
*Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush: Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade**

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Historical analyses of slavery in India generally emphasize the escalation of this social institution during the era of Muslim domination in north India.¹ The present study is not an exception to this rule. However, while historical records make it clear that the Delhi Sultans and Mughal emperors retained slavery in order to suit their political and economic needs, it should be emphasized that Muslim rulers did not introduce slavery to the subcontinent. Sources such as the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Manu-smṛiti* and the *Mahābhārata* demonstrate that institutionalized slavery was well established in India by beginning of the common era. Earlier sources suggest that it was likely to have been equally widespread by the lifetime of the Buddha (sixth century BC), and perhaps even as far back as the Vedic period.² Furthermore, just as slavery was common in India long before the eighth-century Islamic conquests in Sind, recent work demonstrates that the institution continued, in various manifestations, well after the decentralization of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century.³ Still, it is argued here that the expansion of slavery in Muslim India is an important component of the medieval and early modern history of the region and, at least in terms of its role in the commercial and cultural relations of India and Central Asia, it is a subject that would benefit from further historical analysis.

Discussions of the movement of peoples between India and Central Asia have generally focused on the activities of merchants, scholars, religious figures, political elites and invaders. These groups can be credited with establishing and maintaining the bonds which in many ways formed a cultural and economic bridge connecting north India and Central Asia. Still, one must be careful not to overlook slaves as a group of people who, despite their low status, comprised another important aspect of Indo-Central Asian relations. The

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¹ As one might expect, a number of these works suffer from a strong ideological bias. For two of the more useful recent studies, see K. S. Lal, *Muslim Slave System in Medieval India* (New Delhi, 1994); Salim Kidwai, 'Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics: New Forms of Bondage in Medieval India', in Utsa Patnaik and Manjari Dingwaney (eds), *Chains of Servitude: bondage and slavery in India* (Madras, 1985), pp. 76–96.

² Cf. Anal Kumar Chattopadhyay, *Slavery in India* (Calcutta, 1959), p. iv; Uma Chakravarti, 'Of Dasas and Karmakaras: Servile Labour in Ancient India', in Patnaik and Dingwaney, *Chains of Servitude*, p. 37. While it is likely that the institution of slavery existed in India during the Vedic period, the association of the Vedic "Dasas" with "slaves" is problematic and likely to have been a later development.

³ See Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1999). Chatterjee provides an excellent historiographical essay on slavery in India and its relationship to the caste system in her first chapter, 'Searching for Slaves in Indian History', pp. 1–33.

transportation of people as a commodity across India's northwest frontier dates, like the institution of slavery itself, to ancient times. Alongside Buddhist Qalmaqs (Oirats), Christian Russians, non-Sunni Afghans, and the predominantly Shi'a Iranians, Hindu slaves were an important component of the highly active slave markets of medieval and early modern Central Asia. The history of the institution of slavery in India and Central Asia is a subject that merits much more attention than can be offered in this brief study.⁴ The intention here is only to demonstrate that the slave trade between India and Central Asia was significant, and to suggest that the movement of considerable numbers of Hindus to the Central Asian slave markets was largely a product of the state-building efforts of the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire in South Asia.

The slave population of early modern Central Asia was considerable; virtually every affluent household included several slaves to look after its affairs and maintain the garden, and large numbers of slaves were used to cultivate the land and watch over livestock on the plantation-style farms of Central Asia's wealthy families.⁵ Slaves were also used for such purposes as soldiering, maintaining irrigation canals, working in brick factories, and many were trained in construction engineering.⁶ The seventeenth-century *Maṭlab al-ṭālibin* records, for example, that one Juybari Sheikh (a Naqshbandi Sufi leader) owned over 500 slaves, forty of whom were specialists in pottery production while the others were engaged in agricultural work, tending livestock, and carpentry.⁷ Demand was especially high for skilled slaves, and India's comparatively larger and more advanced textile industry and agricultural production, and its magnificent imperial architecture, demonstrated to its neighbours that skilled labour was abundant in the subcontinent.⁸ This accounted for the common practice of rival political powers enslaving and relocating large numbers of artisans following successful invasions.⁹ For example, during Timur's late fourteenth-century sack of Delhi, several thousand skilled artisans were enslaved and taken to Central Asia. Timur presented many of these slaves to his subordinate elite, although he reserved the masons for use in the construction of the Bibi Khanum mosque, located in his flourishing capital of Samarqand.¹⁰ It is perhaps not surprising that attractive, young female

⁴ For a social analysis of slavery in nineteenth-century Bukhara, including facsimiles of Persian-language archival records, see T. Faiziev, *Bukhoro feodal jamiyatida qullardan foidalanishga doir hujjatlar (XIX Asr)*, in Uzbek (Tashkent, 1990).

⁵ According to Mukminova, the majority of slaves mentioned in sixteenth-century *waqfnāmas* were used for agricultural purposes or to tend livestock. Cf. R. G. Mukminova, *Sotsial'naia differentsiatsiia naseleniia gorodov Uzbekistana v XV–XVI vv.* (Tashkent, 1985), pp. 122–123; Anthony Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels to Russia and Persia . . .*, edited by E. Delmar Morgan and C. H. Coote, Hakluyt Society Publications, 2 vols, 1st ser., nos 72–73 (London, 1886), I, p. 89, note 2.

⁶ Mukminova, *Sotsial'naia differentsiatsiia*, pp. 122–123.

⁷ Muhammad Talib, *Maṭlab al-ṭālibin*, Oriental Studies Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (henceforth abbreviated OSIASRU), Ms. No. 80, fols 117a–18a. Muhammad Talib elsewhere reports of one Juybari Sheikh said to have owned 300 slaves, and another who owned 400 slaves. *Ibid.*, fols 48a, 198b.

