Chapter - II

The Armenian Community in India in the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries
From the outset of the eighteenth century a new migration wave of the Armenians to India commenced, overwhelmingly from Iran. This inflow was more massive and the reasons for it were much different compare to the previous wave. If the seventeenth century migration was stipulated by commercial interests and was ignited by the emergence of prospering New Julfa merchant community with its targeted policy of their trade spreading out and focusing on India as a hub, in the eighteenth century it was largely conditioned by a series of domestic developments within Iran. The state of affairs of the Iranian-Armenian population drastically deteriorated due to changes in the policy towards non-Muslim minorities. The trend, displayed during the reign of Safavid Shah Sulayman (1666-1694), turned into an abrupt policy of persecution of Christians and non-Shiite Muslims at the time of religious fanatic Shah Sultan Husayn (1694-1722). The latter started with gebres (Zoroastrians) and then turned to the Armenians. Forcible conversion of Armenians to Islam was elevated to state policy and was directed first of all at the wealthy New Julfa community, as well as the Armenian population of Peria (Faridan), Charmahal, Tabriz, Hamadan, Shiraz, Kerman etc. Some adopted Islam, receiving privileges and the right to inherit the property of close and remote relatives according to the law of Imam Jafar, while the others were firmly resisting all attempts of apostasy. The environment of dire insecurity in the Armenian settlements and especially in New Julfa, subjugation to constant humiliation compelled many of them to emigrate from Iran. They were heading to Bushehr and from there to India. The note, dated September 14th, 1705 of Bishop David, the primate and the prior of All Savior’s Monastery in New Julfa testifies that on the 10th and 11th year of Shah Sultan Hussein’s reign only in two parishes of New Julfa 159 in number households diminished.\(^1\)

The Armenian merchants of New Julfa were experiencing the religious and economic pressures in Iran at a time when both Russia and the English East India Company in India were trying to co-opt them into their own service.\(^2\)

The consequent Afghan occupation of Isfahan in 1722 economically devastated New Julfa and caused a large migration to India, Iraq, Russia and European countries. The ravages caused by Afghan tribal chief Mahmud of Qandahar dealt such a blow on

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2 Vazken Ghougassian, *The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 162
Bengal. As an important trading group, their presence was a common feature in all the prominent centers of trade and manufacture, cities and ports. Thus it is not surprising that the Armenians had strong presence and commercial interest in Saidabad, Hugli, Calcutta, Kasimbazar, Dhaka and Patna with their own localities and churches.

The case study of Bengal clearly shows that the Armenian merchants mostly were not peddlers. Even the conclusion, based on the analysis of Hovhannes Jughayetsi’s ledger that as far as he operated on the peddler level so the whole trade of the Armenians, as all of the Asians was just a peddler one, doesn’t depict the whole picture. Hovhannes was just working for an eminent New Julfan merchant family whose activities were incomparably wider. K.N. Chaudhury calls the Armenian merchants a group of “highly skilled arbitrage dealers”, “ready to deal in any commodity that offered the prospect of a profit”. Among the Indian-Armenians there were merchants whose status was equal to that of the most successful merchants of London and Amsterdam. The cases of Khoja Israel Sarhad (Surhau) and Khoja or Khwaja Wazid, the two prominent Armenian merchants in Bengal in the first half of the eighteenth century, will bear the point out. The European trading companies in Bengal generally contracted for procurement of export commodities with substantial merchants who could handle a large volume of trade. The commercial empires and the trading world of Umichand and Khwaja Wazid (the Armenian among them), and most important of all, the business world of Jagat Seths were not the ones which correspond to the world of Hovhannes but were the Indian equivalent of the business world of the Medici family or the Fuggers or the Tripps. The power and wealth of the merchant princes were closely allied with the favour from the darbar (court). One of the main props of their rise to such a great height of eminence in the commercial life of Bengal, especially in the forties and fifties of the eighteenth century, was the darbar backing.

Wajid, with other two merchant princes, collectively dominated the commercial life and hence, to a great extent, the economy of Bengal in the last three decades of the first half of the 18th century. He operated his extensive business empire from Hugli, the then commercial capital of Bengal. According to Zamia-i-Tadhkira-i-Yusufi, though

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6 Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 124
Wajid was born in Patna, his forefathers belonged to Kashmir and that he settled in Hugli. According to the "Memorie" of Alexander Hume and those of the Dutch Directors, Wajid was the son of "Coja Mahmet Fazel", an influential Armenian merchant in the 1730s and the early 1740s. It is known from Calcutta Mayor's Court Records that around the early 1740s, Wajid obtained a foothold at the darbar of the Hugli faujdar (an administrative official in the Mughal set-up) as the representative (vakil) of the Armenian community of merchants.

Along with Bengal, Coromandel, and Madras in particular, emerged as a place for Armenian population's concentration in India. Within the scope of the overall history of Armenians in India, the role of Madras is exceptional. In the second half of the eighteenth-century Madras became a prominent center of enlightenment, cultural awakening, education, literary life and the Armenian national-liberation ideology. The Armenian community of Madras gained a fame of prospering Diaspora entity with all its multifaceted structures since the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Armenian merchants' network was so active here that F. Braudel, one of the prominent scholars on the history of civilizations exclaims: "What would Madras be without Armenians?" The Armenian Church at Madras was erected in 1712. It was one of the few magnificent edifices in the esplanade of that city, but the Armenians were obliged to desert it after a time, as the British authorities would not permit so high an edifice to stand in the immediate vicinity of the Fort. Later on it was demolished when the French, under count Lally, took Madras in 1746. Presently existing Armenian Church of Holy Virgin Mary, situated in Armenian Street, was erected in 1772 at the site of the old Armenian burying-ground, on which a chapel stood. The ground was the property of famous Agah Shameer, whose wife Anna was buried there in 1765.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Armenian merchants of Madras acquired prevailing positions in money-spinning trade with Manila. At some point the President of the Honorable Company's Council blamed them for carrying their merchandise to and from Europe on the Danes' ships, contracting with the French and Spaniards, and consigning their eastern goods to Pondicherry and other foreign ports in

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7 Memorie of Alexander Hume: Antwerp, Stadsarchief Antwerpen, General Indische Compagnie, 5768
8 F. Braudel, Civilisation materielle, economie et capitalisme, Paris, 1979, t. III, p. 422
9 Mesrovb Jacob Seth, Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present, p. 580
India. The merchandise list of their commercial turnover with Iran and Europe included precious stones luxury items. The Armenian merchants often sailed their ships under European flags. The following extracts from the official records of the Honorable Company spread light on the mode in which the trade was carried out by Madras merchants, the Armenians in particular and on their relationship with the Company.

“Monday, 27th April, 1724 – The President told the board that the Armenians had for a long time behaved themselves in a very insolent haughty manner; and had rendered themselves not only undeserving the great privileges granted them, but likewise obnoxious to the Government by several actions, contrary to the rules and regulations thereof; and that he had ordered them to attend the Board to answer to several facts he had to charge them with. The first was that Codejee (Khoja) George, and the rest of the owners of the ship ‘London’, had imported great part of ship’s cargo at Pondicherry, to the amount of 12,000 pagodas, contrary to the order of the Company; as would fully appear from their letter of the 7th April 1708, where they order native inhabitants to be expelled the bounds, if they carry the trade to St. Thome to the prejudice of the customs of Madras; which by parity of reason holds the same with respect to Pondicherry, since wherever the goods are imported, still the customs are lost to them. He, the President, likewise produced the Company’s letter of the 19th December 1719, where are these remarkable words, speaking of the French, - that none of our servants, whether Europeans or Indians, nor any of our merchants or brokers, be permitted to buy or sell for them, or otherwise assist them in their trade or merchandize. He added that Codejee Petrus, an Armenian lately arrived from Manila, and an inhabitant of this place, had contracted with the French this very year for 30,000 dollars worth of goods upon freight; ...all which actions tend greatly to the damage of the Company with respect to their customs, and to the place itself, by encouraging foreigners and destroying the navigation of the English. He added that this evil had been long growing to the height it now is, and that as it is daily increasing, if the Board does not take some measures to prevent it, the commerce of Madras must inevitably fall away to nothing.”

In the report of 20th May, 1724 it is said that “the Armenians not taking warning by the late orders given them at the Board, but

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10 J. Talboys Wheeler, Madras in the Olden Times Being a History of the Presidency from the First Foundation of Fort St. George to the Occupation of Madras by the French – 1639-1748, Madras, 1882, reprint of Asian Educational Services, 1993, pp. 418-419
growing more insolent; and having since engaged with one Agostinho Bassilio, who is a Spaniard..."11

The permanently residing Armenian population in Madras was small in size. In 1870s it numbered 20 households, with 51 males and 45 females.12 But the factual size of the community was much larger. In addition to permanent residents, numerous Armenians were staying in Madras on temporary basis – just for several years. Among them were merchants, who had to frequently move from one place to another due to their commercial endeavors. There were also workmen, who sought employment in this and other communities. The fact that Madras hosted many Armenian orphans is registered in several documents.

Madras Armenian community was not only able to create institutions of self-governance in the second half of the eighteenth century, but also produced legal basis for its implementation – relevant bylaws, assembled in community charter. That was the first undertaking of this kind among the Armenian settlements of India and even the whole Armenian Diaspora. Madras Armenians emerged as pioneers not just in theoretical elaboration of local self-government principles, but the noteworthiness is in ability of putting it into practice. According to “Booklet Called Guidelines” of 178313, self-governing structure of Madras Armenian community was defined. According to its full title, the pamphlet was a “guideline for the management of the Orphan’s Fund and the estates of those who have died without leaving a will.” But in reality, it was the internal bylaws of the Armenian community of Madras, which since 1760 had regularly held its annual General Assembly.

It contains several clauses, truly revolutionary in their novelty, which testifies to broadmindedness of Madras Armenians. According to one of them (clause 28), it was allowed to receive contributions and provide financial assistance to the Armenians of non-Apostolic faith. It has never been before that any Armenian formal document contains such a scheme. Recognizing solely national adherence and refusing to stick to enveloped ecclesiastical dogmas, the mentioned provision “bursts through religious

11 Ibid., p. 420
13 Booklet Called Guideline, (in Armenian), Madras, 1783
Another clause of significance relates to defining the categories of children, who can enter Armenian school in Madras. The right to study at the Armenian school was bestowed, along with the Armenians, upon Indians, Ethiopians and Assyrians, who follow their own religion and faith. This notion could also unquestionably be considered as unprecedented in the Armenian realities of the period concerned. The Armenian thought, shaped under the influence of Madras multinational environment within traditional millenniums-old Indian civilization, produced advanced for its times results. But still it was not entirely moderate as far as certain limitation was anyhow reflected in it. Among the local Indians, "pariahs were not allowed" to enter the school, meaning outcasts.

Nonetheless, on Madras scale the authors of "Guidelines" attempted to introduce the principle of the state and the church separation. The clergy was excluded from the Executive Committee and the management of the fund, because, as a matter of principle, "the laymen should not interfere in the affairs of the church and the clergy should not be involved in secular matters." Consequently, this principle was realized in practice by Madras Armenians. In the minutes of Madras Armenians General Assembly proceedings of August 17, 1793 the same principle is manifested: "lay people should not interfere in affairs of clergy, and vice versa, clergy should not meddle in affairs of lay people."

According to the "Booklet Called Guideline", which was supposed to be officially adopted and put into effect as of August, 1784, the highest authority in the internal life of Madras Armenian community was the General Assembly, attended by all the members of the community "as equals". The most progressive step in the pamphlet is introduction of the voting right. By free election in the General Assembly, a three-member "executive committee" and a secretary from among the "well to do and respectable" members of the community were entrusted with the management of the community fund. For individuals, who were eligible to be elected there was property cense, but not for voters. Every participant at the meeting had the right to speak and vote, with no exception. Two cups, having written "yes" or "no" on them served as voting boxes. Beans were the votes,

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15 Booklet Called Guideline, p. 77
thrown into this or the other cup. The voting was conducted in an open and transparent manner, while decisions were taken by simple majority of votes.

The incomes of the fund were derived from membership dues, individual contributions, wills, and profits earned by wise investments and accumulated interests. The annual profit of the fund was partly used for charitable, social, educational and cultural purposes. At the end of every year, a detailed accounting was presented by the Executive Committee to the General Assembly. The official language for proceedings and records was the Armenian.

