

ARMENIANS IN INDIA

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NAIRA MKRTCHYAN



DIVISION OF SOUTH ASIAN STUDIES
CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL, SOUTH-EAST ASIAN
AND SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
INDIA
2000



जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067 INDIA

CENTRE FOR SOUTH, CENTRAL,
SOUTH-EAST ASIAN AND SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC STUDIES
SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation titled Armenians in India submitted by Ms.NAIRA MKRTCHYAN in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university. This is her own dissertation.

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

Prof. S.D.Muni
(Supervisor) **SUPERVISOR**
Centre for South, Central South East
Asia and South West Pacific Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Prof. K. Warikoo
(Chairperson) **CHAIRPERSON**
Centre for South, Central South East and
South West Pacific Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

CONTENTS

PREFACE	
CHAPTER 1	1
<i>INDIAN SETTLEMENT IN ARMENIA AND ARMENIAN SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA</i>	
CHAPTER 2	28
<i>PROMINENT ARMENIANS IN THE HISTORY OF INDIA</i>	
CHAPTER 3	55
<i>INDO-ARMENIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS</i>	
CHAPTER 4	84
<i>CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF ARMENIANS IN INDIA</i>	
CHAPTER 5	106
<i>ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF INDIA IN 20th CENTURY</i>	
CONCLUSION	134
APPENDICES	137
BIBLIOGRAPHY	146

PREFACE

The dissertation *Armenians in India* is intended to provide information about the Indo-Armenian relations from ancient times (4000 years ago) till present days as well as different spheres of life of the Armenian community in India.

CHAPTER 1 deals with the history of the Indian community in Armenia (from 149 B.C. till A.D. 301) and Armenian communities in different cities of India starting from the 7th century.

CHAPTER 2 tells about the prominent Armenians in the history of India, among them poets, governors, army commanders, businessmen.

CHAPTER 3 dwells upon the trade relations between Armenia and India from ancient times, cooperation of Armenian traders with the European East India Companies, activities of the Armenian businessmen in India.

CHAPTER 4 elaborates on the cultural and intellectual life of the Armenians in India. It tells about Indo-Armenian historians, scholars, publishers, benefactors, about the first Armenian journal in the world, which was published in India, about the Indo-Armenian progressive thinkers who had made their share in preparing the freedom movement in Armenia, about different Armenian welfare organisations and societies.

CHAPTER 5 is about the Armenian community in the 20th century as well as the situation of the Indo-Armenian community at present. As there is no any published material about the Armenian community after the 1960s, this Chapter is mostly based on the interviews with the members of the Armenian community of Calcutta.

CONCLUSION sums up the topic and also contains some suggestions to the Armenian community.

CHAPTER 1

INDIAN SETTLEMENT IN ARMENIA AND ARMENIAN SETTLEMENTS IN INDIA

The mutual economic, cultural and scientific ties between the Armenians and the Indians are of long standing. They existed before our era and continue at present. They intensified as the first Armenian settlers set foot on the hospitable soil of India where they won the affection and respect of the Indian people, and began to enjoy patronage of the local authorities. Being situated on the crossroads of caravan routes between the East and the West, Armenia had established cultural and economic ties with India over the centuries.

Armenians, whose love for commerce has been proverbial, have seen trading from time immemorial with India. They were lured from their distant homes in the snowclad mountains of Armenia by the glamour of the lucrative trade in spices, muslins and precious stones. They carried on their trade successfully with Europe via the overland route through Afghanistan, Persia and Armenia via Trabezund (Trabzon) long before any European traders, adventurers and intruders first appeared in India.

It can be mentioned that even before the Moghul invasion of India, Armenians were found in all the principal commercial centres and state capitals of India engaged in the peaceful pursuit of commerce. However, the early Armenian traders formed no permanent settlements.

The Armenians might have come to India first about 4000 years earlier. According to Ctesias and Diodoros, Semiramis, the warrior queen of Assyria, invaded India in about 2000 B.C. and it is most probable that Armenians, as faithful allies, accompanied her.

Armenians as allies or otherwise might have accompanied the Greek invasion of India in 327 B.C. under Alexander the Great as it is a well known historical fact that he passed through Armenia en route to India via Persia.

The first written reference to Indo-Armenian relationship is found in the ancient Greek writer Xenophon's (430-355 B.C.) *Kyropaedia* (*Persian*

Expedition). From this work we come to know that Armenians often travelled to India and entered the military service there. When Kyrus (558-550 B.C.), the King of Persia, came to know that Khalds and Armenians often visited India and were very well acquainted with the route to India, he asked them to accompany his ambassador there to develop and strengthen trade relations with this country.

Hearing of the Khalds often going to the Indian King and recalling Indian ambassadors coming to Midia to get the news about Midia's internal situation, Kyrus came to know about the Indian King's interest on Persian King's heroic deeds.

He narrated: "King of Armenia and you, Khalds! If I send one of my people to the Indian King, tell me, will you send somebody from your people, who will show the way to my ambassador and support him to persuade the Indian King to fulfill my requests?"¹

From the further narration one can find out that Kyrus, by sending an embassy to India, meant to get financial aid from the Indian King. The Armenians and Khalds in the course of action agreed to arrange guides for his ambassador and help him with the implementation of that mission.

According to the information given by Xenophon, the ancient rulers of Armenia were often sending their people to India and these people were so familiar with this country that they could help the ambassadors of Kyrus and solicit in front of the Indian King.

From the ancient times the Indians and Armenians, by and large, had trade relations, but in this reference military-political relations were quite effective. The Armenians agreed not only to accompany the Persian ambassador, but also to introduce him to the Indian King and to help him with getting financial support for the King Kyrus. Evidently the implementation of mediator's such kind of mission was going to be successful only through friendly relations between the Armenians and the Indians.

¹ Xenophon, *Persian Expedition*, Rex Warner, trans., Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1943, III, II, 27-28.

However, there were mostly economic relations between Armenia and India. Russian Prof. G. Bongard-Levin in the article *Indians in Ancient Armenia* writes: “Armenia maintained close relations not only with neighbouring Parthia and Roman Empire, but also with India and China. In order to promote relations with these countries, Armenian Kings founded new cities on the trade routes passing through Armenia and leading from Parthia and Bactria to India and China”.²

These and other valuable information about old-time relations between the two countries are mentioned in the writings of Armenian historians and scholars, such as: Agathanguéghos (5th century), Movses Khorenatsi (5th century), Yeghisheh (5th century), Yeznik Koghbatsi (5th century), David Anhaght (6th century), Bishop Sebeos, Tovma Artsrouni (10th century), Aristakes Lastivertsi (11th century), Stepanos Orbelian (13th century), Khachatour Joughayetsi (18th century) etc.

Old manuscripts on the history of India and the Indo-Armenian relations have been preserved in the archives and depositories of Armenian manuscripts and documents situated in Yerevan, Venice, Vienna, Jerusalem, New Julfa and other cities.

Ancient Armenian historians could have highlighted about the Armenians’ presence in India but unfortunately the annals of ancient Armenia, which were carefully preserved in the temples of pre-Christian Armenia, had been entirely destroyed when Gregory the Illuminator³ started getting the Armenians converted into Christianity in the beginning of the 4th century of our era. King Tiridates III (298-330) of Armenia initially fiercely rejected Christianity. But after the Milan Edict of Constantine the Great he adopted Christianity and declared that as a state religion. From the historical perspective, the traditionally accepted date of adopting Christianity in Armenia is the year of A.D. 301 when the new religion

² As cited in: Assadour Gouzelian, *Some Notes on Ancient Armenia*, Calcutta, Journal of the Asiatic Society, vol. iv, No.2, 1962, p.38.

³ Gregory the Illuminator (239-325 (326?)) – Armenian religious-political leader, inspirer and initiator of imposing Christianity in Armenia, from 302 – the head of the Armenian Church – the Catholicos. He is considered as a saint. On his name Armenian Christian religion is called Armenian-Gregorian.

became dominating in the country. Already during the 2nd – 3rd centuries A.D. Christianity began to penetrate into Armenia from south-west – from Syria and from the west – from Kappadokia and Armenia Minor. Christian missionaries who came from those places, set up their active activities which gave significant results by the end of the 3rd century.

Indian Settlement in Armenia

Zenob (Zenobius) Glak, an earliest classical writer from Syria, was one of the first disciples of Gregory the Illuminator. In the beginning of the 4th century Zenob was in Armenia and wrote *The History of Taron* (an important province in Armenia). In this work Zenob dwells upon the history of the Hindu colony that had existed in Armenia since the middle of the 2nd century B.C. till the beginning of A.D. 4th century. Originally Zenob wrote his work in Syriac, which afterwards was translated into Armenian. The Armenian text of Zenob's book was initially printed at Venice in 1832 by the Mekhitarist Fathers.⁴ The first part of the text gives a description of the Hindu colony, and the religious wars between the Hindus and the early propagators of Christianity.

Zenob states that two Hindu princes, named Gissaneh (probably Greek variant for Krishna) and Demeter (the Greek for either Jagannath or Ganesh), conspired against Dinakspal (Dinaksi), the King of Kanauj. On the discovery of the plot they had to flee with their families and followers, and found refuge in Armenia in 149 B.C.. The Hindu princes were granted a royal welcome by

⁴ Mekhitarist Fathers - An Armenian Roman Catholic Monastic Order founded towards the end of the 17th century by Abbot Mekhitar, an Armenian monk of Sebastia (the modern Sivas) with the object of advancing Armenian Classical Literature. Frustrated in his objective at Constantinople by the Armenian clergy, the Abbot went with his disciples to Modon (in Morea) in 1700. There they built a monastery and engaged in study and research. Twelve years later the Turks invaded Morea and burned the monastery. In 1715 the Senate of the Venetian Republic conferred upon Mekhitar and his followers forever the Isle of St.Lazarus in the vicinity of Venice. There they built a monastery, a church, a school and a printing press. Since then the Mekhitarist Fathers of Venice and Vienna have devoted their lives to study and research. They published works on history, literature, antiquities and archaeology of Armenia. They played an important role in the development of the Armenian philosophy. They showed keen interest in Armenian history and literature, published works of ancient and medieval Armenian historians and scholars, research works on Armenian linguistics, dictionaries. They did a great deal of translations into Armenian language, collected ancient manuscripts all over the world. It may be said that it has been mainly due to their efforts that Classical Armenian has survived. It may also be of interest to mention that Lord Byron stayed at St. Lazarus in 1816 where he learned Armenian and wrote appreciatively about the Fathers. Mekhitarist Society exists at present.

Armenian King Valarsaces who offered them some land in the province of Taron where they built a city and named it Veeshap (Armenian name for dragon. The city was named so, because those princes belonged to the Takshak house, Takshaka means Naga King⁵) or Odz (snake) and put an idol like a snake there.

Some time later the princes moved to Ashtishat (religious centre of ancient Armenia famous for its temples of national deities) and erected temples to their gods and goddesses which they used to worship in India, and these temples were served by the Hindu priests. Zenob narrates:

“After 15 years the King put both the brothers to death, I do not know why, and conferred the principality to their three sons, Kuars, Meghtes and Horean. Kuars built the city of Kuars, Meghtes built a village on the plain and called it Meghti and Horean built a village in the province of Paloonies and called it Horeans.”⁶

Later on these three brothers succeeded to find a better place in the area of mountain Karki where they built two temples in memory of Gissaneh and Demeter, whom they used to deify and worship. According to Zenob, the statues of these gods were entirely made of brass. Priests who were appointed for the service of these gods, were all Hindus. In a short period of time the Indians built twenty towns, and in each of them they erected their temples. Some of these towns, mentioned by Zenob, retained their names and stood till the middle of the 19th century. Until the early 20th century one of the villages in Taron was called Hindkastan. The names Hindubek, Hindu, Hindukhanum, Hindumelik were often used by the Armenians of Taron.⁷

The fact of the existence of the Hindu colony in Armenia is proved by a very interesting ethnographic information. It states that the Armenians of those districts, where the Indians were settled, used to dance the dance of Demeter and

⁵ J.W.M'Crindle, ed., *The Invasion of India by Alexander the Great as described by Arrian, Q.Curtius, Diodoros, Plutarch and Justin*, New Delhi, Today and Tomorrow's Printers & Publishers, n.d., p.343.

⁶ As cited in: M.J.Seth, *Armenians in India*, New Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta, Oxford & IHB Publishing Co., 1983, p.624.

⁷ Gh.Injijyan, *Old Geography of the Country of Armenia*, (original in Armenian), Venice, Mekhitarist Publishers, 1836, pp.191-198.

sing Indian melodies.⁸ Some prominent scholars prove that the cult of Vahagen (Armenian god of fire, as well as conqueror of dragons) came to Armenians from the Indians (Indian god Agni).⁹

Under the auspices of the Armenian government the Hindu colony flourished for a considerable time in Armenia. It was a fairly large one comprising over 15,000 members.¹⁰ However, things changed when Christianity was brought to Armenia, the religion which was imposed by fire and sword. The followers of Christianity demolished heathen temples and erected churches on their site. The same fate was waiting for the Hindu temples. On the site of the two Hindu temples in the town of Veeshap or Odz, Gregory the Illuminator built a monastery in A.D. 301 where he deposited the relics of St. John the Baptist and Athanagineh the Martyr which he had brought with him from Caesaria. This edifice exists till now and is known as St.Karapet of Moosh (a city at present located on the territory of Turkey, near the Lake Van) and has always been a great place of pilgrimage for Armenians from all parts of the world. It is noteworthy to mention that almost till the end of the 19th century, not far from this monastery there was a settlement, which used to be called Odz.

There was no better end for ancient Armenian traditional symbols as well. The ancient Armenian books were burnt or thrown into the river. As Armenian historian of the 5th century Agathanguoghos¹¹ mentioned, the number of books thrown into the river were plentiful, so much so that the river changed its direction. Many Armenians and Hindus headed by their priests, resisted gallantly against the rush of Christianity but were defeated due to superior numbers of the Christians. The Hindu priests, seeing the destruction of their gods and goddesses, pleaded with the Christians to kill them rather than destroy their sanctum. Many of these Hindu priests were killed on the spot during the course of action.

⁸ Gh.Alishan, *Ancient Faith or the Heathen Religion of the Armenians*, (original in Armenian), Vienna, Mekhitarist Publishers, 1900, pp.314-325.

⁹ M. Abeghyan, *Armenian National Myths*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, 1930, p.101.

¹⁰ Assadour Gouzelian, op. cit., p.39.

¹¹ Agathanguoghos (in Greek - 'kind angel'), Armenian historian of the 5th century, author of *The History of Armenia* which includes pre-Christian period of Armenia, the events of the 3rd century and early 4th century.

In A.D. 301 there was a bloody battle between heathen Armenians-Hindus, and Christians. According to Zenob, the Hindu army itself numbered 10,000 warriors. Most probably this figure has been deliberately exaggerated by the historian as he was in service of Christian church and, by showing the big number of the heathens, he might probably wanted to overemphasize the victory of Gregory the Illuminator and Armenian King Tiridates. It is also probable that besides the Hindus Zenob would have mentioned also the number of heathen Armenians. But in any case the Hindus were in large numbers as they had their own separate army.¹²

Zenob precisely describes the military actions between the governmental forces and heathen Armenians and Indians. He also mentions that Prince of Ashten in the army of the Illuminator secretly sent a message to the heathens, warning them about the danger. Not long after that, during one of the battles he left the King's army and with his 700 soldiers joined the army of the heathens.

Being the participant of the events, Zenob describes the proceedings of the state army:

“And having taken our departure from there (Thordan), we intended to proceed to Karin and Harkh, but some of the Armenian princes informed St.Gregory of the existence of two temples in the province of Taron which still offered sacrifices to the devils, whereupon he resolved to demolish them. Having arrived in the country of the Paloonies, in the extensive village, called Gissaneh, near the village town of Kuars, we met there some of the heathen priests. Having ascertained from the Hindu prince of Hashtents that the great images of Gissaneh and Demeter were to be leveled to the ground on the following day, they [Hindus] returned to the temples in the dead of the night and removed the treasures and filled them into sub-terraneous houses.”¹³

The Indian Head priest buried the statues of the Hindu gods, hid the treasures of the temples, and then informed the priests of Ashtishat to gather armed forces and come for help. The following day heathen Armenians joined the

¹² R.Abrahamyan, *From the History of Indo-Armenian Relations*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Historico-Philological Almanac, No.2, 1958, p.165.

¹³ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.625.

Indians and a fierce battle took place. The heathens suffered a defeat. After the battle a monument was raised which bore the following inscription:

“The first battle which was fought very fiercely. Artzan [Arjun], the head priest, the Chief Commander of the battle, lies interred here, and with him one thousand and thirty eight men.

We waged this war on account of the idol Gissaneh and on behalf of Christ.”¹⁴

According to Zenob, who was the eyewitness of the events, the Hindus that were baptized on the first day of Navasard (New Year of ancient Armenia which was celebrated in the middle of August) numbered five thousand fifty, and they were men and children only, while the women were baptized on another day. Some of these converted Hindus taunted the Armenian princes telling them that if they lived they would retaliate for the harsh treatment they had received at their hands, but if they died, the gods would wreak their vengeance on the Armenians on their behalf. For this, by the order of the Armenian prince these Hindus were imprisoned, and they numbered four hundred.

Then Zenob continues:

“Gissaneh had long flowing hair and for that reason its priests allowed the hair of their head to grow, which the King ordered to be cut. This people were not, however, perfect in their faith after their conversion into the Christian faith and as they could not profess the religion of their pagan ancestors openly, they therefore practiced the deception of allowing their children to grow a plait of hair on the crown of their heads, so that they may, be seeing that, remember their idolatrous abominations.”¹⁵

With this, the history of the Hindu colony, which had existed on the territory of Armenia for more than 450 years, came to an end. No further reference is available to the Indians in Armenia after A.D. 4th century by any of the Armenian historians who came after Zenob.

There are hypotheses on the future faith of these Indians:

¹⁴ H.Mamikonian, *The History of Taron*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1941, p.79.

¹⁵ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.624.

- they moved to the North and founded the city of Kyiv;
- they were absorbed into the Armenian population;
- they returned to India. Armenian priests with their followers headed by the Head of priests Mamgoon joined the Hindus, taking with them ancient Armenian books. (This is a crucial fact for Armenia, as there are no books of pre-Christian period of Armenia. The Christians did a real great job!).

It may be positively assumed that those heathen Armenians, who left Armenia after A.D. 301 for any other part of the world (most probably India), preserved the religion and philosophy of heathen Armenia, like the Parsis in India who left Persia in the 10th century after their country adopted Islam.

Recently it has been stated by some scholars that those Armenians came to India and settled in the Punjab. This statement could bear an element of truth, given that Punjabis look like Armenians by their appearance, habits and character.

Indo-Armenian relations grew further. Armenian historian of the 19th century Alishan in his work *Sisakan* says that in the 4th - 5th centuries A.D. Armenian merchants reached India and China.¹⁶ During the 3rd and 4th centuries close trade relations were established between Persia, India and China and in this trade Armenians played an active role.

There is an information on Indo-Armenian economic relations in Armenian historian Agathanguogh's (A.D. 5th century) work *History of Armenia*. He says that Armenian kings liked to beautify their crowns with gems brought from India, having no idea about the intense hardships the merchants underwent to get these precious stones. Agathanguogh himself witnessed that gems from India were being sold in Armenia. In the palaces of the Armenian kings there were halls decorated in the Indian style.¹⁷ These has also been stated by other Armenian historians, like Pavstos Buzand (4th century) and Movses Kaghankatvatsi (6th century).

¹⁶ Gh.Alishan, *Sisakan*, (original in Armenian), Venice, Mekhitarist Publishers, 1893, p.434.

¹⁷ As cited in: R.Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.164.

Historian Ourhayetsi (12th century) states that according to the order of Armenian King Smbat Bagratouni (end of the 9th century), a big crystal chandelier was brought from India for the famous Main Church in the city of Ani (the then capital of Armenia) which cost was 80,000 golden coins.¹⁸

In the beginning of the 16th century, in various places of India, especially in coastal towns, Armenian permanent settlements began to emerge. The first Armenian colonies were not very big. Initially there were only a few people, a few families, with whom their kinsmen and compatriots began to join in course of time.

The first Armenians who settled in India were merchants and people working in Indian state and military services. Then came a period when physical existence of Armenian nation was put in question, and thousands of Armenians had to leave their motherland in search of a peaceful corner. The country of holy Ganga became their second homeland.

For many centuries the Armenian nation has been deprived of statehood and was under foreign rule. Since the 16th century it was divided into two parts and was under the sway of two despotisms - Turkey and Iran. Western Armenia was under Turkey's and Eastern Armenia was under Iran's supervision.

Economic and political backwardness of the Ottoman Empire as well as Iran stipulated supremacy of medieval forms of manufacturing, degradation of agriculture, absence of one national market, lack of elementary conditions for the development of industry. During the 17th - 18th centuries the European economic and political penetration into the East began and this caused further decline of the Ottoman Empire and Iran.

The condition of subject nations was rather difficult, who lacked not only any rights but elementary guarantees of personal and property security as well. In the 17th century the situation of the Armenian nation was rather hard. The decline of the Ottoman Empire increased anarchy in the outlying districts, tyranny of Pashas and Beks from whom first of all was suffering Armenian population.

¹⁸ Ourhayetsi, *Chronology*, (original in Armenian), Vagharshapat, 1898, p.19.

Disintegration of Iranian state caused disturbance and civil wars which brought uncountable distress to the population of the Eastern Armenia. It is not surprising, that in this conditions immigration of Armenians increased from Turkey and Iran. They migrated to the already-formed Armenian colonies in Europe and Asia. Among all those immigrants one stream came to India.¹⁹

In 1605 Shah Abbas (1587-1629), the King of Persia, invaded Western Armenia which was under the yoke of Turkey, and forcibly carried 60,000 Armenian families or 300,000 souls from Julfa to Persia. By doing so he meant to utilize the Armenian merchants to improve Persia's trade with India and European countries. Thereafter, New Julfa²⁰ became the centre of Persian trade and the headquarters of the Armenian trade who began to flood the Russian and Italian markets with Indian goods.²¹

However, the successors of Shah Abbas persecuted the Armenians, extorted money and merchandise from the wealthy merchants. This was the reason that thousands of Armenians fled from Persia to India and they mostly settled in Surat which was considered to be a commercial centre from the 16th to 18th centuries.

The Armenians were coming to India by overland route as well as by sea. The overland trade route was reaching India through Kashmir, and then through Ganges valley was going southwards to Dhaka. Another branch of this route from Lahore was going to south-westwards towards Moltan, and via Indus valley was ending in down South. The beginning of sea route were Basra or Bandar Abbas ports where Armenian migrants used to embark on ships and get down in Surat port and from there dispersed all over India.

¹⁹ A.Hovhannisyan, *Joseph Emin*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1989, p.6.

²⁰ New Julfa - a suburb of Isfahan, the name of the Armenian settlement in Iran. They called it New Julfa in memory of the one abandoned in Armenia.

²¹ Cosroe Chaqueri, ed., *The Armenians of Iran*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1998, p.39.

Armenians in South India

The visits of Armenians to India grew in number as the first Armenian colonies began to appear on the Indian territory. One of the first Armenian communities came into existence on the Malabar Coast in the 7th century. The Armenian merchants were the foremost traders in the South. They practically controlled the trade of the Carnatic and conducted a highly profitable business with Europe, Persia and Manila, especially in precious stones and costly fabrics.

In 1956 an Archive Directory was published in Delhi. It was stated there that seven centuries before Vasco de Gama an Armenian merchant-diplomat named Thomas Cana landed on the Malabar Coast in A.D. 780 reaching India via overland route. Thomas Cana was not only a prosperous merchant in muslins and spices but as he proved later, an able diplomat and a protector of Christians. He founded a commercial town near Cranganore where he built a church and opened a school. From the Emperor of Malabar he obtained a copperplate document, which mentioned several commercial, social and religious privileges for the Christians of that region. The early Portuguese writers mentioned him as Thomas Cananeo and gave his nationality as an Armenian.²² As the priests, who served in the church were trained in Assyrian language, they spread here this language and literature. Due to these people and their efforts the Indian Assyrian Church was born, and its followers were called Christians of St. Thomas. This Church existed for centuries, far from Western influence until the 15th century when the Portuguese appeared here and transformed it into a Catholic Church.²³

To the present Malabar Christians Thomas Cana is known as Knayi Thomman or Kanaj Tomma, which means the merchant Thomas.

There is an interesting story on record about Thomas Cana which states that Christianity was in a decline in India during the 7th and 8th centuries. Towards the end of the 8th century an Armenian merchant named Thomas, arrived in India and revived Christianity. This merchant, whether he was ordained or not is not

²² M.J.Seth, op.cit., p.612.

²³ Torgom Archbishop Goushakyan, *Indo-Armenians*, (original in Armenian), Jerusalem, 1941, p.43.

known, discharged the office of a bishop and was so considered, and under his protection the native chiefs ceased persecuting the Christians.²⁴

Some authorities think Thomas Cana has been confused with the apostle bearing the same name. Other authorities who have recorded the same story state that the tradition of the arrival of the Apostle St. Thomas in South India may be traced to that of the Armenian merchant, Thomas Cana, who had been famed as the pillar of Christianity in South India. Some Armenian scholars admit Thomas Cana could mean Priest Thomas as in Armenian language priest is called Cahana, and during a period of time Cahana became Cana in India.

Henry Davison Lovie in his *Vestiges of Old Madras* states:

“In 1507, Don Francisco de Almeida, the Portuguese Viceroy at Goa, heard from some native Christians of Malabar that the house or Chapel of the Apostle [Thomas] still existed on the Coromandel Coast. Of four men whom he sent round by sea to make inquiries, two died, but the survivors brought back a report, which was transmitted, to the King of Portugal. Ten years later, [1517] two Portuguese, named Diego Fernandes and Bastiao Fernandes, arriving at Pulicat from Malacca, heard of the Chapel from some Armenian merchants. They all proceeded to the spot, some seven leagues distant, and discovered a very ancient edifice, constructed like a church with nave and aisles, and having timber pillars and roof. Its length was twelve cubits. A sacristy beyond, five cubits long, had a dome, surmounted by a dwarf spire rising to the height of thirty cubits. Crosses and peacocks in plaster constituted the decoration. This structure was believed to be the sepulcher of the saint, [Thomas the Apostle].”²⁵

From the above mentioned statement it can be assumed that one of the oldest, if not the first, Armenian settlements in India was founded on the Malabar Coast.

There is another reference on Armenians who lived in South India from ancient times. One of the active personalities of East India Company Francois Martene, who settled in Malabar in the second half of the 17th century and conducted a thorough investigation of this region, wrote that “in Saint Fomes the

²⁴ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.613.

²⁵ Ibid., p.579.

Armenians who settled in this area from ancient times and were engaged in trade were very active... Here there used to be Armenian families whose wealth estimated in millions.”²⁶

Near Madras there is an old Portuguese town of great historical interest, called Mylapore or San Tome. The Armenians who were found on the Coromandel Coast in the early 16th century, are known to have lived in Mylapore since the 17th century. Alberto de Mandelslo, a Portuguese traveler who traveled in India from 1638 to 1640, found some Armenian merchants in that area.

In May 1662 this town was captured from the Portuguese by Abdullah Kutub Shah, the King of Golcond. Later on he appointed Markus Erizad (Hoorizad), an Armenian, as the Governor of Mylapore.

