



REVIEW ARTICLE

TRANSPORT SYSTEM AND MODES OF CONVEYANCE IN COASTAL ODISHA: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

***Dr. Gokulananda Patro**

Lecturer in History, K.M.Science College, Narendrapur, Ganjam (Odisha) India

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ABSTRACT

System of Transport and conveyance constitutes an amazing chapter in the economic history of Odisha. No study on the economic history of Odisha can be completed without the reference of the means of transport and conveyance. Hence, an attempt has been made in this paper to discuss various means of transport and conveyance in medieval Odisha.

Key words:

Transport and conveyance constitutes.

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INTRODUCTION

Coastal Odisha comprised the four undivided districts i.e. Balasore, Cuttack, Puri and Ganjam lying on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. It was also known as *Mughalbandi* areas of Odisha (the rest of Odisha was known as *Garjat* or princely states) In olden times, the royalty and their vassals used horses, elephants and horse- driven carts (chariots) as the means of conveyance. Palanquin was also found to be used by the lesser nobles and the rich people. Bullock-cart was the vehicle for the common men in the plains country. In hilly tracts the luggages were carried by the beast of burden such as elephants, horses and bullocks.¹ All these were used for the conveyance of passengers. The last two being only for the private individuals. Carriages were hired alone in Cuttack town, while palkies were available in different parts of Coastal Odisha.

Means of Transport

For the purpose of inland transport elephants, bullocks and buffaloes were used. But the carts driven by the bullocks were very common and mostly used as the means of transport. Pack-horses were used for carrying merchandise. Boats and rafts were used as means of transport in the Chilika Lake and the seas, rivers and canals. Hunter has described all such boats as

flat-bottomed and able to carry about 25 tons of burdens. The palanquin being carried by four to six persons were used for conveyance. The lorries, trucks and buses were introduced in Orissa for transportation after the 30's of the 20th century, but were rarely used. The Rajas and the members of the royal family began to use cars for conveyance, after its introduction during the last phase of the period under review. There was competition among the royal family of the Rajas and Maharajas of Orissa to purchase costly and sophisticated cars for their personal use and the remodelling of the palaces for boarding the cars even from their bed room. Thus, the means of communication and transport facilities were not at all satisfactory in Orissa during the period under review. There were only 5 principal roads, 3 railway lines and two ports in Orissa. It caused enormous inconvenience to the people and posed insurmountable obstacle to the economic growth of Orissa.

1. Bullock Cart

Bullock cart occupies an important place among all the means of rural transport.² The inevitable choice lies with the means of transport, which can provide economic and chief service on the narrow unsurfaced roads at convenience of the shipper. The Bullock carts were, therefore, inevitable under Indian condition and could not be replaced even by the motor transport. Carts were mainly used for transportation of paddy to Balasore from Soro and also returning back from Balasore

*Corresponding author: Dr. Gokulananda Patro,

Lecturer in History, K.M.Science College, Narendrapur, Ganjam (Odisha) India.

to Soro in the shape of oil and salt for distribution at the Bazar and in the neighbourhood market.³ There are some obvious reasons why the bullock carts continued to occupy the most significant place (1) the village roads in Orissa were narrow, earthen rough and uneven and hence suitable (2) rural transport was short distance transport - from one village to another or from the mandies or to the market. (3) The volume of traffic was generally small for which bullocks were kept by villagers. (4) The Bullocks were kept by the villagers for agriculture operations and they remain idle for several months in a year when they were used for transport purposes, hence the bullock cart involves no extra capital and running expenses. (5) In the countryside, there was no regular system of transportation, and hence some means of transport was required which might be owned and used at the convenience of the village people. (6) The carts were locally constructed and repaired and hence there was no difficulties of availabilities. There were, therefore, very widely used for various purposes. The carrying capacity of an Orissa bullock cart ranges from 350 kg to 400 kg, depending upon the strength of the bullock and condition of the road. The cost altogether was about 12 annas for their construction.⁴ The carts were made up of wood, while smaller carts were generally made up of Bamboo. In appearances, durability, and capacity there was no difference from district to district in Odisha. Some of them however, were to be found only in certain parts of Cuttack district without wheel and were known as Kharooahs. The framework of these carts inclined from the yoke of the bullock right down to the ground at the back.⁵

2. Pack Bullocks

Bullocks were used not only for drawing carts but also for transportation goods.⁶ Saltpetre was carried on the back of oxen from Patna to Balasore in the fifties of seventeenth century.⁷ The transport of goods of the English from the interior to Balasore port was impeded in 1878, owing to non-availability of oxen as these were engaged by Mirza Mohammed Saha.⁸ During last quarter of 19th century pack bullocks were seen in the district and village roads, which were chiefly used for conveyance of grains to and from marts of the district. The loads carried in this varied from two to three manunds. Such loads were carried in baskets.⁹ But mostly ninerant travellers from the inland parts of the Mughalbandi and even other parts of Hindustan with pack bullocks laden with salt, food, grains and other important articles travelled from village to village, even penetrating into the innermost recesses of the hills and bartered for the produce of the soil.¹⁰ Mostly they used to come, as reported T. Motte, during the months from January to April, forming themselves into caravans for better security of their property, and bringing their goods on bullocks.¹¹