The intellectual leadership of Madras Armenian society was very much concerned with the unavoidable perspective of dispersing and eventual vanishing of the accumulated wealth of their community, as far as Armenia is not independent and their capital could not truly serve the motherland. So, all these arrangements also served the purpose of consolidating the community and spearheading in guidance through proper governance mechanisms. Pointing in the right direction in drawing the prospective was intended to be vital in attaching sense of final goal for each and every Armenian in Madras as well as in entire India. The “Booklet Called Guideline” was intended to guide the community until the glorious day when all the Armenians would most willingly return to Armenia. But until then, if for any reason the Armenians felt obliged to depart from Madras or India, they should go to the North Caucasus and settle in Kizlar under Russian rule, in the region of New Nakhichevan (currently Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia), to be closer to their homeland and wait for the liberation of Armenia. Assumingly, Russia was encouraging such plans for its own purposes. While lacking direct testimony for this case, nonetheless reference to a later period episode comes to support this notion. The Russian envoy to Persia, General Aleksei Ermolov wrote in his report to the minister of finance in St. Petersburg that given the trade between India and Astrakhan over Persia was in the hands of the Armenians, if these Armenians relocated to Russia, the state would benefit greatly. 17

Simultaneous to advancement of the Russian troops in the Caucasus, Armenians worldwide were regarding Russia as country that could help in liberating Armenia from

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the foreign yoke. Madras Armenians also relied on Russian power. In preparation for their interim settlement in the North Caucasus, a draft agreement between Madras Armenians and the Russian emperor was even proposed, according to which the Armenians should enjoy full religious and economic freedom, should not be required to do mandatory military service, and, more importantly, should be free from serfdom, which was an accepted social norm in Russia. In the "Booklet" the principle position of Madras Armenians is stated through the following sentence: "People of our nation should not be serfs but free citizens".18

In overall assessment, Madras Armenian community only through the "Booklet Called Guideline" produced: a) sophisticated community charter, b) principle of separation of the church and limiting clerical authority, c) universal voting right, d) serfdom's negation. All these principles were so advanced for that time that could make their author Shahamir Shahamirian famed even beyond the Armenian circle, along with other Enlightenment thinkers.

Valuable volume, titled "Events or tools" was published in Madras in 1806, which is a collection of General Assembly proceedings. The study of these documents brings to conclusions that Madras Armenian community continued its energetic lifestyle, the institutions set upon the "Booklet" were not short-lived and the local patriots continued the quest for Armenia's liberation.19

Madras had its own Armenian educational institution. That school functioned in 1843-1860.

The eighteenth century Madras decorative art was enormously valued in Armenia. Madras produced church altar curtains, both stamped and embroidered and rich in color. They were made by stamping prepared cotton fabrics with carved wooden blocks. There are samples, preserved in the collections of the Catholicossate in Etchmiadzin in Armenia and the Armenian Patriarchate in Jerusalem. These large altar curtains have purely Armenian designs, often the life of St. Gregory or the conversion of Armenians to

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18 Booklet Called Guideline, p. 57
19 A. Yeremian, "Madras Flag Bearers of the Armenian People's Liberation Struggle", Etchmiadzin, 1948, no. 10-12
Christianity, with long Armenian inscriptive bands. Most probably they were manufactured by Indian workers after designs supplied by Armenian artists.20

The history of the Armenians in Madras recorded names of many prominent individuals, whose contribution to the community and the city is valuable. The most prominent among Armenian merchants in Madras was the family of Khoja Petrus, son of Khoja Woskan. Several famous constructions in Madras are associated with them (preserved until present). Khoja Petrus Woskan constructed 160 broad stone steps leading to Little Mount of Madras, hilltop burial place of worship of the Apostle St. Thomas.21 Khoja Petrus Woskan also built a long bridge across the river Adyar in 1726, which separates the hilltop shrine from the city of Madras.22 The construction of the bridge cost him 30,000 hoons, i.e. pagodas (each pagoda being equivalent to Rs 3-8), and left a fund for its maintenance. A stone marker on the western side of the Maralai or Marmalong Bridge reads: Hunc pontem edificari jussit pro bono publico Coja Petrus Usca natione Armeni, Ano Salutis, MDCCXXXVI." The same stone also includes inscriptions in Armenian and Persian, but they are almost unreadable due to erosion.

On the occasion of the visit of the Nawab of Arcot to Madras, Khoja Petrus provided hospitality, entertained him for few days and had all the main streets through which he had to pass draped in silk. The Nawab, greatly appreciating the loyalty of the Armenian merchant, granted him the sole monopoly of the import trade to Madras and into the interior. Khoja Petrus thus amassed considerable riches, but sustained heavy losses in the days when the French captured Madras in 1746 and totally demolished all the public buildings. Upwards of forty houses belonging to him in the city were leveled with the ground, besides other houses that he had in the Fort. The French seized all that he had in the Fort. He took refuge in a Danish town close to Madras.

The extract below illustrates the jealousy which had prevailed among the English respecting the residence of foreigners, namely Armenians, within the walls of White Town, Madras. "Monday, 22nd August, 1743 – Notice being affixed at the Sea gate of

21 Hundreds of thousands of Christian pilgrims still climb those stairs every year, especially December 18, when Indian Christians celebrate St. Thomas Day.
22 The bridge, which has since been reinforced, still stands and is the only route between Madras and its airport. There is a catholic church on one of the hills not far from the bridge. Not only many tombstones with Armenian inscriptions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be found nowadays in it, but also typical Armenian cross and depictions of the Christ and Apostles with Armenian scripts.
the intended sale of a house in the White Town on Monday the 29th instant; and it being intimated to the Board that some Armenians design to purchase the same; it fell under debate, whether it was not become necessary to put a stop to such indulgence to foreigners and strangers; and agreed in the affirmative, on considering how large a part of White Town is already in the possession of foreigners, and that if they are permitted to purchase more, the inconveniences arising there from to the English inhabitants may be very great. It is agreed that the following prohibition be affixed at the gates of the town in English, and the French, Dutch, Portuguese, and Armenian languages. ‘Resolved and ordered that no foreigners or strangers, or any others than the natural subjects of the King of Great Britain, shall be permitted from and after this time to purchase or inhabit any house or houses, godowns, or other buildings, within the walls of the White Town; except only such as they have heretofore been permitted to purchase’.23

The history of the Armenians in Madras recorded the name of Agah Shameer Soolthanoomian, famous merchant in pearls, Persian rose-water and dried fruits from his native New Julfa. He sold his merchandise to the Nawab of the Carnatic and lent him large sums. The debt was not cleared off when the English took his realm. Then noble Agah Shameer went to Nawab, took out the latter’s promissory note from his breast pocket, tore it up and threw the pieces at the Nawab’s feet. The grateful debtor signed and sealed a firman to grant the village of Noomblee with all the lands attached thereto to his esteemed friend Agah Shameer, as a personal gift. Neither his heirs, nor the British Government were in any way to annul the provisions contained in the deed of gift which was bestowed on Agah Shameer, and he was exempted from paying any taxes thereon. 24

Agah Shameer also sent a precious diamond and other valuable presents to King of Georgia Heraclius II. In return the king conferred upon him in 1775 and his male children the town of Lori with all surrounding villages, fields, mountains, forests and waterways, as a mark of royal approbation and invited him to settle there with his children. In 1786, Georgian King Heraclius II, by his royal edict, nominated Agah Shameer and his children as Princes of Georgia and sent him a coat of arms.

23 J. Talboys Wheeler, Madras in the Olden Times, pp. 624-625
24 Mesrovb Jacob Seth, Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present, p. 587-588
The Armenian Church for the Armenians in their motherland deprived of independent statehood, alike in Diaspora communities, as the one in India constituted the main pillar for preservation of national identity, the armenianness and a shield against assimilation among bigger nations. At a later stage the Armenian school became another pillar of national survival. The history of setting up Armenian settlements and their stretching out to many corners of the Indian subcontinent testifies on its sustainable strong bondage with the Mother Church. The center of the latter was located in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, and the Catholicos was the spiritual leader of the Armenians, residing in Armenia proper and the whole world. With the advent of the Armenians to India the community considered as vital the task of creating proper spiritual environment, erecting churches in all places of its concentration, even with few scores of people. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the Armenian Church had its presence in many corners of the subcontinent. The Armenians expressed zealoussness in securing strong presence of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the country of their residence and business, and very many clergymen were invited to serve in relatively large and small communities all over India.

In national-ecclesiastical terms, India for Armenians was under jurisdiction of New Julfa diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Armenian merchants settled en mass in different towns of India, new Armenian communities were formed under religious jurisdiction of the Archbishop of New Julfa, thus turning the diocese into a geographically very large religious entity, extending from India also to South-East Asia. In the eighteenth century, the diocese of New Julfa was gradually renamed “Diocese of Iran and India” to better express the jurisdictional sphere of the diocese.

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25 India was originally affiliated with the Armenian Church’s diocese of Baghdad-Basra, until 1628, when Iraq was conquered by Turks. It was not necessarily placed under Baghdad-Basra diocese administrative jurisdiction but mostly in spiritual terms. Consequently, it was transferred under full jurisdiction of New Julfa Diocese, which was formed in 1605 for the religious administration of the local Armenian community, first with limited geographical jurisdiction. But within two decades the jurisdiction of the archbishop of New Julfa was extended over the all territory of Iran and beyond. It emerged as one of the most prosperous and influential eparchial enters of the seventeenth century Armenian Church.

26 Vazken Ghougassian, The Emergence of the Armenian Diocese of New Julfa in the Seventeenth Century, Pp. 2, 6, 94
Since late seventeenth – beginning of the eighteenth century, the primates of New Julfa used to assign pastors for the Armenian communities in India. All priests of the Armenian churches in India were delegated normally for three years service, with some exceptions of prolongation. Due to this reason they were regarded as “vichkavor”, not as “tskhater qahananer”. Upon completion of their service clergymen were obliged to return to Iran, according to rotation principle. It was a routine procedure to send priests upon requests from local communities. A letter from Madras to the Primate at All Savior’s Monastery in New Julfa, dated 1711 indicates: “And I also beg from your eminence’s generous affection, that, during this monsoon season, you send us three fine priests, two for this place at Madras and one for Pegu…”

Almost all the Armenian communities had their priests and their life revolved mostly around their church. The priests served many functions not all of which were purely religious. First, they were tasked with meeting the spiritual needs of Armenians residing in India, far away from their original hometown New Julfa. In fulfilling this task, priests also helped to maintain the economic and cultural integrity of the Julfan network as a whole. Second, priests serving in the overseas Julfan settlements played an essential role in vouchsafing the financial survival of the Diocesan center of their Church in New Julfa. According to Vazken Ghougassian’s research, the Church relied on three principal sources of income to meet its expenses: 1) individual donations and wills, 2) land income from vakf properties owned by the Church, and 3) various types of taxes collected from the community. In the last category were special taxes known as khostmunk and nverk, which were essentially pledges of money made by wealthy merchants to be used after their death in the form of hogebazhin (literally the soul’s portion) or money set aside for priests to pray for the deceased person’s soul. There does not seem to have been a set standard for how much merchants were expected to pay for their hogebazhin. However, an examination of wills containing data on khostmunk or nverk reveals that this portion varied from individual merchant to merchant, but was

27 Torgom Patriarch Gushakian, Armenians of India, Impressions and Information, (in Armenian), Jerusalem, 1941, p. 17
28 Letters from Madras, folder 104, All Savior’s Monastery Archive (in Armenian)
generally in the range of 5 to 10 tumans (1 tuman being worth between 16 and 20 rupees). This is based on the money bequeathed to the Church by two Armenian merchants in Chinsura, one of whom a wealthy merchant named Ulukhan, left 110 rupees and a low level merchant who left 90 rupees. Another merchant, Poghos son of Zeni Aghazar, who passed away in Surat, left a more substantial sum of 1,000 rupees for three churches in New Julfa and 300 rupees each to three Armenian priests in Surat.

The priests were regularly reporting from India back to their Primate in New Julfa on financial fortunes of the notable merchants belonging to their parish. If a merchant had passed away while traveling to distant markets, the priests were expected to arrange for the execution of the deceased will and also to secure his donation to the All savior’s Monastery and send there the money by means of letters of credit or other commercial instruments used by the merchant class. For instance, writing a letter to Primate Movses Vardapet on November 16, 1711, a Julfan priest in Madras named Ter Avet, reports on the cases of several wealthy merchants who had recently passed away in India and in one case in Manila and outlines his steps. The writer also informs the Primate that two years prior to his letter a merchant in Madras named Almaz had traveled by ship to Pegu, but his ship had not been heard from again. He informs that he has no heirs but his wife in Julfa. He therefore asks the Primate to tell the merchant's wife to appoint a power of attorney and send him to Madras to settle the deceased’s accounts and receive her share of inheritance. The writer doesn’t forget to mention that the share bequeathed to the All Savior’s Monastery as hogebazhin would be significant. He asks the Primate to send the appropriate papers to Madras.

