

India and central Asia during seventeenth century: Revealing the relevance of overland routes

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Abstract

Historically, India has maintained long and strong connections with Central Asia, be it political, economic, social or cultural. The links to these connections were provided both by the land and maritime routes. During Medieval period connections emerged More Strong owing to the affinity in religio-cultural conditions of both these regions. When the Mughal Empire emerged on the political atmosphere of India, politically it became one of three great Muslim powers to reckon with and economically it surpassed its immediate neighbors, in terms of the overall size of its economy. In this connection, agricultural productivity increased and trade and industry flourished. The present study is to highlight the relevance of Overland routes linking India with Turan and Iran during seventeenth century. Against the earlier held impression that Uzbek Turan relapsed into economic crisis due to the standstill of overland trade resulting from the growth of maritime trade under European trading companies, this study argues that despite the expanded climate of maritime commerce, overland routes continued to maintain their economic vibrancy with full vigour.

Keywords: mughal India, Uzbek turan, safavid Iran, routes, economic isolation, silver currency, commodities

Introduction

There were long historical ties between India and Central Asia ^[1]. These relations continued through much of the historical period and comprised of political, economic and social relations. During early medieval period, in the trade relationship, Multan acted as a focal point where caravans from Khorasan and other regions used to come regularly. It is on the basis of its trade that Arab geographers described it a large and commercially thriving city. (Andre Wink, 1990, p 171, 186). Another important centre in this relationship was Kabul, where several commodities from India and China were available. During medieval period, the caravan trade continued to flourish ^[2]. This is substantiated by the observations of Minhaj us Siraj, who says that most of the inhabitants of Lahore were traders and they used to travel to Khurasan and Turkistan very frequently with the passes, guaranteeing safety and security, obtained from Mongols. (Minhaj us Siraj, 1970, p. 1133). Moreover, in fifteenth

century, Clavijo noted that Samarqand received commodities from a number of places including India ^[3]. With the advent of Mughals to the political scene of India, commercial relations deepened more and the two regions came closer in terms of both trade and culture. (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 202). It must be noted that, the Mughal occupation of India replaced the multi-state system of Delhi Sultans with a strong political organization controlled by a powerful monarch. Thus, during this period not only trade and industry flourished but fine arts like sculpture, music and painting also reached to great heights. (S.S. Kulshreshtha, 1964, p.1). The impetus given by Mughal rulers to Indian agriculture and manufacturing implied a rise in exports and as a result, caravan trade with several regions increased where Central Asia is no exception. In the present study, attention has been paid to one of the minutest aspects of economic relationship, i.e., finding the relevance of overland routes.

Brief Description of Routes

For maintaining the commercial and cultural relations, certain links or channels are important, without which it is much impossible to make and sustain the relations. Similarly, India and Central Asia were linked with each other by both land and maritime routes ^[4]. In the present

¹ As per the UNESCO definition of 1967, Central Asia included the areas lying within the borders of Afghanistan, western part of China, northern India, north-eastern Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan and the five Central Asian Republics. However, for the purpose of present study Turan will be used for Central Asia as Mughal sources refer to all western Turkistan or central Asia as Turan. Moreover, Iran in the present study signified the lands under the control of Safavid rulers and India will signify the territory controlled by Mughals including Kabul and Kandahar excluding Deccan and South Indian States. (Miroshnikov, L.I., 1992 pp. 479-480).

² The Sultans of Delhi took different steps to ensure that trade remained unhindered. For the purpose of security on routes Iltutmish and Balban suppressed the refractory groups who were engaged in robbery on the routes. During the reign of Ghiyas ud-din Tughlaq, caravans travelling to Iran and Central Asia were provided protection. (Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, 1983, p. 296).

³ He noted that spices like cloves, nutmeg, mace, cinnamon were imported from India. Satish Chandra holds that Timur's conquests were aimed at securing control of the main Asian trade routes, both overland and overseas. (Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, 1859, p 278, 289; Salish Chandra, 2003, p. 154).

⁴ Going from India, by maritime routes, traders first reached the Persian ports of Hormuz and Bandar Abass and then took the land routes through Iran reaching to Turan. Compared to overland routes, maritime routes were more indirect and longer and the two regions

study, the focus has been paid on overland routes and the primary routes, connecting India with Turan and Iran, passed through Khyber and Bolan passes, and on these routes, Lahore, Multan, Kabul, and Kandahar acted as the major entrepôts. In addition to the above-mentioned routes, there were other routes that passed through Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, and Muzaffarabad reaching up to Yarkand and Kashgar. From Kashgar, onwards the routes advanced towards Samarqand and Bukhara and onwards to other important cities of Central Asia and further to Russia. (Mohan Lal, 1846, pp. 373-462; Irfan Habib, 1982, pp. 11-12, 15-16; Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 203). It must be noted that, there were two groups of routes going to Central Asia. Leading from India one set of routes went to Bukhara and Samarqand and the other from India to Persia through Meshed and other important cities of Iran.

The Routes to Turan

Although our sources mention several routes going from India to Turan,^[5] however, the principal route connecting India with Turan^[6] went through Khyber Pass, it was the most preferred one because, during the reign of Mughal emperor Akbar, it was levelled and made suitable for wheeled transport^[7]. Starting from Agra,^[8] the route went to Kabul and from there it went to Balkh and onwards to Bukhara and Samarqand. Moving from Agra to Delhi, the road passed through Fatehpur Sikri, Hodal, Palwal, and Faridabad. Between Delhi and Lahore, the chief halts were Gannaur, Panipat, Karnal, Ambala, Sirhind, and Phillaur^[9] The Sutlej and the Beas were the two main rivers

were more directly accessed by land connectivity, where several routes functioned as channels of communication.

