new diamonds were sold for two thousand gold pounds. If it contained the old diamonds then it was sold for ten thousand gold pounds. Raichur belonged to Malik Khan, a vessel of the Sultan, and it was thirty Kos from Bidar (Nikitin 1950: 41).

Nikitin has mentioned about the slave trade. He had said that Asad Khan maintained slaves in large numbers and these slaves were brought from Khorasan and the region around it in Indian ships. The import duties which were many were extracted from all traders except a particular group of traders. “These duties were applied and extracted from traders coming with goods in their ship, and there were traders who had not to pay any import duty” (Nikitin 1950). Minayev on the basis of account of fifteen Century traveller to Goa has noted that ships which had at least twenty slaves in it were exempted from the import duties of reaching Goa, while other ships which did not have at least twenty slaves in it were required to pay the import duties (Minayev 2010).

In India the merchants were put in the hostels which were maintained both by the private individuals and also by the state for the convenience of the merchants and the travellers. In these houses or inns the women prepared food for the visitors or the guests. These women also sometimes sleep with them on the payment of two silver coins. These women did so because they loved people of white complexion. If any merchant did not

⁵⁸ Pocka was a unit of weight used in Russia up to the seventeenth Century. During the fifteenth Century it was equal to 198 milligrams. Opp. Cit. Belkov, 1950

⁵⁹ A Small coin, a sixty-fourth part of a Tanga. Ibid. Belkov, 1950.

want to have sexual relation with these women then they had to pay one silver coin only, as charge of the facility given by the inn (Nikitin 1950: 14-15).

On the mode of transport, Nikitin observed that it was based mostly on Oxen and Buffaloes. This mode of transportation was used not only for travelling, but also for carrying goods away from one place to other and for various other purposes. This was because India did not have good variety of horses to be used in the mode of transportation. Therefore horses were imported from abroad and were feed on peas and 'Khichri' (made from sugar and oil) (Nikitin 1950).

In Kalur comelian was produced and here they finish it and export it to all over the world. In Kalur there were three hundred diamonds artisans, who decorated weapons. Golconda was a great market. Among local points, within the Bahamani kingdom, Nikitin has a commentary on the diamond mines of Raichur and the diamond-working industry at the nearby settlement of Kulur, where he stayed for five months. He also visited Golconda, historically noted for its diamonds. His great interest in precious stones has led one writer to propose that Nikitin actually participated in the trade in these items, but there are no direct references by him on this point (Morris 1967: 502-508).

5.1.2 Indians in Russia and their trade during 17th and 18th Century

The Indian merchant, Sutor, came to Astrakhan in 1645 for trade. From Astrakhan he went to Kazan and then to Moscow. He was allowed to trade freely after being collected custom dues. He was nowhere harassed as opposed to Iran where foreign merchants were harassed. The ten thousand Indians who lived permanently in Iran had a tough time in trading there as they were harassed by the various functionaries of the Shah. He returned India the next year and narrated the kindness of Russian authority towards foreign merchants. Having learnt this, twenty five Indian merchants reached Astrakhan along with their goods for trade. The Indians brought for Astrakhan market goods such as, costly silk, cotton textiles of various sorts such as Calico, Coarse calico, etc, precious stones and other goods which they produce. The Indian merchants who went

to Astrakhan along with Suttur did not have many goods to trade as they had come for the first time to see the reality of the Russian kindness however they had that much good with them that the custom duties on their goods fetched to the Russian treasury around 4000 roubles. The Indians purchased Sable, bird's feather, white fur Coats, Copper and other goods fit for India. These Indians were harassed at Astrakhan not by any government functionaries but by an interpreter Devlet-abyz, a resident of Ugrench (Turkmenistan). Suttur had complained to the Russian authorities to get Indians out of this problem. He stressed that if Indian merchants in Astrakhan were not harassed further, then Indian merchants would come to Astrakhan in great numbers with lots of goods so much so that it would have been difficult to find place for them. On return Indian may purchase goods worth one Lakh roubles. If the Russian government become kind enough then the Indians living in Iran would go to Astrakhan for trade which would fetch the government huge money as tax. The Russian authority replied to Suttur's complain and Indian merchants were asked to come and trade in the Russian kingdom till eternity, with the same care and love (Gopal 1988: 29-31).

On 31 may 1651, Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich sent a letter to Shahjahan through his two agents and desired that if the Indian ruler Shahjahan consented to establish diplomatic relation with the Russian empire and subsequently sent his ambassador and merchants with goods to Moscow, then those merchants would not be charged any governmental duties for trade and they would be allowed to trade freely in the kingdom of Muscovy. The Russian agents were asked to note down about the affairs of the Custom department of the Indian empire by employing means such as offering food, drinks or presents to the officials. They had to note down- who were the policemen in the department and who were flexible to be manipulated? Do Indians produce golden Velvet and Satin or plain Velvet and Satin or they import these? And if, these items were imported than at what price they were imported? They had to see all the goods available in the Indian market and note down their price. What goods did German merchants or merchants from other kingdom bring to the Indian empire and do these goods were

available in Russia and were there any good in India from Muscovy? What were the routes taken by these foreign merchants to come to India? (Gopal 1988: 43)

An Armenian merchant petitioned the tsar of Russia on 30 August 1663, to allow him and his colleague to trade in 'Chepuchin roots'- an Indian medicinal herb, at Terk, Astrakhan and Moscow which they were refused to by the custom official to trade as they did not like it. These merchants had later talked to the medicine Department of Russian government which agreed to buy all those important roots and other medicines which Russians had been importing from India and Persia. The traders were allowed to trade in Indian medicinal herb at Astrakhan and later at Moscow (Gopal 1988: 68-69).

The Russian Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich has ordered on 28 January 1665, that Indians, resident of Astrakhan, Armenians and traders from the land of Shah (the ruler of Persia) who were presently in Moscow with their goods should sell their goods to Russians in wholesale and should not sell in retail anything to anyone (Gopal 1988: 70).

An order was issued to the military commander of Astrakhan from the Kazan Palace, where southern affairs of the Foreign Ministry of Russian Empire were looked after, with the instruction to invite Indian craftsmen capable of dyeing 'Kindyak'⁶⁰ and other varieties of cotton textiles such as 'Byaz'⁶¹, for manufacturing and dyeing cotton textiles in Moscow. If anyone was able to bring these skilled Indian craftsmen to Moscow, he was to be rewarded with Sable worth 50 or 100 roubles from the royal treasury (Gopal 1988: 70-71).

