4 STATE POLICY AND OVERLAND TRADE

This chapter looks at the policy of the Mughals and their contemporary rulers of Central Asia and Iran towards the caravan trade. It will also take note of conditions on the north-west routes during the Eighteenth century which was characterized by break up of the Mughal empire and the emergence of the Durrani state and the Sikhs in Afghanistan and Punjab respectively.

Sarays

Sarays were an important component of the pre-modern transport and communication system. They provided shelter in an age when travel was tedious and risky. In India the policy of building rest-houses on roads dates back to ancient times. In the sixteenth century, Sher Shah is credited with the construction of several rest-houses on the major highways. The Mughal rulers surpassed their predecessors in the building of sarays. Akbar obtained funds from the nobles to finance the construction of public works including sarays.2 His successors

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1 Iqtidar Alam Khan, 'The Karawan sarays of Mughal India: A study of Surviving Structures', Indian Historical Review, Vol 14, No 1-2, July 1987 and January 1988, p 111. Sher Shah also constructed several new roads and had trees planted on their sides.
2 Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, Vol 3, p 516.
continued to build these crucial structures. Early in his reign, Jahangir had given orders for the construction of sarays in remote areas.

Apart from the ruling class, other social groups also used to put their money in improving the facilities on the roads. The people of Kabul were known to have engaged in digging wells and building sarays. Manrique informs us that 'the majority of caramossoras are sometimes constructed at the cost of the surrounding villages, sometimes with the donations of princes or wealthy and powerful individuals who hoped thus to immortalize their name or alleviate their conscience'.

The sarays of the Mughal age had provision for the safety and comfort of their occupants. There was an official to ensure that the belongings of the travellers were safe. Each saray had staff responsible for cleaning and cooking. They were remunerated by a small charge paid by the occupants. State grants and endowments created by individuals provided for most of the expenditure.

A typical saray consisted of a square or rectangular compound and it was surrounded by high walls having large doorways. Rooms were arranged along the

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3 ‘Since the time of Humayun, many more sarais have been built upon the royal highways throughout the realm’, Mannuci, Storia Do Mogor, Vol 1, pp 114-5.
4 Jahangir, Tuzuk, p 8.
5 Thevenot, Indian Travels, p 81.
6 Manrique, Travels, Vol 2, p 100-1.
7 Manucci, Storia Do Mogor, Vol 1, p 67.
interior of the walls. A large open space existed in the centre. Few shops also existed within the saray.  

Agra, the capital of the Mughals till 1637 and an important destination for the merchants coming from Iran, Turan, Afghanistan, etc was provided with many sarays. According to Mandelso, a German traveller it had 90 sarays most of which were three storeyed. Thevenot who visited the city few decades later put the figure at more than three score. According to Bernier, Agra’s caravan sarays were prettier than those of Delhi. One of the prominent sarays in the city was the Nurmahal Ki Serai which could accommodate 3000 people.  

Delhi attracted a large number of people in search of employment and business. Various sarays existed to cater to their needs. Among them was the saray constructed by Jahanara Begum. Bernier provides us with a description of it. He writes:

It is a large square with arcades except that arches are separated from each other by partitions and have small chambers at inner extremities. Above the arcades run a gallery all around the building, into which open the same number of chambers as there are below. This place is the rendezvous of the rich Persian, Uzbek and other foreign merchants who in general may

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13 Thevenot, Indian Travels, p 48.
14 Bernier, Travels, p 284.
be accommodated with empty chambers, in which they remain with perfect security, the gate being closed at night.  

The Bhaktawar Nagar was a large saray outside the city. The Araban saray could accommodate 300 people and was said to be usually fully occupied. Modave mentions five or six sarays each of which was named after the country whose merchants resided in it. According to a Russian observer, the sarays of Delhi were made of stone and were spacious. 

The cities of Punjab had numerous sarays, many of which were built by Mughal officials. For instance, Wazir Khan, Governor of Lahore in Shah Jahan's reign constructed many sarays, apart from several roads, markets and wells in the city. The famous official Abdul Rahim Khan-i-Khanan had a saray built near the city which still stands. According to Finch, separate rooms that could be locked were a notable feature of the sarays of Lahore. During his tenure as governor of Multan, Prince Murad had built many sarays and bridges in the city. At Peshawar, a saray was constructed by Ali Mardan Khan, the celebrated Persian

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17 Blake, 'Cityscape', p 65.
18 Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, 'Shahjahanabad, the Mughal Delhi, 1638-1803.' In Frykenberg, *Delhi*, p 144.
22 Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries*, p 81.
official who had defected to the Mughal side and who also built several bridges in
the Punjab and the north west.25

