Mughal Commercial Relations - An Analytical Study
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Abstract:
The coming of the Mughals to India in the sixteenth century deepened the pre-existing links between India and Central Asia. The two regions drew closer in terms of trade, population and culture. Material life in both regions was deeply affected by the accelerated movement of goods and people, while institutions of learning, religion and politics in each area bore the imprint of the other. Not much work has been published in English, until recently, on general aspects of India's relationship with Central Asia. Indeed, the significance of the trade of these regions has often been overlooked in modern writings on the Mughal-Indian economy. A major reason for this has been the nature of - or perhaps the way in which we have used - the available sources. In recent years, however, there have been some notable publications in English which enable us to ask some new questions relevant to this trade.

I. INTRODUCTION

The vast expanse of Central Asia was connected with India both through land and sea-routes. Seafarers first reached the Persian shores and hence took the land routes to the north of the Amu Darya across Khurasan. The principal routes on the mainland went through the Khyber and Bolan passes. Lahore, Multan, Kabul and Qandahar were the major entrepots of these roads. In addition, there were the Kashmir routes which led through the Kara Koram to Yaqqand, where the routes from Ladakh, Tibet, China, and India were joined by those leading to Kashgar. From Kashgar the caravans proceeded to Samarqand and Bukhara. Samarqand, the first major city of Transoxiana, was the junction of the main routes from India (via Kabul and Kashmir), Persia (via Merv) and the Turkish territories. The city of Samarqand, together with Bukhara, was thus the centre of the Indian merchants for their export trade in Central Asia. In a late sixteenth century manuscript collection of papers relating to the office of the chief qadd (qadd-alquddt) of Samarqand, titled MajyimCa-Wathfdiq, numerous Multanis are reported to have been involved in commercial and monetary transactions in the city). As early as 1326, Indians, next to Turks and Tajiks, were reported in a waqf-name to be among the notable visitors (d'inda-o-rawtna), while in the fifteenth century lands, villages (dih, qarya, nuwda) and rest-houses (ribat) of the Hindus are mentioned in the sale and purchase deeds from the Samarqand region.

II. MATERIALS AND COMMODITIES OF TRADE FROM PERSIA

On the basis of the Persian material it is difficult to identify all the commodities which the Indian traders brought into Central Asia. Textiles of varied range appear, however, to have been important items of export. In the Majmima-t- Wathfdiq the Multdnis figure as trading in chint of different hues, plain coarse calico (fota) and fine cloth of Thanesar, silk brocade (jdmawdr), and fine calico (solagazi), as well as napkins and handkerchiefs (mzndil) of Lahore). Vathema saw Indian goods in Central Asia from as far as Bengal and Gujarat, and according to him many of these Indian goods manufactured in Bengal and Kambayat also reached 'Tartary', Persia and Turkey.

Napkins, handkerchiefs, coarse and fine calico from Bengal, multi-colour chintz from Khairabad, and silk brocade from Gujarat were among the different items which passed between a Multani merchant and a local noble. Anthony Jenkinson further identified the kinds of cloth imported from India in Samarqand and Bukhara. He writes: "The Indians doe bring fine whites, which the Tartars doe all roll their heads, and all other kinds of whites which serve for apparel made of cotton wool and Crasca...") Kashmiri shawls, of course, were prized possessions of the Central Asian elites in medieval times. Later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, textiles continued to be the chief exports from India. An important duty of some of the special envoys of the Uzbek rulers to the court of the Mughal Emperor AwnangZiz (1658-1707) was to procure varieties of cloth suitable for the royal establishment ) Some of the Indian merchants had brought Indian master weavers and encouraged them to settle in Samarqand. IHusayn, Ustid Rajab, Ustdd Kajar, all from Multan, and Jitkar, from Lahore, were among such weavers). Generally these weavers worked only for the Indian merchants; in cases of defiance, they had to appear at the court of the qeidi to reaffirm their loyalty and commitment. Spices, sugar, indigo, together with some drugs, precious stones, as well as animals were some important additional trade items. According to a Spanish visitor to Timur's court during 1404-1406, "the best varieties of nutmegs, cloves, mace, ginger, etc." in Samarqand came from India. Babur mentions sugar and medicinal herbs among the special export items from India. Slaves, both Hindus and Muslims, also figured prominently among the most favoured Indian commodities in the bazaars of Central Asia. But it may be noted that Indian slaves reached there in a number of ways. Some of them were secured in exchange for Central Asian goods, horses in particular; some were taken as prisoners during wars, while many others were captured during raids on trading caravans. Slaves with specialized skills were much sought after Timfir, after his invasion of Delhi, handed over a large number of skilled craftsmen to princes, nobles and other members of his entourage, in order to have them taken to Samarqand. Many Indian stonemasons were employed in the construction of his mosque in Samarqand. There was a colony of slaves on the bank of the river Baran, who had been brought by a Timfird prince from the suburbs of Multan to catch fish and birds. In the course of the Mughal reverses during
Shahjahan's Central Asian campaigns in the 1640s, many Indians were taken prisoner and sold for petty sums in Balkh, Samarkand and Tashkent. Horses, dry and fresh fruits and musk, furs, falcons, corals were the principal imports from Central Asia, while later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when Indian traders reached, through Astrakhan, as far as Moscow and St. Petersburg, sables, bird feathers, white fur coats, red yuf, mirrors, copper and iron became those Russian items in demand in Indian markets. Horses were imported to India in very large numbers right from the early middle ages. The Gaurjara Pratiharas, the Pilas, and the Rashtrakutas kept large standing armies which included cavalry. The importance of horses during the period is indicated by numerous manuals on horses such as the Asvayurveda of Gana, the Ashwashattra of Salihotra, of Nakula, and others.) It was perhaps during this period also that the use of the iron stirrup and heavy armour, both for the horses and horsemen, became more general and had a significant impact on warfare and social organization.

