14

SOCIETY

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Contents

Part One

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Nomadic societies

(*The Editors*)

There are many ways in which Central Asia can be defined.[1] One that is quite often resorted to considers it as the largest set of contiguous inland river basins in the world: Eurasia forms such a vast land mass that there are within it many large depressions filled in part by saline lakes and 'seas' that are unconnected with the oceans. Yet, besides the fact that such a definition must logically put the Volga basin, containing the heart of Russia, in Central Asia, the concept relies far too much on what is, after all, essentially a curiosity of physical geography: even if the Aral and the Caspian were connected with the Black Sea, not much would have changed for most of what goes by the name of Central Asia.

A far more persuasive way to define Central Asia, if we are seeking a common feature of social history that can link all its major component parts, is to consider it as a zone of low precipitation in the Asian land mass, where, in the natural state, steppes and deserts coexist with green belts along snow-fed rivers. Central Asia, as delimited for the present work, is, indeed, a vast area where the pastoral economy prevails over the larger part, side by side with agriculture mainly based on irrigation covering a much smaller space.[2] From the point of view of social history, we deal here with nomadic communities, pasturing their herds over large areas of grassland and desert, and which have coexisted with sedentary populations scattered in dense pockets of cultivated tracts located in oases and narrow river valleys.

[1] See Miroshnikov's note on the meaning of Central Asia, Appendix to Vol. I of the present series; Miroshnikov, 1998, pp. 8–25.

[2] This criterion, can, perhaps, justify the inclusion of the Indus basin, in which the Indus and its tributaries run through what otherwise, owing to low rainfall, would have been a desert. The Indus and its tributaries, however, are fed by both snow and rain in their high catchment areas.

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Pastoralism requires a far larger area to feed a family than agriculture does. Unlike peasant agriculture in which particular plots either belonged to, or were under the occupation of, a single household, a herdsman's family could not be restricted to such a limited piece of land. Rather, it was the ownership and control over a number of particular animals that were the essential elements of the herdsman's property.[3] The right to pasture animals in a relatively large area was normally shared with other herdsmen, usually of the same clan or tribe.[4] The clan or tribe, therefore, substituted for the village, or the village community, of peasants. Bābur (1483–1530) was, indeed, surprised to find that sedentary people in India bore caste names, for 'in our countries [only] dwellers in the steppes (*sahrā*s) get tribal (*qabīla*) names'.[5] In other words, the tribe was the distinguishing feature of steppe society.

The pastoral economy involves nomadism, most typically when the herdsmen in mountainous areas move from lower grounds in winter to higher in the summer. In lands of northern latitudes in the plains this generally takes the form of a south-to-north movement. Such seasonal movements meant that there could be no permanent home for the pastoralists, but only camping grounds. The word 'yurt', with its various meanings in Turkic languages down the centuries, brings out clearly the very different perceptions that the nomad has of his home: 'abandoned camping site', 'a specific kind of a felt tent' and 'a community'.[6]

A factor for instability in the nomadic steppes was, perhaps, not only the growth of excess population among the nomads – so often invoked as the reason behind the nomadic invasions of territories of other nomads and of sedentary populations – but also the increasing numbers of animals so that the lands on which a tribe pastured its herds might no longer suffice. Thus some years after the Moghuls (or Muslim Mongols) had conquered the Tarim basin (the Kashghar principality), their ruler Sa^{c}īd Khan (1514–33) was informed (in 1522) that 'the Moghul *ulūs* [tribal domain] – both man and beast – have so greatly increased that the wide grazing grounds of Kashghar have become too confined for them and frequent quarrels arise concerning pastures'. A plan for the conquest of Moghulistan (modern Dzungaria) was therefore proposed in order to secure more grazing lands.[7]

As a result not only did warfare frequently break out among the steppe tribes, but vast migrations of tribes with their herds also occurred. In 1522, when pressed by the Manghīts (Minghays), some 200,000 Kazakhs (Qazāqs) are reputed to have migrated into

[3] Cf. Lyashchenko, 1949, p. 235.
[4] On the rights of tribes (and later of their chiefs) on pasturelands in Iran, see Lambton, 1953, pp. 284–5.
[5] Bābur, 1995, p. 466; 1922, Vol. 2, p. 518.
[6] Clauson, 1972, p. 958.
[7] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, pp. 358–9.

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Moghulistan, temporarily driving out the Moghuls under the khan of Kashghar.[8] Another great migration known to us from both Russian and Chinese records is that of the Kalmuk (Qalmāq) people, known as the Torguts, who, Mongol in origin, had migrated to the lower basin of the Volga. Finding their pastoral lands increasingly hemmed in by the encroachments of Russian landlords and peasants, as many as 168,000 of them decided to migrate back to their original homes; this they did in 1771 after a seven-month-long trek over more than 3,000 km of steppe until they arrived in Dzungaria (old Moghulistan) in the Xinjiang region of China. But only some 66,000 managed to complete the journey, their numbers depleted due to starvation and attacks by other nomadic peoples such as the Bashkirs and the Kazakhs on the way.[9]

In this state of seasonal movement and constant instability, there was practically no urban life in the great steppe north of the Syr Darya (Jaxartes) and the Gobi desert. The historian of Moghulistan Mīrzā Haydar Dughlāt (1499–1551) relates that the Kazakh khan Qāsim told the cultured Moghul khan Abū Sa ᶜīd in 1531:

> We are men of the desert, and there is nothing in the way of riches and formalities. Our most costly possessions are our horses, our favourite food their flesh, our most enjoyable drink their milk and the products of it. In our country are no gardens or buildings. Our chief recreation is inspecting our herds.[10]

There could be no better picture of steppe culture.

People in the steppe bred horses, along with sheep, in the deserts of East Turkistan (China) and the Gobi; they also bred the Bactrian camel. As herdsmen, they all had to be skilled horsemen. In times when cavalry was the principal military arm everywhere in Eurasia, this gave the tribes the appearance of large groups of armed horsemen. This identification of tribe or clan with a troop of warrior-horsemen is illustrated by the dual sense in which the Turco-Mongolian word *ulūs* is used in Persian texts from the fifteenth century onwards both for a tribe and for a band of armed retainers.[11] The military power that horse-breeding and riding gave to the steppe peoples is surely one factor which sustained the institutions of statehood in the steppes, going much beyond ordinary tribal chiefdoms.

No state can exist without resources, whether in money or in kind. In the steppes it was sheep which formed a practically standard unit of wealth. On his last expedition into Moghulistan, Saᶜīd Khan of Kashghar seized 100,000 head of sheep as booty from the

[8] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, pp. 134–5.
[9] See Ch. 6 in the present volume.
[10] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, p. 276.
[11] Cf. Habib, 1999, p. 205 and note. For its earlier meanings, without any military connotation, see Clauson, 1972, pp. 152–3.

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Kyrgyz.[12] Taxation also rested on the supply of numbers of heads of herd animals. In 1595 in the province of Kandahar (Qandahār) in Afghanistan, the pastoral tribes and localities were expected to pay an annual tax in the form of 45,775 sheep and 45 Baluch horses, although the administration exacting it at the time was that of the Mughal empire, by no means a nomadic state.[13]

Out of such tax or tribute the ruler, whether khan or *taiji* (or *taishi*) (*tāyshī* in Persian texts), maintained himself in his special encampment, or *ordu*. This last is a Turco-Mongol word (*urdū* in Persian), from where the English 'horde' is derived; it embraces the entire tribe or set of tribes controlled from the *ordu*.[14] Under the ruler would be a number of tribal or clan chiefs, for whom the ancient Turkic word was *beg*, which later came to mean, in the more sedentary polities, a captain or administrative officer.[15] Owing to their tribal nature, the steppe sovereignties were not generally as absolute as the one that Chinggis Khan had been able to construct in the thirteenth century. When a Russian officer, Captain Unkovsky, visited the encampment of the Dzungar supreme ruler (*khongtaiji*), Cewang Arabtan (Tsevangraptan) (1688–1727) in 1722–3, he found that the *khongtaiji*' undertook nothing without consulting the *zaysang*s [*jaisan*s], i.e. the heads of the different clans'.[16]

A major obstruction to effective centralization was undoubtedly the absence of awell-developed bureaucratic apparatus that could have constrained the powers of the clan chiefs. Literacy was very rare among the steppe peoples and there was little use of writing in the steppe languages, whether Mongolian or Turkic. However, the old Mongol script, derived from Uighur, was used to preserve the traditional customary law, the *Yāsā*, attributed to Chinggis Khan. The *Yāsā*, in fact, was constantly compiled and updated.[17] Throughout the Turkic lands the same customary law, called the *tura*, was orally preserved, though there was a growing feeling that it did not accord with Muslim law (see Chapter 8).[18] Such preservation, with modifications, of customary law represented a very limited act of legislation; and it is not even clear how far the *Yāsā* or the *tura* by itself could have contributed to sustaining the ruler's authority. Bābur does refer, however, to the military arrangements set out in the *tuzuk* (regulations) of Chinggis Khan, which, as Bābur himself

[12] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, pp. 378–9.

[13] Abū'l Fazl, 1867–77, Vol. 1, p. 402. The figures for the whole province (*sūba*) are as given by the author. The detailed figures given for the various tribes and localities (pp. 402–3), however, come in the aggregate to 44,635 sheep, 45 Baluch horses and 30 camels.