⁵ Mughal sources refer to all western Central Asia as Turan. In this study Uzbek Turan has been used for the Mongol appanages of Balkh, Bukhara, Samarqand, Tashkent and Khiva. Turan has been used, in addition to this areas, to signify Yarkand and Kashgar.

⁶ Babur took account of four routes in his autobiography from Hindustan to Kabul through Khaibar, Bangash, Naghar and Farmul passes. Abul Fazl takes note of seven roads for going to Kabul from Hindustan. According to Burnes, there were five routes between Peshawar and Kabul. Masson writes "from Peshawar to the valley of Jalalabad there are three distinct Kafila routes, all of them leading through the great hill ranges separating the two countries, viz those of Khaibar, Abkhana and Karapa. The former is decidedly the preferable, from its level, character and directness but the most dangerous owing to the lawless character of the predatory tribes inhabiting it. It is therefore seldom frequented and only by faquirs or large bodies of troops; Kafilas of traders and others, passing by the more difficult and tedious, but at the same time the more secure routes of Abkhana and Karapa". (Zahir ud din Muhammad Babar, Vol. I, 1922, p. 206; Abul Fazl Allami, Vol. II. 1892, p. 405. Alexander Burnes, Vol. I, 1834. p 113; Charles Masson, Vol. I, 1844, p. 147).

⁷ Mughals being conscious of its commercial importance, took several steps to ensure that travel on this route was safe and secure. Abul Fazl Says, "Khaibar was formerly somewhat difficult, but by the command of His Majesty it has been made easily practicable for wheeled conveyance, and at present time travellers from Turan and India take this route". (Abul Fazl Allami, Vol. II, 1892, p. 406).

⁸ Agra was the capital of Mughal Empire for the most part of 16th and 17th century. Although Shahjahan shifted the capital from Agra to Delhi (Shahjahanabad), However, Agra continued to maintain its status as the commercial capital of Mughal Empire.

⁹ Different stages on this stretch have been mentioned by William Finch. (William Foster, 1921, pp. 167-170; Jean Baptist Tavernier, Vol. I, 1925, 76-77).

encountered on this stretch. Bernier found some sarais and the line of trees planted along the road and was impressed to see wells for the requirements of the traveler. (Francois Bernier, 1891, p. 284). On the stretch from Delhi to Lahore, The Portuguese traveler Fray Sebastian Manrique noted that several villages and cities lay on the road and all of them had sufficient supplies of food. (Fray Sebastian Manrique, Vol. 2, 1947, p. 190).

From Lahore onwards, the road, which had been easy so far, became difficult and several rivers and streams had to be crossed to reach the plain of Chach. Thus, river Ravi was crossed near Shahdara and then the towns of Aminabad and Chima Gakhar were reached. Another river Chenab was crossed near the town of Gujarat^[10] The crossing of the Indus River was sometimes dangerous when the flow of water was strong. After crossing the Indus River, the next important station reached was the town of Peshawar and after moving 10 miles westwards of Peshawar, the route entered into the famous Khyber Pass extending in North West direction for about fifty miles. The route was seasonal and in the winters, due to snowfall, traveling through the pass was extremely difficult. (Edward Thornton, Vol. I, 1844, p. 387-387).

It is important to mention that the routes from Kabul to Turan had to pass through the tough and terrible Hindukush Mountains. Although difficult, the Hindukush mountains were provided with many passes through which the traders and travelers crossed it^[11] However, it was crossed mostly through the Khawak Pass which seems to have been the most preferred one. The next stage was Parwan, located on the banks of the Panjhir River. Continuing from Parwan, the next stages on this stretch were Andarab, Baghlan, Saminjan or Haybak, and Tashkurghan or Khulum. From Khulum onwards to Balkh, the route was tough and the land was barren to the extent that even military movement was very difficult^[12]. On the stretch from Balkh to Bokhara, Amu Darya was the largest river which was crossed either at Termez or Kelif^[13].

¹⁰ The town was named so after the Gujjars who had been settled there by Emperor Akbar in order to make them give up the practice of robbery and to make the passage of men and merchandise safe. (Nur ud din Muhammad Jahangir, 1909, p. 91).

¹¹ Babar in his Tuzuk has taken note of seven different passes that were used for this purpose like Khawak, Tul, Bazarak, Yangi Yul, Shibr Tul, and Qipchak. Three passes Khawak, Tul, and Bazarak were located in the Panjshir region. Of these Tul was the longest while Bazarak was the most direct. The road through Parwan had seven minor passes between Parwan and the main pass. The Yangi Yul, Shibr Tul and Qipchak passes were part of the Ghorband system. (Zahir ud din Muhammad Babar, Vol. I, 1922, p. 204 – 205).

¹² On this route as Mughal army on its way back from Balkh in 1647 had to face several difficulties. For example, between Shahburghhan and Char Chashma several animals went off the path and tumbled down the slope causing injury to many men. Many men and animals died due to heavy snowfall while crossing the Hindu Kush Mountains. (Inayat Khan, 1990, pp. 400-402).

¹³ Alexander Burnes and William Moorcroft noted a unique method followed for crossing the river. They mention that a boat was attached employing a rope to a couple of horses, who then swam across the river to the other side. It is important to note that the practice does not seem to be usual, and only when the wind was too strong to allow boats to cross in the normal manner, this practice was followed. (Alexander Burnes, Vol. I, 1834, pp. 249-250; William Moorcroft, Vol. II, 1841, pp. 499-500).