⁸ See Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 279–280. See also the discussion of the Indian textile industry in Scott Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550–1900* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 71–82.

⁹ Mukminova, *Sotsial'naia differentsiatsiia*, p. 125.

¹⁰ Beatrice Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 80, 90; Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib, eds, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 1, c. 1200 – c. 1750 (Hyderabad, 1984), p. 91; Surendra Gopal, 'Indians in Central Asia, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', Presidential Address, Medieval India Section of the Indian History Congress, New Delhi, February 1992 (Patna, 1992), p. 4. To this day the Bibi Khanum complex, magnificent even in ruins, is the largest religious structure in ex-Soviet Central Asia.

slaves commonly demanded an even higher market price than those skilled at construction engineering.¹¹

Because of their identification in Muslim societies as *kāfirs*, “non-believers”, Hindus were especially in demand in the early modern Central Asian slave markets.¹² They were by no means, however, the only ethnic or religious group present in large numbers. It is well known that the slave markets were also stocked with considerable numbers of Iranian slaves, whose association with the *Shī‘a* sect of Islam made them legitimate targets for the *Sunnī* Muslim Uzbek and Turkman slave traders. The abundance of Iranian slaves in early modern Central Asia is generally attributed to the great number of prisoners taken during the Uzbeks’ wars with the Safavids and, in later years, to repeated Turkman raids on the poorly protected villages of northeastern Iran.¹³ It is also well known that Christian Russians were similarly abducted from their frontier settlements by Qalmaq, Crimean Tatar, Nogay and Bashkir pastoralists and brought to the markets of Khiva, from where many were further transported to Bukhara and Balkh.¹⁴

Despite ample evidence demonstrating the presence of a considerable population of Indian slaves in medieval and early modern Central Asia, this aspect of the Central Asian slave trade has received much less attention. A survey of available sources reveals that a Bukharan *waqf-nāma* (a letter indicating a religious endowment) written in 1326 repeatedly lists Indian slaves together with slaves from various other parts of Asia.¹⁵ A similar document dating to 1489 from the archive of the great Naqshbandi Sheikh Khwaja Ahrar (1404–90) mentions a group of Indian slaves working as agricultural labourers and artisans on an estate near Bukhara.¹⁶ Furthermore, the presence of Hindu slaves even among the Turkic pastoral groups in early modern Central Asia is mentioned in an account of the Uzbek ruler Shibani Khan’s victory over the Qazaq ruler Tanish Sultan.¹⁷ According to this account, in the winter of 1509–10, a fourteen-year-old Indian slave escaped from his cruel master in a Qazaq *qishlaq* (winter encampment) near the city of Turkestan and, while wandering through the steppe, fortuitously came across the encampment of Shibani Khan and informed the Uzbeks of the location of the enemy Qazaq *qishlaq*. This enabled the

¹¹ According to the account of Baron Meyendorff, in the 1820s in Central Asia a slave skilled as a craftsman was valued at approximately 100 *tilla*, whereas an attractive young female slave could fetch as much as 150 *tilla*. E. K. Meyendorff, *Puteshestvie iz Orenburga v Bukharu*, Russian translation by N. A. Khalfin (Moscow, 1975), p. 145.

¹² The overwhelming number of Hindus in India motivated Muslim rulers in India to grant them *dhimmi* (protected) status for purposes of expediency. However, Muslim rulers outside of the subcontinent did not share such motivations. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 281–283, 291.

¹³ In addition to *Shī‘a* slaves, there is also reported to have been a number of Zoroastrian slaves in sixteenth-century Central Asia. Mukminova, *Sotsial’naia differentsiatsiia*, p. 122.

¹⁴ See Audrey Burton, ‘Russian Slaves in 17th-Century Bukhara’, in Touraj Atabaki and John O’Kane, eds, *Post-Soviet Central Asia* (London, 1998), pp. 345–365. One Russian account claims that in the 1660s there were 20,000 Russians held captive in Bukhara, Balkh and Urgench. This is most certainly an exaggeration designed to spark the Tsar’s interest in investing in their freedom. A later source, dating to the 1720s, places the figure at the more believable 2,000. *Ibid.*, pp. 355–356, 362. See also Capt. R. A. Clarke, ed., ‘A Voyage to Uzbekistan in 1671–1672’, in Sir Duncan Cumming, ed., *The Country of the Turkoman: An anthology of exploration from the Royal Geographical Society* (London, 1977), p. 87.

¹⁵ O. D. Chekhovich, *Bukharskie dokumenty, XIV veka* (Tashkent, 1965), pp. 108–110; Russian trans., pp. 184–185; facs., pp. 315–316.

¹⁶ *Idem*, *Samarkandskie dokumenty, XV–XVI veka* (Moscow, 1974), p. 172; Russian trans., pp. 232–233, facs., p. 575.

¹⁷ Fazl ‘Allah ibn Ruzbihan Isfahani, *Mihmān-nāma-i Bukhārā*, translated by R. P. Zhalilova (Moscow, 1976), fols 105a–7a; Russian trans., pp. 135–137.

Uzbeks to defeat Tanish Sultan's forces, for which the slave earned the favour of Shibani Khan, who renamed him "Khush Khabar" ("Good News").

