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Overseas trade between India and Central Asia: The root of the growing economy during medieval India

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Abstract---Overseas trade between India and Central Asia: the root of the growing economy during Medieval India is an important topic that may lead us towards the sources that revealed the fact behind the growth of the Indian economy during the medieval period. In that course of time, we can come across a lot of business tycoon migrated from central Asia and Persia and built an overseas business tie-up with Indian Territory. This fastens essentially was among the major causes that developed the foundation of the Indian economy during medieval India. Here in this topic, it would be my earnest effort to throw some fresh light on the trade and trends of India and central Asia and their contribution to the growth and development of the Indian economy during that golden age.

Keywords---overseas trade, India, Central Asia, medieval period.

Introduction

Medieval India was regarded as to be the golden age by almost every inland and foreign historiographer of both modern and ancient times. This period of Indian history witnessed the highest growth of the Indian economy and the position of Indian GDP was however reached its high zenith that could able to catch the eyes of the rest part of the world. Many foreign investors and business tycoons came herein to gain more profit in their trade affairs. Among them, the most prominent were the traders and the business tycoons of central Asia and the Middle East.

The cause that prompted them to build the business tie-up with India, according to the earlier historians was as follows:

- 1) Geographical condition among India and central Asia.
- 2) The routing system of both territories.
- 3) The favor of inland business tycoons.
- 4) The good turn of local kings.
- 5) Evade of religious conflicts between native and foreign trades.

Here in this topic, the discussion will be carried out on all sides of the above-mentioned points to proceed towards the ending of my finding regarding the topic entitled "*Overseas trade between India and Central Asia: the root of the growing economy during Medieval India*".

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are

1. To examine how the Geographical condition of India and central Asia helps to develop overseas trade for its benefit during the medieval period.
2. To explore the religious facts and local king's intersection policies towards the proposed region regarding trade and commerce.
3. To analyze the Trade routes or Networks of India and central Asia in the Medieval Period promote trade and commerce during the Medieval period.

Methods and Methodology

The topic entitled "*Overseas trade between India and Central Asia: the root of the growing economy during Medieval India*" is an important and eye-catching research topic which is carried out with scientific methodology where I put all the materials in juxtaposition to disclose the fact behind the trade affairs and Indian growing economy of the medieval period. I used most of the inland resources to interpret my topic and avoid all the materials which seemed to be published or released by some time serving historian's in-order to pursue or gain their pretexts. I juxtaposed both inland resources with that of colonial historiography to understand the circumstances under which the trade affairs of India were carried out in ancient India and how it brings colour to Indian trading inch-by-inch during Medieval India.

Geographical condition among India and central Asia

The most important point that had been proved as the core motivation of building relations between India and central Asia was effectively the geographical set of both territories so to learn and understand the connection between India and Central Asia and Persia as well we must go through the physical frame of these regions. If we observe the geographical status of these two regions we may comprehend that India and Central Asia, these two regions were well connected excluding some diminutive barriers. Among those barriers and obstacles, the most prominent were the Hindukush mountain range, Safed Koh, Pamir, and a part of the Himalaya mountain range. Excluding these barriers, both territories

are well connected and the most remarkable route that connects these vast lands, one may estimate or count the river Indus which was connected with the rivers Sym, Amu, Kabul, Helmand of Central Asia, and Persia.

The routing system of both territories:

According to many historians and travelers of the medieval period, the most easier route that had been chosen by foreign traders was the silk road that connects via rivers like Sym, Amu, Kabul, Helmand of Central Asia, and Persia with Indian territory through the river Indus. The Pamir plateau functioned as a connecting point at which the pathways of four Kingdoms were intersected i.e. India, China, Central Asia, and Persia. Safed Koh, a mountain range is situated in between Hindukush and Indus River which creates a juncture of water stream that flows to Kurram and Kabul River. The water flow coming from this watershed meets the Indus River which connects the Indus valley with the territory viz., Balam, Gomal, Tochi, Kurram, and Khyber of Central Asia. As far as the south portion is concerned, it is surrounded by Baluchistan and the Thar. The region of Kashmir and Panjab is situated on the east. Eastern Persia is located on the west. Yet despite all obstacles and barriers, some passes connect both regions. Among those passes, the Khawak pass bears the historical importance which runs from Kabul to Panjsheer valley (having 11650 feet height) which was chosen by numerous invaders like Greek invader Alexander and Timor of central Asia. Another impressive pass through which Buddhist pilgrims and Chingiz Khan entered Indus valley which runs towards Baniyan valley. It was a low area of land between high mountains more than 12500 feet. Another route comparably easy to cross remains between Himkush and Andar connecting Khawak pass. According to Ibn Batuta, this path was more comfortable to travel. Several small ranges are found by the side of the Kabul River that moves to the south direction from Himkush. The geographical structure of these places is formed in such a way that several well-known rivers viz. Swat river, the Kunar river, the Chitra, the Panjkura river pass through these ranges which bear vital importance to the development of communication among the regions. The Jhelum River is started from the mountain path of Kashmir crossing several places along with Srinagar and Baramula and falls in the Kishan-Ganga river of Muzaffarabad. From this place, the river turned to the east direction of Rawalpindi. This river flows across several commercial spots like Jhelum Jhang, Kushab, Shahpur, Monga, Jalalpur, Bhera, and Trimmer as well.

Apart from this, there were several passes discovered by the foreign traders, travelers, and invaders in the northwest frontier region. This region was referred to as the juncture of passes in the ancient history books. For instance, Al-Biruni recorded in his book *Kitabul Hind* that the sea path and road connect the commercial and political places of India along with the time record required for covering the journey. A lot of information available in the account of Al-Idrisi, Ibn-Batuta, Mustawfi, and other Arabian and Persian travelers about the routes connecting India and the Muslim worlds. These routes were the main channel through which the export and import of the goods were performed. The routing system of central Asia and Persia were assembled in such a way that they were well connected with Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, and other Middle-east countries via Baghdad city. These route systems and geographical structure of the sub-

continent inspired the business tycoons of central Asia to communicate with the Indus valley for various causes, especially for commercial aspects.

