

# Mechanism of Transportation: Rajputana (17th-18th Century)

Shabir Ahmad Punzoo

Paper Received Date: 15th January 2024  
Paper Acceptance Date: 24th February 2024  
Paper Publication Date: 6th March 2024

**Abstract-** When we think of trade and commerce, a few things immediately come to our mind, like commercial groups, means of transport, commodities and their carriers, the taxation system, and so on. The current research tries to analyse the modes of transportation prevalent in Rajputana during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Furthermore, our study sheds light on commercial communities involved in the profession of transport.

**Index Terms-** Means of Transport, Banjaras, Rebaris, Charans, Bhats, Rajasthan.

## I. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

For the study under consideration, several approaches have been used, including the analysis of primary and secondary sources, visits to numerous Rajasthani archives and libraries with the aim of material acquisition. Different sources have been used, like archival material in the form of *Bahis*<sup>i</sup> (preserved in the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner), travelogues, Persian texts, modern works (books and articles), and dictionaries. Rajasthani primary sources both published and unpublished, are also available at *Rajasthani Shodh Sansthan Chaupasni*, Jodhpur.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While dealing with the transportation system, we find that in 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Rajasthan, goods were either transported by bullock and camel carts or on the back of oxen, camels, and ponies/pack horses.<sup>ii</sup> Camels, known as ‘the ship of the desert’ were used for transport as well as for travelling. We find references to *Katar*, *Balad*,<sup>iii</sup> *Poth*<sup>iv</sup> and *Gaadi*<sup>v</sup> as means of transport. The term *katar* refers to the caravan of camels.<sup>vi</sup> Camels and carts drawn by camels were mostly used in western Rajasthan-the desert region.<sup>vii</sup> For example, ten camel-carts loaded with gunpowder were sent to Jodhpur from Jalor.<sup>viii</sup> Similarly, two camels loaded with cotton, lead, and groceries were carried by traders from Pali to Rajghar.<sup>ix</sup> Camels were mostly used for transport between Multan, Sindh and Rajasthan as evident through sources.<sup>x</sup> That is why, almost all the routes of western Rajasthan (connecting the towns of Sindh and Multan) were known as camel-routes (*katar*).<sup>xi</sup> The carriers of grain or owners of the caravan were called as *katariya*.<sup>xii</sup>

Literally, the terms *balad* and *poth* meant ox/oxen. The two terms are synonymous and are defined as a group of oxen carrying goods on their backs from one place to another.<sup>xiii</sup> In eastern Rajasthan, bullock carts were generally used for transportation. For example, goods were carried on eighteen bullock carts by traders from Nagaur to Bundi.<sup>xiv</sup> Normally, fifteen *maunds* of goods were carried by bullock-carts. The roads coming from eastern and southern Rajasthan were called cart-roads (*balad*). The owners of oxen were called as *baladiya*.<sup>xv</sup>

Chariots drawn by bullocks or horses were commonly used by the rulers for travelling purposes.

In the profession of transport, *Banjaras* and other communities like *Rebaris*, *Bhats*, and *Charans* were engaged in large numbers.

Banjaras were also known as ‘*baldiyas*’ in our region.<sup>xvi</sup> Basically, the term banjara has been derived from the Sanskrit word-*vanij*, which means a trader.<sup>xvii</sup> Banjara was a large trading community since the medieval period that dealt with bulky commodities/ goods/items like food grains, sugar, salt, butter, etc.<sup>xviii</sup> Salt was carried on a large scale by banjaras to the different parts of Rajasthan and outside as well (from Sambhar, Didwana, Pachbhadra, and Nawa). Nayak Heera Gogera transported 2257 oxen of salt to Jhansi via Harauti from Pachbhadra. Similarly, Nayak Maru of Marwar carried 885 oxen of salt from Pachbhadra to Harauti. They were honoured by the state with *siropaos* (robes of honour).<sup>xix</sup>