II. SLAVE TRADE

On occasion, some unfortunate Indian merchants also found themselves sold as slaves in the bazaars. One such story of a turn of fortune comes from the experience of one Ala-al-Din Khan. Around 1645, Ala-al-Din was in Balkh as a trader. After two years, having sold his goods, while returning home, he was enslaved and taken to Bukhara, to be sold to the Khivans three years later. He found himself eventually owned by a Tatar woman, but he managed to escape after stealing a horse. He was arrested at Chemoyar and was then sent in 1661 to Astrakhan, where he is reported to have applied to the Russian Tsar to become a Christian. However, the fate of Ali-al-Din was a very rare feature of the Indo-Central Asian trade. It is not without significance that while we have references to numerous instances of the sale, purchase and manumission of Indian slaves in the relevant Persian records of the earlier centuries, the seventeenth to early eighteenth century sources do not talk much about the markets for these either in India or Central Asia. However, we do know that in the eighteenth century when the slave trade entered a new phase of expansion, at the markets of Bukhara, Khiva and Kashgar, India was no longer the main source of supply. Most slaves came from Africa or from the mountain and desert fringes of Iran and Afghanistan. We know little about the status of the slave trade under the Mughals, let alone about the import of slaves into Central Asia. If a significant decline occurred it could be explained both in economic and social terms. By the seventeenth century India had begun to manufacture enough textiles to clothe nearly the whole of Central Asia as well as Iran and thus there was no longer the need for exchanging Central Asian horses and other goods for Indian slaves. We cannot establish the precise volume of India's trade. Our sources have little concern for statistics. But it is notable that by his time, as we shall see below, Indian merchants had brought the trade of almost the entire Eurasian region under their control.