The north-western city of Kabul was the entrepot for traders coming from
and going to Central Asia. Many sarays existed to cater to their needs.26 An early
nineteenth century visitor to the city counted fourteen or fifteen caravan sarays. He
was disappointed however by their appearance in comparison to the rest-houses of
Persia.27 Similarly Kandahar also had many sarays.28

The highway from Agra to Kabul was dotted with sarays at regular
intervals. Steel and Crowther, who traveled from Agra to Kandahar in the reign of
Jahangir noted that there was a Saray every five or six Kos on this road.29
Aurangzeb had many of these structures repaired. He also constructed new Sarays
on the Agra-Kabul and Agra-Aurangabad road.30 Manrique recorded that the
branch road from Lahore to Multan had “excellent caramossoras”, most of which
were the work of officials.31 Their remains can be still seen today.32

25 Dale, Indian Merchants, p 53. The presence of caravan sarays in Peshawar is confirmed from
several sources. Surprisingly, Forster says that there were no sarays in the city and he had to stay in
26 Finch, Early Travels, p 169.
27 Masson, Narrative, vol 2, p 263.
29 Purchas, Purchas His Pilgrimes, vol 4, p 268; Similarly Bernier noted that ‘tolerably good
caravan serais’ existed at a day’s journey from each other between Agra and Delhi, Travels, p 284.
30 Koch, Mughal Architecture, p 131.
32 Deloche, Transport and Communication, Vol 1, p 175.
Besides Sarays, the road from Agra to the north-west was also provided with trees on both sides for the relief of travelers. This measure, initiated by Sher Shah was followed by Jahangir who claimed to have had trees planted from Agra to Attock and from Agra to Bengal. He also ordered that a pillar should be put up at every mile and a well be dug at a distance of three miles. Shah Jahan seems to have neglected the task of maintaining the trees for Tavernier mentions that they had died in some stretches and had not been replaced. Several foreign travelers have recorded their praise for this achievement. For instance Thevenot who writes ‘the great walk of Trees (which begins at Agra) reaches as far as Lahors, though these two towns be distant from one another an hundred and fifty Leagues, that lovely Alley is very pleasant, because the Achy trees (wherewith it is planted) have long and thick branches which extend on all sides, and cover the whole way’. Unfortunately, by the mid-eighteenth century, constant warfare and lack of maintenance had led to the disappearance of the ‘long walk’.

33 Jahangir, Itcatk, p 100. Another beneficial measure undertaken by him was to prohibit officials from opening bales of merchandise without the permission of merchants. It is unlikely that this order would have been followed strictly by officials.
34 Tavernier, Travels, Vol 1, p 96.
35 Thevenot, Indian Travels, p 85. Tavernier and Bernier also mention the tree lined road. Tavernier, Travels, Vol 1, p 78 and Bernier, Travels, p 284.
36 Deloche, Transport and Communication, Vol 1, p 149. In the 1830s Burnes noted that the trees along the road to Kabul had disappeared but the minars and the sarays were still extant. Travels, Vol 1, p 15.
Security on the routes

The Mughals were keen to ensure that the overland routes were safe from the danger of robbery. Since the routes to Iran and Turan passed through Afghan territory, it was necessary to secure control over this area. But this was a difficult task due to the geography of the region. The fact that the Afghan tribes benefited from commercial traffic passing through their region led many of them to cooperate with the Mughals in ensuring order. The Yusufzais assisted them in removing the Dilazaks from the Khyber route. The Khataks were given the charge of guarding the road between Attock and Peshawar with the right to collect tolls. The Afridis were made guardians of the Khyber Pass. Thus the intention of the Mughals was to convert the Afghans from robbers to tax collectors. To ensure that the tribes did not stray from the arrangement, several forts were constructed and troops were placed at important points.

The Mughals were not completely successful in their attempt to control the Afghans. From time to time disturbances took place in the region affecting the flow of traffic. Frequent expeditions had to be undertaken to keep the roads open. The first major challenge to Mughal authority in this region came from the anti-orthodox Raushaniyya Movement led by Bayazid Ansari, a horse merchant.

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opposed to the high rate of taxation of the Mughal government. Bayazid’s teachings emphasizing on freedom from observing the Shariat, obedience to the Pir and the promise of dominion of the world attracted many followers. Initially the movement confined itself to socio-religious activities and was therefore tolerated by the Mughals. But Bayazid’s consent to the plunder of the property of non-Raushaniyyas by his followers in order to maintain their loyalty led to frequent attacks on caravans. The Raushaniyyas became so bold that they attacked the Badakshani prince Mirza Shah Rukh who was on his way to Akbar’s court in 1584. Fearing that their authority in the region would be lost, the Mughal government decided to crush the movement.

