

# Mughal Imperial Capitals of Agra and Lahore: As Thriving Commercial Centres during Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

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## Abstract

The expansion and consolidation of the Mughal Empire necessitated the emergence of power bases or capitals at a central location from where the Mughal rulers could control and regulate the regional power holders. The Mughal rulers administered from prominent places, which were their abode and became the imperial seats. Selection of the location for their imperial hearts depended mainly on the economic and strategic importance and the discretion of the rulers. There is a common feature regarding the site of the imperial cities- they were located at the bank of the river and held control over the most fertile region of the empire. Agra and Shahjahanabad were on the bank of river Yamuna. They regulated the Ganga-Yamuna doab region, whereas Lahore was located on the bank of river Ravi and regulated the Punjab region. It facilitated the imperial cities with river transportation and navigation and established their control over the local power holders. The imperial seats gradually developed into imperial cities. The prominent imperial or capital cities of the Mughals were Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri, Lahore and Shahjahanabad. The imperial cities emerged as administrative- cum- military centres. Though they were not exclusively attributed to administrative functions. Gradually, they evolved as thriving commercial centres.

**Key Words:** Agra, Lahore, Indigo, *Karkhanas*, Trade Routes, *Sarais*.

## Introduction:

### *Agra*

The city of Agra is situated on the west or the right bank of the Yamuna River, 124 miles east of Fatehpur-Sikri. In historical context, the first account of the existence of Agra ‘as a flourishing city having a strong fortress built amidst sand like a will’ in A.D. 1080 is available in the celebrated poem written in praise of the rulers of the Ghazni by a twelfth-century Gazanavite poet, Khawza Masud bin sad bin Salman (Elliot & Dowson, 1964, pp. 522-24). The geophysical position of the city of Agra had a significant influence on its evolution. It was situated on the confluence of three distinct geographical regions- ‘the plain, the plateau and the desert; of four culture areas- Braj, Bundelkhand, Rajasthan

and western U.P.; of different trade routes and on politically strategic position’ (Vandana, 1999, p. 82). In 1506 Sikander Lodi founded the city of Agra and made it his headquarter due to political reason. The site selected by the Sultan was in the villages of Bashi and Poiya in the *pargana* of Deoli, and nine *parganas* out of a total of 52 from the *sarkar* of Bayana were included in it (Habib & Nizami, 1992, p. 648). While making Agra his headquarter, it appears that Sikander Lodi had comprehended the strategic significance of the Kalpi region. He removed his nephew, Azam Humayun, from Kalpi and entrusted it to a reliable noble- to exercise greater control over the extension towards Malwa and the Western coast. Thus it was the need of the time to place his headquarter at a centrally located site from where the Sultan could have controlled the adjoining areas. With time, the

process of urbanisation set in with the flocking of various types of people viz. businessmen, artists, scholars and workers from different places like Arabia, Persia and Bukhara (Elliot & Dowson, 1964, p. 446).

The growth of Agra as a city, in fact, began when Emperor Akbar reorganised it. It seems that Akbar had also considered the strategic location and various linkages of Agra to make Agra his capital. The objection by the rebellious Rajput villagers to pay tribute prompted Akbar to place his capital at Agra and named it Akbarabad (Manucci, vol. I, 1981, pp. 129-30). Contrary to the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals had a transferable nature of assignment system, ensuring total dependence on the emperor. The assignee who might have been assigned outside the capital city or other parts of the empire also had to keep permanent establishments in the capital. In the Mughal Empire, a large proportion of ruling elites maintained their permanent establishments in the capital city. Writing about the houses of the nobility, William Finch writes - 'The city layeth in the manner of half moon, bellying to the land ware some 54 (kos) in length, and as much by the river side, up the banks, where of are many goodly houses of the nobility, pleantry overlooking Gemini....' (Finch, 1985, pp. 182-85)

