



# TRADE AND COMMERCE BETWEEN AGRA AND LAHORE IN THE MUGHAL PERIOD

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**Abstract:** The Mughal Empire developed an atmosphere conducive to substantial commercial activity. As the imperial capital and a strategically significant city, Agra and Lahore grew as vital trading hubs, linking numerous areas and allowing the movement of products, ideas, and cultural influences. The study explores the many items exchanged between Agra and Lahore, including exquisite fabrics and spices as well as rare jewels and metals. The development of a well-organized market system, complete with busy bazaars and caravan routes, was critical in supporting this commerce. Furthermore, the research explores the socioeconomic impact of this trade on the urban landscapes of Agra and Lahore, examining how these towns' riches affected architectural development, creative endeavours, and general quality of life. This research contributes to a better understanding of the economic linkages that existed between Agra and Lahore during the Mughal era, emphasising the importance of trade and commerce in defining the Indian subcontinent's cultural and economic environment. The findings provide important insights into the interconnection of towns and regions, showing the Mughal Empire's continuing effect on trade networks and cultural interchange.

**Keywords:** *Agra, Lahore, Trade, Commerce, Commodities, Routes*

**Introduction:** The development of individual cities plays a crucial role in the overall progress of a community. Cities serve as hubs for arts, crafts, trade, and industries. This study aims to examine the trade and commerce dynamics between Agra and Lahore during the Mughal era. The advent of the Great Mughals in India brought about a significant transformation in the social and economic status of Northern Indian towns. The Mughals initiated commercial connections with a substantial part of the world, leading to the proliferation of numerous towns in the northern region.

During the zenith of Mughal India's commercial prosperity, a refined economic system resulted in the affluence of villages, enhancing their role as economic entities. The surplus agricultural production seemed to fuel the expansion of cities and the diversification of urban activities. Initially, small markets grew as surplus goods were traded through local brokers. Over time, these places evolved into 'mandis' or markets,

eventually developing into cities of varying sizes and importance based on trade volume and transport facilities for exportable goods. India attracted foreign merchants, leading to the establishment of foreign factories in different towns, turning Indian cities into hubs for global trade and commerce. Agra, among others, emerged as a pivotal centre for Mughal trade and commerce. The establishment of Agra as the capital by Sikandar Lodi in 1505-06 stimulated the exodus of highly skilled artisans like ironsmiths from Rapri and stone cutters from Nagaur.<sup>1</sup> The royal karkhanas attracted a diverse range of professionals from many areas and civilizations to settle in Agra. All of these factors contributed to the city's economic prosperity and allowed for the establishment of a variety of marketplaces as well as the residences of various businesses and moneylenders.<sup>2</sup>

Lahore was an important city in Mughal India because of its strategic location as a major commerce and economic centre. It was an important junction on the Great Grand Trunk Road. The city functioned as a thriving market for items like textiles, spices, and precious stones, and fashion interchange enabled commerce and cultural exchange. Lahore's closeness to the Punjab's agricultural sector enabled it to serve as a centre for agriculture and numerous crops and commodities. The presence of talented artisans and craftsmen in Lahore helped its economic growth by being brought and sold in its market. The city became identified for its complex handicrafts, like as carpets and textiles, which drew commercial Elias from all over the empire and beyond. The middle class evolved as a powerful social stratum with strong influence over the country's trade and industries. Money was lent to Indian producers and manufacturers, while commodities were purchased and stored for export by foreign merchants<sup>3</sup>.

**ROUTES:** The trade between these two cities was facilitated by a well-developed network of roads and rivers, such as the Yamuna River, which connected Agra to Lahore. Tavernier, who visited India several times in the mid-seventeenth century, discovered that "the manner of travelling" in India "is not less convenient than all that they have been able to invent in order that one may be carried in comfort either in France or in Italy."<sup>4</sup>

Earlier in 1615 Coryat noted about the imperial highway from Lahore to Agra, that: "*From the famous city of Lahore I had twenty daies journey to another goodly citie, called Agra, through such a delicate and even tract of ground as I never saw before, and doubt whether the like bee to be found within the whole circumference of the habitable world.*"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, 'Social Mobility in the Delhi Sultanate', *Medieval India I, Researches in the History of India 1200-1750*, ed. Irfan Habib, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p.48.

<sup>2</sup> Shaikh Rizqullah Mushtaqi, *Waqiat-e Mushtaqi*, tr. & ed. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, Indian Council of Historical Research New Delhi & Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 1993, pp.35,42-43,62-63.