IV. CAVALRY FOR MILITARY SYSTEM

As cavalry came to be the mainstay of the political and military system under the Delhi Sultans and the Mughals, the trade in horses became a major component in the relations between India and the territories beyond the North-West frontier, known collectively in the Delhi Sultanate (‘the high land’ or ‘the land on the higher side’). These biddastaf lands seem to have been the principal source of supply of war horses under the Sultans, even though a large number of fine horses also came to India through the sea-routes from the Gulf countries and Persia. Early in the fourteenth century Mongol tribal groups, amongst others, used to come down with their herds for the winter and sell them in the territories of the Delhi Sultans. According to Ibn Battitâfa28), the people of Asaq or Azaq in the steppelands of southern Russia exported horses to India in droves of 6,000 or there about. Various merchants had a share of about 200 horses each in these herds. For each fifty horses, they engaged the services of a keeper called qdsifh who looked after them and their feeding on the way. These traders wholly travelled by a route north of the Caspian Sea, through the Dasht-z-Qtziqdiq and Transoxiana down to the Khyber Pass. The trade in horses was voluminous as well as profitable. Throughout medieval times, Central Asia remained the principal source of supply of horses for all purposes. In the sixteenth century, according to Babur, seven to ten thousand horses arrived in Kabul every year. During the seventeenth century the demand rose enormously and the Indian traders, according to a report, sometimes purchased as many as a hundred thousand Central Asian horses at Kabul. As early as in the fourteenth century the profit in this trade was estimated at 2500 per cent. Trade in horses often had a close connection with medieval Indian politics. The services of horse traders and breeders were considered valuable by medieval rulers. Many of the well-known Indo-Afghan rulers started their own careers as horse dealers. This applies to the Lodis and Stirs of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as well as to northern Indian Afghan chiefs of the eighteenth century, some of whom established their powers along the trade routes to Central Asia. The political and military dimension of this trade diminished only in the nineteenth century, when large Indian armies of horsemen were substituted for small ones of infantry. With this, the nature of the relationship between India and the countries beyond its north western borders underwent an obvious change. Some of the Central-Asian chroniclers also noted cotton as a precious export item from Bukhara to India. Narshakhi mentions a village, Zandana, near Bukhara as a production centre of an expensive variety of cotton, which was named after the village as Zandajaf and sold at the price of silk (ba-qimat-i-abrisham) in Fars, Iraq, Kirkman and Hindustan. But it seems that Indians themselves, throughout the period, aspired to be the chief carriers of even the Central-Asian articles in India. They seem to have had a keen appreciation for precious metals and a dislike for passing them on to the foreign merchants. Jenkinson noted that ‘gold, silver, precious stones. They (Indians) bring none’. However, this did not apply to certain merchants who were especially commissioned by Central Asian rulers to sell or to buy goods in India for their masters and who were exempted from customs duties everywhere. The extraordinary strong Khatri participation in this trade, it should be noted, seems to have coincided with the rise and growth of Mughal power in India. The fourteenth-century historian Diya-al-Din Barani already noticed the presence of Hindu Multanis, precursors of the Khatis, as traders and moneylenders. We saw that in the sixteenth century many Multanis, both Hindus and Muslims, figured in a variety of monetary and commercial transactions in Samarkand. But, until about the end of the sixteenth century, traders from almost the entire subcontinent participated in India's trade with its north-western neighbours. The Central Asian documents in effect mention other Hindustanis and Hindus in general together with the Multdnis43). Jenkinson met in Bukhara Hindu traders from the farthest parts of India, including Bengal and the Gangetic plain. The Sharaf-ndma-z-Shdhi noted Deccani merchants in Kabul and Peshawar, on their way to
Khurasan, Transoxiana and Turkistan. We also cannot rule out the presence in Central Asia of a sizeable number of merchants from Sind, Gujarat, and the Deccan, who also reached the Persian shores through the sea-routes and then took the land-routes to the areas south and north of the Oxus. The fact that CAbd-al-Razziq of Samarqand, the envoy of Shah Rukh (1409-1447), arrived in Vijayanagar via the sea-routes is well known. Many Iranians at the courts of the Deccan sultanates were from Khurasan, the Iranian province which extended into Central Asia. The ports of Thatta and Lahari Bandar, which linked Sind, Multan and the Punjab to Hurmuz, Bushahr and Basra, also mediated the trade of Western India to Persia. The bulk of the trade of Sind went to the west, to the great Persian Gulf entrepôt state of Hurmuz centred on the land offarun, but coastal navigation also linked the ports of the Indus delta with Khambayat, in Gujarat, and the Konkan. It was perhaps because of Thatta's central position that the Portuguese, after taking over Hurmuz, made a bid to capture it. One of the most formidable ports in India, Thatta was the meeting point of several routes, some terrestrial and some fluvial. In 1622, when the Portuguese still held Hurmuz, about one seventh of all shipping to that port originated from Sind. Thus, until about the end of the sixteenth century, the participants in India's trade with Central Asia and Persia, both along the overland and maritime routes, came from almost the entire subcontinent. Some nodal transit points like Multan and Lahore had emerged in the north-western region, the merchants from this region profiting conspicuously from this trade. But their share in it was still not overwhelming. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, belonged, almost exclusively to the traders from the north-western provinces of the Mughal Empire. A number of developments around this time may explain this change. One of these was the spirit of the caravan trade, which, in part, resulted from the tightening European control over the sea-routes. The India-Central Asia caravan trade was, in a large measure, a latter-day continuation of the enterprise which centuries earlier had led Indian Buddhists to move out along the same routes. There were, however, some obvious disadvantages in these routes. As they passed through difficult terrain, possibilities for their improvement were extremely limited. Conditions were particularly unfavourable to wheeled heavy traffic. Pack animals, which were the principal means of transport, could carry only limited loads. Further, the cost of such transport was very high, all the more so because the animals had to be unloaded for rest every day. Again, because of the danger of theft and violence, the merchants had to wait at the major surd is until a sufficiently large convoy had been formed. W.H. Moreland cites the case of Manrique, who having missed a caravan at Multan; found he would have to wait six months for the next. In another case, Bento de Ghes, a Portuguese missionary who travelled from Lahore to China via Kabul, was to encounter difficulties from thieves between Attock and Peshawar and then from marauders in the hilly passes, who used to roll stones down on caravans, and wounded many of his fellow travellers, even though his convoy had obtained a guard of 400 soldiers at Peshawar. After reaching Kabul they halted because some of the merchants would go no further, and others dared not, being so few. The carriers of the trade along such routes could not have afforded to be mere passive onlookers to the politics around.