The reorganisation of the Agra *suba* in 1580 by Akbar made the capital city regulate the economic viability of the adjoining regions. The reorganisation of *suba* Agra consisted of 13 *sarkars*- Agra, Alwar, Erachh (Irij), Gwalior, Kalpi, Kanauj, Kol, Mandlaer, Narnaul, Narwar, Payanwan (Bayanwan), Sahar and Tijarah (Trivedi, 1998, p. 23). According to Allami- 'the length of Agra from Ghatampur on the Allahabad side to Palwal on that of Delhi is 175 kos....it contains more than five hundred buildings of masonry...the sarkar of Agra contained 33 mahals, 91,0007,824 bighas land' (Allami, vol. II, 1989, pp. 190-93). In

*suba* Agra, agriculture was in perfection (Allami vol. II, 1989, pp. 190-91). The organisation of the Agra *suba* served two purposes. Firstly, it incorporated various regions of strategic and political importance. The recalcitrant centres like Kol, Bayana, Etawah, Gwalior etc. (before 1605) emerged as the economic centres after the reorganisation of *suba* Agra. Secondly, the revenue collection of *suba* Agra was parallel to the collection of Delhi *suba*.

Although Agra was not a producing or manufacturing city, it benefited from its location and the commercial advantages of its hinterlands. Subsequently, it emerged as an important commercial centre of its age. Agra being in the heart of the empire, provided multi-dimensional links with other important cities and regions to support Agra with provisions. Pelsaert (2001), in context to the cities and towns like- Allahabad, Jaunpur, Benaras, Oudh, Lakhawar, Patna, Chabaspur, Sonargaon and Jaganath, writes that:

*All these countries are very fertile, and yield immense quantities of grain, such as wheat or rice, sugar, and butter, large quantities of which are brought up the river Jamuna, or carried by green overland, to provision this country (that is Agra) and the king's army. (p. 9)*

Being a capital city, Agra had emerged as the nodal point in the north (Gupta, 1986). It was because major routes between eastern and western or northern and southern regions of the subcontinent terminated in this *suba*. K. K. Trivedi considers that Agra acted as the convergence point for routes from all directions (Trivedi, 1994, p. 161).

As an urban centre, Agra had not many producing items- it manufactured the carpets in royal *karkhanas* and manufacturing units. However, *suba* Agra incorporated many hinterlands and centres, which produced certain specific commercial items. Bayana was one of the most important indigo-

producing centres. *Suba* Agra also had the Mewat indigo tract and the copper mines of Narnaul. The control of copper for military purposes was essential for the empire. It was also used for the mintage of coins. There was a great demand for the indigo produced in Bayana. Kol, Khujra, Khanva, Hindaun and Gwalior were other exclusive markets for the indigo-dye. Europeans, Persians, Armenians, and other merchants were eager to procure Bayana indigo. For this, either they rush to the producing centres or procure it from Agra.

Regarding the demand for indigo, Pelsaert says, '.... sale of the indigo (of) Koil, Mewat, and the most distant villages of Agra and Bayana which is an important article of commerce throughout the whole world' (Pelsaert, 2001, p. 9). Saltpetre was another product found in *suba* Agra. About saltpetre, Pelsaert says- 'Saltpetre is found in many places near Agra, at distances of from 10 to 40 Kos; it occurs usually in villages which have formerly been for some year's abandoned' (Pelsaert, 2001, p. 46). Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri and Alwar were important centres for ordinary and woolen carpets. It was Akbar who initiated the manufacturing of carpets at Agra and Fatehpur-Sikri. Agra had a great demand for spices as Pelsaert (2001) informs-

*I know by experience that some banias of Agra maintain agents in Golkonda with two objects in particular, to buy diamonds and spices, which their people in Masulipatam sent to us (i.e. to Agra); and this year they brought 300 maunds (15,000 lb) of cloves at 11 pagodas per maund (of 25 lb), and transported them to Agra, as well as proportionate quantities of nutmeg, mace, tin, and other goods. (p. 22)*