Significant numbers of Indians were taken to the slave markets of Central Asia in a variety of ways. It is a regular, persistent feature in the commercial history of the region that many slaves were exported by caravan merchants, who either purchased them outright or received them in exchange for other commodities in demand in India, especially horses.¹⁸ While travelling from Lahore to Kabul in 1581 the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Father Antonio Monserrate reported that one tribe in the Punjab, identified as the "Gaccares" (Ghakkars), had made mediating the trade of Indian slaves for Central Asian ("Turki") horses such a regular practice that they had even become associated with the proverb, "slaves from India, horses from Parthia".¹⁹ The Central Asian slave markets swelled with Indians following Shah Jahan's aborted annexation of Balkh in 1646–47 and the capture and enslavement of many of the retreating Indian soldiers.²⁰ According to the Uzbek chronicler Muhammad Yusuf Munshi, following a four-month siege of the Indian army in Balkh during an unusually severe winter, Shah Jahan recalled his starving army to India and, during their retreat, the Central Asian "wolves" captured the fleeing Indian "slave-sheep" from every direction and took them to Samarqand, Turkestan and Tashkent.²¹ Although this event was unique in the history of the region, it resulted in the influx of a large number of Indians into Central Asian society. Thus, whereas in 1589 a thirty-three-year-old male Indian slave in good health was sold in Samarqand for 225 *tanga*, after the Mughal retreat in 1647 the Central Asian slave markets were flooded and the price of an Indian slave dropped as low as 84 *tanga*.²²

Smaller numbers of skilled slaves were also commonly included in the gifts sent between the rulers of India and Central Asia. For example, in the sixteenth century, Badr al-Din Kashmiri reported that four slaves skilled in masonry were included in the gifts that the Mughal emperor Akbar had dispatched to the Bukharan ruler 'Abd Allah Khan II.²³ A century later, Shah Jahan is reported to have sent 100 Indian slaves to the Ashtarkhānid rulers Imam Quli Khan and Nadir Muhammad.²⁴ Also, in addition to their regular employees, Indian merchants venturing to Central Asia commonly brought slaves with them, many of whom were likely to have been sold in the Central Asian markets. Sources further demonstrate that, while traversing dangerous caravan routes, some unfortunate

¹⁸ Muzaffar Alam, 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, c.1550–1750', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 37, 3 (August, 1994), p. 207; Gopal, 'Indians in Central Asia', p. 13.

¹⁹ Cf. Father Antonio Monserrate, *The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S. J., on His Journey to the Court of Akbar*, translated by J. S. Hoyland, annotated by S. N. Banerjee (London, 1922), p. 117; Dirk H. A. Kolff, *Nawkar, Rajput and Sepoy: The ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450–1850* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 11.

²⁰ See the thorough treatment of this important event in Mughal-Uzbek political relations in Richard Foltz, 'The Mughal Occupation of Balkh, 1646–1647', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7, 1 (1996), pp. 49–61.

²¹ Muhammad Yusuf Munshi bin Khwaja Baqa, *Tadhkirah-i Muqim Khāni*, OSIASRU, Ms. No. 609/II, Russian translation by A. A. Semenov under the title *Mukimkhanskaia istoriia* (Tashkent, 1956), fols 323a–324a.

²² Cf. *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq*, OSIASRU, Ms. No. 1386, fol. 3a–b; Audrey Burton, 'Bukharan Trade, 1558–1718', Indiana University Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies: Papers on Inner Asia, no. 23 (Bloomington, 1993), p. 30 and note 137.

²³ Badr al-Din al-Kashmiri ibn 'Abd al-Salam al-Hussain, *Rauḍat al-riḍwān wa ḥadiqa al-ghilmān*, OSIASRU, Ms. No. 2094, fol. 261a.

²⁴ Burton, 'Bukharan Trade', p. 31, note 138.

Indian travellers were occasionally captured, robbed and, if not killed, sold into slavery.²⁵ The association of one Indian slave mentioned in the *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq* ("Collection of Judicial Decrees", the late sixteenth-century register of a *qāḍī* in Samarqand) as being from Multan suggests that, if he himself was not a Multani merchant fallen from grace, then he was most likely a slave that had been brought to Samarqand by a Multani merchant and subsequently sold in the local slave market.²⁶ Nearly a century earlier, Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire, recorded coming across a colony of 200–300 households of Indian slaves forced by a descendant of Timur to relocate from near Multan to the banks of the Baran river, a tributary of the Kabul river in Afghanistan, where they were engaged in the business of catching birds.²⁷

Probably the greatest factors contributing to the increased supply of Indian slaves for export to markets in Central Asia in this period were the military conquests and tax revenue policies of the Muslim rulers in the subcontinent.²⁸ Already during the early Arab invasions of Sind at the beginning of the eighth century, the armies of the Umayyad commander Muhammad bin Qasim are reported to have enslaved tens of thousands of Indian prisoners, including both soldiers and civilians.²⁹ The policy of enslaving conquered Indians continued in a much greater magnitude under the Turko-Afghan Ghaznavid invasions of subsequent centuries. For example, according to the *Tārīkh-i Firishta*, following the Ghaznavid capture of the Indian city of Thanesar in the year 1014, "the army of Islam brought to Ghazna about 200,000 captives (*qarīb do sīt hazār banda*), and much wealth, so that the capital appeared like an Indian city, no soldier of the camp being without wealth, or without many slaves". The same source also mentions that, several decades later, the Ghaznavid ruler Sultan Ibrahim led another raid into the Multan area of northwestern India and returned to Ghazna with 100,000 captives.³⁰ While it is important to note that *Firishta's* history was written several centuries after the Ghaznavid period, his assertions are supported by the reports of contemporary observers. For example, in his early

²⁵ See, for example, the account of the Indian merchant 'Ala al-Din Khan, who was captured while returning to India from Balkh in 1646. Living as a slave in Bukhara, and then in Khiva where he was owned by a Tatar woman, he eventually escaped to Cherny Yar where he was arrested by Russian authorities in 1661. He was then sent to Astrakhan where he applied to the Tsar for permission to convert to Christianity. K. A. Antonova, N. M. Gol'dberg and T. D. Lavrentsova, eds., *Russko-indiiskie otnosheniia v XVII v.* (Moscow, 1958), doc. 62, 1661, pp. 134–135. See also Alam, "Trade, State Policy and Regional Change", p. 207; Gopal, 'Indians in Central Asia', pp. 17–18.