In the Public Records Office Museum in Chancery Lane, London, a letter is exhibited written by the Governor of Mylapore Markus Erizad to Charles II, King of England on 14 February, 1664. In his letter the Governor was asking the King to grant him a ship and instead he sent some valuable presents for His Majesty, along with their description in that letter. However, there is nothing in the Public Records to whether the King of England favoured the Governor of Mylapore or not. It is not possible to specify how long Markus Erizad governed Mylapore. It is only known that in 1698 he was still holding this position. There is such a reference in an old manuscript which was written in that city and the governor was referred to as “friend of kings and the pride of Christians”.²⁷

Madras (now Chennai) has been an important and big centre of Armenian colony. This community played a significant role in the formation and development of the ideology of national freedom movement of the Armenian nation. There are references from the 16th century regarding the existence of Armenian merchants in Madras. But those were individuals who had only come for trade and they meant to go back after their business had got over. Thus their

²⁶ H.D.Lovie, *Vestiges of Old Madras*, London, 1901, vol.1, p.285.

²⁷ A.Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of Armenian Colonies*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, vol. 1, 1964, p.453.

settlement was temporary. Permanent Armenian settlement in Madras was established from the middle of the 16th century.

In one Armenian manuscript which was copied in 1790 in Masulipatam by an Armenian named Sarkis Johannes, it is written that "the Armenians permanently settled in Madras in the year 1666".²⁸ However, the oldest Christian grave in Madras belongs to an Armenian who died in 1663.²⁹

One more evidence about the permanent Armenian settlement in Madras is the manuscript of *Voskeporik*, written in 1688. This manuscript is now the property of the British Museum.³⁰ In this manuscript Madras is mentioned in its old name – Chenapatam.

The Armenian colony of Madras became larger and played a significant role especially in the 18th century. A printing press started there and consequently publishing work developed. From that time onwards the Armenian colony was situated in the centre of the new city on the Armenian Street (the street has preserved its name until now). The Armenian population of Madras mostly consisted of artisans and petty merchants. However, Armenian wealthy traders and industrialists had a tremendous success. The trade in precious stones, spices, muslins and other goods was concentrated in their hands.

The first Armenian Church in Madras was built in 1712 but it fell into disuse as the British objected to such an impressive edifice in the Fort area. The present Armenian church dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary was erected on Armenian Street in 1772 on the site of the old Armenian cemetery.

The war in this region between the French and the British in the 1780s had an impact on the population as well as the Armenian colony of Madras. They began to leave the city. One section settled in Nigapatam and Seringapatam, while the other settled in Masulipatam, and the third section remained in Madras. In Masulipatam the Armenian settlers erected a church. However, only a few

²⁸ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.579.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 608.

³⁰ F.C. Conybeare, A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Museum, p.218.

families remained in this place by the middle of the 19th century. Many Madras Armenians left for Indonesia and Malaysia.

According to 19 preserved tombstones bearing inscriptions in Armenian language, which were found in an old cemetery in Hyderabad by Mesrobian Jacob Seth (the author of the book *Armenians in India*) we can assume that there was an Armenian colony here during the 17th-18th centuries. And the community has been considerably large as among the tombstones there are two of Armenian priests.

Armenians in Agra

The Armenians settled in Agra in the 16th century on the invitation of Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) and till the middle of the 19th century they formed a rather big Armenian community over there. By the order of the Moghul Emperor Armenian merchants were allowed to export and import any items without tax, enter those districts of the empire where entrance of foreigners was prohibited.³¹ It is noteworthy to mention that the Armenians enjoyed such a high regard among the native population that the Catholic fathers were entering India and China dressed in Armenian traditional clothes thus to be able to conduct their missionary work without any obstacles.³² Armenian colony was held in such a high esteem that the Indian rulers used to visit them.³³

The letter of Father Jerome Xavier, written in 1604, says the following: "Owing to Akbar's Firman, the Christians might practice their religion quite openly."³⁴ In 1562 an Armenian Church was built in Agra, expenses were bore by the ruler from his state treasury. Erection of the church proves that there was a sizeable Armenian community in Agra. About the considerable number and

³¹ A. Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.447.

³² Derenik Bishop Poladian, *Armenians at Agra*, Beyrut, 1963, p.16.

³³ A. Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.448.

³⁴ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.201.

wealth of the Armenian colony in Agra speaks the fact that in the 17th century. Echmiatsin³⁵ sent a special priest-envoy to Agra.

Armenians in Delhi

There are few records about the Armenian settlement in Delhi. There is a reference regarding the arrival of the English delegation from Calcutta to Delhi in 1715 to obtain Grand Firman from Emperor Farrukh Siyar. Khojah Israel Sarhad, an Armenian merchant, was a member of this delegation. On their arrival in Delhi, the envoys were received by an Armenian priest, Rev. Stephanus.³⁶

Since an Armenian priest in the Imperial capital was given such a responsible task, it can be assumed that there was an important Armenian colony in Delhi in the early 18th century. And as there was a priest, there must have been a church as well. However, nothing can be found at present, as during the devastation of Delhi in 1739 and Indian Mutiny in 1857, all the Christian churches and cemeteries were destroyed.

Father Felix, a research scholar on Christianity during the Moghul period, writes the following about the Armenians in Delhi:

“Delhi also had a fair congregation of Armenian Christians, but it gradually died away after Nadir Shah had taken possession of Delhi in 1739.”³⁷

The only traces of the Armenians in Delhi are a few scattered graves bearing Armenian inscriptions and a memorial tablet in the Delhi Museum which states that an Armenian chapel was built in Delhi in 1781. At present a few Armenian families live in Delhi.

³⁵ Cathedral of St. Echmiatsin - Armenian religious centre, located 18 km to the west of Yerevan (capital of Armenia), Holy See of the Catholicos of all the Armenians. Was built in A.D. 301 and has been complemented till the 19th century.

³⁶ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.196.

³⁷ Ibid., p.198.

Armenians in Surat

The Armenians of Persia formed the Armenian settlement in Surat in the 16th century. Surat was the most important port on the Western Coast of the Indian Subcontinent for merchant-vessels coming from Basra and Bandar Abbas. Surat was an important market for the precious stones as well.

In Surat the Armenians built two churches and a cemetery. There is a tombstone in Surat of the year of 1579 which bears Armenian inscriptions.³⁸ That is the grave of the wife of the Armenian priest. From this it can be assumed that since there was an Armenian priest in 1579, there must have been a church or a chapel. A new church was built in 1778 which was dedicated to Virgin Mary. At that time the Armenian colony was very small. In fact, the community began to grow in numbers in the 17th century. An Armenian manuscript, written in 1678, which is now the property of Saltikov-Shchedrin Library, St.-Petersburg, bears an account of the permanent Armenian colony in Surat.³⁹

The most prosperous period for Surat was the second half of the 18th century. Among the Armenians of Surat the merchants played an active role. They owned merchant-vessels and had their significant role in transit trade.

In Surat many Armenian entrepreneurs were engaged mostly in muslin manufacturing. They were buying cotton, giving to the weavers, then passing ready threads to other workers to make fabrics and finally giving to Armenian Khojas to sell their product in the market.⁴⁰

However, when the commercial importance of Surat began to wane, the Armenians shifted to Bombay (now Mumbai). Initially it was a Portuguese trade centre, which was captured by the British from 1661. Since the British wanted Bombay to become a trade centre, they invited Armenians from Surat to settle there giving them land and loans to build houses. One of the most outstanding

³⁸ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.225.

³⁹ A.Abrahamyan, op.cit., p.450.

⁴⁰ Leo, *Selected Essays*, Yerevan, Louys, vol.5, 1986, p.510.

Armenian merchants in India was from Bombay. His name was Khoja Minas who owned merchant-vessels.⁴¹

Armenians in Bombay

The Armenian settlement in Bombay was not large. Due to Bombay's geographical position, there has been a steady, temporary influx of Armenians to this city. Thousands of Armenians from Iran, Armenia and Turkey have passed through Bombay to the other cities of India. During the World War I many Armenian refugees fled from Turkey to Bombay on their way to England and other countries. During the World War II many Armenians from Rangoon (now Yangon) and Calcutta stayed temporarily in Bombay but the permanent residents were not large in numbers.

S.M.Edwardes, in his book *Rise of Bombay*, mentions about the early Armenians in Bombay. He says:

"The Armenians are wearing the Persian dress, and dyeing their hair and whiskers with henna. Armenian ladies pass their time either engaged in the care of their families, or in receiving and paying visits, drinking coffee or sherbet, embroidering and making delicious confections of Hulwah and various sweetmeats. They have very considerable influence in their families, understand business admirably, and are commonly entrusted with the full control of their property. Their condition is easy and agreeable, little restraint being placed upon their conduct, a slight degree of personal seclusion being considered honorable and dignified."⁴²

Armenians were concentrated in a district which was called Armenian Line. The adjacent street is called Armenian Street. There is an Armenian Church on Meadows Street in Bombay, which was built in 1796. At present a few Armenians live in Bombay.

⁴¹ Annie Basil, *Armenian Settlements in India: from the earliest times to the present day*, Calcutta, Armenian College, n.d., p.19.

⁴² As cited in: M.J.Seth, op.cit., p.299.

Armenians in Chinsurah

The Armenians settled in Chinsurah in 1645 after the Dutch, who formed a colony there in 1625. Till the end of the 19th century the Armenian settlement in Chinsurah was very large. In 1697 an Armenian Church was built here and was dedicated to St. John the Baptist. This Church is the second oldest church in Bengal.⁴³ It has been well preserved because it is near Calcutta and the Calcutta Armenian Church Committee is taking care of it.

Armenians in Chandernagore

There was a small settlement of Armenians in Chandernagore from the middle of the 17th century till the end of the 19th century. Very little is known about this settlement. As is known, there was a French colony in Chandernagore and the Armenians had good relations with them, both social and commercial.

The oldest tombstone in the Chandernagore French Church is in the memory of an Armenian lady, Catherine Vosky Hyrapiet, who married the French Governor, Monsieur Francis Daguin de la Blanchetier in 1696 and mothered eleven children. There lived also an Armenian priest, Father Joao Armenio who was a member of the Armenian Monastic Order of St. Anthony the First Hermit and the "Missionary Apostolic to the Armenians in India".⁴⁴

Armenians in Saidabad

Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) continued the policy of Emperor Akbar of giving privileges to Armenian settlers. In 1665 the Armenians obtained a Firman from the Emperor which permitted them to form a settlement in Saidabad, a suburb of Murshidabad which was the capital of Bengal at that time. By the middle of the 18th century a large number of Armenians resided in Saidabad. By the order of the Emperor it was stated that the property and the state of the

⁴³ Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, p.28.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.33.

expired Armenians should belong to Armenian community, as well as five percent of tax was reduced to three-and-half percent.⁴⁵

Bolts wrote about the Armenian settlement of Saidabad in his *Considerations in India Affairs* (published in London, 1782), the following:

"The Armenians, who have ever been a great commercial body in Hindustan, have also long had considerable settlements in Bengal, particularly in Syedabad. Their commerce was likewise established by the Mogul's Firman, whereby the duties on the two principal articles of their trade, piece-goods and raw silk, were fixed at three-and-a-half per cent."

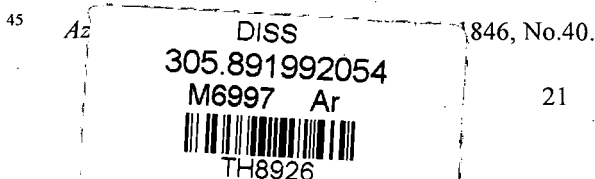
In 1758 an Armenian Church of the Virgin Mary was built in Saidabad. It is located at Sweta Khan's Bazar. From the 19th century Armenians began to leave the city.

From the 17th to 19th centuries there were also small Armenian settlements in Monghyr, Narwar, Gwalior, Lucknow.

Armenians in Narwar

A few Armenian tombstones, which still exist prove the existence of an Armenian colony in Narwar. Inscription on one of the tombstones says that an Armenian priest was buried there in 1743. From this it could be assumed that there was an Armenian settlement with its priest.

Father Tiefentaller, a Jesuit missionary, who traveled all over India in the middle of the 18th century, wrote in his notes that there was an Armenian in Narwar "who stood in high favour with the Great Moghul and was subsequently appointed Governor of that province. He resided in one of the first palaces of the city and has houses built for his numerous relatives and employees, as well as a chapel, in which he and all his Christian retinue attended divine service on



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Sundays". However, when the Armenian Governor died, the Christian community of Narwar dwindled away.⁴⁶

Armenians in Gwalior

In the 18th and 19th centuries there was an Armenian settlement in Gwalior. There was a famous Armenian here, Colonel Jacob Petrus, who was the Commander of Scindia's army. Colonel Petrus built an Armenian cemetery near the small Armenian Church in 1825. By the end of the 19th century no Armenians were left in Gwalior.

Armenians in Calcutta

From the end of the 16th century Armenians also settled in Calcutta. As is known, Calcutta was founded by Job Charnock. Archaeologists succeeded in finding an Armenian tombstone of 1630 in Calcutta. Thankappan Nair in his book *Calcutta in the 17th Century* writes:

“Who founded Calcutta? How was Calcutta founded? Why was Calcutta founded? These are three questions that every student of history frequently asks. There was no dispute about who founded Calcutta till 1895 when an Armenian historian produced an epitaph bearing the date July 1630 from one of the churchyards of the city. This apparently casts doubts about the claim of Job Charnock being the founder of Calcutta on the scene.”

Another scholar, Rev. James Long states that “the Armenians are among the oldest residents, and their quarter attracts by its antique air contrasted with conspicuous modern buildings in Calcutta. The Armenians, like the Jews, were famous for their mercantile zeal... The Armenians had settled in this quarter as early as the days of Job Charnock”.

In the first half of the 19th century the population of Calcutta was 229,714 of which British were 3,138 and Armenians – 636.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p. 148.

⁴⁷ Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 17th Century*, Calcutta, Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, 1986, p.171.

Calcutta has been and is the centre of the Armenian community of India. There are Armenian schools, three churches there. We will elaborate on this in the later chapters.

Armenians in Lucknow

When Lucknow was the capital of the Nawab Viziers of Oudh (1775-1856) there was a small Armenian settlement there in the end of the 18th century. It is known that the first king of Oudh, Ghaziuddin Hyder, married an Armenian lady.

The list of the Armenian settlements will be incomplete if we do not mention about the Armenian settlements in Lahore (now in Pakistan), Kabul (now the capital of Afghanistan) and Dhaka (now the capital of Bangladesh).

Armenians in Lahore

When Lahore was an important commercial centre and the summer capital of the Moghul Emperors, there was a flourishing Armenian settlement there from the end of the 16th century till the end of the 18th century.

There are some references to the Armenians of Lahore in the letters of the Jesuit Fathers of those days. From the letters we come to know that when the Moghul Governor threatened to persecute Christians in Lahore in 1609, the Armenian community were in such a fear that some twenty three Armenian merchants fled with haste.

There was an Armenian bishop in Lahore, which can prove the existence of an Armenian Church and sufficiently large Armenian settlement which required the appointment of a bishop. ⁴⁸

It appears that the Armenians had a special quarter at Lahore. According to Father Tieffentaller, this quarter still existed after the third invasion of the Punjab by Ahmed Shah Durrani in 1757, because the Armenian and Georgian

⁴⁸ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.63.

soldiers serving under Ahmed Shah protected the Armenian quarter from the Afghan soldiers, and thus it was not devastated. At the end of the second invasion of the Punjab by Ahmed Shah in 1755, he took away many Armenian gunmakers with him to Kabul.⁴⁹

Armenians in Kabul

The Armenian gunmakers of Lahore were not the first Armenian settlers at Kabul. The Armenians were living there at least hundred years prior to gunmakers' arrival.

One Jesuit Father, Benedict Goes passing the borders of Afghanistan in 1603, heard that there might be some Christians there. A few years later the Fathers in Mogor learnt from some Armenians who had come from Kabul that the inhabitants of Kafiristan (who were not Muslim), bore a cross traced on their heads and had probably at one time been Christians. Fired with the prospect of this new opening for their efforts, the Jesuits at Agra obtained permission to undertake a Mission to this country.⁵⁰

Those Christians may or may not have been Armenians, but the fact that there were Armenian merchants living in Kabul in the end of the 17th century seems as a conclusive proof of the existence of an Armenian settlement there.

According to Armenian Church Records, this settlement was included in the Indo-Iranian Diocese and Armenian priests were regularly posted to the Kabul Armenian Church. However, due to the difficult conditions and isolation, majority of the Armenians left Kabul. As a result, after 1830 no priests were posted to Kabul.

In 1896 Ameer of Afghanistan Abdur Rahman Khan sent a Circular to the Armenian community in Calcutta, inviting ten-twelve Armenian families to settle in Afghanistan. From his letter we come to know that in the time of King Nadir Shah there were five hundred Armenians in Afghanistan. But in the time of this

⁴⁹ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.204.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.207.

Ameer only twenty-one Armenians were left there. Then the letter continues as follows:

“It is desirable, that, from your national and religious feelings and sympathies, you should send ten or twelve families, men of education and of some profession, to live in the Dominions of Afghanistan, and so relieve their loneliness, and they themselves pass their days in comfort...”⁵¹

The Wardens of the Calcutta Armenian Church sent an official reply to Ameer on behalf of the Armenian community that the Armenians were not willing to uproot themselves, and requested him to send Armenian children to Calcutta for education and his Armenian subjects to Peshawar where an Armenian priest would meet them and minister to their spiritual needs. However, two elderly Armenians accompanied the official to Kabul. But the Ameer was not impressed and they were immediately repatriated at the Ameer's expense.

A year later, in 1897, the same Ameer suddenly expelled all the Armenians from Afghanistan. This happened because of the letter from Turkey, from Sultan Abdul Hamid II, in which he warned the Ameer that Armenians were dangerous. That time the Turkish Sultan had already started ethnic cleansing in the Western Armenia, killing or deporting the Armenians from their native land.

The Armenians of Kabul took refuge in Peshawar. Sadly, nothing was done by the wealthy Armenian community of Calcutta to relieve the distress of the unhappy refugees. It is worth mentioning that these refugees carried with them their religious books and ancient manuscripts. There was a very interesting article on this issue in the *Englishman* (Calcutta) dated February 11, 1907:

“...These people in the time of the late Ameer Abdul Rahman had dwindled down to ten families. They were, for reasons unknown, banished to Peshawar and brought down with them a collection of manuscripts said to be of immense antiquity. Indeed, they are so old that none of the families possessing them are able to read them... In any case an examination by experts of the manuscripts now said to be in Peshawar, should yield some valuable results. The families themselves are unaware of the history of the first

⁵¹ M.J.Seth, op. cit., pp.209-213.

settlement in Kabul, except that it dates back to the very earliest times."

Armenian Archbishop Sahak Ayvadian, after this publication went to Peshawar for a pastoral visit to these Armenians as well as to examine the books and manuscripts. On his return to Calcutta he presented some books to the Armenian Church Library, which he had obtained from the refugees.⁵²

Armenians in Dhaka

Dhaka has been one of the main commercial cities in Bengal, which was an important centre for jute trade. Thus, Armenian traders settled there. The first Armenian traders came to Dhaka in 1613, and from the first half of the 18th century till the end of the 19th century there was a flourishing Armenian settlement there. In 1781 the Armenian Church of Holy Resurrection was erected on the site of the old chapel. This church is located on the Armenian Street, Armanitola.⁵³ On the territory of Bangladesh there are the remains of almost twelve Armenian churches. After the partition of India most of the Armenian families left Dhaka. Majority settled in Calcutta, the rest left for England. Now only eight Armenian families live in Dhaka.

Archive documents, tombstone inscriptions and many facts show that in the 18th century there were Armenian colonies also in Adoni, Arcot, Bangalore, Bihar, Cochin, Chittagong, Hughly, and other cities.

We cannot provide any specific figure on Armenians in India. On this question opinions of scholars differ from each other. Reverend Aramais Mirzaian in his book *A Short Record of Armenian Churches in India and Far East* which was published in Calcutta in 1958, brings the number of 18-20 thousand of Indo-Armenians, who permanently resided in India till the 19th century and says that by 1950s Armenians were not more than 2 thousand. French author Doloriere gives the number of the Indo-Armenians as 25,000, Alishan as 5000,

⁵² Annie Basil, op. cit., p.69.

⁵³ Ibid., p.70.

Shahnazaryan as 1500.⁵⁴ In our opinion, till the 19th century the number of Indo-Armenians was not less than 10,000 without counting those who were coming temporarily for trade or other works to India and then going back.

There is a wrong assumption about the Armenian colonies among many scholars who are not really aware of the social structure of the colony. They think that Indo-Armenians were only wealthy traders. However, there were petty traders, workers and artisans as well. Many Armenians were coming to India, losing here their health, wealth, becoming disabled and returning, others died and were buried in unknown places.

Last but not the least, it should be stated again that Indo-Armenian relations bear a few thousand years old history. From the fact that Armenian King Valarsaces welcomed the Hindu princes so warmly, it can be assumed that this kind of visit was not the first.

The journeys were mutual. However the first permanent Armenian settlements appeared on the Indian subcontinent in the 7th century. From the 16th century the number of Armenian migrants increased significantly and they settled in the main commercial centres of Indian subcontinent such as Surat, Bombay, Agra, Calcutta, Dhaka etc. Wherever the Armenians formed their settlements, they also erected churches or chapels. There had been only several cases when the Jesuit Fathers could persuade Armenians to join the Catholic Church.⁵⁵

According to the inscriptions on the Armenian tombstones, the population of Armenian colonies consisted of state and military officials, warriors, artisans, armourers, traders, architects, petty merchants, day-workers, caravan guides and the like.

By the end of the 19th century, the Armenian colonies decreased in number. At present one can find Armenians only in Calcutta, Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai and Bangalore.

⁵⁴ A Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.455.

⁵⁵ E.Dennison Ross and Eillen Power, ed., *Akbar and the Jesuits*, C.H.Payne, trans., New Delhi, Tulsi Publishing House, 1979, p.135.

CHAPTER 2

PROMINENT ARMENIANS IN THE HISTORY OF INDIA

For more than twenty centuries the Armenians had been connected with India as commercial people and achieved success in the sphere of trade and commerce during the Hindu, Moghul and British periods. Although a purely commercial community, the Armenians displayed themselves to be more than ordinary merchants and traders whenever opportunity came.

During the 16th - 17th centuries, regular Armenian communities had already been established, particularly in the coastal towns of India (as we have already mentioned in Chapter 1). The rulers of Moghul India also measurably fostered the emergence of new Armenian settlements in India. They often persuaded Indo-Armenians to invite their kinsmen, artisans and merchants to India from Persia and Armenia. It was Emperor Akbar who induced Armenians to come and settle in his dominions, giving them land and allowing to conduct their own religion – Christianity. He was well aware of their intelligence and their integrity in commercial affairs, and desired to improve the trade of his country through their agency.¹

According to Thomas Khojamall, the Armenian historian of Bengal of the 18th century, this invitation was issued in Kashmir to an Armenian merchant named Jacob:

"Akbar invited the Armenian merchant to come and settle at Agra and at the same time to induce his countrymen in the Punjab and elsewhere in India to come and reside at the imperial city where they would be given permission, by their royal patron, to build a church for the worship of the God in their own way, as Akbar knew that the Armenians were religious race of ancient Christians and

¹ A. Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of the Armenian Colonies*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, 1964, Vol.1, p.447.

would not settle in a place where they could not have and enjoy the free and undisturbed use and exercise of their own religion."²

The Armenians responded to Akbar's invitation and settled in Agra in large numbers. Later, in 1562 an Armenian Church was erected there.

Armenians in the Court of Emperor Akbar

Akbar was well disposed towards his Armenian subjects and several held high positions during his reign. The Chief Justice of the Empire was an Armenian named Abdul Hai (in Armenian language 'hai' means Armenian). In the *Ain-I-Akbari* he is mentioned as "the Qazi of the Imperial Camp". Abdul Hai is also mentioned in some manuscripts of the *Akbarnama* (vol. III) as participator in the religious discussions of Akbar.

The Portuguese interpreter of the court was an Armenian named Domingo Pires (he adopted Portuguese name). Akbar employed him as the interpreter to the embassy he had sent to Goa in September 1579, inviting Jesuits to his Court for religious discussions. Following lines are quotes from that letter:

"... I am sending Abdullah, my ambassador, and Dominic Perez (an Armenian Christian, the interpreter) with the request that you will send me two learned Fathers and the books of Law, especially the Gospel, that I may know the Law and its excellence..."³

From the Jesuit Fathers' letters it appears that Domingo Pires was Akbar's favourite for the latter participated in his wedding ceremony (Pires married an Indian lady).

² As cited in: M.J.Seth, *Armenians in India*, New Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta, Oxford & IHB Publishing Co, 1983, p.2

³ Ibid., p.88.

The lady doctor of the royal harem was an Armenian named Lady Juliana. This Lady Juliana was given by Akbar in marriage to Prince Jean Philippe de Bourbon of Navarre of the royal house of France. According to some writers, Juliana was Akbar's Christian wife's sister and it was she who built the first Christian Church at Agra.

There is a note in the Agra Mission Archives which states that the "Church was built by Philip Bourbon of the House of Navarre and his wife Juliana, an Armenian lady who was in medical charge of the Emperor's Harem. They are both buried in the Church itself, probably the epitaphs are in Armenian."⁴

Akbar's Christian wife, Mariam Zamani Begum, is considered to be an Armenian.⁵ Indian historian Henry George Keane in his *Sketch of the History of Hindustan*, says:

"Akbar subsequently married at least two other foreign ladies, an Armenian and a princess of Marwar. Preserving unmolested in the palace their chapels and their chaplains, these ladies would necessarily have their share in promoting the Catholicity of the Emperor's mind and predisposing him to regard with favour Hindus and Christians."

Henry Blochmann, in his translation of the *Ain-I-Akbari*, in one of his notes mentions that "there is not the least doubt of Akbar having an Armenian wife."

Fanthome, in his *Reminiscences of Agra* says:

"I have in my possession information which leads me to believe that there is a great deal of truth in the assertion that Akbar had a Christian wife whose name was Mariam."⁶

⁴ M.J.Seth, op.cit., p.93.

⁵ A. Abrahamyan, op.cit., p.447.

⁶ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op.cit., p.152.

Akbar's Christian wife's beautiful palace at Fatehpur Sikri still exists.

There was another Armenian Queen in the early 19th century. In 1814 the British conferred the title of King on Ghaziuddin Hyder who thus became the first King of Oudh. He married an Armenian lady who became one of his queens. This lady was known with the name Nawab Sultan Mariam Begum Saheba. She was also known as Vilayeti Begum (English Queen).

Mirza-Zul-Qarnain, Akbar's adopted son, was an Armenian, too. Father Francisco Corsi, a resident of Mogor since 1600, wrote about Mirza-Zul-Qarnain's parents that his father was an Armenian whose name was Mirza Iscandar, a native of Aleppo. He was admitted as a cavalier to King Akbar's court. He was "possessed of good parts, among others a knowledge of various languages, in particular Portuguese". The King married him off with Juliana, the daughter of another honourable Armenian in Akbar's court. Their first son was "our founder Mirza Zulcarnen, a name given as a favour by King Akbar himself, this being the name of Alexander the Great, whom they call Scander Zulcarnen". Zulcarnen means two-horned.⁷ He was brought up in the palace as the adopted son of Akbar's Armenian Queen, and grew up as the brother and playmate of future Emperors, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. In Emperor Jahangir's Memoirs, called *Tuzak-i-Jahangiri*, these lines about Mirza-Zul-Qarnain are notable:

"Zul-Qarnain obtained leave to proceed to the Faujdarship of Sambhar. He is the son of Iskandar, the Armenian, and his father had the good fortune to be in the service of Arshashyani [Akbar], who gave him in marriage the daughter of Abdul Hai the Armenian, who was in service in the royal harem. By her he had two sons, one was Zul-Qarnain, who was intelligent and fond of work, and to him, during my reign the chief diwans had entrusted the charge of the Government Salt Works at Sambhar, a duty, which he performed efficiently. He was now appointed to the Faujdarship of that region. He is an accomplished composer of

⁷ A. Abrahamyan, op.cit., p.482.