Campaigns against the Raushaniyyas lasted throughout the second half of Akbar’s region. By the early seventeenth century the movement had lost its earlier vigour. It suffered continuous setbacks during Jahangir and Shah Jahan’s reigns. At last Abdul Qadir, the Raushaniyya leader realized the futility of

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resistance and submitted. He was made a Mansabdar. By 1638 the political significance of the movement had ended. 49

Another challenge for the Mughals was the Yusufzai tribe who were said to be engaged in the practice of 'robbery and turbulence'.50 Faced with Mughal might they submitted initially and apologized for their conduct. But their promise of loyalty was short-lived and they soon resumed plunder. 51 Mughal reprisal was harsh with a large number of rebels being killed and enslaved and sold in Iran and Turan. Most of Swat was conquered and several forts were established to maintain order. 52 Abul Fazl praises the military achievement in the following words “roads became safe and hill and plain were united. Traders came from every side and things became cheap.” 53 Akbar’s favorite courtier was idealizing the situation for the Afghan tribes continued to be restive and rebelled several times during the reign of Akbar. 54

According to another source, robbery was frequent on the Kabul road in spite of the presence of guard stations at regular intervals. 55 De Goes, who went from Lahore to Kabul in 1603 mentions that the caravan in which he was travelling was forced to halt for five days near Attock as they had heard that a large body of robbers was threatening the road ahead. Proceeding from Peshawar

49 Smith, ‘Lower Class Uprisings’
50 Abul Fazl, Akbar Nama, Vol.3, p 716.
55 Foster, edited, Early Travels, p 167.
they once again received news of the road being infested with brigands. 400 soldiers were hired to protect the caravan but they were still attacked at Jagdalik. Many travelers lost their lives while trying to save themselves from being looted.\footnote{Wessels, \textit{Early Jesuit Travellers}, p 12-4.}

With the final loss of Kandahar to the Safavids in 1648 the importance of the Khyber route increased as it was the only link to Kabul and Central Asia where the Mughals had some control.\footnote{Gommans, \textit{Indo-Afghan Empire}, p 112.} But here they had to face a large scale uprising of the Afridis in the 1670s. Swat and the adjacent areas were lost. Even Aurangzeb’s long presence of one and half year in the region did not help much. With the appointment of Mohammed Amin Khan to the governorship of Kabul in 1678, the situation improved. Amin Khan followed the policy of paying subsidies to the Afghans and supporting one tribe against the other. As the result the Afghan region was kept peaceful for two decades.\footnote{Verma, ‘The Tribal policy of the Mughals’, \textit{Islamic Culture}, July 1952, p 32-3.}

As mentioned earlier most of the Indo-Iranian caravan trade was conducted through the Multan- Kandahar route. The Afghan and Baluchi tribes were a constant threat to travelers on this route.\footnote{Manrique describes the Baluchis as ‘a race addicted to plunder and robbery’, \textit{Travels}, Vol 2, p 251-2.} Steel and Crowther noted that the Afghans had an economic stake in the caravan trade as it provided them an opportunity of selling provisions to the traders. This factor along with the Mughal military presence in the region had made them less opposed to trade than before.
But the threat of robbery had not disappeared entirely. Tavernier cautions travelers in the Afghan region to be vigilant against the local people whom he refers to as "powerful men and great thieves at night." Thevenot notes:

"to the east of it (Multan), there are high mountains, in many places inhabited by rajas, of whom some are tributary to the great Mogul, and others not, because having strong places to retreat into, they cannot be forced, though the merchants suffer much by their robberies."

On this route travelers generally moved in large numbers for security. Guards were also hired to deal with the brigands. Sometimes these measures were insufficient in providing safety which had to be purchased from the robbers. Manrique observed that a small garrison had been posted at the fortress of Chatza to provide security but these guards were not very trust-worthy and were very likely to rob travelers. Likewise he felt that the garrison posted at Khush Kinakhud, the last Mughal outpost on the road to Persia was too small to offer protection from thieves.

