



Topic: Important Trade routes in Economic prosperity in the perspective of Mughal Era Rajputana

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Abstract

Trade and Commerce played a pivotal role in serving as engines of social change and Economic growth In Medieval Rajasthan. Trade Routes & Transportation Trade and commerce requires good routes and occupies an important place in the economy of the state. The routes started developing in the early Medieval Period with the growth of urban life because they were the connecting links between the towns and cities and towns and rural areas. The trade routes were developed by the frequent use of traders. The traders always preferred routes which were safe from natural obstacles such as mountains, deserts and deep forests. In addition, they chose routes which had easy accessibility to supply centers. Geographical location of Rajasthan offers some important linkages with numerous trade routes passing through it. The network of trade routes was connected prominently trading with important places/areas like Sindh, Multan, Agra, Delhi, Gujarat, Malwa and Punjab. The traders could pass through it with merchandise and the state earned revenue by levying duties upon them. To establish a trade link between the Mughal capitals of Agra, Delhi with the commercial centers of Gujarat such as Ahmadabad and Surat a route was marked out through Rajasthan, which created trading and revenue possibilities for the state. The geographical location influenced its history to great extent. However, the state was surrounded by the prosperous provinces like Sindh, Multan, Punjab, Gujrat, Malwa, Agra and Delhi. This benefited its economy and subsequently many important trade routes were developed in the region which brought evident Economy prosperity to the state. These imperial highways were connected with numerous internal routes which created a network of the trade-routes in the state in during the Medieval period. The well known centres of trade during the Medieval period in Rajasthan were Ajmer,Pali,Naraina,Nagour,Jodhpur,Jalore,Sirohi and Mewar.

Key Words : Trade routes and Commerce, Economic growth, Medieval Rajasthan, prosperity.

Introduction : The eighteenth century in India was characterised as a century of transition which changed the structure of power and initiated important social and economic reconfigurations. Trade routes led to alliances between rural and urban Towns.As we know that trade routes are key of prosperous Economy and Commerce. The trade routes served principally to transfer raw materials, foodstuffs and luxury goods from areas with surplus to others where they were in short supply. On India level , Rajasthan was prominently trading routes with Northern and western regions .

The movement of people from one place to another brought exchange of goods and materials by way of trading routes. This has resulted into a cross-cultural influence over the two traditional society forms as reflected in many resemblances of material culture,

.The research paper highlighted regional level changes in the period of transition, provoked reconsideration among historians working on Mughal India as well. In the Medieval Rajputana the policy of the Rajput states in their respective regions is quite interesting. Every Rajput state made administrative efforts to regulate the trade and artisan production to augment their income. Rajasthan was on the Mughal highway junction connecting Agra to Ahmadabad and to some other regions of India which facilitated the accessibility of merchants to it. The eighteenth century Rajasthan witnessed flourishing internal trade. Different Rajput states carried on trade by land route with other parts of the country.

Object

1. To highlight the regional level changes in the period of transition in the medieval Rajasthan.
2. To evaluate the importance of trade routes during Medieval Rajasthan
3. The importance of trade and commerce in the overall economic history of Mughals Rajasthan.

Sources :

The research paper is based on insight from rich archival primary sources from the Rajasthan State Archives in Bikaner.

Methodology : Since most historical comparatively and analytical studies are largely qualitative in nature, the search for sources of data, evaluating, analyzing, synthesizing and summarizing information and interpreting the findings may be separate, sequential steps i.e. the sequence of steps in historical research is flexible.

The essential methodology in writing a historical research paper has used as follows:

1. Identify a topic and define the problems.
2. Search for sources of archival data.
3. Evaluate the historical primary and secondary sources.
4. Analyze, synthesize and summarize interpreting the data / information.

Hypothesis

The agricultural progress of the Mughal's period created favourable conditions for the prosperity of trade and commerce. Weaving and other handicrafts also developed greatly during this period. Indian spices, textiles, leather, gems, sandalwood, metals, pearls, ivory, etc. were in great demand in foreign countries.