<sup>3</sup> *Baburnama* in English (Memoirs of Babur), tr. A.S. Beveridge, London, 1922; 2 volumes bound in 1, Low price publication, Delhi, 2017, p.520.

<sup>4</sup> Tavernier, Jean Baptist Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Trans. From the original French by V. Ball, LL.D., F.R.S., F.G.S., in 2 Volumes, Macmillan and Co., London, 1889; 2d ed. revised by W. Croke, London, 1925. I, p.32

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Coryat, *Early Travels in India* (1583-1619), ed. William Foster, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921. p.244

Terry, who noted about Coryat's journey after his death, noted for the imperial highway from Lahore to Agra, a distance of four hundred English miles, that and the rode-way on both sides all this long-distance planted with great trees, which are clothed with leaves all the year, exceedingly beneficial unto travellers for the shade they afford in those climes. Travellers refer to this extremely long distance as the Long Walk.<sup>6</sup> When describing the regions of the Mughal empire, Thomas Roe observed that the distance from Agra to Lahore was 320 kilometres (700 miles). Everything is a plane and a highway. It is one of the world's great works and wonders, with trees planted on both sides like a delicate stroll. Tavernier, a regular visitor to India in the mid-seventeenth century, said "Nearly all the way from Lahore to Delhi, and from Delhi to Agra, is like a continuous avenue planted throughout with beautiful trees on both sides, which is very pleasant to view;" but he showed displeasure for not taking care of the trees in these words " However, in other areas, they have been left to perish and little care has been made to grow a replacement."<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, they discovered 34 *kos-minars* on the Agra-Delhi route and 78 *kos-minars* on the Delhi-Lahore Road. At least twenty *kos-minars* were discovered on the route between Agra and Allahabad.<sup>8</sup> In 1641, *Zamindars* along the road between Agra and Lahore were ordered to erect a milestone every *kos* (2 miles) and to dig a well every 3 *kos*.<sup>9</sup> These minars were composed of several types of bricks or stone coated with plaster.<sup>10</sup> The shape and size of these minars varied according to the area. The remaining minars on the Agra-Lahore route appear to be cylindrical columns on octagonal bases, with heights ranging from 6 to 10 metres.<sup>11</sup>

The route from Agra to Lahore was also noted for its many good *Sarais*.<sup>12</sup> The existence of wells and tanks for water for travellers was another advantage supplied by Mughal routes. Almost all of the *sarais* had wells. Mughal rulers, particularly Jahangir, took a keen interest in this charitable activity and ordered the construction of wells along the roads. After coming to the throne, Jahangir directed the *jagirdars* of the surrounding region to construct *sarais* and dig wells; if the area was under *khalisa*, i.e., under direct imperial control, the *mutasaddis* were directed to accomplish this work. Again, in the fourteenth regnal year, he ordered to dig wells at a distance of three *kos*, on the route from Agra to Lahore. Bernier, during his journey from Agra to Delhi, met frequently with wells, which afforded drinking water to the travellers and served water to the young trees as well.<sup>13</sup> In the northwestern region, Agra was well connected to the city of Lahore<sup>14</sup> and had brisk trading relations with the region.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Edward Terry (1616-19) in William Foster, *Early Travels in India (1583-1619)*, Low Price Publication, 2012 p.283-84

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels of India*, 1977, vol.I, p.78

<sup>8</sup> Annual progress report, Archaeological survey of India, 1914, p.45-47

<sup>9</sup> Irfan Habib, , *The Agrarian System of Mughal India: 1556-1707*, 1st pub.1963, second revised edition, OUP, New Delhi, 1999. p.414-15.

<sup>10</sup> Subhash Parihar, , *Land Transport in Mughal India: Agra-Lahore Mughal Highway and its Architectural Remains*, Aryan Books International Delhi, 2008. p.14.

<sup>11</sup> Annual progress report, 1914, p.44,45

<sup>12</sup> *Travels Fray Sebastien Manrique of 1629-43*, tr. C.E Luard, assisted by H. Hosten, Hakluyt Society, (London, 1927), vol. II, p.184.

<sup>13</sup> Francious Bernier, *Travels in the Mughal Empire 1656-58* (London: Archibald Constable, 1891), p.284

<sup>14</sup> Edward Terry, *Early Travels in India*, p. 293.

<sup>15</sup> *Jahangir's India: The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, pp. 30-31.