²⁶ *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq*, fol. 37a. For discussions of Multani merchants, cf. Stephen Dale, *Indian Merchants and Eurasian Trade, 1600–1750* (Cambridge, 1994); Claude Markovits, *The Global World of Indian Merchants, 1750–1947: Traders of Sind from Bukhara to Panama* (Cambridge, 2000); Levi, *The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia*.

²⁷ Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, *Babur-nama: Memoirs of Babur*, edited and translated by Annette Beveridge, reprint (Delhi, 1989), p. 225.

²⁸ The enslavement of conquered peoples was common practice in India prior to the Islamic period. In his classic history of ancient India, A. L. Basham observed that the *Mahābhārata* considered it to be "a law of war that the vanquished should be the victor's slave." A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 153–154. For more on slavery laws in ancient India, see R. P. Kangle, *The Kautilya Arthaśāstra*, 3 vols (Bombay, 1960–1963), II, pp. 271–275; III, pp. 186–187.

²⁹ Mirza Kalichbeg Fredunbeg, tr., *The Chachnamah, an Ancient History of Sind, 1900*, reprint (Delhi, 1979), pp. 154, 163. This thirteenth-century source claims to be a Persian translation of an (apparently lost) eighth-century Arabic manuscript detailing the Islamic conquests of Sind. See also André Wink, *Al-Hind: the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 1, *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam, Seventh to Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden, 1990), p. 161.

³⁰ Muhammad Qasim *Firishta*, *Tārīkh-i-Firishta* (Lucknow, 1864), pp. 27–28, 48–49. See also André Wink, *Al-Hind: the Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 2, *The Slave Kings and the Islamic Conquest, 11th–13th Centuries* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 126–127.

eleventh-century *Tārīkh al-Yamīnī*, the Arab historian al-ʿUtībī recorded that in 1001 the armies of Mahmud of Ghazna conquered Peshawar and Waihand, “in the midst of the land of Hindustan”, and captured some 100,000 youths. Several years later, following his twelfth expedition into India in 1018–19, Mahmud is reported to have returned to his capital with such a large number of slaves that their value was placed at only two to ten *dirhams* each. This price was apparently so low that, according to al-ʿUtībī, “merchants came from distant cities to purchase them, so that the countries of Mā warāʾ an-nahr (Central Asia), ʿIrāq and Khurāsān were filled with them, and the fair and the dark, the rich and the poor, mingled in one common slavery”.³¹ Later, during the Delhi Sultanate period (1206–1555), references to the abundant availability of Indian slaves at low prices are common. This should be attributed primarily to the vast human resources of India, which boasted a much larger and denser population than its neighbours to the north and west.³² Many of these Indian slaves were reserved for use in the subcontinent, but their availability in substantial numbers greatly contributed to their affordability, which likewise increased their demand in international markets.

The revenue system of the Delhi Sultanate produced a considerable proportion of the Indian slave population as these rulers, and their subordinate *iqṭāʿdārs*, ordered their armies to abduct large numbers of Hindus as a means of extracting revenue.³³ While those communities that were loyal to the Sultan and regularly paid their taxes were often excused from this practice, taxes were commonly extracted from other, less loyal groups in the form of slaves. Thus, according to Barani, the Shamsi “slave-king” Balban (r. 1266–87) ordered his *iqṭāʿdārs* in Awadh to enslave those peoples resistant to his authority, implying those who refused to supply him with tax revenue.³⁴ Sultan ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Khaljī (r. 1296–1316) is similarly reported to have legalized the enslavement of those who defaulted on their revenue payments.³⁵ This policy continued during the Mughal era.³⁶

An even greater number of people were enslaved as a part of the efforts of the Delhi Sultans to finance their expansion into new territories.³⁷ For example, while he himself was still a military slave of the Ghurid Sultan Muʿizz al-Dīn, Qutb al-Dīn Aibak (r. 1206–10 as

³¹ Abu Nasr Muhammad al-ʿUtībī, *Tārīkh al-Yamīnī* (Delhi, 1847), pp. 395–408; Wink, *Al-Hind*, II, p. 126. See the more readily available edition translated from the Persian (translation of the Arabic original) by James Reynolds, *The Kitāb-i-Yamīnī* (London, 1858), pp. 282, 393. It is interesting that the account presented in the (generally less reliable) translation by Elliot and Dowson refers to the Ghaznavids capturing “five hundred thousand slaves, beautiful men and women.” See Henry M. Elliot and John Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, 8 vols (London, 1867–77), II, pp. 26. See also *ibid.*, pp. 39, 50.

³² The early modern populations of Uzbek Turan and Safavid Iran were not likely to have been much more than five million each, while at the end of the sixteenth century, the population of the Mughal Empire is estimated to have reached between sixty and ninety-eight million. See Dale, *Indian Merchants*, pp. 15–21.

³³ Cf. Raychaudhuri and Habib, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, I, pp. 89–90; Kidwai, ‘Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics’, p. 87.

³⁴ Zia ud-Dīn Barani, *Tārīkh-i-Firūz Shāhī*, edited by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, W. N. Lees and Kabiruddin, Bib. Ind. (Calcutta, 1860–62), pp. 57–59.

³⁵ Barani, *Tārīkh-i-Firūz Shāhī*, p. 382.