The economic and commercial activities attracted foreign merchants to come and trade in Agra. The prime location of Agra city at the bank of a river and many trade routes connected to different parts of the country

provided the merchants access to Agra by both- inland highways and the waterways. Tavernier gives descriptive information regarding the routes to Agra- the route from Surat to Agra by Burhanpur and Sironj, and by Ahmadabad; Ispahan to Agra by Kandahar; Delhi to Agra; the route from Agra to Patna and Dacca and towns of Bengal (Tavernier, 1977). While describing Agra's trade relations with Cambalu (Peking), Sir Thomas Roe says- 'Ther passeth yearly caravans from Agra to Cambalu' (Roe, 1926, p. 76). The English, Dutch, Armenians and others settled themselves at Agra. The main commodity that attracted the Europeans was indigo, termed the 'prime commodity' for trade with Europe (Moreland, 1990, p. 40). The Dutch had their factory at Agra, where they generally kept four or five persons (Bernier, 1983, p. 292).

### **Lahore**

Lahore was strategically important for the defence of the northwest region of the Mughal Empire as well as it remained during the times of the Delhi Sultanate. The disturbances, in the form of invasions and rebellions, became a matter of security concern for the Mughal Empire to keep the adjoining power holders in control. Lahore had been possessed by Babur in 1523-24 and posted Mir Abdul-Aziz, his master of the horse (Babur, 1970). During the reign of Akbar, Abul Fazl informs that- 'In the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Akbar's reign, Mirza Muhammad Hakim, King of Kabul invaded India and besieged Lahor....' (Allami, vol. I, 1989, p. 514 ; Laet, 1928, p. 146). Akbar shifted his headquarter to Lahore in 1584 to pacify the rebellions and to consolidate Mughal rule in the north-west region. He remained at Lahore for fourteen years from 1584-1598 A. D (Baqir, 1985, p. 126).

Lahore had economic and commercial advantages too. The region between Lahore and Agra was the most fertile as mentioned

by the contemporary foreign traveller- ‘The whole country between Agra and Lahor is well cultivated and is the most fertile part of India, bearing all kinds of crops abundantly’ (Laet, 1928, p. 54). Lahore *suba* contained fourteen *sarkars* and three hundred and fourteen *parganas* which yielded 2,46,95,000 rupees (Bernier, 1983, p. 456). The location of Lahore facilitated it with both- inland route and waterway connectivity. The city was situated on the banks of river Ravi which ‘flows by Multan and on to Tatta and Bakkar, carrying a large trade in shallow-draught vessels’ (Pelsaert, 2001, p. 30). Lahore was an important trading centre in the route connecting upper India with Persia to Aleppo or Constantinople (Finch, 1985, p. 18). Lahore was connected with the royal route to Agra, and trade with Persia in overland caravan trade made Lahore the centre for trade between the merchants of Central Asia and Iran, and Indian merchants (Richards, 1993, p. 50). The merchandise of trade at Lahore comprised horses from Central Asia, fruits, silks and porcelain (from China), precious metals; Indian spices, textiles and other valuable commodities (Richards, 1993, p. 50). The English factors used to sell indigo at Lahore on the company’s behalf which they purchased at Agra (Finch, 1985, p. 123). Due to its commercial significance, Lahore was regarded as ‘a place of very great trade’ (Coryat, 1985, p. 283) and ‘the chiefe citie of trade in all India’ (Terry, 1985, p. 292) by the European travellers. The riches of Lahore can be estimated by the incident of a fire which took place and even considered as a factor to leave Lahore at once by Akbar, as described by Pierre Du Jarric (1979):

*That which grieved the King most was the lost of all his treasures, both those which he had inherited from his ancestors, and those he had amassed during his own reign, and which were worth many millions in gold; for the fire consumed everything, including large quantities of draperies of cloth of gold,*

*silver, and other metals melted in this conflagration ran down the streets like streams of water. (p. 75)*

