Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy

The ethnohistory of the military labour market in Hindustan, 1450–1850

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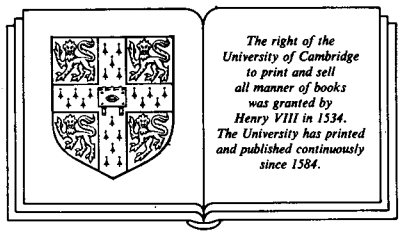

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CONTENTS

1

The polity and the peasantry

The emperor Jahangir remarked about the most powerful *zamīndārs* of Gujarat, that what mattered in politics were 'territory and forces', in other words, agrarian revenue and manpower.[1] In the present century, and increasingly since the last world war, much has been added to what is known about the medieval Indian economy. Production, taxation, prices and, in particular, agrarian relations and the system of land revenue have received a relatively large proportion of historians' attention.[2] The aim of this book is to investigate some of the aspects of the other source of power: manpower, which, as a factor contributing to the formation and upholding of the state deserves attention in itself. Moreover, the ways in which a large portion of the income of the state was distributed to what one could call the military workforce of India must be held to be an important subject of analysis if one is to understand the nature of the medieval economy. At the very least it seems natural to ask how numerous the recipients of the state's distributive system were. And, as the most important distributive institutions of the states we are dealing with were their armies, one is eager to know the number of military dependants of the various North Indian states as well as the kinds of men recruited for the armies of the sultanates, the rajadoms and, lastly, the Mughal empire. It is also crucial to know what proportion of the state's income was dispensed to entirely professional soldiers, perhaps of foreign origin, who had no agrarian interest whatever and, on the other hand, what part was surrendered to peasant-soldiers, recruited perhaps from the same landed communities who had

[1] Jahangir, *Tūzuk*, II, 19.

[2] See in particular Raychaudhuri and Habib (eds.), The *Cambridge Economic History of India I*; Moreland, *Agrarian System*; I. Habib, *Agrarian System*; Siddiqi, *Land Revenue Administration*.

helped, by yielding a share of their harvest as land revenue, to fill the coffers from which they were paid their salaries.

I would suggest that any analysis of the mechanisms and scope of the distribution of the resources of medieval Indian political centres presupposes an understanding of the workings of the Indian military labour market. In this chapter I shall try to show the importance of this concept for the study of North Indian history. In other words, my contention is that an enquiry into the nature of the military labour market is called for if we are to acquire a better understanding of the North Indian distributive system, the social history of much of its peasantry and the processes of state formation in *ancien régime* South Asia.[3]

I will restrict myself mainly to the Mughal period. The difficulties, even then, appear insurmountable. We do not even know the size of the Mughal army in its heyday, the seventeenth century. Long ago, Irvine listed a few of the estimates, made by contemporaries, as to the numbers of cavalry and infantrymen who served the emperor, but the result was confusing. For Aurangzeb's reign (1658–1707), for instance, Bernier gave 240,000 cavalry and only 15,000 infantry, whereas Catrou thought the correct numbers were 300,000 cavalry and 600,000 infantry.[4] The discrepancy in the number of footsoldiers should at least be explained. Since Irvine not much has been added to our knowledge of the Mughal army, though there have been great advances in other fields of Mughal history. There is, it seems, a good reason for this. I would suggest that the idea of the Mughal army as a distinct institution, to be described and analysed, is a false one. The Mughal army can never be made into a neat category of research outside the context of North Indian society: as such, it defies definition. It can only be described in terms of the dilemma in which the Mughal empire itself seems to have been caught, to wit, the dilemma between, on the one hand, the territorial state where the writ of the emperor was unopposed, and, on the other hand, the state as the largest and most honourable employer of the country whose huge army was the fundamental expression of its achievement.

[3] On the latter aspect, see my 'The End of an Ancien Regime: Colonial War in India, 1798–1818' in J. A. de Moor and H. L. Wesseling (eds), *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa (Comparative Studies in Overseas History, 8)*, Leiden 1989, 22–49.

