

INDO-PERSIAN TRADE DURING MUGHAL RULE: SOME NEW INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

Indo-Persian trade predates the Mughal rule in India. Since ancient times, both inland and sea-borne trade flourished between India and Persia. The coming of the Mughals in sixteenth century deepened the pre-existing links between both the regions. This paper tries to explore the nature of trade between India and Persia during the Mughal rule. That includes: channels of trade (i.e. sea route and land route), centres of trade, trade items of import and export, customs duty levied from import and export etc. The paper also tries to explore the role played by the western colonial powers like, Portugal, France and Britain in 17th century for the decline of the Indo-Persian trade.

Keywords: Indo-Persian Trade, Centres of Trade, Trade Items, Import and Export

INTRODUCTION

The coming of the Mughals in sixteenth century deepened the pre-existing links between India and Central Asia. The two regions drew closer in terms of trade population and culture. Material life was deeply affected by the accelerated movement of goods and people, while institution of learning, religion and politics in each area bore the imprint of other. During the Mughal era, Persia was one of the greatest empires in the world. The most important city in Persia was Isfahan which means *nesf jahan*ⁱ. The Persian culture was so rich that we can find its image on the cultural mirror of Mughal India. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the economy of Muslim controlled Asia was in some respect single and integrated system. The rulers of these empires had a mutual interest in stabilizing and preserving the trade routes. In addition to sea routes and the land route through Qandahar which connected India with Persia and beyond west, the *Ain i Akbari* lists seven different routes through the *Hindukush* employed by *Turanis* travelling between India and Central Asia. The efforts of the Safavid, Mughal and Uzbek ruler to facilitate trade bore fruit which was advantageous to allⁱⁱ. As Stephen dale has noted "the simultaneous pacification of trade routes and construction of roads and caravan saraes throughout north India. Iran and Turan in the late sixteenth century established exceptionally

favourable conditions for trade throughout the entire region". Moving goods became faster, less dangerous and therefore cheaper.

Mughals also inherited the trade oriented mind from their ancestors. It was the normal policy of the Timurid rulers, both in their original Central Asian homelands and in India to encourage trade. Mughals followed the established pattern of Sher Shah Suri and especially Akbar and Jahangir encouraged trade by linking together various part of the country through an efficient system of road and abolishing many inland tolls and duties. The Mughals maintained this general policy, but their rule was distinguished by the importance that foreign trade attained by the end of the sixteenth century. This was partly the result of the discovery of the new sea routes to India; but even so, progress would have been limited if conditions within the country had not been favorable.

The Mughals welcomed the foreign trader, provided ample protection and securities for his transactions, and levied a very low custom duty not more than the expansion of local handicraft and industry resulted in a reservoir of exportable goods. Indian export mainly consisted of manufactured articles, with cotton clothes in great demand in Europe and elsewhere. Indigo, saltpeter, spices, opium, sugar, woolen and silk cloth of various kinds yarn, asafoetida, salt, beads, borax, turmeric, lac, sealing wax, and drugs of various kinds, were also exported. The articles which imported were bullion, horsesⁱⁱⁱ, and a certain quantity of luxury goods for the upper class, like raw silk, coral, amber, precious stones, superior textiles like silk, velvet, brocade, and broad cloth, perfumes drugs, china goods, and European wines. In return the Indian merchants insisting on payment in gold and silver and this was not popular in England and rest of the world, and writers on economics affairs in the seventeenth century frequently complained, as did sir Thomas roe, that "Europe bleedeth to enrich Asia". India alone sent cloth to almost half of the world textile industry were well established in India during Akbar also under his successors.

TRADE WITH PERSIA

Carpet was the major item of import from Persia^{iv} takya-namads or woolen coverlets were brought from Kabul and Persia^v. Kamkhab was also imported from Persia^{vi}. Akbar appointed experienced workmen, who have produced many masterpieces. The gilims of Iran and Turan are no more thought of, although merchants still import carpets from Goshkan, Khuzistan, Kirman, and Sabzwan^{vii}, all kind of carpet weaver have settled here, and drive a flourishing trade. These are found in every town especially in Agra, Fathpur and Lahore. We can also say that as Shireen Moosvi wrote that the Persian demand for Gujarat cloth continued after the fall of Hormuz^{viii}. Persian and Armenian merchants carried "Cambay" cotton goods on board of English ship in the seventeenth century. Silk cloth woven in Sind had a large market in Persia and turkey and she

also analyze that Moreland's finding that Indian textiles exports were an important fact of the world trade of the time.