In addition to collecting nverk or khostmunk from wealthy merchants, each priest was expected to make his own donation of two tumans on the annual basis. We assume that they were supposed to pay from their own income while serving their mostly merchant flock in places like Madras, Surat, Bombay, Chinsura, or Calcutta.

So all the Armenian churches in India were under jurisdiction and part of Iran-India Diocese, reporting to the Primate in New Julfa. At the same time it is not known much about hierarchy in India itself. Through a careful examination of merchant wills, encyclicals, and church correspondence from the eighteenth century we try to Outline the hierarchical system of the Armenian Church by 1793 that had emerged within India.
There always were senior priests at some churches. The senior priest of the church in Surat had authority over Armenian priests in Bombay, Shahjehanabad, Aurangabad, and Hyderabad; that of Madras had authority over the priests in Muchlibandar, Nagapatan, Pegu, and Batavia; and after its establishment in 1724, The Holy Church of Nazareth in Calcutta had jurisdiction over the churches of Chinsura, Saidabad and Dhaka.

The devotion to the Mother Church and active benevolence of the Indian-Armenians is well-known. As a matter of fact, since the fall of the Armenian state it was the Church that quite naturally personified national sovereignty in the eyes of the Indian-Armenians. Furthermore, the Armenian Apostolic Church assumed the crucial role of preserver of ethno-cultural identity, along with its spiritual mission. If "the church’s cultural stewardship was particularly crucial in communities lacking well-developed educational and structural organizations", in India it was more focused on spiritual aspect and the bridging with New Julfa All-Saviour’s diocesan See and the Holy See of Etchmiadzin. The Armenian community in India became a prevailing stronghold of the Armenian tradition, an important center of enlightenment and cultural prosperity. It established renowned schools, printing houses, gave birth to the first ever Armenian periodical, produced the first draft constitution of the future independent Armenia, advocating republican administration, published numerous books and magazines in their printing houses, assumed the advocacy of the liberation of Armenia, thus turning into focal point of the Armenian intellectual, cultural and political life. In addition to that, during the years of the British Raj the Armenians established their clubs, following the British pattern of clubs, which were the local power structure. Hence, the Armenian community in India generated new types of activity centers, functioning along with the church, which was not a common case in majority of other Diaspora communities of that time. Nevertheless, the role of the Armenian churches in India was always absolutely crucial in safeguarding the armeniannes of the community, especially in a country of hybrid, cosmopolitan civilization, but with all absorbing and assimilating in a time space Indian tradition.

The Armenian clergy also played a certain role in application of British civil laws towards the Armenian population in India, which significantly contributed to the increase of their prominence in community’s secular affairs. During their period of empire-
building in India, under the rule of East India English Company (1772-1857), the British accepted the view that Hindu and Muslim personal law (marriage, divorce, inheritance etc.) should not be subject to legislative interference. The dual system left important sections of the population without any law at all outside those areas subject to the jurisdiction of the Supreme Courts, Armenians, Parsees, Jews, and Portuguese had no discoverable system of law. Yet the administration of justice required that the customs of the people should be respected. When problems arose concerning the right of succession to land owned by Armenians, the matter had to be “dealt with by reference to the customs of the people as they were supposed to have existed in former times and by reference to their priests who advise upon their customs, but there is no established law”. According to the Law Commission, some judges apparently applied English law, some their own idea of equity, and some made vain attempts to take advice from Armenian clerics. The confusion over personal law persisted until after the assumption of power by the Crown in 1858.  

In his reply to the letter from a group of Armenian inhabitants of Calcutta the Chief Justice of the British Supreme Court, Sir Elijah Impey pointed out that “his Majesty has already most graciously consulted your religion and customs, and the climates which you inhabit, and has with most fatherly tenderness indulged even your prejudices; it is his royal pleasure that only such of his laws shall be enforced as are conformable to your customs, climate, prejudices and religion.”

The Armenians of India wondrously responded to the calls of the high clergy for contribution in need. When Catholicos Simeon Yerevants’i (1763-1780) desired to establish a printing house and adjacent paper mill in Etchmiadzin, Indian-Armenian Grigor Khojajanian Chakikents from Surat made required financial contribution. The printing house was established in 1771 and paper mill in 1774. Responding to the appeal of the prelate of the Armenian Church in Russia Archbishop Hovsep Arghutian, Indian-Armenians brought their valuable contribution to the Armenian communities in Nakhijevan, Astrakhan and Grigoriopolis. Archbishop Arghutian built an Armenian school and printing house in Astrakhan upon generous donation of Surat Armenian

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30 Michael Edwardes, British India 1772-1947, New Delhi, 1999, p. 81
31 Joseph Emin, The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, Calcutta, 1918, p. 508
Hovhanjan Girak. Calcutta Armenian Masseh Babajan devised his whole real estate and left by will all his properties to the Armenian community of Nor Nakhijevan. Abdul Msehen left by his will the profit from the two-story building adjacent to the Holy Church of Nazareth in Calcutta and numerous shops on the Armenian street to the Armenian community of Grigoriopolis. Indian-Armenians built three churches in New Julfa, reconstructed All Saviour’s cathedral, built repository of manuscripts next to it as well as seven schools in that town. It worth mentioning that by financial contributions of Indian-Armenians Muradian school was established in Italian city of Padua in 1834, which was shifted to Paris in 1846, and Raphaelian school in Venice in 1836. Even prominent catholic Armenian Petros Voskan in his will apart from St. Peter cathedral in Rome put Holy Etchmiadzin, Jerusalem and St. Karapet of Mush.

The Holy See of Etchmiadzin has established direct channel of communication with the community in India through its Pontifical legates (nviraks). The institution of nviraks was noteworthy in the internal structure of the Armenian Church, and carried out the function of distribution of the Chrism, overseeing the state of churches and perishes of their temporarily assigned jurisdiction and more importantly raising and channeling funds to Etchmiadzin. Nviraks were collecting dues from every Armenian family upon their ability. to contribute during their once in every three years visits to nvirakutiuns. Those were several Diaspora regions, designated teruni – pontifical, belonging directly to Etchmiadzin. Apart from India nvirakutiuns included Smyrna, Baghdad, Basra, Gilan province in Iran, Resht, Enzeli, and Tiflis with some other Armenian populated areas, and the whole Armenian population of Russia.\footnote{Archives of New Julfa All Saviour’s Monastery, part I, Encyclicals of Etchrmiadzin Catholicoses (1652-1705), compiled by Khazhak Ter-Grigorian, (in Armenian), Antilias, 2003, p. 135} Holy See of Etchmiadzin along with attaching great importance to nvirakutiuin valued very much India in this regard. Variety of original goods that were brought by nviraks from India served to content Turkish and Iranian rulers. Particularly valuable among the contributions of the Armenians from India were precious stones, jewelry, rare herbal medicine, and tapestry. Those presents enabled catholicos to gain favorable attitude of the royal courts and local governors. At the same time these kinds of presents were also manifestation of catholicos’s connections that extended all the way to India and used to attain prestige for him. When in 1767 nvirak
like; can move wherever they like; no one is allowed to set any restrictions. Tomb inscription of 28th April, 1835 in Madras Armenian Church refers to Archbishop Khachatur as to delegate from the See of Etchmiadzin.36

Internal correspondence between the Armenian clergy in India reveals the mechanism for duty collection of its time, which comes to display the financing sources of the churches. In his letter of September 8, 1857 the priest of the Armenian Church of St. Peter in Bombay Rev. Martiros Ter-Hovakimian, addressed to the priest of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth in Calcutta Very Rev. Hovhannes Khachkian, informs in detail about the duties, collected from Bombay’s Armenian community, donations to the church and the plans for their use, seeks the mediation of the Calcutta church in mercantile controversy between Bombay and New Julfa Armenian communities. He also requests his portion of Java Armenian’s donation. The letter-writer complains of the decrease in volume of donations and duties. The Church of St. Peter in Bombay as well as the other Armenian churches in India raised taxes and duties called “vashkh”, “terunakan chorsanots murhak” from the members of the Armenian community, used promissory notes. In its turn the Armenian churches in India were channeling a portion of collected duties in obligatory manner since 19th century often through the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth to All Saviour’s Cathedral in New Julfa, the Head Church of Armenians in Iran, India and Far East, and Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. “We demand the monthly duty “vashkh” always on time according to the standing rule, which I did not pay yet but I shall do… The monthly “terunakan chorsanots murhak” I paid to you personally, so the rest of the amount due upon my promissory note I attach to this letter, - wrote Rev. Martiros Ter-Hovakimian of the Church of St. Peter in Bombay.37 The Armenian community in India was organizing benevolent institutions, which were called “snduk aghkatats”, “snduk vorbats” etc. “Snduk aghkatats is doing well due to generous donations of local people (probably Armenians in Java). The sum collected by them is sizable and reached 3,000 rupees … I was there and allowed them to accumulate the above mentioned amount with 7 or 8 monthly paid “vashkh”… For poor people I designated 100 rupees annual, and the duty, terunakan murhak, which I should

36 Julian James Cotton, List of Inscriptions on Tombs or Monuments in Madras, Vol. I, Madras, 1945
37 Library of Calcutta Holy Church of Nazareth, M. Setian’s fund, bookcase no. 6, 2nd file, document case no. 47/7-12 (currently all these files are not in Calcutta and their location is unknown).
pay to you, constitutes 300 rupees". Regarding the commercial dispute between Bombay, New Julfa and Java Armenian communities the letter writer requested assistance of Calcutta priest and at the end stated: "If the issue is not solved by peaceful means I'll resort to pressure in receiving our money due".38

Interestingly, the Armenian community in India is one of the rare cases in Diaspora where along with the significant role of the church in community life the status of the clergy substantially differed, certainly from comparative viewpoint. From the earliest times in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta as well as in all other Armenian settlements national affairs, trusteeship of the churches and the schools and so forth were allotted to solely secular bodies, where clergy didn’t have direct saying. It was stipulated by the principles laid down by the central administration during the British rule in the bylaws of the local Armenian administrative setting. According to them clergymen and functionaries on payroll were just prohibited to participate in national structures. As an example of later – nineteenth century - period, the “Scheme for the management of the property and affairs of the Armenian Churches...” states that “all male members of the Armenian community... having been baptized into communion of the Armenian Church, subject to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin..., if not in Holy Orders or attached to or employed at either of the said Churches as Ministers or servants thereof or recipients of charity from any charitable institutions be eligible for election as members of a Church Committee consisting of eleven members of the Armenian community”.39 Apart from that, the national income was under supervision of the government.

The Armenians of India were actively taking part in almost all crucial endeavors relating to Etchmiadzin. As it is well-known, during the brief period of existence (1828-1840) of the Armenian Province within the Russian empire Tsar Nicholas I by his decree of March 11, 1836 defined in detail the status of the Armenian Church. The Statute or in Russian Polozhenie was aimed to regulate wide spectrum of the Armenian Church affairs, starting from the degree of control by the tsarist government over the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, the election of the Catholicos, property and taxation issues up to

38 Ibid
39 see Scheme for the Management of the Property and Affairs of the Armenian Churches at Calcutta and Chinsurah, Calcutta, 1889
outlining the dioceses of the church in different regions of Russia and establishing the supremacy of Etchmiadzin over them. The Tsarist authorities severely limited Church's authority, depriving her of traditional role as the leading Armenian institution. By exclusion of the Church from political affairs according to the statute, the scope of the Church activities was affected. The Church embraced difficult times, because it was a formidable challenge also due to its novelty. In preceding centuries the Church used to pass through fiery trials but it learned the acknowledged way to cope with in the absence of the national statehood. With Polozhenie for the first time the Armenian Church was imposed orderly regulations, limiting its power but simultaneously granting apparent status. The autonomy of the Armenian Church was recognized, while granting full freedom of worship and permitting church control over Armenian schools. Hence, the document contained many contradictory clauses, needed to be addressed.

The adoption of Polozhenie was an event that definitely deserved proper attention of the whole nation. In spite of that, the only Diaspora community that expressed interest in defending the standing of the National Church and came up with proposals and amendments to Polozhenie was the remote Armenian community of India. Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian in his brilliant work “Azgapatum” expresses his astonishment with the fact that even Constantinople and Jerusalem patriarchates didn’t comment or react at all to Polozhenie. The Armenians of India were apprised about Polozhenie through Mother See’s nvirak Bishop Poghos. On July 10th, 1840 two letters were received at Etchmiadzin, addressed to catholicos Hovhannes Karbets’i and the Armenian Church’s Synod. The first one was written by Gevorg Avetian, the representative of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth and dated December 14th, 1839. The second, dated January 27th, 1840, was sent on behalf of the Holy Virgin Mary Armenian church of Madras by Poghos Melitosian, Baghdasar Astvatsaturian and Harutyun Hovhannesian. The letters were sent through the British ambassador in Saint Petersburg to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and from there forwarded to the Caucasian vice regency and finally reached Etchmiadzin from there. In general terms, the attitude of the Indian-Armenians was not opposing to the principle of regulation and even the new administrative setting of the Church. The first draft amendment related to the articles 11, 12 and 13 of Polozhenie.