Thomas Coryat records regarding the excellent connectivity between Agra and Lahore, to quote: “*from Lahore to Agra it is four hundred English miles, and that the countrey betwixt both these great cities is rich, even, pleasant, and flat, a campania; and the rode-way on both sides all this long distance planted with great trees, which are all the year cloathed with leaves, exceeding beneficial unto travellers for the shade they afford them in those hot climes. This very much extended length of way ‘twixt these two places is called by travellers the Long Walk, very full of villages and towns for passengers everywhere to find provision.*”<sup>16</sup>

Early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century William Finch while travelling from Agra to Lahore saw the famous Barapalla bridge Near Delhi.<sup>17</sup> It was said to have been built under the direction of meh’rban Agha the chief eunuch at Jahangir’s court. Near Lahore, at Sirhind, Finch saw another beautiful stone bridge which he described as most beautiful stone bridge supported upon fifteen fine great arches. In Lahore itself there was a strong bridge built in 1590 by the author of *Tarikh-i-Humayun wa Akbar*, Bayazid Biyat.<sup>18</sup>

**Commodities:** Abul Fazl describes that about twenty kinds of woollens from Lahore were available in the Agra markets. The overland route from Lahore to Persia was also used by travellers and merchants thus the trade between Agra and Lahore also exchanged goods for Persia and from Persia. Pelsaert even mentions that before the entry of English in the Agra trade, the indigo from Agra was carried to Europe through Lahore which is why the indigo brought to Europe was known as Lauri or more properly Lahori.<sup>19</sup>

Agra imported from Lahore commodities like horses, woollens, ormesines and carpets and other commodities such as fruits<sup>20</sup> from Kabul, hing (asafoetida) from Kandhar region and diverse commodities obtained from Multan region.<sup>21</sup> Sal ammoniac was also imported from the Lahore route and was found in the Thanesar or Sirhind region. Pelsaert reported that it was sold at a good price of 7 to 7.5 rupees per maund at Agra during the reign of Jahangir.<sup>22</sup> Agra on the other hand exported to Lahore all kinds of cotton textiles from Bengal and Golconda region, ivory, vermilion, quicksilver, corals, turbans, pepper and most of the spices and drugs. Quantities of spices and red salu (which reached from Burhanpur to Agra) were sent to Multan from Agra via the Lahore route.<sup>23</sup> The extent of the Agra-Lahore trade could also be gathered from the fact that the city of Agra even had a *sarai* named Lahori *sarai*.

The English complained that the emperor had impounded all the carts and camels to carry royal goods to Lahore.<sup>24</sup> Monserrate mentioned various kinds of commodities which were produced in the city of Agra and also imported from different places not only from India but from different corners of the world.<sup>25</sup> Abul Fazl wrote that ‘twenty kinds of Lahore woollen stuff were on sale in the Agra market.’<sup>26</sup> Ralph Fitch who visited

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Coryat, *Early Travels in India*, pp. 283-84.

<sup>17</sup> William Finch, *Early Travels in India*, (1583-1619), ed. William Foster, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921.p.156

<sup>18</sup> Bayazid Biyat, *Tarikh-i-Humayun wa Akbar*, Calcutta, 1941, pp.374-75.

<sup>19</sup> Jahangir’s India: *The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>24</sup> *E.F.I.* 1646-1650, p. 225

<sup>25</sup> Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, ed. by S. N. Banerjee & John S. Hoyland, 1922, pp. 35-36

<sup>26</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari*, Nawal Kishore’s edition, Vol. I, Lucknow, 1881, p.67

Agra in the 1580s writes that: "The city is much populous and much greater than London."<sup>27</sup> Fitch also records there is a great resort of merchants from Persia and out of India, and very much merchandise of silk and cloth, and of precious stones, both rubies, diamonds, and pearls."<sup>28</sup> The city was thus a thriving centre for trade and not only foreign goods but even the foreign merchants were well settled in large numbers within the city. Merchants from Persia, Europe, Aleppo, Arab, Armenia and other such regions were to be found within the city well placed in the economic set up of the city. The Armenian merchants were frequent visitors to the city and brought quantities of broadcloth by the overland route from Lahore.<sup>29</sup>

William Finch records how he purchased 12 carts of nil (indigo) and departed from Agra to export indigo to Lahore in order to recover his debts and in the hope of a good price for Agra indigo.<sup>30</sup> Besides Agra itself was the producer of cotton cloth. Tavernier mentions regarding the textile industry of Agra that white cotton cloths come partly from Agra itself and partly from the vicinity of Lahore.<sup>31</sup> Apart from textiles meant for use in dress materials for all income groups, the development of furnishings received no less encouragement. Akbar took initiative and a keen interest in carpet making at the imperial *karkhanas* of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, and Lahore."<sup>32</sup> It appears that till about the time of the Mughals, shawl-making was primarily confined to the Kashmir region. With Akbar's active interest, Lahore soon emerged as a prominent centre with more than a thousand units of manufacture. A mixture of silk and wool, called *Mayan*, of Lahore was highly commended."

