Mughal India had active trade links with Iran and Central Asia in the seventeenth century. This chapter tries to provide a comprehensive picture of this commerce. It examines the commodities involved in the trade with special emphasis on textiles and horses, the main export and import of the Mughal economy respectively. It also discusses the role of various merchant groups like the Afghans and the Armenians in this trade.

The Trade with Iran

Although most of Mughal India's trade with Iran was conducted by sea, a significant part of it was channeled through the overland routes. This is clear from the accounts of contemporary travelers. In 1611, William Finch reported the arrival of two large caravans from Persia in the city of Lahore.¹ Coverte, present in Kandahar in the same year, writes:

There is a great and continuall traffique by land, from Persia, Indestand, Mesopotamia, and from all partes between that and China, with all sorts of

¹ Foster, edited, Early Travels, pp 161,167.
merchandise and commodities which those Countries yeelde; For there are continually 7 or 8 thousand camels about the Citie which trade to and fro with merchandise.”

In 1615 Richard Steel and John Crowther, two Englishmen who traveled from Lahore to Isfahan noted that the normal annual traffic on the Kandahar route consisted of 3000 to 4000 camels but the Iranian-Portuguese naval war over the possession of Hormuz had diverted the sea-borne trade to the land route so that 12000 to 14000 camels now passed to Iran every year. The city which was the meeting point of merchants of India, Persia and Turkey had become bigger in size due to the increased amount of trade flowing through it. In the same year Thomas Coryat came from Iran to India in a caravan consisting of 2000 camels, 1500 horses and 800 mules. In 1621 the Dutchman Von Poser traveled from Kandahar to Agra in a caravan of 2000 camels. A Dutch report of 1639 estimated that 25,000 camels mostly carrying Indian textiles used to come to Isfahan every year. From Manrique’s account of 1641 it is clear that trade on the route was regular. When he arrived in Kandahar, he found that a caravan to Persia had just left. Fortunately for him it was followed by another one coming from Multan. He also notes that a

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2 Wheeler, Early Travels in India, p 63.
3 Foster, Early Travels, p 260.
5 Manrique, Travels, vol 2, p 261.
yearly caravan to Persia started from Bakhar in Sind.\textsuperscript{7} He describes Kandahar as a busy commercial town where prices were high because of the presence of large numbers of foreigners.\textsuperscript{8}

Trade on the Kandahar route was subjected to occasional interruptions caused by the Mughal–Safavid tussle over possession of the strategic city. From 1595 to 1622, Kandahar was held by the Mughals. The Safavids possessed it from 1622 to 1638. In 1638 the Mughals regained Kandahar as a result of defection of its Persian Governor. During this period it was reported that the closure of the land route had forced the caravan merchants to take their goods to the port-city of Surat.\textsuperscript{9} Kandahar was re-conquered by the Safavids in 1649. The Mughal launched three expeditions between 1649 and 1653 to regain the town but they were not successful. This war had a damaging effect on the caravan trade. An employee of the English East India Company reported in April 1649 that 'the beleaguering of Kandahar by the Persian king has obstructed the land trade between the two countries and has thereby much improved the trade of Gombroon as a result, all the English goods... have been sold at a good profit'.\textsuperscript{10} The situation continued to be the same in the next year.\textsuperscript{11} Shah Jahan's decision of prohibiting Indian merchants from trading with Persia resulted in the English company making

\textsuperscript{7} Manrique, \textit{Travels}, vol 2, p 232. \\
\textsuperscript{8} Manrique, \textit{Travels}, vol 2, p 261. \\
\textsuperscript{9} Foster, edited, \textit{English Factories in India}, 1637-41, p 125,211. \\
\textsuperscript{10} Foster, edited, \textit{English Factories in India}, 1646-50, p 261. \\
\textsuperscript{11} Foster, edited, \textit{English Factories}, 1646-50, p 280. 'The trade with Persia is at present very profitable owing to the hinderance of land traffic by the wars over Kandahar'
huge profits out of the sale of Indian goods at Gombroon. But there was no complete break in the trade for in 1651 it was reported that although the land route had not been opened, a caravan had still managed to arrive in Iran.

Writing in the 1650's, Tavernier notes that the Multan route was no longer used by merchants going to Persia who now preferred the way via Kabul. Steensgaard interprets this change as a consequence of the gradual decline of the Iranian demand for Indian goods. He suggests that the markets of Kabul could have compensated for the reduced sales in Iran. Other sources provide a different perspective. In 1654 Richard Bell noted, 'Qandahar brings vast customes to the king of Pertia for theres noe other way into the northern parts of it from Multan and other parts by land expect it come by way of Sindy. In 1660 it was noted that a caravan left for India from Qazwin every two months. A large caravan carrying Surat textiles arrived in Isfahan in 1666. In 1667, a caravan was robbed of a significant quantity of gold near Kandahar. Such attacks became more frequent in the next decade. While these incidents indicate the risks involved in the caravan trade they also attest to its continuing vitality. During the last decade of the

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13 William Foster edited, English Factories, 1651-54, p 64.
14 Steensgaard, "The route through Quandahar", p 72.
16 Floor, The Economy, p 209.
17 Floor, The Economy, p 207.
18 Rudi Mathee, 'Between Venice and Surat: The trade in gold in late Safavid Iran,' Modern Asian Studies, Vol 34, pt 1, p 229.
seventeenth century, however, tribal disturbances had brought the Indo-Iranian caravan trade to a standstill. William Lee, an Englishman present in the city of Mashhad in 1696 reported that the trade of the city depended upon India from where textiles, shawls and indigo used to be imported but no caravans had arrived from India that year as the road was unsafe due to a civil war among the Uzbeks.19

The Indo-Central Asian Trade

Active trade relations have existed between India and Central Asia since early medieval times. The Mughal Emperor Babar speaks of the commercial importance of Kabul in his era. He writes that it was frequented by caravans from Kashgar, Balkh, Badakshan, Samarkand, Bukhara and other places. The products of Khorasan, Turkey, Iraq and China were readily available there. From India caravans of '10, 15 or 20,000 heads of houses' arrived every year. A profit of 300 to 400 percent was not considered unusual by the traders.20 Central Asian traders did not buy the desired Indian goods from Kabul only. They also traveled to North India, Gujarat and the Deccan.21 Alexander Jenkinson, who visited Bokhara in the mid sixteenth century, commented that several merchants from India, Persia,
Russia and other countries used to visit the city. He also observed that one third of the city was occupied by markets and the residence of traders.\textsuperscript{22}

The establishment of the Mughal Empire heralded a new phase in Indo-Central Asian relations. The Mughals took special interest in promoting contacts between their original homeland and their newly acquired kingdom. Various measures were taken to make travel across the Hindu Kush safer and more convenient. As a result the flow of goods and people between the two regions increased. We hear of a caravan bringing 1000 camel loads of goods from Kabul in 1586.\textsuperscript{23} Such statements on the volume of the Indo-Turanian trade are rare but the accounts of European travelers clearly show that the commerce was vigorous. In the 1630s, Henry Bonford, an employee of the English East Company described Lahore as “the prime city of traffic in India” where the commodities produced in the adjacent regions were collected. The Uzbek merchants came here in large numbers along with the Armenian and Persian merchants.\textsuperscript{24} The Italian traveler Manucci, who lived in India for a very long time, calls Lahore the ‘key to the kingdoms of Kabul, Balkh, Tartary, Kashmir, Persia, Baloches. Multan, Bhakkar

\textsuperscript{24} William Foster, \textit{English Factories}, 1637-41, p 135; Edward Terry says something similar. “Lahore, the chiefe city, is well built very large populous and rich, the chiefe city of trade in all India,” Foster, edited, \textit{Early Travels}, p 292.
and Tattah. He also notes that the Attock fort on the Indus was the halting place for caravans arriving from various places of Central Asia. As many as 150,000 horses and several camels came to India every year carrying various types of fruits. Thevenot writes that the province of Kabul was very rich due to its 'great trade' with Central Asia and Persia. 'That province lies so conveniently for Traffick, that what is wanting in it, is bought from all parts; and things are very cheap there'. Tavernier describes Kabul as 'a large town' and 'a great meeting place for Tartary, India and Persia.' Bernier mentions that rich Uzbek merchants used to visit Delhi on a regular basis. Likewise, Indian merchants regularly visited Bukhara carrying various types of goods.