Long-distant trade, also helps to develop urban commodity production, it also helps in the development of the internal economy as we find that master weavers from Persia, Kashmir and Turkistan it also helps in opening of large number of factories at important centers. Better quality of horse and dried fruits were also imported from Persia, Samarqand, Balkh and Bukhara^{ix}. The economy, culture or trade of both the great empires Mughals and Safavid were the reflection of each other and also depended on each other.

ROUTES AND CENTERS

Now the most emphasized topic that is the routes and centers of trade and also the cities of attraction of the merchants and traders either it is Persian European or Central Asian. But now describing about the trade of India with Persia so the description of Qandhar is too important. Kabul and Qandhar was the most important center as they were called as the 'two gateways of Hindustan' commanding the two important routes one leading to Central Asia and the other to Persia. But when mentioning about Qandhar as a trading centre it always create problem during that time. Mughals and Safavid were always eager to control over Qandhar as it had an economic importance both wanted to control the trade routes there were regular attack on Qandhar for the supremacy mostly the year between 1648 -53. Trade over that route must have been practically block for most of these years. There was the evidence that land route was also not yet opened in 1651. so import and export was also not possible and it affected the trade and economy which indirectly also effects the society and life standard.

There was a sharp decline in market and in the north-western mints during 1646-55^x. embargo was laid on all Indian exports to Persia even by sea.^{xi} The English factories also wrote about the tussle between the two great Monarchs and also said that this conflict was in their favour because the trade wholly fall upto them^{xii} and finally Indian economy face the effects of this falling of trade in the hands of the European. The last three century saw the dominance of Europeans on Asia as well as on India

Trade was carried from Surat to Persia which was called by the servants of the company as the 'store house of all India'^{xiii}. There was a deep link between India and Persia the tradition of Mughals was deeply rooted in Persia so also the politics and economy as well as technology. figured silks, cottons and brocades of the highest quality were woven in India during the seventeenth century there is a view that the manufacture of Indian figured silks is a relatively recent importation from Persia, but no direct documentary evidence is available in support of this view. However, in 1679 master observed at Ellur, Andhra the manufacture of carpets on upright looms with coloured woolen weft-threads^{xiv} woven in accordance with patterns set on paper; and

he was told that the industry had been established there a century earlier by Persian immigrants. Importation of Persian weaving devices and techniques during the Mughal period is, therefore, quite likely. It is also said that calico printing was coming possibly from Persia. Akbar offered the foreign carpet weavers to settle in Agra, Fathpur and Lahore and manufacture carpets to compete with those imported from Persia.

The work of commercial reconstruction which began with the resumption of trade in 1657 continued during the next two decades. The trade and economy of these empires were generally same and they favoured each other as we find the English traders complaining. The Armenians were favoured and privilege given by the Persians. The silver currency used in these three powerful empires means the Safavid the Mughals and the Uzbeks was originally based on the Tanga-I-Shahrukhi, established by the Timurid Shahrukh in the fifteenth century. This was replaced in Central Asia by Khanis^{xv} in India by rupees and in Iran by Tumans. As K.N Chaudhari says that the coinage system of Persia was more complicated, there were two types of silver coins the Shahi and the Abbasi. The acceptability of certain types of coins for commercial transaction in Asia was closely related to the confidence which merchants were prepared place on their intrinsic metallic content, as it eliminated the bullion dealer and need for laborious and time consuming examination. Persians were also given privileges in India as the culture and tradition was same but there was also some bitterness between Indians and Persian due to the religious sect, the Mughals were the Sunnis and the Safavids were the Shias. Their culture, tradition and architecture etc. even the court language under Mughal was Persian. As Foltz finds that the enduring effects of Mughals deference to Persian [or Safavid] prestige can be seen in an account by the mid seventeenth century French traveler Francois Bernier, who states that only Persian ambassadors were allowed to salute the Mughal emperor 'according to the custom of their own country' or to deliver their letters to him without the intervention of an Omrah^{xvi}. As I want to describe this in the words of Bernier. On his entry into the capital, the ambassador was received with every demonstration of respect. The bazars through which he passed were all newly decorated, and the cavalry lining both sides of the way extended beyond a league; many Omrahs, accompanied with instruments of music, attended the processions, and a salute of artillery was fired upon his entering the gate of the fortress, or royal palace. Aurengzebe welcomed him with the greatest politeness; manifested no displeasure at his making the salam^{xvii} in the Persian manner, and unhesitatingly received from his hands the letter of which he was the bearer; in token of peculiar respect, nearly to the crowns of his head^{xviii}.