Lahore also served as a producing and manufacturing centre. Sugar was produced here (Laet, 1928, p. 55). Akbar initiated the manufacturing of carpets; hence, carpet weavers were settled in cities, especially in Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri and Lahore, which advanced the flourishing trade in carpets (Allami, vol. I, 1989, p. 57). Skilful masters and workmen were settled in imperial *karkhanas* and important towns e.g. Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur-Sikri, Ahmadabad, Gujarat, etc. produced many masterpieces, which astonished foreign travellers (Allami, vol. I, 1989, pp. 93-94). There were more than a thousand *karkhanas* of shawl manufacture in Lahore. A variety of shawls had been woven there, called ‘*mayan*’ which is made of silk and wool mixed (Allami, vol. I, 1989, p. 98). Even large ships were built at Allahabad and Lahore (Allami, vol. I, 1989, p. 290). Lahore was also a market for varieties of fruits. The cultivation of mangoes was encouraged after Lahore became the capital of the Mughal Empire under Akbar (Allami, vol. I, 1989, p. 72). Varieties of Grapes were available in Lahore. Jahangir informs that- ‘Several sorts of grapes, such as *Sahibi* and the *habshi* and the *kishmishi* became common in several towns; for instance in the bazars of Lahore every kind and variety that may be desired can be had in the grape season’ (Jahangir, vol. I, 1989, p. 5). Lahore also witnessed the manufactures of different countries. In this context, Abul Fazl informs that- ‘It is the resort of people of all countries whose manufactures present an astonishing display and it is beyond measure remarkable in populousness and extent’ (Allami, vol. II, 1989, p. 317). Silver and copper were coined in Lahore including other nine places- Allahabad, Agra, Ujjain, Surat, Delhi, Patna, Kashmir, Multan, and Tanda (Allami, vol. II, 1989, p. 31).

The emergence of Agra in the sixteenth century as the nodal centre of exchange in northern India affected the position of Lahore (Trivedi, 2005, p. 92). However, Lahore was instrumental in linking the subcontinent with other Asian regions (Trivedi, 2005, p. 93). Lahore continued to have exchange relations of commodities with Agra. Pelsaert informs about the articles imported by Agra from Lahore- ‘Agra imports from Lahore ormesines and carpets, which are woven there, and also many goods from more distance places, such as fruit from Kabul, asafoetida from Kandahar, and other commodities obtained in Multan’ (Pelsaert, 2001, p. 31). Pelsaert (2001) also informs of the articles exported by Agra to Lahore-

*Agra exports to Lahore most of the spices which we sell here (for the local consumption is very small when the king is not here, or there is no camp); also all kinds of white cotton goods, both Bengals and Golcondas; ivory (most of which is wrought in the neighbourhood of Multan); quicksilver, vermilion, coral; turbans, girdles, and all sorts of silk goods from Ahmadabad, where they are woven; silk from Patna; lac, pepper, and drugs too numerous to be named. (p. 31)*

Lahore was crucial for the products of the north-western producing centres to be sent to Agra for redistribution. It is clear from the writings of Pelsaert (2001) in the context of Multan-

*Very much sugar is produced, which is carried by water to Tatta in large quantities, and also to Lahore; gall nuts and opium are also produced; sulphar is obtained in large quantities, as well as the best camels in India; the finest and the most famous bows are made here, also large quantities of white cotton goods and napkins, which are exported to Kandahar. All these goods come by way of Lahore to Agra, and are thence distributed in all directions. (p. 31)*

Sirhind which is situated south-east of Lahore and laid in the way of the Lahore-Agra royal route was an important commercial center of cotton goods. Fray Sebastien Manrique who calls Sirhind ‘Sirynam’ informs that- ‘It is a city which is filled with followers of the mercantile profession on account of the great store of various cotton goods made there’ (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 182). Multan acted as a halting place for the *Kafilas* coming from Persia and Khurasan etc. Manrique (vol. II, 1927) says that Multan-