Father Monserrate, who accompanied Akbar on his journey to Kabul in 1581, while describing the prosperity of Lahore, said, it was second to 'no city in Asia' or Europe, and that its shops were so full of every kind of merchandise and so full of people that passage was difficult. Situating on the Ravi River and possessing the port of Lahori Bandar, the city was well connected with the main overland and maritime trade routes leading to Persia, Arabia and Central Asia. During the reign of the Mughals. In the northwestern area, there were two land routes for export trade: one from Kandahar to Multan and another from Kandahar to Kabul. The first route, from Kandahar to Multan, was less in miles than the one via Kabul, but it ran into desert and required 3 to 4 days of walking without water. As a result, the road from Kandahar to Kabul was largely used. This route has 24 stages: 22 from Kabul to Lahore, 18 from Lahore to Delhi, and 6 from Delhi to Agra.<sup>33</sup> The merchants of India used to gather at Lahore and invest a large portion of their money on goods before joining caravans to cross the Kandhar mountains into Persia.

The City of Lahore acted as an important production centre, as all kinds of carpet weavers had settled there which led to a flourishing trade.<sup>34</sup> Carpet weaving continued to be an important industry in Lahore during

<sup>27</sup> Ralph Fitch, *England's Pioneer to India and Burma: His companions and Contemporaries*, by J. Horton Ryley, London, 1899, p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Ralph Fitch, *Early Travels in India*, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> *English Factories in India*, (1642-45), VII, 1913, p. 18; *English Factories in India*, (1646-51), VIII, 1914, p. 50; *English Factories in India*, (1651-54), IX, 1915, p. 30, here it says that it was brought from Persia.

<sup>30</sup> William Finch, *Early Travels in India*, p. 155.

<sup>31</sup> Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. 2, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i Akbari* p.442.

<sup>33</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels of India*, 1977, vol. I, p. 30

<sup>34</sup> Surendranath Sen, ed., *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, (Delhi: The National Archives of India, 1949), p. 17.

the seventeenth century and catered to the demands of both the internal and external markets<sup>35</sup>, During the reign of Akbar, there were more than a thousand *Karkhanas* in Lahore. Agra supplied the majority of the spices sold in Lahore for local consumption. Cotton fabrics from Lahore and Delhi were marketed at Ahmadabad.<sup>36</sup> Lahore had some superb wine and the best sugar in all of Hindustan.<sup>37</sup> Sugar and Ginger were the main commodities sent from Lahore, Multan produced a considerable amount of sugar, which was transported to Thatta and Lahore, while candies and powder were transported by water to Multan from Lahore.<sup>38</sup> In 1639, the price of sugar (being white, but much less in quality than that at Agra) was ₹7 per manpack and the second type at ₹5.75 and ₹6; sugar candy at ₹11 was manufactured in large numbers here; suffocannes from ₹40-60 per cargo; cantaurs at ₹30 per cargo; Chintz at ₹30, ₹36, and ₹37 per cargo; and salloos at ₹32 each cargo.<sup>39</sup> Sugar prices in Agra were as follows: in 1639, ₹10; in 1646, ₹4.75 to ₹6; and in 1651, ₹6 per man-i Shah Jahani.<sup>40</sup> The freight of goods from various places to Lahore was: ₹2 per man from Agra (if the camp is not that way) to Lahore; ₹1 per man from Serwerpore (from where the majority of sugar comes to this place); ₹0.75 per man from Sirhind to Lahore; and 46 seer per rupee from Lahore to Multan. from Lahore to Thatta ₹0.75 per person, but the best option was to buy a boat for ₹250, which could be sold at a profit or at the original cost in Thatta.<sup>41</sup> The customs tax paid at Lahore on all products travelling to Kandahar or down the river to Sind was 2.25 per cent, with some additional costs at the ghat or passage of 0.25 per cent. Fremlen was sure that transporting Agra products via Lahore to Thatta instead of Burhanpur or Ahmadabad to Surat would save the firm money.<sup>42</sup>

Bazaar food costs in Agra, the Mughal capital from 1526 to 1658, remained at least twenty per cent higher than in Lahore between 1595 and 1708. All five rivers, according to Niccolo Manucci, are passable by big boats.<sup>94</sup> Large ships were built at Lahore and Allahabad and then shipped to the shore. With the acquisition of Sind in 1591, the port of Lahori Bandar entered into the hands of Akbar. Sind lacked timber, so Akbar had an excellent plan of making ships at Lahore, 650 miles distant from Thatta. Lahore, for its part, benefited from its closeness to Himalayan wood supplies.<sup>95</sup> The boat-building business was present along all of the major rivers, with Wazirabad on the bank of Chenab in Rachnao Doab serving as a major hub. The traders were well renowned for removing the Sal wood from the mountains of Chamba and driving it through the Chenab stream for substantial exchange profits.

