

**TRADE ROUTES, TRANSPORTATION AND
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN DELHI TO PATNA
DURING THE 17TH CENTURY**

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Abstract

The aim of this paper focused on the development of commercial activity especially various trade routes connecting between Delhi to Patna during 17th century. During this period different trade route led to growth and development of land route and riverine route. It also deals with modes of transportation on these routes, theft and security, and a brief description of kos minars, caravan sarai, and rest houses etc. that gained importance in trading and commercial during the 17th century.

Keywords

Trade routes. Land route, riverine route, Modes of transportation, caravan sarai and rest house, kos minars, theft and security, etc.

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Introduction

The proposed research work would be historical, analytical and descriptive in nature. It would include both primary as well as the secondary sources. The Primary sources like *Babur-nama*, *Ain-I- Akbari*, *Jahangir-nama* and travellers like Frencois Bernier, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Jesuit missionary Father Monserrate and other sources explores the commercial activity between India and Central Asia during 17th to 18th century.

During the Medieval period, India had neither metaled roads nor advanced means of transport. India's varied physical features, clubbed with the dangers of travelling alone in these vast plains or rocky mountainous regions led travellers to from and travel in groups of various types, of which the caravans were the most popular, while pilgrims formed smaller groups. Along these routes rulers and their armies travelled for campaigns while merchants and traders travelled to earn profits.¹ The Mughal period saw important social and economic developments. During this period, many European travellers and traders came to India and their accounts contain vivid information about the trade routes of India.

Trade Routes

Well-maintained roads and river routes linked various parts of the country with one another, which facilitated domestic trade and swift movement across the country. During the 17th century the trade routes can be broadly classified into two, i.e.

1. The land routes and
2. The riverine routes.

1. The Land Routes

With the advent of Muslim power on the forefront, roads were laid all across northern India, which connected the principal cities with one another for military as well as economic purposes. It was this land transport that transported the principal articles of merchandise to different parts of the country, and enabled them to attain prosperity during the 17th century, which has been attested by the numerous foreign travellers who visited north India. The imperial highways were constructed and many other tertiary roads radiated out from these highways in all directions, connecting the principal cities with one another.

The last section of the book, *Chahar Gulshan* consists of a road book, which describes all the major routes radiating from Delhi and Agra, which were the capital

1. Subhash Parihar, "*Land Transportation in Mughal India*", Aryan books international, New Delhi, 2008, Pg. 3.

cities of the Mughals as well as large commercial centres. It was a short history of Mughal India written by Rai Chararman Kayath in 1759. According to M.P. Singh “the Chahar Gulshan records 24 roads leading to different directions and they were: (1) Agra to Delhi, (2) Delhi to Lahore, (3) Lahore to Gujarat-Attak, (4) Attak to Kabul, (5) Kabul to Ghazni-Qandhar, (6) Gujarat to Srinagar, (7) Lahore to Multan, (8) Delhi to Ajmer, (9) Delhi to Bareilly-Banaras-Patna”.²

Delhi to Agra

On moving from Delhi to Agra (80 kos) stages are given by different sources:

The stages mentioned by Jadunath Sarkar in *India of Aurangzeb* are: Delhi – Barapula – Madanpur – Badarpur – Faridabad – Ballabgarh - Sikri – Pirthala – Baghlaula - Palwal - Khera Serai - Mitnau - Hodal - Kosi Serai - Banchari - Khataila - Deotana - Chata – Akbarpur – Mathura – Naurangabad - Koila Serai of Jhandipur - Ganu-Ghat - Jhandipur - Farah-Serai - Sikandra – Agra³.