[4] Irvine, *Army*, 61

Let us leave the state to its own devices for a moment. No investigation of state activity, however complete, can hope to encompass the whole of the history of North Indian soldiering. A large proportion of the military labour force of India, i.e. the total number of fighting men, remained, either permanently or temporarily, beyond the purview of the state. As I shall try to show, the states of medieval India not only had to leave the recruitment of troopers largely to middlemen, but also, notwithstanding the impressive size of their army camps, they could never come anywhere near to engaging, whether directly or indirectly, all those in North India who had taken up arms for a living, let alone all those who were skilled in the use of arms. Therefore, any enquiry into the sociology of the North Indian soldier which limited itself to the employment of armed men by any state or state-like structure, would find that much information as to their origin, recruitment and careers remained beyond its range. The military labour market has to be studied as a phenomenon in itself.

The challenge of an armed peasantry

An idea of the almost limitless proportions of the military profession in medieval India is conveyed by Abul Fazl's *Ā'īn* which gives, for the twelve *sūbah*s of the empire in the 1590s, a number of 342,696 horsemen and no fewer than 4,039,097 footsoldiers.[5] From these figures no conclusion whatever can be drawn as to the size of the Mughal army. They apparently include all those men who were considered on occasion to be acceptable reinforcements of the state at any of its many executive levels. This is, in other words, not an army list, but an inventory, a census of the military labour market. The fact that the census was taken indicates not only a desire to know where troops could be had. The state could never employ all these men. The count also appears to betray an uneasy awareness of the problem of how to control millions of men who were essentially as free to become rebels as they were to turn auxiliaries. Abul Fazl's census of the military labour force of Northern India lists the retainers who could be produced by the innumerable unruly *zamīndār*s of the empire. They cannot have represented less than 10 per cent of the active male population, and if Valentijn, who wrote that the empire in 1707 yielded more than four million

[5] Abu-l Faẓl, *Ā'īn*, II, 141–367.

soldiers, is right, then this proportion did not decrease much during the seventeenth century.[6]

The numbers involved are staggering. There is indeed no doubt that most of these men never served the Mughal state during their lifetime. Irvine rightly remarked that the figures of the *Ā'īn* include 'all the militia levies and zamindar's retainers throughout the provinces'.[7] However, probably even Abul Fazl's enumeration did not exhaust the North Indian reservoir of armed men. There were more potential soldiers than those employed by the emperor, his officials or the innumerable *zamīndārs* of the country. Let us take an example.

Peter Mundy, travelling between Surat, Agra and Patna in 1632–3, at one time hired a convoy of 25 soldiers, at another 22 footmen and 3 horsemen, in the towns on his route. His caravan also employed some 440 Jats, Baluchis, carters, and cameleers, who had fire-arms and swords. They were an unruly lot. At one stage, as Mundy explained, the Baluchis and camel-drivers, who were muslims, clashed with the Jats and carters, who were hindus. One Baluchi died. Mundy concluded it was dangerous to take both carters and cameleers and both Jats and Baluchis in one caravan.[8] On another occasion even Jats and carters fought with each other. But such men were nonetheless indispensable. In the records of the Dutch East India Company one finds frequent mention of troops hired to protect caravans on the Agra to Surat road. Thus, in 1637, to accompany 22 carts, 37 soldiers were hired, most of them armed with bows and arrows, some with muskets. They received Rs 3½ a month, except their leader Ibrahim, who was engaged for Rs 4. Similarly, in 1644, to escort bullion to the value of Rs 300,000, 190 soldiers were employed.[9] Two lists are preserved giving the names of 77 and 65 peons who were sent from Agra to the coast in 1638 and 1639 respectively. The first distinguishes again between Jats, most of whom were musketeers (*roerdragers*) and Baluchis, almost all of whom were archers. They and their two leaders were paid the same wages as those engaged in 1637. Their leaders were styled

[6] Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, IV, 2, 276–9. Valentijn, oddly enough, supposed there were exactly as many cavalrymen as foot-soldiers. The population of what is now Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan has been estimated at 130 million in 1600 AD, 160 million in 1700 AD, McEvedy and Jones, *Atlas*, 185.

[7] Irvine, *Army*, 61

[8] Mundy, *Travels*, II, 256–7, 261, 287, 294–6.