[14] Clauson, 1972, p. 203. The earliest quotation in *COED*, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 1330, s.v. 'horde', is of 1555: 'The Tartares are divided by companies which they caule Hordas. they consiste of innumerable Hordas.'

[15] Clauson, 1972, pp. 322–3. Bābur (d. 1530) in his memoirs uses the term in an intermediate sense of leading men in his clan, who also had armed retainers (Bābur, 1995, p. 431; 1922, Vol. 2, p. 478).

[16] Cf. Barthold, 1956*a*, p. 163.

[17] See Chs. 6 and 8 in the present volume.

[18] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, pp. 69–70. See also Isogai, 1997.

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saw in 1502, the Moghuls followed punctiliously in Moghulistan;[19] and this must, at least, have made military operations more disciplined and effective.

The existence of steppe statehood makes it clear that we are dealing with a fairlywell-stratified, hierarchical society whose relatively rough manners should not be thought of as representing any kind of egalitarianism. Indeed, when Bābur visited his relatives, the Moghul khan and his brothers and kinsmen, at their encampments in 1502, the requisite ceremonies and formalities were given considerable attention.[20] These clearly reflected systems of etiquette that grew out of the close regard paid to aristocratic hierarchy.

Steppe society must also have been stratified according to wealth that mainly depended upon the number of herd animals one owned. Below the 'free' mass of herdsmen, rich and poor, there was also a fairly large segment of semi-servile and servile populations. When the Dzungars conquered the Kashghar khanate, they took a number of captives to their main seat of power, the Ili valley, and used them as agricultural workers.[21] These peasants were tied to the land and were, therefore, practically serfs.

The rulers and chiefs also had slaves. Haydar Dughlāt gives an eyewitness account of how the Moghul ruler, Vays Khan (d. 1428), cultivated a small field, irrigating it with pitchers of water brought from a well with the help of slaves.[22] The nomads of the steppes generally had the reputation of being slave-raiders; this reputation is principally associated with the Turkmens, and there are nineteenth-century accounts of their being engaged in capturing slaves.[23] It should, of course, be remembered that the steppe people too were subjected to enslavement to meet the demand for slaves in sedentary societies.

Sedentary societies

(*S. Moosvi*)

Central Asia forms a major component of the great nomadic pastoral belt from Mongolia to Atlantic North Africa. This is mainly due to the low precipitation in the entire

[19] Bābur, 1995, p. 149; 1922, Vol. 1, p. 155.
[20] Bābur, 1995, pp. 148–55; 1922, Vol. 1, pp. 154–61.
[21] These people were called 'Bukhārans'. Cf. Barthold, 1956*a*, p. 163. See also Chs. 6 and 7 in the present volume.
[22] Haydar Dughlāt, 1898, p. 67.
[23] Burnes, 1834, Vol. 1, pp. 338–9; Vol. 2, pp. 11–13, 57.

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zone, largely owing to the distance between the zone and the oceans. Here agricultural areas were confined to oases and narrow riverine valleys, and did not form large territorial blocks as in the great agrarian regions of the world (eastern China, the Gangetic basin, western Europe). Sedentary societies in Central Asia often had, therefore, the appearance of islands within a sea of steppes, and thus sedentary populations often coexisted as close neighbours with nomadic communities. These relationships involved ethnic differences between nomad and settler (Turk vs. Tajik; Mongol vs. settled Turk) in certain historical periods; yet often enough nomads and settlers also shared common languages because of geographic proximity, or because of the transformation of nomads into peasants. And yet despite such demographic admixtures the two societies, by their economic nature, required totally different systems of organization.

Nomads, for example, needed generally to be organized in tribes (see previoussub-section), whereas settlers, inhabiting permanent villages and engaged in multiple professions, had essentially local or territorial, not tribal affinities. One may again recall Bābur's surprise that Indians had caste names, though they were settled people: in his homelands only nomads had tribal names.[24]

The fundamental unit of pre-modern sedentary society was not, therefore, the kinship group, clan or tribe, but the 'village community'. The village community is an institution that has been subjected to theoretical analyses by many authors from Hegel to Maine, though mainly in relation to India.[25] A framework of co-operation has existed among villagers in most sedentary societies, especially when in pre-modern conditions the villages were largely isolated units of habitation.[26] In the arid zones of Central Asia, irrigation became one important factor binding the villagers together. It is often difficult to establish how the *kārez*s or *qanāt*s (underground irrigation channels) were originally built;[27] but in areas outside the great landowners' estates, the distribution of the water from these channels was usually based on village custom.[28]

In India, where well irrigation was more important in pre-modern times than canal irrigation, and was, therefore, based normally on the resources of the individual peasant,

[24] Bābur, 1995, pp. 466–7; 1922, Vol. 2, p. 528.

[25] Hegel, 1956, p. 154; Marx, 1973, pp. 474–86; 1887, pp. 350–2; Maine, 1876. Baden-Powell, 1896, may be added to this list of eminent writers.

[26] Of Iran, Lambton says that 'neighbouring villages often spoke, as they still do today, different dialects' and that 'from early Islamic times the villages in general appear to have enjoyed a considerable degree of autonomy and to have been organized as self-contained and virtually self-governing communities' (Lambton, 1954, p. 8).

[27] It is said of *kārez*s in Khurasan that these were built 'as an act of charity by the piously disposed, but most owe their construction to the actual requirements of the interest of local governors or chiefs' (Bellew, 1874, p. 298).

[28] Cf. Lambton, 1953, pp. 217–20.

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irrigation played little role in the formation of the village communities. Here, however, certain specific social factors underlay the structure of the community, namely, the caste system with its hereditary division of labour, and a hierarchical system of caste dominance as well as caste co-operation.[29] This had its economic aspect in that all villagers were linked together as traditional customers to particular village artisans providing customary shares out of their harvests in order to receive defined services from the craft workers.[30]

The village community did not imply any communal ownership or co-operative cultivation. It coexisted with individual cultivation, leading to peasant rights over definite parcels of land. Such a right was not necessarily a property right, since property implies not only saleability but also rent appropriation. This was because, for one thing, the *kharāj* (land tax) in almost all parts of Central Asia far exceeded the claims on peasants by local intermediaries. Indeed it was the king who was often recognized as the owner of the land in both Iran and India.[31] But in all sedentary communities of Central Asia, there were between the ruler and peasants intermediary layers of rights as well.

First, there were the higher elite elements in the community, the *kadkhudā*s in Iran, *arbāb*s in Sind, *panch*s/*muqaddam*s in northern India, often just called *kalāntarān* (great men, sing. *kalāntar*) in Persian.[32] In certain areas, a stronger superior right had also developed; its holder was given the designation of *zamīndār* in Mughal India – the right implied not only fiscal claims in part of the land or its produce, but also the hereditary obligation to collect tax, at given rates of remuneration, for the state.[33] There were similar intermediary classes in Iran (*arbāb, mālik*, etc.).[34]

The state, with its increasing ability to collect taxes, itself generated particular changes in the social structure. Wherever it obtained the necessary power, the fiscal right of the state approached the full surplus (or economic rent), often exceeding the permissible level of *kharāj* in Muslim law, viz. half the produce. Abū'l Fazl (*c*. 1595) makes this statement especially in respect of 'Iran and Turan', that is, the Safavid empire and the Uzbek khanate.[35] Yet an almost identical assertion is made about the Mughal land tax in India

[29] Cf. Habib, 1999, pp. 144–60.

[30] In 1847 a British report from Sind refers to a 'strong bond of union between all members of the village', and to the carpenter receiving 'his fee for the annual repair of the Persian wheels, and the potter for the supply of earthen vessels attached to them' (Thomas, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 728).

[31] Cf. Lambton, 1953, p. 105, for Iran; and Habib, 1999, pp. 122–6, for India.

[32] Lambton, 1954, p. 8; 1953, *passim* (see index); Habib, 1999, pp. 335*n, passim*.

[33] Habib, 1999, pp. 169–229.

[34] Lambton, 1953, pp. 422, 434.

[35] Abū'l Fazl, 1867–77, Vol. 1, p. 293: 'In Iran and Turan, since olden times one-tenth [of the produce] has been taken [as tax], but often it happens that it exceeds one half, and out of the habit of cruel-mindedness it does not seem disreputable.'

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early in the eighteenth century by a theological writer who wanted to prove that this tax was not *kharāj* but *ujra*, or rent.[36]

The concentration of such enormous fiscal resources, which gave rise, as we have seen, to the sovereign being seen as the universal landowner, naturally raises the question as to whether we are in the presence here of 'oriental despotism', the central feature of which, according to Marx, was that rents and taxes coincide.[37] This is not the place to enter into a debate on the nature of oriental despotism, or its place in Marx's concept of the Asiatic mode of production, first mentioned by him in 1859.[38] It is not very clear how matters would be different if one applied the term 'tributary mode of production' to an economy containing such a rent-receiving state.[39] The real question is whether a rent-extracting state would throttle trade and urban development or by generating 'induced' trade (for transfer of agrarian surplus to towns) help maintain a money economy and promote urban growth. It can be shown that Marx's different statements can lead to both conclusions.[40] While Marx's own contradictory views are important as indicating the futility of reconstructing unreal frameworks on the basis of a selection of his statements, as in the case of Wittfogel (1957), what is surely crucial is not simply to pursue theoretical deductions, but to see what the historical evidence tells us in respect to both the nature of the pre-colonial state and its economic environment in Central Asia.