Trade routes can be defined as a set of established paths and stopping points frequently used for the transport of commercial wares. Trade routes can be determined by the possibilities offered by the physical nature of the landscape to be crossed but also by economic interests, social practices, and infrastructures. Mughals Emperors inherited with its conquests both an infrastructure and previously established trade routes. Thus trade routes were a network identified as a series of pathways and stoppages used for the commercial transport .

The contemporary records of various categories of the different Rajput states of 18th century, contain ample evidence about the important trade-routes connecting Rajasthan with the Mughal highways and other distant regions of India, various capital towns of the provinces. Sometime they provide references to the routes from starting to end point and sometimes mention only important towns on the way. In short, Rajasthan was a connecting link between Northern and Western India. Rajasthan could derive great advantage of its location between the two regions of India.

MUGHAL HIGHWAYS THROUGH RAJPUTANA

As said above Rajasthan had been the junction of major trade routes of the Mughal highways. It served as a link between the Mughal capitals Agra/Delhi. Besides imperial routes there were many other routes which were frequently used by the merchants to reach Sindh, Multan, Malwa, Delhi, Agra, Deccan, Lahore and other important towns of Punjab. The imperial route from Ahmadabad to Agra entered Rajasthan to the east of Aravali Range. This route proceeded directly northwards through Sidhpur, Palampur, Bhinmal, as far as to Jalor then bends via Pipar and Merta to arrive at

Ajmer. ¹This route served market towns and joined the main route at commercial centres. This route, from Ahmadabad to Jalor, had two alternative ways: one went via Radhanpur ², while another via Sidhpur passing east of Mount Abu and Sirohi. Then between Jalor and Merta diverted towards the princely capital city of Jodhpur and then again rejoined flourishing market towns of Pali. ³This route diverted at Ajmer for Agra passing through Kishangarh, Mozabad, Chatsu, Lalsot, Hindaun, Bay ana, Khanwa, Fatehpur Sikri and finally reaches to Agra. ⁴ On the main Mughal route the kosminars (milestones) were erected. This route is further bifurcated at Kishangarh to arrive directly at Amber (Jaipur) then to reach Agra through Banskoh, Todabhim, Khanwa and Fatehpur Sikri. The imperial capitals were not only linked only with Gujarat but also with other provinces such as Sindh, Multan and Malwa through Rajasthan. There was also in existence a well defined route between Delhi and Ahmadabad which ran through Bhiwani, Rajgarh, Churu, Landnu, Nagaur, Jodhpur, Jalor, Sirohi, Palampur and Ahmadabad. ⁵ We also get evidence of a route in use between Jaipur and Surat. This was through Ajmer, Bhilwara, Udaipur, Dungarpur and then connected with Mughal highway at Ahmadabad to reach Surat. ⁶ Besides this, the

route between Multan and Delhi passed through Rajasthan by two alternative ways: one, Delhi to Multan via Bhatner, Rohtak, Hisar, Sirsa, Bhatner, Suratgarh, Anupgarh, Bhawalpur and Multan ⁷

while another was via Bhatner but its stages could have been little different which passed through Rohtak, Rajgarh, Reni, Bhadra, Nohar, Rawatsar. It also passed through Bhatner to reach Multan.⁸ There were many towns connected with Multan such as Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kota. Besides there were some other important commercial towns like Pali, Nagaur, and Rajgarh, etc. which had their connection with Multan. The route from Multan to Jaipur was connected with two other important urban centres. The stoppages were Bhawalpur, Anupgarh, Mahajain, Lunkarasar, Garab, Deshar, Churu, Ladnu, Didwana, Sambhar and Jaipur.⁹ Other alternative route was through Lunkaransar, Bikaner, Jarrasar, Ladnu, Sambhar and Jaipur and Sindh on which Bikaner, Barsalpur or Pugal were located¹⁰. The route from Multan to Kota was covered by many places such as Jaipur and then it goes from Jaipur to Tonk, Devli, Bundi and then Kota.¹¹ There was a well crafted route between Multan and Jodhpur which was extended upto Pali. It was traversed through Bikaner that was Pugal, Barsalpur, Bikampur, Phalodi, Jodhpur and then it detour to reach Pali. ¹² it detour to reach Pali. Nagaur was also advantageously placed on the way to Multan. The other important town that is found on the route of Multan is Rajgarh. It was a singular fortune of these towns that they were well in touch with Multan as well.