Apart from the above-mentioned route, there was yet another route to Bokhara from India via Kandahar, Herat, and Mashhad. Between Kandahar and Ghurmow, the Persian fort town of Girish was located, where provisions could be bought. The presence of a few streams that could be difficult to cross in spring was the main impediment on this route. (Edward Thornton, Vol. I, H. 1844, pp. 293-304). George Forster, who travelled on this route, while describing the landscape of the region lying between Kandahar and Herat noted that the area is generally open, and intermixed with barren rocky hills of moderate height, where the soil is light and sandy, producing nothing other than the aromatic weeds. Moreover, he was glad to see several springs of running water on reaching Herat^[14] It is very important to mention that unlike the routes passing through Hindukush, this route had the advantage of being open throughout the year. Although, there was a route between Kabul and Herat passing through the territory of the Hazaras which required only around Eight to Ten days of travel, however, it was very difficult. Thus, mostly the traders traversing between Herat and Kabul went via Kandahar even though this took them more time. (George W. Forrest, 1906, p. 9-10).

The Road to Iran

Although most of Mughal India's trade with Iran was conducted by sea, however, from the accounts of contemporary travelers, it is clear that a significant part of it was channelled through the overland routes as well^[15] Thus, the principal overland route to Iran went via the town of Kandahar. The Portuguese priest Fray Sebastain Manrique who travelled by this route in 1641 has left with us a detailed report of his journey. (Fray Sebastien Manrique, Vol. 2, 1947, p. 191-355; Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p. 266-280). He noted that the journey between Lahore and Multan was easy, as food and other necessities were easily available on the way and from there the route went westward through a well-cultivated region reaching up to the foothills of the Sulaiman ranges. (Fray Sebastien Manrique, Vol. 2, 1947, p. 258; Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p. 266-280). The fort of Chatza was reached after crossing the river Indus. Steel and Crowther, two Englishmen who travelled on this route around 1615 mention that it was difficult to find food and fodder on the stretch between Lacca and Chatza^[16]. The next important halting point was at the village of Duki^[17]. The next

important point on this route was the crossing of the Arghandab River, and subsequently, the Persian fort of Girishk was reached. From here the caravan travelled to the town of Farah, and subsequently to Isfahan, the Safavid capital. (Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p. 266-280).

From Joseph Salbancke's account, it appears Lahore Kandahar route through Sanghar pass was longer than the one through Bolan pass, however, because of the smoothness of the Sanghar pass, it was preferred by traders and travelers^[18] Although Masson praises the level character and easiness of Bolan Pass, however, due to severe cold at Bolan Pass during winters it remained blocked. (Charles Masson, Vol. I, 1844, p. 338; Henry Pottinger, 1816, pp. 41-42). It is important to note that, writing in the 1650s, Tavernier believes that due to the scarcity of water on the Multan route merchants preferred to go to Kandahar via Kabul even though it was longer and took ten more days. (Jean Baptist Tavernier, Vol. 1, 1925, p. 73). However, it is not possible to fully agree with Tavernier, because we get an impression from our sources that the Multan route had been in regular use, thus there must have been some other reason for the shift. Possibly, the conflict between Mughals and Safavids over Kandahar and the annexation of Kandahar by the Safavids and subsequent ban by the Mughal ruler, Shah Jahan on exports to Iran would have the possible reason^[19].

Bypassing Punjab, there was another route from Agra to Iran which passed through the Thar Desert to reach Sind.^[20] From the Sind town of Sukkur, the route went in a north-west direction crossing a desert known by the name of Dasht Bedari and Dasht Bedowlat reaching the village of Dadar. From here onwards, the route entered into the famous Bolan Pass, stretching for a distance of about 55 miles. Charles Masson, while journeying through it, has praised the easiness of the pass as "perfectly level"^[21]. After passing through the town of Quetta, the route joined the Multan-Kandahar route near Pishin. (Jean Deloche, Vol. 1, 1993, p. 26). It must be noted that this route was used by those caravans going from lower Sind to Iran but it was blocked in winter due to severe cold in the Bolan Pass and as mentioned earlier the route going through Sanghar pass was mostly used. (Henry Pottinger, 1816, pp. 41-42).

Apart from the routes linking India with Iran and Turan, there were several other routes going through Kashmir, which connected India with Kabul, Kashgar, and Khokand.

¹⁴ Forster's view regarding the productive capacity of the region was not correct since Mohan Lal mentions corn production in some places on the route. (George Forster, Vol. 2, 1808, p. 116-130; Mohan Lal, 1846, pp. 208-210).

¹⁵ In 1611, William Finch reported the arrival of two large caravans from Persia to the city of Lahore. Roberte Coverte mentioned that, "there is a great and continued traffique by land, from Persia, India and, Mesopotamia, and from all partes between that and China, with all sorts of merchandise and commodities which those Countries yeelde; For there are continually 7 or 8 thousand camels about the Citie which trade to and fro with merchandise". (William Foster, 1921, pp. 160-161, 167; Roberte Coverte, 2000, p. 202).

¹⁶ As a precaution their caravan had hired oxen at Lacca to carry barley for the horses. (J. Talboys Wheeler, 1864, p. 64. Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p. 270).

¹⁷ The journey of Steel and Crowther, from Multan to Kandahar, took one and a half month while Manrique took only eighteen days.

(Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p 266-80; Fray Sebastian Manrique, Vol. 2, 1947, p. 258).

¹⁸ Judging from the dates given by Joseph Salbancke it appears that this route was longer than the Multan-Kandahar route. (Samuel Purchas, Vol. 3, 1905, p. 82-89).

¹⁹ The wars between Mughals and Safavids over Kandahar and Shahjahan's Seizure of Kandahar in 1638 brought about a stoppage of overland trade. With the Persian attempt to retake Kandahar in 1648-49 overland trade was again obstructed. (William Foster, 1912, p. 125-126, 202, 242; William Foster, 1914, p. 261, 310. William Foster, 1915, p. 64).