Foreign merchants residing in Astrakhan and who often went to Moscow for trade, such as Persians, Indians, merchants from Bukhara, Armenians were asked to pay custom duty at the rate of 10 percent of the whole goods sold, for trading at any place in

⁶⁰ Kindyak is a variety of Cotton Cloth.

⁶¹ Byaz is a variety of thick cotton cloth manufactured in eastern countries.

the Muscovy kingdom. The foreign merchants including Indians were banned from trading in gold and 'efimki' (A Russian name of a German silver currency called Taeler). They were also asked not to sell Russians in slavery to the Persians. The goods of those not following the order were to be confiscated. In all over the Russian kingdom foreigners should not sell foreign goods in retail. They were banned from going to any fairs held at different cities of the kingdom with their goods nor should send their agent to these fairs (Gopal 1988: 72-73).

Saltpetre and other goods were brought to Russia by the Indians and traders continually come and bring precious stones, pearls and variety of Indian goods. From the kingdom of the great Tsar, they need goods such as good Sable, black Vixen. Ermine. broad cloth, and bone and tusks of walrus (Gopal 1988: 74-75). In India precious stones were found in the earth in great quantities (Gopal 1988: 84-87).

On interrogation by the foreign officials, Indian merchants replied that. in Indian kingdom following Russian goods were in great demand: costly sable costing between 10 and 15 and between 20 and 30 roubles per pair, red and green broad cloth, red Yuft (i.e., Russian leather), good fishbone, mirrors of big and small sizes, good red corals (big and small), Turkish golden and silvery velvet. The Indian ruler love to have grey hounds and big hunting dogs and strong and furious watchdogs. For the Indian kingdom, wild and strong dogs were purchased at Persia at high prices (Gopal 1988: 76-78).

Indian merchant Kardas brought to Astrakhan various goods and in various quantities which included, pearls worth 1000 roubles precious stones worth 2000 roubles; silk worth 2000 roubles; brocade worth 500 roubles and saffron worth 500 roubles. Kardas brought these goods to Astrakhan without paying any tax. At Moscow also he did not pay any tax (Gopal 1988: 94-95).

Russian merchants petitioned to the Russian Tsar complaining that Indian merchants living in Astrakhan and Moscow for many years and were not going away and falsely described themselves as the residents of Russia. They were not paying tax

properly to the custom authority. And they trade in retail which they were not allowed to do. Indian merchants were accused of giving loan on a high rate of interest to the local populations. With the Russians these Indians exchanged very bad goods which they cannot keep for long. All fine goods which they had, were taken to the 'Makarevsk' fair⁶² and were sold in retail. These Indians after becoming rich in the Russian empire leave for their wife and children in India. Indian merchants defended their position through a petition to the Tsar stating that the allegation of the Russian merchants were baseless. That they traded only in two cities within the confines of Russian empire, one was Astrakhan and the other was Moscow. And that in this process no one was harmed or oppressed. They considered themselves as true residents of Astrakhan who lived with their wives and children in the house built for the Indians by the Tsar. These Indians traded in Indian and Persian goods in Astrakhan. They went abroad or to Moscow from Astrakhan and after trade returned to Astrakhan only, as per the order of the 'great' Tsar Mikhail Feodorovich. They invoked the articles 77 and 78 which stated that "foreigners from abroad, Persians and Indians and residents of Astrakhan will go to Moscow and other cities with their goods. With these foreigners custom duty is to be charged at the rate of one 'grivna' (10 Kopecks) per rouble from goods sold. If anybody stays to trade in Astrakhan, he would pay at the rate of one 'dengas' (5copecks) per rouble". They further stated that they traded in goods which were liked by others and did not inflict any burden on anyone or harm any person. They did not lend money to anyone on interest and did not sell their goods in retail. "We Indians live in your kingdom in Astrakhan in the Indian 'Dvor' (House) since eternity and besides trade we have no other profession to earn our bread. Please do not expel us innocent Indians from Moscow" (Gopal 1988: 112-126)

Indian merchant Abu Ram and his colleagues petitioned to the Russian Tsar Peter the Great to allow Indian merchants to trade freely in Russian territory and to extend their

⁶² An annual fair held in Russia in the city of Nizhnii Novgorod on the Volga river. Gopal, 1998, pp. 126.

trade to European as well as Chinese market. The petitioner requested to allow them and other Indians to trade in St. Petersburg and from there to German territory in the West and China in the East via Siberia. The petition claimed that these Indians had been doing trade in Russian territory as well as in Germany and China for many years⁶³ (Gopal 1988: 149).

Vice Admiral D. Wilster of Russia was sent to the Indian Territory to secure trade agreements with the Mughal emperor. On reaching Bengal, the Russian emissary was asked to meet with the Mughal Emperor and convince him to allow for Indian commerce with Russia in goods needed by each party for the mutual benefit of both. He had to secure plenty of from India as Russians had very little of them. These logs should be in the diameter (ranging) from 20 to 30 inch⁶⁴. He was asked to purchase them at the prevailing price in much quantity and to be kept in place of ballast in the frigate (Gopal 1988: 131-132).

Printed Indian cloths, Calicoes and Chintz, were bought in bulk by the Russian ambassador to Hague, as per the order of Imperial government, and were dispatched to St. Petersburg. The items purchased were 132 arshins, amounting 877 guilders on 25th may 1722; 114 arshins, amounting 806 guilders on 29th may 1722; and 54 arshins, amounting 455 guilders (Gopal 198: 168-170).

Indian merchant Marwari Barayev had submitted to the Russian authority about the land routes from India to Russia and about the trade of the Indian merchants in Russia. The capital city of Mughal India was Delhi where Mughal rulers lived. There

⁶³ This is the first reference to Indian traders undertaking journey from the Russian empire to European countries and china. Unfortunately, we do not have any other information regarding their activities in the European countries (other than Russia) or in china. Probably the trade of Indians to other European countries never attained a significant level because European Trading Companies had established direct contacts with India over the past hundred years and so their requirements of Indian and Persian commodities were met by those organizations. The Indian merchants had no role to play.

⁶⁴ The term Dyumov was used for one inch. Gopal 1988, pp. 152

were four routes from Delhi to Russian territory. The first route was from Delhi to Persian city Kandahar in the caravans of camels and horses loaded with goods of all variety; then from Kandahar to Gilan in three month by camels and horses; then from Gilan to the Caspian Sea; and finally from Caspian Sea to Astrakhan. The second land route lay through the Bukhara territory. The journey from Delhi to Kabul- the frontier Indian city required one and a half month; from Kabul to Badakhshan and then through Bukhara territory to Khiva in two months and finally from Khiva to Astrakhan it took one and half months. The third route was though seas and oceans. From Delhi to Thatta⁶⁵, it took three months on camels; from Thatta to Macheli Bandar or Kum Bandarin in the Persian kingdom, it took one month a good weather; from Macheli Bandar to the Persian capital Isfahan it took one month by land routes; from Isfahan to Gilan in 20 days and from Gilan to Caspian Sea and then to Astrakhan. The fourth route was through the Indian city of Kalat. From Delhi to Kalat it took four Months and from Kalat to Persian city Kerman in 45 days; from Kerman to Kashan in 35 days and from Kashan to Isfahan in 5 days and from Isfahan to Gilan in 20 days; from Gilan to Caspian sea and then to Astrakhan (Gopal 1988: 178-180).