Apart from the Uzbek territories, Mughal India also had trade relations with the kingdom of Kashgar situated across the Karakoram Mountain. In the early seventeenth century it was reported that a caravan proceeded from Lahore to Kashgar every year. There was another and more direct route to Kashgar via Kashmir. Caravans used to regularly go to 'Katay' from Kashmir via Ladakh but the route was closed by the king of Ladakh after Shah Jahan's attack on his kingdom in 1639. Merchants then had to take the route through Baltistan or Little

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Tibet. The prohibition on Kashmiri merchant's entry into Ladakh was perhaps lifted in 1663 when the new king agreed to be loyal to the Mughals. Sujan Rai Bhandari writes that merchants of Kashgar resided in late seventeenth century Delhi.

Commodities; Exports

Cotton textiles were the main item carried from India to Iran and Turan. This is not surprising considering that the Medieval Indian textile industry produced enormous quantities of good quality cloth. The dependence of the Iranians on Indian cloth is testified by Edward Pettus, an official of the English East Company in the following words, "The bannians, the Chief Marchantes whoe vende linene of India, of all sorts and prices, which the countrye cannot be without, except the people should goe naked". John Fryer writes that the sarays of Shiraz were full of Indian merchants carrying textiles. Another observer of the early seventeenth century noted that high quality Indian cloth was available in the markets of the North Iranian town of Kazwin. According to Chardin, the Iranians

34 Janet Rizvi, 'The Trans-Karakoram trade in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,' Indian Economic and Social History Review. Vol 31, No 1, 1994, p 30.
37 John Cartwright, 'Observations of Master John Cartwright in his Voyage from Aleppo to Hispaan, and back again... in Purchas his Pilgrimes, Vol 8, pp 506-7.
manufactured coarse calicoes but they did not make finer varieties as they were available from India at lesser prices. Similarly, the Iranians preferred to buy Indian painted linen rather than trying to make it at home. \(^{38}\) According to a Dutch survey of 1634, 211,000 pieces of Indian cotton textiles were sent overland to Iran while 383,000 pieces were sent by the sea route. \(^{39}\)

A substantial part of the cargo of Indian textiles reaching Iran was sent further west. The Ottoman Empire imported large quantities of Indian textiles, mostly through the Red Sea and the Gulf routes, but also via the land route. \(^{40}\) Manrique reports the departure of a caravan carrying Indian cloth from Isfahan for Baghdad. \(^{41}\) There is no information on the volume of Indian cloth sent to West Asia but judging from the size, wealth and tastes of the inhabitants of the Ottoman territory, Gilles Veinstein concludes that the Ottoman Empire was an important market for Indian fabrics. \(^{42}\)

As in the case of Persia and Turkey, there was a large demand for Indian textiles in Central Asia. In 1558 Jenkinson noted that Indian merchants sold fine white cloth in Bukhara which was used for making turbans and other cotton cloth that was used for making apparel. The rulers of Bukhara purchased large quantities

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\(^{39}\) Steensgaard, 'The route through Quandahar', p 69.

\(^{40}\) Gilles Veinstein, 'Commercial Relations between India and the Ottoman Empire(late fifteenth to late eighteenth centuries): a few notes and hypotheses,' in Chaudhury and Morineau, eds, *Merchants, Companies and Trade*, pp 195-112


\(^{42}\) Gilles Veinstein, 'Commercial Relations between India and the Ottoman Empire', p 104.
of Indian cloth. In 1639 the ruler of Balkh, Nadir Muhammad khan distributed turbans made in Benaras and the Deccan to many of his subjects.\footnote{Audrey Burton, \textit{The Bukharans}, p 450.}

A sizeable part of the textiles sent to Iran and Central Asia originated from the province of Punjab. Abundant cultivation of cotton along with the aristocracy’s demand for fine cloth were important factors responsible for the emergence of several towns of Punjab as centres of textile production. Proximity to West Asian and Central Asian markets also contributed in a significant way to the growth of these towns. Among them the more important ones were Lahore, Multan, Sirhind, Samana. Various types of cloth were made in Lahore.\footnote{William Foster, \textit{English Factories, 1637-41}, p 135.} The city also served as an outlet for the products of near-by areas.\footnote{Francisco Pelsaert, \textit{Johangir’s India: The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert}, Translated by W.H. Moreland and P. Geyl, p 31; William Foster, \textit{English Factories, 1637-41}, p 136.} Multan’s manufactures included white cotton goods, napkins and coarse chintz.\footnote{Foster, \textit{English Factories, 1637-41}, p 135; About Sirynam(Sirhind), Manrique writes that ‘it is a city which is filled with followers of the mercantile profession on account of the great store of various cotton goods made there’, \textit{Travels}, Vol 2, p 182.} Sirhind produced chintz and red muslin.\footnote{Foster, \textit{English Factories, 1637-41}, p 135.} The cloth of Samana was purchased by Persian and Armenian merchants.\footnote{Foster, \textit{English Factories, 1637-41}, p 135.}

Other towns of Punjab where cotton textiles were manufactured were Sialkot, Gujrat, Bajwara, Sultanpur, Machiwara and Batala. Sialkot was a prominent manufacturing centre where ‘embroidery with silk and gold threads and many kinds of bafta, chira(scarf), fotah(sheet), sozani, adsaka, table cloth, tray
covers, small tents' were made. Embroidery work was also carried out at the town of Gujarat. The artisans of Bajwara and Sultanpur manufactured several kinds of textiles. Not much is known about the manufacturing activities carried out in Batala but on the basis of the size of the town, Chetan Singh suggests that it must have been a producer of textiles. The English factory records refer to the cloth made in Machiwara.

Apart from the cloth manufactured in the Punjab, the textiles of several other cities of Mughal India also attracted the West Asian and Central Asian merchants. Delhi was visited by foreign merchants for its chintz which was said to be slightly inferior in quality compared to the Masulipatnam variety. At Panipat was made white cloth that was sent to Lahore and Sirhind for sale. Agra was another important market for silk and cotton textiles.

The city of Patna was frequented by merchants from several places for its wide variety of textiles. In 1620 a visitor to the city noted:

The Mogoles and Pragchaes are here like bees, whose cheefest provisions are mandyles(turban cloth), girdells, layches and doupattas of Malda...also a sorte of thin cloth called Caymeconyes of Beyhare and are

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49 Sujan Rai, Khulasat, p 95.  
50 Sujan Rai, Khulasat, p 98.  
51 Sujan Rai, Khulasat, p 83.  
53 Foster, English Factories, 1642-45, p 204, 301.  
54 Foster, English Factories, 1637-41, p 135; Manrique notes that dyed cotton cloth and chites(chintz)were among the goods made in Delhi, Travels, Vol 2, p 180.  
55 Foster, English Factories, 1637-41, p 135.  
much like unto coarse cassaes, 14 coveds longe and four-fifths of a coved broade, of 40,50,60 per courge. The ise are brought for trade to Lahore, and thence for Persia’.