Besides these routes of different places, the Rajasthan had close relation with Khandesh and Malwa region. Apart from the above mentioned routes Burhanpur (of Khandesh area) and Indore (of Malwa area), were connected Central India with Western India. The route used by Malwa traders to reach Bikaner, and Rajgarh was through different ways. For instance, the route connecting Malwa with Bikaner passed through the places like Chitor, Mandalgarh, Badnur, Pali, Jodhpur, and Nagaur. ¹³ Similarly the route between Malwa and Rajgarh, passed through the places like Bundi, Ajmer, Kishangarh, Merta, Didwana, Churu. ¹⁴ Burhanpur was connected to Kota via Indore and then ¹⁵ Ujjain, Jhalarapatan and Kota."

There are stray references in the documents of the period under study that Rajasthan had its connection with other regions like, Deccan, Kashmir, Jhansi, and Umar kot (Sindh). The trade link of Jodhpur with Kashmir was through Nagaur, Hardsar, Nohar, Sirsa, Bhatinda, Amritsar and Kashmir.¹⁶ Jammu was connected in the same way.¹⁷

The merchants of Bikaner transacted business with Deccan. The route was through Nagaur, Merta, Tatoti, Bundi, Kota, Jhalarapatan via Ujjain to Deccan.¹⁸ There are stray references of a route from Mundawa to Umarmarkot which passed through Nagaur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and terminating at Umarmarkot,¹⁹

These major trade routes were well connected with other routes of India and also with major commercial urban centres viz, Rajgarh, Churu, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Pali and Nagaur. These towns were linked with the routes of eastern and southern Rajasthan. Now we can say with certainty that all major routes (Delhi-Ahmadabad, Agra-Ahmadabad, Agra-Malwa, and Delhi-Multan) passed through Rajasthan. These routes assumed the status of commercial routes of the 18th century, and were used as alternative routes by the travellers which brought prosperity to various Rajput states, exemplified by a number of urban centres.

INTERNAL TRADE ROUTES of RAJPUTANA

The contemporary documents testify that there were several internal trade- routes which connected all Rajput states of Rajputana in 18th century. From these records a significant point emerges that the Mughal highways and the routes adopted by the indigenous traders were not always analogous but distinct. These help us gather the details of internal trade and trade routes in 18th century Rajasthan.

It also becomes clear from the documents that sometimes the traders of different regions had 'discovered' trade routes of their convenience to reach and serve specific destinations. The capital cities of the Princely states of Rajasthan also happened to be major commercial towns namely Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Ajmer, Udaipur, Jaisalmer and Kota etc. Apart from these major routes, there were some alternative routes which were used by traders, even though with lesser frequency.

The documents demonstrate that Jaipur was connected with Bikaner through various routes. One route which passed through Parbatsar-Maroth was most frequently used by the traders. ²⁰ Second route that linked Jaipur with Bikaner went via Sikar. ²¹ A third route mentioned in a documents was through Mewar and Marwar which was used by the traders only in the period of crisis. Though it was quite a long route but was adopted to avoid heavy tax demand on other routes. ²² In other words, this route appears to have been to protest against the heavy demand on some routes. Then the concerned states were compelled to reduce the tax demand on traders. The officials of Parbatsar-Maroth were given instructions to realize the transit tax exactly at the rates being realized on Sikar and Mewar-Marwar route and encourage the traders to use this route. ²³

A fourth route which connected Bikaner and Jaipur together was through Maroth, Daulatpur via

Nagaur. **24** Similarly, the link between Jaipur and Bikaner was via, Churu **25** which merged at Sikar.