V. TREADE THROUGH SEA ROUTES

It was an indication of the importance of the sea-routes to Central Asia and Persia that the Sind ports in Thatta and Lahari Bandar, yet again, became significant towards the sixteenth century. As Henry Pottinger, a member of the British mission to Sind in 1809, observed, "Thatta had been an important trade centre between the Indian Ocean and Central Asia before the Portuguese sack of the city in the sixteenth century. During the period of Portuguese control of its trade, Thatta continued to be an active commercial centre, boasting 40,000 weavers of calico and lowgoes .... and artisans of every other class and description to the number of 20,000 more, exclusive of banes, money changers, shopkeepers and sellers of grains, who were estimated at 60,000 more. Thatta also occupied a distinct place in India's trade with the Persian Gulf and Africa in the seventeenth century. The emergent European domination over the western Indian Ocean seems to have reduced Indian control over the seas. In Sind in the seventeenth century the Mughals made some efforts to regain ascendency, but the Indians could not re-establish themselves as the prime navigators there. Thatta, however, continued to be of some import, and India maintained its sea trade with Persia and its neighbours, in particular through the Armenians. The Armenians, as trading partners of the Europeans, had acquired a dominant position in the trading world of Persia and India in the seventeenth centuries. Among the various trade treaties the Armenians signed with the Europeans, their agreement with the English in 1688 was of special significance in this connection. Since 1605, when Abbas set up their colony at Julfa, in the suburbs of Isfahan, they were well established in Persia. Their strength and share in India's trade grew as they arrived at a trade agreement with the English both in Persia and India in the seventeenth century. The English utilized the Armenian familiarity with local language, customs and the political authorities to promote their interests, while the Armenians themselves used the European ships for their own goods and exploited the new connections, to emerge as the chief carriers of European goods from India to Persia(35). According to the agreement of 1688 they were to share in all the trading privileges enjoyed to the English in matters of employment to the Company's service. The Armenians, in return, pledged to give up exporting Indian goods by the land-route and promised to send these on Company ships. All this, however, also created a climate in which the rulers of both Kabul and Qandahar recognized the necessity of a policy of protection of the land route, not withholding their political rivalries. Thus, the land-route in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries not only competed successfully with the maritime route, but it also seems to have posed a kind of threat to it. The English had to persuade the Armenians to send their goods on ships. The caravan routes proved reasonably secure and also quick, to the extent that Jahangir, as we noticed earlier, could boast of getting even fresh fruits from Central Asia. Further, in Iran in the seventeenth century, "the Multanis", with support from the Safavid Shah, had also acquired a notable position in money transaction and trade. The stability of the route, in a measure, also encouraged an unprecedented movement during this period of Central-Asian scholars and poets, many of whom were also involved in trade. This was so in spite of the fact that the relations among the rulers along the routes were always volatile. Rivalry between the Mughals and the Safavids over Qandahar, and the outbreak of wars with the Uzbeks around Kabul, Balkh and Badakhshan in Shahjahan's time (1626-1656) did not affect the traffic. Relations between the Uzbeks and the Safavids were rarely cordial. But they regularly informed each other of the details of their caravans to ensure appropriate protection in each other's territory What is more interesting is that for this purpose the ruler of one territory often had direct contact with the provincial and local officials of the other, and only in case of their failure or violation of


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norms was the ruler approached. Protection of trade and traders was integral to ruler ship. This was the case even when the traders were just in transit, without concluding any formal transactions.