The following are the stages given by Tavernier from Delhi to Agra: Delhi-Badarpur – Palwal- Koti Serai- Mathura (Shaiki Serai) – Goodki Serai –Agra. Tavernier calls Badarpur as Badelpoura, which was 8 kos from Delhi. He wrongly mentions Mathura, as the Shah Ki Sarai, and gives the name Mathura to a temple.⁴

Agra, the capital city of the Mughals was the commercial nucleus which served as a link between various parts of the empire. Major roads fanned out from Agra in all directions, to Sirhind, Lahore and Delhi in the North West, Etah, Allahabad, Banaras, Patna and Bengal in the east, to Ajmer, Ahmadabad and Surat in the south west. According to Pelsaert “the city was at the junction of all the roads from distant countries like Gujarat, Thatta (or Sind), Kabul, Kandahar, Multan, Lahore, Deccan or Burhanpur, and Bengal”⁵.

Agra to Patna

On moving further from Agra to Patna (300 kos) in the east the stages or the places crossed were:

2. M.P. Singh, “*Towns, Market, Mint and Port in the Mughal Empire: 1556-1707*”, Adam Publication, New Delhi, Pg.171-174.

3. Jadunath Sarkar, “*Khulasat and Chahar Gulshan: India Of Aurangzeb*”, 1901, Pg. xcvi - xcvi.

4. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, “*Travels In India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*”, Vol.-1, (Trans V. Ball, Ed. William Crooke), ch- p- 7, Pg. 361-371.

5. Francisco Pelsaert, “*Jahangir’s India: The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*”, (Trans.W. H. Moreland), W. Heffer & Sons Ltd,) Cambridge, 1925, Pg. 1-7.

According to Tavernier these were: Agra - Beruzabad (Firozabad) - Serai Murlidas – Estanja (Etawah) – Ajitmall – Sikandra - Sankla Jamwara - Serai Chageada - Serai Atakan – Aurangabad (The original name of the place was Khajuha or Khajwa, which was changed to Aurangabad, ‘place of the throne,’ after the battle in which Shah Shuja was defeated) – Alamchand - Alinchan- Allahabad- Saudoul Serai – Yakedil sera – Bouraky sera - Banarou (Probably his route was: Sa’adu-lla ki Sarai, Jagdis Sarai, Ahirbans ki Sarai) – Benares – Baterpour - Satragy sera - Moniarky sera (The route was apparently: Bahadurpur, Sarai Sirsi, Mohania ki Sarai) - Gourmabad (Khurramabad now Jahanabad) – Sasaram.

From Sasaram Tavernier diverted his journey to Rhodas (Rohtas) - Daoud Nagar Sera (Daudnagar in Gaya District) – Halva sera – Aga sera – Arwal – Patna.⁶ From Banaras onwards to Patna the stages are clearly given, which are as follows: Benares - Serai Said Raze – Ghazipur – Buxar – Ranisagar – Arrah - Bisambhar - Patna.⁷

Delhi to Koil (Aligarh)

According to Jadunath Sarkar the stages on the way from Delhi to Aligarh were: Delhi – Patparganj - Chalera - Pucca Serai of Bhagel - Begampur - Serai Khasi – Kasna - Sikandrabad – Khurja – Chandaus – Koil.⁸

Agra to Koil (Aligarh)

Peter Mundy was sent to Cole to purchase indigo and saltpetre and he also describes the route and junctions which he crossed on the way. Which are given as follows: Agra -Jellesere (Jalesar) - Nusarae (Nau Sarai) - Aulkeera (Anwalkhera) - Neemake Sarai (Sarai Nim)-Sikandra- Cole (Koil or Modern Aligarh)⁹.

3. Riverine Routes

Many civilizations have taken root along banks of great rivers, which have sustained them. The river Ganges along with its tributaries like Yamuna, Gomti, Ramganga, Ghaghra, etc has formed an important channel of riverine routes. In the view of Jean Deloche, the waterways on the Indian subcontinent had assumed and retained a position of uppermost importance until the 19th century.¹⁰

6. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, “*Travels In India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*”, Vol.-1, Trans V. Ball, Ed. William Crooke), Pg. 371-381.