Two capital cities of the Kachhwahas and Hadas (i.e. Jaipur and Kota) were connected with each other. The major centres/stages between Kota and Jaipur were Bundi, Devli, Tonk, Niwai, Chaksu and Jaipur. Same stages were adopted in return Journey. **26**

The connection of Jaipur with the Bhati capital Jaisalmer was via Merta and Nagaur. The former was preferred more whose stages from Jaipur were Naraina, Kishangarh, Merta, Pokhran and Jaisalmer and vice versa. **186** The route via Nagaur had the stages like, Jaisalmer, Pokhran, Phalodi, Nagaur, Rupnagar and Jaipur. **27**

The Rathor principality of Jodhpur and Jaipur had quite handsome trade. The route from Jodhpur to Jaipur ran through Merta, Parbatsar, Sambhar, and Jaipur **28** The commercial capital of the Rathors, Jodhpur and Merta had quite close link with Jaipur. The traders of this city adopted the route to Jaipur through Parbatsar, Naraina, and Jaipur, **29** avoiding the route through Maroth. This multi- route connectivity of Jaipur brought prosperity to the Kachhwahas and Rathors.

The documents help us to trace the trade links of Jodhpur and its other towns with the Kota territory. The route between Jodhpur and Kota passed through, Merta, Ajmer, Devli, Bundi and Kota. **30** Similarly, the other cities like Merta, Pali and Nagaur were well connected with Bundi and Kota. The goods destined for Merta, Pali and Nagaur from Bundi were captured at Jahazpur" which indicates that this station was also on the route. Thus the stations between Bundi and Merta were Jahazpur, **31** Devli, Ajmer and Merta and for Pali, it detours at Ajmer via Kotara and for Nagaur it goes straight from Merta to Nagaur." **32**

A route from Bundi to Bihana appears to have been used by the traders more frequently. Our sources mention the stages which are Merta, Nagaur via Fatehpur to Bihana. **33** The stages appear to have some missing links omitting some important stages. But we can reconstruct it with the help of other documents. **34** Probably the stages between Bundi and Bihana were Jahazpur, Devli, Ajmer, Merta, Nagaur, Fatehpur, and finally Bihana. But sometimes the traders avoided using this route and started plying through Kishangarh, and then entered into Shekhawati to reach Bihana. This place could not be identified but it appears to have been an important place. This place must be somewhere in Shekhawati.

Two Rathor principalities of Jodhpur and Bikaner share boundaries with each other and had intimate trade relations. The traders of both the states adopted various routes which were beneficial to them. One route between Jodhpur and Bikaner traveled through Khinwasar, Nagaur and Bikaner. **35** Bikaner had link with Pali through Nagaur, Jodhpur. **36** Rajgarh and Pali, two important towns of these two different states, had links through Churu, Nawalgarh, Didwana, Nagaur and Pali. **37** Rajgarh was an important grain mandi of Bikaner state while Pali was an emporium of Marwar.

Jaisalmer was also well in touch with Jodhpur and Nagaur via Pokhran." The route from Nagaur to Jaisalmer was through Phalodi and Pokhran. **38** It is believed that it was a shorter route to reach at Jaisalmer. The two capital cities of Bhati and Rathor shared trade links through Gajsinghpura, Bap, Phalodi, Pokhran and finally Jaisalmer. **39**

The trade link between Mewar and Bikaner is mentioned in our sources. The first stage from Udaipur was Jojawar then it goes to Sojat, Jodhpur, Nagaur and finally Bikaner, **40**

On this route traders had to part transit duties at three places viz. Jodhpur, Nagaur, and Sojat. In order to avoid multiple taxation (at three points) they adopted alternative route which was through Desuri valley, Pali and after crossing desert villages arrived Jodhpur, then finally to Bikaner. On this route, therefore they had to pay transit duty only at Jodhpur. **41**

The use of alternative routes by traders always depended on the quantum of taxation on particular routes. This becomes clear from an example. The traders preferred the route of Jaipur to Bikaner via Sikar where the transit duty was charged at the rate of Rs. 8.5 per camel while Rs. 15.5 per camel was charged on Maroth-Jharoth on the route of Nagaur to Bikaner. Obviously, the former route was avoided by the traders. The avoiding of Maroth alarmed the state authorities which immediately issued instructions to the chowki officials to reduce the tax down to that of Sikar route. **42** It, therefore, alarmed with lesser tax. Obviously, the route burdened became more popular among traders. This facilitated greater development of the routes unleashing the process of urbanization along such routes. **43**

. It is remarkable to note that the process of growth in the trade routes did not stop even in the late 18th century. After the disintegration of the Mughal Empire during the later half of 18th century, the Rajput rulers organized their financial resources primarily through trade and commerce. They provided many concessions, security on the way and all kinds of inducements to the traders. Such encouragement also opened new routes. This is evident from the increase in the number of

mandis and jagat (Persian zakat) chowkis, which cropped up in the vicinity of the towns even in the remote areas of the states. An increase in the income of zakat (custom duty) further testifies the fact.