Manrique's skeptic attitude was not completely justifiable for the Mughal forces were frequently engaged in efforts to keep the roads open. For example in 1639 the governor of Kandahar reported that the 'Afghan turbulence' had been

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crushed and they had agreed to act as convoys for the merchants using the road. 65
But a few months later the route was again held up and had to be cleared by an
expedition. 66 The report of robbery of a caravan that was carrying large amounts
of gold near Kandahar in 1673 shows the dangers involved on the route. 67

The Routes in the Eighteenth Century

By the early eighteen-century Peshawar, Roh and the land between the
Indus and Sulaiman range had become virtually independent. 68 Prince Shah Alam,
Governor of Kabul from 1699 to 1709 continued to make payments to the Afghans
in order to keep the route open. In the 1730’s the failure of the Governor of Punjab
to send money to Kabul for the maintenance of the army stationed there led many
Afghans to leave Mughal service and resort to robbery. 69

Under the Durranis, guards were stationed on dangerous roads to protect
wayfarers. They were provided by the local tribe and were paid by the state. But
they were not very effective and travellers either had to buy their safety from tribal
chiefs or hire escorts. Usually one escort was sufficient for the purpose but in some
regions a large party had to be hired in order to guard one’s goods. 70 This option
was not available in the case of the tribes of the Khyber Pass. About them,

Elphinstone writes:

68 Caroe, Pathans, p 248.
69 Alam, Crisis of Empire, p 294-5.

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‘but such are their habits of rapine that they can never be entirely restrained from plundering passengers and when there is confusion in the state, it is impossible to pass through their country... In quiet times, the Khyberees have stations in different parts of the Pass, to collect an authorized toll on passengers, but in times of trouble they are all on the alert: if a single traveler endeavours to make his way through the noise of his horse’s feet sounds up the long narrow valleys, and soon brings the Khyberees in troops from the hills and ravines; but if they expect a caravan, they assemble in hundreds on the side of a hill, and sit patiently, with their matchlocks in their hands watching its approach.‘\(^7\)

Although they received an annual grant from Kabul that was meant to keep them from harassing travellers they still engaged in looting.\(^7\) Forster mentions that an Armenian merchant whom he met in Peshwar preferred to go to Kabul via Multan and Kandahar, a considerably longer route in order to avoid the risk of robbery in the Khyber Pass. That the merchant’s fears were not unfounded was proved later when a small band of robbers made a sudden attack on the caravan in which Forster was traveling and looted goods worth Four Hundred Rupees from a Hindu merchant. Forster blamed the conduct of the tribes on the weakness of the Afghan government which was unable to pacify them and the

resource poor nature of the region. A traveler to Kabul in 1797 noted that caravans without adequate protection were likely to be plundered near Jalalabad, located between the Khyber Pass and Kabul. The Khyber route continued to have a bad reputation in the early nineteenth century and was avoided by those going to Kabul. The Karapa route lying in Mohmumd territory was preferred by travelers who could either hire a local guide or make a payment to their chief to ensure safe passage.

The Gomal route was also not free from danger. Here the Waziri tribe regularly threatened the Lohani caravans who carried arms for protection. In the 1780s, a severe fight took place between the two parties in which a large number of men were killed on both sides. The Lohanis also had to deal with another tribe known as the Sulaiman Kyl who had a reputation of being less ferocious than the Waziris. They were usually satisfied with a payment.

Traders employed several devises for their safety in dangerous areas. Orderly march was undertaken and parties were stationed at proper intervals for security. When the caravan made a halt, a party of horsemen was kept ready to

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75 Burnes writes that the Mohmunds demanded an amount of half rupee from a Muslim and one rupee from a Hindu but agreed to receive a lesser sum, Travels, Vol 1, p 114; Elphinstone, An Account, Vol 2, p 41.
76 Vigne, Personal Narrative, p 84-5, 104-111. About the Waziris, Elphinstone says 'Though they are notorious plunderers, the smallest escort secures a traveler an hospitable reception through the whole tribe. They are particularly remarkable for their attacks on caravans, and migratory tribes to the west of the pass of Gholairee. No escorts are ever granted or applied for there; the caravan is well guarded, and able to deter attacks, or to fight its way through', An Account, Vol 2, p 79.
deter robbers. Several members of the caravan kept watch at night. Bills of exchange were preferred instead of cash. Those who carried valuables hid them in their slippers, turbans and belts.