We need, perhaps, to ask, first, how far the fiscal collections actually went into the hands of the state and to what purposes these were used. In different forms all the three major sedentary states of the region had systems of appanages, by which the sovereign alienated his fiscal and often administrative rights to members of the nobility temporarily or for all time. The most rigorous system appears to have been followed in the Mughal empire, where the *jāgīr*s (fiscal territorial assignments) were temporary and constantly subject to transfer, and did not involve any rights of civil or judicial administration.[41] In Persia under the Safavids, the *tuyul* was a land assignment either in lieu of salary or conditional upon maintaining a military contingent, while the *suyūrghāl* (land grant, lit. gift) was anoutright grant for all time with practically no conditions attached. It seems that in Persia

[36] See Habib, 1999, pp. 123–4.
[37] Marx, 1959, pp. 771–2.
[38] Marx, 1950, p. 329.
[39] I take Wickham, 1985, as an uncompromising representative of the applicability of this concept, originally proposed, I believe, by Samir Amin.
[40] Cf. Habib, 1995*b*, pp. 22–9, for quotations from several passages from Marx, of dual (and Contradictory) import mentioned here.
[41] See Habib, 1999, pp. 298–341, and Ali, 1997, pp. 74–94, for excellent studies of the system.

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the *suyūrghāl* grants were far more extensive than in the Mughal empire,[42] and the *tuyul*s tended to become hereditary and continuously reduced the royal domain, the *khālisa*.[43] In the Uzbek khanate the loss of the khan's power owing to the hereditary nature of the appanages was demonstrated when the khanate broke up among various principalities after the death of Shaybānī Khān (1510) and again under the Janids in the seventeenth century. When Nadr Muhammad (who occupied the khan's seat at Bukhara in 1641) fatally antagonized his nobles by trying to transfer their appanages, he worsened his position further by trying to resume the vast *suyūrghāl* grants made to the religious classes.[44]

Such assignments force us to consider the social situations of those who held them. If the assignees had rural seats, and they and their retainers lived off the land, the room for induced trade could have been quite limited. Much work has been done on the composition of the Mughal nobility in India. (Owing to the transfer of *jāgīr*s from one part of the empire to another, there cannot be any study restricted only to the Central Asian parts of that empire.) The results as summed up in the most authoritative study are that immigrants from Iran and Turan (the Uzbek territories) accounted for 51.5 per cent of the high nobility (*mansabdār*s of '1,000' and above) in 1656–7 and 51.6 per cent during the period 1658–76.[45] Such immigrants were least likely to spread out among villages. The *jāgīrdār*s who came from within the limits of the empire, such as Afghans, Rajputs, local Indian Muslims and others, were hardly ever posted even temporarily in their ancestral localities (unless they were hereditary chiefs as well, the total area under the chiefs being fairly limited);[46] and, when transferred, they tended to move with their entire establishment (*sarkār*) to the new location.[47] In such circumstances, any fixed rural associations were out of the question. The farming of revenues, a practice which grew in the eighteenth century, did not alter the situation very greatly, since the *jāgīrdār*s and their retinue then lived away from the *jāgīr* and depended on the remittance of the tax collections in money form. In either circumstance, induced trade must have been the consequence. A statistical study of the detailed fiscal and administrative data available for the Mughal empire *c*. 1595 has found that over 50 per cent of the revenues flowed to the urban sector;[48] and this would well accord with the nature of the Mughal *jāgīr* system that we can establish from our sources.

[42] In the Mughal empire moreover the grantees largely formed a town-based class (Moosvi, 1987, pp. 164–8).
[43] Lambton, 1953, pp. 107–19.
[44] Lāhorī, 1866–72, Vol. 2, pp. 435–56.
[45] Ali, 1997, pp. xvi–xvii. The results are worked out from Ali, 1985, a uniquely detailed work.
[46] On the area under chiefs see Habib, 1999, pp. 222–9.
[47] Habib, 1999, p. 330.
[48] Moosvi, 1987, pp. 272–95.

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When we turn to Safavid Persia, we find that in the beginning a very important and influential part of the nobility consisted of the Qizilbāsh Turkmāns who came from the eastern parts of Asia Minor, a territory largely lost to the Ottomans after the battle of Chaldiran (1514). Their language being different from Persian, it is unlikely that the Qizilbāsh commanders and the soldiery could have spread out in the Iranian villages: perforce they had to be town- or camp-based.[49] In time as the Qizilbāsh dominance declined, or was forcibly restricted under Shāh ᶜAbbās I (1587–1629), the Qizilbāsh element was partly replaced by the royal *ghulām*s, or slaves, recruited mainly from the Christian lands of the Caucasus, and so largely again in the same position of aliens in Persia proper.[50] The nobility did begin to be Persianized, but this does not mean that it was necessarily ruralized, since the Persian recruits to the nobility came largely from the bureaucracy (*mīrzā*s) rather than the rural landowners. The Shiᶜite religious establishment, which received large grants of land, was also mainly Persian (overlooking the immigrants from the Jabal ᶜAmil in Lebanon).[51] The institutionalization of religious instruction in Persia and the emphasis on Shiᶜite shrines, however, tended to give an urban orientation to the Shiᶜite clergy; and it is, therefore, likely that the taxes in large *auqaf* estates created for its benefit were not collected in a way different from those in the appanages of town-based potentates.[52]

As for the Uzbek khanate, it has been a standard view that the Uzbek chiefs who ascended to power in Transoxania under Shaybānī Khān (d. 1510) were nomadic tribal leaders, and it is even alleged that their ascendancy led to the addition of 'large numbers of Turkic and Turco-Mongolian nomads to the population of Transoxiana'.[53] However, while Barthold concedes that under the Uzbek ascendancy conditions in Khwarazm became 'quite barbaric', he paints a fairly positive picture of urban culture under the Uzbeks, in the Zarafashan basin (containing Samarkand and Bukhara) and in Balkh.[54] Another interesting feature in the socio-political structure of Transoxania was the increasing resources of the *khwāja*s, or Sufi mystics, who exercised unmatched influence over the popular mind; and this often induced the various rulers to keep them satisfied with large grants of lands.[55] It is difficult to see what kind of economic influence they exercised by the management of

[49] On the tension between the Qizilbāsh and the Persian elements, see Banani, 1978, pp. 89–91.
[50] Minorsky, 1943, pp. 14–19; Hodgson, 1974, pp. 32–3.
[51] Cf. Lambton, 1953, pp. 126–7, for large grants of land to the religious classes. On the scholars ('*ulamā*') from Jabal ᶜAmil, see Abisaab, 1994. The ᶜAmilī immigrants 'shared no fundamental or ethnic ties with any of the military and aristocratic elites of Safavid society' (ibid., pp. 121–2).
[52] On the growing emphasis on shrines, see Arjomand, 1984, pp. 169–70.
[53] Subtelny, 1997, p. 16. But Shaybānī himself had fled the steppes in early childhood and 'had taken a liking to sedentary life' (Burton, 1997, p. 3).
[54] Barthold, 1956*b*, pp. 64–5.
[55] This may be inferred from Lāhorī, 1866–72, Vol. 2, pp. 439–40.

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their estates; but their shrines, being large pilgrimage centres, generally made the *khwājas* an urban or semi-urban class.

The structure of the state in sedentary societies in all three major empires was thus closely connected with the towns. Bernier's account of India in the seventeenth century has been widely understood to mean that in India and other eastern countries, the towns were mere nomadic encampments, though it can be legitimately argued that this was not really what the French traveller had intended to say.[56] One wonders, however, how the extensive archaeological remains of Mughal cities and several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century descriptions of these could have been ignored. The reported populations of certain towns cannot similarly be overlooked. Within the Indus basin, Lahore had around 250,000 inhabitants in 1581 and Thatta about 200,000 in 1635.[57] In the early 1820s in Persia the population of Mashhad was estimated at 32,000, and Shiraz at 40,000,[58] but by then the country's economic decline had long set in. There are apparently no estimates for towns in Transoxania in the period before 1800; but in 1831–2 Burnes estimated the population of Bukhara at 150,000 souls, and gave a fairly enthusiastic description of it.[59]

Ever since they came into existence, towns have depended for their existence on the surplus received from villages. The rulers' dependants and retainers and artisans, labourers and servants, who met the consumption requirements of the ruling classes, had to be fed and clothed from resources obtained from the countryside, most conveniently throughtax-generated trade. There was also the long-distance trade by which goods of high value were conveyed.

The mercantile classes carrying out various commercial functions were miscellaneously composed. There were semi-nomadic communities like the Banjaras in India, transporting goods in bulk on pack oxen,[60] and Afghan tribesmen who combined horse-breeding with extensive horse-trading.[61] But trade in finer goods was conducted by other communities, who combined commerce with banking and other credit operations. From their headquarters at Julfa in Persia, the operations of the Armenians spanned almost the whole of Eurasia.[62] The Banyas and Khatris, often called Multanis, not only controlled much

[56] Bernier, 1916, pp. 219–20, 251–2, 281–90. For the understanding obtained from Bernier of Indian cities being just military camps, see Marx and Engels, 1945, pp. 57–8.
[57] Cf. Habib, 1999, pp. 83–4.
[58] Fraser, 1984, pp. 169, 463–4.
[59] Burnes, 1834, Vol. 1, p. 302; Vol. 2, p. 184.
[60] Habib, 1990, pp. 372–9.
[61] Habib, 2001*b*, p. 33.
[62] See, e.g., Mauro, 1990, pp. 270–4, for a summary account. For the Armenian trade with India, see Moosvi, forthcoming.