[9] ARA The Hague, Coll. Geleynssen no. 102, W. Geleynssen to C. Jansen Silvius, Agra 25. xi. 1637; ARA The Hague, VOC 1157 f. 408 v°, C. Weijlandt to A. van Diemen, Surat 5.vii. 1644.

muqaddam or *mirdah* and travelled with their men.[10] Such men did not only conduct caravans. Any journey seems to have been inconceivable without a certain number of them. William Hawkins, who was in India from 1608 to 1613, found that 'almost a man cannot stirre out of dores throughout all his [i.e. Jahangir's] dominions without great forces, for they are all become rebels'. Tavernier said that, in about 1660, to travel with honour in India, one hired 20 to 30 armed men, some with bows and arrows and others with muskets. They cost Rs 4 a month. The profession must have been rather well organised, because in the towns where the men were hired, they had a headman who answered for their honesty 'and when you employ them, each one gives him a rupee'.[11]

They appear often to have been based in the *qasbas* or district towns of some importance along the road. There in the end they may well have lost all connection with the villages they probably originated from. In the process, their behaviour and reputation could change almost beyond recognition. Thus Nicholas Withington, who lived in India from 1612 to 1616, found that the Baluchis of Baluchistan were bloodyminded villains; 'yet there are manye verye honeste men of that caste dwellinge about Guyseratt, but moste of them aboute Agra'.[12]

At the Gujarati end of the great caravan routes worked by the Baluchis, these people would undergo quite a transformation over time, their activities widening again into quite a 'portfolio' of possible sources of income. This was the case in the towns of Dholka, Viramgam and Ahmadabad, where muslim soldiers of Rajput, Baluchi and Pathan origin, a 'powerful and warlike body' significantly known as Qasbatis, flourished for several generations. The *Mirāt-i-Ahmadī* described their sphere of action as follows: 'They became source of resistance against the Kolis in this very region in thorny places and ravines. They attacked villages, drove away cattle, escorted Nazims, took responsibility of collecting peshkash from zamindars on a small salary, they got enlisted as recruits in the army for a few days, served the faujdars and the thanadars. They, thus, maintained themselves. Most of them lived on fodder and grains of their fields.' They could afford to refuse

[10] ARA The Hague, Coll. Geleynssen no. 113, 'Notitie der naamen van 77 pijons . . .' and 'Notitie der naemen van 65 pijons . . .'

[11] Foster, *Early Travels*, 113, 114; Tavernier, *Travels*, I, 38.

[12] Foster, *Early Travels*, 220.

service in the Mughal armies fighting the Marathas on the Dekkan and did not even accept service outside Gujarat. Only later on some of them, finding themselves in reduced circumstances, tried their luck in other *sūbah*s and 'made bravery their profession'.[13] To sum up, this group of military settlers acquired a stake in agricultural pursuits and in the military administration as centred on provincial towns. In this way they were largely successful in avoiding direct service in the emperor's camp. Ultimately, such men certainly came within the range of Abul Fazl's census of North India's military labour force. It is difficult to say at which point a family of Baluchi camel-drivers, who turned to escorting caravans and mercenary soldiering and then to a combination of agrarian pursuits and military duties as organised by government officials in the *qasba*s, became sufficiently useful or dangerous to be taken cognisance of by the imperialist administration. But it is important to notice the social mobility that was a corollary of the dynamics of North India's military labour market. The military entrepreneurship of the Baluchis-turned-Qasbatis provides a striking example of this.

If carting and camel-driving were unthinkable without skill in the use of arms, this applied with equal force to the most widespread economic activity in India, agriculture. The Dutch East India Company servant Simon Diodati, whose caravan was stopped in 1717 in Malwa by 2,000 people armed with muskets and 3,000 others, described his attackers as peasants (*boeren*).[14] In 1632, Peter Mundy actually saw, in the present-day Kanpur district, 'labourers with their guns, swords, and bucklers lyeing by them whilest they ploughed the ground, being att varience with a little towne ½ a mile out of the way', where 'rebels' lived.[15] And Irfan Habib cites a manuscript where it is said about the Bhadauriya Rajputs in the Agra area around 1650: 'They are a numerous industrious and brave race. Every village has a small fort. They never pay revenue to the *hakim* (= *jāgīrdār*) without a fight. The peasants (*ri'aya*) who drive the plough keep a musket (*banduq*)

[13] *Ibid.*, see also 314; Robertson, *Glossary*, 59. Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirāt*, 580; this work contains numerous references to the Qasbatis of the eighteenth century. See also Nightingale, *Trade and Empire*, 227.