³⁶ Cf. Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor, or Mogul India 1653–1708*, 4 vols, translated by W. Irvine (London, 1907–8), II, p. 451; Sebastian Manrique, *Travels of Frey Sebastian Manrique*, 2 vols, translated by Eckford Luard (London, 1906), II, p. 272; François Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire, AD 1656–1668*, revised by Vincent Smith (Oxford, 1934), p. 205; Kidwai, ‘Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics’, pp. 87–88; Lal, *Slavery in India*, pp. 58–59.

³⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the complex relationship shared by the Muslim rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and their Hindu subjects, see the chapter ‘The sultans and their Hindu subjects’ in Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 278–295.

the first of the Shamsi slave-kings) invaded Gujarat in 1197 and placed some 20,000 people in bondage. Roughly six years later, he enslaved an additional 50,000 people during his conquest of Kalinjar.³⁸ Later in the thirteenth century, during Balban's campaign in Rantabhur, he is reported to have defeated the Hindu army and to have subsequently taken "captives beyond computation".³⁹ K. S. Lal's assertion that the forcible enslavement of Indians due to military expansion "gained momentum" under the Khalji and Tughluq dynasties is supported by available figures.⁴⁰ At the beginning of the fourteenth century, Barani suggested that Sultan 'Ala' al-Din Khalji owned some 50,000 slave-boys, and had an additional 70,000 slaves engaged in architectural construction. Later that century, Sultan Firuz Tughluq is said to have owned 180,000 slaves, roughly 12,000 of whom were skilled artisans.⁴¹ It should be noted that many of the very large number of slaves owned by Sultans 'Ala' al-Din Khalji and Firuz Tughluq were likely to have been military slaves who were not used as labourers or domestics. Still, despite earlier traditions of maintaining an army comprised of both Hindu soldiers and Turkic slave-soldiers (*ghulāms*, *mamlūks*) from Central Asia, the early thirteenth-century rise of the Mongol Empire disrupted the movement of Turkic Mamluks to the Delhi Sultanate and forced the Delhi Sultans to turn to local Indian populations to satisfy their demand for both military and domestic slaves.⁴²

By and large, the enslavement of Hindus and their exportation to Central Asia continued unhindered throughout the Mughal period. Although the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) attempted to prohibit the practice of enslaving conquered Hindus, his efforts were only temporarily successful.⁴³ According to one early seventeenth-century account, 'Abd Allah Khan Firuz Jang, an Uzbek noble at the Mughal court during the 1620s and 1630s, was appointed to the position of governor of the regions of Kalpi and Kher and, in the process of subjugating the local rebels, "beheaded the leaders and enslaved their women, daughters and children, who were more than 2 lacks [200,000] in number".⁴⁴ Whether agriculturalists or pastoralists, following their enslavement many of these individuals were sent in large numbers to markets beyond India's northwest frontier, far from their family support systems. Recognizing that the figures presented in the chronicles and other accounts are likely to be exaggerated, it still seems reasonable to accept the estimation that, over the years, Mughal military expansion in India accounts for the

³⁸ Minhaj al-Siraj Jurjani, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, translated by H. G. Raverty, 2 vols (New Delhi, 1970), I, pp. 522–523.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, p. 828. For more on Balban's enslavement of Indians, see *ibid.*, I, pp. 680, 683. See also Lal, *Slavery in India*, pp. 46–47.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴¹ Cf. Barani, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, p. 45, 341; Shams-i Sirāj 'Affif, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, Bib. Ind. (Calcutta, 1890), pp. 267–273. See also Kidwai, 'Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics', pp. 84, 87; Lal, *Slavery in India*, pp. 50–51; Vincent A. Smith, *Oxford History of India*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1961), p. 236; Raychaudhuri and Habib, *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, I, pp. 89–90.

⁴² Cf. Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*, pp. 103–122, 280; Kidwai, 'Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics', pp. 84–85. It is interesting that, following the Khalji armies' victories over the Mongols, the Delhi Sultans are reported to have captured thousands of Mongols and sold them as slaves in India. Barani, *Tārīkh-i Firūz Shāhī*, pp. 253–254, 320–322.

⁴³ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Akbar Nama of Abu-l-Fazl*, 3 vols, translated by Henry Beveridge, reprint (Delhi, 1998), II, pp. 246–247.

⁴⁴ Francisco Pelsaert, *A Dutch Chronicle of Mughal India*, translated and edited by Brij Narain and Sri Ram Sharma (Lahore, 1978), p. 48. See also Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*, pp. 12–14; John Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, *The New Cambridge History of India*, vol. 5, part 1, 1993, reprint (Cambridge, 1995), p. 128.

enslavement and exportation of hundreds of thousands of individuals. This included not only those men who militarily resisted the Mughal armies, but also vast numbers of women and children. The slave population was significantly augmented by the considerable number of children who were sold into slavery by financially destitute parents, a factor that increased dramatically in times of famine or other economic hardship.⁴⁵ As noted above, mediatory traders, such as the Ghakkars, purchased many of the conquered and destitute and marched them to India's northwest frontier to be exchanged for Central Asian horses.