During 17th Century the trade from India to Russia was free from hindrances and many merchants journeyed to Russia: about 200 hundred or more people carried goods with themselves every year. But when anarchy overtook Persia, the journey became unsafe because of robbers and trade declined from year to year, and during the first half of the 18th Century very few people passed through either Persia or Bukhara. Hardly 80 or less people were undertaking the journey annually. The route via Bukhara was nearer and was fit for transporting all varieties of goods however this route was subject to attacks by Kirgiz's, Kara-Kalpak and Turkmens. Had this route been free, one could have hoped for the arrival in Russia of at least 600 Indian merchants every year. The goods

⁶⁵ Thatta is a capital city of Thatta district. It is a historic town of the Sind province of Pakistan near Keenjhar.. the largest fresh water lake in Pakistan. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thatta*. Marwari barayev was speaking on the basis of his experiences of Western India only.

brought by them would have been worth a great deal of money. The merchants desired unhindered trade with Russia so that they could carry with themselves on return journey to India, Russian goods (Gopal 1988: 178-180).

On Indian Territory there was never any winter or snow. Two crops were harvested every year. There were various flowers and grass never disappears. There were varieties of ores available in plenty such as Gold; Silver, Copper, Tin etc. Several varieties of berries grew in the country twice a year. The Indian nuts were round and measured $\frac{3}{4}$ arshins or more. Lemons also grew twice a year and various fresh vegetables were available. The Indian silk was as good as the Chinese but was not available in great quantities. The cotton textiles were in plenty. The place was warm and the people move about in dress made of cotton or silk, grown there (Gopal 1988: 178-180).

From India following goods were exported to Russia: Diamonds, Rubies, Sapphires- brought to Delhi from hills after a journey for two months; Cardamoms, Cloves, Nutmegs, Pepper, Cinnamon, white Ginger, yellow Ginger and other spices- produced in India; Gold and Silver materials, silken goods, various cotton cloths, chintz and various superior variety of cotton cloths- manufactured in India. The Russian goods which were exported to India were broad cloth from Gilan, Needles, Yuft, soft Linen, small Mirrors, etc (Gopal 1988: 178-180).

English trader J. Harris submitted a memorandum to the empress Anna Ivanova related to his proposal to establish a company in Russia to carry on trade with India. He stated that there were some special advantages which Russia must necessarily derive from commerce with India. Firstly, Russia would earn a profit of more than one Lakh thirty five thousand roubles from the sale of iron. In different parts of India every year one Lakh and fifty five thousand Poods of iron were needed. Iron was sold in India at the rate of one hundred and fifty kopecks per Pood. Although the export of iron from Russia to India was much less than its export to Europe, yet iron was sold in Europe at the rate of 60 kopecks per Pood. The difference in price was 90 kopecks or more. Hence through the sale of iron in India the treasury of Russian empire would have got more than one Lakh

thirty five thousand roubles per year. In the trade of copper it was estimated that Russian Empire would have received 40 thousand or more roubles in profit. This part of the trade in East India was advised to be under imperial government influence and within a short time; Russians could drive out other nations who went there for trade. When iron guns and cannon balls, and anchors would be sent to east India in 20 thousand Poods in weights every year, Russians would earn more profit. Trade in ropes, sail cloths, Yuft and Russian hides could have prospered subsequently. The Russians would get much profit from selling goods which they would bring with themselves from East Indies to their country. These items were pepper, sugar, linen (Gopal 1988: 198- 205).

Reacting to the petition the Russian authority formed a trading company called Russian Emperor's East India Company which was to be a privileged company of the Russian empire for 8, 10 or 12 years as the need be. The company was directly under the supervision of Imperial majesty. Harris and his colleagues were allowed to start trade with East India. The company was given monopoly to import goods from India to Russia. The ship of the company was required to leave Russian territory for trade with India from two ports only, St. Petersburg and Kronstadt⁶⁶. No taxes were to be levied on the goods brought by this company from India to Russian territory. In its place, the company was required to pay a duty at the rate of 15 roubles per packet (of English measure), when their ships return safe and sound from East India. This had to be charged from the company within three months of the public sale of the goods. The company had freedom to export and import silver. The company was given freedom to have factories and the servants required, in Russia as well as anywhere else. The company was allowed to empower itself with the naval power and infantry officers. If any harm was done to the imperial flag or the company itself by any prince of Asia, then the company could retaliate severely, with the exception of Turkey and Persia⁶⁷. The Russian authority

⁶⁶ Kronstadt is a port town in the federal city of St. Petersburg.

⁶⁷ This was because the tsarist empire was in direct contact with the rulers of Persia and Turkey

promised to protect the interest of the company wherever needed. The company was also given monopoly to trade with Persia and China through land routes (Gopal 1988: 198-205).

5.1.3 Russian travellers and the Indian trade & commerce during 18th Century

From the Shah City of Kum was the route to kingdom of India where people went by camel on pack saddles. From Kum it took 66 days to reach Kandahar, which used to be the Indian frontier city against the Shah kingdom but, the shah captured the city. And subsequently Kandahar became the Shah Kingdom frontier city against Indian kingdom. After reaching Kandahar, one must go in the direction of sunrise to reach India. In the open sea stood the city of Hormuz which was a port city and a harbour for ships. This city earlier belonged to Indians but Shah Abbas with the help of Europeans captured it and claimed that it belonged to the shah only (Kotov 1959: 40- 41).

During the summer fans in India were made from the white and curly hair of the tail of 'Yak' found in Tibet. These fans were called 'Khovras'. In Kashmir, a cloth called 'Shawl' was made from the hair of thick but soft- like silk, tail of Tibetan sheep. No where such a fine cloth was made apart from Kashmir and this was made possible because Kashmir had excellent water (Yefremov 1959: 76-77).