**VIIROLE OF KHATRIS**

The increase in strength of the Khatri in state service could also be seen in light of the fact that the fortunes of the merchants in Mughal India were tied to those of the ruling elites. Trade, according to one view, was subservient to the coercive state system, while the markets were generated through the unproductive lifestyle of the ruling class, which thrived, in turn, on an irrationally high claim over the social surplus. The financial difficulties of the nobles, it could well be argued, affected the prospects of trade as well. But this model helps us appreciate the situation within a limit only. Further, the trade in India in general was little affected because of the financial distress of the Mughal nobles in the eighteenth century. Much work is to be done before we can say anything in definitive terms about the nature and extent of the Khatri's share in political power. But it is interesting to note that the Khatri saw themselves as a people who combined tijarat or trade with amadr or dominion. Anand Ram Mukhls, a noted eighteenth century Khatri poet and author speaks boastfully of numerous Khatris who excelled in both. What is of greater interest to us is that if, on the one hand, the Khatri who were principally a business community had a share in administration and politics, some of the members of the Mughal ruling elites, on the other, also participated in trade. Shahjahan not only defended the Indian overseas merchants, especially the Muslim shippers, he also had his ships in Surat, karkhanas in Burhanpur, like his son, Prince' Ddra Shukoh, and daughter Princess Jahd Ara(68). Awarangzeb, as a prince, tried to build his own port in Sind, and his grandson, Prince CAzim Shukoh, as is well known, was accused of sad-z-khas, monopolithic control over business, in Chittagong and Dacca. Among the nobles, Shidyasta Khhn and quite a few others in Bengal, for instance have been noted in our sources as merchants or descending from a family of merchants (tijarat-plsha and tdjir-zdddeh Further, a number of the letters of Imam Quli Khan and Subhan Ql Khin record instructions to local officials to encourage the merchants from different parts of the neighbouring countries to come to and trade in the Uzbek lands. Trade and traders were seen as a source of bliss for society. These royal orders are invariably reinforced with such Quranic verses and traditions of the Prophet which highlight the importance of trade in Islam. By promoting trade and traders, they believed, they also served their religion. The rulers, then, would not merely encourage trade, but many of them would be keen to participate in it, albeit indirectly or symbolically. Symbolic is the case which Mutribi recorded at the court of Jahingir, when the Emperor sold some slaves to his courtiers, avowedly to earn a lawful livelihood (wajh-z-hald) according to the Quranic injunction. From Uzbek Central Asia our sources record at least two instances of the ruler's involvement in trade. Imam Quli Khan preferred to secure goods from Masqat and Subh.n Quli Khin from India, both for consumption in the royal establishment and for sale to the nobles and the members of the royal family, through their favourite slaves. And since the Hajj offered an ideal occasion for trade, they showed not merely special concern for the protection of the Uzbeks and traders, but also tried to promote good relations with the Sharif of Mecca. Indian merchants adjusted to different social and political situations to maintain their credit-worthy status and to protect and promote their trade. Their participation in administration and politics apart, the fact that they operated across frontiers imposed constraints on them. It had to appear that their movements ensured good for all. They were thus allies, at home, of the Mughals, earned favours from the Safavids and succeeded in maintaining their own autonomous organization in Central Asia. In Astrakhan, as Stephen Dale tells us, the Indian merchants lived in separate quarters and followed their own customs and rituals. But, being unaccompanied by women, they had mistresses and sometimes even married women from the local Turkic groups. In the Uzbek territory too, the Hindus had their own leader (dsaqadl, kaldntar) to take care of their needs and maintain community cohesion. The dsaqadl appointed by a royal order (manskur), enjoyed the ruler's support to deal autonomously with the affairs of his community spread over the towns of the Uzbek Khnate. Not much is known about their internal organization. We can only speculate that they were there with their own priests and had their own places of worship, like in Baku in Azerbaijan. We can also speculate that the Hindu Khatris, like the other trading communities in the region, settled their disputes, including commercial and succession issues, according to their own caste and family rules. The facilities for autonomous community organization, again, seem to be a seventeenth-century phenomenon, a follow up of the Indians' Increasing strength of number and of a newly developing general policy in the region of tolerance and coexistence. The earlier pattern seems to have been a bit different. While we notice Hindu quarters in fifteenth-century Bakhara and Samaqrand, we also see the Indian merchants and master craftsmen getting almost completely absorbed into local society. They lived in mixed mohallas, their houses and shops surrounded by those of the local Uzbeks or the Ta-jiks. Many abandoned their ancestral religion, took Muslim names, married Uzbek women and were identified with their in-laws. And in commercial and money matters they all had to approach the courts of the local qddis. That the trade in Central Asia had an important impact on the history of the region is stating the obvious. But the details of this impact are yet to be identified. A major impact of the trade was the emergence in the Punjab of an ideology which was expressed in a language borrowed from the world of trade. This new ideology, in a measure, represented the traders' worldview. I am referring here to the initial phases of Sikhism. In some passages of the Sikh scriptures of the Guru Granth Sahib, the value system appears to be strongly influenced by a consciousness intimately connected with trade and commerce. The visible growth by the sixteenth century of big and small towns in the Punjab, Multan and Sind and the areas north of Delhi was another significant feature of North-Indian history. All these towns were connected with each other through roads and river routes. The entire area then came to be linked, on the one hand, to India's eastern and western seashores, while opening up, on the other, to Central Asia and Persia through Kabul and Qandahar. The well-known road building activity of Shar Shah Stiri (1530- 1545) here is worth noting: "... and he [Sher Shih] built a road with resthouses which commenced from the fort that he had constructed in the Punjab and it ran up to the town of Sonargaon, which lay situated on the edge of the Bay of Bengal. He built another road that ran from the city of Agra to Burhanpur, on the borders of the Deccan.