The Maratha raids disrupted the trading activities in the region. In the later half of the 18th century, their raids increased, specially against Jaipur and Mewar. The battles of Patan and Merta (1790 A.D) caused irreparable damages. Subsequently, they captured Sambhar, Parbatsar and Rupnagar, temporarily terminated the trading activities between Jaipur, Bikaner and Jodhpur. But even their raids could not disturb the trading activities for longer period in entire Rajasthan. The traders continued their activities and goods were safely transported from one place to another. The credit and financial institution continued to develop all over the regions. This clearly shows growth of trade and commerce in the 18th century except partial disruption for short period.

Transportation Merchandise in Rajasthan :

When there were no proper metallic (Meddnized) roads in the 18th century, the camels and oxen were used for transporting merchandise in Rajasthan. The contemporary documents contain numerous terms which indicate the means of transport such as Katar, Balad, Poth, and gaadi etc.⁴⁴

These terms are found in all the Bahis viz. Sanad Parwana, Jodhpur, Kagadau-ri- bahis, Bikaner and Zakat Bahis, kota, pertaining to the period.

The physical diversity of Rajasthan played a role in determining the mode of transport. Broadly speaking, Rajasthan has four divisions: (a) the western sandy plain which covers the areas of Barmer, Jaisalmer, Bikaner, and Jodhpur and stretched to the region of Shekhawati, (b) hilly/mountainous region, spread over Mewar; (c) the eastern plains and (d) south-eastern plateau consisted of Jaipur and Kota region which are in plains.

The term used for the camel carrier is katar ⁴⁵ The camels were used mostly in desert region of north-western Rajasthan. The climate of the desert region is hot and the high velocity of winds raise sand and dust. In this part, camel was a natural choice of transport. This animal bears some unique features which were conducive for it. This is said that camels can survive without water and fodder even for several days. The region is covered with thorny bushes; camels can obtain fodder from these bushes. Precisely because of this kind of topography, climate and vegetation, the camels were bred at many places in Rajasthan such as, Ajmer, Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Nagaur.

References of camel as a beast of burden is mentioned in our sources, that there were several routes joining the major trade routes on which camels were plying as a carrier. First one was the imperial (Padshahi) route from Agra to Surat. Surat was linked from Agra via Ajmer and Ahmadabad and it was further bifurcated at Jalor into two and was rejoined at Magarvada; another one passed through east of Mount Abu and Sirohi which was fit both for carts and camel [It was eastern branch]. While the western one passed through the desert region viz. Merta, Bhimnal and Dantivada which was fit only for camels.⁴⁶ Moreover, Agra was also connected with Lahore and Multan through Rajasthan via Ajmer, Merta and Jaisalmer. ⁴⁷ It is evident from the documents that on Jaipur-Sindh-Multan ⁴⁸ route, the camels were employed to carry goods. For example, a merchant was carrying indigo from Jaipur to Sindh via Bikaner ⁴⁹ Similarly a trader brought tobacco from Sindh to Deshno.⁵⁰ A broker of Sindh had hired camels at Deshno to transport the goods. Besides these major routes camels were used for transportation work on the internal routes also. Many major trade centres of Rajasthan were well linked with each others. Two Centerport of the Rathor principalities viz. Pali and Rajgarh, were well connected and camels were the chief means of transportation.⁵¹ On the route connecting Jaipur and Jaisalmer camels had borne the responsibility of transportation. ⁵² On the Jaipur-Bikaner route also camels did the work of carriers.⁵³ Goods were loaded on the back of the camels in two bales of equal weight on each side and were tied with rope. So, the beast of burden could travel with greater ease. The grain carriers or owners of the caravan were known as katariya.⁵⁴