**Taxation on the routes**

Traders in Mughal India had to pay various kinds of transit dues to the state like the baz, tamgha and the zakat. Another cess levied on the roads was Rahdari. It was intended to provide for the remuneration of the Rahdars that were appointed by officials and Zamindars to guard roads. The rahdars were also expected to ensure that stolen goods were recovered. The amount paid in rahdari varied from place to place. It depended upon the value of the goods carried and the number of men and animals in the caravan. Usually, this charge was not very high. In order to promote trade, many Mughal Emperors had sought to prohibit these tolls. Akbar had abolished the tamgha. Jahangir had abolished all transit dues in Kabul which had brought in one crore and twenty three lakh dams to the treasury. He had also remitted the Zakat in Kabul and Kandahar and claims that the people of Iran and Turan benefited by this step. His successor Shah Jahan however, re-introduced many of the taxes. The rate of Rahdari and Hasil(paid on

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81 Jahangir, *Tuzuk*, p 47.
profits) was also increased. Foreign merchants complained of the high rate of tax imposed at Attock. Aurangzeb proved to be more supportive of traders than his father. He abolished the Hasil and exempted Muslim merchants from paying sales tax. 82

Imperial regulations declaring the abolition of transit duties were however disregarded by local officials who continued to collect them. This is brought out by the testimony of several travelers. Steel and Crowther mention that the Mughal garrison at Chatza (situated near the Indus) levied a toll at the rate of 2 Abbasis on every camel. Their caravan was held up again at Dukee due to negotiations with the head of the guards regarding the tax rate. The caravan paid at the rate of one and a half Abbasis per camel. At Coasta (Kawas) the Afghans demanded two and a half Abbasis on each camel. The caravan once again paid a small duty of half Abbasi per camel at Pesinga (Pishinj) to the Mughal soldiers. 83 Thus between Multan and Kandahar the caravan paid transit dues at four places.

Manrique did not pay any duties on the same stretch as he was accompanying a high ranking noble. He records that in Kandahar a duty of half rupee per camel was levied. The garrison stationed at Khush Kinakhud also collected tolls. 84 Entering Persian territory, Steel’s caravan paid an import duty at

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82 Burton, The Bukharans, p 446.
84 Manrique, Travels, Vol 2, p 261, 342.
Farah at the rate of three per cent ad valorem. Manrique does not mention this duty. In all, Steel records a total payment of 56 shahis per camel in transit dues while Poser, who traveled in the opposite direction, paid only 18.5 shahis. Thus the rate of the tolls was not fixed but depended on the capriciousness of officials. Going by the evidence of the sources we can say that the tolls were not very high.

We lack information on the amount of tax levied by the Afghans at the Khyber Pass and at other places on the road to Kabul and beyond in the seventeenth century. Forster records that the Afghans of the Khyber Pass collected a small charge from all travelers in the late eighteenth century. Such payments had to be made at several other places too. For instance, in 1812, Hafiz Mohammad Fazil Khan mentions that the Hazaras inhabiting the territory between Sarchashma and Kaloo on the road to Bukhara used to levy a small charge on all travelers. Similarly the Hazaras of Akrabad, were in the habit of collecting tolls but the ruler of Kholoom, whose territory was nearby had put an end to this practice. But whenever they got an opportunity, they made their demands on travelers and accepted whatever was given to them.

In the Eighteenth century, the traditional route to Kabul via Lahore was overshadowed by a new route through Rohilkhand and Jammu due to the unsettled conditions of Punjab. Although this route was safe, the tolls collected by numerous

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86 Steensgaard, 'The Route through Quandahar.' p 61.
88 Hafiz Muhammad Khan, Tarikh i Manazil i Bukhara, p 17.
petty chiefs made it expensive. Forster had to pay duties at five places between Najibabad and Jammu. At one place (Bilaspur) he managed to evade any payment through the intercession of some merchants going to Delhi and Lucknow. The situation continued to the same beyond Jammu causing an exasperated Forster to remark: 'At the distance of every ten or twelve miles from Jumbo to Chinnaun river, one of these petty tyrants takes his stand, and on the payment of a stipulated sum to the government, collects the public duties as well as enforces every species of private exaction, and such taxes have become the more grievous to the merchants, by their being equally levied on the transportation of goods through a district, as at the actual place of sale.' He also mentions that a duty of 3 to 4 per cent had to be paid at thirty places between Lucknow and Jammu.