Hindi songs. His method in this art was correct and his compositions were frequently brought to my notice and were approved."⁸

Mirza-Zul-Qarnain's rise was fast. He was only twenty years old when his father died in 1613. Mirza-Zul-Qarnain succeeded him in collecting the salt revenues from Sambhar (Rajputana). Mirza held in turn the Governorship of Sambhar, Mogor, Babraich (Oudh), Lahore and Bengal. Jahangir conferred the title of Amir on him, and he was also known as Prince Mirza. Both Jahangir and Shah Jahan had affection for Mirza and showered honours and wealth on him from time to time, for they appreciated his outstanding administrative ability and respected his staunch faith and virtuous life. However, periodically large sums were extracted from him, as he did not want to get converted to Islam. He considered himself as a genuine Christian. Mirza-Zul-Qarnain was in a very good relations with Jesuit Fathers. Michael Angelo Lualdi in the *Annual Letter of Goa* for 1619, wrote:

"The Faith was propagated most in certain province of Mogor, where Mirza-Zul-Qarnain, a native of Armenia and a Christian from his birth ruled since 1619 with title of Governor. Greatly in favour with the king and therefore very powerful, he promoted largely our religion. He built a church in his province, where the faithful would assemble and conduct their religion."⁹

In the records of Jesuit fathers Mirsa-Zul-Qarnain is referred to as the "Father of Mogor Christians" and the "Pillar of Christianity in India". His every action was an example of charity and his generosity and kindness to all in need - regardless of caste or creed, did much to propagate Christianity. He gave the Jesuit Fathers a large sum of money to purchase land at Salsette (Bombay), to found a college in Agra and establish a mission in Tibet.

⁸ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op.cit., p.4.

⁹ Ibid, p.12.

Mirza had always helped the Jesuit Fathers by donating funds, freed them when they were imprisoned and thus he won their unqualified admiration, and they have left glowing accounts about Mirza-Zul-Qarnain.

"At all the most solemn Feasts of the year, Mirza sends to the Fathers a large sum of money to be distributed in alms among the poor Christians. His kindness towards those who came from paganism is beyond words. He helps and assists them in all their needs, that they may be confirmed in the Holy Faith. He does the same for orphan girls, who otherwise would be in danger. He presents them with dowries, and marries them according to their rank, thus placing their virtue beyond the reach of temptation. In a word, Prince Mirza is among these Mogores, another Apostle, a second St. Paul, who becomes *omnibus omnia, ut omnes Christo lucrifaciat* (all things to all men, that he may save all...)"¹⁰

Mirza was a gifted poet, playwright, singer and raconteur. He composed heart touching Hindi poems and elegant Persian verses. In the translation of the *Tuzak-i-Jahangiri* (which is now in the British Museum) it is noted that Zul-Qarnain Farangi came from Bengal and presented poems which he had composed on Shah Jahan's name, for which he got Rs.4000. Later on, in 1648, when Shah Jahan shifted his capital from Agra to Delhi, he asked Mirza to compose a suitable poem in praise of the new capital, Shahjahanabad.

An interesting story is said about this poem. Mirza-Zul-Qarnain, emanating from religious norms, showed in the poem that the glory of the city and its perfection were attributable only to God. Shahjahan became very furious and discontented, and initially rejected the poem. Afterwards the Emperor substituted his own name wherever 'God' was mentioned and accepted the poem.¹¹

¹⁰ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.11.

¹¹ A.Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.483.

In composing songs and poems Mirza-Zul-Qarnain reached that level of fame that the best of his works were placed in Indian *Ragmala* – a collection of favourite and famous poems in India. He composed his poems in Persian, the language of poetry of that time.

Another Armenian poet of great merit lived in Delhi in the 17th century. His name is often put near the names of Firdausi, Sayadi, Hafez and Khayam. This poet's grave is near the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi and even today Hindus and Muslims remember him and strew flowers and burn candles and incense at his grave.

This Indo-Armenian poet was known as Sarmad who was also a scholar, mystic and saint.

In the *Oriental Biographical Dictionary* by Thomas William Beale, revised and enlarged in 1894 by Henry George Keane, it is mentioned, that Sarmad (Arabic word for eternal) was the poetical name of an Armenian merchant who came to India from Persia and started business at Sindh. After some time, under the influence of the Indian philosophy as well as Sufism, he adopted the life of an ascetic and roamed the streets like naked fakir. Sarmad was well versed in Sufism. His elegant quatrains and gazelles in Persian and Arabic won him wide popularity as well as numerous Hindu and Muslim disciples. Among them was Prince Dara Shikoh, the elder brother of Aurangzeb. The disciples of Sarmad did not only regard him as a saint and mystic, they also credited him with miraculous powers.

When Aurangzeb (1658-1707) became the Emperor, he persistently persecuted Samrad, seeking some pretext to take his life because he had befriended Dara Shikoh and predicted the latter to be the Emperor (but as is known, Aurangzeb killed Dara Shikoh and became the Emperor).

Some authorities state that the Emperor eventually executed Sarmad in 1661 for his supposed heresy as contained in his couplet:

“The Mullahs say Ahmed went to heaven,
Sarmad says that heaven came down to Ahmed.”

There is another version of the story. Aurangzeb, wishing to show his people that he was acting according to Islamic Law by following Sarmad, ordered his mullahs to enquire from Sarmad why he repeated only the first half of the Kalima - *There is no God* - but not the second - *but God*. To that he replied that "I am still absorbed with the negative part. Why should I tell a lie?"

Thus he sealed his death sentence. Ali Khan-Razi, Aurangzeb's court chronicler, was present at Sarmad's execution. He describes how contemptuously Sarmad accepted his death sentence. Before the execution he uttered some couplets. The following is one of them:

"There was an uproar and we opened our eyes from the eternal sleep.

Saw that the night of wickedness endured, so we slept again."¹²

Sarmad was a great philosopher. He was tolerant to all the religions. He said: "I go towards the mosque, but I am not a Musulman."

Four hundred of Sarmad's quatrains in manuscripts are preserved in the British Museum in London. In the Oriental Library of Rampur there is a manuscript copy of the *Diwan of Sarmad*, which contains a portrait of the poet with his disciple, Abhai Chand. Emanating from the fact that contemporaries

¹² A. Abrahamyan, op.cit., p.485.

numbered Sarmad among the other prominent poets, it could be assumed he was among the greatest poets.

There was another Indo-Armenian poet who lived in Lucknow in the middle of the 19th century. He was a reputed scholar and wrote poems in Urdu.

Armenians in Indian Armies

The Armenians who found their second homeland in India and were enjoying affection and sympathy of the Indian people, could not be indifferent to India's freedom struggle against the British colonisers. Armenians also contributed their modest share in this struggle.

In this regard a prominent Armenian in India was Colonel Jacob Petrus who had been the Commander of Scindia of Gwalior's Army for seventy years (1780-1850).

Jacob Petrus was the son of an Armenian merchant, yet he had no desire to continue with his father's work. Instead he was dreaming about a military career. In 1778, 23-year old Petrus formed a military corps and joined the Rajah of Bortpore for whom he fought on remuneration basis. Afterwards he joined General de Boigne, the then Commander of Scindia's Army. Jacob Petrus rose to the highest rank – Commander of Scindia's Army – the position he held for seventy years. Under his command Jacob Petrus had twelve infantry and four cavalry battalions with 150 artillery. There was an Armenian detachment in his army. The 78-year old Colonel became more respected and famous during the developments of 1843 when the Indian people were fighting against the British. Colonel Jacob's military talent has been recalled with gratitude and praise among

high ranking Indian officers.¹³ His reputation was so high and he was so respected that the entire city of Gwalior mourned his death in 1850. Thousands including the nobility and military attended his funeral, and guns were fired ninety five times from the ramparts of the historic Gwalior Fort, to mark his age.

Colonel Jacob's two sons were also from the army who used to serve under their father. Between the two one was a Major, the other was a Captain. In Colonel Jacob's army there were forty Armenian officials. Colonel Jacob Petrus's achievements were never forgotten, and even his great grandson got a life pension from the Gwalior Government. Colonel Jacob's residence at Naumahalla accommodates the Gwalior Municipality. His Camp, Parade and Garden are still considered to be landmarks in Gwalior.¹⁴

One of the Armenian officers, who served under Colonel Jacob Petrus, was Johannes. He was famous with his artificial tank and a well, which he had built in Gwalior. They were in existence till 1960s and were known as *Waness Sahib ka talao aur kooa*.¹⁵ After the death of Colonel Jacob Petrus, most of the Armenians of Scindia's army left Gwalior and gave up their martial occupation.

In the first half of the 19th century there was another high ranking Armenian officer - Movses Manook - Colonel of Hyderabad Army. Colonel Manook was one of the most outstanding army officers of the Nizam of Hyderabad.¹⁶

In the second half of the 18th century, during the freedom movement in Bengal, the name of Gorgin Khan was very famous. He was also an Armenian.

¹³ Azgaser Araratyan, Calcutta, 1848, Vol.A, p.44.

¹⁴ Annie Basil, *Armenian Settlements in India*, Calcutta, Armenian College, n.d., p.60.

¹⁵ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.144.

¹⁶ *Armaveni*, Vol.A, 1937-38, p.224.

His real name was Khojah¹⁷ Gregory, but he used to be known with his orientalized name - Gorgin Khan. Originally Gregory was a textile merchant in the Hooghly district of Bengal. By sheer merit, military genius and outstanding military sagacity, he rose so rapidly that during three years (1760-63) he was the virtual ruler of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

When Mir Qasim became the Nawab of Bengal, being aware of Gorgin Khan's exceptional abilities, he appointed him the Minister and Commander-in-Chief of his Army. Gorgin Khan realized in order to maintain and, if necessary, assert the Nawab's independence, a strong, well-disciplined and well-equipped army was indispensable. He trained up a corps of artillerymen. Besides Gorgin-Khan, there were eight other high ranking Armenian officers in the Bengali Army. Among them, Margar Calantar - initially served in Holland and reached to the rank of General. This "Armenian Margar" is referred to as the commander of Indian army in the *History of India* by N.K.Sinha and A.Ch.Banerjee; Hovannes Nazar was the other who was the head of Mir Qasim's security detachment. There were about a hundred Armenians in Gorgin Khan's army, all were of high ranks, like Generals, Colonels, Captains.

Having organized a regular army, Mir Qasim was faced with serious difficulties in arming it. Gorgin Khan turned to the Indian and Armenian armourers in organizing the local production of armaments. He established a foundry for casting guns and an arsenal for manufacturing firelocks.

English historian Marshman, writing about Bengal's Nawab Mir Qasim's powerful position, states:

“For the rapid progress he was mainly indebted to the exertions of an Armenian, born at Ispahan, generally known by his orientalized name of Gorgin

¹⁷ Khojah – a common title of honour among eminent merchants and others.

Khan. He was originally a cloth-seller at Hooghly but when intrusted with the responsibilities of office, turned out to be a man of original genius and vast resources. In less than three years he created a force of 15,000 cavalry and 25,000 infantry, disciplined on the modes of the company's army, he manufactured firelocks which were superior to the Towerproof muskets, he established a foundry for casting cannon, and trained up a corps of artilleryman who would have done credit to the Company's service."¹⁸ It should be mentioned that for a long time the British did not want to believe the Indians have succeeded in making artillery guns.¹⁹

Prince of India, Ali Gauhar gave a special estimation to Gorgin Khan for his sincere service to the people of India. On another Armenian, General Margar, for his bravery and good service, Mir Qasim conferred the title of 'Prince' and sent him valuable presents and one elephant.²⁰

The role of Armenian army men has been highly estimated by the Indian patriots and it is interesting to know that after each victory over the British, besides the Indian flag, Armenian flag was also hoisted in honour of their devoted ally²¹.

The British consequently became concerned of the rising power of Mir Qasim through his Commander-in-Chief, and took it as a threat to the East India Company's ambition of the territorial conquest of India. Moreover, because of Gorgin Khan's power and position, a number of Armenians held high civil and military posts and the Armenian merchants instead of being hampered in their

¹⁸ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.386.

¹⁹ R.Abrahamyan, *The 1760-63 Uprising of the People of India Against the British Colonisers and the Indo-Armenian Colony*, Yerevan, Historico-Philological Almanac, No.3(10), 1960, p.111.

²⁰ Thomas Khojamal, *History of India*, p.96.

²¹ Ibid., p.97.

trading activities, were bestowed certain privileges. These incidents arouse the anxiety of the British.

One of the members of the East India Company was complaining that because of Gorgin Khan the Armenians felt very confident and self-reliant and conducted trade which caused a big loss for the Company's enterprises in all the parts of the country:

"Khojah Gregory is in the highest degree of favor with the Nawab [Mir Qasim] and his adherents, and has posts of the greatest trust near the Nawab's person, and through him the Armenians in general are setting up an independent footing in this country and carrying on a trade greatly detrimental to our investments in all parts."²²

Accordingly, the English Council Board of Calcutta precipitated an open rupture with Mir Qasim who was now regarded as an enemy. The Governor of Bengal and other British senior officials designed plans on how to weaken Mir Qasim's position. They persuaded Agha Petrus (elder brother of Gorgin Khan who was pro-British) to write a letter to his brother requesting him either to imprison Mir Qasim or to leave him and join the British with his troops. However, according to Armenian historian Thomas Khojamall, Gorgin Khan replied that he was a genuine Armenian and could not betray his master. He would "serve him faithfully and remain royal to him always."²³

The spy of Mir Qasim immediately informed him about the letter from Agha Petrus to Gorgin Khan who was known to be well disposed towards the British because of his brother, and once even he showed his reluctance to kill the British prisoners by the order of the Nawab..

²² M.J. Seth, *op.cit.*, p.386.

²³ R.Abrahamyan, *18th Century Armenian Sources on India*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1968, p.62.

Mir Qasim believed that Gorgin Khan was capable of betraying him and “within 24 hours one of the greatest men of the age was a corpse”, writes Marshman. A group of Mir Qasim's men entered Gorgin Khan's tent on the false pretext of asking for pay and murdered him in cold blood.

There is another version about the tragic death of Gorgin Khan. That version says, Mir Qasim was not the mastermind of Gorgin Khan's assassination and he was so upset and furious with the death of his Commander that he ordered to kill all the British prisoners instead. Later on, when Mir Qasim left the political arena, some Armenian armymen joined the army of the Nawab of Oudh, showing themselves as serious, brave and honourable warriors.

At the time of his tragic death Gorgin Khan was only thirty three years old. A man of remarkable genius and foresight, Gorgin Khan played a prominent role in the history of that time.

It is noteworthy that Gorgin Khan's memory is still alive in Monghyr. Even today he is referred to as “General Sahib” who started an arsenal and gun-manufacturing factory in Monghyr.

Monsieur Raymond (alias Hadji Mustapha or Mustafa Khan) writes of the Monghyr-made rifles as follows:

"The European reader may possibly hear with surprise that the firelocks manufactured at Monghyr proved better than the best Tower-proofs sent to India for the Company's use; and such was the opinion which the English officers gave when they made the comparison by order of the Council of Calcutta. The flints were all Rajmahal agates, and their metal more mellow."²⁴

²⁴ M.J. Seth, op.cit., p.415.

An interesting relic was the famous gun Zamzamah.²⁵ An expert Armenian gun-maker Shah Nazar Khan made this gun in 1761 for Ahmed Shah Durrani, the Afghani invader of the Punjab. Sikhs who regarded it as a talisman of success later captured the Zamzamah. The Zamzamah was the only gun from the hundreds cast by Shah Nazar Khan, which survived. The Zamzamah was cast from a mixture of copper and brass. The Persian inscription round the muzzle reads:

“By order of the Emperor Dur-I-Durran Shah Wali Khan, the Vazir made this gun, the capturer of strongholds. The work of Shah Nazar Khan.”

This gun is exhibited in the National Museum in Lahore.

As is known the uprising in Bengal was suppressed by the British. They started persecuting not only the native population but also the Armenians. And this persecution was in such a high degree that most of the Armenians had to leave the region.²⁶

The British did not forgive the Armenians for their participation in the armed struggle against them. As we will see in Chapter 3, the East India Company signed an Agreement with the Armenian traders, giving them large privileges. After a few years from these events in the Chamber of Communities of Britain the question of the rights of the Armenians who lived on the territory of East India Company was discussed. Their behaviour was viewed as an act of ingratitude and the Chamber of Communities deprived them of all their previous rights and privileges.²⁷

²⁵ Zamzamah – means “hummer” or “applauder”. It also means a “lion’s roar”.

²⁶ *Azgaser*, Calcutta, 1846, No.37, pp.132-38.

²⁷ Archives of Institute of History of Academy of Sciences of Armenia, File 148, book 21, pp.28-31.

Pro-British Armenians

In their behaviour and mentality Indo-Armenians were divided. One part was living with the Indian people, sharing with them their hardships. The others were keen to be closer to the British adopting their culture, way of life and views.

As we have already mentioned, Gorgin Khan's elder brother, Khojah Petrus Arathoon was loyal to the British. He was the head of the Armenian community in Calcutta and was held in high esteem by his compatriots for his benevolence and his charities. Khojah Petrus built the Saidabad Armenian Church in 1758 at his own expense. He repaired and embellished the Calcutta Armenian Church in 1763. Joseph Emin (ref. to p.46) in his book *Life and Adventures* calls Khojah Petrus "the earthly God of the Calcutta Armenians."

Khojah Petrus was famous as an able diplomat as well. Colonel Clive, who called Khojah Petrus "Armenian Petrus", highly appreciated him and appointed him as his confidential agent in the negotiations with Siraj-ud-Dowlah in 1757. These negotiations resulted in overthrowing of Siraj-ud-Dowlah and appointing Mir Jaffir as the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

In 1760 Colonel Clive again used Khojah Petrus's diplomatic abilities as well as his connections in the delicate proceedings, which resulted in overthrowing of Mir Jaffir, and his son-in-law, Mir Qasim came to power.

Khojah Petrus Arathoon was also connected with the "Black Hole" incident (referred in Chapter 4). He secretly supplied provisions to the stranded English fugitives in their ships at Fulta after the fall of Fort William, which enabled them to survive for six months, until the arrival of the English Army of Retribution from Madras, under Admiral Watson and Colonel Clive, in December 1756.

For his loyalty to the British Khojah Petrus suffered a lot. In 1763 when the British were fighting against Mir Qasim, Major Adams, Commander of the British troops, fearing that Gorgin Khan or other Armenian commanders might harm the British prisoners who were in the hands of the Nawab, kept Khojah Petrus as a hostage in his camp.

Despite his valuable services to the British, Khojah Petrus was later accused of disloyalty, intrigue, espionage and serving the Nawabs of Bengal from Suraj-ud-Dowlah to Mir Qasim, and almost was expelled with his family from Calcutta by the English Council.

The Calcutta Council was presented the following note on March 24, 1763:

"The evil designs of the Nawab [Mir Qasim] against us appearing now in a glaring light, and it being wellknown through whole country that Coja Petruse, the Armenian acts as the Nawab's spy in this place, Mr. Batson proposed that he and his family be turned out of Calcutta immediately and desires it may be put to the vote."²⁸

However, the President of the Calcutta Council pointed out that ordering a merchant of long standing out of the settlement would be arbitrary and would shake all confidence. Khojah Petrus was honourably acquitted by the Government. He was able to clear himself but he had suffered a lot.

There was another Armenian merchant who was also connected with the "Black Hole" incident. His name was Agha Petrus Nicholas (he was also from Saidabad) whose piety, integrity and humanity won him the favour of Ali Verdi Khan, the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. At that time he had a great influence at the Court of Murshidabad.

²⁸ As cited in: M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.340.

The Armenians of Saidabad greatly relieved the hardships of the prisoners of the "Black Hole". Agha Petrus Nicholas bribed the Nawab's superior officials and thus released the women prisoners. He gave hospitality to these women for a few days and then sent them to Chinsurah, from there to Calcutta - and all these were at his own expense. One of these women was Mrs. Frances Watts, the wife of William Watts, Senior Member of the Supreme Council of Calcutta and Chief at Murshidabad.

The Apcars – a prominent Armenian family in India

For more than a century the name Apcar was prominent in commerce and industry. Aratoon Apcar came to India in 1795 from Iran. He was not only a brilliant businessman but also patriotic and religious person. He founded schools, donated financial assistance to Armenian Churches in India. His firm, Apcar & Co., continued to handle enormous business until the World War I. At that time Apcar & Co. owned several steamships known as the Apcar Line. They were sold to the British India Steamship Navigation Company and renamed the B.I. Line.

His son, Seth Apcar was the first Armenian Sheriff of Calcutta. He was awarded the Order of the Lion and the Sun (Sheer-O-Khorshid) by the Shah of Iran, which was presented to him by the Governor-General of India.

Another son – Alexander was the Consul for Siam (Thailand) until his death in 1895.

Alexander Apcar's son, Sir Apcar Alexander Apcar, K.C.S.I., became a prominent businessman and landlord and was the President of the Bengal Club and the Bengal Chamber of Commerce. He succeeded his father as the Consul for Siam and held that office until his death in 1913.

His sister, Diana Apcar has been the first lady-ambassador of Armenia to Japan. She was appointed in 1918 when Armenia gained independence for two years. (In November 1920 Armenia became a Soviet Republic).

Seth Apcar's son, Aleck Apcar, was the pioneer in opening up trade between Calcutta, Balasore, Ghatal and Midnapore. He was also a coal merchant, a qualified civil engineer and an architect. Being a prominent businessman and landlord, he was invited to become a municipal councilor and offered prestige positions in important institutions.

Arratoon Apcar's younger brother, Gregory Apcar, was noted for his charities particularly to the Armenian Church and Armenian College. His son, J.G.Apcar was known as "Father John". He got his education in Harrow and Cambridge. J.G.Apcar was a member of the Bengal Assembly and a municipal commissioner.

Gregory Apcar's grandson, Walter Gregory, got his education in Eton and Cambridge. He was the Standing Counsel of Bengal. Later he acted as Advocate-General of Bengal, and then was Acting Puisne Judge of the Calcutta High Court.²⁹

Apcar's distant relative was Emin Joseph Emin who was the first prominent representative of the Armenian freedom movement of the second half of the 18th century. This personality is interesting in the sense that how the Armenians on the hospitable soil of India could prepare the freedom movement in Armenia.

Emin came to India from Iran in 1750. That time Armenia was divided between Turkey and Iran, and the Armenian nation was suffering a lot under their yoke. Seeing the sufferings of his people, Emin's life aim became to free his

²⁹ Annie Basil, op. cit., pp.139-143.

compatriots from foreign oppression. Thus all his life he dedicated to this patriotic task. Emin underwent military training course in England, met English aristocracy trying to rouse their sympathy for the Armenians. With the financial help of Armenian merchants in India Emin tried to organise a joint Armenian and Georgian force to fight for freedom of Armenia. But under some circumstances this idealistic goal was not achieved. Bitterly disillusioned, he returned to Calcutta and joined the British Army under Hastings. Emin Joseph wrote his *Memoires* where he described all his numerous and dangerous adventures. The book is entitled as *Life and Adventures of Emin Joseph Emin, 1726-1809, written by himself*, which was first published in London in 1792.³⁰ The second edition was prepared and published in 1918 by Emin's great granddaughter who also included all the preserved letters written by Emin in English.

Indo-Armenian merchant-benefactors

During the first half of the 18th century in Madras there was a famous Armenian merchant named Khojah Petrus Voskan. He was a member of the Madras East India Company's Council. When the Nawab of Arcot visited Madras, he draped the main streets with rich silks giving a royal welcome to the Nawab. For this the Nawab of Arcot granted him the monopoly of the import trade to Madras and the interior.

Voskan was a prosperous merchant. He mostly invested in buildings. Voskan was also public-spirited and pious. He built the impressive Marmalong [Mambalam] bridge in Madras, as well as a flight of a 160 stone steps - with rest houses at convenient spots - from the base of the hill to the top on which St. Thomas's Church stands. Marmalong bridge bears a stone inscription at the

³⁰ Emin Joseph Emin, *Life and Adventures of Emin Joseph Emin, written by himself (1726-1809)*, Calcutta, Armenian College, edn. 2, 1918.

northern end in Arabic and Armenian, recording the name of the builder and its purpose (i.e. to benefit the pilgrims to St. Thomas's Mount). This bridge which spans 200 years of history, has been widened, as it was one of the city's bottlenecks.³¹

Khojah Voskan has also built the Chapel of Our Lady of Miracles of Vepery in Madras. This Chapel Voskan placed under the control of the Capuchin Fathers. In 1749 the British tried to hand over this Chapel to the Danish missionaries due to their suspicion of the Fathers of spying for French. Voskan objected this British decision but after his death in 1751 the British passed it on to the missionaries in 1752. Khojah Voskan left Rs. 7 lakhs, of which he willed a large amount for places of pilgrimage in India and for setting up schools in Julfa (his hometown).

At the end of the 18th century there was another prominent merchant named Agha Catchick Arakiel. He built the parsonage of the Holy Armenian Church of Nazareth in Calcutta, presenting a clock and erected its surrounding walls. He was not charitable only to his community. In 1789 when King George III of England recovered from a mental disease, the citizens of Calcutta celebrated the event enthusiastically. On this occasion Agha Arakiel paid off the debts of all the prisoners of the "Court of Requests" and released 138 Hindus, Christians and Muslims. King George was informed about this notable gesture and he sent to Agha Arakiel his miniature portrait and a sword.

Agha Arakiel's son, Moses was also loyal to the British. In 1801 he raised and maintained a corps of volunteers at his own expense, in order to assist the British in Calcutta, who were fighting the French in South India. Moses was appointed Captain to this corps. The Governor-General presented him with a sword in recognition of his loyalty.

³¹ Annie Basil, *op.cit.*, p.

Other prominent Indo-Armenians

Joseph Melik Beglar was the most eminent Chinsurah Armenian during the 19th century. His knowledge of Indian Archaeology secured him a post in the Bengal Government and he rose to be the Executive Engineer and Archaeological Surveyor in the Bengal Public Works Department. The archaeological group headed and guided by him reclaimed the famous Buddhist Temple of Bodh-Gaya at Gaya (Bihar). He participated in the excavations at Gaur, Malda and Sasaram. Beglar also supervised the erection of Jubilee Bridge near Naihoti, which was opened in 1887 during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

It may be interesting to mention that when one day Joseph Beglar visited a famous book shop to purchase the most uptodate works on Civil Engineering and Archaeology, he was given a book which was authored by himself.

At the beginning of the 20th century Herbert Michael Shircore was very famous in Bengal. He was a freemason and a member of the Zuriel Lodge of Dhaka, a generous supporter of charities, the chairman of the Narainganj Municipality and was decorated with the Order of Companion of the Indian Empire in 1933 by Sir John Anderson, the Governor of Bengal. In Narainganj a school and a road were named after him.