In Kashmir, the climate was healthy and mild; the land was fertile; the ground was flatter; low hills occurred frequently; the soil for the most part was clayey; there was little sand and still little marsh; the land was less manures because of its fertility. No little rice or saffron was grown; grain crops like wheat, millet, barley and other crops besides rye, oats and buckwheat also grew very well. There were no grapes, however water melons, melons, plums, pears, apples and pomegranate were found in great quantity. People kept cattle for their own use. Sheep and goats were in abundance, and from their wool shawls and other textiles were made. There were horses but no camels. The people in Kashmir engaged themselves in trade & Commerce and handicrafts, and they were prosperous. They often journeyed to India, Tibet and Bukhara (Yefremov 1959: 81-83).

Delhi was the most important city for trade in Asia from the country of which there comes Persians, Bukharans, Kashmiri people, Armenians, Greeks, Tibetan, Chinese and others (Yefremov 1959: 85-86).

In India the land produced all the essentials for life, both for use and for pleasure; they harvested much rice, millet, lemons, oranges, grapes, pomegranates, coconuts, silk, sugarcane and cotton; gold and silver mines were also found, as well as pearls diamonds and other precious stones. There were many elephants, dromedaries, lions, tigers and leopards. The country abounds in a number of products, in pearls and diamonds too, especially on the Coromandel Coast. Sugarcane also called 'Nai Shakkar' was produced in great quantity; Indians made sugar out of it and distil wine for them and for sale. There are very few horses; they were brought by way of trade from other countries and sold very dear; the people also suffer from a great lack of fodder. Hence it pays better to keep twenty men than one horse (Yefremov 1959: 87-88).

Departing by sea from Muscat, Danibegov arrived at the city of Bombay in twenty two days. It was a famous English port. Merchants went from here by ships to China, Persia and India. Bombay was more famous because the best English vessels were constructed there. The harbour of Bombay was built by the Portuguese on the model of European harbours. It came into the possession of English by division which took place between them and the Portuguese. From the point of view of plants and fruits this town was very badly off but its deficiency were supplied by the abundance of Bengal, so that the inhabitants of the aforementioned town trading with the residents of the latter bring nothing in greater quantity to Bombay than fruit and other natural produce. Bombay was famous for its merchants who were extraordinarily rich. In general all the local inhabitants were fire worshippers and called themselves 'Parsi' (Danibegov 1959: 103).

Colombo situated on the island of Ceylon, was formerly under the Dutch, but around the end of the Eighteenth Century the English owned it. Very rare trees grew there, for example- Sandal, Clove, Cardamom, Cinnamon, etc. On the shores of ocean, the town of Mannar was situated; where once in three years large quantity of pearls were

produced. The climate of this town was very hot so the inhabitants were black (Danibegov 1959: 103).

Madras was rich in numerous and rare kinds of fruits, such as pineapples. The water was good and the soil fertile (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

The city of Calcutta was very beautiful and imposing enough. It had many wealthy residents. It lies on the banks of the bay of river Ganges. There were very many Armenians in Calcutta who lived in a very rich and luxurious style. And do a considerable trade with the foreigners. Besides the Indians, the original inhabitants, who are all idolaters and Muslims, there were English French and above all Portuguese lived there. They traded among themselves, paying no duties to anybody. In this city the governor was an Englishmen to whom the local people called 'Lart'; he also governed the whole of India. The English company under his governorship received a yearly income of up to 500 hundred million rupees; however little remained with them as they also had a great expenditure. Out of this money they had to pay wages to a very large army which was maintained by them (Danibegov 1959: 104-105).

Three hundred Versts from Meerut were located the mountains of Srinagar (in Garhwal near Nanda Devi), on which was the source of the river Ganges. Here there held a great fair every year. Indians living in even five thousand Versts away from it come to it to worship the water of the Ganges. At this time the Muslims also comes here with various goods for trade. Around 500, 00,000 people gathered there every year. The Indians who comes to this place to worship had to pay custom dues to the English of one rupee per head; in return for which the English give them a permit or ticket for worshipping the waters of the Ganges (Danibegov 1959: 115-116).

Kashmir was a famous city known to all Europeans. Except Kashmir, snow fall occurs nowhere in India. Very many small rivers existed in Kashmir on which people sail in boats. These boats were close to twenty thousands in numbers. Kashmiri shawls were very famous and were exported to many nations. In the city of Kashmir there were close

to 24,000 looms on which Kashmiri weavers weave shawls. The governor of the city was able to collect as revenue 3000 rupees daily from the shawl manufacturers; and without the seal of the governor they were not allowed to sell so much as a kerchief. All the revenue received by the governor in a year was one million (Danibegov 1959: 118-119).

Lebedev shifted to Bengal to improve his financial conditions as Bengal was considered to be a place where innumerable sojourners most of all nations had rapidly acquired competent fortune. (Lebedev 1988: 252-253)

5.2 Conclusion

There were four routes from India to Russia. The first route was from Delhi to Kandahar, then to Gilan, then to Caspian Sea, then to Astrakhan. The second route was from Delhi to Kabul, then to Badakhshan, then to Khiva and finally from Khiva to Astrakhan. The third route was through Indian ocean which included, from Delhi to Thatta, then to Machali-Bandar, then to Isfahan, then to Gilan, then to Caspian Sea and then finally to Astrakhan. The fourth route was from Delhi to Indian city Kalat, then to Persian city Kerman, then to Kashan, then to Isfahan, then to Gilan, then to Astrakhan through Caspian Sea.

The route from Russia to India was well established and widely used by merchants from different lands but it was Nikitin who accounted it first. Sometimes the motives of travel define the nature of travelogues. It was true for Nikitin as well. He thought it necessary to provide information to Russian traders and travellers after him who would plan to visit India, that is why he noted in detail the route to India; trading centres on the route; items on offer in different trading centres; and the time taken for going from one place to another and that to by a particular means of transport.

The standard of living of the Muslim nobles and that of common mass in India were like two extremes of a pole. It was not that Bahamani Economy was lagging behind but that the major control over the resources were in the hands of nobles and Sultan.

Both men and women slaves were cheap, but women slaves were cheaper than what it was in Russia. The beggars and poor were coming to Place of the Sultan for want of some material benefits. Slaves were in great demand in India. Ships coming to the port of Goa with at least twenty slaves were not required to pay import duty otherwise they had to pay eight percent import duty. Goods found in the Indian markets were not apt for Russians but for Indians only. Those goods that were available for Russians were very expensive as all non expensive goods were meant for Muslim lands only. The toll fee was high for goods to be taken to Russia, but it was free for Muslim lands.