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It stated that all the Armenians, living in different parts of the world, should be entitled to participate in the election of the catholicos and to send their delegates for that purpose. The second remark applied to the articles 32, 71 and 91, according to which the estate of celibate clergy, including the Catholicos and bishops, could be inherited by closest heirs or administered according to the will. The Indian-Armenian gave a lengthy explanation to the point that whatever celibate clergymen receive is designated for the church, and not for personal possession or for enrichment of relatives. Upon their opinion Polozhenia's new rule could lead to embezzlement and would become a reason to cease donations to the church. They also highlighted apparent contradiction with article 89, prohibiting clergy to have individual property. The third item, touching upon articles 33 and 37, questioned the legitimacy of the right of Synod comprising four bishops and four archimandrites to make decisions on behalf of the whole Church. The representatives of Armenian Churches in India proposed to delegate the authority of adoption of crucial decisions to the National Assembly and for executive decisions to form a Synod in 24 members – 12 bishops and 12 vartabeds. At this point we should mention that the schism was not to turn Synod into the supreme body of the Armenian Church but to delegate high authority to it in affairs relating only to Russia. The fourth observation was against 6th item of article 35, which envisaged the right of abandoning the clergy rank. The Indian-Armenians characterize it as contradicting to the tradition of the Armenian Apostolic Church. They anticipated likelihood of numerous abuses when people could become clergy only to amass a fortune and then to leave the church.

The Catholicos and Synod attached importance to the notes and remarks of Indian-Armenians. The Catholicos presented those remarks through the Russian Ministry of Foreign and Internal Affairs to the Tsar in 1842. The latter was inclined to take into consideration proposals of the catholicos in the spirit of preservation of the old traditions. In March of the same year Catholicos Hovhannes Karbets'i passed away and the matter of addressing the concerned issue was delayed. His successor Catholicos Nerses Ashtarakets'i (1843-1857) expressed his gratification in connection with the remarks of Indian-Armenians vs. Polozhenie in his epistle (kondak) of December 30th, 1850,

addressed to the Armenians of India on the occasion of Bishop Tadeos Begnazarian accepting the position of New Julfa prelate.

The state of the Indo-Armenian community continually was affecting and shaping its status among the Armenian Diaspora communities and in Armenia itself. Exactly during the period of prosperity Indo-Armenians were able to acquire leading role within the whole Diaspora and generate its well-known multidimensional energy. Not accidentally at the end of the eighteenth century the emigrant Armenians were granted several special rights and privileges in India. From published in Calcutta weekly Azgaser (Patriot) we come to know that “the Armenian nation is entitled for complete freedom in the country; they pay 3,5% taxes and duties; they are free to wear any kind of attire, to move to any place they like; no one has the right to impede these rights; if an Armenian passes away, his whole property, both immoveable and movable, belong to his nation and foreigners don’t have any rights towards respective possessions”. More details on these rights and privileges are lacking. Nevertheless, irrespective the issue of absoluteness of the mentioned rights in terms of trustworthiness and their realization, evidently India provided fertile soil for the living and business of the Armenians. Accumulation of considerable wealth contributed to consolidation of the Armenians’ status and advancing the state of affairs in India throughout the eighteenth century.

The topmost service of the Armenian community in India to the nation relates not just to abovementioned achievements. The greatest virtue of the Indian-Armenians was that they were able to combine two prevalent in the Armenian nation movements - literary and political, aimed towards liberation - to pull together intellectual progress, thoughts and conception of political freedom.

The paradoxical situation of the Armenian homeland in ruins and the fact that Armenians were one of the first communities in the East – namely in India - to maintain pace with the advanced instruments of spreading literacy and culture available to their European counterparts, is a unique phenomenon. Suffice it to mention liberation movement of Madras group; the publication of Azdarar in Madras, the first Armenian journal; the four secular schools of Calcutta (including two for women); a number of cultural associations in Calcutta and Bombay; more than ten printed or lithographed

42 Azgaser Weekly, Calcutta, 1845, p. 125
journals in Madras, Calcutta and Bombay; almost 200 books – mostly secular in nature – produced by 16 Armenian printing presses in Madras and Calcutta; the translation of several literary works from English; and the creation of Armenian theater in Calcutta.

Another key factor making Indian-Armenians special among all other groups of Diaspora Armenians of their time and similarly classified worldwide groups was the fact that, unlike traditional benefactors of religious institutions, many of them were personally involved in planning and directing cultural and political programs, assisted only by a few intellectuals settled among them. While the aggressive commercial policies of the English East India Company caused tremendous economic pressures and bias on the Armenian merchants, the Armenian communities of Madras and Calcutta emerged as centers of Armenian national and cultural revival and played a crucial role in the Enlightenment movement over the following several decades.

The actual involvement of the Armenians of India in the Enlightenment movement began with the return of Joseph Emin to India and the establishment of Shahamir Shahamirian’s printing press in Madras in 1772, and ended with the closure of the journal Azgaser Araratian (The Patriot of Ararat) in 1852 and the consequent departure of its editor, Mesrob Taghiatians, from Calcutta. In terms of chronology, geography, and ideological content, the span of eighty years that constitute Armenian Enlightenment movement’s ascend can be conditionally divided into two main periods: 1) the first or Madras period, 1772-1797; and b) the second or Calcutta period, 1797-1852. The Madras period is marked primarily by its pan-Armenian nationalistic direction and the ideology for the liberation of Armenia, while the Calcutta period is characterized by moderate national ambitions. For the latter the focal point of Enlightenment activists was the secular education of the local Armenian community, the preservation of their language and national aspirations, and the promotion of human, social, educational, and cultural values. 43

The issue of freedom and independence of Armenia proper conquered and divided between Ottoman Turkey and Iran formed a focal point in the minds of Armenian patriots in India. The history of the Armenian liberation movement recorded the name of a

43 Vazken Ghougassian, “The Quest for Enlightenment and Liberation: The Case of the Armenian Community of India in the Late Eighteenth Century”, in Richard G. Hovannisian and David N. Myer (ed), Enlightenment and Diaspora: The Armenian and Jewish Cases, Atlanta, 1999, p. 242
prominent devotee - Joseph Emin, who was one of the first Armenian Enlightenment activists as well. He was born in Hamadan, Iran, in 1726 and moved to Calcutta to join his merchant father. He dreamt of going to Europe, learning the military art and other sciences, and moving to Armenia “like a European officer” in order to “be useful at least in some degree” to his country, because he “could not bear to live like a beast, eating and drinking without liberty or knowledge”.44 In 1751 Emin settled in London and through support of Edmund Burke was admitted to the military academy of Woolwich. Upon graduation in 1757 he volunteered in the British and Prussian armies during their war against France. Emin’s “adventure” for the liberation of Armenia began in 1759, when he left England and traveled to Armenia. His ultimate goal was mounting support for liberation of Armenia from Ottoman and Persian rule and securing cooperation of the Armenian meliks (princes, chieftains) of Karabagh and King Heraclius (Irakly) II of Georgia, who, after the death of Nadir Shah, had liberated Georgia from Persian reign and reestablished independent Georgian kingdom. He had meetings with the Russian Imperial Chancellor Count Vorontsov in St. Petersburg and the Georgian King Heraclius II in Tiflis (Tbilisi), aimed at seeking assistance in armed struggle for national freedom. Having failed in his attempts to persuade potential allies, Joseph Emin left Georgia, and passing through Armenia and Iran, returned to India in 1770, where he tried to secure financial support from the Armenian merchants to go back to Armenia to maintain a “few troupes” there.45 But facing clerical opposition, he failed. Emin lived in India for the rest of his life, until 1809, and devoted his time and energy to keeping the idea of the liberation of Armenia alive.

Some scholars have seen Emin as an adventurer, while others have idolized him only as a champion of the liberation of Armenia. Little attempt has been made to look beyond his life story and explore his ideology. We entirely share the conclusion of cotemporary scholar Vazken Ghougassian that Emin was an idealist with great ambitions and an enlightened mind and an intellectual who not only integrated the idea of the free development of man with patriotism and the liberation of his country but also made a

44 Joseph Emin, The life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian, Calcutta, 1918, p. 59
45 Ibid., p. 444
colossal impact on future activists of the Armenian Enlightenment movement. His book was written for his friends, who “will not let his suffering for the cause of his country to be forgotten after his death, but are desirous that it may be transmitted to posterity, who may follow the same example, [and] walk in the path of true understanding.” Emin had gone to England not to “learn luxury and extravagancy.” As an individual he had traveled there “to obtain worthyness, to learn wisdom, to know the world, and be called a perfect servant to [his] sheeplike-shepherdless Armenian nation, ”because he realized that the Armenians “consume their flesh to grow rich, and having made a little money, they are robbed for foolish invented pretence sometimes by Bashaw [Ottoman pashas], sometimes by Cawns [Persian khans]... because they have not sword in their own hands” and are in slavery and ignorance.” They “imbibe nothing but horrid superstitions, which of course have made them entirely strangers to those commendable virtues which lead to sweet liberty, and enlighten the human mind.” His ideal was “to be of some use to his poor countrymen, who are an industrious, brave, honest people, and who will soon become formidable, provided they can receive the light of understanding.”

According to Emin’s philosophy, the success of national liberation largely depended on three potential forces: the people, the clergy, and the merchants. For centuries, the people had remained in darkness, in slavery, and without national leadership. It needed - through education - to be first enlightened with the ideals of human freedom and the led into struggle to achieve national liberation. In the absence of national leadership, it was the natural duty of the Armenian clergy to educate the people and lead them in their aspirations for liberty. The Armenian merchants, with their great resources, had to finance the education of the people and their struggle for liberation. But as both the clergy and the merchants of the time were quite lacking in their understanding of human liberty, Emin would direct his harshest criticism against them. He firmly believed that individuals dedicated to a just cause could bring about great changes. Having failed in his pragmatic attempts to build a ground for a new era for realization of freedom for his nation on the ground, Emin considered India as truly ripe place for

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46 Vazken Ghougassian, *The Quest for Enlightenment and Liberation: The Case of the Armenian Community of India in the Late Eighteenth Century*, p. 246
47 Joseph Emin, *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin, an Armenian*, p. xxviii
48 Ibid., pp. 103, 68, 58
49 Ibid., pp. 471, 189
seeding his ideals. He concentrated his efforts on several Indian-Armenian individuals of dedication. The story of Emin’s quest for enlightenment and liberty found its continuance and turned India into an Armenian center of worldwide prominence, sustaining and generating national liberation ideology. Shahamir Shahamirian of Madras followed him and for twenty-five years (1772-1797) dominated the scene of the Armenian liberation movement, as Emin’s star was gradually setting following his sojourn in India.

When Joseph Emin returned to India in 1770 after almost twenty years of absence, he found the Armenian merchants of Madras with “little more virtue.” Because of the interposition of a “singular active gentleman,” Shahamir Shahamirian, “all the other Armenian merchants joined to advance 12,000 rupees a year, to be remitted to him in Armenia, so as to maintain a few troops.” One of the merchants, named Gregor Michael (Grigor Khojajanian) even pledged “the best part of his fortune...in promoting that laudable design, upon condition that...Simon Catholicus [Catholicos], the Father in God of All Armenia, would concur with Emin.”50 But once again the plan failed because of the intervention of Bishop Ovanes, legate of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and all the merchants except Shahamirian withdrew their financial pledges to Emin.

Indeed, by the early 1770s, the political, economic, social and cultural outlook of the Armenian merchants of Calcutta and Madras was considerably changed. Under the domination of the English East India Company, which had practically turned into colonial power in these two cities, they were economically weakened, the security of their capital was threatened, and they were subject to discrimination and various types of restrictions. They were forced to adjust to this new situation by accepting the laws and regulations imposed by the British, learning their language, and, to a certain degree, adopting their economic, social, and cultural concepts. But in order to maintain their ethnic identity under a superior power they had started to create closer cooperation, mutual support, and solidarity within their own community. They began to realize the importance of education, to develop a sense of self-awareness and national identity, and to dream about creating an independent Armenia where they would economically flourish again, free from foreign political and social domination. Shahamir Shahamirian was the principal promoter of these ideas.