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of the long-distance commerce and banking in India, but also in Iran, Afghanistan and Transoxania.[63]

The relationship between the rulers and merchants was not necessarily antagonistic. For Mughal India there has been much debate over the treatment of merchants by the rulers; Moreland's description of the oppression from which the merchants suffered has been widely contested.[64] With regard to merchants in Persia, Malcolm had this to say early in the nineteenth century:

> The merchants of Persia are a numerous and wealthy class; and there is no part of the community that has enjoyed, through all the distractions with which this kingdom has been afflicted, and, under the worst princes, more security, both in their persons, and property. The reason is obvious: their traffic is essential to the revenue.[65]

As for Transoxania, Burton's recent massive work has shown in detail how the various khans of Bukhara did much, according to their lights, to further commerce.[66]

If, indeed, there was a system of despotic states in Central Asia different fromstate-forms elsewhere, then it would seem from our descriptive evidence that such despotism was not necessarily inimical either to towns or to trade, despite many violent upheavals and individual acts of oppression.

A few words may be added about the social order. The bulk of the populations comprised freeborn persons, but slavery was fairly widespread. Slavery is permissible under Islamic law, and as an institution was much used by the Safavid rulers (but not by the Mughals or Uzbeks) to bolster their control of the nobility.[67] There was muchslave-capture and slave-trade resulting from the conflict between the Uzbeks and the Persians; and Persian slaves formed a significant element in the population of the Bukhara emirate in 1831–2.[68] They could, however, redeem themselves, and were not apparently too inhumanly treated by their masters as a general rule.

Except for slaves there do not seem to have been any restrictions on change of residence or profession in the sedentary societies of Central Asia, with the notable exception of the Indian caste system, which normally prevented a change in occupation. There were, however, classes like the *faqīr*s (lit. the poor or indigent) who were landless labourers under

[63] For the Banyas and Khatris, see Habib, 1990, pp. 379–88. For the Banyas in Iran, see Chardin, 1686, pp. 98–101 et seq. See Burton, 1997, pp. 451–2, for Multani or Indian merchants at Bukhara; also Burnes, 1834, Vol. 1, pp. 284–6, for about 300 Hindus living in Bukhara with a caravanserai of their own.
[64] Moreland, 1920, pp. 50–2, 264–5. For a contrary view, see especially Habib, 1995*b*, pp. 223–9.
[65] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, p. 430.
[66] Burton, 1997, pp. 413–26.
[67] Cf. Minorsky, 1943, p. 127.
[68] Burnes, 1834, Vol. 1, pp. 432–3.

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the Yūsufzāi peasants among the Afghans.[69] Finally, freeborn persons could be subjected to *begar* (forced labour). This obligation was imposed on certain communities in India,[70] while in Persia the guilds (*asnāf*s) of artisans were often made liable to it.[71] There were thus large sections of partially unprivileged populations; but equality has not been a hallmark of sedentary societies anywhere.

Part Two

THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Transoxania

(*A. Tabyshalieva*)

Central Asian societies were not uniformly structured, and the extent of men's control over women depended not only on religion, but also on tribal custom and kinship structures. In accordance with the *sharīᶜa* (Islamic law), the Muslims tended to be highly patriarchal and, in public life, strictly gender-segregated; but it was the sedentary populations in most of the region who lived more in conformity with the *sharīᶜa*, whereas the nomadic peoples largely followed their own customary practice (*ᶜādat*). The behaviour of women was strictly regulated everywhere; if a woman dared to break the traditions of male supremacy, she and her relatives were punished. A woman was expected to be, first, under the control of her father and, then, under that of her husband and his relatives or sons.

The contradiction between patriarchal traditions and the need for women's work in real life necessarily led to some conflict. A wife was almost universally considered a lower creature than her husband, usually designated 'unequal' or 'weak' (*nāchār* among the Turkic tribes). She had no right to intervene in the men's world, although domestically she generally enjoyed a recognized status. For example, a Turkic man would seldom buy or sell without his wife's permission, and a mother's agreement was needed for the marriage of her son or daughter.

[69] Elphinstone, 1839, Vol. 2, pp. 26–9. Elphinstone's information relates generally to 1809.
[70] Habib, 1999, pp. 181, 182, 206, 280, 289.
[71] Minorsky, 1943, p. 148.

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In Xinjiang the Arabic word *mazlūm* (oppressed) designated a married woman, while an unmarried daughter or a widow was called *ʿājiza* (helpless one). The duties and sufferings of women were believed to be divinely ordained. Nevertheless, it has been noted that in practice the position of women in this region was in some respects remarkably free, compared with some other countries. For instance, nineteenth-century French visitors were struck by the ease with which the Muslim women of the region could (and did) discard their husbands and acquire new ones.[72]

In Pashtoon tribal society (Afghanistan and the North-Western Frontier Province of Pakistan), women were conceptualized as forming two opposite and polar models. *Mor*, the mother, was assigned a highly positive image, which echoes the common saying of the Prophet Muhammad that heaven lies beneath the feet of one's mother. On the other hand, when a woman's chastity had been compromised and the honour of her close agnatic kin – father, husband and brothers – was at stake, she was considered to be in a state of *tor* (literally, black). Colour symbolism is a universal tribal phenomenon, and, among the Pashtoons, black symbolized death or evil, while white symbolized purity and goodness.[73]

Women in Transoxania not only had their household duties but also worked in the fields. A Russian traveller noted: 'All work at home and in the fields is carried on by women. An Uzbek woman is an ox, who works without rest. The man always has the money. He calculates carefully how much to give his wife for expenses.'[74] Women in nomadic society were burdened with innumerable tasks: riding, doing the housework, pitching the tents and taking them down, cooking and mothering children. Even a pregnant woman was expected to dismantle a tent and load it on to a camel; indeed, she would work on until childbirth. If a woman was ill and could not do all her household tasks, she was seen as abnormal, and explanations were found from folklore. Turkic nomads ascribed this to the actions of a monster called Albarsty, Maty-basy or Gelmagy-kempir.[75]

Discrimination against a girl began from birth and continued to haunt her throughout her life. A girl's birth was often received as sad news and would go unmarked, while great festivities accompanied a boy's birth. It was customary at the birth of a boy to give extravagant gifts, whereas at a girl's birth, a small present or nothing at all would be given. Moreover, women who bore only girls would be reproached or ostracized. Since in tribal societies girls would usually, upon marriage, leave the family and belong to other

[72] Badlick, 1993, p. 205.
[73] Ahmed, 1988, p. 30.
[74] Grebenkin, 1872, p. 60.
[75] They believed that this many-breasted creature with red hair changed into many shapes and was extremely dangerous for women and newborn babies. The belief was so strong that people did not leave a woman alone with her infant at night or extinguish the light.

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communities, they were sometimes considered potential enemies, so that there seemed little point in providing them with a good upbringing. A Kyrgyz saying went: 'A girl is an enemy.' Traditionally, a girl aged 7 or 8 was considered to be mature. A Kazakh proverb reflected the desire to marry off girls as early as possible: 'Do not keep salt a long time, because it will become water; do not keep a daughter for long, because she will become a slave.' A daughter-in-law was subordinate not only to her husband, but also to all his male and female relatives. She had to do whatever her mother-in-law asked of her. In fact, she served the family as a slave and was usually hemmed in by many petty restrictions.

The practice of seclusion varied according to region and among the nomadic and settled groups of the population. Stricter seclusion tended to occur in sedentary Muslim groups rather than among the nomadic peoples. This was connected with features of their economy and way of life. A settled woman was isolated in the *ichkarī*, or inner rooms of the house. Her way of life was established by tradition; even an innocent conversation with a man or the removal of the *paranja* (veil) was seen as a serious transgression against society's laws. If a man knocked at the door of her home, she could only respond by knocking in a manner to indicate that there was no man present. The lot of females in Pashtoon society is perhaps best summed up by the proverb, 'For a woman, either the house or the grave.'[76] An old Tajik saying echoes this: 'The way of a woman in this life is from the bedroom to the kitchen, the kitchen to the washroom and the washroom to the grave.'

The status of women was reflected in their traditional clothing. In sedentary Muslim societies, a woman usually wore the *paranja* from the age of 9 or 10. This meant that she was covered from head to toe. Her face was hidden under a black net,[77] and even her infant was carried under the *paranja*. In contrast, due in part to economic conditions, a nomadic woman never covered her face and generally led a less restricted life. Her voice could often be heard in meetings, especially on issues of common interest. Kazakh and Kyrgyz women rode freely in the steppes and took part in festivals.

Virginity was cherished in all Muslim groups and any infidelity was punished severely: if found out, lovers would be executed. In nineteenth-century Bukhara, a woman suspected of having an extramarital affair would be sewn into a sack by servants of the emir and thrown from a minaret. The rules of divorce, except those concerning property, were designed wholly in favour of men. There were only two grounds on which a woman could ask for a divorce, namely, cruelty or sterility of the husband: the second was very difficult to prove. For a man, divorce was extremely easy; he simply had to utter the word *talāq* (divorce) three times. According to the *sharīᶜa* and *ᶜādat*, male children must remain with

[76] Ahmed, 1988, p. 30.
[77] In Persian, *chashm-avez* or *ayazī* or *ayasī*, made of hair: see Inju, 1351/1972.