Distinct from the transit dues was the tax on the goods sent out and goods imported. In Akbar’s time, the rate of tax on Iraqi half-breds and Arab horses that came from Persia and Kabul was three rupees. Turkish and Arab horses that came via Kandahar were taxed at the rate of two and a half rupees and the Kabul variety at the rate of two rupees. In Multan, a tax of two and half per cent was levied on goods sent towards Qandahar and Thatta. According to Manucci, an import tax of twenty five percent was imposed on horses that came from Kabul, Bukhara and

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93 Foster, *English Factories, 1637-41*, p 81.
Bulkh at the Indus. He adds that this was a great source of profit to the state. In the eighteenth century, the Afghan state collected duties at four places—Bamiyan, Kabul, Peshawar and Jalalabad. On Turki horses, the duty charged at Bamiyan and Jalalabad was two rupees each. At Kabul, it was four rupees and at Peshawar, it was three rupees. On dry fruits a flat rate of two rupees was charged on the amount carried by a mule or a pony. The rate was higher on indigo and Kashmiri wool.

Information on the rate of tolls on the routes from Central Asia in the 1830’s is provided by Mohan Lal. He writes that no duties were paid between Bukhara and Kholoom. At the latter place, a duty of one and half Tila or Nine rupees and Ten annas was collected. A small duty of One rupee Six annas was levied at Haibak. At Ghur, traders paid at the rate of Two and a half per cent. In the Afghan state, a duty of Two rupees per load was collected at two places. A ‘town duty’ had to be paid in Kabul at the rate of Eleven Rupees per camel load on fruits and Two Hundred and Sixty rupees per camel load on silk. The Lohani chief at Manjigarh imposed a uniform tax of Two rupees Eight annas on all commodities. The duty paid between Derabund and Multan was Eight rupees per camel load while the rate between Derabund and Bahawalpur was Two rupees Eight annas. Mohan Lal also mentions that merchants were not happy at the high

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95 Hafiz Muhammad Khan, Tarikh i Manazil i Bukhara, p 17.
rate of taxation imposed in the Punjab. His associate, Burnes writes that the route from Delhi to Kabul via Lahore, Attock and Peshawar had fallen into disuse due to the heavy duties imposed by Ranjit Singh. Merchants from Bengal took the route of Delhi, Hansi, Bahawalpur, Multan and then followed the course of the Gomul river to reach Ghazni and Kabul. Merchants from Bombay went via Pali and Bombay to Bahawalpur from where they followed the course mentioned above. He appreciates the fact that the duties then levied at Kabul were low and did not exceed two and half per cent.

Rahdars and Sarays in Iran

Security on the roads in Iran was the responsibility of the rahdars who were posted throughout the empire. They were empowered to stop a traveller and to verify his credentials. A small charge per pack animal was their remuneration. Many travellers have expressed their admiration for the Rahdari system. According to Coverte "And there a man may travel without danger of robbing, for it is there a strange thing to hear of a thief". Tavernier vouches for

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96 Mohan Lal, Travel, p 240-3. The rates payable at the customs house of Multan were as follows-Six Rupees Eight Annas per maund on indigo, seven per cent on English cloth, eight per cent on spices, one rupees Five annas per maund on cotton, Five to Six Rupees per camel load on fruits, Five Rupees per horse and Two Rupees per camel.
98 Tavernier, Reflections, p 233.
100 Emerson and Floor, 'Rahdars and their Tolls,' p 320.
the efficiency of the system by saying that one could travel alone in Iran. Fryer mentions a case of robbery but observes that it was a rare occurrence due to the fear of severe punishment imposed on the thieves. He also reports that when an agent of the English company had some of his goods stolen in a saray, the Rahdars acted promptly and caught the thief. In case the stolen goods could not be recovered the local Governor had to pay their value to its owner. For instance Tavernier who lost goods worth 1400 piastres between Lar and Shiraz was given the exact amount by the Governor of Jahrum.

The effectiveness of the Rahdari system had declined considerably by the late Safavid era. Cases of robbery became frequent. In the reign of Shah Hussain (1694-1722), Rahdars were said to be in league with highwaymen with whom they divided the loot. Travellers had no option but to make compromise with the robbers. Rahdars themselves took advantage of the weakening of royal authority and indulged in plunder.

A bigger blow to safety was dealt by the tribal insurrections of the early eighteenth century. It was mentioned in 1722 that the Baluchis and the Afghans, 'range the country even within sight of Isphahan and many times carry away both goods and merchandise and have very considerably reduced the trade of Persia in

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102 Emerson and Floor, "Rahdars and their Tolls", p 319.
105 Tavernier, Reflections, p 233.
106 Emerson and Floor, "Rahdars and their Tolls", p 323.
general." Though the system was resumed after the Safavid Restoration (1730) it was not as effective as before due to Iran's disturbed political condition.