The Englishman Peter Mundy informs that ‘Mughal’ and Persian merchants were a common sight in Patna. It was reported that in the early seventeenth century, the Armenian and Central Asian merchants procured expensive calicoes worth one lakh rupees every year in the city. Like Patna, Banaras produced large quantities of cotton goods. Central Asian sources speak of ‘futai Benarasi’.

Sironj, situated in Central India on the road between Agra and Surat was another city that specialized in cotton fabrics. Tavernier writes “There is a large trade there in all kinds of coloured calicoes, which they call chites, with which all the common people of Persia and Turkey are clad and which are used in several

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57 Foster, English Factories, 1618-21, p 195.
59 Kumkum Chatterjee, Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India, Bihar 1733-1820, Leiden Brill, p 27. About Bihar, Thomas Bowrey says, ‘This is a country of very great traffic and commerce, and is really the great gate that openeth into Bengale and Orixa, and so consequently into most parts of India, vizt from the northerne kingdoms or empires (by land), namely Persia, Carmania, Georgia, Tartaria, etc. The commerce of those countries are transported hither by Caffila, who alsoe export the commodities brought hither by the English and the Dutch, as alsoc of this Kingdome’. Thomas Bowrey, A Geographical Account of the Countries around the Bay of Bengal, 1669-1679, edited by R.C. Temple, Delhi Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers and Distributers, 1997.
60 Pelsaert, Jahanig’s India, p 7, Naqvi, Urban Centres, p 121-3.
61 Mansura Haidar, Central Asia, p 468.
other countries for bedcovers and tablecloths". In the late seventeenth century merchants of Kabul used to travel to Gwalior to purchase coarse printed cloth.

Indian silk was also exported to Central Asia in spite of the region's abundant production of the commodity. Tavernier writes that the Central Asian merchants used to buy six to seven thousand bales of silk every year from Kasimbazaar. Like cotton fabrics, Kashmiri shawls were widely popular in Asian markets. Woolen textiles were manufactured in Kashmir since at least the tenth century. The introduction of the Kani technique of weaving from Central Asia during the reign of Sultan Zayn al-Abidin, (1420-70) who is noted for encouraging handicraft production, was an important step in the development of the industry.

Abul Fazl records that Emperor Akbar encouraged the industry and introduced the practice of dyeing the Tus shawls. He also induced some weavers of the city of Andijan, located in eastern Turkistan to migrate to Kashmir. His successor Jahangir who is known for his love for Kashmir mentions about different varieties of shawls in his autobiography. Bernier noted that the shawls were made in large numbers and even children were employed in their manufacture. He also noted that

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62 Tavernier, Travels, vol 1, p 56.
64 Tavernier, Travels, Vol 2, p 2-3.
66 Abul Fazl, Ain, vol 1, p 97-8. The Tus was the hair of the Tibetan antelope. The Pashm or hair of the Tibetan goat was the usual raw material used to make the shawls.
67 Jahangir, Tuzuk, p 147-8.
the water of Kashmir imparted softness to the wool. That was the reason for the failure of attempts to manufacture similar shawls elsewhere. 68 Merchants from Russia, Central Asia and Iran visited Kashmir to buy them.69

Indigo was another Indian commodity that had a large demand in Iran and Turan. The best quality of the dye came from Bayana near Agra. The Dutchman Francisco Pelsaert informs that the Armenians and the ‘Moguls’ transported the Bayana variety to Isfahan from where some of it was sent to Aleppo.70 According to an English report of the early seventeenth century, Iran and Turkey imported 20,000 to 30,000 ‘churls’ of Agra indigo every year.71 The substantial purchases of the Armenian and other merchants were responsible for the frequent failure of the European companies in buying as much indigo as they would have wanted. In 1628 the English factors reported that unless the Armenians and other merchants stopped buying Indigo there was no likelihood of its price going down.72 The overland trade was very profitable for in 1635 the Armenians purchased it at prices which the English found too high.73 The Safavid ruler Shah

68 Bernier, Travels, p 402.
69 Abdul Majid Mattoo, ‘Shawl industry in Kashmir in the Mughal Period,’ Indian History Congress Proceedings, 1975, p 270.
70 Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India, p 16.
72 Foster, English Factories, 1624-29, p 307.
73 Foster, English Factories, 1634-36, p 138.
Abbas even tried to introduce indigo cultivation in order to remove the need for its import. 74

Koil (Aligarh) and Khurja in the Gangetic doab also produced indigo that was of lower quality in comparison to the Bayana variety. Most of it was purchased by Kabuli and Armenian merchants. 75 In 1611 William Finch noted that the indigo manufactured in this region was transported to Samarkand, Kashgar and other places of Central Asia. 76 From Central Asia some of the dye was re-exported to Russia. 77 During the latter half of the seventeenth century the steady demand for indigo in Iran and Central Asia compensated, to some extent, for the reduction in the European imports that had been caused by the introduction of indigo cultivation in the Caribbean, Guatemala and Java. 78 In the late seventeenth century the Aligarh area produced for the external market while the Bayana region catered to the internal demand.

Other agricultural exports to Iran included Tobacco which by the early seventeenth century had begun to be cultivated in Mughal India. In 1628, Sir Thomas Herbert recorded the arrival of a small caravan of 40 camels carrying tobacco in Kazwin from India. 79 Indian powdered sugar was also very popular in

74 Riazul Islam, A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations, 1500-1750, Karachi Institute of Central and West Asian Studies, 1979, vol 1, p 164.
75 Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India, p 15.
76 Finch, Early Travels, p 179; Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India, p 15.
79 Thomas Herbert, Travels in Persia, 1627-9, New York Free Port 1972 Reprint, p 203. The tobacco was burnt because the traders had disobeyed a prohibition on trading with India.
Iran with 300 Tons being sold every year. Sugar-candy was also exported. Pelsaert informs us that sugar was transported from Multan to Sind from where it was shipped to Iran. It was also sent overland. Babur mentions sugar-candy, refined sugar and common sugar among the commodities sent from India to Kabul. As in other Asian countries there was a big demand for Indian spices in Iran and Central Asia. The spices required by Iran were mostly transported by sea but were also dispatched overland. Steel and Crowther noted that spices were expensive in Persia due to the high transport costs involved in transporting them from Masulipatnam to Lahore and beyond. Cinnamon was imported by the Bukharans from India. Pan (betel) leaf was sent in small quantities for the requirements of the Safavid court. Saffron was an important export from Kashmir. In the fifteenth century Sultan Zayn al-Abidin gifted ass-loads of this costly item to Sultan Abu Said of Khurasan. Along with saffron, other items sent were yak tails, musk and cups made of rock-crystal. According to Tavernier, Indian merchants used to go to Bhutan to buy rhubarb which was then taken to ‘Great Tartary’. Central Asian

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81 Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India, p 31.
83 Babur, Baburnama, p 202.
84 Foster, edited, The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe, p 446; Wheeler, Early Travels, p 63.
86 Riazul Islam, A Calendar of Documents, Vol 1, p 443.
87 Simon Digby, ‘Export industries and handicraft production’, p 409.
merchants transported it to Iran creating a misleading impression that the rhubarb came from their country.88

Slaves were a prominent, though less known export from India. Since the eleventh century Islamic invaders had engaged in enslaving and exporting people from the sub-continent. We have earlier noted that the slaves were purchased in India by the Khurasani merchants during the Delhi Sultanate Period. Babur mentions slaves as one of the commodities taken from India to Kabul. 89 The Jesuit Monserrate observed that the Ghakkar tribe of the north-west used to capture travelers and sell them for horses in Persia. 90 The Mughal state itself contributed to the slave trade through the practice of enslaving and selling rebels even though this had been prohibited by Akbar. 91 In the late sixteenth century, during the course of the campaigns in the north-west, many Afghans were captured and subsequently sold in Iran and Turan.92 Bernier narrates how a Persian ambassador to the Mughal court had unsuccessfully attempted to export slaves which he had purchased very cheaply.93 Sometimes, Indian traders were captured on dangerous routes and sold in slave markets.94