[14] ARA The Hague, VOC 1913 'Kort dagverhaal van de Agrase residenten . . .', 97–100 ('Souratta'). See also Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*, 143, and, for specific mention of plundering villagers, Mundy, *Travels*, II, 110, 111; Manucci, *Storia*, I, 307.

[15] Mundy, *Travels*, II, 90. Irfan Habib quotes from the same passage, see next note.

slung over the neck, and a powder-pouch at the waist. The relief-loan (*taqavi*) they get from the *hakim* is in the form of lead (and) gunpowder.' Similarly, Manucci described how in Akbar's days the villagers of the Mathura region defended themselves against Mughal revenue collecting officers: 'The women stood behind their husbands with spears and arrows. When the husband had shot off his matchlock, his wife handed him the lance, while she reloaded the matchlock.' Habib assumes that those who had matchlocks or even only swords belonged to the higher strata of the peasantry. Yet, it is clear that Indian agrarian society was to a large extent an armed society, skilled in the use of arms, and that very few men would have been without at least a spear or bow and arrows. Moreover, the countryside was studded with little forts like those of the Bhadauriyas. As late as the end of the eighteenth century, Dubois could still write that 'it frequently happened that a wretched little fortified town, surrounded by nothing but mud walls and defended by a few hundred peasants ('*campagnards*') armed with a few wornout matchlocks, was able to hold out for months against the attacks of a host of assailants'. The phenomenon of such occasional armed resistance against the revenue collecting activities of Indian officials is too well-known to demand further elaboration. Rightly Gautam Bhadra speaks of 'the general tradition of rebellion and agrarian resistance' in Mughal India.[16]

In such a society, no government, however powerful, could even begin to think of achieving a monopoly on the use of arms. In some respects, the millions of armed men, cultivators and otherwise, that government was supposed to rule over, were its rivals rather than its subjects. Indeed, the peasant's arms frequently proved of use for other than defensive purposes. Whenever the risks seemed worth taking, they resisted and fell upon intruding mercenaries, whether the latter were collecting revenue or not. Significantly, historical sources often refer to peasants and townspeople assaulting soldiers and not only in the hills and inaccessible places far from the well-subdued plains, sometimes described as the peaceful core of the empire. Thus, the great Rana Sanga's camp was once looted by villagers in the Agra area, whereas the townsmen of Dhar in Malwa participated in the plunder of Silhadi's

[16] I. Habib, 'Forms of Class Struggle'; Manucci, *Storia*, I, 134; Dubois, *Hindu Manners*, 680; Dubois, *Moeurs*, II, 492. Gautam Bhadra, 'Two Frontier Uprisings', 59. According to the commissioners of the Bombay Government reporting on Malabar in 1792, 'even the labourers in the fields were armed', Nightingale, *Trade and Empire*, 76.