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their father and his relatives. The *sharīᶜa* allowed only under-age daughters to remain with their divorced mother.

Polygamy was widespread in Muslim areas, although mainly among the rich and prosperous. The emirs and khans had large harems with many wives (the Qur'an allows up to 4 wives and any number of concubines). The last emir of Bukhara, Sayyidd Mīr ᶜĀlim (1910–20), had 112 wives and concubines. Customary practice among the Timurids in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries provided for a category of wives called *ghūnchachī*s: these were free-born women, who could be married in addition to the four legal wives. They were generally styled *āghā* and could be promoted to full legal status if there was a 'vacancy' among the group of legal wives, usually after motherhood.[78] In many cases polygamy was not only the 'cult of masculine honour', but also served the large household. The head of a nomadic family would often send part of his herd away with his elder wife and remain in nearby pastures with his young wives or move on in another direction. The family would gather again for the winter. Almost all witnesses of polygamy wrote that the wives lived in discord among themselves. Their children took sides in the fights and quarrels. A Karakalpak (Qara-Qālpāq) saying goes: 'Rivals [wives] have quarrels every day: [even] for cinders there is a quarrel.'

Until Soviet times, the custom of levirate was traditionally followed mainly by the nomadic peoples. Buying a wife meant that she was a chattel not only for her husband, but also for all relatives in the clan. Her husband's relatives inherited the woman as the object of exchange after his death. The harsh conditions of nomadic life and the never-ending wars, together with the idea that women's sexuality must be controlled for the preservation of clan honour, made it hard for a woman to survive alone. Widows often had to agree to leviratic marriages for the sake of their children and to avoid being ostracized. A Kazakh proverb laid down the rule of levirate thus: 'If an elder brother is dying, his wife is given to the younger brother; if he dies, his wife is transferred to an elder brother, just as the skin of a dead horse is the property of its master.' [79] Apart from the father-in-law, it was of no importance who inherited the woman: it could be her dead husband's brother, uncle or another distant relative. If there were several brothers, the youngest would inherit the wife.

A marriage under levirate could result in a great difference in ages between the spouses. For example, a 30-year-old woman could become the wife of a 7-year-old boy if he were the brother of her dead husband.[80] If the widow returned to her family, her husband's family might be subjected to ridicule. Among the Karakalpaks, for example, there was a

[78] Bābur, 1922, Vol. 1, p. 17 and note.
[79] Usenova, 1986, p. 29.
[80] Abramson, 1973, pp. 58–9.

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saying: 'Really, do you not have any men that the widow left you?'[81] If a prospective groom died having partly paid for his future bride, his younger brother inherited her. Sometimes, however, a widow's views on which of the eligible men she wished to marry were taken into account.

The practice of sororate, meaning the right of a widower to marry a younger sister of his dead wife, was widely practised among nomadic peoples such as the Kyrgyz, the Kazakhs and the Karakalpaks. Among settled peoples such as the Uzbeks and Tajiks, levirate and sororate were unfamiliar customs. The Tajiks, however, believed that to leave a fertile woman without a man was inadmissible: remarriages of widows were thus common.

Throughout the region, women had value in men's eyes only in relation to men and reproduction. The fertility cult in Central Asia was based on the widespread assumption that children always bring good luck and are pleasing to God. The desire to have more sons has had social, economic and environmental causes for thousands of years. High infant mortality and the need to maintain large families to support the natural economy and to wage wars may explain the fertility cult's particular popularity in Transoxania. The centuries-old fear that a child would not survive led to customs and traditions that emphasized a woman's fertility. Extremely early marriages for women often led to premature sterility and thus a declining birth rate. The difference in spouses' ages, especially in polygamous marriages, also had a significant influence, as did the early death of women and lengthy lactation.

A woman's status in society was thus often determined by her ability to bear children. Sterile women held a marginal position: among the Kyrgyz, for example, they were contemptuously nicknamed 'dry skulls'. Childless women maintained the tradition of pilgrimage to numerous holy places. An entire network of holy tombs (*mazār*s) and innumerable customs were devoted to the cure of sterility. *Mazār*s, along with the rituals, spirituality and social functions associated with them, were deeply venerated thanks to the cult of fertility. Holy places for women could be found everywhere and for many centuries pilgrims have visited places such as Shah-i Zinda and Bibi Khanum (Uzbekistan) and Safid-Bulend (Kyrgyzstan).[82]

Women are mostly known in history as mothers, wives or daughters of men. However, the wives and other women of the court of Timur in the fourteenth century are worthy of consideration. Their position owed more to Mongol customs than to the traditions of Islam. As can be seen from the accounts of the banquets in 1404 by Ruy González de Clavijo, ambassador of the king of Castile, and Ibn ᶜArabshāh, the queens and princesses were

[81] Bekmuratova, 1970, p. 58.
[82] Abramson, 1973, p. 61.

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present there unveiled. They also gave banquets to which they invited their own guests. Timur built palaces with gardens in the environs of Samarkand both for his wives and for other princesses.[83] His grandson, Ulugh Beg (1394–1449), the famous astronomer and a builder of *madrasa*s, had the following words carved over the main portal of the Bukhara *madrasa*: 'Learning is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman.' This certainly referred to the study of theology and some scholars believe it applied to secular learning too. The reference to women is significant and indicates that Ulugh Beg must have had progressive views concerning the position of women in society. It is also significant that these words were displayed in Bukhara, the stronghold of the most conservative *shaykh*s and theologians.[84]

Though secluded, women in Central Asia could still write. Prominent female poets of the nineteenth century include Uvaysī, Mahzuna, Nadira, Tajudaulat and Dilshād. Nadira, the wife of the khan of Kokand, left a rich literary legacy in the form of more than 10,000 verses in the Uzbek and Persian (Tajik) languages, both under her own name and under the pseudonyms Kamila and Maimuna.

Iran[85]

(*S. Moosvi*)

The position of women in Safavid Iran was perhaps not very different from their position in other Central Asian societies. In Iran, as elsewhere, the material conditions of urban, aristocratic and middle-class women differed from those of women of the poorer classes. Women's seclusion was perhaps less strict than in the towns of Transoxania, however. In about 1575 the Italian traveller Vincentio d'Alessandri noted the 'fine features of Iranian women', and stated that they wore 'robes of silk, veils on their heads and show their faces openly'.[86] Jean Chardin, a century later, recorded that'they don't shut up young women in Persia, till they are six or seven years of age; and before they come to that age, they go out of Seraglio sometimes with their Fathers insomuch that one may see them' and 'they

[83] Barthold, 1963, p. 31.
[84] Polonskaya and Malashenko, 1994, p. 22.
[85] I am grateful to Professor Chahryar Adle for kindly supplying some important facts and references for this section.
[86] 'Narrative' of Vincentio d'Alessandri in Grey (tr. and ed.), 1873, p. 233.

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wear no veil in the House at any age'.[87] Chardin's description (with illustrations) of the veils worn by Iranian women supports d'Alessandri's statement that their veils covered the head and not the face. Out of the four types of veils described by Chardin, three covered the forehead or head fully or partially; only one covered the entire body including the face, revealing only the eyes.[88] After describing the features of Iranian women at some length,[89] Thomas Herbert (1628) still describes them as being 'Unseen'. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1644) remarks that they were visible only to their husbands.[90] There is possibly some element of exaggeration here. However, John Fryer says that women were not allowed to go out unveiled and unescorted and were served only by female attendants and eunuchs.[91] Both Tavernier (who visited Iran in 1644) and Chardin (who did so in 1665–77) found women superbly attired,[92] and Chardin notes that their garments were not much different from those of men.[93] Fryer (who was in Iran in 1677–8) reports that the women were taught to 'Ride a Straddle like Men, to Leap, to Dart, and drink Tobacco'.[94] All this, of course, relates to the upper echelons of society. There was a certain amount of ethnic admixture among Iranian women of the higher classes: according to Chardin, since the beginning of the Safavid period the men of substance in Iran had had a tendency to seek Georgian or Circassian wives.[95]

Marriage in Iran was a matter of contract in accordance with Muslim law. Thus it was a legal requirement for a woman to consent to her marriage. However, Raphael du Mans and Chardin in the second half of the seventeenth century,[96] and Malcolm at the turn of the nineteenth,[97] found that in most cases this was a mere formality: marriages were mostly arranged by the families, and the prospective partners were not known to each other, except in the case of marriages between cousins, which were not uncommon.

The husband was required to pay, or pledge to pay, a dowry (*mahr*) to his wife, but if the wife sued for a divorce before the *qāzī* (judge) (which she was entitled to do), she forfeited her right to the dowry. This latter condition meant that the financial safeguard provided for

[87] Chardin, 1927, Vol. 2, p. 216.
[88] Ibid., p. 217.
[89] Ferrier, 1998, p. 385: 'their hair black and curling, their forehead high and pure, eyes diamond like, having black luster, their noses high, mouths rather large than sparing, thicke lips and cheekes fat, round and painted.'
[90] See statements from Herbert and Tavernier quoted in Ferrier, 1998, p. 389.
[91] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 126.
[92] Ferrier, 1998, p. 390.
[93] Chardin, 1927, Vol. 2, p. 216.
[94] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 127.
[95] See statements from Herbert, Tavernier and Chardin quoted in Ferrier, 1998, p. 385.
[96] Ferrier, 1998, p. 385.
[97] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, pp. 589–90.