7. Jadunath Sarkar, “*Khulasat and Chahar Gulshan: India Of Aurangzeb*”, 1901, Pg. cix

8. Jadunath Sarkar, “*Khulasat and Chahar Gulshan: India Of Aurangzeb*”, 1901, Pg. cx

9. Peter Mundy, “*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*”, Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 71-72

10. Jean Deloche, “*Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion*”, vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 5.

The rivers of the Gangetic plain between Delhi to Patna, during the 17th century were extensively used for commercial navigation. The Ganges and Jumna were recognized as the main highways for travel and trade. Imperial capitals as well as provincial capitals and commercial cities like Delhi, Mathura, Agra, Lucknow, Allahabad, Banaras, Patna, etc were located on the banks of some or the other rivers.

The Ganges originates from the Gangotri glacier at Gomukh. It reaches Haridwar via Rishikesh and after flowing through Haridwar, the river enters the plains of northern India. It flows through Farrukhabad to join Ramganga at Kannauj. Then it moves forward to Allahabad via Manikpur and Kara,¹¹ where it meets the river Yamuna and the confluence is known as Sangam.

While on the other hand, the Yamuna rises from the Yamnotri glacier. After crossing the Garhwal, it enters the indo-Gangetic plain and runs parallel to the Ganges. From Delhi, Yamuna reaches Agra via Mathura, the sacred city of the Hindus. Further it moves towards Etawah, then Kalpi¹² and reaches Allahabad to merge in the holy Ganges.

From Allahabad the Ganga reaches Banaras via Chunar. After Banaras, river Gomati that flows from Lucknow and river Ghaghara, which is also called Saryu in Ayodhya, merges into the river Ganga. And it finally reaches Patna, the commercial mart as well as one of the wealthiest cities of 17th century India as referred by Sebastian Manrique. From Patna, the Ganges enters Bengal via Munger and Bhagalpur and finally ends her journey on falling into the Bay of Bengal.

Peter Mundy travelled through land routes from Agra to Patna but he has given an account of custom posts on the Ganges at Allahabad¹³ and Banaras¹⁴, where they had to pay the custom duties for crossing the river. And Sebastian Manrique also travelled through the Ganges from Bengal to reach north India via Patna and Banaras. This clearly shows the importance of riverine routes in trade and commerce between Delhi to Patna.

11. J.E. Schwartzberg, "*A Historical Atlas Of South Asia*", Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, Pg. 186.

12. J.E. Schwartzberg, "*A Historical Atlas Of South Asia*", Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, Pg. 187.

13. Peter Mundy, "*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*", Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 109.

14. Peter Mundy, "*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*", Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 124.

Modes Of Transportation

During the 17th century in the region between Delhi to Patna, the mode of transportation can be broadly divided into two. The first being the modes for land transportation and the other were the modes of transport on the rivers. For land transportation carts and pack of animals like horses, mules, oxen, camels, elephants were used. And even muscular power of man in form of human portage was used. While on the other hand for riverine traffic in the Gangetic plain, boats and vessels were used.

Animal portage

Man has domesticated animals from the very beginning for riding as well as transportation purposes. The animals used as beast of burden during this period in the region between Delhi to Patna were elephants, horses, oxen, mules, and camels. The mode of transportation varied from person to person, like the common man often travelled on foot or mules or oxen, elephants were generally reserved for the emperor and those whom he granted permission,¹⁵ while camels were mainly used by nobles as informed to us by Peter Mundy. But the most common mode of transportation was the use of oxen.

According to Francis Bernier “the emperor keeps in Dehly (Delhi) and Agra eight or nine hundred elephants intended to carry the numerous and capacious tents, with their fittings, his wives and women, furniture, kitchen apparatus, Ganges water and all the other articles necessary.”¹⁶ The use of camels as beast of burden in this region was less frequent but they were used only in matter of haste as they could cover a distance of 70 coss in a day.¹⁷ Camels were often used to fetch the holy water of river Ganga for the emperor and it was transported to Agra on camel backs in brass or copper vessels¹⁸.