93 Bernier, Travels, p 150.
94 Alauddin, an Indian trader was sold by some Bukharans in Khiva. He was further sold to a Tatar couple. He managed to escape and come to Astrajhan, Surendra Gopal, Indians in Russia, p 63-4.
Indian slaves, along with those from Russia and Iran were used in agricultural work and in professions like pottery and carpentry in Central Asia.\footnote{Gopal, 'Indians in Central Asia,' p 226; Scott Levi, The Indian Diaspora, p 60-71.} They were also made to render unpaid labour services to the Khans.\footnote{Mansura Haidar, 'Taxation system in the Uzbek Khanates,' Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 1972, p 317.} The scarcity of references to the export of slaves from India from the seventeenth century onwards suggests a decline in the phenomenon. According to Muzaffar Alam, the growth in textile production precluded the need to exchange slaves for horses and other Central Asian goods.\footnote{Muzaffar Alam, 'Trade, State Policy', p 208.} Scott Levi feels that Mughal decentralization and the end of Islamic military expansion was responsible for the decrease in supply of Indian slaves from the early eighteenth century. From now Turan's demand for slaves was met from the bordering areas of Iran.\footnote{Scott Levi, The Indian Diaspora, p 69; Burnes had noted that the Uzbeks managed all affairs through their slaves that were captured by the Turkmans from Iran, Travels, Vol 1, p 231.}

There were several other goods that were sent from India to Iran and Central Asia. In the early seventeenth century drugs and precious stones like diamonds and rubies, brought from the 'East Indies', were obtainable in the Iranian city of Arasse, situated in the province of Shirwan.\footnote{Cartwright, 'Observations', Purchas, Vol 8, p 501.} Agra was a prominent market of precious stones like diamonds, pearls and rubies.\footnote{Salbancke, Purchas, Vol 3, p 83.} In 1671 the Bukharan envoy to Russia informed officials that Indian traders brought Saltpetre
to Bukhara.\textsuperscript{101} He also noted that pearls and precious stones came to Bukhara but he does not mention the place from which they were imported. Most likely these commodities also arrived from India.\textsuperscript{102} In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese prohibition on transport of metals and steel by sea had led to their import into Iran by land from India and Aleppo. But after the fall of Hormuz, metals began to be supplied from India, Japan and South East Asia by maritime channels.\textsuperscript{103} Since Persian steel was not of very high quality, south Indian steel was used to make swords.\textsuperscript{104} Being a heavy commodity, it must have been shipped to Iran rather than sent overland. Central Asia had a well developed weapons Industry that was based on local iron ore deposits. There are no references to import of Indian weapons although weapons were bought from Russia and Europe. Camphor, used in burials was transported overland to Iran.\textsuperscript{105} Musk and Yak-tails were among the goods exported from Kashmir to Central Asia.

\textsuperscript{101} Extract from notes of the "discussion" of Bukharan envoy Farrukha with Director A.S. Matveyev of the Foreign Department about the trade of Bukhara with India and about goods in demand in the Khanate of Bukhara, Surendra Gopal, Indians in Russia, p 74.

\textsuperscript{102} Extract from notes of the "discussion" of Bukharan envoy Farrukha, Gopal, Indians in Russia, p 74.

\textsuperscript{103} Ferrier, 'Trade from the mid-14th century,' p 448; Floor, The Economy, p 144.

\textsuperscript{104} Tavernier writes "The Persians are excellent artists at Damasquing with vitriol or engraving Damask-wire upon swords, knives and the like. But the nature of the steel which they make use of, very much contributes to their art, in regard they cannot perform the same work neither upon their own nor ours. This steel is bought from Golconda and is the only sort of steel which can be damasqued." Tavernier, Reflections, p 230.

\textsuperscript{105} Floor, The Economy, p 139.
Imports

As was the case in the previous centuries, the horse was India's main import from Central Asia and Iran in the seventeenth century. This was in spite of the fact that the horse was bred in various parts of the sub-continent. The doabs of the Punjab provided suitable ecological conditions for horse breeding. In the thirteenth century, pastoral tribes like the Jats, Mandahars, and the Khokhars were engaged in rearing horses for the Delhi Sultanate. Abul Fazl informs that the area between the Indus and the Jhelum produced the Sanuji breed. Lakh Jumle, created by the waters of the Sutlej and the Beas was a well known horse breeding area. The Bhattis, a pastoral community had settled here in the tenth century and had taken to horse breeding. The pargana of Ast Purmalie in the Bari doab and the town of Gujarat were other centres of horse breeding. The semi-arid regions of Mewat, Ajmer and Agra produced the Pachwariya breed. In the sandy

108 According to Abul Fazl the Punjab horses resembled the Iraqis and were of 'excellent mettle' Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 317. Several Eighteenth century observers commented on the quality of the horses of Punjab. Polier described them as 'middle sized, but exceedingly good, strong and high spirited, and mild tempered'. He also noted that the Sikhs promoted breeding of horses. 'The Writings of Colonel Polier on the Sikhs,' Amandeep Singh Madra, edited, Siques, Tigers and Thieves: Eyewitness Accounts of the Sikhs. 1606-1810, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p 81. In the 1770s James Brown felt that the Punjab horses were among the best in the country. He ascribed their high quality to the climate of the area and the use of Persian and Arabian stallions for cross breeding. 'Browne's Treatise on the Sikhs', Siques, Tigers and Thieves, p 95; According to Modave. the horses of Punjab had the beauty of the Persian horse as well as the strength of the Turki horse. Voyage en Inde du Comte Modave 1773-1776, edited by Jean Deloche, Paris Ecole Francaise D'Extreme-Orient, 1971, p 326-7. I am grateful to my friend Uma Shankar Pandey for translating the relevant parts of this source for me.
109 Sujan Rai Bhandari, Khulasat, p 83, 98.
110 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 140; James Tod mentions that good horses were bred on the banks of the Luni river, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, New Delhi Rupa and Company 1997, Vol 2, p
expanses of Western Rajasthan and in Kutch pastoral communities carried out breeding of camels and horses.\textsuperscript{111} The horses of Kutch, said to have originated from the Arabian breed, enjoyed a good reputation.\textsuperscript{112} Good quality horses were also bred in Sind.\textsuperscript{113} The Baluchi horses, according to Pottinger, were large and strong but difficult to handle. Those bred in the region south of Kelat and in Kutch Gundava were considered well enough for the markets of India.\textsuperscript{114}

The northern Himalayan region was known for the gut, a small and tough horse.\textsuperscript{115} The Tanghan was found in the Eastern Himalayas.\textsuperscript{116} Like the Himalayan

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\textsuperscript{111} The Horses of Rajasthan were used by the Marathas in the Eighteenth century, William Francklin, \textit{History of the reign of Shah Aulam, the Present Emperor of Hindostan containing the Transactions of the court of Delhi, and the neighbouring states. During a period of Thirty Six years: Interspersed with Geographical and Topographical Observations on several of the Principal cities of Hindustan.}, London Couper and Graham, 1794, p 59.

\textsuperscript{112} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain}, Vol I, p 140; According to Ali Mohammad Khan, the writer of the well known Mirat-Ahmad, the Kutch horses were fast, intelligent and attractive, \textit{A Persian History of Gujarat, Mirat-i-Ahmad}, Baroda 1965, p 11; Modave writes that the horses of Kutch had a good sale in the Deccan, \textit{Voyage en Inde}, p 327. William Finch mentions that a chieftain of Gujarat owned a race of fine horse that was reputed to be very fast and had the ability to run an entire day without stopping. Foster, edited, \textit{Early Travels}, p 174.