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the wife was far less effective, since Fryer and Malcolm both testify that men who wished to divorce their wives would treat them so badly that the women were compelled to seek a divorce and lose their claim to a dowry. Only if the wife could convince the *qāzī* of her husband's tyranny and his wilful violation of the marriage contract could a suspension of the marriage be pronounced and the husband directed by the *qāzī*'to give [the wife] alimony and maintain her at his own charges'.[98] But, Fryer adds: 'Divorces are common among the ordinary People, though seldom among the great ones, who count it a shame.'[99] Malcolm in 1799–1801 found the woman's right to her dowry well 'guarded not only by law and usage but by the protection of her male relations, who are in general the witnesses'. He says that it is 'one right of which women in Persia are very jealous'.[100]

For women infertility was considered the worst stigma and a number of superstitions were attached to it. According to Chardin, the general belief was that infertility was a consequence of ill-gotten possessions and the sins of husbands which needed to be expiated through charity.[101]

Under Shi^{c}ite law, temporary marriage (*mut^{c}a sigha*) for a specified period, with the permission to have more than one such alliance, depending upon means and inclination, is legal; and the practice was not uncommon.[102] There was also the well-recognized practice of concubinage, based upon the institution of female slaves, who were bought and sold.

In Safavid Persia prostitution was also quite common. Prostitutes were excluded only from Ardabil. According to Chardin, in Isfahan alone there were 12–14,000 officially registered prostitutes paying taxes, not counting those who freelanced, and who altogether paid the state 8,000 *tuman*s annually. They paid for the king's licence when they first set up business and then paid an annual fee as long as they practised their profession.[103] Fryer put their number in Isfahan at 40,000.[104] In addition, there were bands of dancers and singers, either attached to particular nobles or freelancers, spread all over the country, who also doubled as prostitutes.[105] Registered prostitutes had their own organization with a head and officers. In spite of their large number, the prices of their services were very high, particularly during their first year of business. Prosperous courtesans even built grand mansions in respectable localities.[106]

[98] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, pp. 106–8; Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, p. 592.
[99] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 107.
[100] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, p. 590.
[101] Ferrier, 1998, p. 391.
[102] For these marriages in Iran, see Levy, 1957, pp. 115–17.
[103] Ferrier, 1998, pp. 394–5.
[104] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 129.
[105] Chardin, quoted in Ferrier, 1998, p. 394.
[106] Ibid.

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Although there was no public execution or flogging of women, there were still quite harsh ways of punishing them. A married woman could be disgraced by being forced to wear a border on her garment, the mark that usually identified a prostitute, or 'to shave her Head, [which] is the greatest Mark of Infamy she can be branded with; unless to add a perpetual stigmatizing'.[107] Malcolm reports that innocent females were often included in the punishment meted out to their husbands and fathers, particularly where those of high rank were concerned. Women were tortured to give information about concealed wealth, and if a noble incurred the wrath of the ruler and was sentenced to death, it was not unusual for his wives and daughters to be given away to his slaves or in certain cases to men of lower classes, such as mule drivers.[108]

Women of substance in Safavid Persia were not brought up to perform any useful tasks, being designed merely to be 'idle companions'. According to Fryer, upper-class Iranian women were only 'instructed in the Affairs of Bed, Banqueting, Luxury and Brutish Obsequiousness'; 'nor are they trained up in those Principles from their Youth which should render them fit to become prudent Matrons.'[109] Infants were left in the care of slaves and male children were educated by eunuchs, tutors and teachers.[110] Du Mans records in 1660 that one of the few activities left to women were visits to public baths; or 'they only smoke tobacco all day and in the harem their most demanding task will be to embroider some fabrics and to line the tops of stockings. The whole household depends on the man.'[111]

Nevertheless, if Persian paintings of the time are any guide, the women of the upper classes in Persia were not all illiterate. The depiction of young Layla and Majnūn, along with other girls shown at school, was a popular theme with Iranian artists; but there are quite a few other miniatures depicting women reading or writing: for instance, a painting of 1526 shows a woman reciting a poem from a book,[112] while another well-known painting of the Isfahan school shows a girl writing.[113] In the cities, women could be active in other spheres as well. In private workshops, for example, they could participate in producing manuscripts. Budāq Qazvīnī had seen with his own eyes (*c*. 1576–7) that in the houses of Shiraz 'the wife is a copyist [*kātib*], the husband a miniaturist [*musawwir*], the daughter an

[107] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 128.
[108] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, pp. 454–5.
[109] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 127: 'They have little care over their Children, nor have they much business with the Reel or Spindle.'
[110] Ferrier, 1998, p. 389.
[111] Du Mans in Ferrier, 1998, p. 389.
[112] Blochet, 1929, Pl. CXXIII.
[113] Robinson, 1976, Pl. XVI, no. 1003.

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illuminator [*muzahhib*] and the son a binder [*mujallid*]. Shiraz was at that time the main centre for producing commercial manuscripts.'[114]

Some Safavid princesses and other women of the aristocracy were also keen builders. At Isfahan alone Shāh ᶜAbbās II's (1642–66) grandmother, Dilārām Khānum, constructed two caravanserais and two *madrasa*s in the 1640s; Shahrbānū, the sister of Shāh Sultān Husayn (1694–1722), built a *madrasa* and a bathhouse; while Princess Maryam Begum built a *madrasa* and a large mansion during 1703–4. Quite a few mansions, mosques and *madrasa*s were also constructed by women of the nobility.[115] Princess Mahīnbānū Sultanam, Shāh Tahmāsp I's (1523–76) beloved sister, was a calligrapher.[116] She used to ride on horseback and took her stand, while hunting, behind her brother.[117]

Notwithstanding Fryer's categorical assertion that no women 'though of the Royal Lineage, are permitted in Matters of State to meddle, or have their Cabals or Instruments, whereby to convey their policies', there are several instances of royal ladies' directparticipation in Safavid court politics and government, before as well as after Fryer's visit.[118] The Mughal emperor Humāyūn's (1530–56) servant Jauhar Aft ābchī records that it was the wise counsel of Shāh Tahmāsp I's sister (presumably Sultanam) that ensured Iranian assistance for the royal exile, though Tahmāsp himself wanted him murdered.[119] Parī Khān Khānum, the daughter of Shāh Tahmāsp I, was influential enough to play a crucial role in the struggle for the succession in 1575–7 (she favoured Ismāᶜīl). But in November 1577 she allegedly had him poisoned for his lack of gratitude. After his death, at the beginning of the reign of Muhammad Khudābanda (1578–87), she managed to control the affairs of state through her Circassian uncle, Shamkhal Sultān. It was only through the designs of another woman, Khayr al-Nisā Begum (known as Mahd-i ᶜUlya), the wife of Khudābanda, that Parī Khān Khānum was removed from power and later murdered.[120] Far from being content to exercise her influence on affairs of state indirectly, Mahd-i ᶜUlya chose to take direct control. For well over a year, she governed openly, appointing the chief officers, before she was herself overthrown and strangled on charges of infidelity in July 1579.[121]

Shāh ᶜAbbās I's (1587–1629) daughter Zaynab Begum and some other ladies of the harem, including the queen mother, exercised considerable influence over Shāh Safī I

[114] Budāq Qazvīnī, MS, fols. 109r–v; Akimushkin and Ivanov, 1979, p. 50.
[115] For details see Blake, 1998, pp. 409–13.
[116] See Adle, 1993, p. 228.
[117] Gulbadan, 1902, Persian text, p. 69, tr. pp. 169–70.
[118] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 127. On the important role of women in the exercise of political power in sixteenth-century Safavid Iran, see Szuppe's outstanding study published in 1994. See also Adle, 1993, p. 228.
[119] Āftābchī, MS, fol. 77a–b.
[120] Cf. Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, pp. 247, 251, 253–5.
[121] Jackson and Lockhart, 1986, pp. 255, 259.