At that particular era means seventeenth century in Asia there were the monopolization of commodities started. The immediate and short term monopolization of a particular commodity or its arbitrary confiscation might be provoked by the market condition, but their only result would be an unpredictable increase in the merchants expenses and action of this kind would therefore

only lead to an increase in the non-transparency of the market and an augmentation of the price fluctuation and thereby the profit margin necessary to maintain the supply to the peddling trade. Such monopolization was either directed centrally or locally. The two great examples of centrally directed state trade within the area investigated; the Portuguese pepper trade and the Persian silk trade^{xix}.

In the early seventeenth century, the Dutch [1606] and the English [1607] established their first trading posts in India in an attempt to wrest control of the profitable spice trade from the Portuguese. Following the defeat of the Portuguese in 1615, the Dutch and the English companies would spend much of the seventeenth century in the struggle to secure monopoly rights over the trade of certain spices, and trading privileges for other valuable goods such as textiles and opium. The decline of the Dutch grip on Asian maritime trade after 1670, the dwindling competition from France in the later half of the eighteenth century, and the conquest of Bengal in 1757, placed Britian squarely on a trajectory towards territorial and commercial hegemony on the land and in the ocean.

The Indian sub-continent, however, had been connected to the fringes of Europe, the near east and central Asia [as well as east and south east Asia] not for centuries, but for several millennia before 1498. There was also the turning point in commercial activities, economic affairs and the pattern of trade was also change as it is discuss by Jagjeet Lally.

A fact of life with which the student of India's medieval economy has learned to live is the absence of statistics. The history of foreign trade therefore becomes a discussion of the structure of commerce and the role of the merchants in it. The Indian merchants investing in the trade of the Indian Ocean was the most important figure in the country's overseas trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries^{xx}. It was in the eighteenth century that Indian shipping and the Indian Ocean trade declined in importance to make way for European carriers and trade with Europe. Arab and Persian merchants usually journeyed to Cambay to take ships to Malacca. Just as Indian merchants traded and settled more or less freely in Arab as the Gujarati's settled in Persian towns, Arab and Persian merchants were welcomed all along the west coast of India. Cambay, which was by far the most important Indian port of the period, had large colonies of Arab and Persia^{xxi}. Persian Gulf was the major route at that time upon the whole the trade in the Indian Ocean remained firmly in the hands of Indian ship owing merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The political scenario change in Muslim dominated area due to the conquest of Basra and it also affected the trade and commerce of the whole area. The Safavid and Mughals energetically encouraged the pilgrim traffic to the Islamic holy cities in Hijaz.

CONCLUSION

Trade with Persia under Mughals was very flourishing as the Mughal India was influenced by the Persian tradition. The Persian traders were the privileged one in Mughal empire. But Qandhar was the bone of contention between the two empires, for a long period there was no trade. Apart from these the relation was good overall, number of commodities were imported and exported specially silk was exported to Persia and carpets was imported from there. The tradition and culture of Mughal India was also the shadow of Persian culture. Persia was the principal importer of indigo from India. It was carried by the Armenians and 'Moor' merchants [i.e. Mughals or Persians]. Horses

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