camp in 1531–2. A few years later, peasants attacked, plundered and seized the horses of parties of Afghan troopers retreating before Humayun's army from Chitor in the direction of Malwa. In 1540, villagers (*gūwārān*) of the central Doab closed the market for Humayun's men and attacked them; then, they collected nearly 3,000 horse and foot many of whom were subsequently killed by the Mughal's troops. Another report says that, on this occasion, 'needy men' intercepted the Mughals, some taking away the horses' saddle cloths, others striking them down with *lāṭhī*-blows from behind; it was said that in this way 20,000 horsemen forming Humayun's escort were killed and their horses stolen.[17] Other instances of such attacks are reported during Jahangir's reign. The inhabitants of the village of Bharwal in Assam once exterminated an imperial contingent of 200 matchlockmen. And after Sultan Khusru had been defeated in the Panjab in 1606, peasants (*landslieden*) killed most of the fugitive soldiers they could lay their hands on and captured all the prince's horses, camels and other animals. Similarly, after Abdullah Khan's defeat of 1623 near Ahmadabad, large numbers of his men were killed by the peasantry (*boeren*). Peter Mundy tells of the people of the *qasba* of Bhadohi in the present-day Mirzapur district, who in 1632 attacked the soldiers of a Mughal governor killing 200 of them. The governor had arrested seven Banyas who, he thought, had stolen goods from a serai. The Bhadohi men made an attempt to liberate them and besieged the local castle which contained some 2,000 horsemen. Mundy noticed that the Mughal nobleman was compelled to entertain extra parties of foot and horse to re-establish his authority. In 1658, the peasants (*paysans*) to the east of Agra robbed many of the followers of Sulaiman Shikoh after the latter's defeat on the field of battle and killed some of them.

This was a well-known pattern. For the period down to 1818, when British arms to a great extent succeeded in demilitarising large-scale politics in India, such incidents were commonplace as a few examples dating from the end of the period illustrate. When, after the battle of Panipat in 1761, nearly 3,000 exhausted Maratha horsemen entered the city of Delhi, they were plundered by the 'local vagabonds' of the capital. This contributed to the flight of

[17] Niamatullah, *History*, 177; Nizamuddin, *Tabaqāt*, III, 357; Digby, *Dreams*, 68; Abu-l Faẓl, *Akbarnāma*, I, 354, 355; Roy, 'Some interesting anecdotes', 223. See also Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhab*, II, 10, about villagers getting hold of Hemu's gold in 1555.

these defeated men, large numbers of whom soon fled across the Chambal towards Gwalior. Some of them lost their way and sought refuge in distant and nearby villages and towns. 'Cultivators killed many of them', a contemporary observer reported. Many had to give up their garments and were made to drink salt water on suspicion of having swallowed *ashrafīs* and jewels. Those on whom such things were found, were killed. In 1804, Arthur Wellesley told Lord Lake that if you moved after your enemy with 'celerity' and sufficiently distressed him, armed peasants could help you a great deal. 'Whenever the largest and most formidable bodies of [the freebooters] are hard pressed by our troops, the village people attack them upon their rear and flanks, cut off stragglers, and will not allow a man to enter their villages.' Something very much like that happened in 1818, when many of the retreating Pindari freebooters in Central India were cut up by 'the villagers, who now regarded their destruction as certain and no longer hesitated to retaliate on them the cruelties they had so often suffered at their hands'. But the same peasantry could turn quite as easily against the Company's troops. When, in 1804, Colonel Burn's battalion retreated before Holkar, peasants rose in his rear and seized the baggage he had to leave behind.[18] I suggest, in conclusion, that not only the rebellious *zamīndārs* of the countryside or the hill rajas with their pernicious war-bands were jealous rivals of central government in North India. More fundamental to the state was the problem of how to deal with the peasantry at large, how to subject to some manner of control and collect revenue from these almost ungovernable tens of millions of people protected by mud forts, jungles and ravines all over the plains of Hindustan and above all by the weapons they were so familiar with. It is clear that the Indian process of state formation and the Indian state itself cannot adequately be described with the help of models inspired by the phenomenon of the early modern European state if these presuppose the achievement of a central monopoly, or something nearly approaching it, on the use of arms.

What solutions to this challenge did the Mughal emperor and his

[18] Mirza Nathan, *Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī*, I, 301; Pelsaert, *Geschriften*, 126, 179; Mundy, *Travels*, II, 109, 110, 118, 119; Bernier, *Travels*, 60; Bernier, *Voyages*, I, 85; Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirāt*, 917; Brett-James, *Wellington*, 103; Prinsep, *History*, II, 116; G.R.C. Williams, 'The Sikhs in Upper Doab', *Calcutta Review 1875*, cited in Madanjit Kaur, 'Some Reflections on the Socio-economic Conditions of the Jamuna-Gangetic Doab in the 19th Century: A Contemporary Account', Indian History Congress 1984, Annamalai, 9.

