

DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION IN MUGHAL PERIOD

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Abstract

The territories of the Mughal empire included part of present day Afghanistan, Pakistan, the whole of northern India and parts of the Deccan, but by 1690, other once independent states in the Deccan had been incorporated into the empire. Before his death, Aurangzeb (1658-1707) had conquered the greater part of the Deccan, but much of the empire was in a state of chronic disorder. Historically, the present work is confined to the period between 1556 and 1707, geographically, it covers northern, central and western India, the area generally known as Mughal India, the administration and power of the Mughals being more or less consolidated within it. The whole of the Deccan did not come fully into the administrative orbit of the Mughals even at the end of the 17th century.

Keywords: Road, Bridge, River system, Trade, Horse, Highways.

Introduction

An efficient system of transport and communication sustains and stimulates trade and industry of a country. Its importance to the commercial progress of the state can hardly be exaggerated. The degree of efficiency with which the trade and communication lines are maintained reflects the condition of trade, commerce and industry in the state. We are given to understand by the contemporary sources of the Mughal state that there was a fairly good network of roads connecting the different industrial centres, market places and the harbours in the empire, thus greatly facilitating both internal and foreign trade of medieval India.

Internal trade of Mughal India of three kinds. Coastal trade, riverine trade and inland trade. Whenever the facilities of coastal trade and inland trade were both available, the merchants as a rule preferred the first, for the simple reason that it was by far much easier, much safer and far more profitable to trade by sea than by land where there were no metalled roads, and whatever roads there were, were not serviceable all the year round, the means of transport and communication were almost primitive, and the caravans were most of the time confronted with the problem of safety on the highways. In the coastal trade also there was a danger from the pirates, but not pirates the merchant ships plied under the protection of a convoy. The coastal trade was brisk from September when the monsoons heavy downpours dislocating the traffic. During this period it was usual for the Portuguese fleets of Goa consisting of some frigates to give protection to the coastal trade against the pirates. Under their protection the trading ships moved up and down from Cambay in the north to Cochin in the south. Generally three groups of convoys, two along the western coast and one along the eastern coast, conducted traffic in the seas. The first group plied between Cambay and Goa and was composed of about 300 craft whose yearly traffic amounted to about 30,000 tons. The second group of convoys moved between Goa

and Cochin and its annual traffic consisted of about 10,000 tons. There seems to have been a third group of con+voys on the eastern coast, though we do not get sufficient details from contemporary sources about this group, plying probably between Negapatam in the south and the Orissa group of ports in the north.

River System

In Mughal India there were principally four river systems, the Indus system, the Ganges system, the Tapi system and the Bengal delta system. The Indus system penetrated into the provinces of Sind, Multan, Lahore and Kashmir. The goods manufactured in these provinces were sent down the Indus or its tributaries to Lahari Bandar from where the exports were sent out, and the imports were unloaded and sent back up these streams and rivers. On the banks of these rivers naturally there grew up flourishing commercial centres at such places as Thatta and Bhakkar. At the confluence of the Indus and Ravi, Bhakkar was situated, and Multan grew up at the confluence of the Jhelum and the Indus. A number of places converted by the Indus river system were greatly benefited by this riverine trade. The boat-building industry of Sind received its timber supply from the northern forests by the riverine routes of the Indus.

The Ganges-Jumna river system including many of their tributaries such as the Chambal, the Son and the Gogra, greatly stimulated the trade of Hindustan. This river system was interconnected with the Bengal delta system. A number of flourishing commercial centres were situated on or near the banks of the important rivers of these systems such as Delhi, Agra, Allahabad, Jaunpur, Dacca, and Sonargaon. These were joined to various industrial centres of Hindustan by means of tributaries and land tracks. The big rivers such as the Ganges, Jumna and Chambal were navigable, and a great volume of traffic moved up and down these rivers. From the emporiums of Agra and Delhi, which received a regular supply of various commodities from their vicinity, were shipped through the Ganges-Jumna river system articles such as rice, salt, indigo, lead and cotton to Bengal whence they were carried either to inland emporiums such as Sonargaon and Dacca, or exported to the eastern and western countries through Satgaon and Hugli which were situated at the end of the Bengal delta system. Similarly foreign goods unloaded in these seaports were sent up the rivers to the market towns in Bengal, Bihar and Hindustan. Finally the Tapi-Narmada river system formed an inseparable part of the Cambay-Surat trade on the western coast. Commodities from the inland market places of Malwa, Khandesh and Deccan such as Burhanpur, Elichpur, and Ujjain were sent down these rivers to Broach, Surat and Cambay, and the foreign articles brought to these seaports were carried up the rivers to be supplied to these provinces.

The maintenance of roads presented a number of problems. First, they were to be kept in good repair making them usable by the traders. Bridges were to be built wherever the rivers intersecting the roads were not fordable. In a tropical country like India the caravans were to be supplied at intervals with cool drinking water, for which wells were to be dug at different places along these routes, or provision of drinking water was to be made in serais. Again the shade-giving trees were to be planted on either side of roads wherever possible. Rest houses were to be built for sheltering the travelling merchants especially at night and food provisions were to be made available to them easily. For this purpose a small administrative staff was to be maintained in these rest houses or serais. And, above all, the highways and other roads were to be kept safe from marauding activities

of the robbers. These conditions were fairly fulfilled, and the road system, judged by medieval standards, was fairly good in Mughal India.