Cambay was a famous Indian port city in which goods such as Alacha, Taffeta, Coarse Cloth and Indigo, carnelian, Lac and Salt were found in abundance. In Cambay goods such as Talach (Long gown made from half cotton and half silk), damask, khan, Kiota (blankets) and agates were manufactured. The people of Junar made wine from the huge nuts in a vessel and they also malt brew from palm bark. Junar was famous for crops like wheat, Peas and Vegetables and these were cultivated in Rabi Season. Raichur was situated at a distance of thirty Kos from Bidar, where diamond was found in abundance.

Indian ships full of items such as spices, silk, gold, precious stones and elephant bones were reaching the port city of Hormuz in the fifteenth Century to exchange goods. Indians brought efficient horses from Hormuz along with other goods not available in India. In India, buffaloes and oxen were bred but not horses, so there was dearth of high breed horses there. Buffaloes and oxen were also used as a means of transport. Trade in slaves, brocades, silk, horses and edible fruits on in Bidar but nothing of them was suitable for Russian land. People were wicked as they held magical powers by which they killed their masters. Women prostitutes and robbers were easily found. There were pirates in the sea who were neither Muslims nor Christians but the idol worshippers who were ignorant about Christ. These pirates were found mostly near the port of Calicut, where items such as pepper, ginger, muskets, cloves, cinnamon, aromatic roots were produced.

During 17th Century Indian merchants brought Indian goods such as Calico, Coarse Calico, precious stones to Russia in Astrakhan for trade. Indian merchants also brought 'Chepuchin roots'- an Indian medicinal herb and saltpetre to Astrakhan for trade which was in great demand in Russia. While in exchange Russian goods such as Sable, bird's feather, white fur Coats, Copper were bought by Indian merchants from Russia. Indian merchants in Astrakhan were required to pay 10 percent as the custom duty on the goods brought in Russia, also these merchants were not allowed to trade in retail but in whole sale only. The Indian merchants were not allowed to trade in Russian slaves, in gold and in silver currency. In India, Russian good such as costly sables, red and green broad cloth, red yuft (Russian leather), fishbone, mirrors, corals, golden and silvery velvet, grey hounds, big hunting dogs, strong and furious watchdogs were in much demand.

The Indian climate was suitable for growing two crop crops every year. There were no extremes of winter and snow. Varieties of crops as well as vegetables were grown in India. The Indian climate helps in producing plenty of cotton that is why Indians wore cloths made of cotton and silk as silk was also found here but not in huge quantities as in china.

The Russian empress established Russian emperor's East India Company with a monopoly to trade with east eight years. Only St. Petersburg and Kronstadt ports were allowed to be used for trade with India. On successful return to Russia after trade in Asia, the ships had to pay 15 roubles per packet.

In India, rice, wheat, spices, millets, lemons, oranges, grapes, pomegranates, coconut, silk, sugarcane, cotton, gold, diamond, precious stones were found in abundance. Animals such as elephants, lions, tigers, leopards and dromedaries were also found in India. Sugar was produced from the sugar cane and from it distilled wine was made. There was dearth of fine horses, therefore it was imported. Since there was a lack of fodder for horses, it was said that ten men were better to keep than one horse.

Bombay was famous English port- though it was built by Portuguese- because here the best English vessels were constructed. Bombay was deficient in fruits and vegetables which were fulfilled from Bengal where it was in abundance. In Bombay the rich merchants lived who were fire worshippers and called themselves 'Parsi'. Madras was also famous for rare kinds of fruits such as pineapple as its land was fertile. Calcutta which lies on the Ganga River was also famous for rich merchants. In Calcutta, Armenians, British, French, Portuguese lived side by side with the local population of both Hindu and Muslims. The governor of the region was called 'Lart' who also governed the whole of British India. The company earned revenue close to 500 hundred million rupees from their Indian dominion.

In Kashmir, a cloth called 'shawls' was made from the tail of a Tibetan sheep's. It was made possible because Kashmir had a good climate and excellent water. These shawls were exported to different parts of the world. The governor of Kashmir was able to collect three hundred rupees daily from the shawl manufacturer as a tax.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

To understand medieval Indian history, we need variety of Sources, both primary literatures and secondary literatures. Primary sources were those contemporary literatures which were written and documented both in India by the contemporary Indians as well as in foreign lands by the travellers of those times who happened to visit India. Foreigners had been visiting India for many years and some of them had documented their Indian experience. Though contemporary Indian literatures between 15th Century and 18th Century, with which we are concerned with for this research, have helped us in comprehending Indian medieval history, however foreign traveller's account of this period adds on to this process of comprehension. Since this research is based totally on the foreign traveller's account therefore I will talk less about the contemporary Indian literatures, rather the foreign literatures only.

The information in the accounts of the western foreign travellers have been read and used many a times in India as well as in other places to get more into medieval India. But less importance have been accorded to the accounts of Russian traveller's to India. We do not find much reference of the writings of Russian travellers, in modern writings on medieval Indian history unlike western traveller's account whose writings are emphasised upon time and again. Many of us researchers know what western travellers had to say about Medieval Indian socio-politico; religious- cultural and economical aspects (as they have been engaged with and presented many a times) but not many of us scholars know what Russians had to say about India during 15th Century to 18th Century. There are reasons for it which is not obscure to enumerate. The first and foremost is the colonial legacy which we Indians possess, wherein the colonial scholars attempted to fit Indian history in a particular narrative seen from the prism of the existing western notion of India. The idea of India seen from the other prisms such as that of Russians was not given any chance to have a say in this matter. Unfortunately this legacy continues in

which some of the scholars of Indian history have attempted to locate medieval Indian history in a grand narrative from the western perspectives, which suits latter's interest. The second reason is the belief among scholars that contemporary Russian literatures provide not much information to comprehend medieval Indian history properly to see a pattern in the Russian perception of India. That may be true to some extent, but that does not mean that we end up leaving altogether those important details which could help scholars of medieval India to understand early modern history more holistically. After all, we cannot forget that in the thriving democratic world of today, even those who are least in numbers cannot be ignored or do away with but have to be taken on board.

There can be more reasons for this indifference to contemporary Russian literatures, but it has been seen very recently that there is a new interest in reading deep into the literatures which are non-western to understand more about different phases of Indian history. This research is also in continuation to that new interest and has studied the idea of India from Russian perspective between 15th Century and 18th centuries. Between 15th and 18th Century, there were four Russian travellers who had visited India and had accounted their experience as they encountered with in India. These travellers' account tells us different aspects of India from 15th Century to 18th Century. In addition to the traveller's account, there are one hundred and eighteen documents pertaining to Indian Diaspora in Astrakhan, Russia during 17th and 18th Century. Unfortunately we do not have any primary Russian literature of 16th Century India, which creates a break in comprehending the continuity or change of the Russian idea of India from 15th Century to 18th Century, but I hope, future research on this issue would provide information to bridge this gap. The findings of this research are based on these available contemporary primary documents as well as the secondary documents of later periods.