In other parts of Rajasthan (such as south-eastern parts ie., non desert regions), the oxen were used for transport. This is evident from our sources that the term which had been used to indicate the animal of carriage, were Balad and Poth ⁵⁵ The literal meaning of Balad and Poth is ox or oxen.⁵⁶ These two terms are synonymous, and are defined as a group of oxen carrying goods on their back for sale from one place to another. H. H. Wilson, describes Balad as herd of cattle and Poth as sack bales for loading bullock. To Wilson, former is ox or oxen while latter are sack/bales.⁵⁷ Now it becomes clear to us that oxen were used in large number in the transportation sector. The owners of oxen were known as baladiya.⁵⁸

There are good number of examples mentioned in the sources that the goods from Kota were brought on oxen to Marwar and Bikaner. A trader Naik Nand Kishor Sangrola of Jhansi brought goods on oxen.⁵⁹

From our sources we came to know that oxen were utilized as beast of burden for transporting goods in Kota for bringing and taking away from there to Malwa, Gujarat and Jhansi alike. Even the transportation between Kota and Multan was also done on oxen: Oxen were employed for transporting goods in all parts of Rajasthan and even outside it. Charan, Bhats and

Banjaras were also actively engaged in this sector they owned large number of oxen. **60** " From the source materials, we came to know that a merchant of Nagaur transacted goods on bullock carts from Bundi to Nagaur in large quantity.**61** Likewise, in a way, ten camel carts full of gunpowder were sent from Jalor to the Rathor capital at Jodhpur.**62**

Apart from the above mentioned beasts of burden, gaadi (carts) were also utilized in transportation sector. The carts could certainly carry more goods than single camel and ox could do, but these two were bit faster than the carts. The physical diversity of Rajasthan gives us clues that in eastern Rajasthan, grounds are even and hard where carts were drawn by bullocks while the western part is full of desert where grounds are uneven and therefore camels could draw carts at ease. Now it becomes clear to us that in the 18th century Rajasthan camels enjoyed formidable position in transportation sector than their rival carriers i.e., ox and bullock carts.

The research paper encompasses the study of rural urban linkages is also of great value. The commercial towns were emerging due to its activities at state initiative. These activities generated the interaction between a town and its hinterland and other function were appended to it later on. The interaction is apparent from the fact that the goods produced in rural areas were regularly marketed in towns/cities or chief mandi of the state and outside of it. Their increasing involvement in long distance trade drew them into an economic relationship with the more far flung areas some of which lay within the region and others beyond regions. Thus Rajasthan was emerging as a well knit trading unit and was becoming an important part of subcontinents trading world. This integration was being facilitated by trade and commerce.

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- 52 Sanad Parwana Bahi, Jodhpur, no. 20, V.S 1835-A.D 1778, f. 193 (b).
- 53 Sawa Mandi Sadar Bahi, Bikaner, no. 8, V.S 1815-16/A.D 1758-59.
- 54 Ibid.

55 Bhandar no. 4, Basta no. 2; Zakat Bahi, Pargana Bara Barod, Kota, V.S 1871/A.D 18147.

56 Balad and Poth define as a group of bullocks carrying goods on their back from one place to another in Badri Prasad, Sakariya and Bhuptiram Sakariya (ed.), Rajasthan Hindi Sabad Kosh, Jaipur. 1977.

57 H.H. Wilson, 4 Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms, London, 1855.

58 Sanad Parwana Bahi, Jodhpur, Kagadau ri Bahi.

59 Bhandar no. 4. Basta no. 2, Zakat Bahi, Kota, Pargana Bara-Barod, V.S 1871/A.D 1814.

60 Sanad Parwana Bahi, Jodhpur, of various years, Kagadau ri Bahi's Bikaner and Zakat Bahis, Kota all refer them that they own large herds of oxen.

61 Sanad Parwana Bahi, Jodhpur, no. 21, V.S 1835-A.D 1778, f. 294.

62 Kotwali Chabutra-Jamabandi, no. 735, Pargana Jalor, V.S 1833/A.D 1776, Jodhpur, District Depository. Oxen continue to be the chief means of transportation and annual fairs are frequent feature of rural life of a large part of India.