A policy of construction of roads and sarays also characterized Safavid rule. Shah Abbas whose reign marks the high point of the dynasty placed great emphasis on public works. Various roads were built with Isphahan as their focal point. The capital was provided with 1800 sarays. All the important routes were lined with rest-houses. Some of these structures were still intact till the nineteenth century. Lewis Pelly, an English official travelling overland to India in the 1860s, described them as the 'finest and most enduring structures I have seen in Persia.' Shah Abbas' successors continued the building programme, though not with the same zeal. Some sarays were also built by merchants from altruistic motives. For instance, the 'Zaffranue serai' near the town of Subzwar was said to be the largest in Persia. It was constructed by a merchant of Khorasan.

Iranian caravan sarays were simple structures lacking the finery that a European was used to. In the words of Tavernier:

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108 Krusinski, The History, p 129.
109 Emerson and Floor, "Rahdars and their Tolls", p 323.
110 Dale, Indian Merchants, p 38.
112 Several travelers mention the Sarays located on important roads. For example William Hedges mentions several Sarays between Lar and Isphahan. The Diary of William Hedges, edited by R. Barlow, Hakluyt Society, p 205-209.
113 Pelly, Journey from Persia to India, p 23.
114 Fraser, Narrative of a Journey, p 361.
115 Fraser, Narrative of a Journey, p 383-6.
The caravanseras are the eastern inns, far different from ours, for they are
neither so convenient nor so handsom. They are built square, much like
cloisters, being usually but one storey high for it is rare to see one of two
stories. A wide gate brings you into the court, and is the midst of the
building. In the front and upon the right and left hand, there is a hall for
persons of the best quality to keep together. On each side of the hall are
lodgings for every man by himself.'\textsuperscript{117}

Though there was no provision for food, tanks and cisterns provided
water; facilities that weary travelers were grateful for.\textsuperscript{118} Lodging was free in the
sarays situated on the highways. In the case of cities one paid rent for rooms and
rest-houses.\textsuperscript{119} The caretaker of the saray supervised commerce conducted in the
saray and was responsible for the security of goods.\textsuperscript{120}

Sarays were a conspicuous feature of all Iranian cities. The Russian
traveler Kotov noted that Shemakha had seven sarays and all of them were
provided with water.\textsuperscript{121} Kazwin, Kashan and Ardebil also had many sarays or
'hostelries'.\textsuperscript{122} Pottinger counted nine sarays in the city of Kirman and noted that
there were several others outside the walls of the city.\textsuperscript{123} At Mashhad a saray was

\textsuperscript{117} Tavernier, Reflections, p 45.
\textsuperscript{118} Tavernier, Reflections, p 179, p 256.
\textsuperscript{119} Fryer, A New Account, Vol 2, p 250.
\textsuperscript{120} Levi, Indian Diaspora, p 42.
\textsuperscript{121} Kemp, Russian Travellers, p 9.
\textsuperscript{122} Kemp, Russian Travellers, p 10, 14, 15.
\textsuperscript{123} Pottinger, Travels in Beloochistan, p 224-5.
The city which later became Nadir shah's capital had 90 Sarays, 'all in good repair'. By the early nineteenth century, however, only about Twenty five to Thirty of these establishments were still in use while the rest had become defunct since their founders had died and no arrangement had been made for their upkeep. The neglect of these valuable structures was not confined to Mashhad; most of the sarays on the Iranian highways were in a sorry state in the nineteenth century.

Commercial Policy of the Central Asian rulers

Like his contemporaries Shah Abbas and Akbar, Abd Allah Khan of Turan paid attention to the needs of traders. He built several sarays, bazaars, bridges and resting places in his kingdom. Many of these structures like the Tim Bazaar of Bukhara and the saray of Qaraval, situated near the city were still surviving in the nineteenth century. Praising the long deceased ruler, Mohan Lal says, 'he has filled this part of the country with numerous monuments and deserves the highest praise for his liberality in making places and wells which

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126 Fraser, *Narrative*, p 460.
127 Fraser, *Narrative*, p 383; Mohan Lal, *Travels*, p. 126, 137, 139, 170, 174. Speaking of the decay of the rest-houses, Pottinger writes 'the greater part of the intervening country between Kirman and Bandar Abbas is barren and inhospitable, and there are only a few miserable villages. There was formerly a large and elegant Karawan Surae at each stage built by Abbas the great but they have been allowed to go to decay. And the systematic avarice of the Persian government leaves no chance of their being repaired', *Travels in Beloochistan*, p 228-9.
refresh travelers'.129 Taxes like the Baz, Tamgha, and Zakat were levied on local and foreign traders in Bokhara.130 According to Jenkinson, a tax of ten percent was levied on merchants and artisans. The attention shown by Abd Allah Khan towards promoting trade and commerce can be seen from the fact that when Jenkinson narrated to him how he had been robbed on the way to Bokhara, he immediately sent a contingent of 100 soldiers to capture the robbers. Some of the robbers were caught and hanged publicly to set an example to others. The goods that had been stolen were also recovered in part.131