6.1.1 Religion and Culture

As regards the religious condition in India was concerned, the perception of Indian forcefully converting the foreigners, changed in the 18th Century when there was no forceful conversion and the foreigners can live in India freely. In eighteenth Century

Delhi was reduced to one third of what it was during the time of Nadir Shah Invasion. Greater parts of the buildings here were made of stones but others in mud. The people here were weak and timid but there were large number of canons. That means welfare of the people were not given due importance.

As regard the dressing style of native Indians are concerned, the Russian perception did not change to greater degree. People of low income group continued to remain half naked in 18th Century as against the privileged class who wore costly cloths along with ornaments, which was same as that of Indian image of 15th Century. The custom of Hindus cremating the dead bodies of their kith and kin did not change and the custom continued in the eighteenth Century. Even the Indians living in Astrakhan was allowed to perform this ritual at Astrakhan.

6.1.1.1 Russian perception of India before 15th Century

It was believed earlier that in the land of India, people were mostly Pagans or were following Islam. Later during 12th- 13th centuries a new conception emerged according to which there lie in India the eastern version of the Christian empire which was different from the western one and Indians were Christians. It was believed that the pious St. Thomas, the famous disciple of Jesus Christ came to India in 1st Century A.D. and baptised Indians in to Christianity. The then Indian ruler Gondophernes was also converted to Christian religion. The Indian Panchatantra literature was famous in Russia. Panchatantra was believed to have immense potential to provide solution of life, to correct the ills of life through legendary moral stories. The Indian prince had abandoned the throne and became ascetic because he saw an old man with lots of miseries. The Indian prince abandoned his worldly materialistic life in order to go to the kingdom of heaven.

6.1.1.2 The 15th Century India

The foreigners visiting India during the 15th Century had to convert to Islam to sustain his life and to make good fortunes. This interpretation of Afanasy Nikitin was

based on his own experience to which he encountered in Junar, a province of Bahamani Kingdom. Nikitin was asked to convert or to perish. He was ordered by Asad Khan to convert to Islam or to pay as a fine one thousand Gold coins as well as to surrender his stallion which Nikitin had brought to India to sell for profit. Though he was rescued from the wrath of Asad Khan by a merchant from Khorasan, however he had to maintain Muslim identity during the period he stayed in India. By maintaining Muslim identity, what I mean is that Nikitin wore cloths of Muslims throughout his stay in India. He attending all the Muslim festivals and began fast in Muslim festivals like Ramadan. At some point later after his encounter with Asad Khan, Malik Khan, a noble of Bahamani kingdom casted doubt over Nikitin's being a Muslim, but Nikitin convinced him that he actually was a true Muslim.

There is a debate among scholars on whether Nikitin actually did convert to Islam or not. Lenhoff argued first in 1979 that Nikitin converted to Islam, and he is supported by a host of other scholars, but many scholars do not believe. Lenhoff argued about Nikitin's conversion on the basis of certain reasons which he enumerated as follows: Nikitin said to Hindu inhabitants of Bidar that he was not a Muslim- since he was portraying himself as Muslim through his cloths- but a Christian. That means he was lying that he was a Muslim. Secondly Nikitin called his Muslim name as Khoja Yusuf Khorasani to Hindus. These titles like Khorasani and Khoja were used by those non Muslims of 15th Century who had visited to Mecca, that means Nikitin had also visited to Mecca and converted. Thirdly, he began to fast along with Muslims during holy month of Ramadan. Fourthly all through his stay in India, he maintained Muslim identity through his cloths, speech as well as actions. Fifthly, the number of prayers dedicated to Allah in his account is seven out of eleven prayers of his account and that too in Creolized Arabic, the language of orthodox Muslim writers of 15th Century.

Maxwell has supported Lenhoff and has argued that in 15th Century Muslims were the dominant class in the region in which Nikitin was travelling. Since he encountered with Asad Khan he became aware that to garner more and more profit and to sustain in India,

it was necessary to convert. As against Hindu polytheistic religion, Islam monotheistic religion attracted him more. He had learnt that all toll free goods in India were for Muslims only and in addition to it he knew that while returning he was required to pay high custom duty in the ports of Hormuz and Aden as he was not a Muslim but the port was controlled by Muslims. Thus these reasons according to Maxwell demanded from Nikitin to convert to Islam, and he did.

Riasanovsky does not believe in the conversion hypothesis. According to him, merely fasting with Muslims does not mean conversion to Islam. Moreover he never showed any sign of Bigotry in his account. According to P m Kemp, it was expedient for Nikitin to portray himself as a Muslim, but that does not mean he converted. He further stressed that the use of foreign language in his account was just to show his fellow Russians samples of foreign language. On inclusion of Muslim prayers in his account by Nikitin Kemp, had to say that since he was using portraying as Muslim and using Muslim language, it was natural to include Muslim prayers just to show his sincerity towards Islam to hid Indian political masters.

To J S Lure, Nikitin was just portraying himself according to the demand of the environment in which he was to sustain as a foreign merchant. He was trying to find whether it was the monopoly of one monotheistic religion only like his own or some other like Islam to find the truth. He could have edited his text which he did not do. Moreover he did not go through the rite of circumcision, to become a Muslim. Otherwise how could he be accepted as a true Muslim, without going through the rite of circumcision? Lenhoff and Martin critiqued this proposition of Jure and argued that in 15h Century India circumcision was not mandatory to become a Muslim. It was just a cultural exercise.

There were eighty four divisions within Hindu religion and each group kept distance from the other in matters related to dinning together, marriage etc. The Hindus were the idol worshippers, who organised fair every year at one of their religious centres. These fairs drew many people from all across. People came to one of the Hindu religious

centre called Parvata, where they save their head and pay few coins as a mark of respect. In Hindu tradition, one bid was considered in auspicious, as it sits on anybody's house then the owner if that house was destined to die. In Hindu tradition, the dead were not buried but cremated, and after cremation the remains of the burnt dead bodies were thrown in to river which created lots of pollution to the river.