²⁰ Joseph Salbancke noted that this route passed through Bayana an important indigo producing town. (Samuel Purchas, Vol. 3, 1905, pp. 83-86).

²¹ Masson writes that, "The magnificent pass of the Bolan may be said to be, throughout its extent, perfectly level, the gradual ascent of the upper portion of it, and the slight kotal, or pass, if deserving the name, by which the Dasht Bedowlat is gained, scarcely forming exceptions". (Charles Masson, Vol. I, 1844, p. 338).

These routes passed through Ladakh, Gilgit, and Muzaffarabad leading to Kashgar, Balkh, Badakhshan, and Kabul respectively, and onwards to Samarqand and Bukhara. (K. Warikoo, 1996, p. 114). During the Mughal period, Kashmir bound routes acted as regional routes where the commerce of the Kashmir region was conducted and they contributed less in terms of national trade. The volume of Indian trade with Central Asia through Kashmir routes was considerably lesser in value than through Punjab – Afghanistan – Turan routes, (K. Warikoo, 1996, p. 114), and during the second half of the 19th century that with the growing Anglo-Russian rivalry and apprehension of enemy entrance perceived by the British, the Kashmir – Kashgar route was further demoted to a less important position ^[22].

Overland Routes: Debating Relevance

Deliberating upon the relevance of overland routes, there is varied kind of opinions on the trade along land routes connecting India with Central Asia during the seventeenth century. Pioneering the debate, W.H. Moorland, believed that with the growing maritime trade of India under the domination of European trading companies, the overland routes became redundant and trade along these routes came to a standstill, which Moorland considered very futile to discuss in detail. He thought that “so far as can be judged from the contemporary accounts, the merchandise passing through the land frontiers was of small importance in this period”, (W.H. Moorland, 1920, p. 218), and estimated the normal traffic from India to Persia in the seventeenth century at hardly 3,000 camels a year or 500 tons of merchandise and found it possible that part of this was diverted by Dutch and English Navigations. (W.H. Moorland, 1923, p. 58). Moreover, Bertold Spuler argues that, from the early sixteenth century, “in spite of all their political power in the tenth/sixteenth century, Shaybanids, were unable to make any incursion into the core of the Islamic heartlands, and therefore led an existence on the margin of world history. From the threshold of modern times, Central Asian history becomes provincial history.” Spuler concludes that “the discovery of the sea-route to East Asia rendered the Silk Road increasingly superfluous so that the volume of trade was not significantly greater than in the Middle Ages and in any case did not share in the universal upswing of this period.” (Bertold Spuler 1970, pp. 470, 483). Similarly, Samuel Adshad divided the history of Central Asia into two phases, i.e., active and passive, and argues that, in the mid-seventeenth century, Central Asian civilization began a transition from an “active phase” into a “passive phase”, which was characterized by declines of military power and political stability, resulting in deurbanization, decreases in population and cultivated acreage. Again, Adshad attributes this to a shift in importance from continental trade routes to European-controlled maritime routes. He believed that Central Asia was pushed to the periphery of the world economy during this period and the impact of the world market on Central Asia was “indirect and oblique” mediated by its neighbors. (S. A. M. Adshad, 1993, pp. 177, 194).

However, some scholars in more recent times changed the narrative from decline to progress. For Example, Muzaffar

Alam believes that “during the seventeenth century the overland routes not only competed successfully with the maritime routes but they also posed a kind of threat to them” and justifies the view by saying that “English had to persuade the Armenians to send their goods in ships”. (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 214). Subsequently, Stephen Dale, while studying the role of Indian merchants in Central Asia and Russia during the 17th and early 18th centuries, has driven us to the point that India had good trade relations not only with Central Asia but also with Russia. He pointed out that, “the sales of Indian cotton textiles, indigo, and sugar in Uzbek Turan were sufficient to pay for thousands of Turkic horses that merchants purchased every year for the Indian market,” and that there is little evidence to show that “Mughul currency or bullion was used to purchase these animals”. (Stephen Dale, 1994, p. 26). Moreover, in discussing the Indian merchant communities in Turan Scott Levi gives certain glimpses of the trade between India and Turan during the said period. He said that, “while there is convincing evidence suggesting economic hardship, political decentralization, and de-urbanization in specific regions of early modern Turan, other evidence suggests that early modern Turan was responding to changing global economic trends and was undergoing a process of economic re-alignment and even growth in some transregional trade relations. One result of this re-alignment was the removal of some previously central regions to the periphery and the intensification of economic activity in other, previously peripheral, regions”. (Scott Levi, 2002, p. 23).

These new entrants into the debate believe that although there was an expansion of Indian maritime commerce during the seventeenth century which, however, does not explain any sort of stagnancy of the overland trading network. They believe that along with the increasing movements at sea, overland routes not only continued to flourish but trade along those routes increased tremendously. After studying all the above-mentioned narratives, it becomes clear that there are two extremes found in W.H. Moorland and Muzaffar Alam. The former highlighting the decline and the later overemphasizing the progress of routes. In the light of these narratives, it must be noted that overland routes were something more than what W.H. Moorland has believed but something less than what Muzaffar Alam has tried to make us believe, which means that there is no doubt that overland routes continued to flourish but they did not pose any sort of threat to maritime routes.