Unfortunately most of Abd Allah Khan's successors followed policies that were detrimental to the interests of traders. They however made frequent requests to the Mughals to keep the roads safe and to help visiting Bukharan merchants in buying Indian commodities.132 A visitor to Bokhara around the mid-eighteenth century mentions that the city had several sarays. The bazaars though had fallen into ruins. A nominal duty of one per cent was imposed on imports whether by local or by foreign merchants. The duty on exports was set higher, at ten per cent.133

Bukharan rulers continued to make provisions for the needs of traders. This policy was appreciated by Burnes in the following words, 'No people could be more liberal encouragers of trade than the rulers of Bukhara.' He also notes that

129 Mohan Lal, Travel, p 74, 78.
130 Haidar, 'Taxation Policy,' p 314-5.
132 Burton, The Bukharans, p 418; Levi, Indian Diaspora, p 44.
133 Hanway, Historical Account, Vol 1, p 353.
in accordance with Islamic law, zakat of two and half percent was levied on Muslim traders while Hindu merchants paid at the rate of Ten percent. 134 The Zakat, imposed on a commodity was realized once in a year. If a merchant had paid Zakat on an item in the previous year, no tax was to be paid by him on the same item in the current year.135 Burnes also noted that the city of Bukhara had around twenty sarays that housed merchants from different countries.136 His assistant Mohanlal believed that it had more rest-houses than Kabul.137

The rulers of the principalities of Kholoom and Kundooz also followed a policy of encouraging trade. In 1812, Muhammad Fazil Khan observed that there was no fear of robbers in the territory of Kholoom. The state was also free from transit duties. He adds that in the same year, Mir Qulij Beg, the ruler of Kholoom had undertaken an expedition against the Hazaras of Aqrabad, near Bamiyan, who were in the habit of attacking caravans traveling between Kabul and Kholoom. Several Hazaras were captured and enslaved. As a result, the road had become very safe.138 Kholoom had four sarays in the early nineteenth century.139 The ruler of Kundooz, while indulging in raids on neighbouring territories to capture slaves did not harm any trader passing through his territory. He had also kept duties low

135 Muhammad Fazil Khan, The Uzbek Emirates of Bukhara and Kholoom, p 28.
136 Burnes, Travels, Vol 1, p 301. Mohan Lal puts the tax rate paid by Non Muslims at Five Percent.
137 Mohan Lal, Travel, p 82.
138 Muhammad Fazil Khan, The Uzbek Emirates of Bukhara and Kholoom, p 17, 21; Mir Izzatullah, Travels in Central Asia, p 80-1.
139 Moorcroft, Travels, Vol 2, p 452.
and even remitted duties on some articles.  

Around the same period, the city of Herat had seven sarays inhabited by merchants from different countries. One of them was occupied by Indian traders; another was inhabited by merchants from Bokhara and Kandahar and one was reserved for traders of Herat and Persia. Captain Christie who had also visited the city had commented that the large and spacious sarays of Herat were occupied by several merchants along with their goods. All the rest-houses had cisterns to provide water. The best sarays were occupied by the Hindus.

Conclusion

The Mughals took several measures to facilitate overland trade like establishing a network of sarays, building bridges over rivers, leveling difficult passes, etc. These facilities continued to be useful even in the eighteenth century when the Mughals had lost effective power in the subcontinent. The contemporaries of the Mughals, the Uzbek Khans and the Safavids also undertook similar works although they did not possess the quantum of resources that the Mughals did. The Mughal desire to promote the caravan trade was also expressed in the frequent abolition of duties. Unfortunately local officials did not take note of royal orders and continued to collect them.

141 Mohan Lal, Travel, p 159.
142 Pottinger, Travels, p 414-5.
The efforts of the Mughals to ensure that the overland routes were safe were not very successful due to the difficulty in enforcing their will in the mountainous areas of Afghanistan. Traders had to deal with the tribes on their own. Instead of offering resistance to their demands and thereby putting their life and property in danger, they generally preferred to ‘buy’ protection from them. The amount paid as Protection cost was not fixed but was subject to negotiation. The tribes were generally conscious of the fact that traders could choose alternative routes and were therefore modest in their demands.