H.M. Shircore's uncle, Michael Rafayel Shircore was the Honorary Consul of America in Calcutta. His younger brother, John, was a judge in Lucknow.³²

³² Annie Basil, *op.cit.*, p.73.

There was another famous Armenian in Calcutta, Greg Moses, who was a well-known attorney, a notary public and the Consul for Portugal in Calcutta for twenty one years (till 1941).

In Calcutta an Armenian, named Demetrius, was very popular with his outstanding specimens of cacti, lilies and orchids. He was a life member of the Royal Agri-Horticultural Society of India and served on its Council from 1946 to 1960. Demetrius was considered to own the best private collection of cacti and succulents in Asia. He won numerous prizes including gold medals for his exhibits in different exhibitions.

Mrs. Demetrius was also engaged in this sphere. The Governor of West Bengal requested her to assist in arranging the flowers in Raj Bhavan on the eve of the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh to Calcutta in February 1961.

Armenians in Law

Persian had been the official language of India during the Moghul rule as well as during the British Raj until 1838. It was used in the Supreme Court of Civil Procedure and the Supreme Court of the Criminal Procedure where all proceedings were conducted in Persian. The English judges and magistrates delivered their judgements in Persian. Hindu Law was translated from Sanskrit into Persian and from Persian into English. Thus the British lawyers had to know Persian and the Indian lawyers had to know both Persian and English. At that time second language of the Armenians was Persian (as they were mostly from Persia), and as they have an aptitude for languages, they could easily learn English. Of course, they knew also Indian languages, depending in which part of India they lived.

A number of Armenians were advocates and barristers at the Calcutta High Court from the middle of the 19th century to almost the middle of the 20th century. They were leading barristers, attorney solicitors, pleaders, members of the Bengal Assembly and Bengal Legislative Council municipal commissioners.

In 1870s the leading barrister of the Calcutta High Court was M.P.Gasper who was the first Armenian who passed the Indian Civil Service Examination in England in 1869.

Among the advocates of Calcutta Armenians Gregory Paul enjoyed a big authority. He was graduated from Cambridge University and held different high posts in the High Court in India.

Many of the Armenians who pursued the legal profession in Calcutta, rendered valuable assistance to the Armenian Church voluntarily. Some of them acted as honorary legal advisers of the Church.

Armenians in Medicine

Medical profession also attracted a number of Armenians.

The first Armenian who joined the Indian Medical Service was Dr. Joseph Marcus Joseph, M.D. He joined the Medical Service in 1852 and rose to the rank of Deputy Surgeon General in 1880. Among Armenians who joined the Indian Medical Service, were Lieutenant Colonels, Surgeon Captains, and Surgeon Majors.

Till the end of the 19th century Stephan Hovsep Manouk was in the Indian Medical Service. He was the son of Hovsep Manouk who was not only a prominent businessman, but an able ship-captain as well. Among Armenians and

Indians he was famous as "Captain Manouk".³³ In 1836 he ordered to manufacture a 200-ton ship in Rangoon and named it *Elizabet* after his elder daughter. In this ship Captain Manouk was transporting his and other merchants' goods besides passengers. This man's son, Stephan Manouk, was considered to be a very famous doctor of his time. He got the Diploma of Doctor-Surgeon from Royal Medical University in London in 1862. For two years he was a doctor on the ship *Aragon* of the British Empire. Then he was transferred to Shahabas city where he was not only a doctor but also Deputy Mayor of the city and the treasurer.

Besides holding these posts, Stephan Manouk had also been a Deputy Governor and for his skilled activities and self-sacrifice during the big cholera of India he was granted a Certificate of Honours by the British Government.³⁴

Another famous Indo-Armenian doctor who lived in the second half of the 19th century was Sargis Avetoom. He was the son of Tadevos Avetoom who has been a well-known scholar, poet, one of the founders of the *Araratyan Society* of Calcutta and chief editor of newspaper *Azgaser*. Tadevos Avetoom's uncle, Prince Sargis Manook, had been a governmental official in Rangoon, Burma. He became very famous when he was acting as a mediator between the British and the Burmese in 1826.³⁵

So, Sargis Avetoom was named after his such a prominent relative and he proved to be such. He got a bright medical education: at Thomas's Hospital College in London (Certificate of Doctor-Chirurgien) plus another six months of education to become an army doctor; then in Venice specialising in eye-throat-ear illnesses along with specialization in Royal London Ophtalmic Hospital.

³³ *Azgaser*, Calcutta, 1847, March 27, No.85, pp.97-98.

³⁴ Dr. Vahram Torgomyan, *Contemporary Indo-Armenian Doctors*, (original in Armenian), Venice, 1896, p.13.

³⁵ *Azgaser Araratyan*, Calcutta, No.57, 1850, September 30.

Being an army doctor, Sargis Avetoom participated in British army's different operations in Afghanistan, Egypt and Burma. For his diligent and qualified service he was granted certificates and medals by the British Government, Medal and Clasp and Khedives star with Clasp from Egypt, and Medal and Clasp from Burma. Dr. Avetoom rose upto the rank of Surgeon Major.

Besides practising, Sargis Avatoom was also engaged in scientific research. He discovered a medicine against dysentery, which was acknowledged by the Government of India. This information was published in London in the newspaper *The Lancet* as well as in the *British Medical Journal*.

Being the master of his work, Dr.Sargis Avetoom was also fluent in many languages such as Armenian, Russian, English, German, Hindi, Bengali, Beluji and Pushtu.³⁶

Doctor Arthur Zorab was an eye specialist. He perfected an operation for glaucoma which was named the “Zorab-operation.”

Dr.Marie Catchatoor was the first woman to be appointed by the Government of West Bengal as Presidency Surgeon. She organised the Family Planning work in the village Khareberia (YWCA) near Calcutta and was a member of YWCA Board of Management. Dr.Catchatoor was also a member of the Mulvaney House³⁷ Committee and Medical Adviser to inmates of that home. Dr. Catchatoor has been the President of both the Bengal Medical Women Association and the Medical Women Association of India. She was retired as a superintendant of the Lady Dufferin Hospital in Calcutta in the early 1980s.

³⁶ Dr.Vahram Torgomyan, op.cit., p.29.

³⁷ Mulvaney House – a small home in Calcutta for aged women, fallen girls and their unwanted babies.

Another Armenian doctor, Dr. Stephen Owen Moses, known as “uncle Moses”, was the pioneer of Calcutta nursing homes. He established the first Maternity Home and Clinic. Dr. Moses initiated the St. John’s Ambulance Courses in Calcutta. Having the first Red Cross ambulance, he put it into service during the World War I.

Indo-Armenians were also engaged in engineering, civil services, railways, agriculture (about Armenians engaged in business and various industries we will talk in Chapter 3).

Emanating from the above facts, it can be concluded that the Armenian settlers in India were not only traders but also people of different professions. Among these professions one can find a number of Armenians famous as commanders, army officers, high ranking officials in the court, barristers, lawyers, doctors, engineers, landlords, real estate agents etc. A number of these Armenians have their significant role in the history of India. Among them Mirza-Zul-Qarnain and Sarmad – prominent poets of their time, Gorgin Khan – Commander-in-Chief of Mir Qasim’s army, Colonel Petrus, Aparcar family were the most outstanding ones.

CHAPTER 3

INDO-ARMENIAN ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Economic relations between Armenia and India have existed since ancient times. From time immemorial India has been trading with the West. Part of the caravan routes between the East and the West was passing through Armenia, and thus Armenia was the link between India and the West.

Indo-Armenian relations began to acquire more definite character in the end of the 4th century B.C. when Alexander the Great conquered the East. That time not only Iran but also Central Asia and India joined the world trade. As a consequence of such growing trade flows, Armenia became one of the centres of transit trade, and it linked the Western countries with India and China. The transit trade with Chinese silk was conducted through Armenia.

In ancient Armenia the main trade points were the cities of Armavir, Yervandashat, Tigranakert where thousands of merchants of Armenian and other nationalities, including Indians were interacting to conduct trade operations.

The long distance, division of India into various kingdoms and principalities and the subsequent loss of sovereignty of the Armenian state to Iran and Turkey could not lead to the establishment of a political relationship between Armenia and India. However, there were mainly contacts of an economic nature.

For many centuries Armenia has been the focal point of transit trade. One could find there goods from various countries, particularly from India. Strabo states that the inhabitants of South Russia carried on caravan trade and transported on camels Indian and Babylonian goods, which they acquired

from Armenians and Midians. Their trade was so prosperous that their clothes were fully decorated with golden jewellery.¹

During the 4th-5th centuries the Armenians had already reached India and China. Indo-Armenian economic relations became more vital in the context of the tensed political relations between the West and the East. Neutral Armenia was considered to be a comfortable market. Major cities of Armenia like Artashat, later Dvin have been the junction points of trade of the West with India over the centuries. In the 7th century five major trade routes were coming out of Dvin. According to the Darius agreement signed between Khosro I, King of Persia and Justinianus, Emperor of Byzantine, Dvin was recognized as the place of barter between the East and the West. Greek historian of the 6th century Prokopius Caesarian mentions Dvin as a big trade centre and says that there had been crowded settlements which were engaged in trade with merchants coming from India and Iberia. Both Armenian and Indian merchants had been participating in that brisk trade. There is an evidence that the famous Chinese traveller Hwen Thsiang met Armenian merchants in North India in 620 and traded with them.²

The chief items of Indian export to Armenia were precious stones, numerous kinds of spices, medicinal herbs and substances, which were often mentioned in the Medieval medicinal manuscripts. The blue from Lahore was very famous in Armenia which was called 'indicon'. The Armenians exported mainly coloured leather and various dyes to India. Maroon and red dyes (which they got from special red worms) and excellent cotton from Armenia were very popular in India.

¹ R. Abrahamyan, *From the History of Indo-Armenian Relations*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Historico-Philological Almanac, No.2, 1958, p.164.

² *Ibid.*, p.168.

Greek sources of the 7th century B.C. mention the high quality of iron produced in Armenia.³ Other sources suggest that from the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. to the Medieval Ages, Armenian iron had been exported to the Arabian Peninsula, Persia and India. This also proves that Indo-Armenian ties have a very old history.

During the 6th-7th centuries Armenia attached such a great importance to India that in the *Geography*⁴ of Anania Shirakatsi⁵ India was among the first mentioned countries. Shirakatsi gives detailed description of India. He describes the rich nature of India, its people, different tribes, their habits. He also lists the goods which are available in Indian markets, such as gold, silver, copper, tin, pearl, precious stones, pepper. In the end Shirakatsi describes various types of diamonds and their prices. These information, given by Shirakatsi is not only valuable for the history of Indo-Armenian relations, but also gives an idea about the role played by India in ancient times in trade of the East.

There are interesting materials on Indo-Armenia relations in the Armenian manuscripts which are preserved in Matenadaran – National Institute of Ancient Manuscripts of Armenia in Yerevan. One of them is an Armenian guidebook of 12th century, titled *Names of Indian and Persian Cities*. The name of the author is not known. But it can be assumed from the book that it is written by an Armenian merchant who knew India very well and has been there personally. He starts his description with the North of India - from Lahore, Kashmir – and concludes with the southern part of India, Ceylon. The author dwells upon the cities which were situated on this route, the people, their customs and habits. He describes in detail the economic life of these cities, their trade cooperation as well as the types goods available

³ S. Ayvazyan, *History of Culture of Ancient Armenia*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, 1986, p.11.

⁴ A.Abrahamyan, *Historiography of Shirakatsi*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, 1944, p.353.

⁵ Shirakatsi - Armenian scholar and scientist of the 7th century.

there. This interesting guidebook once more proves the magnitude of interest of the Armenians towards India in the Middle Ages.

Hetoum, King of Cilician⁶ Armenia who was a historian as well, wrote about India. In his History book a whole chapter is dedicated to India. He describes the location of India, both overland and sea routes to India, the customs of inhabitants, the neighbouring countries.

As is known, King Hetoum has never visited India. Therefore, it can be assumed that he used the Armenian manuscripts of the Royal Library as well as the descriptions of Cilician Armenians who visited India, as the sources of his writing. Cilician Armenian merchants imported gold, precious stones and medicinal substances from India to Cilicia.⁷

In the Middle Ages in Caesaria the Armenians and Indians did trade deals jointly and in the markets they displayed their goods jointly.⁸ Later in the 17th-18th centuries, they performed their trade jointly in Russia, particularly in Astrakhan.⁹

In southern Russia and Poland it was so customary to see the Armenians in the role of traders of the eastern commerce that the entire series of oriental goods were known as 'Armenian goods'. Polish queens often sent Armenian merchants to the East to bring specific luxury products for them.¹⁰

⁶ Cilicia – Medieval Armenian state from the 11th to 14th centuries, situated in the extreme North-East coast of the Mediterranean Sea. During the 8th-10th centuries, under the pressure of foreign conquerors a large number of the Armenian population of indigenous Armenia were ousted down south, gradually forming an Armenian settlement in Cilicia. Already in the middle of the 11th century an Armenian Cilician principedom of the Artsrouni family arose.

⁷ R.Abrahamyan, op. cit., p.171.

⁸ A. Alpoyajyan, *History of Armenians in Caesaria*, (original in Armenian), Cairo, Vol.1, 1937, p.666.

⁹ Acts of Transcaucasian Archaeological Society, (original in Russian), Tbilisi, Vol.7, 1879, p.949.

¹⁰ Cosroe Chaqueri, ed., *Armenians of Iran*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1998, p.37.

Many Indian traders were seen in the 17th century in Ispahan. Adam Olearius, a member of an embassy from the Duke of Holstein, was struck by the wealth of Ispahan and international character of its trade when he visited the city in 1637. In his book *The Voyages and Travels* (London, 1662) he wrote:

“There is not any nation in all Asia, nor indeed almost of Europe, who sends not its merchants to Isfahan... There are ordinarily 12,000 Indians in the city... Besides these Indians there is at Isfahan great number of Turks, Jews, Armenians, Georgians, English, Dutch, French, Italians and Spaniards.”¹¹

The Armenians were thoroughly familiar with all the corners of India long before the Europeans appeared on the subcontinent. They had preceded the British in being the principal exporters from India. They carried on extensive trade in Indian goods with nearly all the major countries of Europe and Asia.

By the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century English merchants were purchasing some of their major wares (silk, spices, rugs, etc.) from the Armenian merchants of Constantinople, who had brought them from India and Persia via the overland route.¹²

There are a lot of documents on the Indo-Armenian trade relations in the depository and archive of the Armenian monastery named Amenaperkich in New Julfa (Ispahan, Iran). During a few hundred years thousands of letters and documents, related to different issues of Indo-Armenian colonies, were sent from India to this archive. There was a tradition to send here diaries and correspondence, documents on business operations as well as wills of Iranian and Indian Armenians. This monastery performed the role of a keeper of hundreds of documents, agreements of Armenian merchants and artisans who were working in the foreign countries. The main portion of Armenian

¹¹ Cosroe Chaqueri, op. cit., p. 43.

¹² G.Sandys, *A Relation of a Journey Begun in A.D.1610*, London, 1627, I, p.86.

manuscripts written in India and in neighboring countries were kept there, too.

Among the documents of the Monastery Archive, the *Manual for Trade Schools* by Kostand Joughayetsi,¹³ a great Armenian scholar of the 17th century, deserves special attention. This *Manual* is almost fully dedicated to India. According to Joughayetsi, in the following cities of India the Armenians were conducting their trade deals and they had colonies there: Multan, Lahore, Akbarabad, Kashmir, Hyderabad, Shahazadpur, Surat, Cochin, Shahjahanabad, Patna, etc. The author informs about the prices of hundreds of goods, brings more than 20 tables on the price and weight of precious stones and their correlation with different currencies being in circulation that time in India. The *Manual* of Kostand Joughayetsi is considered to be the most valuable source for studying economic and trade life of India during the 17th-18th centuries.¹⁴

In the 17th century a trade school for the children of merchant Armenians was founded in New Julfa. The students studied there economic geography, trade, measures and currencies of different countries. Special attention was devoted to India. Kostand Joughayetsi, who was an expert in economic and trade life of India, was teaching in this school. It is interesting to mention that Indian languages were also taught here.¹⁵

For the first time Haroutyoun Ter-Hovnanyan, a scholar of the 19th century, paid attention to this *Manual*. In his *History of New Julfa* (written in 1880), he brings some quotes from the *Manual*.¹⁶

¹³ Manuscripts of Matenadaran, No. 5994, pp.1-120b, No. 8443, pp.148a-248c.

¹⁴ R. Abrahamyan, *18th Century Armenian Sources on India*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Published by Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1968, p.20.

¹⁵ R. Abrahamyan, *Armenian Sources and Documents on India and Indo-Armenian Relations*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Directory of Armenian Archives, No.3(9), 1964, p.163.

¹⁶ Ter-Hovnanyan, *History of New Julfa*, (original in Armenian), New Julfa, Vol.1, 1880, pp.159-160 and New Julfa, Vol.2, 1887, pp.254-255.

The *History of New Julfa* is not particularly about India and Indo-Armenian relations. But as the Armenian settlements of India were founded mostly by the Armenians of Iran and New Julfa, the author in detail dwells upon his countrymen, living in India, brings many valuable archive documents on economic and political life of India related to the activities of the Armenians there. Armenians of Iran were closely related to India. Young men from almost every family would leave for work in India to send money to their parents in New Julfa.¹⁷

In the 17th century Armenian merchants of New Julfa situated themselves both on the major arteries of overland trade as well as of maritime trade, thus involving themselves in Indo-Persian, Indo-Ottoman, Central Asian-Ottoman, Perso-European, and Perso-Russian trade. Thus they turned out as competitors of the Levant Company, the Muscovy Company and the East India Company. The monopoly of the silk trade became the major source of wealth for New Julfans of this period. After the Afghan occupation of Iran, many Armenians, including wealthy and influential merchants, migrated to Georgia, Russia, Europe and South Asia. In the 18th century the Shahs of Iran restored the Armenian trade activities. The former favoured and employed Armenians and issued specific decrees enabling Armenian-Iranian merchants to revive trade with India. They continued to play a crucial part in Iranian trade with India, Russia and Europe, where dried fruit, leather and carpets were exported.¹⁸

Enjoying the kind attitude of Indian people and local authorities, the Armenians performed large-scale activities in the spheres of trade and artisanship in India. Armenians kept in their hands the trade with Egypt, Russia, Livorno, Venice and other European countries and cities. They were using Arabian and European ships to transport their goods.

¹⁷ Cosroe Chaqueri, op. cit., p.13.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.57.

Rev. James Long in his *A Peep into the Social Life of Calcutta During the Second Half of the 18th Century*, writes:

“The Armenians came to India some by the Persian Gulf, others by Khorasan, Kandahar and Kabul to Delhi. They were among the earliest settlers, coming gradually from Guzerat and Surat to Benaras and Behar. They settled in Chinsurah soon after the Dutch settlement of 1625. On the congression of Calcutta, 1690, the Armenians in common with the Portuguese, accepted the invitation of the Governor, Charnock, to settle there, and flourished, so that in 1757 they received as compensation, for their losses seven lacs of rupees... They were pioneers in Central Asian trade, which has yet a great future before it.”¹⁹

From the early 17th century the Armenian merchants were trading not only with India but also with the Far East, continuing their way to Burma, Siam, islands of Indian Ocean – Java, Sumatra, Philippine Archipelago, especially the city of Manila. The Armenian merchants were also conducting trade in China where many difficulties and obstacles were created for foreigners. But the Armenians were so ordinary and well known visitors here that the Jesuit missionaries used to wear Armenian clothes in order to be able to have free entrance, to travel safely and undisturbed and conduct their missionary work in this country.²⁰

Indo-Armenian relations became more close when the Armenians established permanent settlements in India. Armenian merchants were seen in all the corners of India. They were very famous. Father Monserrate reports that even Moghul Emperor Akbar “was deceived by the common but erroneous supposition that all of the Christians of Asia are Armenians”.²¹

¹⁹ As cited in: Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 18th Century*, Calcutta, Firma K.L.Mukhopadhyay, 1984, p.31.

²⁰ Leo, *Selected Essays*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, Vol.5, 1986, p.508.

²¹ Father Monserrate, *The Contemporary of Father Monserrate, on his Journey to the Court of Akbar*, trans. from Latin by J.S.Hoyland, Oxford, 1922, p.137.

As we have already mentioned, on the invitation of Emperor Akbar many Armenians settled in Agra. For 300 years, up to the middle of the 19th century there was a flourishing Armenian community in Agra.

Armenian merchants had their own Caravan Serai at Agra, which was very famous among other merchants, traders, and travelers as well. They knew that they could get all the necessary information there. Father Manrique in his *Travels* wrote in 1640:

“After entering the city [Agra], I made my way to the Caramossora [Caravan Serai] of the Armenians in order to obtain information there about a rich merchant to whom I had been directed to apply...”²²

The Armeno-Indian trade relations continued also in the subsequent centuries. They strengthened and acquired a new quality.

Archive documents, manuscripts, tombstone inscriptions prove that during the 16th-18th centuries Armenian settlements existed in Agra, Gwalior, Arkat, Bangalore, Delhi, Lahore, Kabul, Surat, Bombay, Chinsurah, Chandernagore, Saidabad, Monghyr, Calcutta, Lucknow, Dhaka, Madras, Hughli, Chittagong, Pondicherry, Cochin, Hyderabad, Kandahar.

For their brisk activities the Armenian merchants occupied an important position in the trade in India, so much so that they were regarded as the main masters of the trade, though at the same time a few European nations were acting on the territory of India who owned a large number of serious companies.

Armenians in India were considered as a separate group of merchants having their own routes of export, separate markets and trade branches. The situation of Armenian and European traders was not even comparable. Europeans had their big companies and were backed by troops and artillery

²² As cited in: M.J. Seth, *Armenians in India*, New Delhi - Bombay - Calcutta, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1983, p.5.

guns while the Armenians continued acting in old and time-worn system. They did business alone. Sometimes they set up companies with only their brothers or relatives working with them as a rule. The merchants were divided into sizeable merchants and petty traders. The formers lent money to petty merchants, who traded and gave money-lenders 6-12 percent interest.²³

Armenian small firms –‘companies’ – with their Asian, and even ancient trade methods were far from powerful European companies. But owing to the bright knowledge of their job and their acquaintance with all the corners of India, the Armenian merchants could organize their activities in a methodical way. In a short period they acquired high profits, and emerged as the serious competitors for the European companies.²⁴

Being unable to assemble together and establish a large company with considerable amount of money, the Armenians had to depend on European companies for their transportation to export goods, as well as to preserve those in the ports and stores. These and other circumstances, which were coming from their conservative and traditional mentality, forced them to join one of the European nations. And the Armenians chose the British. The British understood the Armenians’ capabilities for trade in India as well as in Asia, and reckoned their force. The British initially did not move against this force. They adopted the policy of compromise and agreement to win over the Armenians.

When the British came to Surat in the early 17th century, Armenians were already living there and were conducting their trade successfully. They were using Arab vessels to carry their goods through the Persian and Arabian Gulfs to Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Venice. Among the Armenians of Surat there were also diamond, jewelry merchants. History gives us also the name of an Armenian lady merchant, Hripsimeh Eleazar Leebruggen, who inherited

²³ Leo, op.cit., p.510.

²⁴ A.Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of Armenian Colonies*, Yerevan, Louys, vol.1, 1964, p.458.

a lot of wealth and conducted her own business. Her name has been remembered with respect as she left the residue of her large estate to the Armenian Churches in Madras and Calcutta, to the Armenian Philanthropic Academy (now Armenian College of Calcutta) and Madras Armenian Orphans' Fund.²⁵

In 1665 the Armenians obtained a *Firman* from the Emperor Aurangzeb which entitled them to form a settlement in Bengal, at Saidabad. There the Armenian merchants traded mainly in raw silk and piece-goods.

Armenian Merchants and European East India Companies

In the 17th century the East India Company found Armenians firmly settled in Agra, Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay and other places.

The representatives of the East India Company studied the trade methods of the Armenian merchants. Realizing the position and connections of the Armenians in India, the European merchants were initially trying to establish friendly and fruitful relations with them. Armenians in this period played a certain role not only in the economic but also in the political life. They were well aware of the habits and customs of the Indian people, as well as the Eastern languages. They enjoyed a big repute among the Indian authorities. Not only British, but also French and Dutch East India Companies in the initial stage of their activities in India, were looking for partners among the Armenian merchants. During the negotiations with the local authorities Armenian Khojahs played the role of mediators. In the 17th century the Armenians had such a big influence and position that the Europeans used their connections to penetrate deeper in the Indian community.²⁶

²⁵ Annie Basil, *Armenian Settlements in India: from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Calcutta, Published by Armenian College, n.d., p.17.

²⁶ A.Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches...*, p.460.

Here we shall cite a few examples.

When in 1651 the British went to Shah Jahan to seek permission for building a factory, the famous Armenian merchant Agha Sarhad was appointed one of the heads of this delegation.

In 1669 Margar Avanchintz (Margar Avag Sheenents), an Armenian of great influence, was dispatched by the French East India Company as an envoy to the court of Abdulla Kutub Shah, the King of Golkonda. The Company wanted to establish factories and obtain trading privileges. The French got the privilege of trading with the kingdom to purchase whatever merchandise was required, to employ manufacturers and obtain license to establish a factory at Masulipatam on the Coromandel Coast. Margar successfully conducted the negotiations and obtained a Firman by which the French East India Company was privileged to trade to all parts of King's territory, without paying any export or import duties. In Masulipatam Margar arranged for the construction of the factory and was appointed as a President.

When Job Charnock started an English colony in Calcutta in the end of the 17th century there was a big need to build a factory and a fort. For this the Moghul Emperor's permission was required. The British were well aware that the Armenian merchants had always been in favour of the Moghul Emperors because of their knowledge of Persian, business integrity, shrewdness and adaptable ways. So they chose a wealthy and eminent Armenian merchant in the Armenian community in Calcutta, Khoja Israel Sarhad. As a result of negotiations between Prince Azim-ush-Khan and Khojah Sarhad, in 1698 the British obtained letters-patent for the modest sum of Rs.16,000 which entitled them to purchase the renting rights of the three villages of Calcutta, Sutanuti and Govindpur from the holders.

In 1713 the British again needed the services of Khojah Sarhad. This time they asked to negotiate for an English embassy to the court of Emperor Farrukh Siyar at Delhi. To use Khojah Sarhad's skills and abilities further the

British appointed him as a member of the Embassy in Delhi in 1715. This Armenian was also mainly instrumental in obtaining the historic Grand Firman, which conferred certain privileges on the British.²⁷

In 1699 the Ambassador of England Sir William Norris was sent to India by King William III to Emperor Aurangzeb to obtain trade and other privileges. Prior to getting audience to the Emperor, Sir Norris started collecting information regarding official visit procedure in the Court. Detailed and useful information and instructions were given to him by an Armenian, Johannes Pottvleet, who had been twice at the Emperor's Camp and had lived there some time in attendance on the Dutch envoy.²⁸

The other reason of cajoling the Armenian merchants by the East India Companies was the huge profit which they got from Armenians for transporting their goods. Initially the Armenians did not possess ships. So they hired European vessels for this purpose and paid enormous transportation tax.

The overland route through Persia was not safe. The founding of the sea route resulted in the development of sea trade in the 17th century. Before the competition between the Europeans and Armenians started, the Armenians did not have their own ships, and they had to rely on European and Asian seafarers. Because of this, the Armenian merchants suffered heavy losses, they had to pay a big transportation tax, and these seafarers intentionally were delaying the transportation of their goods. In a short period of time Armenian merchants either bought or built their own ships. The captains of these ships were Armenians. These Armenian ships were passing on under the Armenian red-orange flag. All the ports of Asia and Europe were open in front of

²⁷ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.134.