Principal Highways

In the system of communications of Mughal India Agra, not Delhi, occupied the central position. From it went out five principal highways in different directions, the first running to Kabul, the second to Qandahar, the third to Cambay, the fourth to Burhanpur and the fifth to Sonargaon. The first and second highways were common from Agra to Delhi whence they branched off into two, the third reached Cambay via Pattan-Nahrwala, the fourth went to Burhanpur via Gwalior and the fifth was really a double highway running separately from Agra to Sonargaon meeting only once at Jaunpur. There was also a sixth highway, not radiating from Agra, but starting from Dacca and running in an irregular line roughly along the southern frontier of the empire, finally terminating at Thatta via Cambay and Pattan-Nahrwala. The effects of the system of these highways on the trade and commerce were most salutary. Now the goods produced in Hindustan could easily move between distant places, say, from Kabul or Qandahar to Sonargaon or Dacca via Delhi and Agra, from Cambay or Surat to Agra and Delhi and from Gujarat or Malwa to Bengal. The easy and brisk movement of goods naturally gave an impetus to Indian industries, to inland trade and also to foreign trade as the famous seaports such as Lahal, Bandar, Cambay, Surat and the Bengal ports were all connected with these highways, the life-lines of commercial Hindustan.

As adjuncts to these highways there were a number of smaller road systems. In the north-west the Lahore-Kashmir road, also called the Imperial Road, the Delhi-Multan Road, the Multan-Qandahar Road, and the Agra-Lahore Road formed part of the first two highways. In the central part the Agra-Fatehpur Sikri Road, the Agra-Jodhpur Road, the Agra-Allahabad Road, the Agra-Ajmer Road, the Agra-Sarhind Road, the Agra-Allahabad Road, the Agra-Etah Route, and the Ajmer-Allahabad Road were the smaller lines joining the highways. In the west the Thatta-Ahmadabad Road, the Ahmadabad-Surat Road, the Bengal-Bihar road, and the Jaunpur-Maldah Road were prominent, while in the southern part of Hindustan the Burhanpur-Orissa Road was an important line making communication between the western harbours such as Surat and Cambay and the eastern places possible.

As regards the planting of shade-giving trees on either side of the roads, building caravansaries, etc. a few examples may be noted. It is well known how Sher Shah built serais at different stages along the roads providing lodging and boarding facilities to both Hindus and Muslims. He also made security arrangements in these serais. He is said to have built or renovated about 1700 serais in his short reign. All these and many others were obviously maintained under the Mughals as well. Akbar gave instructions to his Kotwals to build serais. Jahangir and Aurangzeb likewise paid attention to the construction of serais. The Agra-Fatehpur Sikri Road, the Agra-Lahore Road and many other roads were planted with trees on both sides. On many roads, in addition to the shade-giving trees, the travellers were provided with cool drinking water from the wells dug at intervals. For overcoming the difficulties presented by the unfordable rivers crossing the roads, bridges were built over them as in the case of the Gomti river at Jaunpur and of the Indus at Attock.

The means of transport included pack oxen, bullock-carts, horses, mules, camels, dolis or litters and palanquins. The contemporary Indian sources and the accounts of foreign travellers throw light on these means of transport used for trade and commerce. Of all these, the pack oxen and the bullock carts were most common

and useful. Horses and mules were employed because of their swiftness also. The camels were mostly used in Malwa and Gujarat, and sometimes elephants were pressed into service by the nobles and kings. The dolis generally meant for women and carried by two men, and the palanquins usually carried by four or six persons, were often used. Many details such as the weight of merchandise carried by the beasts of burden, the speed of their movements, the kind of tracks trodden by them and the like are also mentioned incidentally in these sources.

Conclusion

The volume of trade and the variety of the articles of trade increased considerably under the Mughals. The imports of India may be broadly classified under three heads, viz. consumer goods, raw materials, and luxury goods. The consumer goods consisted of gold, silver and horses. Gold and silver were in great demand for minting coins, and the horses for military purposes. The raw materials included raw silk, copper, tin, zinc, lead, quicksilver, ivory, and coral. These were employed in silk textile industry, metal industry and in various handicrafts manufacturing artistic objects. Finally the luxury goods covered such articles as high quality skills, velvets, brocades, precious stones, perfumes, spices, drugs, China goods, European wines, African slaves and other rare objects. The exports of India included silks, cotton textiles, spices, indigo, opium, sugar, rice, etc.

References

1. Cf. Manrique, II, pp.100-02
2. Rehla, pp.16-24, Pelsaert, p.6; Terry, Foster, p.293; De Laet, p.55.
3. Fitch, Ryley, p.98; E & D, iv, P.417; AN, III, pp.156, 761; Finch, Foster, p.179.
4. Withington, Foster, p.225; Mundy, II; p.29; EF, 1618-21, pp.90-92.
5. E&D, IV, p.417
6. Cambridge History of India, IV, p.57; Manrique, II, pp.99-100.
7. Ain, II, p.44.
8. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, I, 8; JASB, June 1908, p.231
9. Fitch, p.98
10. Mundy, II, pp.83-84
11. AN, III, p.523
12. Ain, I, 146, 157, 159, 160, 264; e&d, I, PP.295, etc.
13. EF, 1618-21, pp.74,90; Mundy, II, p.95; Jourdain, p.127, Barbosa, I, pp.141 ff.
14. Hamilton, I, pp.114-118.
15. Withington in Early Travels, p.206.
16. Della Valle, I, p.93.
17. EFI, 1618-21, p.90.
18. Mundy, II, pp.95-95
19. Thomas Roe, The Embassy, p.67; Mundy, II, pp.95-96, Tavernier, I, pp.32-33; Tuzuk, p.345; W. Crooke, Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, p.151.
20. Manrique, II, pp.252-2.