How Relevant the Overland Routes Were

For explaining the flourishing overland trade during the seventeenth century, three important aspects of the presence of good trade relations have been discussed. First, references from political chronicles and travelogues have been identified. Secondly, the social organization of Indian merchants in Central Asia and thirdly, the silver currency output from India’s North-western mints have been taken into cognizance. Coming to the relevance of overland routes, there are only few references in political chronicles mentioning that caravan bringing 1000 camel loads of goods from Kabul in 1586 ^[23] Although such statements on the

²² British Indian government thought that these thinly served roads could support some small attacks from the Russian controlled Khokand. (George Janzen, 2014, p. 23).

²³ Nizamudin Ahmad mentions that “accidentally a fire broke out at Peshawar and a thousand camel loads of merchandise belonging to merchants was burnt”. (Nizamudin Ahmed, Vol. II, 1936, p. 602).

volume of the Indo-Turanian trade are very meagre however, the accounts of European travellers clearly show that the overland commerce was vigorous. For example, in 1615 Richard Steel and John Crowther, two Englishmen who travelled from Lahore to Isfahan observed the normal annual traffic on the Kandahar route at 3000 to 4000 camels and noted a trade diversion resulting out of naval war fought between Iranians and Portuguese over the possession of Hormuz, thus benefiting overland route through Kandahar as nearly 12000 to 14000 camels plied through it every year, making it bigger due to the increased amount of trade. It has been further noted that Kandahar was the meeting point of merchants from India, Persia, and Turkey ^[24]. In 1630s, Henry Bonford, an employee of the English East Company observed that Lahore was “the prime city of traffick in India”, where the commodities produced in the neighboring areas were collected. He also observed the coming of Uzbek, Armenian and Persian merchants in large numbers to Lahore. (William Foster, 1912, p. 135; William Foster, 1921, p. 292). Thevenot writes that the province of Kabul was very rich due to its “great trade” with Central Asia and Persia. He writes, “that province lies so conveniently for Traffic, that what is wanting in it, is bought from all parts; and things are very cheap there”. (Jean De Thevenot, 1949, p. 80). Moreover, Tavernier describes Kabul as “a large town” and “a great meeting place for Tartary, India, and Persia”. (Jean Baptist Tavernier, Vol. I, 1925, p. 75). From Manrique’s account of 1641, it is clear that trade on the Kandahar route was regular, as he describes Kandahar as a busy commercial town ^[25]. Bernier noted that rich Uzbek merchants used to visit Delhi regularly and stayed there in caravansarais. (Francois Bernier, 1891, p. 281). Moreover, the Italian traveller Manucci, noted the Attock fort as a halting-place for caravans arriving from various places of Central Asia and believed that as many as 150,000 horses and several camels used to come to India every year carrying various types of goods and fruits ^[26].

It must be noted that our sources are full of information regarding the presence of Indian merchants in Iran, Turan, and Russia with their business activities. For example, in 1558 Anthony Jenkinson met in Bukhara several merchants from India as far as Bengal. (Anthony Jenkinson, Vol. I, 1886, pp. 87-88). This information is corroborated by other sources as well. For instance, Hafiz Tanish Bukhari mentions the business activities of the Indian merchants in the Uzbek territory. (Hafiz Tanish bin Mir Muhammad Bukhari, ff. 451). The fabulous wealth and unmatched trading skill of the Indian merchants have been elaborated in our sources. Our sources further attest that Indian merchants

in Turan possessed enormous amount of wealth which sometimes excited jealousy among the local people. For example, in Bukhara it was generally believed that a successful way that a lover could meet the exorbitant demands of his beloved was to locate and plunder the fabulous wealth of a rich Hindu merchant ^[27].

It must be noted that, our sources also help us in getting some idea of how Indian merchants adjusted to different social and political situations to maintain their business and to protect and promote their trade. Stephen Dale tells us that Indian merchants living in Astrakhan followed their own customs and rituals. (Stephen F Dale, 1990, pp. 147-148). It is further believed that in the Uzbek territory, Indians had their leader (*aqsaqal, kalantar*), who enjoyed the ruler’s support to deal autonomously with the affairs of his community who were spread over the towns of the Uzbek Khanate ^[28]. Although the information about the internal organization of Indians is scanty, however, it is believed that the Hindu Khatri settled their disputes, of both commercial and succession, according to their caste and family rules. (Edmund Herzig, 1992). It should be noted that, the facilities to deal autonomously in the interests of community organizations, developed during the seventeenth-century as a consequence of increased number of Indian merchants and a policy of tolerance and co-existence. Before the seventeenth century, Indian merchants were completely absorbed into local society, where, taking Muslim names, marrying Uzbek women, abandoning ancestral religion by Indian merchants have been noticed. Moreover, for problems in commercial and credit transactions, they were required to appear before courts of the local Qazis ^[29]. The situation of autonomy, the increased number of Indians in Central Asia, and the policy of tolerance are unmistakable clues signifying the flourishing trade between India and Central Asia. Both Scott Levi and Stephen Dale highlighted the significance and role of Indian trading communities in Iran, Turan, and Russia as an indicator of the flourishing overland routes. However, it is also possible that Indian business communities conducting business in the above regions must have come through maritime roots as well. So it becomes imperative to see other aspects as well. Thus the silver currency output from North-Western mints of the Mughal Empire has been analysed. It must be noted that during the 16th and 17th centuries in European economic history, an important development took place, i.e., the great influx of silver into Europe from America. The consequences of this phenomenon were not restricted to Europe alone, but India also bore its impact, (Aziza Hasan, 1969, p. 85), thus resulting in large silver imports both through maritime and overland routes. Since India did not produce practically any amount of silver herself during this

²⁴ In the same year, Thomas Coryat came from Iran to India in a caravan consisting of 2000 camels, 1500 horses, 1000 mules, and 800 asses. Subsequently, in 1621 the Dutchman Von Poser travelled from Kandahar to Agra in a caravan of 2000 camels. (J. Talboys Wheeler, 1864, p. 63. Samuel Purchas, Vol 4, 1905, p. 269; William Foster, 1921, p. 260; Neel Steensgaard, 1999, p. 60).