²⁸ Harihar Das, *The Norris Embassy to Aurangzeb*, Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1959, p.211.

them.²⁹ The Europeans did not like such kind of peaceful competition. They began to oust the Armenian ships from the Indian Ocean.

Armenians and English East India Company

The Europeans tried to limit the activities of the Armenians in India. In the initial stage the European merchants were in no position to oust the Armenians by force. The British saw that the only superiority that they had over the Armenians in India was their shipping. There remained one way open – to win over the Armenian merchants to their side and gradually take control of their activities.

With this aim in view, on June 22, 1688 an Agreement was concluded between Khojah Panoos Kalantar, the leader of the Armenian merchants in India and the Company of London merchants trading to the East Indies (Appendix 1).³⁰ The original copy is preserved in the archives of India House in London.

According to this Agreement the Armenians were entitled to the rights of British subjects and to large privileges. The Agreement says that: 1) the Armenians have the same rights as the British merchants, 2) the Armenians were free to travel from India to other countries and from other countries to India in the Company's ships and in the same conditions which free people have, 3) they were free to reside in any city, settlement or fort under possession of the Company; they could buy and sell property, be elected for civil offices and jobs equally with the British.

Further, as per the Agreement, if any Governor of the Company would try to hinder these privileges and rights, he should be called off from his post. The Armenians should give taxes equal to the British. It is mentioned in detail

²⁹ A Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches...*, p.461.

³⁰ M. J. Seth, op. cit., p.233.

how much tax should be paid by the Armenians and for which goods, as well as how much for transportation. Those mentioned goods were the following: bullion, diamonds, coral, amber, silver, sword blades, fire arms of all sorts, iron paper, looking glasses, drinking glasses, leather etc. This large list of goods shows how diverse were the trade activities of the Armenians in India, Indian Archipelago and China.

The Armenian merchants could take passengers on the ships, both to and from India. These passengers could carry with them their clothes, furniture and provisions (not more than 250 kg per person) free of cost. The Armenians were also allowed to exercise their own religion. The cunning Britishers stipulated to give the Armenians even ground for a church, to be first built at the expense of the Company wherever forty or more of the Armenian nationals became inhabitants of any of the Company's towns or garrisons.

The Company was supposed to build wooden churches for Armenians giving them the right to build churches from stone instead of the wooden ones in future if they wanted. Even the Company agreed to give 50 pounds annually in seven years to a priest who would be chosen by Armenians to serve in their church (Appendix 2).

This Agreement sounded the "death knell" to the Armenian commerce in India. Later events proved conclusively the truth of the German Emperor's pithy remark that a treaty was nothing but simply a "scrap of paper".

In gratitude to Khojah Panos Kalantar's efforts in concluding such important negotiations which resulted in signing of the above mentioned Agreement, the British granted to him the sole monopoly of the garnet trade in India (Appendix 3). However, in this Agreement the British mentioned that it was only Kalantar's request that they were doing him such a favour.

The British also wanted to get Armenian soldiers through Khojah Panoos Kalantar. The documents from the Court of Directors in London to their Deputy and Council of Bombay, dated January 26, 1692 (Appendix 4), state that Armenian soldiers would be given the same pay as English soldiers. Even they promised to pay the transport expenses to those Armenians who would like to come from Armenia and Iran. But the British failed in this case. No Armenian wanted to fight under the British flag.³¹

The rights and privileges mentioned in the Agreement show how important were the Armenians for the British at that time. In correspondence of the Company they admitted that the major part of the trade in India and the East was in the hands of the Armenians. Hence emanating from interests of both the East India Company and England, it was desirable that Armenian merchants transported their goods in English ships, changed their trade routes and had relations directly with England, thus bringing to the country's treasury taxes paid by them. So, the Company bought these benefits on the cost of privileges and freedom given to the Armenians.³²

English politics in this case had only one goal. They understood very well that sooner or later the rival Armenians in the British factories would be deprived of their independence and cut off their previous independent communities.

This is how the Armenians bound their destiny with the British. On the one hand the Armenians were very proud to enjoy all the privileges and rights of free British citizens in far corners of Asia, to have protection, to be able to conduct large-scale activities and at the same time to have all the rights to preserve and develop their own national identity, language, literature, religious independence. But on the other hand, a handful of nationals could not survive for a long time and preserve their national identity. This small

³¹ M. J. Seth, *op.cit.*, p.241.

³² Leo, *op.cit.*, p.573.

nation was going to be engulfed by the big waves of British culture. And after some time only churches and tomb-stones would tell about once flourishing Armenian community in India.

Although the Armenians in India not only began to co-exist with the British and often became their direct agents to strengthen and enlarge the British possessions in the country, there were some representatives of the Armenian commerce capital who, not willing to follow Khojah Kalantar, continued to conduct their own policy and thus became evident rivals of the East India Company. These people were trading on the territory which was under possession of the French. Other merchants were trading with native population under the patronage of Moghul kings. In some cases Armenian merchants left their jobs and acquired even the title of Raja. They had such a big influence on the local authorities that they could dictate their wills.³³ One of such people was the famous Gorgin Khan – the Armenian merchant Grigor, who was the Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of Mir Qasim, ruler of Bengal.

The good attitude of the British towards the Armenians existed only in the initial period. When the Europeans settled in India, a big competition began, first among the Europeans themselves, and then between the European and Armenian merchants. During this competition the Armenian merchants received a heavy setback and began to be ousted from trade markets. The Armenians who were trading either alone or in small companies, despite being skillful and flexible in their work, naturally could not seriously oppose the East India Company, which used its huge army and fleet to achieve its goals.

The Armenian colonies were mostly constituted from artisans, workers, service people, daily workers. And the Indians knew the Armenians

³³ H. Chagjyan, *History of Armenia*, (original in Armenian), Venice, Mekhitarist Publishers, 1872, p.411.

through these people. Among the merchants, wealthy Indo-Armenians, there was some part, which was linked with the Europeans through their interests and were very close to them. But the working sector of Indo-Armenians, which was living together with Indian people in the same political and economic conditions and sharing with them the difficulties and hardships created by the colonizers, was with the Indians.³⁴

In a short period of time those Armenian colonies which were small and weak, began to decrease and in some places they were deserted. The Armenians, in big or small groups left the regions, which were under the possession of the British or other Europeans and began to settle in the places, which were free from colonization.

Indo-Armenian colonies were also suffering because of the struggle of the Europeans among themselves. When the hostilities broke out between the British and the French in India, the situation of Armenian traders in India sharply deteriorated. Many of them sustained heavy losses and became bankrupt, their vessels were seized, goods confiscated. A letter of an Armenian merchant addressed to the Armenian Archbishop of Julfa dated April 1783, says:

“We are having troublous times nowadays, as the English are engaged in war with the French and Hyder Ali, and at present they are fighting the Dutch, so that there is war on land and at sea. Our [Armenian] merchants lost two lakhs of rupees over a ship from China that was captured at sea, and lately the Maharattas captured a ship bound for Surat from Bengal whereby we lost two and a half lakhs of rupees.”

Another letter of an Armenian merchant dated February 1797, says:

“... All these, our present misfortunes, are manly due to the wars that are being waged between the Europeans and the French and other European nations, for which we, as well as merchants of other nationalities, have suffered heavily during these few years. I may add that, in the present year alone, the

³⁴ A.Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches...*, p.462.

merchants in the Fort here have lost 15 lakhs of rupees. It is the same all over India."³⁵

The condition of almost all the sections of the Armenian population in India sharply declined following the penetration into, and the subsequent conquest of India by the Europeans. At first by peaceful competition but later by force they were ousted from the Indian markets over a short period. The Armenian merchants, artisans and other related sections of the Armenian population succumbed to a harsh economic plight. Individual Armenian merchants, artisans or small companies of Armenians could not, naturally, stand the power of the East India Company. The Company's commercial and economic operations would often result in bloody expeditions and onslaughts. In the meantime the British had already got a firm footing in India and were in no need of their Armenian "allies".

The British not only started to oust the Armenians from the trade markets, create obstacles for the development of artisanship, but also began evident persecutions. They raised up illegal cases against the Armenians, put them to jails, seized their goods and so on. In these conditions the Armenian colonies economically began to depend on the Britishers. Soon the British started to consider the Armenians as their enemies.

All these developments resulted in adoption of political orientation of the Indo-Armenian population. All the sectors of the Armenian colony basically had anticolonial mood, of course, having their own interests. Joining with the Indians for the freedom struggle against the British, the Indo-Armenians were not only defending their second homeland, but also their personal interests.

Each sector of the Armenian colony participated in the freedom movement in their own way. Armenian merchants, who were under the

³⁵ As cited in: Seth, op.cit., pp.249-252.

patronage and protection of the Indian authorities, were helping financially; Armenian armourers were helping in casting guns and artillery and Armenian warriors joined the Indian army, fought against the Britishers and shed their blood for the freedom of India. We have already mentioned that after each battle Armenian flag was also hoisted together with the Indian flag.³⁶

The British have ever since not only ousted the Armenians as their rivals in trade but they took to outright persecution consequently: the Armenians were sentenced, thrown into prison, their goods taken away and merchant vessels confiscated. The British took steps to take everything in their hands. In 1765 the Select Committee was appointed in Calcutta by the London Court of Directors on the recommendation of Governor Clive. This Committee decided to introduce a universal monopoly in salt, betel-nut and tobacco and divide the profits amongst its members and those members of the Company whom they preferred to favour. In 1767 during the governorship of Harry Verelst the Select Committee grew steadily more autocratic. The result was crucial. Independent merchants including Armenians suffered heavy losses and were ruined.

The Armenian merchants in Bengal traded mainly in raw silk and cotton piece goods but they carried their cargo in Danish, French, Dutch or English ships. Their destination were not only Surat and Basra. They were also doing trade with Indonesia and Philippines. Nawab Alivardi Khan in his letter regarding the seizure of Armenian ships by Commodore Griffin, has the following sentence about Armenians: "These men are the kingdom's benefactors, their exports and imports are an advantage to all men".³⁷

The English found it indispensable necessity to take the help of the Indian and Armenian agents since they were new in the trade activities in India. A large group of indigenous traders, like the Armenians, started to

³⁶ A.Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches...*, p.463.

³⁷ N.K.Sinha, *History of Bengal*, Calcutta, University Press, 1967, p.12.

collaborate with the English traders as junior partners, seeing that it is unreasonable to carry on inland trade in the face of the free traders' offensive. The Armenian merchants who had a large share in the inland trade and held important posts in the state, started to discuss more openly against the free traders. They had already expressed their disregard towards the English monopoly on salt trade in Bihar.

The activities of the free traders affected various indigenous groups: farmers, merchants, basic producers, landholders. The result often was serious conflicts and breakdown of law and order. In this situations the British took law into their own hands.³⁸

One of the Armenian merchants closed his warehouses realising that the price of salt would rise due to the monopolistic policy of the Company. He had almost 140,000 pounds of salt which refused to sell. However, those warehouses were forcibly opened and salt was sold. This merchant appealed to the Mayor's Court in Calcutta. When the Mayor was about to deliver a judgment in favour of the merchant, the former was given a letter after which he immediately terminated the proceedings.³⁹

Oudh was not like Bengal. Private trade was growing there as the private traders from Bengal turned to Oudh because of the above mentioned developments in Bengal. In the local trade groups the most important were the Armenians who always have been middlemen for the private traders. Bolts (the author of *Considerations*) employed 150 Armenian agents.

The Nawab of Oudh, seeing the increase of private traders wrote to the English Government in Bengal to "free his country from the Armenians and Bengalis". To get the monopoly of trade the British needed only this statement. In March, 1768, Captain Harper observed that the permission to the Armenians, a 'designing and intriguing set of people', to settle in the Nawab's

³⁸ N.K. Sinha, op.cit., p.36.

³⁹ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.87.

dominions would inevitably result in clashes with the Nawab. As a result the Select Committee passed a set of regulations forbidding Company's servants and other Europeans to trade in Oudh.⁴⁰ Thus, the Armenian merchants were also excluded from Oudh.

The Select Committee extended its monopolies, it started to control raw silk and piece-goods as well. These were the articles, in which Armenian merchants had traded for ages. Silk workers of Saidabad, working in Armenian factories, were removed and made to work in European silk factories and the piece-goods of merchants, meant for export, were intercepted in transit and sent to European warehouses. These goods were then loaded onto ships as decided by the Company and dispatched in destinations not intended by the owners of the goods, or to unknown ports or lost at sea without any reparations or recourse to redress.

The East India Company continued its policy of ousting successful independent merchants from the trade markets of India. Armenian merchants were forcibly imprisoned for months without any charge against them. By the time when they were set free their businesses were ruined. In order to find justice these merchants even applied in to the Court of Directors in London. But they did not get any reasonable answer.⁴¹

Since the East India Company was new in India, it was establishing its positions in the country. But when it grew stronger and its commercial interests expanded including the territorial conquest, which required vast financial resources, the British performed unjust treatment to their Armenian allies, despite the Agreement of 1688. Afterwards they were arguing that the Agreement was signed by the old Company. The new Company had no intention to follow and implement the agreements achieved by previous authorities.

⁴⁰ N.K.Sinha, op.cit., p.49.

⁴¹ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.38.

Armenians in Industry

Being unable to survive in the competition with the British, some of the Indo-Armenian merchants started to search for new domains of activities in those areas of the Far East which were out of control and influence of the Europeans. In the beginning of the 19th century golden mines were opened in Australia. Some of those merchants left for Australia to find fortune there.

A part of the Armenian merchants was bankrupt because of the competition with the European capital. The other part of the Armenian merchants continued their trade in India despite unfriendly attitude of the British. They understood the spirit of time and rebuilt themselves. These merchants found new spheres of activities. Armenians have been closely connected with the betel-leaf trade in Bengal, shellac trade in Mirzapur, Jhalda and Calcutta, indigo trade in Bihar, jute trade in Dhaka.

The Armenian merchants played a significant role in the jute trade in Dhaka in the second half of the 19th century. Firms M. David & Co. and M. Sarkies & Sons were established in 1875 and were very famous till the early 20th century.

In the 17th century the centre of indigo trade was Biana (situated southeast of Agra). The Armenian merchants of that time played a decisive role in indigo trade competing the British and the Dutch. When the British started to strengthen their positions in India and ousted the Armenian merchants from the Indian markets, the latter lost supremacy also in the indigo trade. When synthetic dyes were discovered and demand for indigo decreased, the Armenian merchants gradually started jute and shellac business.⁴²

The Armenians started to invest in industry, established factories. Following the example of the Europeans they got united, getting together

⁴² Annie Basil, op.cit., p.78.

their capitals and set up unions. Journal *Azgaser* (Calcutta) brings a big list of such Armenian unions. From this list one can assume, that time Indo-Armenians had their own place in the newly developing industry of India. Among those companies were: East Insurance Union (established in 1839), Sea Insurance Agency which had its branches in London, Singapore, Madras, Bombay, China. Companies such as United Shipping Company, Hooghly River-Shipping Company were served by the Armenian ships Joseph-Manook, Johannes-Sarkies, Arratoon Abgar, Hripsimeh-Anna-Martha, Hero, Emnego, etc.⁴³

Although these companies had a considerable amount of money and large scale of activities, most of them cooperated with the Europeans, were going after them, thus were not independent. However, among the Armenian merchants there were many people who could not, or did not, want to rebuild and rearrange their business, and thus reached the verge of bankruptcy. *Azgaser* published a series of articles urging these merchants to engage in industry.⁴⁴

Armenians have played an important role in the shellac industry. In the end of the 19th century there were 2 shellac factories in Mirzapur (that time Mirzapur was the centre of the shellac industry) which owners were Armenians Gregory Gulzad Carapiet and Carapiet M. John better known as Carapiet "Jambore".

"Jhalda" Arathoon was another big figure in shellac industry. His factory was the largest in Jhalda. "Jhalda" Arathoon was the pioneer in mechanising shellac factory by putting there lac-crushing and washing machines in 1917. In 1948 he celebrated, the Golden Jubilee of his factory, holding a big reception in Calcutta. This event was reported in *The Statesman*.

⁴³ Azgaser, Calcutta, 1846, pp.134-135.

⁴⁴ A. Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of the Armenian Colonies*, Yerevan, Louys, vol.2, 1967, p.259.

In 1957 Calcutta Shellac Trade Association was formed and Arathoon was appointed its President. He was also a member of the Indian Lac Cess Committee. Arathoon was interested in agriculture as well. He got a tractor from England and grew wheat and rice crops in Jhalda and Muhru.⁴⁵

Many Armenians were engaged in shellac business till 1960s. They had to face serious competition from the larger manufacturers. That time there was also a serious competition from Thailand which exported shellac to other countries of the world at cheaper rates. Being not able to overcome difficulties those businessmen left for UK and Australia to find more opportunities.

Armenians were also in coal business. The history states that a private geologist from Britain R.G. Tachsom visited Bengal in 1862 and discovered coal seams in the area near Raniganj and Asansol. He was able to prove that the area is very rich of coal. He approached a number of European firms, telling them to visit those places and mine the coal. Only an Armenian firm, Apcar & Co. was interested in this proposal. They purchased an extensive stretch of land and started a mine at Lachipur (4 miles from Asansol). Apcar & Co. extended the railway track from Raniganj to Lachipur and installed the first railway-siding. They raised the coal and sent it to Calcutta by train. Apcar & Co. gradually opened coal mines at Charanpur, Faridpur and Borachuck. A large number of Armenians either owned collieries or worked in various capacities in the coalfields.

Seeing the rapid development of the coalfields, the Europeans approached Apcar & Co. and purchased vast areas from them on a royalty basis and started to mine the coal. As a result Asansol became a large and developed mining district.

⁴⁵ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.98.

Armenian Businessmen in the 20th Century

When Chinsurah and Chandernagore lost their commercial supremacy, most of the Armenians from these settlements came and settled in Calcutta, transferring their business here. N.K. Sinha states in the *History of Bengal*: “The judicial records however, leave no doubt about the significant position of the Armenians in the commercial world of Bengal, particularly Calcutta of the 18th century.”⁴⁶ During the 16th to 18th centuries the Armenians were the most prominent merchants of Calcutta. They developed North Calcutta very quickly so Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Greek, Portuguese merchants also came, settled here and established their businesses. As this area became very crowded, the Armenians moved to Central and South Calcutta. Here they built hundreds of small and big houses. Among them were private residences, hotels, office premises and residential mansions. At one time almost all the area known as Queen’s Park and Sunny Park, Ballygunge in South Calcutta was owned by Armenians.

In the beginning of the 20th century there was a leading builder and property owner in Calcutta named Johannes Galstaun. He developed and beautified Central and South Calcutta by building 350 houses. This wealthy merchant donated Rs.25,000 to the Victoria Memorial Building Fund. Then after winning the Prince of Wales Cup at the Calcutta races in 1921 he presented all the money (Rs. 15, 000) to the Prince for charity. He also had a big park named by him, Galstaun Park. During the World War I he placed this park at the disposal of the British military authorities who converted it into a hospital for soldiers. For this charitable gesture he got the title of the Order of the British Empire. Afterwards Galstaun Park was purchased by the Nizam of Hyderabad and renamed Saba Palace. It is now utilised by the Government of India for offices and other accommodation.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ N.K. Sinha, op. cit., p.387.

⁴⁷ Annie Basil, op.cit., p.146.

In the 20th century the Armenian community of Bombay was very active. There were diamond merchants, people engaged in petroleum, spirit and alcohol trade, in automobile business. However, when the firms were converted into public limited companies, many Armenians sold their shares and left India. Among the Bombay Armenians there were also owners of guest-houses, hotels, restaurants and hair dressing saloons which were very famous in the middle of the 20th century.⁴⁸

Armenians started to leave India after 1947 when it gained independence. There was a panic among the non-Indian businessmen that their future would be insecure. That time the slogan - India for Indians - was very popular. Many private companies were nationalized. In this situation many Armenian businessmen decided to leave the country. Thinking about the future of their children, they felt it would be difficult to compete with the Indians. They mostly migrated to the United States and United Kingdom. Another stream of migration of Armenians from India was in the 1960s. This time they mostly migrated to Australia.

In the 20th century Armenians did not lose their interest towards India. After the World War II many Armenians from America, Europe Middle East engaged in business and other spheres visited India in order to set up their business in this country.

Among those people mention should be made of one Armenian, named Tcherkezian, who had a successful business known as Tobacco Estate Corporation (TOBESCO) in Brussels. In 1950s and 1960s he was closely connected with the tobacco trade in South India and was the largest importer of Indian tobacco in Belgium. With the assistance and patronage of Tcherkezian a modern tobacco factory was established in Guntur (South India). He also helped in establishing scientific centres for correct grading and storage of tobacco.

⁴⁸ Annie Basil, *op.cit.*, p.25.

Stephanian, an Armenian from Iran was an oil technologist and an expert on fertilisers. To implement the Agreement between the Government of India and Government of Iran for the establishment of an oil refinery in Madras, Stephanian was posted there to supervise the installation.⁴⁹

An Armenian-American firm, the Kuljian Corporation of Philadelphia was also interested in India. This creative construction and engineering company was selected by the Government of India to undertake the construction and supervision of power plants at Bokaro (part of the Damodar Valley Project), Barwani, Delhi, Bandel, Cambay and Durgapur.⁵⁰

Indo-Armenians were also engaged in jewelry, hotel, banking, machinery, automobile, engineering businesses.

Summing up this Chapter we can say that trade relations between Armenia and India exist for more than 2500 years. The Armenian traders were importing from India precious stones, various spices, herbs, muslins, blue, and were exporting from Armenia to India coloured leather, various dyes, cotton, iron. The areas of their strong influence were Surat, Agra, Cochin, Multan, Lahore, Kashmir, as well as Coromandel Coast and Malabar Coast.

In the initial stage the British collaborated with the Armenian traders, seeing their strong influence and affluence in the country. The evidence of such collaboration was the 1688 Agreement signed between the British East India Company and the Armenian merchants. However, after some time, getting a strong footing in India, the British started ousting their Armenian allies from the trade markets since they did not need any competitors. The British succeeded in their activities as they were backed by their strong

⁴⁹ Annie Basil, *op.cit.*, p.53.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.185.

government. As a result the Armenian merchants lost their main role in the Indian trade. Since they were not united, they used ancestral trade methods, consequently they were easily suppressed. But one part of these merchants who could feel the changing spirit of time and reorganise their activities, remained on the stage until the 20th century.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE OF ARMENIANS IN INDIA

Many historical facts, historical monuments show that Armenian creative mind implanted such cultural values on the Indian soil that some of them came out of the limits of national culture and found their place in the Indian culture. Series of construction work in Malabar done by Armenians have entered the history of Indian architectural culture. Mention should be made of Armenian port in Calcutta, Marmalong bridge, churches, chapels, houses.

The works of Armenian artisans were very famous. They were mostly implementing different orders of merchants for internal and external markets. In the museums of Armenia, Russia and England one can find the wonderful works of the Armenian craftsmen of India, such as the throne for Catholicos of All the Armenians, the throne for Russian Tzar Alexey Mikhaylovich, the silver model of Taj Mahal, carpets, jewellery, craftwork and silver, wooden and ivory covers for books. In the Museum of Echmiatsin (Armenia) one can see wonderful handworks, which were presented to the Holy See by the Indo-Armenians during the 18th-19th centuries. Among them are silk curtains with paintings from the Bible, different table covers embroidered with golden, silver threads and pearls, silk and woollen carpets. There is a reference of the fact that the Steve F. English jewellery company gave an order to the Armenian jewellers to make the model of the temple Buddha-Gaya as they were considered to be highly qualified masters.¹

Indo-Armenian community had its representatives in the sphere of Indian literature. Mention should be made of Mirza-Zul-Qarnian, a prominent

¹ V. Abrahamyan, *Artisanship in Armenia*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Hayastan, 1956, p.139.

poet and politician, and Sarmad, a philosopher-poet who were very renowned all over India (details in Chapter 2).

Among the Indo-Armenians there were people who were engaged in music, performing, fine arts. Some Armenians left for Germany, Italy and other European countries to get training in opera singing, piano and violin playing.

It should be mentioned that the first Indian classic singer to be recorded on the gramophone record was Gauhar Jan (her mother was Armenian, father was English). She was “the most famous, most charismatic and perhaps the wealthiest female singer/dancer at the turn of the century”.² Gauhar Jan had a mellifluous voice and was well-versed in all forms of light classical music such as *thumri*, *dadra*, *kajri*, *chaiti*, *jhoola ghazal* and *bhajan*.³ She could sing on twenty languages and dialects. Gauhar Jan’s mother was also a classical singer/dancer who started her career after divorcing her Christian husband and adopting Islam. She was known as Malika Jan. Malika Jan was also writing poems in Urdu.⁴

Armenian Scholars in India

During the 17th-18th centuries, there were also Armenian historians and scholars in India. Here in India manuscripts were copied and translation works were carried out. Armenian manuscripts on Indian and Armenian history and culture have been written in Surat, Calcutta, Madras, Bombay etc.⁵

A valuable collection of manuscripts running into several hundred pages on India and Indo-Armenian relations (17th -18th centuries) is in the

² Shanta Serbjeet Singh, *My Name is Gauhar Jan*, The Hindustan Times, 10 July, 1995.

³ Batuk Diwanji, *The Darling Songstress*, The Independent, 18 January, 1993.

⁴ Sahil Brelvi, *The Malika-I Tarannum of the 19th Century*, The Statesman, 26 May, 1996.

⁵ A. Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of Armenian Colonies*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, Vol.1, 1964, p.482.

British Museum. These were written in Surat, Calcutta, New Julfa etc. during 1733-1749. These manuscripts reached London in a very unordinary way. In 1764 Admiral Griffit confiscated an Armenian merchant-vessel as 'a property of enemy'. All the property on board, including the manuscripts, were sent to London. Afterwards the British Court justified the Admiral's action, and the manuscripts remained in London.⁶

The Armenian sources on the history of India assume particular value. Here we have in mind those authors who resided in India or wrote their works while living in this country. Manuscripts of these authors are preserved in Matenadaran, Institute of Ancient Manuscripts in Yerevan. There one can find a brief text about Brahmins where the author describes them as honest, industrious and peaceful people. There are works on India's geography, ethnography.

In Matenadaran there are also books on medicine, astronomy and other subjects. Highly valuable is *A Textbook on Sanskrit* written in the 18th century. All these records bespeak the cultural relations of the two peoples.⁷

Armenians were coming to India not only for trade and acquiring wealth. In this unfamiliar and mysterious world Armenian merchants, besides material interests, were seeking other interests, too. An interesting example is of Thomas Khojamall, sefarer and prosperous merchant of the 18th century. He was fluent in Persian, Hindi and English languages, and he knew the histories of Armenia and India very well. Khojamall was such an influential person that he went to England to protest against despotic rule of Wansittard, Viceroy of India. He stayed a few years in London and was able to achieve conviction of Wansittard and got 500,000 Dirham⁸ for his

⁶ R.Abrahamyan, *Armenian Sources and Documents on India and Indo-Armenian Relations*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Newsletter of Armenian Archives, No.3(9), 1964, p.158.

⁷ R. Abrahamyan, *18th Century Armenian Sources on India*, (original in Russian), Yerevan, Published by Academy of Sciences of Armenia, 1968, p.277.