The favor of inland business tycoons

It was remarkable that with time a lot of cities and trade centers flourished on both sides of the Indus River across coastal areas of the sea like south India, Kerala, Malwar, and Gujrat. Among these trade centers, Sirhind, Dipalpur, Hansi, Uch, Sumana, Multan, Sunam, Ajodhan, Sarsuti, Lahore, Delhi, Bhaeswara, Saurashtra, Kavi, Gandhara, Sindan, Saimur or Chaul, Thana, Somanatha-Pattana, Mangrol, and Cambay town are remarkable. It was seen in the ninth century or earlier, the shippers from central Asia used to travel to China through the South Indian seaports, and often they took a rest in these places or pulled up their ships due to the wind and sea storm. During this time they came into the contact with the native traders and Kings who welcomed them with open hearts. As the businessmen of central Asia were the farsighted business leaders, they could easily hold the opportunity offered by the local traders. Soon they spread their commercial networks throughout the countries*.

The good turn of local kings

The Arabic book Tuhfatul Mujahidin of Zainuddin Makdum noted that the Indus Kings and traders have shown favor to the Arab merchants because the prosperity of their regions depends on foreign money. They treated friendly to Arabs and the traders of central Asia as they knew that the economy of their Kingdom depends on the support given by the Arab merchants. It also testified by the writing of Ibn-Batuta who also suggested that the Good attitude and polite behaviors of local Kings were the vital reasons that tempted the Arabs and the central Asians to build a large commercial network in the coastal areas of the Indian sea and they were doing so as they intended to get more financial gain from trading with the foreigners. As a result, central Asian traders and merchants of Persia had strengthened their grips on shipping and foreign trades in western India. Ibn-Batuta, the Arab traveler also informs us that the entire south and west coast of India became under the control of Arab sailors and the coasts were surrounded by Muslim prayer places, Dargah of Sufi saints, and Settlements of Muslim merchants as well.

Evaade of religious conflicts between native and foreign trades

It would be somehow unfair to say that the Indian merchants and Kings show polite behavior only because of their benefits rather. The attitude of local Kings was remarkable in the development of brotherhood among Arabs and Indians. They always welcomed the Persian traders with imperial felicitation. The friendships between them were so deep that the Kings did not hesitate to offer some part of his Kingdom to the governor use it as their dwelling place. The account of Al Iskandari and Ibn Howkal established the truthfulness of the fact. They tell us that though the area starts from Cambay ended to Chaul were owned

* Dr. Laskar Amjad Hussain, literary contribution of indo-arab scholars to the freedom movement of India from 1858 to 1947.(unpublished thesis) Pp.18-20

by Hindu Rajas but the administration of this area was governed by the Muslim dwellers in its city. Notably, the friendly attitude was not only confined within the Rajas rather it could be found among the local merchants. The inscription of Jagaducharita referred to the grant of land for the mosque[†]. The inscription also mentioned that the land was given by a rich businessman named Jagadu who belonged to the Jain community. Despite being a Jain he built a mosque for Muslims. Was he compelled by anyone to do such a holy deed? No, this was the example of humanity and brotherhood between new Muslim dwellers and the local people. Observing all these references and examples we can easily comprehend that the settlement of Muslims in the early ages was a result of humanity and brotherhood[‡].

Conclusion

The medieval India was regarded to be the best era for India in all recorded history. A lot of business places and huge marts and malls were seen in the coastal areas of Indian territory. These coastal business ports were trace back to the age of the 7th century or so. The writer of the book History of India as told by its historian, H. M. Eliot, and J. Dowson mentioned that the seaport of Cambay city, Malabar port, and the seaport of Chaul and Sumnathapatta were the flourishing business centers of ancient India. They had been ornamented with a lot of beautiful prayer places and a huge quantity of malls and auction places where a lot of foreign traders used to gather to sell and purchase the commodities[§]. The most famous among them was horse-trading from central Asia and Persia^{**}. It was mentioned in the account of the renowned historian V.K. Jain and Satish Chandra Misra that the horse that came from Central Asia had no comparison to any place rest of the world. They also had an artistic hand that supplied weapons made of iron steel and aluminum. These were so gigantic and sharp that had no resemblance. Indian kings were fond of such weapons and furious horses that carried from central Asia and Persia. Moreover, Indian business tycoons purchased the spices and other pickles from them and on the contrary, the businessman of central Asia and Persia exports a huge quantity of cotton and silk cloth, food commodities, valuable woods, and so on. All these business affairs had been carried out with a good and well-arranged system of Marts and auction places. According to Historians Indian market policies of medieval India were so advanced that the people around the world come herein to do business and earn much profit from it. But after the entrance of European traders, these business places were demolished or came under the colonial business places. Gradually they were collapsed as the colonial business policy came on the screen with their rapacious cruelty, extortion, and bribing, legal and illegal wealth draining and plundering Indian wealth. The British business system

[†] Jain, V.K. Trade and Traders in Western India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi 1990 .p.79

[‡] [§] Dr. Laskar Amjad Hussain, literary contribution of Indo-Arab scholars to the freedom movement of India from 1858 to 1947.(unpublished thesis 2020) Pp.18-20

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^{**} Jain, V.K. Trade and Traders in Western India, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi 1990 .p.70-79

brought forth an era of darkness for Indian overseas trade and thus broke all kinds of a business tie-up that demonstrate India as to be the master of international business association.

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