\textsuperscript{113} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain}, Vol I, p 339; Nicholas Withington says of the people of Sind ‘they have exceedinge good horses, verye swifte and stronge, which they will ride moste desperatelye, never shooinge them’, Foster, edited, \textit{Early Travels}, p 218.

\textsuperscript{114} Pottinger, \textit{Travels in Beloochistan}, p 328.

\textsuperscript{115} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain}, Vol I,p 140, William Finch describes the Gunt of Kumaon as ‘a true traveling scaleclife beast’, Foster, edited, \textit{Early Travels}, p 181; In the early nineteenth century, the British veterinary surgeon William Moorcroft had a poor opinion of the horses of Kashmir. He was more impressed by the horses of Ladakh, \textit{Travels in the Himalayan kingdoms}, Vol 2, p 40, 152, Vol 1, p 309.

\textsuperscript{116} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain}, Vol I, p 140. According to the 13\textsuperscript{th} century historian Minhaj us Siraj, the tanghan horses were imported from the region of Karambata. The place has been placed in either Bhutan or Tibet. Minhaujudin Siraj, \textit{Tabaqat-I- Nasiri}, cited in Ranabir Chakravarti, ‘Early medieval Bengal and the trade in horses: A note’, Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient, Vol 42, 2, 1999, p 201.
breeds the horses of the Deccan region were small and sturdy. The famed long
marches of the Marathas and the Pindaris were undertaken on them.\textsuperscript{117}

While the Indian breeds had their merits they came up short in
comparison to the horses of Central Asia and West Asia. This was due to
ecological reasons.\textsuperscript{118} Firstly, the priority given to agriculture in the sub-continent
meant lack of space for keeping horses. Secondly, good quality fodder was not
found except in the north and the north-west. Thirdly, faced with the lack of hay
and grass horses were fed with grain like wheat and peas. Grain was usually
supplemented with sugar, Ghi, milk and butter.\textsuperscript{119} The unsuitability of the Indian
diet for the health of the animal was noted by outsiders. Abdullah Wassaf, a
fourteenth century historian noted that the Indian diet combined with the lack of
training led to the horses becoming weak and slow.\textsuperscript{120} He also felt that the climate
of Mabar contributed to the deterioration of the imported horse’s health. Thus the
Indians had to keep procuring new horses from West Asia.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{117} Deloche, \textit{Transport and communication}, Vol 1, p 230; George Watt says ‘The well-bred Deccan
horse is of medium size, strong, rather handsome, generally of a dark bay colour with black legs,
and has the fine limbs, broad forehead, and much of the docility and endurance of the Arab’,
\textsuperscript{118} The best discussion on this aspect is provided by Gommans, \textit{Indo-Afghan Empire}, p 71-4.
\textsuperscript{119} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain}, Vol 1, p 142-3; Nikitin observed that horses were fed khichri with oil. R.H.
Major, \textit{India in the fifteenth century}, III, p 10: Terry noted that horses were fed boiled grain
sometimes mixed with sugar. Twice or thrice a week they were given butter. Foster, edited, \textit{Early
Travels}, p 304.
\textsuperscript{120} Wassaf, \textit{Tazviyatul Amsar wa Tajriyatul asar}, in Elliot and Dawson, edited, \textit{History of India as
told by its own Historians}. New Delhi Low Price publications, p 33-4. Nineteenth century British
experts believed that the Indian diet made the horse unhealthy, Gommans, \textit{Indo-Afghan Empire}, p 73.
\textsuperscript{121} Wassaf, \textit{Tazviyatul Amsar}, in Elliot and Dawson, edited. \textit{History of India as told by its own
Historians}, p 33-4.
Broadly speaking there were two regions from which horses were imported into Medieval India. The first was Arabia and Iran and the second was Central Asia and Afghanistan. Horses from the former area were transported by sea (bahr) and were therefore called Bahri while the central Asian or the Turki horse was transported overland. The states of the Deccan and south India obtained warhorses from the Persian Gulf ports while the rulers of North India relied more on the overland imports from Central Asia and Iran. According to one fourteenth century source, 10000 horses were annually imported into Mabar, Cambay and other Indian ports from the Persian Gulf islands like Bahrain, Hormuz, etc. The total amount paid for them was 2,200,000 dinars. In the sixteenth century, Nuniz a Portuguese writer claimed that the King of Vijaynagar Krishna Deva Raya purchased 13000 Persian horses every year. After the end of the Vijaynagar Empire around the mid-sixteenth century, the maritime horse trade dwindled while the overland trade became more important.

The number of horses coming from Central Asia into north India was also very large. Ibn Batutah mentions that thousands of horses were transported into India from Southern Russia where they were bred by the Mongols. The trade was very profitable with the lower quality horses being sold for 100 dinars while the better ones fetched over 500 dinars. These horses were valued for their strength

122 Wassaf, *Taziyatul Ansar*, p 33 in Elliot and Dawson, edited, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, p 34.
and stamina rather than for their speed for which the horses of Yemen and the Persian Gulf were preferred.\textsuperscript{124}

Apart from Southern Russia, another important source of horses brought into India was Afghanistan. Barani noted that the Afghans had been engaged in breeding horses in their homeland for the Indian market.\textsuperscript{125} Another source mentions that before selling these horses in India they would take them to Bajwara, a mahal in the Bet Jallandhar doab in order to fatten them with cheap fodder.\textsuperscript{126}

The Mughals like their predecessors relied on imported horses for their cavalry needs. According to Abul Fazl, horses were obtained from various regions like Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Turkestan, Badakshan, Tibet, etc. He adds ‘Droves after droves come from Turan and Iran, and there are nowadays twelve thousand in the stables of his majesty.’ Akbar even used to pay more than the fixed prices for the imported horses\textsuperscript{127}. Usually merchants from abroad came to India to sell horses but the Mughals also used to send officials abroad to buy good quality breeds.\textsuperscript{128}

Between the Arabo-Persian and the Turki breed the Mughals had a clear preference for the latter. Out of the 12,000 horses in the Imperial stables in

\textsuperscript{126} Hussain Khan, ‘The political and economic conditions of Roh,’ Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1971, p 178.
\textsuperscript{127} Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 140-1.
\textsuperscript{128} In 1607, Jahangir sent Kamran Beg to Iran to buy horses. He was provided with an escort and was exempted from paying any taxes. Aurangzeb also used to send agents to Balkh to buy horses. Riazul Islam, A Calendar of Documents, Vol 1, p 152, 273; Burton, The Bukharans, p 448.
Jahangir's time, 6000 were Turki while around 4000 were Persian. Similarly most of the horses kept by the Irani and Turani Mansabdars were of Turki breed. This is intriguing in the light of Abul Fazl's classification of horses in which the Turki breed ranks fourth after the Arabian, the Persian and the Mujannas (a mixed breed from a Persian or a Turki horse). The preference for the Central Asian horse was because of its suitability for war purposes. It was believed that the Turki horse was courageous in war, tough and loyal. The eighteenth century French traveler, Modave had noted that the Turki horse was big and had the ability to withstand fatigue while the Persian horse was more delicate. It was also easier to transport the Turki horse to India by overland routes in comparison to the transport of Arabian/Persian horses by sea.