50 Ibid., Pp. 444-445
The son of merchant in Madras, Shahamir Sooltanoom Shahamirian was born in New Julfa, Iran, in 1723. He lacked a formal education and was first trained as a tailor in New Julfa. Having moved to Madras in the mid-1740s, he became a successful pearl merchant and was granted a village by the Indian governor of the Carnatic province in South India. He was also the benefactor of a number of Armenian institutions in Madras, including the church, the school, and the home for the poor and the hospital. For the Armenian education of his two grown sons Shahamirian employed Movses Baghramian, an intellectual and teacher, who for five years (1763-1768) had been a close collaborator and companion of Joseph Emin. Shahamirian was therefore acquainted with Emin’s work and attracted to his ideology even before meeting him for the first time in 1772.

Shahamirian’s ideological career for the enlightenment and liberation of Armenia began in 1772, when, in the name of his elder son Hakob, he established the first Armenian printing press in India and gathered a small group of patriots to create an intellectual circle in the small community of Madras. The first publication of Shahamirin’s press in 1772 was a modest Armenian grammar book by Movses Baghramian, exclusively targeting the education of young generation. But the second book, produced in the same year, entitled “New Booklet Called Exhortation”, was a unique and very valuable publication, being the cornerstone of Armenian political literature. The “pamphlet,” a volume of 240 pages, was composed for the purpose of awakening Armenian youth from the fearful and indolent lethargy of slothful slumber, and printed with an ardent desire at the expense and through the exertions of Hakob Shahamirian, by the authorship of his tutor, Movses Baghramian.

In the colophon of the book, Hakob Shahamirian claims to be not only the publisher but also the author, acknowledging the close collaboration of Movses Baghramian. Therefore, they must be considered as co-authors. New Booklet is the first manifesto of Shahamirian’s group. It is an appeal to the Armenian people, especially the youth, to open their eyes and see the

51 The name Carnatic refers to the region occupied by the Kannada-speaking people, which roughly correspond to the modern Indian State of Karnataca. In the eighteenth century the coastal Carnatic was a dependency of Hyderabad, within the Mughal Empire. As a result of successive wars between French and British in fifties-beginning of sixties the latter took control of the Carnatic through its nawab.
53 Movses Baghramian, New Booklet Called Exhortation, (in Armenian), Madras, 1772, title page
54 Ibid., Pp. 218-219
Russian translation of the New Booklet in St. Petersburg in 1786 through his son Yeghiazar.

The crowning publication of the Shahamirian group was another volume entitled “Book Called Snare of Glory”, which aimed to “prevent all works of irregularity.” According to its title page, the book was “composed by Hakob Shahamiriants, for the benefit of the Armenian nation, during the pontificate of Catholicos Simeon of All Armenians in Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin) and during the reign of His August Majesty Heraclius II at Tiflis...and printed in 1773 in Madras, at the press of the said Hakob Shahamiriants.” But obviously, the book must have been published at a later date, possibly between 1787 and 1789. The authorship of the book is also dubious, because Hakob had passed away in 1774. Modern Armenian scholarship has resolved the issue of authorship in favor of Shahamir Shahamirian, the father and the prime mover of the Madras group.

Book Called Snare of Glory is a draft constitution for the future independent Armenia. The lengthy introduction is devoted to an explanation of the importance of law and order in human society, the benefits of the proposed constitution, and Shahamirian’s agenda for the liberation of Armenia. In the author’s opinion, his work is an “unbreakable snare, assembled with equity and justice, so that it may be ready to serve as a restraining power for all those who for any reason attempt to do evil works.”59 It is also a magical ax “to destroy the yoke of slavery and restore the natural freedom of man,”60 because nobody “should think of dominating another person’s natural mind.”61 The wills of certain individuals, like the king or the princes, should not replace the law, because they are not super beings but mere mortals like their subjects.62

The liberation of a nation is a just and natural cause. Under the leadership of George Washington, the American Revolution against the British is a laudable movement, which must serve as an example for other nations. The Armenians must also work hard, be ready for greater sacrifices, and contribute generously to the liberation struggles, because the proposed constitution is suitable only for an independent and

59 Book Called Snare of Glory, (in Armenian), Madras, 1773, p. iii
60 Ibid., p. 131
61 Ibid., p. 43
62 Ibid., p. 46
democratic state. But once again the author is silent on the actual course of liberation and only indirectly points to King Heraclius II of Georgia as a potential liberator. The main part of the book is a blueprint constitution, composed of 521 articles, which includes draft of 50 official letters, 3 sample balance sheets showing the incomes and the expenditures of the future state, and 468 articles of law. According to the constitution, the supreme authority in the state is the people, who express their will through elected representatives. The people are divided into two categories: the faithful of the Armenian Apostolic Church, who enjoy full civil, religious and economic freedom and rights, and the non-Armenians or followers of other faiths, who are deprived of equal rights and are obliged to learn the Armenian language.63

The highest governing body is the Armenian National Assembly or the House of the Armenians, which is formed by two elected representatives from each of the 258 districts of Armenia. The representatives, 500 in total, are elected for a term of three years. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin is entitled to appoint one representative to the National Assembly. The National assembly is divided into two groups: legislative and executive. One of the representatives of each district at the National Assembly is elected to executive post, while the other serves as a legislator. The nakharar (president) of the country is also elected by the National Assembly for a period of three years. He is given a shnorats tught (Letter of Grace), outlining his duties and the limits of authority. He is required to abide by the principle of the constitution, serve his people, wage war against enemies, conclude peace agreements, and spare the lives of convicts on the death roll. 64 But according to a special article in the proposed constitution, the office of nakharar may also be hereditary, if a descendant of the old Armenian royal dynasties emerges and claims his hereditary rights.65 This exception was obviously made to accommodate King Heraclius II of Georgia, who was considered a potential liberator of Armenia.

According to Shahrmianian's projections, the male subjects of the state should receive military training beginning at age twelve. The state should maintain a professional and well-paid army of 90,000 soldiers. The poll-tax, which is a symbol of slavery, should be abolished and the national budget should be balanced be legal taxes.

63 Ibid., pp. 140-142
64 Ibid., pp. 174-177
65 Ibid., p. 178
In the epilogue of the book, the author, as a devoted Christian, prays God to liberate the Armenian nation, to motivate the Armenian intellectuals to write treatises on liberty, and to grant the Armenian people unity and mutual love, so that they may liberate themselves from Muslim domination.\(^{66}\)

Shahamir Shahamirian suffered a great blow in 1774, by the untimely death of Hakob, his eldest son, and most dependable assistant. Hakob’s tombstone inscription is certainly another testimony of Shahamirian’s natural aspirations. It reads as follows: “Greetings to you, who read my epitaph; give me the news of my nation’s freedom, which I desire; if there has arisen amongst us a savior and governor, which was always my utmost wish in the world; I, Hakob, a descendant of the ancient Armenian nobles, being a son and bearing the name of Shamer Shanerians, was born in exile, in the Persian village of new Julfa, having been 29 years of age came to my estate here in Malacca, where I passed away on July 7th, in the year of our Lord 1774.”\(^{67}\) After Hakob’s death, Shahamir Shahamirian entrusted the management of the printing press to his second son, Yeghiazar, who in 1775, with the collaboration of Movses Baghramian, printed “Chronicles Armenia and Georgia”, compiled by Mesrop Yerets in the tenth century. The book consists mainly of ancient heroic episodes, the gahnamak\(^{68}\) of the fifth century Armenian princely houses, and the life of Catholicos Nerses the Great. Also included in the book is the vision of Nerses the Great – a creation of the crusaders period – according to which Christian princes from the West should rise and liberate the Christians of the East, including the Armenians, from the Muslim yoke. For centuries this prediction had inspired the Armenians and had made them look to the West for their liberation.

In 1778, Shahamir Shahamirian commissioned a map of Armenia entitled Ashkharhatsuyts Hayastaniayts (Geography of Armenia), which was published at the printing press of the Armenian Mekhitarist fathers of Venice. It was a unique publication and clearly expressed great patriotism. The colophon of the map was encircled with depictions of the legendary Armenian heroes Hayk and Aram, the two great Armenian kings Tigran and Trdat, historical Armenian flags and arms, symbolizing the glorious

\(^{66}\) Ibid., p. 446


\(^{68}\) A protocol type list of Armenian princes according to their rank, from the fifth century AD.
past of the Armenians and the military struggle for liberation. On the map, eastern Armenia, along with Georgia and parts of the North Caucasus were presented as part of a large geographical entity, possibly reflecting Shahamirian’s agenda for the creation of a joint Armenian-Georgian kingdom under the auspices of the Russian Empire.

In 1780, Shahamirian published a partial Armenian translation by Poghos Mirzayan of Jonas Hanway’s Nadir Shah just to remind his fellow Armenians that even in their own times “such a brave, powerful and victorious man was born in the East, who not only defended his country and people, but also, as a conqueror, became vengeful against those who have ravished his inheritance.”

The last publication of Shahamirian’s press was “Booklet Called Guideline”, printed in 1783 and commonly attributed to Shahamir Shahamirian. The substance of this publication was already analyzed in previous pages. Certain principles and legal fundamentals reflected by Shahamirian and his Madras group in the blueprint of the Armenian constitution were attempted to apply on the local scale of the Armenian community of Madras. But if the blueprint of the Armenian constitution remained a utopia, the “Booklet Called Guideline” – code of community self-governance – was duly implemented in Madras.

Shahamir Shahamirian’s endeavor for the enlightenment and liberation of Armenia was not limited to his printing press and the Madras circle. He maintained regular correspondence with Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi, his successor Ghukas Garnetsi, the meliks of Karabagh and King Heraclius II of Georgia. Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi did not approve of his ideas, but he did not express the same level of harshness as he had toward Joseph Emin and Movses Baghramian. Catholicos Ghukas Garnetsi (1780-1799) expressed a cautious approach, saying : “I wish your plans could partly be accomplished, because our entire nation needs the rule of pious lords and security...If a fish caught in a net or a bird in a cage tries to escape, then it is very natural for us, as human beings, to seek liberation. However, because we live in a very difficult time and such a move will be very dangerous, we have no choice but to choose the lesser of two evils.”

69 Hakob Irazek, History of Armenian Printing in India, pp. 85-86
70 Giut Aghaniats, Archives of Armenian History, Vol. 8, p. 1-2; 17-18
In a letter dated 1787, Shahamirian urged King Heraclius to adopt a constitution and ease the burdens of all his subjects by abolishing slavery and making everyone serve the law. He strongly appealed to the king, saying: “while you still have the opportunity...restrain yourself from self-serving acts and establish a system for the government of your throne, your country and your subjects...apply the laws which are acceptable to you, to everyone, to your princes as well as your people.” He proposed to the king his “Book Called Snare of Glory” as a model constitution suitable to both Georgia and Armenia and advised him to have it translated into Georgian, to revise it if necessary and adopt it for the sake of liberating the Armenians and the Georgians from their subjugation to foreigners.

In order to demonstrate his commitment to King Heraclius, Shahamirian made generous financial contributions to the Georgian throne, and in return, on at least four occasions between 1778 and 1797, he received a personal messenger from King Heraclius and was granted the official lordship of the Lori region, in the northern provinces of present-day Armenia.

The liberation movement of the Madras group ended with the death of Shahamir Shahamirian in 1797, at a time when the Russian Empire was preparing to take over Georgia and Eastern Armenia. The closing down of the Shahamirian press did not signal the end of Armenian literary activities and publications in Madras. It was succeeded by a new Armenian printing press established in 1789 under the auspices of the local Armenian Church. The initiator of this new venture was the pastor Harutiuon Shmavonian.

Shmavonian was born in Shiraz, Iran, in 1750. Following the deaths of his two sons in 1777, he isolated himself from the world for seven years. He took refuge among Sufi dervishes in the mountains near Shiraz, during which time he mastered the Persian and Arabic languages and the philosophy of Sufism. In 1784 he was persuaded to descend from the mountains and was sent to Madras to assume the pastorate of the local church.