²⁵ He also notes that a yearly caravan to Persia started from Bakhar in Sind. When he arrived in Kandahar, he found that a caravan to Persia had just left. Fortunately for him it was followed by another one coming from Multan. (Fray Sebastian Manrique, Vol. 2, 1947, pp. 232, 261).

²⁶ It must be noted that Manucci calls Lahore the “key to the kingdoms of Kabul, Balkh, Tartary, Kashmir, Persia, Baloches, Multan, Bhakkar and Tattah”. (Niccolao Manucci, Vol. I, 1907, p. 322-323; Vol. II, p. 186).

²⁷ Mohammad Yousf Munshi gives us a story of a teacher cum lover who needed to buy a gift for his beloved which led him to do a robbery from an Indian merchant. (Mohammad Yousf Munshi, ff. 33a-35a).

²⁸ Aqsqaqs among Indians were appointed by a royal order (*manshur*) to look after their community needs and uphold solidity among Indians. (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 219).

²⁹ Before seventeenth century, Indian merchants in Turan lived in mixed mohallas, their houses, and shops surrounded by those of the local Uzbeks and Tajiks. Although a Hindu quarter in fifteenth-century Bukhara and Samarqand was noticed, however, it was an exception, not the rule. (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 219).

period, ^[30] thus, the entire stock of silver in India was accumulated through imports. Moreover, the Mughal Empire had an open system of coinage, (Irfan Habib, 1961, p. 13; Irfan Habib, 1982; M.P. Singh, 1985, pp. 171-172). Which implied that imported bullion must be brought to mints to get coined ^[31] Therefore, variations in the silver currency output provide an idea of the fluctuations in imports of silver. (Shireen Moosvi, 1987, pp. 48-49). To find more precisely the amount of silver minted from mints of India following table will be helpful.

Table 1: Silver Coinage Output (Annual Average in metric Tons)

Decades	North West	Gujarat	Total
1606-15	39.08	25.59	145.22
1616-25	49.76	10.40	121.46
1626-35	62.14	33.32	213.12
1636-45	56.08	29.52	140.30
1646-55	24.32	35.71	111.90
1656-65	27.69	29.10	102.62
1666-75	9.00	39.18	71.98
1676-85	9.98	43.02	82.80
1686-95	8.86	29.38	127.36

Note: North West Mints include the mints of Lahore, Multan, Thatta, Kabul, and Kandahar. In this table Gujarat mints have been included for better comparison.

Source: Shireen Moosvi, "The Silver Influx, Money Supply, Prices and Revenue-Extraction in Mughal India", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 30(1), 1987, p. 58.

It is clear from the above table that trade was flourishing and the significant output of minted silver coins from North-Western mints, which received bullion through the overland routes, is an unmistakable clue indicating the positive trade developments shared with Iran and Turan. While examining the table minutely, a fluctuating trend is depicted. For example, the increase in the mint output in the decade 1616-1625, resulted from the naval war between Portuguese and Safavids over the possession of Hormuz, which reduced the flow through ports and increase through Kandahar, which is also testified by the observations of Richard Steel and John Crowther. (J. Talboys Wheeler, 1864, p. 63. Samuel Purchas, Vol. 4, 1905, p. 269). Subsequently the war between Mughals and Safavids and the capture of Kandahar by Shahjahan in 1638 also affected the overland trade. The Persian attempt to retake Kandahar in 1648-49, was followed by the repeated wars between Mughals and Safavids from 1648 to 1653, and Shah Jahan laid restrictions laid on all Indian exports to Iran even by the sea which again obstructed the overland trade, and even some decline was noticeable in the sea trade as well. (William Foster, 1912, pp. 125-26, 202, 242; William Foster, 1914, pp. 261, 310; William Foster, 1915, p. 64). The decrease in the silver output from north-western mints from 1666 onwards was partially due to the Afghan revolts, who were constantly in revolts from 1667 till 1675, (John F. Richards, 1999, pp. 170-171, 246; R.C. Verma, 1952, pp. 32-33), which reduced the trade of the Mughal empire through the

overland routes, and partially due to the contraction of silver imports to India ^[32]. Thus, it can be inferred from the above table that overland routes successfully competed with the maritime routes, however, it is not possible to say that they posed threat to them. (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 214). It must be noted that from a Dutch report of 1634, it appears that 35.52% of Indian cotton textiles were sent through overland to Iran while as 64.48% was carried through maritime routes ^[33]. It is true that the English had to persuade the Armenians to send their goods in ships, (Muzaffar Alam, 1994, p. 214). Which doesn't mean that there was any sort of threat to maritime routes. There context seems to be different away from the overland routes of India. For analysing this fact one has to see all the history of English, Armenians and Portuguese in Iran up to late 1630's. It must be noted that, from 1617 to 1637 English in Iran had to fight on two fronts, one that it faced a stiff competition from Armenians and Portuguese and the competition increased with the arrival of Dutch in 1623, and secondly the shortage of ready money which was needed to purchase Iranian silk having much demand in Turkey. The shortage of money is evidenced from the letters of the servants of company. In one it has been said "Wee are destitute of Money, Commodities and Creditt, and not only soe, but left a thowsand five hundred Pounds, sterling indebted" ^[34]. On the other hand, by the end of the reign of Shah Abbas, the Armenians had monopolized most of the Iranian overseas trade. After the death of Shah Abass and the accession of Shah Safi in 1629, the royal monopoly of the silk trade was gradually taken away, which emerged beneficial for Armenians who now emerged independent instead of dependent on the Shah. Moreover, the Armenians, who are said to be as "the principal carriers of money in and out of Iran," possessed not only supplies of ready money but also had a well-organized system of credit facilities. (R. W. Ferrier, 1973, p. 41, 55). It was in this context that English tried to persuade Armenians not the overland Indian context. Thus, during seventeenth century, along with the increased commerce of European trading companies, caravan trade continued to flourish and competed well with it.