Horses, mules and donkeys also served as means of transport but lesser people used them for carrying goods or travelling from one place to another. Tavernier informs us that “in India they do not employ asses, mules, or horses in caravans or

15. H.k. Naqvi, “*Urbanization And Urban Centres Under The Great Mughals: 1556-1707*,” vol-1, Indian institute of advanced study, 1971, Pg. 71

16. Francois Bernier, “*Travels In The Mogul Empire: AD - 1656-1668*”, (Trans. Archibald Constable), Archibald Constable And Company, Westminster, 1916, Pg. 221.

17. Peter Mundy, “*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*”, Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 190

18. Ibid, Pg. 231

journeys and everything is being carried here on oxen or by wagons, and this is a completely different custom from Persia.”¹⁹

According to Peter Mundy, each oxen could carry on an average four maunds and each maund was around 16 gallons.²⁰ Whereas Tavernier tells us that “they give an ox a load weighing 300 or 350 livres.”²¹ Most of travellers who visited north India travelled across Delhi to Patna on carts and carriages driven by oxen.

Boats and vessels

For navigation on rivers of Gangetic basin boats and vessels of various sizes were used during this period. According to Jean Deloche, the most common vessels in that area (modern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) was the “kaccha”, a shallow, rectangular container, steered by two lateral rudders which helped in changing the direction of the vessel. These boats were generally able to carry 30 to 40 tonnes of weight and were seen on the Ganga and Yamuna near Allahabad region. The “katra” and “patela,” were boats with flat bottom and transported heavier products.²² Vessels were built of various sizes and they were even capable of carrying elephants on them. The Ain-I-Akbari informs that the emperor had numerous ships in every part of his empire. He had boats in shapes of wonderful animals. He also possessed pleasure-boats built with convenient apartments.²³ Turrets and pleasing kiosks, markets, and beautiful flower-beds, have likewise been constructed on the rivers.²⁴

Construction And Maintenance Of Roads

The testimonies of various European travellers and contemporary literature provide a great deal of information on the various aspects of travelling in the Mughal Empire, especially between Delhi to Patna, during the 17th century

19. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, “*Travels In India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*”, Vol.-1, (Trans V. Ball, Ed. William Crooke), Pg. 371-381.

20. Peter Mundy, “*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*”, Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 95.

21. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, “*Travels In India by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*”, Vol.-1, (Trans V. Ball, Ed. William Crooke), Pg. 371-381.

22. Jean Deloche, “*Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion*”, vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 156-170

23. Sarkar, Bejoy Kumar, *Inland Transport and Communication In Medieval India*, Calcutta University Press, Calcutta, 1925, Pg. 4

24. Abul Fazl, “*The Ain I Akbari*,” Vol.-1, (Trans.H. Blochmann), the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, 1873, Pg. 280-281.

Most of the roads in this region were unpaved tracks or kacca roads, which served as major link between towns and villages. And travellers faced a lot of difficulty in crossing them during monsoon season. A similar instance has been described by Peter Mundy, when he came to Jagdis Sarai.²⁵ Other than kacca roads there were paved roads also like between Delhi to Agra the imperial highway was paved.²⁶ Bridges were constructed over rivers for easy transportation. Mundy saw a five arched bridge at Chaparghata over the river Yamuna.²⁷ And many other travellers like Manrique also records that while travelling from Sasaram to Banaras, the roads were lined by villages and most of them lay in groves of green trees, which eased the weary travellers.²⁸

Kos Minars

“Kos” was a medieval term that denoted distance and “Minar” was a Persian word for tower or pillar. Hence kos minars in the Mughal era, were milestones on the Mughal Highways or trade routes which indicated the distance between two places and guided the travellers, so that they could easily commute on their way. According to Catherine Asher these kos minars were covered with information giving distances. Abul Fazl has recorded in Akbarnama that Akbar issued an order that at every Kos on the way a pillar or a minar should be erected for the comfort of the travellers. Many travellers like peter Mundy, Bernier, and Manucci have given an elaborate account of the kos minars, which they saw on the way while travelling across Delhi to Patna.