During the first five years of his printing career (1789-1794), Shmavonian produced twelve volumes, mostly of a religious character. However, at least some of his

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early publications were ideologically compatible with those produced at the Shahamirian Press. A book entitled “Lamentation for Armenia” by Tadeos Soginian, the co-pastor of the madras church, aimed at “exhorting the Armenian children” not to be lazy and ignorant, but to open their eyes, see the miserable situation of their people and through hard work and good education, overcome passiveness, reject the mentality of slavery and analyze the reasons of their national misfortunes.72

Shmavonian’s crowning publication, Azdarar (Monitor or Herald), appeared on October 16, 1794. It was the first Armenian journal in the world. A monthly publication of forty-eight pages, it was issued on a regular basis at the end of each month. In the editorial page of the first issue of his journal, Shmavonian defined his goals as follows: “The civilized British people of this city started publishing a magazine one month ago...which presents the works of famous men of their nation, reports on important events and business affairs, prints good articles by individual writers...the index of market prices and the schedule of arriving and departing ships. Taking that magazine as an example... I will first print articles translated from foreign languages or Armenian original works. Then I will try to obtain and print such news from Armenia and Persia, which you may not have otherwise received. I will also print news taken from magazines of various places....For the benefit of the merchants, the index of market prices, the calendar of the following month... the official holidays of the British and other nations, and if possible the schedule of ships will be printed.”73

Shmavonian had formed an editorial board, a group of young volunteers or urakhakitsk (shares of his joy) for the production of the magazine. He had also secured the collaboration of Shahamir Shahamirian, Movses Baghramian and others from the local community, as well as Archbishop Hovsep Arghoutian and Stepanos Gulamirian from Russia. Articles, poems, translations, letters and other types of writings were accepted from the local Indo-Armenian community. Individual writers, who preferred to remain anonymous, were given the option of leaving their materials in a special box

72 Tadeos Soginian, Booklet Called Lamentation for Armenia, (in Armenian), Madras, 1791
73 Azdarar (Monitor), Madras, 1794, no. 1, p. 4
placed under the bell tower of the church. All articles had to be approved by the editorial board before going to print.

Azdarar was a forum for all kinds of opinions and ideologies. As a clergyman, Shmavonian was naturally more traditional than the members of the Shahamirian group, but his magazine was accessible to men of different persuasions. Articles of religious and secular nature, conservative and liberal ideas, were presented side by side in the pages of the magazine. The “Life and Adventures of Joseph Emin”, which had been published two years earlier, was advertised and criticized in the very same issue The news of the French revolution was presented with a certain degree of sympathy for King Louis XVI, because he was beheaded by the revolutionaries, who had also committed many other “brutalities”.

The correspondence sent from Russia by Archbishop Hovsep Arghoutian was of special interest to the readers of Azdarar. They were being informed about the political and military developments between the Russian Empire and its neighboring countries, the development of new Armenian settlements in and around Nor Nakhichevan, and the special rights granted to the Armenians by the Russian government.


The official language of Azdarar was classical Armenian. However, many articles, letters and advertisements were written in the local Indo-Armenian dialect, which was a mixture of newjulfan dialect and many borrowed and distorted words from Hindi, Persian and English vocabularies.

Azdarar had only forty subscribers and its printing facilities were primitive for the publication of a monthly magazine. Because of a shortage of paper in India, Shmavonian was often forced to manufacture hand-made paper locally from cotton pulp. But due to his great enthusiasm for letters, education and enlightenment, he managed, against all

74 Ibid., 1794, no. 2, p. 76
75 Ibid., 1794, no. 4, p. 182
odds, the publication of Azdarar uninterruptedly for eighteen months. The last issue of
the magazine appeared in February 1796. Shmavonian’s press remained open until 1809
and produced eight additional volumes, including a translation in classical Armenian of
Jean-Francois Marmontel’s Belisaire.

The paramount role of the Armenian community of Madras in the enlightenment
and the development of Armenian political thought is apparent. Madras Armenian
community was a small close-knit society, settled in a single neighborhood of the city,
close to the British quarters. The Armenians were wealthy and relatively well organized.
Their trade with the West and the East, their close contacts with the English East India
Company had enriched their social, educational, economic and political understanding.
Their treatment as a second-class society by the British, especially since the mid-
eighteenth century, had obviously stimulated a strong sense of national solidarity among
them. In such conditions, they were naturally prepared to learn from western experience
and search for ways to improve their social, economic, educational and natural status.
The liberation of Georgia from Persian rule in the mid-eighteenth century and the
consequent reestablishment of the Georgian throne under Heraclius II created a new
impetus for the liberation of Armenia. For seven centuries, Armenians had remained
under the heavy yoke of various Turkic tribes and had dreamed in vain of salvation from
the Western-Christian world. Joseph Emin was one of the first individuals who rejected
the predictions attributed to Nerses the Great and adopted a more reasonable, if not
necessarily feasible, approach.

Emin owed his educational, social and military formation to England. His
childhood experience in Iran and the often prevailing ignorance of the people in the
Middle East motivated his aggressive attitude toward the Armenian Church leadership,
the Georgian court and the Armenian merchants. His pride and militant character were
partly responsible for his failures in Armenia and Georgia. However, his direct influence
on the Madras group was undeniable.

The community of Madras was fortunate to have leader like Shahamir
Shahamirian. Without his financial support, his personal involvement and his printing
press, neither Joseph Emin nor Movses Baghramian, as outsiders, would have been able
to make any impact on the minds of local Armenians. Due to his natural abilities and self-
education, Shahamirian had emerged not only as a successful businessman but also as the leader of the Madras Armenian community. Possibly without even reading English and simply through his direct contacts with the British in India, he had developed a special sense in social and political matters, which is clearly reflected in his books. The financial means of Shahamirian and other merchants as well as their generous contributions to the Church, to various Armenian communities and to the Georgian court were important factors in making their voice heard. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin could not treat Shahamirian the way they treated Emin and Baghramian, because, on the one hand, they needed his financial support and, on the other hand, unlike Emin, he was eager to maintain a good relationship with the Church.

The relationship of Shahamirian with the Georgian court was based on mutual interests. Shahamirian was not a military man on Georgian soil, as was Emin, in whom King Heraclius had seen a real threat. He helped the Georgian king financially and offered him the future Armenian throne. King Heraclius was naturally attracted by the offer, particularly because he was not pressured to take immediate military action for the liberation of Armenia. Therefore, he could easily acknowledge Shahamirian as a prince and offer him the leadership of a region in his kingdom.

The Armenian clerics were not as ignorant as Emin imagined. Catholicos Simeon Yerevantsi was a very learned man and one of the great pontiffs of the Armenian Church. He simply saw Emin and Baghramian as extremists, while he was more conciliatory towards Shahamirian. Therefore, the Armenian Church was not necessarily against those who promoted enlightened ideas.

As a clergyman, Harutiuun Shmavonian was moderately conservative. He was a cultivated man, a true believer in education and well adjusted to the social and cultural environment of Madras. He was not politically oriented and did not necessarily approve of the ideas of Emin, Baghramian or Shahamirian. But with a genuine sense of true journalism, he opened the pages of his magazine to people of different persuasions. The Madras group integrated cultural and educational ideas with social, political and national ambitions. With their publications they not only enriched Armenian literature, but they

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76 Vazken Ghougassian, *The Quest for Enlightenment and Liberation: The Case of the Armenian Community of India in the Late Eighteenth Century*, p. 263
also introduced a national agenda for the liberation of Armenia. They highly valued the education of both men and women. In the words of Mesrob Taghiadian, the distinguished Enlightenment thinker, “when the Armenian communities of Madras and Calcutta were shining with their schools and printing presses and their boys and girls were advancing in education, anybody speaking about the importance of the education of girls in the Ottoman Empire would have either been stoned or persecuted as a heretic.”

Armenians also published the first Persian language book outside Iran again in Madras.

The flexibility of the Armenian merchants’ system in India, while enabling it to stand the shock of change more easily, also gave it a longer lease on life. The setback was, therefore, gradual and it was also connected to the stranglehold that the European powers came to exert over South Asia. In 1753, the export statistics for manufacturers from Dhaka placed the Armenian merchants on top of the list with Rs 500,000 worth of goods – i.e. 20 per cent of the production – intended for the markets of Basra, Jeddah and Mokha. The English Company came next with Rs 350,000, and the French with Rs 250,000. Around 1800, twelve Armenian shipping firms still operated in Calcutta. Nevertheless, during the entire second half of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, British advance and the simultaneous decline of local industries combined to exhaust the Indian gold mine.

Indicative of their changing fortunes is this plaint by Balthazar Gasparian of Shushi at the time. “Among the Armenians of Calcutta, there are many high ranking notables with a grand lifestyle: whether merchants, artisans, employees, priests etc, preceptors, clerks, secretaries, specialists in English, in Armenian or in the vernacular language, and so on. But the English do not care much for the Armenians and do not permit more than two hundred hearts in one town, nor do they appreciate their prosperity..., on the contrary they are jealous of us and mock us: - ‘What do you know of science and art...?’ It is natural that we do not like them in return, although our Lord

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78 Michel Aghassian and Keram Kevonian, “Armenian Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries”, in *Asian Merchants and Businessmen in the Indian Ocean and the China Sea*, p. 165
Jesus Christ told us to love our enemies; especially as they never miss an opportunity to show that they hate us, mocking and harming us wherever they see us.\textsuperscript{80}

The British were gradually introducing commercial and other restrictions for non-English merchants, thus strongly affecting the Armenian trade. In the petition of 12th September, 1769 to the Court of Directors of the United Company of Merchants of England, trading to the Indies, by two Armenian merchants Gregore Cojamaul and Johannes Rafael wrote: “That, to the great astonishment of your petitioners, upon their arrival in Calcutta, they were informed, that your Governor, Mr. Harry Verelst, and his Council had been pleased to publish an edict, under date of the 18th May 1768, prohibiting all Armenians, Portuguese and their descendants, from residing or trading in any part out of the provinces of Bengal, Behar and Orissa, or attempting to transport any merchandise beyond those provinces, under penalty of the utmost severe corporal punishment, and the confiscation of such merchandise. That your petitioners were hereby not only deprived, among others, of those rights which were due to them, as men, by the law of nations, but were deprived of that freedom of trade which their nation had always enjoyed...”\textsuperscript{81}

Lazarovitch remarked in 1829 that “the people of our nation are not as richly endowed today as they were before; because, as mentioned earlier, after European fabrics flooded the world, all Indian trade, so to say, stopped, and what remained was in the hands of the merchants of the English Company.” \textsuperscript{82}

One type of reaction towards maltreatment of the Armenian merchants was joining of some of them the fight of local Indian people against the British.\textsuperscript{83} Vivid example of such struggle was participation of the Armenians in struggle against the British in 1760-1763 in Bengal, detailed description of it being contained in contemporary Indo-Armenian Thomas Khojamall’s History of India.\textsuperscript{84} This short narrative of history he wrote in 1768 in Allahabad, which was edited and published by Mesrovb Thaghiadian in 1849.

\textsuperscript{80} H. Kurdian and H. Papazian (eds), \textit{Father Balthazar Gasparian of Shoushi: a Geographical Anthology} Banber Matenadarani, (in Armenian), Yerevan, no. 9, 1969, pp. 332-333
\textsuperscript{81} Mesrovb Jacob Seth, \textit{Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present}, p. 378
\textsuperscript{82} P.P. Lazarovitch, \textit{A Description of the City of Calcutta}, (in Armenian), Venice, 1832, pp. 33-34
\textsuperscript{83} Rafik Abrahamian, \textit{The Armenian Sources of the Eighteenth Century About India}, Yerevan, 1968, p. 18
\textsuperscript{84} Thomas Khojamall, \textit{History of India}, Calcutta, 1841
When years and events later Bengal’s nawab under British influence Mir Jafar was deposed in favor of his son-in-law Mir Qasim in 1760, the name of the Armenian military commander Khoja Gregory (Harutiunian), alias Gorgin Khan became known. He was cloth-merchant at Hooghly and for championing the cause of Mir Qasim, became his confidant. When Mir Qasim ascended the nawab’s seat, in order to organize his army after the western fashion, Nawab Mir Qasim appointed thirty years old Gorgin Khan as the Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal army. Nawab Mir Qasim was eager to assert his sovereignty constantly flouted by a part of the members of the Calcutta Council in limitless pursuit of their private trade in post-Plassey Bengal. Soon the pursuit of the goal to become independent from the British and to assume full power over Bengal turned into nawab’s policy. In 1761, the nawab moved his seat with the entire government from Murshidabad to Monghir, on a safe distance further from Calcutta. Gorgin Khan established an arsenal inside the fort in Monghir and the manufacture of fir-arms. In two years Gorgin Khan created an army of 15,000 cavalry and 25,000 infantry, disciplined on the modes of the Company’s army. He manufactured firelocks, which were superior to the Towerproof muskets. He established a foundry for casting cannon and trained up a corps of artillerymen. Some of the researchers expressed opinion that his army was also financed by the Armenian merchants from Calcutta. After Gorgin Khan assumed the command over Bengal army, very many local Armenians joined the service. It was known that Armenian officers and soldiers served in Bengal army even before Gorgin Khan. But at the latter’s tenure about one hundred Armenians joined the force. Armenian general Margar Johannes Kalantar, who was previously in military service in Holland, distinguished himself in the capture of Patna. Colonels in commanding positions Arathoon Margar and Gregory Nahapiet Ayvaz, both from New Julfa, Petrus Astwatsatooor from village Aneas in Armenia, Sookias Avietick and Johannes Nazaret from Tabriz, Lazar Jakob and Martyrose Gregory from Maraghah in Iran attained fame in the battles against the British. Names of several captains also were registered by Thomas Khojamall.