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(1629–42).[122] Princess Maryam Begum played a crucial role in securing the throne for Shāh Sultān Husayn after the death of Shāh Sulaymān (Shāh Safī II) against the claims of his younger brother, ᶜAbbās Mīrzā. She is also credited with persuading him to follow a more energetic policy against the Afghans and to transfer the capital from Isfahan to Qazvin. Princesses, especially Maryam Begum, herself a hardened wine-drinker, resisted the demands of Muhammad Baqar Majlisī, the *shaykh al-islām* (1627– 99), and violated the decree restricting the unbridled consumption of alcohol.[123] Indeed, Minorsky, while underlining the role of the 'shadow government' represented by the harem and the queen mother, holds alcohol to be one of the major causes of the decline of the Safavid empire.[124]

All politically influential women from the harems are overshadowed, however, by the dramatic personality of the Iranian religious revolutionary, Qurratu'l ᶜAyn. She was born in Qazvin in 1814 to a religious family and was married to a cleric. Yet she was highly educated and defied her husband in order to follow the mystic *(shaykhī)* sect on which she wrote a *risāla*, or tract. In 1844 she shifted her allegiance to Sayyid ᶜAlī Muhammad, the Bāb, of whose millenary movement she became one of the 18 recognized leaders (*hurūf al-hayy*, 'letters of the living one'). She preached the Bābi doctrines publicly at Karbala and at various places in Iran until, in 1848, her famous public unveiling occurred at Badasht, with a fiery declaration of insurrection. She was arrested in 1850, and in 1852 met her death by torture 'with superhuman fortitude'. Despite some dispute about how far she went in her unveiling, there is little doubt that Qurratu'l ᶜAyn, heroine and martyr, is the one truly emancipated woman in Iran that pre-modern Islam produced.[125]

Away from the spectacular world of these elite women were the ordinary rural and tribal women, who were 'seldom veiled' according to Malcolm. They were useful members of the community who 'not only shared the bed, but the fatigues and dangers of their husbands' and were thus respected. 'They performed all the domestic and menial jobs of their homes.'[126] Adam Olearius (in 1636–67) and Fryer and Le Burn (in 1701) all met such women and were waited upon by them during their journeys. Fryer describes the hospitality he received, being served cheese and 'Butter made before our Eyes, with no other Churn than a Goatskin'. Le Burn found women selling 'butter, milk, eggs and good chickens'.[127] This account is also supported by the evidence offered by Persian miniatures, which show

[122] Ibid., p. 281.
[123] Ibid., pp. 311–12, 317.
[124] Minorsky (ed. and tr.), 1943, p. 23.
[125] For a picture of Qurratu'l ᶜAyn and a biography, see Aryanpur, 1978, Vol. 1, pp. 130–2; illus., p. 145.
[126] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, p. 613.
[127] Ferrier, 1998, pp. 392–3.

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women spinning, washing clothes, cooking, looking after children[128] and milking cows.[129] But Fryer complains that the inns had no female keepers or maids. The profession of midwifery was apparently not a separate one either, since Fryer remarks that 'it is common for the ordinary Peoples Wives to meet together to assist' in childbirth.[130] Poor women too had their share of beauty, particularly when they were young, though Malcolm says it was soon destroyed by hard labour and the continuous exposure to the elements.[131]

India

(*S. Moosvi*)

In late medieval India, as in Transoxania and Iran, the role of women in society was not only regarded as subordinate, but was also rationalized as being due to women's own inherent weaknesses. In religious perceptions, woman was portrayed as vile and as a seductress, both in the verses of the monotheistic saint Kabīr (fifteenth century) and in those of Tulsi Das (*c*. 1580), the author of the *Rāmcharitmanas* (the Hindi story of Rama). Similar views were held by the orthodox Naqshbandi theologian, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī (1564–1624) (see Chapter 24).[132] However, there is a much better perception of woman in the Sikh scriptures, which do not denigrate her in this manner.

While Muslims in India, like those of Transoxania, largely followed the legal system of Abū Hanifa, customs differed in some important respects. Public executions for alleged adultery were practically unheard-of in India, for example. There was also a general aversion to a husband's divorcing his wife, and a theologian (1595) noted that the epithet *talāqī* (a divorcing husband) was deemed an extremely offensive term of abuse.[133] Polygamy among the upper classes was common, and Emperor Akbar's (1556–1605) own spokesman

[128] Froman and Kubekova, n.d., Pl. 21 (Safavid School in Tabriz, work of Mīr Sayyid ᶜAlīor a contemporary of his, mid-sixteenth century), and p. vi (margin illus.).
[129] Froman and Kubekova, n.d., Pl. 20.
[130] Fryer, 1915, Vol. 3, p. 130. For a contrary statement to the effect that midwives were to be found in very large numbers, see Elgood, 1970, p. 205, where, however, no source is cited.
[131] Malcolm, 1815, Vol. 2, p. 636.
[132] Sirhindī, n.d., pp. 190–1.
[133] Badaunī, 1972, p. 437.

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Abū'l Fazl felt particularly blessed to have three wives.[134] Yet seventeenth century marriage contracts contain clauses barring the husband from entering into a second marriage or taking a concubine.[135] Indeed, Akbar publicly endorsed the principle of monogamy and prohibited marriages before puberty. This order covered Hindus as well. He also argued that Muslim law was unfair to the daughter in allowing her only a half-share in the inheritance (as compared to that of the son), whereas being weaker, she should in fact be entitled to a larger share.[136] Widows frequently remarried among all classes of Muslims and widowhood was generally not held to be a stigma. Marriage contracts stipulated the amount of dowry (*mahr*) to be paid to the wife; a husband was also to avoid long absences without providing his wife with a source of sustenance; otherwise, the marriage could be legally dissolved.[137] Prostitution, though prevalent, was looked down upon. Akbar in his capital, Fatehpur Sikri, banished all the city's prostitutes to a special quarter, naming it 'Shaitan Pura' ('Abode of the Devil').[138]

Upper-class Muslim women followed strict seclusion in India; indeed, purdah was a sign of status, of belonging to the *shurafā'*, the gentry. A late sixteenth-century theologian even disapproved of the practice of women riding horses, however well wrapped they might be.[139] For poor Muslim women, however, veiling could only have been an occasional ritual. They are shown in Mughal paintings as spinning and breaking stones in public, unveiled.

Among Hindus of northern India, customs differed widely between the lower and upper castes. In Kashmir, Trebeck (1819–25) reported: 'Hindu women never go veiled, and never affect concealment, either at home or abroad.'[140] In Haryana, however, in the early nineteenth century, women of the higher land-controlling castes tended to be kept secluded, as among the upper ranks of the Jats.[141] Among the Hindu lower castes, bride price and widow remarriage (with forms of levirate) prevailed. Among the higher castes, however, grooms often received high dowries, and widows were strictly prohibited from remarrying.

Among Hindus claiming high warrior or aristocratic status, *satī* (suttee), or widow-burning, was also practised. Under Akbar this practice came under considerable official condemnation, and from his time onwards involuntary suttee was fairly effectively

[134] Abū'l Fazl, 1948, p. 521 (read 'Indian, Kashmiri and Iranian wives' for 'Hindu, Kashmiri and Persian' in the translation).
[135] Cf. Moosvi, 1992, pp. 404–7, for a translation of such contracts.
[136] Habib, 1993, pp. 303–6.
[137] Moosvi, 1992, pp. 404–7.
[138] Badaunī, 1864–9, Vol. 2, p. 186.
[139] Badaunī, 1972, p. 460.
[140] Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1837, p. 131.
[141] Skinner, 1825, fol. 157a.

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prohibited in the Mughal empire.[142] There were regional variations in the custom of suttee. The Hindu women of Kashmir, it was reported early in the nineteenth century, 'had long been exempted' from suttee, the practice having reputedly been 'suppressed by an edict of Aurangzeb in 1669, and never subsequently revived'.[143] Suttee was unknown among the Sikhs, but when Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab, died in 1739, his widows and concubines were compelled to mount the funeral pyre, a practice in line with his claim to be a maharaja. A blanket prohibition of this barbarous practice in British territories came only in 1829 when, following Ram Mohan Roy's agitation against it, the East India Company's government completely forbade it by a special regulation.

As in most other pre-modern societies, India too had a customary gender-based division of labour. Incidental references in literary sources and paintings provide us with some evidence to reconstruct the share of labour that was traditionally allotted to women.

Ordinary peasant women invariably worked alongside their men in the fields: for artists, women working in the fields formed part of the typical rural scene.[144] They mainly did the transplanting and weeding and helped in harvesting, though none of these was exclusively a woman's job. A nineteenthcentury line drawing from Kashmir clearly depicts a woman transplanting paddy along with a man.[145] Interesting evidence of women carrying on actual cultivation comes from the middle Himalayas, from where it was reported in 1624 that 'the women cultivate the soil, while men are weavers'.[146] A nineteenth-century drawing from Kashmir shows a man drawing water from a well, while a woman cuts the earth and makes water channels to irrigate the field.[147] After the harvest was collected from the field, it apparently called for still more work from the woman. The beating of rice and husking of other grains was exclusively a woman's job. The grinding of the grain on the rotary hand-mill was also mainly done by women. They fed sugar cane and oil-seeds into the ox-driven presses worked by men. Peasant women also cooked and carried food to their men working in the fields.[148]

The chores performed in the household are summed up by Fryer in 1676: 'The Indian Wives dress their Husbands Victuals, fetch Water, and Grind their Corn with an Hand-Mill,

[142] Habib, 1993, pp. 303–6.
[143] Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1837, p. 131.
[144] Cf. Moosvi, 1994, pp. 105–16. See illus. in Anwar-i Suhailī, MS, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Varanasi, no. 9069, fol. 18; *Razmnama*, MS, Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, not numbered; Brown, 1947, Pl. 15 (here the operation is probably that of transplanting).
[145] Kosambi, 1956, p. 319, Fig. 41.
[146] Wessels, 1924, p. 52.
[147] Kosambi, 1956, p. 321, Fig. 43.
[148] Cf. Moosvi, 1994, pp. 105–16.