*Nevertheless very wealthy, well stocked, and plentifully supplied with all necessaries and conveniences man desires. This was due to its being the halting- place of all the kafilas coming from Persia, Corazane, and other distant kingdoms.*

*They passed in by this route to all parts of the Mogol empire in order trade and sell their merchandise, returning thence, as a rule, in company with the Mogol caravans or kafilas. (pp. 221-22)*

Goods from Multan were supplied to the Indian subcontinent via Lahore (Pelsaert, 2001, p. 31). Multan had also an alternative route which connected Delhi via Uch (Farooque, 1977, p. 216). Tatta was also important for the *Kafilas* to be congregated to travel to Persia and other distant places. Manrique states that Tatta- ‘...it is not so rich or frequented by merchants as Multan, still large numbers do congregate here on account of a kafila which leaves every year for Persia, Corazane, and other external and distant provinces’ (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 233). At Tatta ‘vast quantities of cotton collected’ and ‘cloths of various kinds are woven’ which were further exported to ‘many parts of Asia as well as to Portugal’ (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 239). Excellent taffetas and tafecirias were made of silk at Tatta (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 239). Manrique followed the route from Tatta to Multan via Jaisalmir (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 231).

Tatta was connected to Agra via Ahmadabad (Farooque, 1977, p. 56).

The opening of the sea route to India affected the importance of Lahore as a trading centre which it enjoyed during the heydays of overland caravan trade. Pelsaert presents a clear picture of Lahore during his stay in India. Pelsaert (2001) says that-

*It was the great centre of trade in the days before the English came to Agra, and the Armenians and Aleppo merchants did a large and profitable business. In those days the chief market was indigo was Lahore rather than Agra, because it was more convenient for the merchants who travelled in caravans in fixed seasons by way of Kandahar and Ispahan to Aleppo; and that is why the indigo which reached Europe from Aleppo or the Levant was known as Lauri or more properly Lahori. A brisk business still done in the fine cotton goods of Masulipatam, or Golconda and Mongapatnam, but nothing like what was formerly transacted. The trade of Lahore may in fact be called dead, for exports are limited to the requirements of Persia and Turkey, because the profits cannot stand the great costs of overland transit compared to those of our sea- carriage. Lahore thus lost practically all its trade, and the substantial Hindus, or Khatris, whose reputation still survives, lived on what was left of their old profits. (p. 30)*

Although Lahore did not experience voluminous trade as it did in the heydays of overland caravan trade, the travellers' accounts of the seventeenth century, suggest that it was economically and commercially viable.

### **Networks of Trade Routes:**

Mobility and accessibility to the distant parts of the empire is a pre-condition to integrating the distant regions into one. The imperial cities were well connected with the distant

parts of the Mughal empire through a well-established network of routes- both inland routes as well as waterways. The network of roads served dual purposes- on the one hand, road communication helped to keep control of the distant regions; and on the other, facilitated the development of trade and commerce (Farooque, 1977). The smooth mobility was essential for the resources to be collected and remitted to the royal treasuries. The trade routes were even used by the royal army and the administrative officials; and were protected from recalcitrant forces so that, the movement of merchants and traders and state officials would not be affected. The state responded to the importance of the routes- which also facilitated the postal and communication system of the realm- and constructed new roads, bridges and military posts; state officials (Governor) and Zamindars were held responsible for the safety of roads and travellers and merchants (Farooque, 1977, p. 13; Tavernier, vol. I, 1977, p. 39).