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86 Thomas Khojamall, *History of India*, p. 71
88 Thomas Khojamall, *History of India*, Pp. 82-83
Subsequent to the hasty capture of Patna by British force of 4,600, Bengal army under the command of Margar Kalantar recaptured the city. Honoring the victorious Armenian officers, a flag with a cross was raised in Patna. Khoja Petrus Arathoon, who was mentioned in connection with the “Black Hole” incident, suffered considerably for his loyalty to the British. In 1763, when still the British troops were fighting against Mir Qasim, Major Adams, Commander of the British troops, fearing that Gorgin Khan or other Armenian commanders might harm the British prisoners who were in the hands of nawab, kept Khoja Petrus as a hostage in his camp.

Legendary commander Gorgin Khan was treacherously assassinated in 1763. Two of his Armenian officers entered the military service of nawab Sujah-ud-Dowlah of Oudh, while the rest moved into Calcutta.

Focusing on the Armenian community in Calcutta, it should be mentioned that starting from the initial steps of founding Calcutta, the English tried to engage the Armenians in certain negotiating functions. Armenian merchant-diplomat Khoja Sarhad was able to establish a personal relation with the future Emperor Farrukh-siyar, yet at the latter’s age of fourteen. As according to court habits of that times, Khoja Sarhad was sending to the teenager prince presents of toys. The prince used to send for Khoja Sarhad and ask him what use they were for. The English, aware of the fact that the Armenian merchant was in good favor with the Mughal Emperor, employed Khoja Israel Sarhad to help them get governing rights to three villages of Calcutta, Sutanati and Govindpur. After being instrumental in obtaining letters patent that granted the English the privilege of purchasing the zamindari right (the right of revenue collection, but actually the ownership) of the three villages, Khoja Sarhad was able to obtain the historic “Grand Firman” for the English East India Company from the Emperor Farrukh-siyar in 1715 as a member of the famous Surman embassy, dispatched from Bengal to Delhi. The latter conferred numerous privileges on them. In 1717, the same Mughal emperor granted the East India Company freedom of trade in return for a yearly payment of 3,000 rupees, which gave an impetus to the growth of Calcutta. Duty-free private trade was launched in this emerging town. Numerous Indian as well as Armenian merchants flocked to

89 Ibid., p. 92
90 Shazad Z. Najmuddin, Armenia: a Resume, with notes on Seth’s Armenians in India, Victoria, 2006. p. 85
Calcutta, the population of which at that time was only 12,000. Armenian settlers were attracted to Calcutta also because in the first decades of the eighteenth century Bandel, Chinsurah and Chandernagore began to lose their commercial importance in Bengal. River Hooghly was well known to them and establishing business and residential houses in its vicinity due to the mentioned factors was perceived in a very natural way. Soon active Armenian community life sprung there. The Armenians erected a wooden edifice in 1707, in the midst of their burial grounds, and named it Surb Hovhannes (St. John’s) Church. In 1724, through the untiring efforts of Agha Nazar and with funds provided by the members of the community at the time, this wooden structure was replaced by a simple construction in brick and mortar, designed by Levon Ghevond, an Armenian architect from Iran. Because an older Armenian Church in Chinsurah was consecrated in the name of St. John the Baptist, to avoid confusion, the church in Calcutta was renamed Nazareth’s Church. Thus the memory of Agha Nazar, its benevolent benefactor, was perpetuated. The belfry and steeple of the church were added in 1734 by Manuel Hazarmalian. In 1790, Catchik Arakiel embellished the interior of the church, presented the tower clock and erected a double-storied parochial house and the surrounding boundary walls. In 1906, a third story was added to the parochial house at the entire cost of Arathoon Gregory Apcar. The Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth had the distinction of being the oldest Christian sanctuary in Calcutta. It has been not only a place of worship, but an institution of the community, closely associated with the religious, charitable, educational and historical activities of Armenians in Bengal, entire India and even the East. Many merchant princes and magnanimous ladies of the Armenian community have enriched this church with munificent bequests and thus ensured the continuous upkeep of this historic church and its properties, as well as sustenance and education of needy members of its congregation.

The status of Armenians within the society at large in Calcutta, especially of the upper class, at the beginning of the nineteenth century is depicted in the “Indian Recreations” published in Edinburgh in 1803: “The Armenians are the most respectable and perhaps the most numerous body of foreign merchants in this Capital. They carry on

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91 Aramais Mirzaian, *A Short Record of Armenian Churches in India and the Far East*, Calcutta, 1958, p. 31
an extensive trade from China and most of the sea ports to the eastward and to the West, as far as the Persian Gulf. Their information from all these different quarters is deemed the most accurate and minute of anybody of men in their profession. They are attentive, regular and diligent in business; and never think of departing from their lives and indulging in dissipation, even after a competency has been acquired. Their houses are therefore of old standing, and many of them are possessed of large Capitals; as subjects they are perhaps the most peaceable and loyal to be found in any country; as members of Society, they are polite and inoffensive... Some of the more respectable Armenians are commonly invited to public balls and entertainments given in Calcutta where they invariably behave with all that decorum and correctness which knowledge of mankind generally produces. A few priests of their persuasion are maintained by them, not only in affluence but in some degree of splendor. In their fondness for show and elegance, the Armenians approach nearer the English than any merchants here, they are, however, more guarded in their expense, for they are seldom seen displaying their equipage till they are fully able to defray its charge."

The population of Calcutta increased to nearly 120,000 by 1752 and to 180,000 by 1821. As far as the Armenian population in Calcutta is concerned, the demographic picture and dynamics are the following. According to the census of 1814, taken by Gentilum Aviet and published in the Armenian Almanac in 1815, Calcutta was stated to contain 480 Armenian inhabitants, of whom 272 were males, and 208 females. As it becomes clear from Aviet's comments, some of Calcutta Armenians temporarily moved to Serampore, Chinsurah and other adjacent places. So they were not counted. The census of 1836, taken by Johannes Avdall, counts 101 Armenian households in Calcutta. The inmates of these households amount to 505, reckoning from newborn children to adults of all ages. That exactly apportions an average of five individuals to each household. Adults amount to 313 and children to 192. From the census of 1814 to the one in 1836 the Armenian population increased in 25. At a first glance it seems to be pretty reasonable natural growth rate. In order to further explore demographics, a better depiction is exposed through analysis of variety of figures, covering period from 1811 to 1835.

92 Mesrovb Jacob Seth, Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present, p. 456-457
93 Johannes Avdall, Census of the Armenian Population of the City of Calcutta, Calcutta, 1837, pp. 7-9
Register of births, marriages and deaths, taken from the records in the vestry of the Armenian Church in Calcutta, point at 286 births, 99 marriages and 395 deaths. The maximum number of the marriages is 7, and the minimum is only 1 per annum, both ranging on an average of 4. According to this data, the Armenian population was supposed to decline by 109, upon negative ratio in births and deaths. Hence, the conclusion is that the number of people increased because of migration process.

The authentic number of the Armenians in Calcutta and all over India was much bigger that is reflected in different censuses. In this case, it is absolutely not a matter of accuracy and correctness. The issue is in the fact that children born in mixed marriages with one Armenian parent were ceased to be considered Armenians in Calcutta. Initially, discouraging Armenians from mixed marriages was stipulated by factor of a small Diaspora nation creating defensive mechanisms against assimilation. Although at some points striving for national preservation was receiving dreadful forms, like non-recognition of children from mixed marriages. Johannes Avdall gave the following explanation to this phenomenon: “There is in Calcutta a certain class of Native Christians, generally known by the appellation of erkrakank (literally signifying natives), belonging to the Armenian Church, but properly not included in the roll of the Armenian community. They are, it is presumed, nearly as numerous as the Armenians themselves, but widely distinguished from them by their color, which partakes of black, and the peculiarly different mode of living. They are, properly speaking, Indo-Armenians or Haico-Indians, tracing their origin to the Haics, the proper appellation by which my countrymen are generally distinguished among themselves. This mark of distinction, existing between them and the Armenian community, rendered the comprehension of the former in the roll of the latter entirely unnecessary.”

The Armenian population of Calcutta consequently increased, in 1870s constituting 622 people, comprised of 113 households, while 345 were male and 277 female. Therefore, this was result of migrant human inflow, mainly from Iran and other parts of India.

94 Ibid., p. 10
95 Harutiun Ter Hovhaniants, History of New Julfa, Vol. 2. p. 316
The social fabric of the Armenians in Calcutta started to change since the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. If initially the majority of Armenians were engaged in trade, gradually more handicraftsmen, workmen, jewelers, doctors, architects, educationists and lawyers were taking their place.

Calcutta became the capital of British India in 1772, when the first governor-general, Warren Hastings, transferred all important offices to the city from Murshidabad, the provincial Mughal capital. In 1773 Bombay and Madras became subordinate to the government at Fort William. In a very rapid mode Calcutta also became the intellectual center of the subcontinent. This circumstance had its impact on the Armenian community as well.

The issue of opening an Armenian school – one of core pillars for safeguarding national identity - and providing education in national language was becoming ripe in the most populous Armenian community in India. A local Armenian, named Margar, a commandant, taught youth at his house. Opinion prevails that the person was Margar Johannes Kalantar, commander under Gorgin Khan in Bengal’s army.96 The first regular Armenian school in Calcutta was started by Arratoon Kaloos in the year 1798. Later on, when the course of instructions at this school was found insufficient for the requirements of the period, the Armenian Philanthropic Academy was inaugurated, in 1821. Arratoon Kaloos School merged with it in 1825. But there is another, extremely remarkable stipulation factor for the opening of the Philanthropic Academy, which also characterizes the collective thinking of the society. Arratoon Kaloos's school despite being fully devoted to the cause of educating Calcutta Armenian youth and being prosperous from the day of its launch was nevertheless a private institution. It was not a duty and responsibility bearer vis-à-vis the society. On the other hand, the society at large was not entitled to any specific rights in regard of the school, being deprived of the capability to have some bearing on it. Hence, the need had arisen to have national-public school – national-public upon its founding and functioning principles as well as administration.

The Armenian Philanthropic Academy is the second oldest educational institution in Calcutta, the oldest being the Calcutta Free School, which was founded in 1789. From the outset there was a girl’s department in the Philanthropic Academy, but it was

abandoned in 1842. According to reports, the Academy hosted Indian children as well.\textsuperscript{97}

The Academy became affiliated to the Calcutta University in 1871, when the first batch of students was sent up for entrance (matriculation) examination, with classical Armenian as their second language. In order to further elevate the level of education, the Academy management started college classes for preparing boys for the First Arts and the higher examinations of the Calcutta University in 1888. Classical Armenian was approved as the second language. Since then the Academy came to be known as Armenian College. Famous “Araratian library” opened its doors at the Academy in 1828, having numerous books in the Armenian, Sanskrit, English, Latin, Greek, French, Dutch, Persian and Chinese and about a thousand volumes of rare manuscripts.

In Calcutta, Armenian theater was established as a socio-cultural institution among the community along with other cultural institutions. Theatrical performances were supported by the Ochanaspyur organization, which furthered the ethos of a secular society by sponsoring a range of cultural events, lectures, concerts, etc. in parallel with other similar Armenian associations in the Ottoman Empire and Iran. This marked an important transition towards the inception of regular Armenian repertory theater in Constantinople and Tiflis in the 1860s, since hitherto Armenian theater had been limited to the Armenian Catholic Mkhitarist school curriculum. Whereas the latter had focused on religious and historical tragedies and farces, the subject matter of the Indo-Armenian stage is drawn from contemporary life portrayed in a rather realistic way, which through humor sought to achieve a deeper moral purpose. In fact, the one extant play represents the first example of bourgeois domestic drama, which was to become the prevalent focus of the nineteenth century East Armenian stage. The play, whose eye-catching title “The Physiognomist of Duplicity” already alludes to the social purpose its journalist author Mkrtich Martirosian had conceived it to fulfil, i.e. to unmask the deeper levels of manipulation and corruption cleverly concealed behind a façade of propriety and normalcy. Theater was kind of a first school for the Indo-Armenian society, in raising public awareness of inequality and injustice and inciting indignation against such excesses. The play is centered on the theme of marriage, while the element of conflict is provided by the contrasting backgrounds of the two suitors for the hand of the bride-to-

\textsuperscript{97} P. Lazarevich, \textit{Portrayal of the City of Calcutta}, Calcutta, 1849, p. 29
be. One is the unprepossessing son of a wealthy merchant, the other a sensitive, cultured poet. Naturally, the bride’s parents opt for the former, setting the stage for a lively dialogue on community priorities and values.98

Aspiration for enlightenment and self-development led to formation of diverse groups and societies among the youth. “Ochanaspiuryan association” was founded in Bombay in 1815 and moved to Calcutta at a later stage. Subsequently “Imastakhndryan association” in 1818 and “Araratian association” in 1845 were formed in Calcutta. The members were writing poesy, prose, translating, mostly from English, and while convening meetings, were engaging in discussions, literary criticism and reading. They were opening schools, like the one in Bombay, printing presses and periodicals. They were intended to serve the purpose of popularization of their ideas and enlightenment of the Armenian people.