The areas around the routes bustled with rich commercial and manufacturing centres, which in turn also encouraged growth in the neighbouring countryside. Urban centres in the Punjab and in its neighbourhood began to emerge and thrive in two lines running along the roads, Attock, Hasan Abdal, Jhelum, Gujrat, Wazirabad, Sialkot, Emanabad, Bajwara, Machiwarra,
under. Some Khatri families evidenced in line with this position. In series of Afghan raids, they also.

bcontinent were 83) involved in this trade and that the merchants from Central Asia, however, noteworthy that in Mughal times traders and the

It is difficult to ascertain the volume of the India trade caused by the factors beyond the pale of the Mughal

migrated to the east, some others moved down to the south of the country. Lahore served together with Agra as "the chief market for indigo...because it was more convenient for the merchants who travelled in caravans at fixed seasons by way of Kandahar and Isfahan to Aleppo; and this is why the indigo which reached Europe from Aleppo or the Levent was known as Lauri [or more properly Lahori]". Punjab also exported sugar and rice to Central Asia. While the Punjab registered unprecedented growth in the seventeenth century, its economy suffered serious setbacks by the turn of the century. The siltation of the Indus, first, affected its trade through the ports of Sind. But the great caravan trade more than made up for the losses accruing from the silt ing Indus. At any rate, trade through the Sind ports by the middle of the century was no longer of a very grand scale. The Punjab was still among the richest provinces of the Mughal Empire. Towards the mid-eighteenth century the economy of the Punjab and its neighbours plunged into a crisis, which can very largely be explained in terms of the decline of its trade with Central and West Asia. The Ghilzai's risings under Mir Wais in Qandahar in 1709 disturbed the route to Persia. The rapid decay of the Safavid Empire, leading to the capture of Isfahan by Mohammad Ghilzai in 1722, Nadir Afshar's loot and plunder of Delhi and the Punjab, all dislocated the existing pattern of trade. In all their actions, there is an anxiety to maintain and enhance their creditworthy status as merchants.

VILCONCLUSION

Finally the foregoing evidence also enables us to re-evaluate the thesis of the crisis of the Mughal empire. When the crisis thesis was initially formulated, two themes were analysed: the inner contradictions of the jagirdar system, and the oppressive fiscal structure of the Mughal state which disrupted the fabric of agrarian society and limited the possibilities of growth. In recent years historians began questioning these arguments, and an alternative picture has started to emerge. Instead of a generalized crisis, evidence of dynamism and growth was discovered in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is evidence of an agrarian crisis in regions like in Punjab. But the explanation for this should not be traced back only to the internal working of the Mughal system. To understand the crisis we also need to look at the fluctuations of trade caused by the factors beyond the pale of the Mughal jurisdiction as well as at the vicissitudes in the relationship of the Mughal state with the outside world.

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