amīrs have at their disposal, faced as they were with a constant threat to their authority? The most radical measures that were taken amounted to a virtual uprooting of peasant society as such. There is irrefutable evidence for the enslavement and deportation of thousands and thousands of peasants by the Mughal aristocracy.[19] Many of these were sold to countries to the west of India. The trade had flourished before 1400, when Multan was a considerable slave-market,[20] but it was continued after that, with Kabul as the main entrepôt. Babur, in his description of Kabul in 1504, mentions slaves as the first of the articles brought up from Hindustan to that city. It was also often deemed expedient to kill many of them straight away. It was said that when, in the cold season of 1528–9, the Mandahar of the area north of Delhi plundered villages and then defeated Babur's forces to the number of 3,000 men, a force consisting of 4,000 cavalry and several elephants was sent against them; their settlement was razed to the ground. Babur kept twenty of the women, the remainder being distributed amongst his companions. According to Ahmad Yadgar, 'The male Mandahars were half buried in the ground and were shot to death with arrows.' Abul Fazl quoted, as a point 'about which both sound jurists and innovators are agreed', the opinion that 'the binding, killing or striking [of] the haughty and the chastising [of] the stiff-necked are part of the struggle for empire'. The fortress of Chitor, for instance, besieged by Akbar from October 1567 to February 1568, was not only defended, Abul Fazl says, by 8,000 Rajput warriors, but also by some 40,000 peasants who had shown 'great zeal and activity'. This widespread participation in the resistance against his imperialist conquest had made the emperor decide to have nearly 30,000 of the defenders killed on the day the fortress fell. It seems that public opinion at the time compared these drastic measures with the procedures of Sultan Alauddin Khilji, who it was recalled, had left the peasantry alone when he conquered Chitor in 1303. But Abul Fazl justifies Mughal ruthlessness by pointing out that, on the earlier occasion, the peasantry had not engaged in the fighting, an

[19] See for the making of slaves and captives by Mughals and others, e.g. Mirza Nathan, Bahāristān-i-Ghaybī, I, 11, 125, 130, 231, 273, 369, 395, 412, 419, and II, 477, 495, 501, 635, 668; Jahangir, *Memoirs*, 22.

[20] The Ghaznavids continually replenished their Indian slave (*ghulam*) army from their expeditions there; 'thus 53,000 captives were brought back' from the Kanauj campaign of 1018 AD, Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, 102. See, for many other examples of slave raids in pre-1400 North India, Irfan Habib's paragraph on 'Slavery' in Raychaudhuri and Habib, *Cambridge Economic History of India I*, 84, 85, 89–93.

assertion that must then have been, as it is now, impossible to disprove or support on the basis of fact.

Of the remainder of the defenders of Chitor in 1568, a large number were taken prisoner. The sight of groups of newly enslaved people must have been a common one at the time. This is illustrated by a story preserved by Abul Fazl, about some thousand musketeers from Kalpi, many of them muslims it seems, who had shown great skill in defending Chitor in the service of the Rana. 'When the victorious army', the *Akbarnāma* recalls, 'was hotly engaged in plundering and capturing, these musketeers . . . bound their wives and children as if they were prisoners and set off with them. The truth remained concealed from the searchers, and they thought that they were royal troops carrying off their prisoners.' Naturally, Akbar's conquests must have fed the slave trade towards the northwest. According to Monserrate, who travelled from Lahore to Kabul in 1581, the Ghakkars of the Panjab exchanged men for horses and a saying 'Slaves from India, horses from Parthia' was current among them. They supplemented their supply of the former commodity by getting hold of free travellers whom they shaved and transported to Persia to be sold there. If the trade in slaves was as brisk as the horse trade, then many thousands of people must have left India each year. In these deportations, Jahangir also had a share. William Finch, who was in India between 1608 and 1611, tells how the emperor hunted around Agra, usually from November to the end of March. Finch wrote, 'He causeth with choise men, a certain wood or desart place to be incircled, so contracting themselves to a neerer compasse till they meet againe; and whatsoever is taken in this inclosure is called the Kings sikar [Hind. *shikār*] or game, whether men or beasts; and whosoever lets ought escape without the Kings mercy must loose his life. The beasts taken, if mans meat, are sold and the money give to the poore; if men, they remain the King's slaves, which he yearly sends to Cabul to barter for horse and dogs; these being poore, miserable, theevish people that live in woods and desarts, little differing from beasts.'[21] The emperor Shahjahan also used to have offenders against the state trans-