The Case of Population Decrease and Urban Decline

As mentioned earlier that Samuel Adshead believed that there was urban decline, and population decrease in seventeenth century Turan, (S. A. M. Adshead, 1993, pp. 177, 194), and Scott Levi, although skeptical to this still believed that old urban centres declined while as new centres emerged. (Scott Levi, 2002, p. 23). So the questions like, was there really urban decline or did new urban centres

³⁰ The once famous silver mines of Panjshir in Afghanistan were no longer worked by the mid-16th century and when Ibn Battuta visited the place, he found not the silver mines but the disused tunnels of former workings. (G. Lee Strange, 1905, p. 350).

³¹ Impoters of bullion were required to carry it from custom house directly to the mint to be coined. (Jean Baptist Tavernier, Vol. 1, 1925, p. 7; William Foster, 1913, p. 17; M.P. Singh, 1985, p. 169).

³² K.N. Chaudhury says that Spanish records have revealed that there was indeed a drop in the American silver arriving in Spain in the 1670s. (K.N. Chaudhuri, 1986, pp. 70-71).

³³ According to this survey, 211,000 pieces of Indian cotton textiles were sent overland to Iran while 383,000 pieces were sent by the sea route. (Neel Steensgaard, "1999, p. 69).

³⁴ The situation of English company was same in India as well where its factors often mention the need of ready money. In a letter sent by an English factor Richard Wickham to Richard Cocks, dated July 14, 1616, it is mentioned, "Called long and double fottos, being about 105 pieces, with 30 pieces of allijas and 7 pieces of serasas, amounting to 14 tayas, to be paid the next of this month, besides some other odd pieces which I have not yet ready money for. As for the quicksilver, the time is so dead that no man will bid any money for it", R. W. Ferrier, 1973, pp. 40-41; William Foster, 1900, p. 137).

emerged on the debris of old ones? moreover, did population of Turan really declined or was there really any decrease in population at some places and increase at other places? need to be answered. It should be noted that although there are few references in 15th century which offer us few population estimates, however, we don't have references to offer a seventeenth century decline ^[35]. Thus, it is important to mention that, Scott Levi has taken a very long period of his research and has relied on 19th century sources and subsequently, generalising it on the whole period he took for his research. But, by minutely analysing the 19th century sources, it is very hard to find the urban decline and population decrease in 17th century. It must be noted that the travel accounts which offer that the population of the regions of Central Asia was much reduced, seems to have been based on flimsy evidence. For example, Alexander Burnes, in 1831, estimated the population of Balkh as low as 2,000 and for Samarqand from 8,000 to 10,000 inhabitants. (Alexander Burnes, Vol. I, 1992, p. 238, 317). Thirty years later when Arminius Vambrey visited the place he put its population at 15,000 to 20,000. (Arminius Vambrey, 1864, p. 213). However, this cannot be said as true for 17th century. Further, for analysing the 19th century population decline, mention must be made of the Russian census of 1897, which put the population of Turkestan at 5,280,983 inhabitants ^[36] with the largest concentrations found in the Ferghana and Syr Darya provinces, each of which held about 1.5 million people at that time. However, this census did not include the autonomous Khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. The population of Bukhara and Khiva was estimated at 2,500,000 and 600,000 respectively. (Lawrence Krader, 1963, pp. 171-72, 198). Thus it can be said that the population of Turkistan including Bukhara and Khiva stood at 8,380,983 inhabitants. By comparing this figure with the estimates of Alexander Burnes and Arminius Vambrey, it seems very hard to accept that the population would have increased too much in just 30 years. Moreover, for clear understanding, the question of Russian migration seems to be important. Following table shows the percentage of Russians in Central Asia as per the 1897 census.

Table 2: Population in Turkistan in 1897

Oblast	Total Population	Russians	%age of Russians
Ferghana	15,72,000	10,000	0.63
Samarqand	8,60,000	14,000	1.62
Semirechye	9,88,000	95,000	9.61
Syr-Darya	14,78,000	45,000	3.04
Transcaspia	3,82,000	33,000	8.63
Bukhara	2,500,000	-----	-----
Khiva	600,000	-----	-----
Total	8,380,000	1,97,000	-----

Source: Lawrence Krader, Peoples of Central Asia, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963, pp. 198-199.

³⁵ For example, Gonzalez D Clavijo, who visited Samarqand in the beginning of 15th century mentions that the city had great number of people brought from many parts of the world and the population is so large that the city is not able to hold them. He further says that the people brought to the city amounted to 150,000 persons. (Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo, 1859, p. 171).

³⁶ This includes only Turkestan Kray and excluding Steppe Kray. The population of Russian Turkestan, including Turkestan Kray and Steppe Kray stood at 7,746,818, inhabitants. (Lawrence Krader, 1963, pp. 171-72, 198).