Jean Deloche has mentioned about the structure of the kos minar on the way to Ellahabad (Allahabad). He says that “the minars were simple truncated cones, pierced at the top to allow the passage of fire provided by a lightening device installed in the interior, thus to guide night travellers, functioning both as milestones and lanterns”²⁹

25. Peter Mundy, *“The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667”*, Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 114

26. Jean Deloche, *“Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion”*, vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 104

27. Peter Mundy, *“The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667”*, Vol. II, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 89

28. Sebastian Manrique, *“The Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique”*, Vol. II. (Ed. C. E. Luard), Hakluyt Society, 1926-27, Pg. 149.

29. Jean Deloche, *“Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion”*, vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 157.

Rest Houses and Caravan Sarais

Caravan sarais were halting places or rest houses, where travellers and their animals could rest and recover from the tiring day's journey. The caravan sarais were not built according to a uniform plan or style and their construction varied from place to place. There were magnificent rest houses or sarais in this region which earned the admiration of the travellers. From Delhi to Mathura there were sarais like Hodal, Kosi, Chata and Azamabad.³⁰ Peter Mundy mentions about the Nurmahal ki sarai that he saw in Agra. It was one of the finest sarais of the city. It was built of stone and had several rooms, which could lodge 2000 to 3000 people and 500 horses at a time. It even had two gardens.³¹ Further from Agra to Patna Jean Deloche has mentioned various other sarais like sarai Ekdil in Etawah built by Ekdil khan, sarai Ajitmal which was built by Ajitmal Kayasth during the reign of Shahjahan³². Chaparghata was the fairest and finest Sarai which has been mentioned by William Finch³³ and Peter Mundy. It had 4 fair towers at the 4 corners, and 2 stately gates at the entrance and exit with a very high wall full of battlements around it. It had a little river with a stone bridge over it.³⁴ Then there were sarais at Ghatampur, Khajuha, Fatehpur, sarai Manda, Cunni ki sarai. There were several sarais in Naubatpur near Banaras and in Daudnagar near Patna.³⁵

Theft And Security

Robbers and highwaymen have always been a matter of concern for the travellers, merchant and traders. And since the very beginning the Mughal emperors have taken great pains to maintain peace and security. According to William foster

30. Jean Deloche, "*Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion*", vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 176.

31. Peter Mundy, "*The Travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608- 1667*", Vol. 2, (Ed. R.C. Temple), Hakluyt Society, London, 1914, Pg. 78-79.

32. Jean Deloche, "*Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion*", vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 175-176

33. William Finch "*India as Seen by William Finch: 1608-11*", (Ed. R. Nath), Historical Research Doc, 1990, Pg. 179

34. Ibid Pg. 89

35. Jean Deloche, "*Transport and communications in India prior to steam locomotion*", vol.-2, (ed. James Walker), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, Pg. 177.

various check posts and chaukis were set up to safe guard the roads and prevent robbery.³⁶

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we find that the trade routes, transportation and communication system were developed through vast plain and riverine system during the 17th century. The land routes, as mentioned by many travellers, extended into the large area and it connected from Delhi to Patna through different destinations. The maintenance of road and communication system are directed and protected by Mughal emperor. Through the major routes, there were important rest houses or sarais in this region. The riverine routes were developed in Gangetic basin and boats and vessels of various sizes were frequently used during this period. Although the different type of trade pattern were developed during this period but the caravans trade were most popular.

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36. William Foster, “*Early Travels In India: 1583-1619*”, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, Pg. 144.

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