From Kashmir, another important centre, saffron and rice were taken to Lahore by boat and then overland to Agra. Most of Kashmiri's exports are therefore shipped down the Jhelum to Lahore<sup>43</sup> The best and greatest amount of musk came from the Kingdom of Bhutan, where it was transported to Patna and sold to the people of the nation. Persia supplied all of the musk sold there, and in exchange, they received golden amber and

<sup>35</sup> William Foster, *EFI*, 1618-21, 51, 168; William Foster, ed. *EFI*, 1624-29, (Oxford, 1909), p.93.

<sup>36</sup> Surendranath Sen, ed., *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, (Delhi: The National Archives of India, 1949), p.17.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85

<sup>38</sup> Jahangir's India: *The Remonstrantie* of Francisco Pelsaert, p.31

<sup>39</sup> William Foster, *EFI*, 1637-41, p.135.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.135-36.

<sup>42</sup> William Foster, *EFI*, 1634-36, p.244.

<sup>43</sup> Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, p.316.

coral rather than gold and money.<sup>104</sup> Bhutanese merchants returning from Lahore, Multan, and Agra brought back calicoes, indigo, carnelian, and crystal beads.<sup>105</sup> The civet known to Europeans appears to have been musk from Bhutan, much as indigo from Bayana was dubbed Lahore indigo due to its overland passage via Lahore.<sup>44</sup>

It appears that a distinct market for clothes with needlework existed in Lahore as well, similar to what we see in Agra, where patterns were stitched with gold and silver wire on turbans and garments of affluent ladies. Nur Jahan's support resulted in the development of a whole market in Agra known as kinnari-bazar.<sup>45</sup> Panipat cloth was shipped to Lahore for sale.<sup>40</sup> Those created in Lahore were the coarsest and hence the cheapest. These were sold in cargoes, with each cargo including 20 pieces and costing between '16 and 30 rupees.<sup>46</sup> The semianas were a kind of cotton textile from the town of Samana.<sup>47</sup> In 1620, the Mogoles (merchants from upper India or Persia) and *Praychaces* (in Sanskrit, *purbhiya*—an inhabitant of the countries to the eastwards, that is to those at Agra) were found at Lahore like bees, whose cheapest provisions were *mandyles* (a turban cloth woven with silk and gold thread) *gidells*, *layches* and *doupattas* (a kind of narrow calico) of Malda. These were purchased for transportation to Lahore and then to Persia.<sup>48</sup>

Lahore produced a great amount of quality fabric, including many pieces of silk in various colours known as *alachah*, as well as extensive work in embroidery, plain and patterned carpets, good bows and arrows, tents, saddles, swords, coarse woollen stuff, boots and shoes. Lahore produced not only all types of painted fabrics but also everything made in the Indies. The company's orders were transmitted to the factories concerned on November 7, 1621, "that they have disbanded their factories at Lahore and relocated it to Agra, where semianoes were to be procured and Lahore indigo was readily available at Lahore, with far fewer expenses." In 1634, a Dutch factor noted that the entire worth of textiles, indigo, sugar, and gum lac shipped annually from Agra, Lahore, Sind, Gujrat, and Daulatabad and sold in Iranian markets was 2,130,350 *mahamudis* or 24.20 metric tonnes of silver.<sup>109</sup> According to other Dutch sources, the merchants of Surat alone import 22.7 tonnes of silver each year.<sup>49</sup>

Both cities played crucial roles in the Mughal economy with Agra as a major economic and administrative centre, and Lahore as a key trade and cultural hub in the northwest region of the empire, geographical factors facilitated the trade between the cities, a diverse range of Goods were traded.

<sup>44</sup> Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of Mughal Empire c.1595: A Statistical Study*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press,1987), p.319.

<sup>45</sup> K.K Trivedi, *Agra: Economic and Political Profile of a Mughal Suba 1580-1707*, (Pune: Ravish Publishers,1998), pp. 142-43.

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels of India*,1977, vol.II, p.4.

<sup>47</sup> William Foster, *EFI*,1618-21pp.47,161,168,337.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*p.195

<sup>49</sup> S.Jeyaseela Stephen,ed.,*The Indian Trade at the Asian Frontier*,(Delhi,2008),p.257.

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