6.1.1.3 The Image of India during 17th and 18th Century

Conversion was not unknown in Russia as the Indians residing in Russian territory in Astrakhan were often recorded to have converted to Christianity. Indians living in Astrakhan were converting to the Slav branch of orthodox Christianity out of their choice but were not forced to do so as the case was with Nikitin. Though Indian merchants were converting to Christianity for material benefits which they received from the Russian government, however the spiritual concerned of the individual merchants for their conversion to Christianity cannot be ruled out. The Hindu merchants living Astrakhan were allowed to cremate the dead to a place outside the city. But the Russians did not like this rite and complained that through cremating the bodies of the dead the Hindus were creating harm to the environment. So the concern for environment was still there as far as Russians in India as well as in Russia was concerned. Indians were thought as cremating the dead bodies to help the deceased to go to the heaven not hell. What is coming out of this is the understanding that the Hindu as believed in the life after death theory.

One of the Indian religion, got diverged from the Brahman religion of ancient Indian period, and it was later introduced in other part of East Asia by the Indians. In Delhi, people of different religion lived together. These were mostly people following Islam as well as the Hindu people who were idol worshippers. There were also Christians side by side. Apart from this there were people who deified the sun, moon, cow, stars etc. There were sun worshippers who had a different, like going to water and after lifting them in their hand and after raising their hands they venerated god. The people of Mannar worshipped cow and water and they did not kill animals for their benefits. People in

Madras were accustomed of chewing 'Paan' as it was available in plenty. The British government were collecting taxes from the production of the leaf, Paan which amounted to the British approximately half a million of rupees. In Patna there was a custom among Hindu that they first wash the whole body of the dead and then after washing they cremated them. If anybody become alive during the process before the cremation is done than he was not allowed to become alive otherwise they were socially boycotted. There was a ritual of sati in India, in which the wife of the deceased husband had to sit at the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Though this rite was not mandatory but once a woman had decided then she could not refuse otherwise she was boycotted.

Sanskrit was a sacred language in which was recorded all the important knowledge of the pasts. The Brahmans and pundits were monopolising on the vast treasure of knowledge and did not allow others to learn the same.

6.1.2 Polity and Society

The Indian polity in the 15th Century when Nikitin visited India was a feudal polity where power was assigned on the basis of military might of an individual feudal lord. This polity changed to a Centralised one of the Mughals, with which Russians were very well aware of. Then Nadir Shah attacked India and tried to disturb that Centralisation. In the second half of eighteenth Century an attempt was made by the company government to provide a cohesive force so that Indian polity could return to its Centralised character.

6.1.2.1 Russian knowledge of India before 15th Century

Alexander invaded India and had a battle with Indian ruler Porus in which the Indian ruler was defeated. The Indian polity was Centralised under Porus but after his defeat at the hands of Alexander there was no Indian ruler, who could recreate the Centralised administrative structure encompassing the whole of India. Since then the Indian polity was a deCentralised polity in which the ruler of the different small territory

in different pockets of India were ruling over their respective area after being elected by the residents of that area.

The Indian society was divided into four groups such as Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. The Brahmins originated from the head of Brahma- the creator; Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra originated from the Shoulders, Legs and feet respectively of the creator. Brahmins inhabited India who were men of piety and were known for their justice, blissful living and their devotion to god. Brahmins pious men who did not eat meat, nor did they drink and did not do harm to anyone. Brahmins lived near Engels that's why the grace of god falls upon them directly which helped them to control upon their passions and do not do any sins.

It was believed by Russians that Indians had six arms, eyes in their chest and had wings. Sometimes the description of the religious text of India transformed and became general information about Indian people amongst Russians. The same happened with regard to description of Hindu Gods, like Hanuman and Garuda, the former had eyes in his chest while the latter had wings. Animals and birds of India held unusual and unheard powers. Indian birds built their nest on fifteenth Oak trees, and did not eat anything for five hundred years. The wild elephants, unicorn, ferocious beasts and one horned Rhinoceros were found easily in India.

6.1.2.2 The idea of 15th Century India

The Bahamani kingdom was based on the feudal polity in which the Nobles held fiefs in different capacity and their position in the administrative hierarchy was based on the military strength which these nobles possessed. There were elements of sub-infeudation also. The sultan as well as the nobles used even the trivial events to show their pomp and splendour as well as the military might. Even the religious ceremonies of the Muslims were celebrated by the Bahamanids by using resources of the state and the event was not missed to show their strength to the people at large. They created awe and fear amongst the inhabitants so that their political legitimacy was not challenged from the any corner of

the kingdom. Constant struggle for power between the Bahamani who had under their rule the areas of Central Deccan, and Vijayanagar Empire characterized the medieval Indian polity in which there was no stability in the existence of political structure of a group but its very existence was always at stake. The same happened with Bahamanids as well as it has been argued by the scholars that the Bahamanids attack on Vijayanagar started the process of former's decline. The local inhabitants of the Central Deccan region in which Bahamanids were ruling had been inducted in the Bahamanids army only in infantry as the higher positions in the administration was fixed for the Muslims from Khorasan.

The nobles and the sultan of the Bahamani kingdom commanded huge resources which they utilized to legitimize themselves by taking part in the festivals of one religion. We need to understand that 15th Century Indian polity was a theocratic, in which religion was not separated from the state as the presence of religion in every aspects of state was easily seen. The nobles lived a luxurious life but the commoners had to strive daily for their basic necessity. The unjust in the society was not uncommon in the Russian society but it was more in India. The slave and their trade were widely rampant in the society. The good quality of slaves could fetch high money. There were differences in the prices of the male and female slaves. The men slaves cost higher than the female slaves. The conditions of the women slaves were pathetic.

The Hindus did not eat or drink with the Muslims. If a Hindu food was touched by the Muslim then it was considered by the Hindus as impure food. The Hindus venerated cow and her dung was used as a fuel for making food. Indians had a fascination with the foreigner, particularly the white complexion foreigners. The inns all throughout the kingdom served as a centre for resting travellers and merchants. The lady of the inns who were assigned the duty of taking care of those who come to take rest, slept with the guest, particularly the foreign guests as they had a liking for whites.

6.1.2.3 The 17th and 18th Century India: Perception through Russian eyes

The Russians did not know much about India during the 17th Century that's why they sent missions to India to establish direct relations. Since 1646, when the first Russian agent was sent to India, it was Kasimov only who succeeded to reach Kabul but could not meet Mughal ruler. Kasimov mentioned about the Central Asian expedition of Shahjahan. Semen Malenki was succeeded in meeting Aurangzeb who was campaigning in Burhanpur, against Deccan states.

During the 18th Century Russians received information about India from their spy in nadir shah camp. Nadir shah invaded India and after defeating Mughals they carried with them the huge treasure of Mughal dynasty. The wealth of Mughals were incomparable to any contemporary empire. Before invading India, nadir shah sent his twenty five representatives to garner support of the provincial chiefs of India. He received support, as Mughals were complaining that those outside Mughal suzerainty were not did not support them against Nadir Shah.