While a detailed study of slavery in early modern Central Asia has yet to be written, a survey of available sources reveals the presence of significant numbers of Indian slaves in the region. For example, the Uzbek ruler Kuchkunchi Khan (an uncle of Shibani Khan and ruler of Samarqand from 1510–30) is reported to have used ninety-five Indian slaves for the construction of irrigation canals in the vicinity of the Central Asian city of Turkestan.⁴⁶ According to Muhammad Talib, author of the *Maṭlab al-ṭālibin*, the late sixteenth-century Juybari Sheikh Khwaja Sa'īd, son and successor of the great Sheikh Khwaja Islam (c. 1492–1563), had in his possession “1000 slaves of Indian, Qalmaq, and Russian origin” many of whom tended his fields and animal herds, while others were engaged in construction and in household services.⁴⁷ In 1558, the Englishman Anthony Jenkinson visited Central Asia where he noted the vitality of the Bukharan slave market and observed that Indian and Iranian merchants who visited Bukhara commonly dealt in slaves.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, there is no means by which to determine precisely how abundant Indian slaves were in early modern Central Asia. It is, however, possible to establish a rough estimate of the proportion of slaves of Indian origin in relation to those of other regions, at least in terms of the slave population of late sixteenth-century Samarqand. A survey of seventy-seven letters regarding the manumission or sale of slaves in the *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq* reveals that slaves of Indian origin (*hindī al-āṣl*) accounted for over 58 per cent of those whose region of origin is mentioned.⁴⁹ It must be emphasized that the *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq* provides a relatively small, restricted sample. It would be irresponsible to suggest that, based on the information elicited from this source, 58 per cent of the population of slaves in all of Central Asia was of Indian origin. However, the predominance of Indian slaves in the early modern markets of Central Asia is further supported by information found in the *Khutūt-i*

⁴⁵ Kidwai, 'Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics', p. 88.

⁴⁶ P. P. Ivanov, *Khoziaistvo dzhuibarskikh sheikhov: k istorii feodal'nogo zemlevladieniia v Srednei Azii v XVI–XVII vv.* (Moscow, 1954), p. 24.

⁴⁷ Muhammad Talib, *Maṭlab al-ṭālibin*, fol. 81a–b. Unfortunately Talib does not mention the proportions of each. Although Indian slaves are not mentioned specifically, it is reasonable to assume that they were part of the contingency of roughly 3,000 slaves used by Yalangtosh Bey, the *vazir* of the Ashtarkhānid ruler 'Abd al-'Aziz Khan (r. 1645–80), to construct the Sherdar and Tillakari madrasas in Samarqand. Cf. Mukminova, *Sotsial'naiia differentsiatsiia*, p. 125; P. P. Ivanov, *Ocherki po istorii Srednei Azii (XVI–serediina XIX v.)* (Moscow, 1958), p. 71. A significant number of Indians were also likely to have been included in the hundreds of slaves owned by the Juybari Sheikhs, mentioned in note 7, above.

⁴⁸ Jenkinson, *Early Voyages and Travels*, I, pp. 88–89. According to Morgan and Coote, editors of Jenkinson's account, the Bukharan slave market was the largest in the region. *Ibid.*, I, p. 89, note 2.

⁴⁹ See *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq*, fols 3a–50b. Of the seventy-seven slaves referred to in these entries, which date from 1588–92, twenty-nine are identified as being “born of the house” (*khānahzād*) with no information given as to their ethnic identity. Twenty-eight of the remaining slaves are identified as being “of Indian origin” (*hindī al-āṣl*); fifteen as being “of Afghan origin” (*āfghāni al-āṣl*); four as being “of Russian origin” (*rūsi al-āṣl*); and one as being “of Badakhshani origin” (*badakhshi al-āṣl*).

mamhūra bemahr-i qaḍāt-i Bukhārā, a smaller collection of judicial documents from early eighteenth-century Bukhara that includes several letters of manumission.⁵⁰ Again, over half of these letters refer to slaves “of Indian origin”.⁵¹ It is revealing that, even in the model of a legal letter of manumission written by the chief *qāḍī* for his assistant to follow, the example used is of a slave “of Indian origin”.⁵²

The Central Asian slave trade continued at an active level throughout the eighteenth century, although during this period there were considerably fewer Indian slaves exported to Central Asian markets. Rather, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the slave markets of Bukhara and Khiva appear to have been increasingly stocked with Iranians. Thus, whereas John Mouraviev, an Armenian merchant from Derbend, observed in 1813 that Khiva was home to some 30,000 Iranian slaves and 3,000 Russian slaves, his account does not mention any Indian slaves.⁵³ In 1821, Baron Meyendorff visited Bukhara and estimated that there were in excess of 25,000 – and perhaps as many as 40,000 – Iranian slaves in that city.⁵⁴ Despite the prohibition of the slave trade according to the Russo-Khivan treaty of 1873, a Russian report from the mid-1870s estimates that there were still approximately 10,000 Iranian slaves in Khiva at that time.⁵⁵

The Central Asian slave trade remained active up to Russia’s nineteenth-century expansion into the region. According to the Russian academician A. A. Semenov, when Russia annexed the Samarqand *vilayat* in 1868, there were still some 10,000 slaves in just that district.⁵⁶ The reliability of this rather high figure is supported by the account of an Indian merchant who, in the early 1860s, reported to British authorities that at that time the Bukharan Amirate was home to 100,000 slaves, 20,000 of whom lived in the city of Bukhara.⁵⁷ In the 1880s, the British Lt Col C. E. Stewart similarly reported that, although the slave population in Central Asia had significantly diminished, prior to the Russian prohibition of the slave trade, the total number of slaves in the combined Khivan, Bukharan and Turkman territories was in excess of 100,000.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Saʿid ‘Ali ibn Saʿid Muhammad Bukhari, *Khuṭūʿ-i mamhūra bemahr-i qaḍāh-i Bukhārā*, OSIASRU, Ms. No. 8586/II. For bibliographic information, see *Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei Akademii Nauk Uzbekskoi SSR*, 11 vols (Tashkent, 1952–85), VIII, pp. 57–58.

⁵¹ Saʿid ‘Ali, *Khuṭūʿ-i mamhūra*, fols 182a–183b. A single entry refers to a Russian slave.

⁵² *Ibid.*, fol. 181a.

⁵³ See Mouraviev’s account in *Russian Missions into the Interior of Asia* (London, 1823), pp. 94, 110. He also mentions the presence of 3,000 Russian slaves in Khiva.