From the above table, it becomes clear that the Russians comprised of only 3.74 percent of the total population of Turkestan, excluding Bukhara and Khiva for which there are no population figures of Russian migrants. Thus, it can be said that, Russian migration to Central Asia during 19th century was very small and hardly amounts to any large scale increase and thus, it is unreasonable to think of any population decline in Turkestan even in the 19th century. Any urban decline in 17th century is again a hypothetical assumption devoid of any historical evidence. There was of course emergence of new urban centres like Mazar-i-Sharif, however, that is the phenomenon of 19th century and again it does not explain any side-lining of previous urban centres, who continued to retain their importance as centres of power and trade. For example, in 1558 Anthony Jenkinson noted Indian merchants in Bukhara and Samarqand conducting trade in Indian textiles ^[37] In 1589–90, the judicial records of the *Qazi* of Samarqand mention Multanis with reference to their commercial activities in Samarqand ^[38]. Although, the direct evidence to suggest the vibrancy of urban centres is scanty, however, there is enough indirect evidence to suggest that during 17th century that the historical urban centres like Bukhara and Samarqand were in a flourishing state and were centres of power. For example, William finch testified Samarqand as a trading hotspot when he said that in 1611, it was, in fact, indigo from Agra that was available in the markets of Samarqand at that time ^[39]. Moreover, it must be noted that sixteenth and seventeenth century Samarqand included a Christian quarter known as “Tarsan” and a Jewish quarter known as “Musaviyan”. (Scott Levi, 2002, p. 188, note 18).

The vibrancy of the above mentioned cities is again testified by the commercial policies of Turanian rulers who invested their capital in creating commercial infrastructure like construction of caravansarais and bridges. Abdullah Khan II is said to have built several sarais, bazaars, bridges ^[40]. The structures like the Tim Bazaar of Bukhara is testified by a nineteenth century traveller, Mohan Lal. (Mohan Lal, 1846, p. 124). Abdullah Khan’s successors are also said to have built caravansarais and one of the successor Abdul Aziz built a special market in Samarqand for the sale of sheep, (Audrey Burton, 1997, pp. 423-424), signifying Samarqand as an active commercial centre. The importance of Bukhara as a power centre is justified by the diplomatic exchanges from the Bukharan *Khans*, who were established in

³⁷ 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”, (Anthony Jenkinson, Vol. I, E. 1886, pp. 87-88).

³⁸ There are eight entries regarding Darya Khan Multani, seven of which refer specifically to his activities as a textile wholesaler in Samarqand. (*Majmua-i-Wathaiq*, fols 182a–b, 187b, 189a–b; Surendra Gopal, 2001, pp. 11–13).

³⁹ He says, “Much Indico called Cole (Koil) of a grosse sort is made in this way, which is spent in India, or transported for Samercand (Samarkand), Cascat (Kashgar), and those parts”. (Samuel Purchas, Vol. IV, 1905, p. 69. William Foster, 1921, p. 179).

⁴⁰ The sardaba being a well-ventilated structure built over a water-cistern. (Audrey Burton, 1997, p. 418; Audrey Burton, 1993, p. 3).

Bukhara, sending agents for trade with India particularly for the purchase of textiles^[41]. Moreover, it must be noted that the head of village site used to be *Aqsaqal*, who used to run village administration and fostered justice to villagers^[42]. On the other hand, in urban centres, justice was administered by Qazis for which we have enough evidence from 16th to 18th centuries in both Bukhara and Samarqand which produced the judgements of these Qazis in the form of *Majmua Wathaiq* and *Khatut-i-Mamhura*. (*Majmua-i-Wathaiq*; *Khutut-i-mamhura bemahr-i-qadah-i-Bukhara*). Thus, it can be said that the historical urban centres like Balkh, Bukhara and Samarqand were commercial cum power centres and it is not unreasonable to suggest that there was neither population decline nor urban decline during 17th century. Of course, there was emergence of new urban centres during 19th century, but it would be unreasonable to suggest that they emerged on the debris of old centres.

Conclusion

To sum up, there were different routes from India to Central Asia, however, only a few were used, depending on their seasonal pattern, political situation over there and the difficult terrain. Despite, all this, traders from different areas regularly visited the Iranian and Turanian cities, bringing much needed commodities for them and likewise, merchants from both Iran and Turan visited India for the same purpose. It is important note that both the regions were mutually benefitting from the commercial exchanges from each other, which made it mandatory for them to invest in maintaining safety and security of traders. Finally, it seems to be reasonable that during seventeenth century, Silk route was still used with full vigour and that Uzbek Turan was still a centre of international trade.

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⁴¹ In a letter from one Bukharan *khan* to a Mughal emperor (probably from Abdul Aziz to Aurangzeb), the *khan* appealed for mutual commercial exchanges and explained that “at this time textile are difficult to find in the boundaries of Bukhara”. The letter goes on to request that, as soon as the merchant Mubarak had entered Mughal territory and procured the necessary textiles, he be sent back to Bukhara without delay. Similarly, Subhan Quli dispatched at least six embassies to Shah Abass II, whose main purpose was trade. Even when Subhan Quli ruled Balkh, he expected his ambassadors to sell goods in Iran on a large scale and to encourage foreign merchants to visit the Khanate. Moreover, Manucci’s account also noted transactions carried out by the Balkh and Bukharan embassies of 1661 in India. (Scott Levi, 2002, pp. 80-81; Niccolao Manucci, Vol. II, 1907, p. 37).

⁴² *Aqsaqal* (literally, ‘white beard’) is an expression to designate the elders, who could fill the informal or more formally codified functions of advisers or mediators. *Aqsaqals* were chosen by consensus from among the group’s oldest, most experienced and influential men. Later, Russians called them *starshinas* (responsible for collecting taxes and other administrative duties). (V. Fourniau and C. Poujol, 2005, p. 44; Tabysheva, 2005, pp. 96, 97; N. A. Abdurakhimova, 2005, p. 127).

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