⁸ Dirham – Arabian currency.

complain.⁹ Armenian literature had its own place in the interests of Thomas Khojamall. Despite being so busy he decided to write the history of India.

Naturally he could not start such an important and serious work without proper information. With great difficulty Khojamall could obtain permission to work in the Royal Archives of Shah Alam for twelve days. In his work he also used charts and atlases, stories of participants and witnesses of those events.

Thomas Khojamall concluded the *History of India* in 1768.

The History of India consists of two parts and Appendices. In the first part there are chapters on: the Christianity of Malabar (from ancient times to the year 1750), the Armenian and Assyrian communities of Cochin, the religions of India, the twelve holy rivers and twenty four holy lakes, and the chronology of Indian Kings.

The second part begins with an introductory chapter as to how and when the Europeans began to penetrate into India. The next two chapters speak on Anglo-French rivalry in Southern India, Deccan and Karnatik. The subsequent chapters dwell upon the events in Bengal in 1756-1760, during the Nawabship of Siraj-ud-Dowla, the “Black Hole” incident, the events in 1760-1764, about Nawab of Bengal Mir Qasim and his Commander-in-Chief Gorgin Khan, the heroic struggle of the people of India against the British. It should be mentioned that this last part takes up nearly one-third of the writing.

The Appendix tells about the famous Armenian political figure and poet Mirza-Zul-Qarnain. The author interprets this entire semi-legendary story in the light of historical facts.

Regarding the “Black Hole” incident it should be stated that no scholar can give specific figures about the dead British prisoners. According to the

⁹ Leo, *Selected Essays*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, Vol.3, 1973, p.546.

history, when Siraj-ud-Dowla captured Fort William in Calcutta, on 20th June, 1757 he threw the British soldiers in a small dungeon (18 feet by 14 feet) of the Fort. Next morning many people died because of insufficient air and space. This incident is named in the history as “Black Hole” incident.

One of the survivors of this incident, J.Z.Holwell stated that the prisoners numbered 146 and only 15 survived.

A reputed historian, J.H.Little, in the journal *Bengal: Past and Present* of July-September, 1915, stated that Holwell’s story was a ‘gigantic hoax’, since none of the Muslim historians of Bengal had made any reference to such an important event in their works.¹⁰

Thomas Khojamall in his *History of India* mentions that “more than 15 soldiers died in one night”. Given Khojamall’s negative attitude toward Siraj-ud-dowla, he was supposed to present an exaggerated account of this event. But since he had given such reduced figures, it can be assumed that the “Black Hole” event was blown out of proportion by Holwell.

There is another Armenian source which states that Holwell exaggerated the figures. That is a letter of a wealthy Armenian merchant Emin to his son Joseph Emin in London:

“The wicked Suraj-ud-Dowlah came with a vast army, destroyed almost 40 innocent English gentlemen in one night in the Black Hole. Calcutta was upset by him. For my share, I have lost 16,000 rupees.”¹¹

A wealthy merchant, having close economic relations with the East India Company and losing Rs.16,000, naturally could not speak about his enemy without exaggerating the facts. But the figure given by him is much less than 131.

¹⁰ M.J.Seth, *Armenians in India*, New Delhi-Bombay-Calcutta, Oxford & IBH Publishing Co., 1983, p.470.

¹¹ Ibid., p.472.

Unfortunately the original copy of *The History of India* has not been accessible. The detailed description of the contents of the book was published in Calcutta in the Armenian magazine *Shtemaran* in 1822.¹²

Another Armenian historian in India in the end of the 18th century was Hakob Simonian who wrote *The History of Life and Activities of Brave Hyder Ali from the day of his Birth till his Death*. From his book it is obvious that Simonian was quite familiar to Hyder Ali, many times spoke to him and even tried to use his links for the interests of the Armenians. He writes:

"In 1778, in the month of December I went to the Palace to see Nawab Bahadur with the intention to obtain from him a Firman about permitting the Armenians to trade freely in his country. There I was shown great favours from Hyder. Nawab Bahadur promised to give the Armenians all what I requested. Besides the permission to trade, I also requested him to free my nation from any taxes".¹³

Armenian scholars who thoroughly examined *The History* conclude that the author basically used his own personal observations, diaries, stories of witnesses etc. He is the witness and sometimes the participant of events in the period of 1761-1784 (till the death of Hyder Ali). *The History* is all the more valuable for the author has not confined himself to a mere description of the private, intimate life of Hyder but has outlined it as against the background of the political and military events in the history of Mysore during 1762-1782. *The History* speaks very little about the history of Indo-Armenian relations but even from that one can assume that the Armenians of Mysore enjoyed the patronage of Hyder and local population.

Author says that the objective to write such a book was "to give the Armenians the spirit of sympathy, love and respect not only towards Hyder Ali but to all Indian nation". The book is written in ancient Armenian. The author was fluent in Persian, English, French, Kannada besides Armenian.

¹² R.Abrahamyan, *18th century...*, p.280.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.86.

The fate of the original copy is uncertain. However, the book was wholly published in the journal *Azdarar* in Madras in 1794-1795 by Rev. Shumavon.

Mesrovb David Thaliadian has been a great Armenian scholar in India in the 19th century. He was an “erudite professor, a profound scholar, an eminent poet and an author of great merit”, as is written on a marble mural tablet in the Armenian Church in Calcutta.¹⁴

In 1841 Thaliadian published the *History of Ancient India* in ancient Armenian language. In 1846 he published *Annals of the Antiquities of Armenia*.

In 1845 he formed the Araratian Society, the aim of which was to publish works in Armenian language. In two years (1845-1847) he published almost ten works. Almost twenty years (1823-1845) Thaliadian studied the manuscript of Khojamall's *History of India*, compared with the English and local sources, edited it. In 1848 he published it periodically in the monthly journal *Azgaser*.

The Araratian society had a journal *Azgaser* (Patriot) which was published from 1845 to 1848 and from 1848-1852 it was named *Azgaser Araratian*.

A born idealist, Thaliadian was, all the days of his stormy life, a confirmed nationalist and a patriotic scholar. He was the zealous standard bearer and indefatigable champion of the glorious culture and the unique literature of ancient Armenia.

Speaking about the Armenian scholars we have to mention also Mesrovb Jacob Seth whose life's mission was to record the history of the Armenians in India. For more than forty years he travelled all over India,

¹⁴ Aramais Mirzayan, *Armenians in Australia and New Zealand*, Sydney, Published by Armenian Church, 1966, p.195.

from Lahore to Madras and from Surat to Dhaka to record the history about his compatriots in India as complete as possible. During his trips he experienced numerous hardships because of the nature of his work and the limited funds at his disposal. Under great physical difficulties and discomfort he succeeded in rescuing from oblivion thousands of old Armenian epitaphs from deserted cemeteries and churchyards.

M. Seth displayed extraordinary aptitude for and interest in historical and antiquarian research, and for many decades engaged himself energetically in the study of old manuscripts, letters, epitaphs and memorial tablets in churches and cemeteries throughout India. The result of his work was a significant volume – *Armenians in India*, which was first published in 1937.

Armenian Churches and Chapels in India

In the early 18th century the Indian subcontinent was in a sharp crisis. There was a struggle between the Indian indigenous population and Europeans as well as among the Europeans themselves, mostly between the British and the French. Eventually bloody wars concluded with the victory of the British. The British Raj expanded all over the subcontinent.

In this environment the main period of formation and development of the Indo-Armenian colony commenced. Anglo-Saxon civilisation spiced with Asianness by virtue of the nature of that environment, and that gave a new feature to the Indo-Armenian community. Being interested only in their shops, offices and profits, the small Armenian colonies were trying to be separated as a religious grouping. This was the reason that first among all in the Armenian settlements churches were built and priests were appointed. Church was considered as the centre of the community activities.

Armenians, being mostly a commercial community, had evidently no time for missionary activities. They never tried to propagate their own belief

in India. Armenians even hesitated to accept into their church those who had spontaneously wanted to become members of the Armenian Church. In fact it was not a small mission for a small Armenian Christian community of India to maintain its own national form of Christian profession.¹⁵ They have done more: they defended it, protected and supported it with all their moral and material means and made Christianity respected in the eyes of non-Christians.

The Armenians in India considered it their patriotic duty to build churches and provide educational facilities for their compatriots in order to preserve their religion, language, literature and national identity.

The Armenians are strict Christians. Rev Frederick Davis Greene, who for several years resided in Armenia in the beginning of the 20th century, observed that by nature the Armenians were deeply religious. It has been the religion of the heart, not of the head. Its evidence is to be found in a brave and simple record written with the tears of saints and illuminated with the blood of martyrs.¹⁶

Wherever the Armenians go, there is one thing common among them and that is, retaining their religion. In India, wherever they started building their settlements, simultaneously they built churches. Now all over India one can find remains of many Armenian churches, chapels, historical monuments, which are the only proofs of once-flourishing Armenian colony in India.

In Northern India the eldest edifice of Christian worship is Martyros's Chapel which was built in 1611. It is situated at the old Armenian cemetery in Agra. It is noteworthy to mention that the oldest tombstones in this cemetery are dated back to 1557 and 1560.

¹⁵ Among Christian Churches of the world only Armenian and Syrian Churches belong to a separate branch of Christianity – Orthodox Christianity.

¹⁶ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.6.

As Armenians left their settlements a few people who stayed, could not take care of the churches which needed renovation from time to time. In 1920 the warden of Bombay Armenian Church Committee asked the Archaeological Department to restore the Armenian Church in Surat but they refused to do it unless the whole property was handed over to them. The warden had no authority to fulfil this demand. After some time the whole structure of this church fell down.¹⁷

Now on the territory of India only a few churches and chapels are functioning which are managed and protected by the Armenian Church Committee of Calcutta. They are as follows:

1. The Holy Church of Nazareth, erected in 1707, repaired and embellished in 1734. This is the biggest Armenian Church in Calcutta where every Sunday morning service is conducted. It is situated on 2, Armenian Street. Today it stands on its original state of preservation. The church of Nazareth is recognised to be the oldest Christian sanctuary in Calcutta. On November 25, 1957 the 250th anniversary of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth was celebrated and a special thanksgiving service was held in the Church. Smt. Padmaja Naidu, Governor of West Bengal graced this ceremony with her participation. Newspapers *The Statesman* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 25.11.1957 fully covered this event.

The Holy Church of Nazareth, besides being a place of worship, has been and continues to be an institution of the community, closely associated with the religious, charitable, educational and historical activities of Armenians in the East.

2. The St. Gregory's Chapel, erected in 1906 in Calcutta. Every Friday evening services are being held here. It is situated on Lower Circular Road. Since its erection, the chapel has been used for performances of the last rites of the deceased who are buried in the adjoining Christian

¹⁷ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.275.

cemetery. On several occasions the Armenian Church Committee allowed other Christian denominations who have no place of worship to use the chapel.

3. The Chapel of the Holy Trinity, built in 1867. This Chapel is situated in Thangra (outskirts of Calcutta). The surrounding grounds serve as a cemetery for the Armenian community. On March 6, 1967 the 100th anniversary of the chapel of the Holy Trinity was celebrated.
4. The Chinsurah Church of John the Baptist, built in 1697. Annually, in January on St. John's Day Holy Mass is celebrated in this Church by the Armenian community of Calcutta. St. John's Church in Chinsurah is the second oldest Christian place of worship in Bengal, which was erected in 1695. (The first oldest is the Roman Catholic Church in Bandel, which was built in 1599). It is now the only remaining landmark of the prosperous and highly populated Armenian community of this town.
5. The Bombay Church of St. Peter, built in 1796. As the Church suffered considerable damage during 150 years of its existence, the Church Committee decided to build a new one on the site of the old. The Church was completed in 1957. It is situated on Meadows Street, near the Fort;
6. The Madras Church of the Holy Virgin Mary, erected in 1772, on the Armenian Street, on the site of the old Armenian cemetery where there was a chapel.¹⁸

Mother Theresa and her Mother's House had close links with the Armenian Church of Calcutta. A few times Mother Theresa visited the Armenian Churches of Calcutta. The Armenian Church Committee has always helped Mother's House financially.

¹⁸ Rev. Aramais Mirzaian, *A Short Record of Armenian Churches in India and Far East*, Calcutta, Published by Armenian College, 1958, pp.31-53.

Contribution of Indo-Armenians in Independence of Armenia

The Armenian merchants in India, seeing the strength of East India Company, tried to unite in companies to be able to stand the competition with the British. First attempts to unite were done in Madras where a considerable population of Armenians were living. However, this union was not successful, the Armenian merchants of Madras suffered a defeat. This defeat was not because of lack of experience or enterprise. The British, Dutch and French merchants were backed by their powerful countries and they could do everything against the unprotected Armenian merchants. In this unequal competition, the lack of support from home state made the Armenians to wake up. The once indifferent Armenian merchant started to think about independent Armenian state.

Interaction and competition with erudite European merchants, who had political and cultural experience, had a big impact on the Armenian merchants. They got familiar to the ongoing European progressive ideologies, and used those during drafting of their political views. The Armenian merchants acquired progressive views. They became more sensitive, more responsible. The Armenian merchant became a patriot while in Armenia patriotism was suppressed in narrow ideas connected with the church and religious rituals.¹⁹

In the second half of the 18th century Madras was one of the centres of the Armenian freedom movement. There was a group of Armenian patriots headed by Shahamir Shahamiryan. This group was under the influence of enlightened English philosophical ideas and conducted an active propaganda in favour of the freedom of Armenia, as well as the establishment of an independent Armenian state.

¹⁹ Leo, *Selected Essays*, Yerevan, Louys, vol.5, 1986, p.513.

Armenian merchants in South India, though primarily concerned with commerce, were real patriots. It is noteworthy to mention that two Armenian millionaire-merchants offered their millions to Catherine II of Russia to liberate the Armenians from Persia and assume suzerainty over them. But their dream did not materialise.

Although being very far from their homeland – Armenia, the Indo-Armenian progressive thinkers were following the developments in the world with great attention. They were closely observing the freedom movement of the Greek people and were calling for uprising of Armenians in Armenia following the example of the Greeks.

In 1806 a register-book *Events or Activities* was published in Madras where the outcomes of all the meetings of the Madras Armenian Committee were registered. From this register it could be understood that this colony led a very active public life. They discussed on their meetings urgent issues, including the issue of freedom of Armenia. Majority agreed that Russia was the only force, which would free Armenia. Even one of the members of the community called for writing a letter of gratitude to the Russian Government for its humane attitude towards the Armenian nation.²⁰

The patriots of Madras have also discussed the issue of separation of the state from the church. They propounded the idea that Armenia must not be an authoritarian state but a constitutional republic.

The Armenians of Madras also sent special petitions to Alexander I, Tzar of Russia and Heraclius, King of Georgia.²¹

In 1827 the Indo-Armenians, to their great pleasure received the news of deployment of the Russian army near the border of Turkey. Afterwards

²⁰ A Yeremyan, *Progressive Armenians of Madras on Liberation Struggle of the Armenian Nation*, (original in Armenian), Echmiatsin, 1948, Nos.10-12, p.41.

²¹ *Shtemaran*, Calcutta, 1822, p.69.

when Yerevan, the capital of Armenia was taken by Russian troops and Armenia was freed from age-old Persian yoke, hundreds of congratulation letters were sent to Echmiatsin from India to express their joy and happiness. Indo-Armenians assumed that the time has come to establish a free, independent Armenia. Many of them decided to return to their ancestral land and start developing their own country.

Publishing Work

The Armenians of Madras were the pioneers in the advancement of the Armenian language and literature in India. The first Armenian press started in Madras in 1772 by Jacob Soolthanoonian and its first publication titled *Exhortation* was printed in the same year. It was mentioned in the titlepage that this pamphlet has been composed for the 'awakening of the Armenian youth from the weak and idle drowsiness of the sleep of slothfulness'.

This book discusses and analyses the Armenian nation. The author concludes that all the existing misfortunes of his nation have been originating from ignorance and laziness. They have forgotten about the heydays of Armenia, her strength and power. Now they can not achieve anything by only crying and cursing their fate. They need to wake up and struggle.

Shahamiryan wrote also a collection of laws which consisted of 521 articles. This is considered to be the first constitution for Armenia. As it was the first attempt for such a serious work and also having in mind that the writer was not a scholar, we can assume about the quality of his work. But this work is valued by scholars for its progressive ideas and ambitious projects.

In 1789 Rev. Shumavon (Arathoon Shumavonyan) started a printing press for publication of books in Armenian language. He was the editor, compositor, printer and moreover he made the paper himself from cotton

pulp. The first publication was a reprint of *The Martyrology of the Virgin Marianeh*. The Nawab of Madras and Arcot, Valaji Mohamed Ali Khan, permitted Rev. Shumavon to publish works in Persian and Arabic as well.²²

It is interesting to note that the first journal in Armenian language was published not in Armenia, but in India. This was an event of worldwide significance for the Armenians. This first Armenian journal, entitled *Azdarar* was published in Madras on October 16, 1794 by Rev. Shumavon who thus became the Father of Armenian journalism. He worked unceasingly for the enlightenment of his compatriots and earned the high esteem of his nationals not only in India but in all parts of the world as well. This monthly journal contained subjects of social, commercial and literary interest. However, *Azdarar* existed only 18 months. In February 1796 it was closed due to financial difficulties. This monthly journal inspired the publication of about two thousand Armenian journals in different countries.²³

The example of the Madras Armenians was emulated by the Armenians in Calcutta and the first printing press started here in 1797. The title of the first publication was *Truth of the Christian Religion*. In 1811 another press started in Calcutta and its first publication was an elementary book in Armenian. This press was at work until 1883.

The second Armenian magazine in India entitled *The Mirror* was published in Calcutta in 1820. After some time it was closed down and followed by another magazine which also met the similar fate. They could not get sufficient financial support to continue. After M.D.Thaliadian's *Azgaser Araratian* (which was the fourth Armenian journal in India) journal's closure in 1852, further attempts were made in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay to revive Armenian journalism but without success. From 1794 till 1863, some

²² Annie Basil, *Armenian Settlements in India: from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Calcutta, Published by Armenian College, n.d., p.114.

²³ Arshak Alpoijian, *History of the Armenian Emigrations*, (original in Armenian), Cairo, vol.2, 1955, p.408.

eleven Armenian journals were published in Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, of which five were printed and six lithographed. Except *Azdarar* and *Azgaser*, these journals do not reveal much literary talent as all the other editors were businessmen and had no literary attainments or any pretensions to scholarship.

An Armenian journal *Ara* in English started in Calcutta in 1892 by J.D.Melik-Beglar. On pages of *Ara* there were articles on Armenian politics, history and literature. But this journal also had a short life, only three years.²⁴

Another English journal *Armenian* (editor J.Barseghian) was also published in Calcutta from 1908 to 1909. Though at that time there were wealthy Armenian landlords, merchants, shipowners, jewellers, colliery proprietors and racehorse owners in India, adequate financial support was not given to enable these scholars, editors, publishers to continue with their important works.

After an interval of forty years, Zebedia John Hananian revived Armenian journalism, publishing *New Azdarar* in Calcutta in 1950. For over six years Hananian succeeded in presenting to his compatriots in India and elsewhere a publication which greatly enhanced the proud prestige of his nationals in India. Initially only Armenian articles were published in it but later on English articles also found their place. Unfortunately, due to financial difficulties, Hananian had to close *New Azdarar* in 1956.²⁵

It is regrettable that Armenian journalism, which was initiated in India, does not exist here anymore now.

²⁴ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.115.

²⁵ Aramais Mirzayan, op. cit., p.197.

Armenian Schools in India

However Armenian merchants of the 18th-19th centuries were very much attached to the developments in their community. Wealthy merchants were contributing a part of their wealth to the community and for common national goals. Of course, social charity has been an individual phenomenon everywhere and every time. But in this case it could be stated that in the Indo-Armenian reality there were so many individuals with charitable mood that this phenomenon acquired common occurrence.

In the 18th century in the history of Armenia bright pages were written which were due to the financial help of Armenian wealthy merchants of India: Simeon Catholicos could open a paper factory in Echmiatsin (Religious centre of all the Armenians and Holy See of the Catholicos situated in Armenia, near Yerevan) owing to the money which he got as a present from India; Archbishop Hovsep could establish a printing press and a school in New Nakhichevan (now Rostov-on-Don in South Russia) with financial help of his Indo-Armenian friends; Mekhitarist Fathers could establish the Rafayel College in Venice owing to Armenian merchant Rafayel who willed part of his wealth for this purpose. The same merchant ordered and financed the translation of 12 volumes of Rolles' *Common History*. Another Indo-Armenian, Samuel Mourad gave 2 million Francs to establish an Armenian school in India. Consequently Indo-Armenians became so famous with their charitable activities that many Armenians from all the corners of the world began to seek their financial support for their various activities.²⁶

While the 18th century is more remarkable for the development of publishing work in the Armenian community, the 19th century is famous for educational movement. Calcutta became the focal point of intellectual life of the Armenians.

²⁶ Leo, *Selected Essays*, Yerevan, Louys, vol. 6, 1987, p. 769.

As the number of Armenians increased, there was a big need for national educational institutions to protect their national language, culture and identity.

From the end of the 18th century till the middle of the 19th century, the Armenians established at least five educational institutions in India besides the first English school.

When English rule was firmly established in India it became imperative for Indians to learn English. It is a historical fact that the first English school for boys of all communities was founded in Calcutta by an Armenian. Unfortunately his name is forgotten. We could not find the exact date when the school was opened. It is only known that this school was founded in the end of the 18th century and was flourishing in 1808. That means that before David Hare (who opened an English school for Indian boys in Calcutta in 1815) there was already such a school there.²⁷

One Armenian Commandant named Margar who was one of the officers in Gorgin Khan's Army, founded a school at his residence and was teaching Armenian boys some time after 1763. The first private Armenian school was founded in Calcutta in 1798 by Aratoon Kaloos where all the lessons were taught in Armenian language. This school functioned for 25 years and prepared many specialists of Armenian language.²⁸

It can be assumed that the Madras Armenian School was founded some time before 1820 as no records have been found on the date of the establishment as well as founder's name. This calculation is done knowing that a wealthy Armenian merchant of Java - George Manuk had made a will in 1820 in which he had left Rs.30,000 for this school. Armenian School at Madras closed in 1889 due to the lack of pupils. In 1912 it was decided to

²⁷ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.122.

²⁸ M.J.Seth, op. cit., p.481.

divert the income of the Madras Armenian School to the Armenian College in Calcutta.

The Armenian Philanthropic Academy was founded on April 2, 1821 at 358, Old China Bazar Street, Calcutta, near the Armenian Church, and subsequently transferred to 56B, Mirza Ghalib Street. This educational institution has been favoured by the Calcutta Armenians and it still functions owing to the financial support of wealthy Armenians (more details in Chapter 5).

In 1837 an Armenian School was founded in Dhaka by an Armenian landlord Nicholas P. Pogose and was called Dhaka Pogose School. Initially it was in the residence of Pogose who was also the principal of the school.

M.D. Thaliadian, the great Armenian scholar, publisher and editor, has also been the founder of a school which was called the Armenian Infant Seminary of St. Sandoukht. It was founded in Calcutta in 1846. The Seminary was open to boys and girls which was very well appreciated, as in 1842 the Armenian Philanthropic Academy had closed its girls' department. Unfortunately, due to insufficient funds it was closed in 1852 though it was recognised in Calcutta as an educational institution of good standing.²⁹

Davidian Girls' School was opened in Calcutta on March 1, 1922. As the Armenian College of Calcutta admitted boys only so the founder, David Aviet David, decided to open a school for poor Armenian girls and admit poor Armenian boys to its kindergarten section. The school expanded so rapidly that a large building became an absolute necessity. So by 1930 the Davidian Girls' School transferred to a larger building. During World War II this school was evacuated to Nainital (U.P.). Davidian Girls' School was meant for Armenians only but David never turned away any child. Consequently Indian, Anglo-Indian, Jewish children were also admitted. Besides regular school

²⁹ A. Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches...*, vol. 2, p.272.

subjects, the Armenian pupils were taught Armenian language, history and literature, drill, folk songs, dancing and music.

David personally conducted the affairs of his school and discussed with his staff all the details connected with the school activities and functions. David dedicated all his life and almost all his wealth to this school. His life was really a remarkable example of single-minded devotion to the cause of education. According to his will, the Davidian Girls' School was converted into a boarding school after his death.

Miss Martin George's Kindergarten and Preparatory Day school was founded in 1926 by Mrs. Lucy George and was one of the leading private schools in Calcutta. The medium of instruction was English but admission was unrestricted. Mrs. George died in 1966 and the school was closed in 1967.

Moir Hall Nursery, Kindergarten and Preparatory Day School was founded in Calcutta in 1957 by Mrs. S. John and Mrs. Amy Sarkies. This school functions till now.

In 1953 Mr. Sookias and his wife started a Childrens' Club in Dehradun. In 1954 they also opened private, coeducational Nursery-Kindergarten-Primary-Junior-High-School on the same premises.

In Dehradun there was also Brightland Primary School which was founded by Elizabeth Arratoon in 1950s.

Among all these Armenian Schools only Armenian College and Davidian Girls' School always have maintained the Armenian spirit where besides other subjects Armenian language, literature and history are taught. These schools function at present.

Armenian Organisations

The Armenians of India established welfare organisations to help the needy people of their community, in addition to donating funds and property to the Armenian churches for the relief and education of their less fortunate compatriots. They have also contributed generous sums of money to Indian and other charities, built churches and chapels, bridges, rest-houses for pilgrims, subscribed towards public buildings, hospitals, orphanages, widows' homes, alms-houses etc.

Armenians formed welfare, cultural, social and sports clubs and societies, and joined non-Armenian organisations and thus shared in the life of the communities among whom they lived peacefully for centuries.

Some prominent organisations among them were: Armenian Ladies Benevolent Association, Armenian Association, Haikazian Cultural Society, Armenian Club, Armenian Sports Club etc.

The Armenian Club of Calcutta has always been the place where Armenians could interact with each other in their own language, to exchange the latest news. A number of indoor sports tournaments, social, wedding and christening receptions, and functions of other Armenian welfare, cultural and sports organisations were also held in the Club. Till the late 1970s, cultural programs were organised in the Club once in a month on a regular basis where Armenian folk songs and dances were performed.

The Armenian community of Calcutta has always been celebrating Indian national holidays, anniversaries of distinguished and prominent scholars, philosophers and national leaders of India. On these occasions concerts, talks, lectures were organised.

The Armenian community always had close relations with Iran as 99 percent of the colony are from Iran. The Ambassador of Iran in India

periodically visited Calcutta to meet the members of the Armenian community. Usually the General Consulate of Iran and the Iran Society invited the Armenian College Choir and Orchestra to perform on different occasions.

In 1956 Shah of Iran, Mohamad Reza Pahlevi and Queen Soraya arrived in India on an official visit. On the decision of the Armenian Church Committee, the representatives of the Armenian community of India welcomed Their Majesties and presented with gifts.

Concluding this Chapter it should be stated that the Indo-Armenians had a very rich cultural and intellectual life. Among Indo-Armenian wealthy merchants there were many people who helped their community donating funds to establish schools, to build houses for elderly and sick people, to restore churches, to set up publishing work in order to preserve their language, religion, national identity. Among them there were real patriots who were not indifferent to the destiny of their homeland - Armenia. They donated most of their wealth to prepare freedom movement in Armenia.