⁵⁴ Meyendorff, *Puteshestvie*, p. 145. Meyendorff suggests that there were, at that time, between 500 and 600 Russian slaves in Bukhara.

⁵⁵ A. P. Khoroshkhin, ‘Rabi Persiiane v’ Khivinskoi’ khanstve’, included in the Alisher Navoi Library of the Republic of Uzbekistan collection *Turkestanii sbornik*, vol. 116, pp. 483–487.

⁵⁶ See A. A. Semenov’s introduction to his translation of Muhammad Yusuf Munshi, *Tadhkīra-i Muqīm Khānī*, p. 18 and note 2.

⁵⁷ Sir Robert Montgomery, comp., *Report on the Trade and Resources of the Countries on the North-Western Boundary of British India* (Lahore, 1862), appendix XXII, pp. clix–clxxvi. The institution of slavery continued beyond its formal abolition according to the 1868 treaty between Russia and the Bukhara. The practice of slavery diminished, however, as slaves were no longer used for agricultural labour. Ivanov, *Khoziaistvo dzhuibarskikh sheikhov*, p. 83.

⁵⁸ Lt. Col. C. E. Stewart, ‘The Country of the Tekke Turkomans and the Tejend and Murghab Rivers’, in Cumming, ed., *The Country of the Turkoman*, p. 156. According to this account, the Russians are said to have released 40,000 slaves from Khiva alone, but Iranian slaves were still being held in Bukhara. Another source relates that the Russian treaty with the Khivans dictated that “Khiva was supposed to repatriate some 20,000 male slaves to Persia.” Mary Holdsworth, *Turkestan in the Nineteenth Century: A Brief History of the Khanates of Bukhara, Kokand and Khiva* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 24–25.

Muzaffar Alam has attributed the decline in the exportation of Indian slaves in the eighteenth century to both economic and social factors, specifying that, as India produced more textiles for export, it was no longer necessary for Indian merchants to trade slaves for Central Asian horses.⁵⁹ Alam's assertion about the magnitude of Indian textile production and its demand in Central Asian markets is well founded. This does not, however, fully explain the unwillingness, or inability, of merchants to continue exporting large numbers of Indian slaves to Central Asia, presuming the availability of an adequate supply at an agreeable price. With this in mind, it seems reasonable to suggest that the supply of Indian slaves dwindled as the Mughal Empire decentralized and its military expansion came to an end. This was compounded by the general exclusion of slaves from the tax-revenue systems of the successor states and the growing commercial and cultural separation of India and its neighbours to the north and west under the British Raj. The combination of these factors resulted in a general decline in the exportation of Indians to the Central Asian slave markets. This left Central Asian slave traders little recourse but to look elsewhere for a viable source to satisfy the market's substantial demand. It was for this reason that, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, the infamous Turkman slave-raiders looked to the numerous comparatively close, and poorly defended, Iranian cities and villages bordering their territory for their unfortunate merchandise.

That is not to say that slavery in the subcontinent ended. Despite the best efforts of the slave-holding elite to conceal the continuation of the institution from the historical record, slavery was practiced throughout colonial India in various manifestations.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the movement of Indians and Afghans to the Bukharan slave markets did not come to a complete halt. Smaller numbers of Indian slaves continued to be sold in the markets of Bukhara well into the nineteenth century. Turgun Faiziev has uncovered several nineteenth-century records documenting the presence in Bukhara of slaves of Indian origin, some identified as "Hindu" and others as "Chitrari" (i.e. from Chitral, a region deep in the Karakoram mountains of far northwestern India, modern Pakistan, bordering Afghan Badakhshan).⁶¹ Writing in the early nineteenth century, 'Abd al-Karim Bukhari also mentioned that Balkh and Bukhara regularly sent weaponry and clothing to Badakhshan in exchange for "black-faced slaves" who, Bukhari reported, came from Chitral and were not Muslims.⁶² In the early nineteenth century, Josiah Harlan observed that frequent slave raids into Chitral were organized by Murad Beg, the Afghan ruler of Kunduz and a "great wholesale dealer in this unholy merchandise". According to Harlan's account, the Central Asian slave trade "opens an insatiable outlet for the disposal of Muraad's insubordinate subjects, thousands of whom, with the useful and inoffensive Hazarrah and the natives of Chitraul, are sold into distant and irredeemable bondage!"⁶³ The profit to be made in the

⁵⁹ Alam, 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change', p. 208.

⁶⁰ Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, p. 223.

⁶¹ Faiziev, *Bukhoro feodal jamiyatida*, pp. 65–66, 79, 110, 118, 119, 124.

⁶² I. Gh. Nizomiddinov, *Abdulkarim Bukharii* (Tashkent, 1966), pp. 39–40.

⁶³ Josiah Harlan, *Central Asia: Personal Narrative of General Josiah Harlan, 1823–1841*, edited by Frank E. Ross (London, 1939), pp. 44–45, 82–84. Harlan further noted that Chitrali women were in particular demand as they were considered, by nature of their physical features, to be even more beautiful than the famed Circassian women. Meyendorff also records the presence of Chitrali slaves in early eighteenth-century Bukhara. Meyendorff, *Puteshestvie*, p. 145. Mohan Lal likewise came across a thirteen-year-old Chitrali slave girl in Qarshi who, reportedly, was "carried off by the ruler of the country, who reduced her to slavery". Mohan Lal, *Travels in the*

slave markets of Bukhara at this time was so great that Murad Beg reportedly required his subjects to pay their taxes in slaves, a demand which exacerbated wars, feuds and slave raiding.

