CHAPTER-VII

COMMERCIAL RELATIONS OF THE DELHI SULTANS
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India's commercial Contacts with the outside world also developed during the Sultanate period. Isami refers to the presence of Chinese traders in Delhi during the reign of Iltutmish. These merchants once showed their articles to the Sultan also

Horses were imported from Turkestan, Russia, Iraq and Bahrain. When the import of horses had almost ceased as a result of political changes in Central Asia, Balban is reported to have boasted that he could maintain the necessary supplies even if horses

from the mongol territories did not reach India. ¹

Elephants were exported from India. ² The author of

Tarik-i- Ghazan Khan says

(They had brought elephants from India for His Majesty)

The author of Rahat-us-Sudoor refers to

Indian sword (سُلْطَانِيَّةُ)³ In a petition drafted

by Amir Khusro on behalf of a merchant and presented

¹ Barani, Tarikh-i-Pirozshahi, p. 53.

² Tarikh-i-Ghazan Khan p. 254

opt cit Nizami's "Studies in Medieval Indian History

and Culture p. 12.


p. 10.
to a high official during the time of Allauddin Khalji there is a reference to foreign traders in Delhi who had made enormous profits in the west in Syria, in Abysinnia, Egypt and Madain and were expected to proceed to China and Khita after visiting Delhi.¹

It is worth noting that there was a great progress of overland as well as maritime trade between India, Iran and the countries of Central Asia during the time of Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Yahya Sirhindi refers to the prosperity of the Khurasani merchants during this period and says:

All the big mansions in the prosperous city (Delhi) were owned by them. They used to purchase all articles

¹ Cf K.A. Nizami - "Studies in med. Ind. Hist. & Culture p.10
such as gold and silver, paper and books and slaves also and sent them to Khurasan. The leading merchants commanded great respect in the countries they visited and would act as emissaries between different rulers. Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq utilized the services of the foreign merchants both for the progress of trade and enhancing his prestige abroad. These merchants came to India from Khurasan, Iraq (Il-Khanid Iran), Transoxiana, Sistan, Harev (the Kingdom of Herat), Egypt, Syria and Mughulistan. They came to India in ships and

1. Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi eng. trans. p.110
Caravans both. They visited the Sultan with gifts and in return received vessels of gold studded with pearls and jewels, gold plates full of gold and silver coins besides robes made of costly silk stuff such as Zarbaft (Silk worn with gold thread), imported horses and expensive belts. Muhammad Bin Tughluq used to send one Saiyid Abul Hasan Ibadi to purchase weapons and other things.

The Tarikh-i Ghazan Khan also refers to the frequent visits of Indian traders to the lands of the Mongols. It appears that the same feeling

2. Ibid.
which an Indian merchant had expressed against
the foreign merchants was expressed by the merchants
of other lands about the Indian traders carrying
business in foreign countries.¹

During the reign of Firuz Shah Tughluq,
a Khurasani merchant assaulted the Kotwal in
the royal palace. When the matter was brought before.
The Sultan he hesitated to inflict any severe punish-
ment on him and said

( How should he be dealt with )
He is a native of a foreign land

Culture" p.10
Ultimately it was decided that all the Khurasani traders in Delhi should be called and asked to spit on his face because he had disgraced them in a foreign land and that he should be expelled from the country.¹

The contemporary Arabic sources further furnishes detailed information about the expansion of India’s trade with the outside world. Shihabuddin Al-Umari informs us that "The merchants bring pure gold to India and take in exchange merchandize of herbs and Arabic gums."² Fruits were brought from Khurasan for Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq. Once the Sultan sent Turkish and Arabian horses and fruits brought for him from Khurasan as presents.

¹ Afif - Tarikh-i- Firozshahi pp. 494-97
to Sultan Shamsuddin of Lakhnauti\(^1\). The garments distributed by Sultan Muhammad Bin Tughluq in spring were prepared in Alexandria. The garments for the Summers were prepared in Delhi but their stuff was brought from China and Iraq.\(^2\) Afif also informs us that two thousand slave girls in the harem of Khan-i- Jahan belonged to Rum and China.\(^3\) Amir Khusro mentions the use of Shami (Syrian) paper in Delhi. Barbosa (around 1518 A.D.) further refers to a kind of sash named *Sarband* made in Bengal was liked by European ladies for their head dress and by Arab and Persian merchants for their turbans.\(^4\)

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Varthema informs us that Cambay and Bangala were the two important ports in north from where Silk and Cotton stuff were taken to Persia, Tartary, Syria, Barbary, Arabin (Africa), Felix, Ethiopia etc. ¹

Shahabuddin Al-Umari mentioned that the merchants both Indian and foreign at this time appear to be the leading capitalists of their age.² They sailed in ships or moved in Caravans to different Countries.³ Ibn Batuta supplements Al-Umari in this regard. His description of Multan and the port cities

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¹ The Travels of Ludovic Varthema Vol.III p.212
³ Ibid.
of Cambay in Gujarat and Lahri in Sind shows how crowded they were by the foreign merchants and yielded huge revenue in the form of custom dues.\(^1\) It may also be emphasized that the exchange of gifts between different rulers that comprised the choiced products of their countries as well as gifted slaves, both male and female, led to diversity in culture and improvement of crafts. That Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq was far ahead of his age is reflected in his enlightened foreign policy. He gave up the offensive policy against the Chaghtai rulers of Khurasan (modern Afghanistan) and Mawara-un Nahr (Transoxiana)

\(^1\) The Travels of Ibn Batuta, Vol. III, pp. 672-73, 730, 733-34.
after he had become convinced that friendship would not only ensure security and peace to his people in the frontier region but also go a long way in promoting overland trade between the Sultanate and the Central Asian countries. It was an outcome of his state'ship that the kingdom of Herat and Chaghtai empire became the satellites of his Sultanate, whereas the rulers of Iran and Khwarizm remained his good friends. His enlightened attitude and generosity not only brought civilized countries closer to India but also attracted men of talent and learning from abroad. All this enriched the Delhi Sultanate's Cultural heritage.