The important commercial centres as well as capital cities of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Mughal India were well connected with a strong network of trade routes. The connectivity of Agra city with different commercial centres and distant parts of the subcontinent has been described by Pelsaert (2001):

*All goods must pass this way, as from Gujarat, Tatta (or Sind); from Kabul, Kandahar, or Multan, to the Deccan; from the Deccan or Burhanpur to those places, or to Lahore; and from Bengal and the whole east country; there are no practicable alternative routes and the roads carry indescribable quantities of merchandise, especially cotton goods. (p. 6)*

Further, De Laet informs us about the route from Agra to Jaunpur; Agra to Ahmadabad; Agra to Asmeere (Ajmere); from Lahore to

Kandhar; Agra to Chatigan, the port of Bengal (Laet, 1928). Agra was situated 'in the very heart of the empire' and its position on the bank of river Yamuna facilitated connectivity through inland routes as well as waterways (Laet, 1928, p. 11 ; Hawkins, 1985, p. 100 ; Roe, 1926, p. 493). The cities of the Mughals were 'connected by a royal highway' (Laet, 1928). The capital cities of the Mughals- Lahore, Agra and Shahjahanabad (Delhi) were connected by a royal highway. In the words of De Laet - 'The route from Agra to Lahore passes through the famous kingdom of Dely or Delhi' (Laet, 1928, p. 47). From Delhi this route proceeded to Lahore and other parts of the Punjab region (Trivedi, 1998, p. 146); it further went towards Central Asia and Persia via Kabul, Kandhara, Ispahan to Aleppo (Pelsaert, 2001, pp. 185-86).

The land route from Agra connecting Surat had two alternative routes (Trivedi, 1998, p. 156). One connects Surat via Ajmere and Ahmadabad, and another via Burhanpur (Trivedi, 1998; Mundy, 1994). Peter Mundy travelled between Agra and Surat in 1631 and 1633. Burhanpur was an important place in the inland route connectivity. Tavernier, in context to the route from Agra to Golconda, mentions that- 'To go from Agra to Golconda it is necessary to go to Burhanpur...from Burhanpur to Daulatabad, which is not more than five or six marches, and from Daulatabad to other places....' (Tavernier, 1977, p. 121). He gives a detailed description of his travels in India and also talks of various land routes he followed. Tavernier informs us of the route from Surat to Agra by Burhanpur and Sironj; the route from Surat to Agra by Ahmadabad; the route from Ispahan to Agra by Kandahar; route from Agra to Patna and Dacca, towns of the province of Bengal (Tavernier, 1977). Agra was also connected to the eastern region of the empire- Patna and Bengal. These regions were well connected with inland routes as well as waterways. Peter

Mundy travelled from Agra to Patna via Allahabad and Benaras in 1632 (Mundy, 1914). In 1583 emperor Akbar made a 'pleasure expedition' in a boat from Agra to Allahabad (Badaoni, vol. II, 1986, p. 344). The first Jesuit missionaries to Akbar 'left Goa by sea and after calling at Chaul they reached Daman, whence they proceeded overland by way of Surat, Mandu, Ujjain, Sarangpur, Sirong, Narwar, Gwalior and Dholpur (Carreia-Afonso, 1980, p. 9).

Lahore was the nodal point for the traffic of trade movement from Central Asia and the north-western region in sixteenth and seventeenth-century India. As mentioned earlier the sequence of the route from Agra to Lahore proceeded to Persia and further to Aleppo, it also enjoins other places of commercial importance. Multan, Kashmir, Sirhind, Tatta etc. were connected to Lahore by land route; Peshawar, Kabul and Kandahar were in the way connecting Lahore to Central Asia. Multan was connected to Delhi via Uch. Tatta was connected to Multan by inland route via Jaisalmer and by river navigation. Lahore was connected to Tatta by waterway joining Multan and Uch. De Laet, in context to river Ravi which passes by Lahore says- '....river Ravee, which lower down joins the Indus and is navigable for boats ply between Lahor and the trading centres of Tatta in the Sinde after the rainy season is over'(De Laet, 1928, p. 51).