An affluent banjara used to possess a huge number of oxen (*balad*) ranging from 200 to 2000.<sup>xx</sup> The banjara who had one thousand or more oxen was known as Nayak.<sup>xxi</sup> We also find 200 to 300 *balads* in a single group of banjaras.<sup>xxii</sup> Mostly, this trading community was involved in long distance-trade having large herds of animals with pack waggons on their backs and moved in large groups for security/safety purposes. Even Jahangir mentions that they had a huge ox (numerous animals) and transported grain from surplus areas to the towns.<sup>xxiii</sup> They also accompanied armies.<sup>xxiv</sup> Both Muslims and non-Muslims were involved in this trade. Banjaras have been dubbed by Tavernier as ‘non-muslims’ (idolaters).<sup>xxv</sup> He even mentions that their womenfolk used to tattoo their skin and had priests and idols (like serpents).<sup>xxvi</sup> But it is not accurate as we find references to Muslims also in this group particularly in north India like Multanis, etc. Sixty-six bullocks of grain were carried by Sujat Khan (Multani) for whom he had paid Rs. 55. Mostly, they organised the trade themselves, but merchants also hired them for trading purposes.<sup>xxvii</sup>

*Rebaris* were chiefly involved in the profession of camel transport. Their camels were hired by traders and the state. For instance, the state paid Rs. 5,000 to the *Rebaris* for the camels hired for the transport. Similarly, a *Rebari* of *mauza* Kapursar was given Rs. 122 and *annas* 8 for seven camels hired by the state for a period of three and a half months.

*Bhats* and *Charans* were also involved in the transport profession. They had a respectable position and took benefit of this to become general carriers of goods in the country.<sup>xxviii</sup> *Charans*<sup>xxix</sup> were known for their literary pursuits and their main work was to preserve the glorious deeds of Rajput dynasties. They composed songs that were recited on several occasions like social gatherings, battle fields, etc. They were being ordered to write chronicles, martial epics, and descriptive genealogies. In hours of need, they played a significant role for the state.<sup>xxx</sup> *Bhats*<sup>xxxi</sup> were genealogists and their main job was to recite the genealogical histories of families on certain occasions like festivals, marriages, etc.

These two groups were also involved in trading activities.<sup>xxxii</sup> They were mostly engaged in transporting goods from one place to another and walked with flocks of camels and bulls known as *katar* (rows of camels) and *balad* (rows of oxen). They also transported the goods of other traders outside Rajasthan. They carried different commodities like salt, opium, grain, spices, tobacco, etc.<sup>xxxiii</sup> We find references to some important *charan* and *bhat* traders like Paima Naik Bhat,<sup>xxxiv</sup> Charan dev Karan,<sup>xxxv</sup> Nathu,<sup>xxxvi</sup> Heera bhat,<sup>xxxvii</sup> Charan Pitha,<sup>xxxviii</sup> Maru bhat,<sup>xxxix</sup> Charan Dullah, Naik<sup>xl</sup> Kalu Bhat, Naik Guman Bhat,<sup>xli</sup> Hariram Keso Maru,<sup>xlii</sup> Lacheram Bhat Maru, Charan Jivo,<sup>xliii</sup> etc. They were engaged in both inter-provincial and inter-regional trade.

Being a respectable class in society, they were exempt from taxes and were also not looted/plundered as was the case with others. Sometimes they misused this by taking goods of other traders.<sup>xliiv</sup> They offered their services to traders (on payment) to transport their items.<sup>xliiv</sup> This meant losses to the state treasury, so they were warned later on.