CHAPTER 5

ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF INDIA IN 20th CENTURY*

During the 19th century the map of Armenian colonies witnessed great changes. Many cities were dropped from the list of the Armenian permanent settlements in India. According to an Armenian traveller, in 1851 Armenians were still residing only in the following cities: Calcutta, Cichra, Saidabad, Surat, Agra, Dhaka, Kanpur, Lahore, Madras and Bombay. And in some of these cities only a few Armenians were left.¹

By the early 20th century only 25-30 families were left in Madras and among them were mostly elderly and disabled people.² Now there are only a few Armenians in Madras. One old man with his wife are taking care of the Armenian Church there.

The big Armenian colony of Bombay began to decrease in the beginning of the 19th century. According to the census of 1813, there lived 107 Armenians. When M.J.Seth visited Bombay in 1889 there were 30 Armenians living there.³ Now a few Armenians live in Bombay. They are married to Indians. There are also some Armenians in Delhi, Bangalore and Shillong.

The only Indo-Armenian colony, which could maintain its existence was the Armenian colony of Calcutta.

* This Chapter is mostly based on interviews with the members of the Armenian community in Calcutta in April 2000. For *Questionnaire* see Appendix 5.

¹ A. Abrahamyan, *Short Sketches of the History of Armenian Colonies*, (original in Armenian), Yerevan, Louys, Vol.2, 1967, p.256.

² Torgom Archbishop Goushakyán, *Indo-Armenians: Impressions and Information*, (original in Armenian), Jerusalem, 1941, p.74.

³ M.J. Seth, *Armenians in India*, New Delhi-Calcutta-Bombay, Oxford & IHB Publishing Co., 1983, p.299.

Rev. James Long in his *Localities* states that in the first half of the 19th century the number of Armenians in Calcutta was 636.⁴ According to the Armenian magazine *Arev*, in the end of the 19th century the number of Armenian population of Calcutta was 800-1000.⁵ In the second decade of the 20th century, because of the influx of refugees from Western Armenia, the number of Armenian colony of Calcutta raised till 2000.⁶ As one of the older and active members of Calcutta Armenians stated, in the 1930s and the 1940s there were 5-6 thousand Armenians in India.

In fact, Indo-Armenian public and cultural life transferred from Madras to Calcutta in the 19th century and the Armenian colony of Calcutta began to give common tone and direction to the other Armenian colonies. Activities of publishing houses, schools and different kinds of organisations are closely linked to Calcutta.

The social structure of the Armenian community also changed. If in the past the main population was of traders, now there were artisans, lawyers, doctors, architects, people in railway, seaport and governmental services.

One of the main streets in Calcutta is called Armenian Street. One of the landscapes not far from Calcutta is known as Armenian. One of the biggest ports of Calcutta used to be called Armenian Ghat. One of the streets in this city used to be known in the name of Sargis, one of the prominent Armenian personalities of Calcutta. From all these one can have an idea about the active role played by the Armenians in the city of Calcutta.

Armenians have been also very renowned house-builders and raised modern and comfortable buildings in Calcutta. They remained prominent builders until the early 20th century and set a high standard for private

⁴ Thankappan Nair, *Calcutta in the 18th Century*, Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1984, p.171.

⁵ *Arev*, Cairo, 1946, June 26.

⁶ A. Abrahamyan, *op.cit.*, p.269.

residences, hotels, office premises, residential mansions, boarding and guest houses. One Armenian builder and property-owner, Galstaun, built three hundred and fifty houses in Calcutta.⁷ Besides being builders, Armenians were also property owners, and until 1930s the whole area known as Queen's Park and Sunny Park, Ballygunge was owned by the Armenians. One of the Calcutta Armenians mentioned: "Armenians are gifted with a vision. In the end of the 19th century Calcutta was very small but the Armenians were building big houses which meant they had faith in this country and saw their future here".

Hotels seem to have held a special fascination for the Armenians. They were one of the first to build and own high standard hotels in Calcutta and Darjeeling. The Grand Hotel in Calcutta and The Mount Everest in Darjeeling, which are now known as Oberoi Grand and Oberoi Everest once were owned by an Armenian. The proprietors of the following hotels like Astoria, Astor, Carlton, Lytton, Russell, Kenilworth, New Kenilworth were Armenians, too.⁸

The members of the Armenian community have been very active in public and business life of Calcutta. Among Armenians there were stock-exchange brokers, bankers, owners of export-import firms, landlords, real estate agents. They were in engineering, automobile, furniture, shellac, indigo and other businesses. Armenians of Calcutta were and are very keen racers. In the history of 20th century Calcutta one can find many Armenian racehorse owners and almost all the horses have Armenian names. The Armenian community had also artists, painters, actors, singers, football, hockey and rugby players.

Women in the Armenian families do not work as a rule. They are mostly housewives taking care of children and the house. Besides, women are

⁷ Annie Basil, *Armenian Settlements in India: from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Calcutta, Published by Armenian College, n.d., p.145.

⁸ Jawhar Sircar, *Armenians: Merchant - Princes of the Past*, Telegraph, Calcutta, May 29, 1983.

engaged in the service of the Church and charitable work. However, at present the status of women has changed. Now one can find more and more Armenian women working in various spheres.

In the social structure of the Armenian colonies there were strictly determined groupings of different levels of population, and sharp arguments always existed among them. In Calcutta there were two groupings - wealthy people and common people. The conflict between them was on the issue of the election of the community Committee. The rich Armenians were performing every machinations, not to allow the common people to vote and be elected.⁹ These wealthy citizens were also criticising the escape of the Armenians from Iran and Turkey in the 1910s and were against providing with temporary shelter to these refugees.

Although there was resistance from rich Armenians, the Indo-Armenian communities did not leave their compatriots in their misfortune. Homes were built for needy, poor, sick and refugee Armenians. Funds were collected through various contributions, some wealthy Armenians willed some part of their wealth to these Homes.

In these Homes hundreds of Armenians were taken care of free of charge. Free medical care was also provided. These Homes were under the protection of the Armenian Churches.

From 1895 the Turks in Turkey started to massacre the Armenian population of Western Armenia, which culminated in a big genocide of the Armenians in 1915. 2 million Armenians were killed at that time. That was the policy of the Government of Turkey - Armenia without Armenians. During this period almost two thousand Armenians fled to India, particularly to Calcutta. The Armenian community was not able to cope with such a huge number of refugees. The Homes were full of these people. Being in the

⁹ *Shtemaran*, Calcutta, 1822, p.69.

Homes for some time most of these refugees continued their way to Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Mongolia.

The Indo-Armenian community was not indifferent to the fate of its compatriots in far away Armenia. In 1895 in January the Armenians of Calcutta held a protest meeting against the massacres of the Armenians by the Turks.¹⁰ It should be mentioned that a few Armenians who were in shellac business raised funds for the Armenian refugees from Turkey.

After the World War I Armenia lost a significant part of its territory. The present Armenia is located on one-tenth of its historical territory. The genocide of 1915 and the loss of territories are very sensitive issues for every Armenian all over the world. Since then it has been termed as Armenian Case or Armenian Question. The most influential Armenian colonies from the US, France, Middle East have been always raising this issue during summits, international conferences, fora. The Indo-Armenian community was also very active on this issue. In 1965 it was decided to present the Armenian Question to the United Nations Organisation to find a just solution.¹¹

Nevertheless the two new buildings of Homes in Calcutta built in 1952 are now situated in the yard of St. Gregory's Chapel. There live almost 50 elderly and sick people. Medical service is available for them free of charge. The Homes gave temporary shelter to those Armenians who left Iran in 1979 after the Revolution. In 1990 during the Iran-Iraq war some Armenian families from Iran and Iraq found a temporary home in the Homes. The supervisor of the Homes of that time gave the number of those Armenians as 50-60. After the war some families went back, others obtained status of refugees from the UNHCR and migrated to the USA or Australia.

¹⁰ Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, p.32.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.195.

Armenians in India were always concerned about their national identity and they were very keen to preserve it in the multicultural societal sphere of India.

In the 1930s the British Government was drafting a new Constitution. The Indo-Armenian community was very anxious to have their status defined under the New Constitution of India. In this regard a special committee consisting of five members was constituted to prepare a Memorial to the Viceroy. On March 24, 1934 the ready Memorial was forwarded to the Viceroy.

In this Memorial the Armenians described in detail their services to India starting from the 16th century. They mentioned various facts and events in the history of India when Armenian colonies often played a decisive role. The 1688 Agreement between the Armenian merchants and East India Company was also remembered when the Armenians were given definite rights and privileges. In the end of the Memorial the Armenians requested that their future status, as a minority community in India, be favourably considered in the new Constitution as the Armenians had large vested interests as loyal citizens of the British Empire. They were anxious for the protection and future security of their churches, educational and charitable foundations and trusts and their vested interests in landed properties and commerce.

“As a small minority, your Memorialists do not ask for separate communal representation but they humbly pray that all the rights and privileges conferred on the Armenian communities domiciled in India be confirmed and embodied in the new constitution for the future government of India and their special status defined in any way deemed appropriate by Your Excellency.”

After 20 days the Armenian got a reply from the Viceroy which made them very upset and disappointed. It stated that:

“Since the Memorial is presumed to be submitted on behalf only of those Armenians who are British subjects, no special definition of the status of the Armenian community is required as that community will enjoy the same privileges as other subjects of this majority.”¹²

Armenians possess a clear understanding as to why it is so important to be an Armenian. Fundamental to these ideas is a perception of the historical legacy of Armenians everywhere, in particular the massacres and expulsions, which occurred in Eastern Turkey (that time Western Armenia) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Much of the ideology that has developed around these perceptions, is essentially nationalist; it is not related specifically to the Armenian community in India but is shared by Armenians throughout the world. This nationalist ideology, so to speak, shapes the ethnic identity of the Armenians.

Since the mass deportation of Armenians from Turkey in 1915, three main political parties have been operating in Armenian Communities: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (or Dashnaksoutyoun), the Armenian Democratic Party (or Ramkavar) and the Henschakyan Revolutionary Party. All three have their beginnings in Armenian nationalist and revolutionary movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which, although often originating in Transcaucasia, sought primarily to address themselves to the situation of Armenians living in Turkey in the last days of the Ottoman Empire.

There is another nationalist party in the Armenian communities all over the world, which is very popular among Armenian extremists. That is ASALA - Armenian Secret Army of Liberation of Armenia. While the Dashnaksoutyoun party focus blame for the failure to provide a solution to the 'Armenian Question' on international silence and apathy, the Popular Movement for ASALA focuses much of the blame for the continuing

¹² M.J.Seth, op. cit., pp.541-547.

dispersion and assimilation of Armenians in the Diaspora on its political predecessors, in particular the Dashanktsoutyoun itself.

The interesting feature of the Armenian community in India is the absence of these political parties. There have never been and there are no Armenian political parties in India. Indo-Armenians have never been interested in politics. They have been mostly business-minded people. Even those Armenians who were not in business, never joined any Indian political party.

Armenians say: - Wherever the Armenians go, first they set up a school and a church and then it spreads from there.

These two institutions are able to serve as gateways into the community. They play an important function in the establishment and maintenance of contacts between the Armenians but they have only small and, at best, an incidental role to play in the integration of Armenians into the wider economic, social and political system which encompasses the community.

Armenian community of India is concentrated in Calcutta. There are two Armenian Churches - Holy Church of Nazareth and St. Gregory's Chapel, two schools - Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy, and Davidian Girls' School, Armenian Club and Armenian Sports Club, which are the places where Armenians can meet and interact with each other now.

These institutions are important focal points for the Armenian community. They are the most visible and permanent identifiers of the presence of an Armenian population in India. They also appear to be traditional landmarks of Armenian communities elsewhere.

The Armenian Apostolic Church, as its title implies, is a national church. As one of the Indo-Armenians mentioned: "We are respected among Indians because we do not convert. We practise our own religion." Even those

Armenians who consider themselves to be secular or atheistic, will marry in the Church even when the spouse is non-Armenian. Similarly, Armenians will visit the Church without actually attending the service inside it. At Christmas and Easter, particularly, the gatherings, which take place in and around the Churches, attract Armenians who might otherwise never visit the institution. The Apostolic Church, like the Armenian language, is an important symbol of Armenian ethnicity and its continuity. However, unlike their attitude to the decline in proficiency in the Armenian language, this does not appear to be any widespread concern about the decline in church attendance.

For the Armenian community of Calcutta the permanent days of gathering are: Christmas Day (6th January), Day of St. John the Baptist (which is celebrated in January in St. John Baptist's Church in Chinsurah), Easter (in March or April), Day of the Battle of Vardanants (in March), Martyrs' Day (April 24, commemoration of victims of Genocide in 1915), Festival of Virgin Mary (in August), Festival of Holy Cross (in mid September). In these days Holy Mass is being served in the Armenian Church, and after that a free lunch is organised for the whole community.

The head of the Armenian community in India is the Armenian Church Committee which functions according to the *Scheme for the Management of the Property and Affairs of the Armenian Churches at Calcutta and Chinsurah and the Administration of the Endowments, Funds, and Charities appertaining or belonging thereto, or administered by the officers thereof*. This Scheme came into force from September 2, 1889.

In 1982 the Scheme was amended as by that time the number of Armenian community diminished and definite changes were needed to run the management of the community affairs. Church Committee is elected for four years. According to 1982 amendments, when there are less than 30 members of the community entitled to vote, the Committee should be reduced to the body of seven members. After the elections the seven members elect

the Chairman and two Church Wardens among themselves on their first meeting. Special requirements are needed for the Armenians who want to be elected: 1) they must be baptised in the Armenian church, 2) they must be citizens of India, 3) they must permanently reside in India, 4) they must not get any charity from the church.

The first three requirements are also needed for the voters. In addition to those mentioned, voter who received financial help from the church during the four-year term of any elected committee is not allowed to vote.

The coming election of the Armenian Church Committee will be held in November 2001. Knowing the present situation of the Armenian community, one can assume that majority of the next Church Committee will be half-Armenians. Most of the community will not be eligible to cast their votes since they get financial help from the Church

The powers and duties of the Wardens are: the management of the property and affairs of the churches, administration of endowments, funds and charities, maintaining order and discipline within the church premises, making all proper payments on account of the said churches and charities, and distributing the charities among the recipients, making and keeping full and perfect lists of all persons entitled to be recipients of charity; submitting to the Committee at every monthly meeting a full account of all moneys received and expended during the previous month; convening General Meetings of the Armenian community once a year for the purpose of considering the accounts of the Committee, and once in every four years, for the purpose of electing a Committee. Previously the quorum for General meeting was 20. After 1982 it is only 10. The Wardens can also appoint, employ and dismiss all Ministers and servants, except the Clergy.

The tenure of the Wardens has been extended from 2 to 4 years. In the previous variant of the Scheme it was mentioned that all the accounts in Armenian churches must be kept in Armenian language. At present keeping

accounts in Armenian language is considered to be formality, causing unnecessary wastage of money. Hence according to the amended variant of the Scheme the Committee and the Wardens are given the liberty to discontinue the keeping of accounts in the Armenian language.¹³

The priest for the churches is appointed by the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church who is seated in Echmiatsin (Armenia) and holds the title of 'Supreme Catholicos of all Armenians'. The priest is formally also a member of the Church Committee but he does not run for office in Committee elections. The priest is also perceived as having a role to play in the community. He frequently visits Armenians in their homes and sick people in the hospitals. He is a regular participant in public gatherings. He also teaches Theology in the Armenian College.

The Armenian community of Calcutta is immensely grateful to Sir Catchik Paul Chater of Hong Kong. This Armenian was very famous in the beginning of the 20th century. He was the leading landlord, architect and the richest citizen of Hong Kong. Sir Catchik Paul Chater willed considerable amount of money to the Armenian Church in Calcutta.

La Martiniere College of Calcutta also owes Sir Chater. When the College was in a financial crisis, this gentleman helped it out on condition that five Armenian boys and girls can study there free of cost during all the period this College will exist and function.

Being strict Christians, Armenians respect the religions and the religious sentiments of other people among whom they live. Here is the example of one Armenian Martin, who was in export-import business in Calcutta. He leased the former residence of Indian saint of the 19th century Sri Rama Krishna and his wife, Sarala Devi, known as the holy mother. Martin permitted the saint's disciples to visit the house. After some time when Sri

¹³ Based on: *Scheme For the Management of the Property & Affairs of the Armenian Churches at Calcutta and Chinsurah.*

Rama Krishna's disciples told Martin about their desire to acquire the house in order to convert it into a permanent shrine, Martin willingly relinquished the remainder of his ninety-year lease and shifted to another house.

The biggest event in the history of the Calcutta Armenians was the historical visit of His Holiness Vazgen I, Catholics and Supreme Patriarch of all Armenians to India in November-December 1963. This visit was conducted on the invitation of His Holiness, Moran Mar Basilio Gevarghese II, Catholicos of the Apostolic Throne of the East and Supreme Head of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India as friendly relations have always existed between the Armenian and Syrian Orthodox Churches in India. The meeting took place in Kottayam (Kerala).

His Holiness Vazgen I paid courtesy visits to Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the President, Dr. Zakir Hussain, the Vice President, Sri Gulzarilal Nandas, the Home Minister. In honour of His Holiness receptions were held by the Ambassadors of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

The Catholics visited also Madras, Bombay and Calcutta. In the Armenian Churches of these cities Pontifical High Masses were celebrated by His Holiness. In Calcutta an important event was the ceremonial blessing and laying of the foundation stone of the proposed new building of the Armenian College on December 9.¹⁴

As a whole, the historic visit of Catholicos Vazgen I had a big impact on the Armenian community of India. It got like a second breath. The Armenianness was revived among the members of the community. Armenian performances, concerts, lectures and seminars on Armenian history and culture were conducted with fresh spirit and enthusiasm. In a short period of time the new building of the Armenian College was ready.

¹⁴ Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, pp.206-211.

Another big event in the life of the Indo-Armenian community was the official visit of Mr. Levon Ter-Petrosian, President of the independent Republic of Armenia, to India in December 1995. Concluding his visit in New Delhi with signing of a big package of Agreements with the Government of India, the President visited Calcutta. The Church Committee had organised a warm welcome to the President. Mr. L. Ter-Petrosian attended the celebration of 200th anniversary of *Azdarar*, the first Armenian journal in the world, which was published in Madras in 1794.

Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy

As we have already mentioned in Chapter 4, the Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy was founded on April 2, 1821. The idea of a national academy in Calcutta was first conceived by Astvatsator Mooradkhan. By his will dated July 30, 1797 he left sicca¹⁵ Rs.8000 for the establishment of an Armenian School in Calcutta "for the education of the Armenian youth both rich and poor". Later on, through the untiring efforts of Manatsakan Vardan, enough money was raised by subscription among the Armenian community to materialize Mooradkhan's idea.¹⁶ It is noteworthy to mention that the Main School Building on Free School Street bought in 1884, has been the birthplace of the celebrated novelist William Makepeace Thackeray in 1811.¹⁷

After the foundation of the Academy a printing press was presented to it by one Armenian merchant of Calcutta. In this press numerous books, pamphlets and calendars were printed. However, after functioning for 60 years the press was closed down.

The Academy had also very famous library which had a rich collection of valuable books and manuscripts. This Araratyan Library was founded in

¹⁵ Sicca - a newly-coined silver rupee.

¹⁶ Annie Basil, op. cit., p.238.

¹⁷ Dabi Kar, *The Kin of the Charitable Sookias*, The Statesman, 26 February 1995.

1828. There were books in Armenian, Greek, Latin, English, French, Dutch, Persian, Chinese and other Occidental and Oriental languages. Ancient Armenian manuscripts were available there, too.

However, when one Carapet Mourad was the Rector of the Philanthropic Academy, all the rare Armenian manuscripts disappeared. This was disclosed in 1890. In 1909 an ex-pupil of the Academy donated a large number of English books thus laying foundation of a new library.¹⁸

During the 20th century this library was being expanded from time to time obtaining contemporary literature. Recently, in autumn 2000 a large consignment of books was sent from Armenia to Calcutta for the library of the Armenian College. The organiser was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, which addressed a request-letter to various publishing houses and libraries in Yerevan to provide with textbooks, extra-curricular literature to the Armenian College of Calcutta. All these organisations unanimously supported the idea and gave a wide selection of Armenian, Russian and English books as a gift to the library. Among those organisations were the Fundamental Library of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Institute of Arts of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Library of the Yerevan State University, publishing houses: Louys, Hayastan, Arevik, Tigran Mets.

The funds and properties of the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy are vested in the Official Trustee of West Bengal. The College was governed according to the provisions of a Scheme drawn up by the High Court of Calcutta in 1883. According to this Scheme the College is governed by a body of male members of the Armenian community in Calcutta known as the Members of the Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy or Members of the Institution. Membership of this body is for life and election of new members is done by the Members themselves at their Annual General

¹⁸ Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, p.244.

Meetings. Three Members, known as Managers, are annually elected to attend to the welfare of the College and the proper running of its affairs on behalf of the Members of the Institution and are responsible to them. Owing to the declining number of the Armenians, women are now able to participate in the management of the Academy. At present, the Armenian College has only one Manager.

During almost 180 years of its functioning, the Armenian College had many principles but the most respected and outstanding one was Vahan Poladyan who is still remembered with great affection by all the members of the community. Poladyan was an Armenian from Lebanon. He was invited in 1952 to teach in the College but he remained in Calcutta all his life. Poladyan was the principle of the Armenian College from 1952 to 1979 and 1982 – 1988.

The Armenian Philanthropic Academy was first affiliated to the Calcutta University in 1870. According to the records of the University of Calcutta the first batch of students from the Academy were sent up for the Entrance (later Matriculation) Examination in 1870.

The Academy was affiliated to the University of Calcutta up to the F.A. (Intermediate Arts) standard by the name of "Armenian College" in 1888. However, the then management did not favour the advisability of continuing permanently the college classes and they were closed in 1892. The Institution is now known as Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy, and is affiliated to the Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal.

In 1949 the Armenian College and Davidian Girls' School were educationally amalgamated with the object of improving the strained financial conditions of both institutions. Up to 1954 the girls were sent up for School Final Examinations of the Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal, as private candidates. On January 27, 1953 permission for co-education was

granted to the College by the Board and since then the girls have been sent up for the School Final Examinations as regular candidates.

Later on, in compliance with the educational policy of the Government of India and the States, the Armenian College and Philanthropic Academy sought recognition as a Higher Secondary School with permission to prepare candidates for the Higher Secondary Examinations, leading to a three-year degree course, and was recognised as such with effect from April 1, 1958. On the adoption of the Higher Secondary Examinations pattern by the Senior Cambridge Certificate Examinations, it was felt advisable by the College authorities to switch over to the latter in view of its wide recognition outside India. An application for affiliation was submitted to the authorities concerned who considered it favourably. The new course of studies was introduced in January 1962.

The College prepares students for the School Final Examinations of the Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal. Both Modern and Classical Armenian were recognised as examination subjects, the former as a vernacular, the latter as a classical language. Besides Armenian and English (the medium of instruction) Bengali was also taught as the local language. Iranian language was also taught to the pupils who had come from Iran and were supposed to go back after completing their studies. In addition to the compulsory and optional subjects prescribed by the Board of Secondary Education, Armenian History and Religious Knowledge are also taught through the medium of Armenian.¹⁹

However, during the last ten years classical Armenian and Bengali languages have been abandoned as the majority of pupils are from Iran (who are ethnic Armenians) and Armenia where classical Armenian is used only by narrow specialists.

¹⁹ Based on: *Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy Prospectus, 1957.*

Prizes are awarded to those students of each class who secure the highest marks in the respective subjects. Besides class prizes there are also special prizes for Armenian language, for Music, for Religious Knowledge, for Good Conduct. Prizes are presented on the Prize Day, usually held on February 7, Davidian Girls' School Founder's Day. The Armenian College Founder's Day (April 2) is celebrated by the Combined Schools' Annual Concert.

The students of the College were taught to sing, to play the piano and violin. There was a College Choir and Orchestra. They performed not only in the College on Armenian and Indian national holidays but were also invited by different governmental organisations and diplomatic missions in Calcutta to perform during particular events and celebrations.

The Armenian College was among the first educational institutions in Calcutta to adopt scouting in 1911. From the very beginning the Armenian Scouting team won many prizes such as: the Ballygunge United Cross Country Races, the Kent Signalling Cup, the Ingonyama Cup and Fram Juvenile Cup in 1912. The visiting Commissioner of Scouts from London declared that in his opinion the Armenian College Scout Troop was the best in the East.²⁰

In the beginning of the World War II Dr. P.K. Biswas, Chief of the Air Raid Precaution Casualty Service, requested the College Scout Troop to join his service. Armenian Scouts were enrolled in First Aid work and local Civil Guards. Armenian Scouts were involved again in First Aid Work during the Indo-Pakistan War in September 1965. According to the records till 1968, Armenian College Scout Troop almost every year has been the winner in Calcutta and West Bengal state, and the best scout of the year was declared an Armenian.

²⁰ Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, p.252.

However, in 1970s when many Armenian families left Calcutta for other countries, the Scout Troop was dissolved. But another famous team of the Armenian College, the Armenian College Rugby Team (which has been an active participant in the rugby since 1890, when the Calcutta Rugby Union Challenge Cup Tournament was inaugurated) still exists, participates in different competitions and wins. That is due to those students of the Armenian College who came from Iran in large numbers in 1980s, and have graduated from the Armenian College. They later got admission in the Calcutta University or other colleges but they still participate in various rugby tournaments under the name of the Armenian Sports Club.

This team have been playing both at the club level and at the national level since 1991. Till 1999 every year they won prestigious rugby tournaments. In 1997 and 1998 four players from the Armenian Rugby Team were chosen to join the National Rugby Team of India to participate in international tournaments.

As long as these Iranian-Armenians are in India, they easily adopt themselves into the Indian ways of life. They speak Hindi and Bengali. As one of these boys told to Rupali Ghosh, a journalist from *The Asian Age*, "We spend our formative years here, make friends outside the community, play for the country and in time, we grow to love this place and recognise it as home".²¹

Armenian children from India, Iran and Iraq had always been studying at the Armenian College. But till the 1950s they were mostly from India. However, when India gained independence, the Armenians started to leave the country resulting a decline in the Armenian population. The authorities of the College thus started inviting pupils from Iran and Iraq. In this regard the Armenian Church Committee of Calcutta sends letters to the Armenian Church Committees in Iran and Iraq to inform the Armenian families about

²¹ Rupali Ghosh, *City's Rugby Merchants and Their Glory*, *The Asian Age*, 31st May 1995.

the admission to the Armenian College of Calcutta. The Church Committees of these countries form the batches of children and organise their departure.

As we see from the Table, till 1980 the number of pupils was high, having its maximum in 1961, 1962 and 1973 (206, 204 and 179 respectively). However, after the revolution in Iran in 1979, the number of students from Iran declined due to the strict regulations imposed by the Islamic leadership. The new Government of Iran did not allow the already-prepared batches of Armenian children to leave for India.

During the Iran-Iraq war a number of students from Iran was sent to India by their parents. But they were taken back when the war ended.

One of the reasons for the decline in the number of pupils is that the parents, seeking better education opportunities for their children, send them to developed countries.

Till the 1970s the standard of the Armenian College was very high. Highly qualified specialists were teaching there. But as the majority left India and elderly people died, nobody was left to run the College properly. So, as we see from the Table, in 1991 there were only 38 students, almost all of them being Iranian nationals.

Of course, this problem was a big concern for the Armenian community in general and the Church Committee in particular.