The purpose of river navigation of Sind was more significant for the English rather than its commercial advantage. This could be ascertained by the writing of Captain Nicholas Down to the East India Company in 1614- 'For the country near Sinde, we cannot understand of any hope for us there, but only by that fair river, whereby we may transport our goods to and from that goodly city and country near Lahor' (Danvers & Foster, vol. II, 1986, p. 174). For the navigation in the river, boats or 'great lighters (barges)' were

used from Agra down to the river Ganges, to Patna and further to Bengal (Mundy, vol. II, 1914, pp. 87-88). The boats take a shorter time to go downwards whereas take a longer time in coming upwards, being against the streams (Mundy, vol. II, 1914; Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 238). But road or waterway had been preferred according to the convenience and safety of the concerned party, in 1614 English preferred to send goods to Surat by land route against waterway- 'For transportation of our goods by water to Surat will be very dangerous by reason of the recourse the Portugal frigates have into their rivers; therefore by land will be more secure, as hath formerly been accustomed' (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 132)

### **Convenience and Safety of the Travellers and Merchants:**

The Mughal administration made all necessary arrangements for the convenience and safety of the travellers, merchants and traders. The construction of *sarais*; plantation of trees on both sides of the trade routes- for providing shade to the travellers; and the punishments given to the thieves and robbers active on the routes, constituted some of the efforts made by the administration for the convenience and safety of the travellers. The commercial activities gave rise to a number of *sarais* for the merchants to rest and halt for the night. Manucci (vol. I, 1981) informs us about the availability of *sarais* on every route, its structure, its administration etc. –

*For the use of wayfarers there are throughout the realm of the Mogul on every route many 'sarais'. They are like fortified places with their bastions and strong gates, most of them are built of stone or of brick. In every one is an official whose duty is to close the gates at the going down of the sun. After he has shut the gates, he calls out that everyone must look after his belongings,*

*picket his horses by their fore and hind legs. (p. 67.)*

The *sarais* were made for the use of travellers and not for the soldiers (Manucci, vol. I, 1981). The *sarais* were made throughout the realm and were fortified places with security measures. The royal highway connecting Lahore with Agra had many *sarais* at equal intervals, built by the King or the nobles, to cater to the needs of the travellers- 'Every 5 or 6 cos is a saray, built by King or some noble, where travellers may obtain sleeping and stable accommodation. Once a traveller has occupied the rooms allotted to him nobody else may turn him out' (Laet, 1928, p. 55). The caravan *sarais* at Agra were the striking figures besides the palaces, and so were the caravan *sarais* of Ahmadabad (Thevenot & Careri, 1949, p. 13). On the route from Agra to Ajmer Akbar gave orders to build palaces, '...and a pillar to be erected and a well sunk at every coss' (Badaoni, vol. II, 1986, p. 176). Trees were planted on both sides of the route to provide shade to the travellers in the hot and dry seasons, as the roads were not used in the rainy season. The travellers testify and appreciate the plantation of trees on the royal route connecting Lahore to Agra (Tavernier, vol. I, 1977, p. 71; Roe, 1926, p. 493; Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 84; Thevenot & Careri, 1949, p. 57).

The trade routes were often infested by thieves, robbers and recalcitrant forces; hence security and safe passage of the travellers and the merchants remained the prime concern of the authorities. The merchants and the travellers were also vigilant and made arrangements for their safety. For their safety, the travellers and merchants travel in caravans which is a congregation of large groups travelling together (Farooque, 1977, p. 57). Although precautionary measures were taken, incidents of theft and robbery often took place and were dealt with sternly. Al-Badaoni writes about the situation of



1572-73 that- ‘...Rajah Awesar, who had continually infested the roads..... kept up rebellion in the vicinity of Agrah, had now become a regular brigand’ (Al-Badaoni, vol. II, 1986, p. 155). The route to every important commercial centre was pestered by thieves and robbers. Peter Mundy (vol. II, 1914) speaks of the thieves and rebels on the route between Bayana and Fatehpur-Sikri:

*We came to this town (Biana [Bayana], 6 course), betwene which and Fattapore (Fatehpur Sikri) were about 250 or 300 men sett on stakes by Mirza Laskarr (Mirza Lashkar), Governor heere, being of Rebels and theeves by him taken, this way heretofore being much pestered with them and very daungerous for passengers. (p. 234)*