### III. CONCLUSION

Our study revealed that the chief means of transport were camel-carts, pack horses, camels and bullocks, and bullock-carts. In the eastern part of Rajasthan where the roads were generally even and had a hard surface, bullock-carts were commonly used whereas in uneven tracts of hilly areas, pack-horses and bullocks were used for carrying commodities from one place to another. The camels were used mostly in the desert parts of the state for travelling and transporting purposes. Carts drawn by camels were also used in the western parts of Rajasthan. Chariots drawn by bullocks or horses were commonly used by the rulers for travelling purposes. Generally, the transport work was mostly done by *Banjaras* who used to carry rice, grain, salt, sugar, etc. on the backs of their oxen. *Rebaris*, *Charans* and *Bhats* were also engaged in the profession of transport as shown by our research.

### AUTHORS

**First Author** – Shabir Ahmad Punzoo, CAS, Department of History, AMU, Aligarh, 202002, UP, India, shabirpunzoo99@gmail.com

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Long documents that are folded (an account book or ledger).
- <sup>ii</sup> Ponies were common on uneven tracts of hilly regions.
- <sup>iii</sup> H.H. Wilson defines *balad* as a herd of cattle, so *balad* meant ox or oxen for him. H.H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms*, WMH Allen and Co., London, 1855 (second edition, 1968, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi).
- <sup>iv</sup> The term “*Poth*” is employed for sack/bales.
- <sup>v</sup> The term “*Gaadi*” is employed for carts.
- <sup>vi</sup> *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 1, V.S. 1821/A.D. 1764, p. 26, f. b; *Kagad Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 3, V.S. 1827/A.D. 1770, p. 45;
- <sup>vii</sup> Five camels loaded with alum were carried from Jaisalmer to Jaipur by Brahman Chand Pokarana. *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 20, V.S. 1835/A.D. 1778.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Kotwali Chabutara Jamabandi Bahi*, no. 753, Pargana Jalor, V.S. 1833/A.D. 1776, Jodhpur Records.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 19, V.S. 1834/A.D. 1777.
- <sup>x</sup> A trader named Khem Chand Khatri carried one hundred and four *maunds* of indigo from Jaipur to Multan on camels. *Zakat Bahi*, no. 81, V.S. 1807/A.D. 1750. Three camels laden with tobacco were brought by Tejpal Golechha to Deshnok from Sindh. Similarly, sixteen camels loaded with asafoetida were brought to Bikaner from Multan by a Pathan. *Sawa Mandi Sadr Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 3, V.S. 1805/A.D. 1748, and no. 4, V.S. 1807/A.D. 1750.
- <sup>xi</sup> G.S.L. Devra, ‘A Study of the Trade Relations Between Rajasthan and Sindh/Multan (1650-1800)’, *PIHC*, vol. 39, 1978, pp. 581-94.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Sawa Mandi Sadr Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 8, V.S. 1815/1758 A.D.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Badri Prasad Sakariya, *Rajasthani Hindi Sabad Kosh*, Jaipur, 1977.
- <sup>xiv</sup> *Sanad Parwana bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 21, V.S. 1835/A.D. 1778.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Bajrang Lal Lohiya, *Rajasthan-ki-Jatiya*, Bikaner, 1891, pp. 167-68.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Henry M. Elliot, *Memoirs on the History, Folklore and Distribution of the Races of North-Western Provinces of India*, ed. J. Beames, vol. I, London, 1869, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Travels in India, 1640-67*, tr. V. Ball, ed. William Croke, Macmillan and Co., London, 1925, vol. I, pp. 32-34. See also Irfan Habib, ‘Merchant Communities in Pre-Colonial India’, in *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World*, ed. James D. Tracy, Cambridge University Press, London, 1990, pp. 371-99.