On December 7, 1988 there was a disastrous earthquake in Soviet Armenia. More than 30 thousand people died leaving 400 thousand out of shelter. The Armenian Church Committee of Calcutta sent financial help to the Earthquake Fund. It also suggested the Government of Armenia to send a batch of orphan children to study in the Armenian College of Calcutta (since many children became orphans during the earthquake). But as the then Soviet regime did not encourage such foreign contacts, this proposal remained unresponded.

**Roll Strength of Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy and
Davidian Girls' School (1952-2000)**

Year	No. of Students		Total
	Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy	Davidian Girls' School	
1952	81	96	177
1953	85	76	161
1954	77	60	137
1955	73	55	128
1956	77	53	130
1957	76	61	137
1958	76	61	137
1959	89	70	159
1960	103	68	171
1961	85	121	206
1962	84	120	204
1963	83	65	148
1964	90	79	169
1965	91	74	165
1966	87	71	158
1967	81	61	142
1968	78	54	132
1969	80	51	131
1970	90	54	144
1971	87	52	139
1972	89	45	134
1973	119	60	179

1974	111	48	159
1975	92	41	133
1976	90	43	133
1977	95	53	148
1978	87	53	140
1979	87	52	139
1980	85	49	134
1981	61	31	92
1982	44	22	66
1983	44	19	63
1984	33	15	48
1985	26	14	40
1986	47	19	66
1987	66	16	82
1988	39	16	55
1989	33	12	45
1990	32	10	42
1991	30	8	38
1992	56	15	71
1993	56	15	71
1994	80	17	97
1995	54	13	67
1996	28	3	31
1997	3	3	6
1998	3	3	6
1999	16	16	32
2000	16	16	32

In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Armenian Church Committee of India renewed its invitation and already in 1992 the first batch of Armenian children from independent Republic of Armenia landed in Calcutta. In 1994 another batch arrived from Armenia, and the number of students rose up to 97.

However, due to some technical problems and misunderstanding, all the children from Armenia were taken back. As we can see from the Table, in 1997 and 1998 there were only six students (three boys and three girls) in the College.

In 1999 Echmiatsin took over the Armenian College in Calcutta. A bishop was appointed as the administrator of the College who chose children from orphanages and among poor families in Armenia. The first batch of 30 children with eight teachers arrived in Calcutta in November 1999.

The next batch is expected to arrive in January 2001. The Armenian Church Committee has decided to raise the number of students till 300. After the completion of their studies, these children will go back and be of use to Armenia.

Armenian Organisations in Calcutta

The Armenians of India have formed welfare organisations at their settlements to aid the needy members of their community. They have also contributed generous sums of money to Indian and other charities. They have raised and maintained voluntary corps in times of stress, relieved the hardships of prisoners and fugitives, and paid off the debts of the prisoners of the "Court of Requests".

Armenians have also formed cultural, social and sports clubs and societies and joined similar non-Armenian organisations. Thus they coexisted with other communities peacefully for centuries.

In 1915 three Armenian ladies formed the first Armenian Ladies Benevolent Association to relieve the sick and needy members of the community, to contribute towards the education of poor Armenian girls and to undertake church welfare work. For this purpose the Association organised entertainments and fancy fairs. But after a few years of fruitful work this Association was closed down.

After the World War I one Armenian from Egypt visited Calcutta and on his initiative the Armenian General Benevolent Union was formed. The aim of the Union was to help the sick and needy members of the community and undertake Red Cross and church welfare work. However, when the organiser, who was the sponsor of the Union, returned to Egypt it was closed down.

In 1928 the Armenian Ladies Educational Union was formed to raise funds for the education of poor Armenian children in the Indo-Iranian Diocese. After some years of useful service this Union also dissolved.

In September 1948, the Armenian Ladies Benevolent Union was founded which aimed at helping the sick and needy members of the community, undertaking church welfare work and contributing towards the education of poor Armenian children. In 1953 the Constitution of the Union was adopted and this organisation was afterwards called Armenian Ladies Benevolent Association. One more goal for the Association was added - to assist deserving compatriots to train for careers. For this, a Careers' Fund was opened.

The charitable activities of this Association were not merely confined within the Armenian community. It contributed to Deshbandhu Chest Clinic in Darjeeling, Governor's Assam Refugee Relief Fund (in 1960), Dr. B.C. Roy Memorial Fund in 1962, National Defence Funds during the Wars of

1962 and 1965, Governor's Welfare of Jawan's Fund in 1965 and to the Prime Minister's Drought Relief Fund in 1967.²²

The Armenian Ladies Benevolent Association was affiliated to the Women's Co-ordinating Council and West Bengal Council of Women.

According to the Scheme of Armenian College of 1883 and Scheme of Armenian Church of 1888, women could not vote and become members of College and Church Committees. In 1963 the Association decided to sponsor a move to obtain voting and representation rights for women in the Committees.

However, their efforts were not successful. Only in 1995 when two of seven members of the Armenian Church Committee died, two ladies could join the Committee because of the lack of eligible male members in the community. Moreover, after the elections of the Armenian Church Committee in 1997, an Armenian lady became the head of the Committee. During her tenure she proved to be an able administrator and manager taking care of all the affairs of the Armenian community in India.

The Armenian Ladies Benevolent Association still exists, but only on papers and yet it has a bank account. As the members gradually left the country, now there is no quorum to dissolve the Association. Five members are requested for quorum. This Association used to have more than 100 members in the 1970s and 80s.

Till the 1960s there was a Committee of the Armenian College Old Boys' Union, which was established in 1909 and celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1965. This Union was assisting outstanding students to pursue higher education, and to attain good positions in the fields they chose. They also were maintaining close links with the Committee Management of the College and rendered assistance whenever there was a need for that. Individual ex-

²² Annie Basil, *op. cit.*, p.215.

pupils donated to Centenary Funds. With their help the swimming pool was constructed on the territory of the College.

Many ex-pupils have not directly helped the College but they have done charitable work. For instance, in Abadan they helped to establish schools and a church. In West Bengal an ex-pupil founded a primary school for Indian children in the coal-fields of Asansol.

The founder of the Armenian College Old Boys' Union was Avetic Gregory Arratoon. After finishing the Armenian College he left for Burma. During his stay in Burma, through his contacts with ex-pupils of Java, he did a great deal to infuse enthusiasm among his numerous friends and ex-pupils with the idea of helping their Alma Mater.

It was during this period that the Burma-based ex-pupils of the College supported five boys in the College at their expense. Similarly the ex-pupils of Java established the 'Batavia Foundation', which supported fifteen students in the College for a long time.

It was due to Arratoon's enthusiasm that a number of affluent ex-pupils subscribed to a fund intended to help the College in employing good teachers and also to aid educational institutions in Julfa (Iran). This fund could be subscribed for due to collective efforts of the Java, Calcutta and London-based ex-pupils, and came to be known as the London Education Trust.

Imbued with the idea of helping the College and establishing a link between Old boys and new students, Arratoon founded the Armenian College Old Boys' Union on December 16, 1909 and was elected the Union's First President.

The historical visit of His Holiness Vazgen I in 1963 stirred the Union into renewed activity resulting in the attempt at revival of the Annual Dinner and the celebration of the Golden Jubilee, which was celebrated in December 1965 in the Armenian College.

The aims and objectives of the Union were to create bonds between the old boys and the College and between them and their Alma Mater. A pleasant way of fulfilling one of the aims has been the holding of formal and informal dinners, which gave opportunity for social contacts between the members and their families and friends.

The categories of membership comprised honorary, life, ordinary, temporary and auxiliary members.

The Union has also donated to the National Defence Fund.

The Armenian Association was founded in 1960. Its primary object was to safeguard the constitutional, economic, social and status rights and privileges of the Armenians in India and their institutions. The Association was also engaged in facilitating the process of obtaining Iranian visas for those Armenians in India who were originally Iranian nationals but afterwards acquired foreign nationality without the prior consent of the Iranian Government. The Association also succeeded renovating and improving the Armenian Churches and other Armenian historical monuments on the territory of India.

However, this important Association no more exists today as the main organisers have left India.

Another important organization in the life of the Armenian Community of Calcutta was the Haikazian Artistic Society, later on the Haikazian Cultural Society. It was founded in 1920. The aim of this Society was to inculcate in young people interest and love in the ancient art and culture of Armenia. For this purpose the Society organised and sponsored theatrical performances, concerts and debates in Armenian language. In the 1960s prominent Armenians from Soviet Armenia engaged in different spheres (arts, music, education, astrophysics) visited Calcutta. Meetings were organised for the Armenian community with these distinguished guests. A few times photo

exhibitions were held to show achievements of Soviet Armenia in education, science and industry.

The most remarkable thing of the Armenian colonies in the world, particularly in India, is that they never lose their connection with their homeland and despite living far from Armenia they try to preserve their language and national identity.

The Haikazian Cultural Society amalgamated with the Armenian Association in 1968.

In India Armenians are distinguished as Anglo-Indians for their fair complexion, the European way of dressing and their names. Armenian surname usually has ending 'ian' or 'yan'. Having, dropped this ending they shortened or altered their surnames and so Khojamalian became Khojamall, Grigoryan became Gregory, Abgaryan became Apcar, Haroutunyan became Arrathoon and so on. Their first names are often European in form, particularly women are given European names: Mary, Jerry, Alice, Suzan, Izabel, Annie, Sonia. Both men and women may use European versions of their first names, so that Haroutune becomes Harry, Krikor - Gregory, or even translations of their names such as Hasmik - Jasmine, Tagouhi - Queenie. It is worth of mentioning that such Indian names as Seth, Vardhan (Vardon), Kochhar, Narayan, Nair, Gauhar have Armenian origin which allows to assume that ancestors of these families were Armenians. The residents of Calcutta are probably the only Indians who are familiar with the Armenians and know that there exists such a nation.

Armenians in Calcutta are dispersed residentially and occupationally. And now when they have sharply decreased in number, the main and painful concern of the Armenian community is the complete assimilation and the disappearance of Armenians as an ethnic group in Calcutta. To be an active Armenia in Calcutta, a member of the Armenian community requires effort, commitment of time and money and careful planning. The Armenian Church Committee several times a year organises gatherings on Armenian holidays in

the Armenian churches, in the Armenian Club and Armenian Sports Club to establish and maintain communication between Armenians and to develop and pass on a tradition of Armenianness. These gatherings are usually crowded as they are attended also by exogamous marriage couples, their children and grandchildren.

The Armenians frequently interact with the non-Armenians. Their ethnicity has become for practical purpose, a part-time ethnicity, restricted largely to the domain of leisure.

As one of the community members stated sadly: "This is a dying community, I can count pure Armenians on my two hands, all others are mixed."

According to the records in the Armenian Church there are 92 Armenians in Calcutta. Provided that we also count non-Indian nationals who are studying or residing in the city, the figure will reach to 200-250. There are almost 250-300 half-Armenians. Among the Armenians there are mostly elderly people aged above 65. Most of them receive charities from the Church. Some of them live in the Homes, which are set up for sick and elderly members of the community.

The Armenians started to leave Calcutta in large numbers when gold mines were opened in Australia. The next stream of departure was in and after 1947 when many private companies were nationalized and the slogan 'India for Indians' was implemented. The Armenians mostly left for England, Indonesia and Australia. Subsequently Armenians left India after 1962, 1965 and 1971 wars. By and large they migrated to England, the United States and Australia in search of better education and job opportunities.

Like the Jews, Parsis and the Anglo-Indians, the Armenians are leaving this city - Calcutta and this country, which had once offered them refuge. With 'Indianisation' standardising social behaviour, slowly but inevitably the Armenian may have finally decided to reconcile the plaguing contradiction between his "Eastern heart" and "Western mind" in favour of the latter.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it could be stated that friendly relations between Armenia and India exist for more than four thousand years. The relations were mostly economic in nature. The journeys were mutual. In Armenia from 149 B.C. till A.D. 301 there existed a Hindu colony, which had more than twenty settlements, temples with their priests, a large army.

Armenia was situated on the crossroad of trade routes from East to West and West to East. Some Armenian towns were considered as joint trade points. Armenian traders carried muslins, spices, precious stones, herbs from India to Europe, and from Armenia to India they mostly carried various dyes, coloured leather and cotton.

India was so familiar to Armenia that one can find detailed information about India in ancient Armenian manuscripts starting from the 5th century A.D..

The identity of culture, language, mythology, creative endeavours have brought the two people together. No trace is to be found in any sources, chronicles that would hint at some hostility or conflict between them.

Though Armenians travelled to India from time immemorial, they started to form permanent settlements only from the 16th century. Armenians in India were not only famous as traders. Among the Indo-Armenians there were prominent poets, army commanders, governors. Living in such a hospitable country, which became a second homeland for the Armenians, the latter could not be indifferent to the freedom movement of the people of India. There were Armenian detachments in the Indian armies.

In the 18th century Armenians were mostly residing in Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Surat. Madras is significant for the Armenians. This is the place where the first Armenian journal named *Azdarar* was started on October

16, 1794, the first Armenian Constitution was written here and progressive Armenians of Madras have their tangible share in preparing of the freedom movement in Armenia.

The Armenians in India can justly be proud of a glorious past but their present and future are not at all bright. They have greatly decreased in number. Now there are hardly 100 Armenians in India, mostly in Calcutta.

The Armenians lost their position of eminent merchants in India. On the one hand it was due to their inability to compete with the British who were equipped with powerful means and were backed by their strong governments. On the other hand it was due to their ties with the Europeans through intermarriages, which greatly weakened their national cohesion. The Armenians left India for Australia, England, the United States where they could find better education and job opportunities.

20th century Armenians have also discarded their national costume. They are not fluent in Armenian language. They have adopted European customs. Because of marriage with Europeans and Euroasians, they have forsaken their Church. However, in spite of all these changes, the Armenian community in India still remains distinct.

Now the main concern of the Armenian Church Committee of Calcutta is to preserve the Armenian colony and its properties. With the efforts of this Church Committee the Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy still functions.

Due to preserve the Armenian community, we would suggest the Church Committee to invite young Armenians, especially from Armenia where the economic situation still remains uncertain and unemployment is very high. These Armenians could be offered jobs inside the community (in the Church, College, Clubs). Armenian professional specialists can share their skills in different joint ventures, e.g. in jewellery business where the

Armenians are considered to be excellent specialists as jewellers as well as cutters of precious stones (especially diamonds); in construction works (buildings, bridges, hydroelectric power plants, etc.); in science and technology (physics, radio physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, information technology), etc.

It would be also suggested to keep in the community the graduates of the Armenian College. Living in Calcutta during their studies (8 or 10 years), these youngsters get used to India, Indian way of life, climate, people, they speak fluently Hindi and Bengali besides English hence they can be of use not only to the Armenian community but also for the Indian society.

The survival of the Armenians outside Armenia in general and in India in particular has been due to the preservation of their national religion, language and customs, avoidance of inter-marriages in the past, loyalty to the government, concentration mainly on commerce and India's age-old acceptance of her minority communities and her tolerance towards other peoples' religions, languages and customs.

The survival of the Armenians outside Armenian in general and in India in particular is due to the preservation of their national religion, language and customs, avoidance of intermarriages with other communities in the past, loyalty to the government, concentration mainly on commerce and India's old-age acceptance of her minority communities and her tolerance towards other peoples' religions, languages and customs.

APPENDICES

AGREEMENT

Between the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to
the East Indies, and the Armenian Nation,
Dated 22nd June 1688

The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies, to all to whom these presents shall come, send greeting.

Whereas representation hath been made to us by Sir Josiah Child, Baronet, our Deputy-Governor, that, upon long conferences by him had with Cogee Phanoos Calandar, an Armenian merchant of eminency, and an inhabitant of Isphahan in Persia, as also with Sir John Chardin of London, Knight, they had, on behalf of the Armenian nation proposed to him several particulars for carrying on a great part of the Armenian trade to India and Persia, and from thence to Europe, by way of England, which will redound greatly to His Majesty's advantage in his customs and to the increase of the English navigation, if the Armenian nation might obtain such license from this Company as will give them encouragement to alter and invert the ancient course of their trade to and from Europe.. And we being always willing to increase and encourage the public trade and navigation of this kingdom, after a serious debate of all the propositions relating to this affair, have thought fit to agree and resolve as follows, viz.:

First. — That the Armenian nation shall now, and at all times hereafter, have equal share and benefit of all indulgencies this Company have or shall at any time hereafter grant to any of their own adventurers or other English merchants whatsoever.

Secondly. — That they shall have free liberty at all times hereafter to pass and repass to and from India in any of the Company's ships on an advantageous terms as any free man whatsoever.

Thirdly. — That they shall have liberty to live in any of the Company's cities, garrisons, or towns in India, and to buy, sell, and purchase land and house, and be capable of all civil offices and preferments in the same manner as they were Englishmen born, and shall always have the free and undisturbed liberty of the exercise of their own religion. And we hereby declare that we will not continue any Governor in our service that shall in any kind disturb or discountenance them in the full enjoyment of all the privileges hereby granted to them, neither shall they pay any other or greater duty in India than the Company's factors, or any other Englishman born, do, or ought to do.

Fourthly. — That they may voyage from any of the Company's garrisons to any ports or places in India, the South Seas, China or the Manillas, in any of the Company's ships, or any permissive free ships allowed by the Company, and may have liberty to trade to China, the Manillas or any other ports or places within the limits of the Company's charter upon equal terms, duties and freights with any free Englishman whatsoever.

But whereas all persons in England do pay for bullion outwards two per cent for freight and permission, and three per cent homewards for diamonds and other precious stones, it is hereby declared and agreed, that the Armenians shall pay three per cent outwards for bullion and two per cent homewards for diamonds, for coral and amber-beads they shall pay six per cent for freight and permission and for coral, amber, raw-cochineal, quick silver, sword blades, fire arms of all sorts, haberdashery wares, iron of all sorts wrought or unwrought, paper, all sorts of stationery wares, English looking or drinking glasses and for all sorts of Norimbergh wares and merchandises, ten per cent for permission and six pounds per ton freight.

That all sorts of leather and Venitian wares and merchandises may be shipped out permission free, paying only six pounds per ton freight. For all cloth or woollen manufactures of what kind or sort soever, they pay twelve and one half per cent in lieu of all charges whatsoever, excepting in the freight and the Company's customs in India. For lead ten per cent permission and three pound per ton freight. For provisions of all sorts for eating and drinking, six pounds per ton freight, but no permission. And for all sorts of goods homeward bound they shall pay in manner and from following, viz., for diamonds, pearls, rubies, all sorts of precious stones, and ambergris, two per cent for freight and permission as aforesaid. For musk of any kind six per cent for freight and permission besides freight. For all raw silk of Persia, twenty-one pounds per ton freight, but no permission custom or any other charges whatsoever, excepting only two and one-half per cent, towards demorage of our ships. For all goods whatsoever of the growth and manufacture of Persia (red Carmania wool excepted, which is hereby totally prohibited) ten per cent permission and the same freights as the Company themselves pay, without any other charges whatsoever. For all sorts of China and Bengal goods, during the Company's indulgence for those kinds of goods, and no longer, in what place soever laden, thirteen per cent for permission and all other charges, whatsoever, over and above the same freight as the Company pay, and the customs hereafter mentioned, viz. All goods outward and homeward bound are to pay the Company in East India five per cent custom on the first cost as per invoices of the said goods, whether they be laden from or delivered into any of the Company's ports or places, or into any other ports or places whatsoever, excepting only from this article all bullion, diamonds, and other precious stones, ambergris, musk and raw Persian silk. And it is agreed that the permission money and freight for all goods outward bound to be paid in India

as aforesaid shall be accounted for at eight and one-half rupees per pound sterling, upon hypothecation of goods of the Company in London. And we do declare that for ease of accounts, the custom due to the Company in East India is to be included together with the other charges, viz. Freight and permission according to the premises and all inserted in one sum upon the respective bills of loading which sum is always to be paid before the delivery of the goods to the persons mentioned in the said bills of loading which is the true intent of the hypothecation before expressed. That all goods which have once paid custom are not to pay any again, either upon importation or exportation of the same goods to the place where they first pay it, or to any other port or place belonging to us in the East Indies. That every person that shall take passages on any of the Company's ships shall pay in East India twelve pounds sterling for his permission outwards, at the rate of eight rupees and one-half per pound sterling; and the like sum to be paid here for every person that shall take passage homewards, besides eight pounds per head for sea provisions, which is hereby agreed shall always be paid in London. And for such persons who shall board at the Captain's table, they shall pay ten guineas to the Captain for the same. But the servants shall be messed apart by themselves, and always have the same allowance of ship provisions as the officers and the seamen of the ship have or ought to have. And it is also granted to the said Armenians that the passengers shall be allowed, both out and home, to carry with them their wearing clothes, furniture and provisions, not exceeding one quarter of a ton for each man, freight free. And whereas the said Armenians have used to drive a great trade from India to Turkey overland, by way of Persia and Arabia, and are now desirous to drive that whole trade by the way of England, it is hereby declared and agreed that the said Armenians have liberty to send upon any of the Company's ship for England, any sorts of goods of East India consigning to the Company by true invoices and bills of loading, and not otherwise, paying ten per cent permission on the value of the said goods in London, besides the same freight as we ourselves pay. And it is hereby declared that the Company have liberty to detain and keep in their possession all such goods as shall be consigned unto them as aforesaid, until they have shipped them off upon English shipping, bound to Turkey, Venice or Leghorn and taken security that they shall not be landed in any other ports or places of Europe except the place to which they shall be directed by the said Armenian proprietors or their agents.

And, lastly, it is declared and agreed, that notwithstanding anything aforesaid it shall and may be lawful for the said Company to reserve and keep for their own use any of the said goods so intended for Turkey, as aforesaid, paying the proprietors one third part clear profit on the first cost as aforesaid; all freight charges, and disbursements whatsoever being first

deducted and foreprized, eight rupees in India being in the case to be accounted for one pound sterling

In witness whereof, the Governor, Deputy-Governor and three of the Committee of the said Company have hereunto set their hands and caused the larger Seal of the said Company to be affixed, this two-and-twentieth day of June, Anno Domini 1688, and in the fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James the Second, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc.

*BENJAMIN BATHURST, Governor
JOSIAH CHILD, Deputy Governor*

*Worcester,
John Morre,
George Boun*

AGREEMENT

The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies, to all to whom it may concern, sending greeting.

Whereas it had been represented to us, that the Armenian nation have a desire to carry on a trade and commerce with our people in the East Indies, we do for the better encouragement of that nation to settle and cohabit in the several garrisons, cities and towns in the East Indies under our jurisdiction, by these presents declare, grant and agree, that whenever forty or more of the Armenian nation shall become inhabitants in any of the garrisons, cities or towns belonging to the Company in the East Indies, the said Armenians shall not only have and enjoy the free use and exercise of their religion but there shall also be allowed to them a parcel of ground to erect a church thereon for the worship and service of God in their own way. And we will also at our own charge, cause a convenient church to be built with stone and other solid material to their own good liking. And the said Governor and Company will also allow fifty pounds per annum, during the space of seven years, for the maintenance of such priest or minister as they shall choose to officiate therein.

Given under the Company's larger Seal, as also under the hands of the Governor, Deputy-Governor and three of the Committee of the said Company, this two-and-twentieth day of June, Anno Domini 1688, and in the fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James the Second, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc.

*BENJAMIN BATHURST, Governor
JOSEPH CHILD, Deputy Governor*

*Worcester,
John Morre,
George Boun*

AGREEMENT

The Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading to the East Indies, to all to whom it may concern, sending greeting.

Whereas Cogee Phanoos Calandar, an Armenian merchant of eminency, and an inhabitant of Isphahan, in Persia, hath taken great trade to be carried on in English shipping by himself and others of the Armenian nation; the said Governor and Company in consideration thereof do, by these presents (at the request of the said Cogee Phanoos Calandar) freely grant unto him and his family the sole trade of garnet, he paying ten per cent custom for the same, and the usual freight paid by the Company. And the said Company do hereby declare that they will neither trade in the said commodity themselves, nor suffer any other persons, English or stranger, for the future to trade or traffick in that commodity.

Given under the Company's larger Seal, as also under the hands of the Governor, Deputy-Governor and three of the Committee of the said Company, this two-and-twentieth day of June, Anno Domini 1688, and in the fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord James the Second, by the Grace of God, King of England, Scotland, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith etc.

*BENJAMIN BATHURST, Governor
JOSEPH CHILD, Deputy Governor*

*Worcester,
John Morre,
George Boun*

Letter from the Court of Directors in London to their Deputy and Council of Bombay under date the 26th January 1692.

"Stores of all kinds wee have sent you by this ship, the Modona, and what souldiers wee could procure. But it is very difficult to get any at this time while the King [William III] has occasion for such vast numbers of men in Flanders. Among those wee send great mortality has happened, as well in their passage out as after their arrival, which has put us on discourse with the Armenian Christians here, to see if by their means wee could procure some private souldiers of their nation from Isphahan, which wee should esteem, if wee could get them as good as English. Not that they have altogether the same courage which Englishmen have, but because by their conduct they are now so united to the English nation, and particularly to this Company, that in effect wee and they have but the common interest. They are very near to our national and reformed religion, as sober and temperate men, and know how to live in health in a hot climate.. Coja Phanoos Calandar tells us it will be difficult to get any considerable number of them to be souldiers: they are universally addicted to trade, but some few, he thinks, may be picked up at Surat and he will write to his friends at Julpa to see if they can persuade any from thence to come to you to make an experiment of their entertainment, and of their liking or dislike of the service."

"If you can procure any Armenian Christians to be souldiers, wee doe allow you to give them the same pay as our English souldiers and forty shillings gratuity and the charge of their passage from Gombroom [Bandar Abbas] to Bombay, wee would not have above fifty or sixty in our pay at one time, and if you had the like number of Madagassar slaves to teach the exercise of arms and to do some inferior duty under our English souldiers, being listed upon an English Captaine kept in a Company by themselves under the Dutch manner, and allowing them a competent proportion of rice, a red cap and red coat and some other trifles to please them, not having above fifty or sixty at a time, and they never to have a custody of their own arms, wee hope such a contrivance might be a good Auxiliary aid to our own garrison, especially when English souldiers are scarce and wee need some balance of power. For take it as an infallible constant rule, that the more castes the more safety and the less danger of mutiny. Wee know their is a necessity for increasing our English souldiers and wee will doe it as soone and as much as wee possibly can. In the meantime, Armenian Christians if you could have them are the very best men to be trusted and next to them Madagassar Coffrees."

**QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN INTERVIEWS
WITH CALCUTTA ARMENIANS**

1. Name
2. Sex and age
3. Parents
4. Where was the person born?
5. Education
6. Occupation
7. Languages known
8. Knowledge of Armenian history/songs/dances
9. Links with Soviet Armenia/independent Republic of Armenia
10. Have you ever visited Armenia?
11. Which festivals do you celebrate here (Indian/Armenian) and how?
12. Differences and similarities with the Indian culture, habits
13. Association with other communities/minorities in India
14. What is the percentage of inter-marriages?
15. Number of Armenians now living in India
16. Reasons for decline. Where did they migrate and why?
17. Links with the Armenians living in other parts of India
18. The situation of Armenians during the 1962, 1965 and 1971 wars
19. What does it mean – to be an Armenian in India?
20. Is the community of Calcutta strong?
21. Are there any Armenian political parties?
22. Are Armenians interested in political life of India?
23. Information about Armenian Church Committee (elections, number of members, their responsibilities)
24. Information about the Armenian College & Philanthropic Academy
25. Information about Armenian Club and Armenian Sports Club
26. What is to be done to preserve Armenianness?
27. Are there any projects, which would benefit the community?

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