The many thousands of Indian slaves sold in the markets of early modern Central Asia affected that society in many ways. Their contribution to Central Asian civilization cannot be measured solely in terms of their commercial value, which must have been immense, or even their role as skilled craftsmen, architectural engineers, and labourers on the plantation-style estates of Central Asia's great dynastic families.⁶⁴ One must also consider the impact these individuals had as they eventually earned, purchased, or were otherwise granted their freedom and became part of the ethnic landscape of Central Asia. In his description of early nineteenth-century Bukhara, Alexander Burnes repeated the popular tradition that "three fourths of the people of Bokhara are of slave extraction", implying that, although most people were not themselves slaves, they were likely to have had antecedents who were.⁶⁵ Burnes attributes this to the great number of Iranian slaves brought to Bukhara and the limited numbers of whom ever returned to Iran. It can safely be assumed that the same could be said of Indian slaves in earlier centuries.

Although the life of a slave was probably often a difficult one, slaves in Central Asia were regularly manumitted for any of a number of reasons. Sources such as the *Majmū'a-i-wathā'iq* and the *Khuṭūṭ-i mamhūra* demonstrate that it was common for slave owners to stipulate in legal contracts that their slaves would be set free after a certain number of years of indentured servitude, or to include a clause in their wills granting freedom to those slaves who outlive their masters.⁶⁶ Perhaps most frequently, slaves were manumitted after they reached a certain age, usually around fifty. The language of these documents suggests that the slaves were emancipated as a religiously meritorious act. However, it is perhaps not unreasonable to suggest that, as the expense of clothing and feeding slaves began to outweigh the work they could do, less altruistic motives contributed to such manumissions. Finally, it should be noted that, although most manumitted slaves lived out their days in poverty, slaves could, and some did, purchase their freedom, own property, and even become prosperous citizens of their new homeland.⁶⁷

It is an underlying thesis here that the escalation of the slave trade during the era of Muslim dominance in South Asia should be understood in the context of the general intensification of Indo-Central Asian trade in this period. The history of slavery in India

Panjab, Afghanistan, Turkistan, to Balkh, Bokhara and Herat . . . , 1846, reprint (Patiala, 1971), p. 123. See also *Ibid.*, p. 342. For more on the role of Kunduz in the exportation of Indian and Afghan slaves to markets in Central Asia in this period, see also Alexander Gardner, *Memoirs of Alexander Gardner*, edited by Major Hugh Pearce, reprint (Patiala, 1970), pp. 103–104.

⁶⁴ According to one early nineteenth-century visitor to Bukhara, "the majority of the slaves here, that is, many many thousands, are Persians . . . The labour of agriculture, in Bucharia, is performed exclusively by Persian slaves". See Jakovlev's account in *Russian Missions into the Interior of Asia* (London, 1823), p. 39.

⁶⁵ Alexander Burnes, *Travels into Bukhara*, 3 vols (London, 1834), I, p. 276.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Sa'id 'Ali, *Khuṭūṭ-i mamhūra*, fols 182a–183b, where it is recorded that a female Indian slave and a slave of unknown origin are to be freed upon the death of their masters and another slave is to be freed after a specified period of time. Another entry records the directive of an individual regarding his Indian slave which stipulates that, "if, after three years, he does everything I say, he will be free". In this historical context, the institution of the indentured servitude appears to have been an answer to those slaves who willingly converted to Islam and therefore required a different legal status. Cf. Burton, 'Russian Slaves', p. 353.

⁶⁷ Robert McChesney, *Central Asia: Foundations of Change* (Princeton, 1996), p. 60.

long predates even the early Ghaznavid invasions. However, in the centuries that followed, first-hand accounts report of tens – even hundreds – of thousands of slaves owned by the Turko-Afghan rulers of the north India. While many of these individuals were enslaved as a result of the expansionist efforts of the Delhi Sultans and Mughal emperors, others were forced into slavery to satisfy the tax demands of the state treasury. Still others were motivated to sell their children, or themselves, in an effort to avoid starvation during times of famine or other economic hardship.

The majority of these slaves lived out their lives in South Asia. However, their comparative affordability and availability in large numbers made them an attractive commodity for the international markets of the time. While some Indian slaves in Central Asia are likely to have worked as domestic labourers, those who were skilled engineers were put to work building early modern Central Asia's grand imperial architecture. Still more could be found working in such labour-intensive jobs as manufacturing bricks and textiles, building and maintaining roads, digging irrigation canals, and tending to the crops and herds on the plantation-style farms of Central Asia's great dynastic families. The comparatively advanced nature of Indian craft production most certainly added significantly to the demand for Indian slaves in foreign markets.

The presence, perhaps even dominance, of Hindus in the Central Asian slave markets continued up to the early eighteenth-century decentralization of the Mughal Empire. Although subsequent years did not witness an abrupt end to slavery in India, or even to the forcible relocation of some Indians to Central Asia, the enslavement of large numbers of conquered peoples did come to an end. Furthermore, slaves do not appear to have been included in the tax revenue system of the successor states, or under the British Raj. This resulted in a dramatic decrease in the supply of Indian slaves and their movement to Central Asian markets, which forced the Central Asian slave traders to turn their attention to the conveniently located, and poorly defended Iranians for a viable supply of this commodity.

This discussion has employed a rather broad historical approach in an effort to illustrate a number of larger issues related to the role of Indians in the Central Asian slave trade. Still, many of the questions addressed here would benefit from further investigation, and even more remain unanswered. For example, no attempt has yet been made to estimate the magnitude of Central Asia's pre-colonial slave population; virtually nothing is known of the movement of foreign slaves from Central Asia to other, distant markets; and beyond our limited sample from late sixteenth-century Samarqand, little has been made known regarding the ethnic proportions of Central Asia's slave population. These are only a few of the many questions yet to be addressed regarding this important and intriguing, yet poorly understood aspect of Asian history.