- xix Nayak Ganga Ram was given a *siropao* of Rs. 19 and annas 11 as he carried 3600 oxen of salt from Pachbhadra to be taken to Jhansi. Similarly, Nayak Heera and Mana were rewarded with a turban and *siropao* each worth Rs. 10 and annas 8 as they carried 1205 oxen of salt from Marwar to Chhabara via Kota.
- xx B.L. Gupta, *Trade and Commerce in Rajasthan*, Jaipur Publishing House, Jaipur, 1987, p. 142.
- xxi Nayak Ganga Ram of Kota had 3600 oxen.
- xxii G.S.L. Devra, 'A Study of the Trade Relations Between Rajasthan and Sindh/Multan (1650-1800)', pp. 584-94.
- xxiii Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, ed. Syed Ahmad, Gazipur/Aligarh, 1863-64, pp. 344-45.
- xxiv Ibid.
- xxv Tavernier, *Travels in India*, vol. I, pp. 30-35.
- xxvi Ibid.
- xxvii Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia 1608-1667*, ed. Sir R.C. Temple, Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, vol. II, pp. 94-96.
- xxviii James Tod, *Annales and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921, vol. I, pp. 554-55.
- xxix The functions and status of *charans* have been described by John Malcolm as, "They rank as the genealogists of proud and ignorant chiefs... It is for them that the proudest Rajputs look for solace in adversity and for increased joy and exultation in prosperity." John Malcolm, *A Memoir of Central India*, vol. I, pp. 517-18.
- xxx Charan Jagmal Khadiya of Marwar died fighting on the side of Maharaja Jaswant Singh in the famous battle of Dharmat in 1658. Charan Sandu and Charan Ratan died fighting on the side of the Rathors against the Mughals in Delhi in 1679.
- xxxi Bhats were genealogists and concerned themselves about the pedigree of the families of various castes as observed by Pandit Shri Pal.
- xxxii Sanad Parwana Bahi, Jodhpur, no. 17, V.S. 1833/A.D. 1776, p. 182, f. a; *Jagat Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 81, V.S. 1807/A.D. 1750. See also Rajender Kumar, 'Nagaur: A Trading Mart of Marwar State in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Reconfiguring the Historical Landscape of Rajasthan*, eds. Mayank Kumar et al, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2021, p. 211.
- xxxiii *Sanad Parwana Bahi*, Jodhpur, no. 17, V.S. 1833/A.D. 1776, p. 182, f. a; *Jagat Bahi*, Bikaner, no. 81, V.S. 1807/A.D. 1750.
- xxxiv Paima Naik Bhat of Marwar was involved in the transport of salt. Paima Naik (owner of one of the huge caravans in Marwar) had forty thousand beasts of burden. James Tod, *Annales and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, vol. I, pp. 554-55.
- xxxv For instance, 914 camels of *al*, cotton and iron were carried from Kota to Gujarat by Charan Deva. Charan Dev Karan was a famous trader from Kota who carried 49 oxen loaded with *al* from Kota to Gujrat for sale purposes.
- xxxvi Nathu Charan was also a well-known trader from Kota who carried 914 oxen loaded with *al*, cotton and iron goods from Kota to Gujarat for sale purposes.
- xxxvii Heera Bhat was a known salt dealer in Marwar and is said to have carried 2257 oxen full of salt from Panchbhadra to Baran and Barod for sale in the eighteenth century.
- xxxviii Charan Pitha and Charan Dullah (traders of Marwar) carried 324 oxen to Ujjain via Kota in the eighteenth century.
- xxxix Maru bhat was a well-known salt dealer of Marwar who is said to have taken 885 oxen full of salt from Panchbhadra to Jhansi via Kota for sale in the eighteenth century.
- xl Literally, the word *naik* means chief. So, it seems that those who had a specific number of animals were called by their fellow traders as "naik -chief" of the caravan.
- xli Guman Moti Bhat paid Rs. 27 for 350 bullocks while carrying grain.
- xlii Probably, *maru* is a subcaste designation of *bhats*.
- xliii Charan Jivo who carried three hundred and thirty-five bullocks paid Rs. 26.
- xliv *Sanad Parwana Bahi* Jodhpur, no. 21, V.S. 1835/A.D. 1778, p. 261.
- xlvi *Sanad Parwana Bahi* Jodhpur, no. 17, V.S. 1833/A.D. 1776, p. 6, f. a.