There are some contemporary estimates of the volume of the overland horse trade. While talking about the trade of Kabul, Babar had noted that seven to eight thousand horses were brought to it every year. Around the mid-seventeenth century, Bernier noted that 25,000 horses were annually imported

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129 William Hawkins, in Foster, edited, Early Travels in India, p 102-3.
130 R.A. Alavi, 'New light on Mughal Cavalry' in Medieval India, a Miscellany, New Delhi p 70-99, Vol 2, p 70-99.
131 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 243-5. After the Turki came the Yabu, obtained from crossing a Turki and a local variety. It was followed by the Tazi and the Jangla, both being local breeds.
133 Modave, Voyage en Inde, p 326; Burnes describes the harsh methods of horse training adopted by the Turkoman tribes. The amount of food and water given to the horses was rationed and it was put to strenuous exercise to reduce body fat. The result was that the Turkoman horse could cover 600 miles in 6 or 7 days. Burnes, Travels into Bokhara, Vol 2, p 272-4; Also see Kinneir, Geographical Memoirs, p 40-1.
134 Gommans, Indo-Afghan Empire, p 78.
135 Babar, Baburnama, p 203.
from ‘Uzbek’ while more came from Arabia and Persia. Both Thevenot and Tavernier put the figure (of imports from Turan) at 60,000 while Manucci writes that one lakh horses were imported from Balkh, Bukhara and Kabul during the reign of Aurangzeb.

Apart from horses, Mughal India’s imports from Iran and Central Asia mainly comprised of several types of expensive cloth and fruits. The Ain-i-Akbari lists the rates of several varieties of brocades and velvets procured from Yezd, Kashan, Mashhad, Herat, etc. A variety of Central Asian fabric, named Zendani after the town in which it was manufactured, was popular in India. Silk made in Khorasan, used to be carried to Lahore but according to an early seventeenth century English report the Lahore merchants had shifted to buying silk cloth due to declining profits.

Central Asian and Iranian fruits were very popular with the Mughals. Babur’s nostalgia for the melons and grapes of his homeland is well known. His attempt to introduce their cultivation in India had satisfactory results. At the same time he ensured a supply of fruits from Kabul. He also informs us that the apples of Ghazni and Farmul were of good quality and were transported to India.

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137 Tavernier, *Travels*, Vol 2, p 75; Thevenot, *Indian Travels*, p 80; Manucci, *Storia*, Vol 2, 390-1. Out of these, 12,000 were taken by Aurangzeb either for use in the Imperial stables or for presenting them to nobles.
Pomegranates of Ala sai were also sent to India though they were not 'first rate.'

Akbar regularly received several fruits from Badakshan and Samarkand. He made fruit-growers from Iran and Turan settle in India in order to improve the quality of fruits but the project was unsuccessful because of climatic constraints. Akbar's fondness for Central Asian fruits was responsible for their increased availability in India. The markets of Lahore had become stocked with several types of grapes.

Jahangir frequently received large supplies of pomegranates of Yezd and melons of Kariz. In his view they were superior to the varieties obtained from Kabul and Badakshan. He regrets that these varieties were not available during the lifetime of his father who was very fond of fruits. Once while he was in Gujarat, a supply of melons from Kariz was sent to him. He records:

At this place some melons came from Kariz which is a place dependent upon Herat and it is certain that in Khorasan there are no melons better than those of Kariz. Although this is at a distance of 1400 Kos and Kafilahs take five months to come, they arrived very ripe and fresh.

Jahangir also mentions receiving grapes from Kabul while he was in the Deccan. He was happy to note that they were fresh in spite of having taken three

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142 Babur, Baburnama, p 518, 218, 220, 221.
143 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 69.
144 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 68.
145 Jahangir, Tuzuk, p 5.
146 Jahangir, Tuzuk, p 270.
147 Jahangir, Tuzuk, p 422, 350.
months to reach him.\textsuperscript{148} The love for Kariz melons was shared by his son Shah Jahan who once went so far as to prohibit the entry of Iranian caravans into India after hearing that the export of the fruit had been disallowed. It was only after being informed that a crop failure was responsible for the interruption in supply that he changed his decision and permitted the arrival of Iranian traders.\textsuperscript{149} During his tenure on the north-west frontier, Prince Aurangzeb ensured that these priced melons were sent to his father.\textsuperscript{150}

The craze for imported fruits was not confined to the Emperors alone. Bernier notes that large quantities of fresh fruits like apples, grapes and melons came from Bukhara, Balkh and Samarkand in the winters while dried fruits like almonds, raisins, plums and apricots were available throughout the year.\textsuperscript{151} He describes the fruit market of Delhi as being well-stocked with the above mentioned fruits.\textsuperscript{152} Manucci writes that several camels loaded with melons, pears, raisins, seedless pomegranates and dried fruits used to come to India from the north west.\textsuperscript{153} Central Asian fruits were available in Agra and were even sent to Surat.\textsuperscript{154} Apart from fresh fruits, preserved fruits also sold well in India.\textsuperscript{155}

Besides textiles and fruits there were several other goods that were obtained in small quantities from Iran. Runas, obtained from the root of a plant

\textsuperscript{148} Jahangir, \textit{Tuzuk}, p 404.
\textsuperscript{149} Riazul Islam, \textit{A Calendar of Documents}, Vol 1, p 285-6.
\textsuperscript{150} Riazul Islam, \textit{A Calendar of Documents}, Vol 1, p 372.
\textsuperscript{151} Bernier, \textit{Travels}, p 203-4.
\textsuperscript{152} Bernier, \textit{Travels}, p 249.
\textsuperscript{153} Manucci, \textit{Storia}, Vol 2, p 391.
\textsuperscript{154} Pelsaert, \textit{Jahangir's India}, p 31; Chardin, \textit{Sir John Chardin's Travels}, p 149.
\textsuperscript{155} Tavernier, \textit{Reflections}, p 231.
was sent to India where it was used to dye calicoes. In 1618, Edward Pettus reported that ‘it is daylie carryed hence into those partes by way of Qandahar at exceedinge great chardges.’ According to a late seventeenth century estimate, 300 packs of the dye, each weighing 150 pounds were sent every year from Shirwan and Tabris to India. Other goods included asafoetida, tobacco, rose-water, wine, distilled water, carpets and hides. From Kabul woolen coverlets were imported in the sixteenth century. Madder was obtained from Ghuzni where it was cultivated for the Indian market. The trade in it was said to be very profitable. Jahangir mentions seeing merchants transporting rhubarb, used as a dye, from Kabul towards India. Manucci mentions that Indian merchants used to go to Kabul to buy animal skins, musk, zedoar and rubies. These articles came from Badakshan, Balkh and the regions further north. Russian Red hides were purchased by Indian merchants in Bukhara in the sixteenth century. From Kasghar came several commodities like Chinese porcelain, silk, musk, rhubarb and medicinal herbs. Other commodities bought from Central Asia were carpets, silk

158 Tavernier, Reflections, p 231; Pelsaert, Jahangir’s India, p 31; Chardin, Sir John Chardin’s Travels, pp 149, 268, 282; Ferrier, ‘Trade from the mid-14th century’, p 482; Floor, The Economy, p 166, 179.
159 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 57.
160 Babar, Babarnama, p 218.
162 Manucci, Storia Do Mogor, Vol 2, p 400. Sujan Rai also refers to the sale of rubies of Badakshan in Delhi, Khulasat, p 5.
164 Finch, Early Travels, p 169; Bernier, Travels, p 426.
and slaves. Abul Fazl informs that large numbers of Pigeons were imported from Turan in the sixteenth century. They were looked after by migrants from the same region. Thevenot notes that Transoxanian dogs were used for hunting in Mughal India. Paper made in Samarkand, the best in the world according to Babar, was known to be used in India. During the period of the Delhi Sultanate, amulets, charms and ornaments that were said to be made of magical alloys were imported by Central Asian merchants. It is likely that the trade in these articles continued in our period.