Following the example of Madras, an Armenian press was started in Calcutta in 1796. Initially, Calcutta Armenians were just eager to follow “the glorious city” in that realm. Soon, the prominence of the Armenian community in Madras in terms of printing, education and literary activities was gradually eclipsed by the Calcutta community. By the nineteenth century the latter has truly became a center of intellectual, economical, religious, educational and national-patriotic activities of Armenians in India.

The first printing press was established under the auspices of the Armenian Holy Church of Nazareth, by priest Hovsep Stepanosian. In 1796-1798, five books were published. Another printing house was of much better quality and was printing ethical-didactic works. The latter demonstrates the new prevailing demand of the public. From 1811 to 1820, Jentlumian printing press produced 21 publications. In the time period from 1796 to 1876 ten different printing presses in Calcutta published books, textbooks, periodicals and calendars.

By 1818, and Armenian weekly, the “Mirror of Calcutta”, was being printed. New presses in Calcutta published Armenian and European authors in Armenian translations. However, despite the efforts of newcomers from Iran, especially Mesrop Taghiadian, who started a weekly called “Patriot” in 1845, the Armenians were gradually accepting

Anglicization and Indianization of their community. By the mid-nineteenth century ten Armenian journals were published in Calcutta and in the whole country.

In Bengal, out of Calcutta, other small Armenian communities continued their existence. One of them is Chinsurah, on the banks of the Hooghly. St. John’s Armenian Church in Chinsurah is the second oldest church in Bengal. According to the church register of marriages, baptisms and burials, between the years 1826 and 1868 sixteen marriages were solemnized in the church at Chinsurah. Between the years 1817 and 1867, seventy two children were baptized in that church and between the years 1817 and 1881, fifty seven burials took place there. The record office has the names of thirteen priests, officiated in that church in the period concerned. Among 128 graves inside the church and in the yard, there is one with a script: “David Freedone Melik Beglar, the son of the last independent Prince of Karabagh in the province of Tiflis, Caucasus.” His eldest son, Joseph Beglar, the Executive Engineer and Archeological Surveyor in the Bengal Public Works Department, upon retirement published since 1892 a monthly journal, in English, called “Ara”. It was devoted to Armenian politics, history and literature. The last number of “Ara” of February 1895 contained an account of the indignation meeting, held by the Armenian community of Calcutta at the old Theatre Royal, on the 21st January, 1895, to protest against the Turkish atrocities of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. This event testifies to the point that the Indo-Armenian community continued to adhere to the time-honored tradition of patriotism.

Located between Berhampur and Murshidabad, Saidabad is another town of Armenian historical interest in Bengal. Armenian merchants traded in Murshidabad since the seventeenth century, and with the increase of their number Armenian Church was built in the town in 1758.

Since the last quarter of the seventeenth – beginning of the eighteenth centuries the role of Bombay increased, acquiring distinction of the most important port of Western India for inland and overseas trade. The Armenian merchants started to move from Surat to Bombay as the former was losing its significance. Armenians settled in an area called Armenian quarter, which was renamed “Armenian lane”, and later “Armenian street”. St. Peter’s Church was built in 1796 through the efforts of Jacob Petrus, an opulent

99 Mesrovb Jacob Seth, Armenians in India from the Earliest Times to the Present, p. 312
Armenian merchant in Bombay. The inscriptions in the Bombay churchyard do not go beyond the nineteenth century, which is an indication of drastic reduction of the numbers of Armenians.

The following account of Armenians in Bombay depicts certain aspects of their lifestyle: "The Armenians are wearing the Persian dress and dyeing their hair and whiskers with henna. Armenian ladies pass their time either engaged in the care of their families, or in receiving and paying visits, drinking coffee or sherbet, embroidering and making delicious confections of hulwah and various sweetmeats. They have very considerable influence in their families, understand business admirably, and are commonly entrusted with the full control of their property. Their condition is easy and agreeable; little restrained being placed upon their conduct; a slight degree of personal seclusion being considered honorable and dignified." The number of the Armenians in the city was fluctuating during the course of the eighteenth century. The Armenian population in Bombay was 105 in 1813, 49 in 1870s, and 30 in 1889, exposing a clear sign of gradual dwindling down. Some of the Armenians in Bombay entered public service, like Dr. J.M. Joseph, who became Deputy Surgeon-General of the country. Apart from the main centers of activities of Armenians in India, Armenian settlements in Lahore, Surat, Chandernagore, Saidabad, Delhi, Lucknow, Arcad, Bangalore, Bihar, Dhaka, Cochin, Chandernagore, Tanjar, Hyderabad, Chittagong and others continued their sustenance, although with a much smaller population.

The issue of overall number of Armenians living in India was always a matter of deliberations. The deeds of the Indo-Armenian were of such a scale and magnitude that an opinion was formed among world-wide spread Armenians about largeness of the community in India, especially in the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. The public opinion could not perceive the fact that the Armenian community in India at most numbered few thousand people. Chief Armenian priest of Calcutta Hovhannes Khachkyan, who officiated for many years also in capacity of spiritual leader in India, counts the general number of Armenians in India as 1,225 persons in 1860s. Memorandum of the Census of British India (1871-1872) refers to 1,250 Armenians in India. Indeed, there were times

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100 Ibid., p. 299
101 Hovhannes Khachkyan, Little Mirror, (in Armenian), Calcutta, 1869, p. 41
of more Armenians residing in India, but, first and foremost, their seemingly limitless energy, dynamisms, patriotism, "aspiration for light, perfection and education", and not just their numbers, were producing the desired results for the whole nation.

Writing on the history of Armenians in India arise an apparent need to respond to the question: why exactly India turned into the center of enlightenment and pan-Armenian liberation movement. The oppressive occupational Ottoman and Safavid regimes in Armenia used to brutally squash any kind of manifestations of liberal and national ideas. In this circumstance quite naturally the center of national-liberation movement was supposed to be sited abroad. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the process of formation of its ideology commenced. In the mentioned period the commencement of the Armenian studies in a systematic way in Europe and the broad scholarly interest expressed there towards the country brought its important contribution to the process. Nevertheless, at that period no any organizational set up came into being. In the eighteenth century as a consequence of several factors, India acquired that role for the whole Armenian nation. The Armenian dynamic communities in India, and in particular the leading ones in Madras and then in Calcutta, were small and close-knit societies. They accumulated significant wealth and were relatively well organized. Their trade in the West and their close contacts with the British, as well as French and Dutch East India Companies had enriched their social, educational, economic, and political understanding. In the meantime, the Indian history, philosophy and culture had its adequate impact. The experience of anti-colonial struggle in its turn had an awakening effect on Armenians. Many of them took active participation in it. The example of Gorgin Khan, Commander-in-Chief of Nawab Mir Kasim's Bengal army in 1760-1763 is a colorful one. The Indian-Armenians realized that solely national liberation is capable to provide fully secure environment for trade-economic prosperity. The case of India, where the Armenians passed through transition from affluence to gradual decline because of domineering British economic and overall policies, espoused their judgment.

The treatment of Armenians as a second-class society by the British after the 1760s had obviously stimulated a strong sense of national solidarity among them. They started a search for ways to improve their social, economic, educational, and natural status. The liberation of Georgia, neighboring to Armenia country, from Persian rule in
the mid-eighteenth century and the consequent reestablishment of the Georgian throne under Heraclius II created a new impetus for the liberation of Armenia. The community of Madras was fortunate to have a leader like Shahamir Shahamirian, whose financial support, printing press, organizational skills and the ability to inspire and lead people were vital. He was able to establish efficient ties with the Georgian court, exploring possibilities to secure their cooperation in the liberation strategy. Another important factor was that the Armenians enjoyed many freedoms in India and their activities were in no way limited or restricted. Such a state of affairs allowed Armenians, based in India, to carry out national projects. In the words of Mesrop Taghiadian, the distinguished Enlightenment thinker, “when the Armenian communities of Madras and Calcutta were shining with their schools and printing presses and their boys and girls were advancing in education, anybody speaking about the importance of the education of girls in the Ottoman Empire would have either been stoned or persecuted as a heretic”.

In the historical framework of the Armenian Diaspora communities, spread all over the world, the Armenian community in India also can be singled out by its uniqueness according to some other characteristics. The main feature for that relates to the sustainable mechanisms, composition and migration processes, prevailing in the community. The Armenians moved and settled in India mainly from Iran, Armenia proper, and Georgia. The bulk of them came from New Julfa, being merchants. As was presented before, the Armenians were engaged in international transit trade and created infrastructure for a successful long-distance commerce. They had trade houses and merchant settlements, stretched to Manila, Batavia, Surabaya, Penang and Molucca. Among other things, the resulting commercial network served as a medium for the regular exchange of business information, the maintenance of trust and credit, and the organization of a system of arbitration and adjudication in business disputes. Together with the merchants of the homeland, these widely dispersed but highly interrelated Armenian trade communities constituted what is known as a “trading Diaspora”. With the self-governing township in New Julfa in Iran as the center of worldwide Armenian commercial activities, India geographically became the main platform for implementation of trade networking. The trade interests compelled the Armenian merchants, residing in India, to conduct a mobile lifestyle. Very often they had to resettle into other countries,
thus causing rapid change in community composition and number. Apart from the main social class of merchants, a big number constituted also craftsmen, farmers, initially scribes and diplomats (working for local rulers), later on government administrative employees (one of the main reasons for their development as administrators was that many spoke several languages having been educated with Armenian, classical Persian, and English), doctors, teachers, military, architects and lawyers. Frequently people from these classes moved with merchants into other places as well because of new job opportunities etc. Starting the day one of the establishment of the Armenian community in India and during consequent centuries as community it needed manpower and new community members at least to replace the ones who left. Almost constantly small groups of Armenians were coming to India from abroad, mainly from Iran. Therefore the Armenian community in India carried a renewable character, depending on “sources of human inflow”. Even the majority of Armenian school graduates in India were returning to their hometowns and villages abroad. Interestingly, the Armenian community in India is the only one where the status of the clergy substantially differed, being limited solely to spiritual functions. As a matter of fact, since the loss of the Armenian statehood, it was the Church that in a way personified national sovereignty in the eyes of Armenians. In India, the Armenian clergy didn’t have its own capital, didn’t posses monopolized property etc.

The transfer of Indian affairs under full control of the British crown from the East India Company in 1858 and the new requirements of trade with Europe have mostly been responsible for the gradual decline of the Armenian community. The economic recession in India naturally had repercussions on the vitality of the Armenian community. A new urban class emerged that was more sensitive to the political aspirations of the nation but also better and deeper integrated into the host society.

Having lost their economic advantages, Armenians from different parts of India began to emigrate more intensely since the second half of the eighteenth century. The specifics of migratory processes in India, as was depicted above, attest that this was not a beginning of an entirely new phenomenon. Migrant flows of the Armenians in South and South-East Asia were already classified in the rank of routine. But since the mentioned period, certain amplification of the process was recorded. Quest for relatively better
opportunities were inducing the Armenians to explore for new business and living conditions within already well-familiarized regions of the traditional Asian trading network. Some joined their families and associates in Burma, Malaysia, or Indonesia. In Burma, Armenians obtained the monopoly of a number of oilfields and opened shipbuilding enterprises. Armenians eventually purchased the famed Strand Hotel in Rangoon and opened businesses and hotels in Malaysia as well. Singapore became another major Armenian center when the British made it one of the focal points of their colonial administration. In 1834-1836, Armenians from India had built the first Christian church (St. Gregory the Illuminator), an Armenian center, and were publishing a periodical in Singapore. 102 Some Indo-Armenians immigrated to China, where Armenian merchants had settled earlier. Thus, the demographics of the Armenian population in India underwent serious changes.

102 George Bournoutian, A Concise History of the Armenian People, Costa Mesa, 2002, p. 223