[21] Bābur, *Bābur-Nāma*, 202; Hussain Khan, *Sher Shah Sur*, 167, 168; Abu-l Faẓl, *Akbarnāma*, II, 246, 247, 475, 476; Monserrate, *Commentary*, 112, 117; Foster, *Early Travels*, 154. In the early 1830s in Central Asia, a common subject of conversation among Turkmens, then the main slave takers, was 'slaves and horses', Burnes, *Travels*, II, 61

ported beyond the river Indus to be 'exchanged for Pathān dogs'.[22]

According to Abul Fazl, in 1562 Akbar forbade the practice, then current among his troops, of keeping or selling the wives, children, and other relatives of the rebellious people they killed or captured. But such a prohibition must have been almost impossible to enforce, particularly as it was not the emperor himself but the Mughal nobility who must have undertaken the lion's share of the state's enslavement, deportation, and even extermination policies. During the 1620s and 1630s, an especially prominent part in this respect was played by Abdullah Khan Firuz Jang, an Uzbeg immigrant *amīr*. It is reported that in 1619–20 Abdullah Khan defeated all the hitherto un-subdued Chauhan rajas and 'rebels' of the Kalpi-Kanauj area he had been given to rule: he then had the principal men beheaded, while the peasants' women, daughters and children, to the number of 200,000, were at his instance transported to Iran and sold there.[23] Mundy, who travelled from Agra to Patna in 1632, saw, during the four days of his passage through this area, 200 minars or pillars on which a total of about 7,000 heads were fixed with mortar. This, he added, was the exploit of Abdullah Khan and a force of 12,000 horse and 20,000 foot, 'whoe destroyed all their townes, tooke all their goods, their wives and children for slaves, and the chiefest of their men, causeing their heads to be cutt off and to be immortered'. On his way back, four months later, he noticed that meanwhile another 60 minars with between 2,100 and 2,400 heads had been added and that the erection of new ones had not yet stopped.[24] For Abdullah Khan this was regular practice. Already in about 1627 he had said to a visitor who had, very politely, asked him how many infidels' heads he had caused to be cut off: 'There would be 200,000 heads so that there might be two rows of minarets of heads from Agra to Patna.' His guest had then suggested that there would certainly have been an innocent muslim among these men, but Abdullah's angry answer had been: 'I made prisoners of five lacs of women and men and sold

[22] Manucci, *Storia*, I, 204. See also, for Persian and central Asian dogs in North India, Bute, *Private Journal*, I, 234–5, and Burnes, *Travels*, I, 24.

[23] Abu-l Faẓl, *Akbarnāma*, II, 246, 247 (see also Beveridge's note about the expeditions of Husain Khan Tukria in Akbar's reign); Pelsaert, *Geschriften*, 148; Pelsaert, who arrived in Agra in April 1621, says that '2 lack' women and children were carried off to Iran yoked together or in rows ('met coppelen ofte rijen'). See, on the practice of yoking prisoners-of-war together, Jahangir, *Memoirs*, 165.

[24] Mundy, *Travels*, II, 90, 185, 186; see for the Chauhans of the Kalpi and Kanauj sarkars during Akbar's reign, Abu-l Faẓl, *Akbarnāma*, II, 195, 196.

them. They all became Muhammadans. From their progeny there will be krors by the judgement day.'[25]