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when they sing, chat, and are merry.'[149] Women collected twigs and leaves for fuel, fed the cattle and prepared yoghurt and butter. Milking was done by both men and women.[150]

As in most other societies spinning was regarded as exclusively women's work, as was ginning (with the famous Indian cotton-gin).[151] Pre-colonial India had an exceptionally large textile industry that engaged multitudes of women belonging to all castes and communities. In Kashmir shawl-wool was spun by girls who started work at the age of 10: in about 1820, as many as 100,000 women (out of an estimated total population of 800,000) were engaged in spinning wool.[152] As everywhere else in the world, spinning was mostly a part-time job, but in India it was not performed for domestic consumption only: women spinners also worked extensively for the market.[153] In Kashmir, which was subject to the heavy demands of the shawl industry, it was a full-time job for women, who were required to begin'to work at daybreak, continue with little interruption the whole day, if not taken off by other domestic affairs, and extend their labour until late in the night spinning by moonlight or oil-lamp'.[154] But in Kashmir, as elsewhere, the weavers were 'all male'.[155] Yet here too women wound the yarn and assisted in warping so that 'each loom required one man and one woman'. Women also helped in washing, bleaching and dyeing. In all parts of India calico-printing was done by both women and men since separate terms were used for female and male calicoprinters. When one looks at the major role played by women in India's traditional textile industry, one can imagine the hardship caused, especially to women spinners, when the modern British textile industry conquered the Indian market in the nineteenth century.[156]

In India women's work has often been physically very demanding. Unlike many other countries, women were (and are) frequently seen on building sites. They engaged in breaking stones, pounding bricks into rubble, preparing bitumen-cement, staining and mixing lime and carrying the mortar up to the masons. To judge from their dresses as shown in paintings, both Hindu and Muslim women engaged in such construction work.[157]

Women also engaged in petty commerce in towns, usually working alongside their husbands, selling and hawking products. Gujjar and Ghosi women hawked milk and milk

[149] Fryer, 1912, p. 118.
[150] Moosvi, 1994, pp. 105–16.
[151] Cf. Habib, 2001*a*, p. 2 and note 8. For illus. see Hajek, 1960, Pls. 48 and 49.
[152] Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1837, pp. 174, 123.
[153] Cf. Moosvi, 1994, pp. 105–16.
[154] According to Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1837, p. 171, one-tenth of their production was for their own consumption, and nine-tenths for the market.
[155] Moorcroft and Trebeck, 1837, p. 178.
[156] Habib, 1995*a*, pp. 341–7. It may be remarked that spinning was even more adversely affected than weaving, since some Indian weavers long tried to survive by using imported yarn.
[157] Sen, 1984, Pls. 31 and 61.

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products and Kunjar women sold green vegetables and fruit. The women of bangle-makers hawked their wares together with their husbands. The parcher's wife parched and sold grain, the potter's wife kneaded clay and the lac-maker's and iron-smelter's wives similarly helped them in their work.[158] An interesting profession was that of women inn-keepers, the *bhattiyaran*s of literature. They were particularly noted by Rafīullāh Shīrāzī, a Persian merchant in the sixteenth century, and by Withington, Mundy and Manucci in the seventeenth century.[159]

The imperial court as well as nobles' establishments often maintained large troupes of professional women dancers and singers, many of them trained in the Indian classical styles. There were also multitudes of women attendants in the imperial as well as nobles' households, and the practice of keeping a few maids in the house was common even among ordinary middleclass people.[160]

Women could own property under both Muslim and Hindu law, and we find Muslim as well as Hindu, Brahman and Khatri women managing and selling their village lands.[161] Sale deeds from certain towns of Gujarat reveal that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries women owned urban property that they themselves purchased, sold, rented and mortgaged.[162] Women could also engage in trade. A Surat merchant entrusted his merchandise and the conduct of his trade at Surat to his wife when he went to Mecca. When he died there, his widow went to the court of a *qāzī* to claim her right to manage her deceased husband's affairs.[163]

Yet if one compares the small number of women appearing in our documents as property holders with the vast numbers of men found in that position, one has a better idea of the true situation. In 1881 there was only 1 literate woman to 23 literate men in India. This tells us to what extent women were excluded from education. It is, therefore, interesting to see in an illustration in the *Miftahu'l fuzala* [Key to the Learned] (*c*. 1500) a young girl sitting with a boy learning to write at school.[164] Mughal painters also depict women reading letters and books.[165] Mughal princesses, as well as women of the nobility, received education at home from tutors appointed for the purpose.[166]

[158] Cf. Moosvi, 1994, pp. 105–16.
[159] Ibid., p. 110.
[160] Ibid., p. 111.
[161] Habib, 1999, pp. 191–2 and note.
[162] Moosvi, 1992, pp. 404–7.
[163] Ibid., p. 403.
[164] Shadiābādī, 1468–9, MS, fol. 278b.
[165] Falk and Archer, 1981, p. 95; Binyon, 1921, Pl. VI.
[166] Sarkar, 1920, p. 22. Sati'u'l Nisa was appointed tutor to Jahān Āra, Shāh Jahān's daughter, to initiate her in reading and writing Persian. Zaibu'n Nisa's (daughter of Aurangzeb) list of tutors also included men, some of them noted poets and scholars.

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That there were a certain number of educated women who could be put to secretarial duties is shown by the way the land grants for women were managed: Jahāngīr (1605–27) and Shāh Jahān (1628–58) both appointed women to recommend and process land grants to women, the head of department being known as the *sadru'l nisa* (the *sadr* for women).[167] Gulbadan Begum, Humāyūn's sister, was well educated, while her husband, an army commander, was illiterate. She has not only left us her memoirs, but she had such ambitious plans for building her library that Akbar issued an order that she was to be presented with a copy of every book transcribed in the imperial establishment.[168] There are notices of poetesses, including princesses, composing in Persian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Emperor Jahāngīr credited his queen Nūr Jahān's mother with experiments in the distillation of rose-water and the extraction of an exceptional perfume.[169]

It should be mentioned that women occupied a fairly high status in the late Timurid families, a tradition that was carried on in the Mughal dynasty. On critical political occasions we find women like Khanzada Begum (1530s and 1540s in Afghanistan), an elder sister of Bābur, or Maham Begah, Akbar's foster mother, rendering useful services. But the best-known instance of a woman exercising political dominance is offered by Nūr Jahān (1577–1645), the queen of Emperor Jahāngīr. It will perhaps suffice to give an assessment of her by Mu^{c}tamad Khān (writing in the reign of Shāh Jahān), well after she had retired and lost all power:

> His Majesty [Jahāngīr] repeatedly said: 'I have conferred the government on Nūr Jahān Begum. What do I want, except one *ser* of wine and half a *ser* of meat!' What can I write of the excellence and goodness of the Begum's character! Every helpless one faced with a difficulty who went appealing to her, she solved that person's problem, and enabled the person's object to be attained; and whoever went to her seeking refuge, was protected from cruelty and oppression... The goodness of her character prevailed over the evil [in her]; indeed, there was nothing evil there.[170]

Nūr Jahān owned ships and is also known to have had trading interests, participating in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf trade.[171]

The most accomplished princess in the subsequent period was undoubtedly Jahān Ara (1614–81), daughter of Shāh Jahān. Even under Aurangzeb (1659–1707), she retained much influence and was sagacious enough to advise him in 1679 against the re-imposition of the *jizya* (poll-tax on non- Muslims), though the counsel was not followed.[172] She was

[167] Shāhnawāz Khān, 1888–91, p. 241.
[168] Bāyazīd Biyat, 1941, p. 377.
[169] Jahāngīr, 1803–64, pp. 132–3.
[170] For the translation see Habib, 2001*a*, p. 9.
[171] Misra, 1965, pp. 35–40.
[172] Manucci, 1907–8, Vol. 3, p. 289–90.

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learned, had mystic tendencies, laid out gardens and orchards, built inns, mosques and mansions, maintained her own *kārkhāna*s (workshops), built a ship of her own, the *Sahebi*,[173] and ably administered her *jāgīr*s (territorial assignments), as we can see from the texts of her orders that have survived.[174] She was also a poet, and her sense of compassion is attested by a Persian couplet popularly attributed to her: 'On the graves of us poor, no candle is lighted, no flower blooms. No insect burns its wings, no nightingale sings.'

Among the women of the nobility there were also a few remarkable figures: Sahebji, the wife of Amīr Khān, governor of Kabul (1678–98), assisted her husband during his lifetime and carried out the duties of governor after his death for almost two years, keeping good order in the disturbance-prone area of Kabul.[175] Another such woman was the wife of Muᶜīnu'l Mulk, the governor of Lahore (d. 1753). Not only did she play an important role in managing his affairs during his lifetime, but she also tried hard to obtain the post of governor herself – she finally succeeded in 1755 for a short while. So impressed was the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shāh Durrānī (1747–72) with her abilities that, although he did not restore her to the governorship of Lahore, he gave her some large *jāgīr*s. On occasion she would come out of seclusion, unveiled.[176]

A notable feature of the Mughal political system was the civilized treatment meted out to the women of families of erring nobles or opponents. No princess was ever poisoned or murdered in any other way or any noble's wife disgraced for his faults. But this restraint did not extend to peasant women. When villages could not pay revenue, or were deemed recalcitrant, they were sacked and the villagers' women and children sold as slaves, often along with their men.[177] They seem to have been the main source of supply for low-priced women slaves for domestic work in Mughal India.

[173] Moosvi, 1991, pp. 308–20.
[174] See Anon. MS, *c*. 1650.
[175] Shāhnawāz Khān, 1888–91, Vol. 1, pp. 284–5.
[176] Rao, 1967.
[177] Habib, 1999, pp. 370–1.

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