On 17<sup>th</sup> November 1630, when the caravan of Peter Mundy came to ‘Baadoore (Bhadwar)’ they heard that a band of 150 or 200 horsemen robbed a whole town (Peter Mundy, vol. II, 1914). On 20<sup>th</sup> November 1630 when they reached near the town of Limboore they found that three carts were cut off by the thieves in the rear (Peter Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 45). Again on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1631 when Peter Mundy was in Jalesar, he was told that- ‘a little before day certaine theeves had carried away two weomen, 4 oxen and 6 asses, which were going towards Agrah..... hereabouts beinge the most daungerous place for robbers that is in India (by report), as usuall neere to great cities’ (Peter Mundy, vol. II, 1914, pp. 71-72). The thieves also pestered the route from Agrah to Patna and also towards Surat (Peter Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 90). In context to Bengal Peter Mundy complains that both-land route and waterway- were unsafe due to the activeness of the thieves- ‘And soe the goods might bee sent downe the river Ganges to the sea. Or els by land, there beinge also daunger both ways, for this countrie (as all the rest of India) swarmes with Rebbels and

theeves’ (Peter Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 151). William Finch informs us of the sacking of Kabul by the ‘Potan’ thieves due to which merchants were not daring to adventure beyond Kandahar (Finch, 1985, p. 167). Apart from the thieves, there were recalcitrant non-tributary factors around Lahore who obstructed the trade and commerce of the country by indulging in robberies (Thevenot & Careri, 1949, p. 84). The threat by the recalcitrant forces became an alarming situation during the times of Aurangzeb when the villagers obstructed the royal route from Delhi to Agrah. The situation as described by Manucci- ‘....for he (Aurangzeb) fore saw that when the villagers were the masters of the roads between Agrah and Delhi, not a single soul would be allowed to pass (Manucci, vol. II, 1981, p. 300).

The administration was concerned for the safety and smooth movement of the trade. The thieves and robbers who were active in the various trade routes of the realm were dealt with by chopping their heads. On the royal route from Delhi to Agrah, Manucci says that- ‘I travelled often from Agrah to Delhi, and every time there was a number of fresh heads on the roadside and many bodies of the thieves hanging from the trees, who were punished thus for robbing on the highway’ (Manucci, vol. I, 1981, p. 132). Peter Mundy also testifies to the hanging of the heads of the thieves on the way to Agrah (Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 73). Manrique travelling towards Agrah describes the hanging of the heads and bodies of the thieves in an interesting manner. Manrique says- ‘We also saw in some places those trees which by their nature bear no fruit, laden only with “robber-fruit”; bearing, that is bunches of hanging thieves....’ (Manrique, vol. II, 1927, p. 149). Peter Mundy notices the *minars* with the heads of the thieves on the route between Agrah and Patna (Mundy, vol. II, 1914, p. 90). *Faujdar* was answerable for the robberies. And in certain cases e.g. - Mr. Beber robbed at Agrah- *Faujdar* had to pay

from his pocket (Thevenot & Careri, 1949, p. 50). The residences of the thieves and robbers were in strange faraway places, and the *faujdar* took action against them by killing most of the men; destroying their towns; taking their goods; and enslaving their wives and children (Mundy, vol. II, 1914, pp. 73-74, 90). Women robbers were also active on the routes followed by travellers and merchants (Thevenot & Careri, 1949, p. 58).

The Mughal imperial capital cities of Agra and Lahore primarily emerged as a political centre but they gradually evolved into thriving commercial centres as well. These cities became important centres due to the rich hinterlands, nodal position, manufacturing industries, and political stability and security provided by the central and provincial administrations. These cities played different roles and were not just limited to the political and economic centres. These cities also became instrumental in the exchange of ideas, language, art and culture between people belonging to different places and regions. And it was due to the economic and commercial exchanges between different regions and countries.

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