

Role of Banjara Community in the Trade and Transportation in Medieval India

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Abstract

Despite the abundant work on mediaeval Indian history, it is a fact that much is not written on trade and transportation system prevailing in in that particular period. The present paper is an honest attempt to trace the trade and transportation services rendered by a Nomadic tribe; Banjara. Banjara community has given everything to ease the complexities of transportation encountered by masses of all walks of life. The paper minutely records the references of some historians who paid much attention towards the system of trade and transportation particularly controlled by this dedicating community. In spite having many obstacles of social and economical backwardness, Banjaras continued their services under various regimes.

Keywords: Banjara community, trade, transportation

Introduction:

Each community or section of society has always been a part of constructive programme in each state. Banjara is such a section of the social heritage which is usually seen as nomadic people. This section of the Hindu community predominantly dwells in the northwestern belt of India in Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Aandra Pradesh and Telangana. Their ancestors were transporters of goods such as grains, wood, salt, pepper, cattle and other domestic products. This is the evident of fact that their role in trade and transportation has been crucial in the dynasty of all rules, ranging from medieval to modern. Banjaras were known as the drovers of cattle, heavy loads and other objects. In the medieval, Indian people used to do trade activities by utilizing transportation by means of bulls, camel, donkey, etc. Most of the commoners carry stack on their heads. In northern parts of the

country, goods were comparatively carried over by transportation on bulls and camel. Even bullock carts were used . In comparison, in the southern India maximum goods transportation was being done keeping it on the back of cattle. Banjaras were predominant in the availability of bulls for the trade transportation.

Role of Banjara Community in trade and transport :

These people, despite having identity as Nomadic tribe, prefer to live in *Tanda* from where they would spread their skill of transportation. *Tanda* was not merely community centre for gathering together and functioning. According to Mundy : In the morning we met the *Tanda* of Banjaras having over 14000 bulls all loaded with grains as rice, wheat carrying four great Maunds...

For this gypsy community, Dasehra & Diwali play pivotal part. Former is an emblem of community togetherness for achieving a special purpose while latter stands for breaking up such compel and leading to celebration of the most holy festival season. Travelling puts forth that for successful carrier of Jowar , Rice and Salt. The trade class had no solution except that of gypsies. That was quite easier for trading class to carry such heavier sacks or loads on 1000 to 1500 bulls with the *Tanda*. It does not mean that their oxen were constrained to serve other but they also had liberty to trade on their own. The powerful in Banjaras was the man who owned thousands of cattle. Even Travelogues of Europe are testimony to confirm that *Tandas* were accessible for trade and transportation.

In the medieval period the roads were not rudimentary particularly those connecting the bigger ruler areas or to capital city. Most of the paths emerging from remote regions had the lowest level of accessibility .In such decrepit circumstance tradesperson's in spices relied on Banjaras. Among the merchant classes some were specialized in whole sale trade and the others were retailer sales business men.

In the seventeenth century , Indian transportation system was not so progressed, roads not even made of stones and sand. Those trodden paths were known as routes for masses but this does not mean big troops or even solitary traveller could walk as per his or their caprice. Business convey large groups of pilgrims would follow the well trodden roads and even for the desolate journey , such paths were secure and were acclimatized with the availability of fodder and water despite having been through passes and river . North Indian plateau was quite formidable for trade and transportation as oxen and camel were used for

carrying loads and even bullock carts also carried goods. But very few roads were approachable for bullock cart carrier in the south India due to natural hindrance. In this part of India maximum transportation was done on back of cattle. This community people carried bow-arrow and guns for self-defense.

Mundy writes in *'The Travels of Peter Mundy In Europe and Asia' (1608-1667)*: The 25th August 1632. This morning we passed by another *Tanda* of oxen in number 20000(as themselves said), laden with sugar which there not could be not less 50,000 English hundred weight, at 2.5 cwt. to each ox. The goods lay piled on heaps by reason of Rayne, covered with great red *Pal* ; a 100s of tent of which in my judgment not could be less than 150 ,which resemble a reasonable *Laskar* or Camp.”

Banjara community was handy in transportation not only in Mughal regime but also in the kingdom of Shivaji Maharaj . Weight of bullock cart during Shivaji reign was light and not heavier as other rule. Rich section of society used Palanquin whereas common section of society preferred cattle for carrying burden of goods. Banjara community was coined with different names in different areas of India, for instance, Edgar Thurston in *'Castes & Tribes of Southern India'*(vol. 4) unambiguously mentions that *Lambadi* class was known as *Lambani* , *Brinjari* , *Banjari* , *Boipari* , *Sugaali* or *Sukali*.

The community of Banjara was a serving that even the renowned *'Journal of A Route Across The India'*; Lieutenant Colonel Fitzclarence precisely notes :”These are a class of itinerant merchants who travel over the India with many thousand oxen loaded with grain. It is by these people that the Indian armies in the field are fed, and they are never injured by either armies .The grain is taken from them, but invariably paid for. The head of Banjaras has privileges at the courts of the native princes. They encamp for safety every evening in the regular square formed of the bags of grains, of which they construct a breast work. They and their families are in the centre while oxen are made fast outside...

The nomadic tribe in India extended its assistance for the army as well as for the trading class. Banjara community had a crucial role in activating trade and transportation system of the Indian medieval period. This working class of the society was conscientious and earned their bread butter with sincerity. This gypsies wandering still appear constant. Most of them have found themselves roaming for work with their families at the site of construction, for sugarcane breaking, harvesting and other labouring site .

With the advent of British rule in India, rapid growth of transportation system as the railways and buses elaborately affected conventional transportation service of Banjaras. Even after 2 to 3 centuries their financial condition is worsening. This section of society has become one of socially and financially backward class. Educational facilities extended to this class are not of high standard. Even wards of this weaker section are deprived of perfect educational milieu on account of family apathy and heedlessness of government.

Conclusion:

1. Banjara's are the community deciding the country from ancient days.
2. Banjara's were and are primary trading section of society.
3. there is no advancement of the community at the abundant level as maximum masses are in nomadic mode
4. Most of the regimes ruling in the India free British time had observed transportation significance of the banjara community
5. Banjara's were spread in every nook and corner of the country
6. Mediaeval era of Indian history is incomplete without the reference of banjara community
7. Banjara communities contribution in trade and transportation of mediaeval age is quite commendable and noteworthy.

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