Overall, Iran's commodity exports to India were far less in comparison to the large quantities of textiles and other commodities imported by it. Therefore it had to export large amounts of bullion to the Indian sub-continent. Most of this bullion was transported through the Persian Gulf by the European trading companies and Indian merchants but a substantial part was sent overland by Indian merchants. Contemporaries like Sir John Chardin, critical of this phenomenon

166 Burton, The Bukharans, p 448.
167 Abul Fazl, Ain, Vol 1, p 310.
168 Thevenot, Indian Travels, p 62.
169 K. A. Nizami, "India's cultural Relations with Central Asia during the Medieval Period", p 250; Babar, The Babarnama, p 81.
called the Indian merchants 'true bloodsuckers(who)draw all the gold and silver out of the country and send it to their own'.\footnote{172} In the case of India’s trade with Central Asia, Dale holds that the sale of Indian commodities generated enough profit to pay for the large purchases of Turki horses. Furthermore there is no evidence of export of Indian currency to Turan.\footnote{173} Gommans, on the other hand, believes that the trade balance was in favour of Central Asia till the mid-eighteenth century.\footnote{174} Dale’s view is supported by the observations of contemporary travelers on the export of bullion by Indian merchants living in Central Asia.

**Merchants**

The overland trade was conducted by merchants belonging to several regions and communities. One of the most important participants in it was the Afghans who had a long history of participation in the trade. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Afghans used to breed horses in their homeland and sell them in India. They also bought horses from Central Asia.\footnote{175} Among the other items sold by them were weapons like swords, bows and arrows that were manufactured by them.\footnote{176} Many of the Afghans who were engaged in the caravan trade belonged to pastoral nomadic groups known as powindas. According to

Anatoly Khazanov the prominent role of these groups in the overland trade was related to concurrence of the trade routes with the path of their pastoral migrations. Among the powindas the most well known group was that of the Lohanis. In the 1830s, G.T. Vigne who traveled to Kabul with a Lohani caravan was informed that the community was descended from a person named Lohani or Lohur who lived during the time of Mahmud Ghazni. Sultan Masud, the grand son of Mahmud granted Derabund to the Lohanis who had since then been engaged in the trade between India and Kabul. Some references to the Lohanis are found in Mughal sources. In his autobiography, Babur mentions how his followers once plundered an Afghan caravan and killed a 'well known and respectable' merchant called Khwaja Khizr Lohani. Abul Fazl notes that in 1599, the Lohanis who regularly brought horses to India from Ghazni were attacked by the Hazaras, a prominent Afghan tribe. The Lohanis fought back but had to retreat. The Lohanis also engaged in grain trade. They are known to have supplied grain to the Mughal army near Kandahar in 1653.

Detailed information about the trading pattern of the Lohanis was compiled by British observers during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

178 G.T.Vigne, A Personal Narrative, p 54.
181 Raverty, Notes on Afghanistan and Baluchistan, Vol 2, p 489.
The Lohanis used to come to the Indian sub-continent every winter bringing horses, fruits and other commodities which were sold in different markets of Upper India. The main articles bought by them were textiles and indigo. In the end of April, the Lohanis would assemble in the Derajat, the region on the right bank of the Indus, named after the towns of Dera Ismael Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan and proceed to their homeland crossing the Sulaiman range through the Gomal pass. The caravans of the Lohanis also included Indian merchants and travellers. Reaching Kabul and Kandahar by June, the Lohanis would set off to Bokhara and Herat to sell the Indian goods and to buy products for the Indian market. In October-November they would again return to India.182

Besides the Lohanis there were several Powinda tribes involved in commercial activities like the Dauntaris, the Nasiris, the Niazis and the Bhaktyars. The last named tribe was descended from a sayyid and by virtue of this fact could carry on trade without the risk of being robbed or attacked by any unruly tribe. The Bhaktyars were not the only example of religious men indulging in commercial pursuits. There were several Afghan trading tribes who were descendants of Saiyads. The Kharoti, Sulimankhel and Taraki sections of the pastoral Ghalzi tribe also participated in trade.183 Broadly speaking, the nature of involvement of the Powindas in the caravan trade was of two types. The first category was of those who provided animals and their knowledge of routes to other merchants while the

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second type comprised of full time merchants. Examples of the former were the Shinwari tribe that lived in the Khyber region and bred mules for the carrying trade and the Abdalis who provided camels to merchants.\(^{184}\) To the second category belonged the merchants of the Babi tribe, who had quit their pastoral life and settled in cities. Pottinger met some of them in the town of Kelat, located in Baluchistan. He added that many of the Babis were settled in northern Gujarat.\(^{185}\) Similarly, the Gundehpors were ‘great merchants’ trading with India and Khorasan. Elphinstone noted that Fifty to Sixty members of the tribe went to Khorasan every year while four times that number traveled to India. The Tereen tribe, which inhabited Pishin, consisted of both ‘merchants and ‘carriers.’\(^{186}\)

Apart from the Powindas, Afghan merchants belonging to several other tribes were also involved in the caravan trade. One such tribe was the Khweshgi which had migrated from the Arghasan valley to a place called Qasur, situated near Lahore. While some of them served in the Mughal army, most were traders who sold horses in north India, Gujarat and the Deccan.\(^{187}\) It was a routine matter for the Afghan merchants to travel hundreds of miles in their commercial ventures. For instance, an Afghan merchant named Amir Khan brought 900 camel loads of

\(^{184}\) Masson, Narrative, Vol 1, p 160, Elphinstone, An Account, Vol 2, p 109; Another example of this category were the Kalals, residents of village of Kalalah, near Peshawar. They owned mules which were used for transporting merchandise of others, Forster, A journey, Vol 2, p 49.

\(^{185}\) Pottinger, Travels, p 44, 79; Mason traveled from the Baluchistan port of Sunniani to Kelat in the company of some Babi merchants who owned sarays in Kandahar and Karachi. He writes that the one suburb of Kelat was inhabited solely by the Babis. Apart with the Babis, there were merchants from other Afghan tribes living in the city and trading between Sind, Kandahar and Bombay, Narrative, Vol 2, p 24, 96-7, 107.


merchandise to Aurangabad in the late seventeenth century where the Mughal army was stationed.  

The Paranchas were another community involved in the caravan trade. Babur mentions them as a separate community while Elphinstone, in the early nineteenth century reckoned them to be part of the Hindkees or people of Indian descent. He describes them as carriers and conductors. His contemporary Charles Masson writes that the Paranchas were located in several places between the Indus and the Jhelum rivers. Some of the biggest merchants of Kabul belonged to this community.

The Armenians

The Armenians are a prominent example of a community that has specialized in trade since ancient times. While they had traditionally been engaged in the overland trade between Europe and Asia they also participated in the commerce between different regions of Asia. In the sixteenth century the Armenians were prominent in the Persian port of Hormuz which was important for the trade with India. They were also present in the Indian ports of Goa, Diu and

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Cambay.\textsuperscript{192} It is likely that the Armenians were also using the overland routes trade between India and Iran during this period.\textsuperscript{193}

Coming to the seventeenth century the evidence for the Armenian presence in Upper India becomes clearer. A large number of tombstones with Armenian inscriptions dating from the early seventeenth century onwards exist in Agra.\textsuperscript{194} Several European travelers noted the Armenian settlement in the city. Manrique records that there was a separate saray of the Armenians in Agra.\textsuperscript{195} According to Father Betelho(1648-54), there were fifty to sixty Armenian merchants living in the city.\textsuperscript{196} Manucci mentions how an Armenian of Agra saved a woman from committing Sati and then married her. He also refers to another one named 'Koja Safar' who had business dealings in Patna.\textsuperscript{197}