Forced migrations were part of a deliberate policy in this area. Great numbers passed the Indus both ways. Whereas Rajputs in Western Hindustan were exterminated and deported as slaves beyond the Indus, Afghans were deported towards the east and settled in areas notorious for Rajput turbulence. The Dilzak Afghans, for instance, completely disappeared from their native land as a result of intensive military enrolment in India, but also because Jahangir deported a large number of them and 'distributed them all over Hindustan and the Deccan'. Afghans seem to have been especially in demand to deal with Rajputs and they played a crucial role in what may be called the partially successful Mughal attempt at the de-Rajputisation of Western Hindustan. During Shahjahan's reign, Bahadur Khan Rohilla, then Abdullah Khan's successor as *jāgīrdār* of Kalpi and Kanauj, brought a caravan of 9,000 Afghans to populate all the '52 *mohallas*' of the newly founded city of Shahjahanpur. His brother Diler Khan laid the foundation of several Afghan colonies between Shahjahanpur and Hardoi. Similarly, Aurangzeb invited Afridi Afghans to settle in Muzaffarnagar and control the rebellious Rajputs there.[26]

Admittedly, Abdullah Khan was noted for his tyranny and cruelty and no doubt more given to these methods of pacification than most of his contemporaries. But many peasant communities left their rulers with no choice but to consider an attack upon them. In January 1624, Jahangir wrote in his memoirs that he was compelled to send a force against 'the villagers and cultivators' (*ganwārān u muzari'ān*) of the Doab on the other side of the river Jumna. The Jats of the Agra region on both sides of the Jumna were, on several occasions, treated in a manner similar to Abdullah Khan's subjects; in 1634 10,000 of their men were killed and their women and children 'beyond computation' were seized.[27] The most eloquent witness, again, is Jahangir himself. Towards the end of 1619, he sent Abdullah Khan to quell the insurgency in the Kanauj area of which we have already made mention. There was some hard fighting before the enemy's fort was carried, 30,000 of the rebels being killed. The 'cap, or tiara', of the chief, containing jewels

[25] Samsām-ud-daula, *Maāṯhir*, I, 105. As late as the 1830s, in Central Asia, slave taking was justified in exactly these terms, Burnes, *Travels*, I, 190.

[26] Rita Joshi, *Afghan Nobility*, 15, 16, 105, 110, 128–9, 167.

[27] Jahangir, *Tūzuk*, II, 285; I. Habib, *Agrarian System*, 339.

worth twenty lakhs of rupees, and 10,000 of the heads of the rebels, fixed on spears, were brought to the emperor's presence. The tragic character of all this was not lost on Jahangir and he wrote philosophically: 'And here I am compelled to observe, with whatever regret, that notwithstanding the frequent and sanguinary executions which have been dealt among the people of Hindustan, the number of the turbulent and disaffected never seems to diminish; for what with the examples made during the reign of my father, and subsequently of my own, there is scarcely a province in the empire [there were about 14 *sūbah*s at the time] in which, either in battle or by the sword of the executioner, five and six hundred thousand human beings have not, at various periods fallen victims to this fatal disposition to discontent and turbulence. Ever and anon, in one quarter or another, will some accursed miscreant spring up to unfurl the standard of rebellion; so that in Hindustaun never has there existed a period of complete repose.'[28]

This description probably remained valid for much of the seventeenth century. The export of slaves also went on for some time more. Aurangzeb, in the beginning of his reign, deprived the Persian ambassador of all the Indian slaves he was taking with him on his return to Persia. The reason was not that the emperor was against the slave trade in principle, but that he had an account to settle with the ambassador. It may be true, however, that by this time the practice was criticised more generally than before. Bernier, for one, comments on the incident as follows: 'It is certain that the number of these slaves was most unreasonable; he had purchased them extremely cheap on account of the famine, and it is also said that his servants had stolen a great many children.' Anyway, it is clear that, in the 1660s, Indian supply of and Persian demand for slaves was still considerable.[29]

As far as the demand side is concerned, it is probable that many of these Indian slaves were employed as peasants and artisans in Central Asia, as were the 120 slaves – tillers of grain, diggers of canals for irrigation, bronze and metal workers, a potter, a cook, a tinker, and a bowl maker; 'fathers, sons and grandsons', 'all

[28] Jahangir, *Memoirs*, 225, 226. This version of Jahangir's memoirs has been called 'garbled', but in my view they contain much that must have been written by Jahangir himself, whereas the official *Tūzuk* was thoroughly edited and enlarged by the imperial chancery's clerks; see Rieu, *Catalogue*, I, 253–54.

[29] Bernier, *Travels*, 151.