Kashmir was ruled by Timur Shah Durrani, who ruled Kashmir through his governor Hadji Karim Dad Khan, and the latter lived in Kashmir. Delhi was devastated in the nadir Shah invasion and was reduced to one fourth of what it was before the invasion. Calcutta was the political capital of British India, where people from different land lived.

6.1.3 Trade and Economy

Though Nikitin's travel to India did not open new avenues for trade immediately, however it contributed immensely in accelerating the Russian effort in establishing direct trade contacts with India. The description given by the Indian merchants living in Russia as well as by the subsequent account of eighteenth Century Russian travellers to India, Russian image of India changed further from a land of deficiency to a land of prosperity with whom on the eve of trade relations Russian empire was going to be benefitted immensely. Thus one can see that perception of Russians keeps on changing with the

passage of time and it was not static. Therefore the inquisitiveness remained in the Russian camp to understand more, the patterns of Indian socio-political and religious aspects with an ultimate desire to establish a strategic relation with India.

6.1.3.1 Indian Economy and its commercial exchanges before 15th Century

Despite the absence of direct trade relations between India and Russia, goods of both the lands were reaching each other's territory with the help of intermediary merchants, like Khazars and Bulgars, at Volga rivers. Both Indian and Russian merchants had their colony in the capital city of Kazaria, Itil by the end of 10th Century, situated at the mouth of Volga River where they first encountered during the early 10th Century. Slaves were the dominant items to be exported by Russians to India during 10th- 13th Century. These slaves were those prisoners who were captured in the war. They were exported first to Greece then to India. In addition to slaves, Russian goods such as furs, honey, wax, linen, flax, wheat and skins were also reaching India. Russian metal wares and horses were also in great demand in Indian markets. The medieval Indian scholar Amir Khusrau has mentioned about the Russian metal wares particularly the blades of the Russian swords which were unbroken even if they were bent to maximum level. Russian horses were sent via Hormuz and Multan to India in a large convoy comprising six thousand horses at a time, and through these Russian merchants were reaping huge profits. Indian goods such as dyes, spices, camphor, musk, rhubarb, soap, sugar, precious stones, textiles, silk, rice, jewels and Indian medicinal herbs were reaching Russia through intermediary markets.

India was a land of fabulous wealth where everything was available in abundance. The Indian roads were neat and clean as sweepers were readily available to clean them. The Indian roads were sometimes tiled with wood and covered with sophisticated cloths. The palaces in India were huge and magnificent and were made of white marbles. The pillars of the palaces were cast in metals and their roofs were decorated by gold. The inventory of the Indian prince Dyuk Stepanovich (the prince had been assigned a Russian name; the Indian name may be different) was largest in the world, to the extent that it was not

possible for any number of clerks to create such a large records plus the amount of ink and number of pages used in creating that record could not be bought from even the price received after selling the Russian capital, Kiev. Despite India being a land of fabulous wealth, there did not exist thief or jealous person.

6.1.3.2 The 15th Century Indian Economy

It was earlier believed by the Russians that India was a land of plenty where everything was in abundance. But when Nikitin came to India he found that in India there was nothing which was useful for the Russians. Whatever goods it had, it was meant for Muslim lands only. Hormuz was an import port where ships loaded with goods were reaching during the 15th Century. These goods included spices, silk, precious stones, gold and elephants bone etc. The same position was enjoyed by the Cambay port where goods from all over the Indian Ocean reached on Indian shore. Cambay was famous for Lac and Camelian. Cambay was also an important manufacturing centre where items like Long Gown, blankets were manufactured. Raichur was famous for diamonds which was costly. The slaves were traded in large numbers.

The religious centres acted as a trade centres in 15th Century India where trade fairs were held every year in the theme of venerated saints or a particular god. Thus the emergence of new trading centre which acted as a link between the main town or the capital city and the village Economy was an important development.

In Indian efficient horses were not available as the horses were not bred in India, though oxen were bred. That's why Nikitin brought to India a stallion to sell for profit. Indians were importing horses from different regions, but mainly from the Arabian lands. The Arabian Sea region was infested with the menace of pirates, and it was difficult for merchants to cross the region with their goods to India or from India. There was a big gap in the standard of living between nobles and the common mass. The nobles lead luxurious life while the commoners were struggling for the needs of day to day life.

6.1.3.3 Trade and Economy of 17th and 18th Century India

During 17th Century Indian goods such as costly silk, cotton textiles of various sorts such as Calico, Coarse calico, Saltpetre etc, precious stones and other goods which they produce were in demand in Russia, while in India Russian goods such as bird's feather, white fur Coats, Copper, good Sable, black Vixen, Ermine, broad cloth, and bone and tusks of walrus were in demand. An Indian medicinal herb, Chepuchin Roots, was very famous in Russia. The Indian merchants along with merchants of other lands had to pay 10 percent custom duty to trade in Astrakhan, Russia.

There were four routes from India to Russia. The first route was from Delhi to Kandahar, then to Gilan, then to Caspian Sea, then to astrakhan. The second route was from Delhi to Kabul, then to Badakhshan, then to Khiva and finally from Khiva to Astrakhan. The third route was through Indian ocean which included, from Delhi to thatta, then to Machali-Bandar, then to Isfahan, then to Gilan, then to Caspian Sea and then finally to Astrakhan. The fourth route was from Delhi to Indian city Kalat, then to Persian city Kerman, then to Kashan, then to Isfahan, then to Gilan, then to Astrakhan through Caspian Sea.

Bombay was famous English port where English vessels were constructed. it was deficient in fruits and vegetables that Bengal fulfilled. In Bombay the rich merchants lived who were fire worshippers and called themselves 'Parsi'. Madras was also famous for rare kinds of fruits such as pineapple as its land was fertile. Calcutta which lies on the Ganga River was also famous for rich merchants. In Calcutta, Armenians, British, French, Portuguese lived side by side with the local population of both Hindu and Muslims. The governor of the region was called 'Lart' who also governed the whole of British India. The company earned revenue close to 500 hundred million rupees from their Indian dominion.

Indian climate was suitable for cultivating two crops in a year. The climate was also suitable for cotton, that's why people wore cloths made from cotton and silk. In

India, rice, wheat, spices, millets, lemons, oranges, grapes, pomegranates, coconut, silk, sugarcane, cotton, gold, diamond, precious stones were found in abundance. Animals such as elephants, lions, tigers, leopards and dromedaries were also found in India. Sugar was produced from the sugar cane and from it distilled wine was made. There was dearth of fine horses, therefore it was imported. Since there was a lack of fodder for horses, it was better to keep ten men, rather than one horse.

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