The Armenian merchants were important participants in the indigo market of Bayana. The Dutch merchant Pelsaert noted that price of the dye rose frequently due to large scale purchases made by them.\textsuperscript{198}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Linschoten, \textit{The Voyage}, Vol 1, p 58, 60, 175.
  \item M.J. Seth writes that a large number of Armenians had settled in Agra in the reign of Akbar. \textit{The Armenians in India: From the earliest times to the present day}, Calcutta 1937, p 111. Bhaswati Bhattacharya, however, points out that there is no evidence for this. ‘Armenian European Relationship in India, 1500-1800: No Armenian Foundation for European Empire?’ \textit{Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient}, Vol 48, pt 2, p 292, F.No. 62. Since two of the Armenian tombstones found in Agra belong to the sixteenth century, it can be assumed that there was a small Armenian presence during that time. An Armenian merchant from Alleppoo, known as Mirza Sikandar had settled in India and enjoyed an important position at Akbar’s court. His son Mirza Zu’lqarnain was put in charge of revenue collection in the salt lake town of Sambhar by Jahangir and was later promoted to the post of Faujdar. Edward Maclagan, \textit{The Jesuits and the Great Mogul}, Delhi Vintage Books 1990, p 171-173.
  \item Seth, \textit{The Armenians}, p 110.
  \item Manrique, \textit{Travels}, Vol 2, p
  \item Maclagan, \textit{The Jesuits}, p 273.
  \item Manucci, \textit{Storia}, Vol 2, p 90, 177.
  \item Pelsaert, \textit{Jahangir’s India}, p 16.
\end{enumerate}
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bought indigo at Koil and Khulja. 199 The overland trade in indigo was very profitable for in 1635 the Armenians purchased the dye at prices which the English had found too high. 200 The Armenian business in Indian textiles was no less profitable for in 1617, it was said with some pardonable amount of exaggeration that the Armenians made a profit of 300 to 400 per cent on the sale of Indian goods in Iran. 201 The main article imported by them into India was European textiles brought all the way from Aleppo. Demand for this commodity was restricted to the Mughal Emperor and the nobility. Advising his superior officials in London, an English factor wrote in 1625 that a yearly import of forty to fifty pieces of broadcloth by the Company would be sufficient for the Indian market since the Armenians imported so much of that commodity to Lahore and Kabul that its price had come down. 202 In the next year too, it was reported that a large quantity of broadcloth, velvets, satin, etc had been brought overland. 203 The English continued to face problems in selling their textiles in India as the Armenians brought the same overland at lesser transport costs. 204

While the Armenian mainly focused on the Indo-Persian trade, they were also involved in the trade with Central Asia. It was said of them that they had thorough knowledge of the manufactures of all cities and towns from India to

199 Pelsaert, Jahangir's India, p 15.
200 Foster, English Factories, 1634-36, p 138.
202 Foster, English Factories, 1624-29, p 63.
203 Foster, English Factories, 1624-29, p 150.
204 Foster, English Factories, 1651-54, p 9, 30.
Central Asia. Lahore was another prominent commercial centre where Armenian presence was concentrated. Twenty Three Armenians had fled from the city in 1604 when the Governor threatened to arrest all the Christians. Their sectarian differences notwithstanding, the Armenians trusted the Jesuit Fathers well enough to store their merchandise in the latter’s house in 1606 when Prince Khusrau’s rebellion had produced insecurity in the city. An Armenian named Issac accompanied the Jesuit Bento De Goes on his journey from Lahore to China.

Kabul had a few Armenians merchants in the seventeenth century. The Armenian presence in the city increased in the eighteenth century when a large numbers were settled here by Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah. By the early nineteenth century however only twenty one Armenians were left. The rest had migrated due to the prohibition on wine making by Dost Mohammad Khan.

The Armenians had a presence in various other places. Some English Company employees sold textiles to one of them in Ajmer. This merchant had fallen into hard times and was able to pay them only a part of the total price of the cloth, half of which he returned after a few months. Armenians were among the various foreign merchants thronging the bazaars of Delhi. Peter Mundy mentions that the Zeffe Ckauns(Saif Khan) Sarae in Patna was meant for the

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205 Baladouni and Makepeace, Armenian Merchants, p 105.
207 Maclagan, The Jesuits, p 272.
211 Baladouni and Makepeace, edited, Armenian Merchants, p 53.
212 Naqvi, “Shahjahanabad”, p 144.
residence of merchants from other countries like the Armenians, Mughals and Persians. Tavernier met four Armenians who were going to Bhutan from Patna for the sale of amber images.

An important source of information on Armenian commercial activity in India is the register of Hovhannes Djoughayetsi, an Isphahan merchant who visited India in the second half of the seventeenth century. Hovhannes was an agent of two merchants of New Julfa who provided him with capital both in cash and kind. It was agreed that Hovhannes was to receive one fourth of the profit. Hovhannes boarded a ship from Bandar Abbas to Surat in 1683. After reaching India he proceeded to Khurja where he purchased indigo for himself. Hovhannes also bought cloth at Lahurpur, near Agra, for himself and for an Armenian merchant of Shiraz. He then entered into an agreement with the agent of the same merchant for undertaking a journey to Tibet. The two parties, Hovhannes and the Shiraz merchant contributed equal money for the venture. Reaching Tibet via Patna and Nepal Hovhannes sold the commodities that he had brought in Agra and Patna and purchased tea, musk, and gold. The Armenian residents of Lhasa assisted him in his transactions. He finally left Tibet in 1693 after staying there for five years.

Various aspects of Armenian commerce are highlighted by Hovhannes's register. The same person could be a factor, a member of a partnership and a

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214 Expressing his disapproval of this practice, he says, 'Wherever the Armenians see that money is to be made they have no scruple about supplying material for purposes of idolatory,' *Travels*, Vol 2, p 203.
financer of other merchants. Armenians preferred to do business with members of their own community though occasionally they used the services of other merchants. Their Trans-Himalayan trade distinguishes them from other Asian merchants living in India and underlines the extent of their commercial spread.

Conclusion

Mughal India had close commercial ties with Central Asia and Iran in the seventeenth century. The main export of Mughal India was cotton textiles. Huge quantities were transported every year to Central Asia and Iran to satisfy these region's requirements. A substantial part of the textiles sent to Iran was further transported to Ottoman Turkey. The exports of Indian textiles ranged from cheap coarse cotton goods to more expensive varieties. They were manufactured in various regions—Punjab, Gangetic plains, Bihar, Bengal, Central India, etc. While this attests to the magnitude of the demand for Indian cloth, it also reveals the fact that commercial relations of Central Asia with India were not restricted to regions of the north and northwest India like Punjab, Kashmir and Rajasthan. Other areas of India participated in this relation. Apart from cotton textiles, other significant exports from India were agricultural commodities like indigo, spices, sugar and precious stones.

The Central Asian commodity most in demand in India was the war horse. The reason for this was the superiority of the former over Indian breeds. Thousands of Turki horses were brought down to India to meet the demands of the
Mughal cavalry. Fruits, both dried and fresh were also sent in large quantities from Central Asia. Other imports from the region were slaves, carpets, silk and Russian hides. The demand for these articles was restricted to the elite. From Iran, the main imports were raw silk, silk manufactures, fruits, dyes, asafetida, rose water and carpets. Overall, India’s exports to Turan and Iran were greater than its imports from these regions leading to continuous inflow of precious metals.

There were several participants in the caravan trade. Apart from the merchants belonging to the three states, i.e., Mughal India, Safavid Iran and Uzbek Turan, two other important players were the Afghans and the Armenians. The Afghan participation was largely a consequence of the situation of their homeland between India and Central Asia. The Afghan traders came down to India every year with Central Asian and Afghan commodities and took back Indian products. While the Afghans mostly concentrated on the trade with Turan, the focus of the Armenians was the trade between Iran and India.