3. Doli

The word “*doli*” is derived from *dolanaa* (swing). It consisted of cot or frame suspended by the four corners from the Bamboo pole, and was carried by two men.¹² Human being hired for carrying goods were known as collies or hired labourers. In 1633, the Governor of Balikuda 11 miles south east of Hariharpur, supplied “cowlers” (coolies) to William Burton, the English party used them for carrying their goods to Hariharpur.¹³ In 1878 the English faced difficulties in transporting their goods from the interior port of Balasore as the collies necessary for these purposes, were all engaged in

transporting the bags and baggage’s of Mirza Muhammed Sahed (the Nawab of Orissa) who was then leaving Orissa.¹⁴

4. Palkies, Carriers, Ponies and Elephants

The internal trade was carried on by means of pack bullocks, carts and country boats. For the purpose of inland transport elephants were harnessed. Bullocks, buffalos and asses were also used for merchandise. For the purpose of inland transport elephants were harnessed. Bullocks, Buffaloes and asses were also used. The carts driven by the bullocks were mostly used as the means of transport. The palanquins being carried by four to six persons were used for conveyance. Pack-horses were used extensively for going from one place to another whereas bullocks were used for carrying merchandise.¹⁵ Boats too were used as means of transport. These boats as described by Motte were very light, the plank being only an inch thick and timbers small in proportion, carry from 600 to 700 mounds. ‘And the largest he saw was 40 feet long, four feet wide in the Zamindari of Athgarh’.¹⁶ Hunter has described all such boats as flat-bottomed of about 25 tons of burden.¹⁷

Riverine Transport

Besides the roads, the rivers in coastal Orissa were used as arteries of transport and communication. All the principal rivers formed the broad waterways during half of the year especially the rainy season.¹⁸ When the roads of Orissa were impassable and when traffic being muddy and unbridged, the great rivers namely Mahanadi, Brahmani, Baitarani, Budhabalanga, Rushikulya, Bahuda and Bansadhara supplied an easy means of communication for import and export of commodities.¹⁹ All these rivers were navigable, when the roads of Orissa were impossible for wheel traffic being muddy and unbridged, these rivers supplied an easy means of communication during the rains. River Mahanadi was the chief water route between Cuttack and Sambalpur through the princely state of Orissa like Athagarh, Athamallik, Banki, Baramba, Baud, Daspalla, Khandapara and Narasingpur. River Brahmani was another highway of communication by water. It was the broad water-ways for the people of Talcher and Dhenkanal for nearly 8 months in a year. River Baitarani was of great use for the people of Keonjhar and Jajpur. In dry season also, it was navigable as far as Anandapur. Navigation through these rivers were conducted by country boats and rafts. Transportation through these water routes was extensive because it was less expensive and there was no fear of way-side robbers and wild animals as in land routes. Therefore, a considerable trade was carried on through these rivers.²⁰ River Mahanadi was the chief water route between Cuttack and Sambalpur and Cuttack and the princely states of Orissa like Athgarh Athmalik, Banki, Baramba, Boud, Daspalla, Khandapada and Narasinghpur. The river Mahanadi was the main out-let of trade of the district till the opening of railways.²¹ Boats could ascent the Mahanadi as far as arrange of Madhya Pradesh. During floods, boats take five days to reach Cuttack from Sambalpur, while the Journey to Sonepur lasts for one day to Binka six hours. But, the duration of the return journey was much longer. In July, it took laden boats 25 days to reach Sambalpur from Cuttack.²² River Brahmani was the broad water-way for the people of Deogarh Sub-division of Sambalpur and the Talcher and Dhenkanal state for barely 8 months in a year. River Baitarani was an important artery of communication for the people of Jaipur Sub-Division and Keonjhar state. In dry season also it was navigable by small

boats as far as Anadapur. A considerable trade was carried on at this place. During the rainy season bamboo trade was carried on through the river Rushikulya. The timbers from the Sorada forest were transported by this river as far as Ganjam town. Bamboo's were also transported on the river Bahuda extensively during the rains. The only water-borne trade of Koraput District was the transport of the bamboo of Malkangiri by the Saleru and Saberi rivers to the Godavari river on the Rajahmundry.²³ The three great rivers of Puri District, the Kushbhaddra, Bhargavi and Daya were navigable throughout for several months of the year. Even in the hot weather, country boats could be seen along their banks for at least ten miles above the point where these rivers enter the Chilika. The boats belonged chiefly to Ganjam Traders, who brought loads of bamboos and other goods and in return carried the surplus rice of the Chilika lake, which was available for boat traffic throughout the year.²⁴ River Rushikulya, Bahuda, Badanadi and Ghadahada were the chief rivers used by the people of Ganjam for trade and communication.

The trade on Chilika lake was carried on boats. Ferry services were in existence for transport of passenger and goods in almost all the big rivers of Orissa. The Kendrapada-Marshaghai canal and the Taladanda canal were also used as other arteries of the trade. Navigation through these rivers were conducted by the country boats and rafts.²⁵ Regarding the boats Thomas Motte writes, "These boats were light, the plank being only a inch thick and a timbers small in proportion could carry from 600 to 700 mounds. "The largest boat he saw was 40 feet long and four feet wide.²⁶ But, Hunter has described these boats as flat-bottomed and were able to carry about 25 tons of burden".²⁷ The boats used in Chilika lake were quite peculiar. They were made of planks without ribs or keels and were quite peculiarly flat-bottomed with perpendicular sides. This for was necessary in the unimproved state of the landing places as the lake in very shallow at the edges, except where a rocky knoll formed the bank; and in such position goods could not be landed safely from the breaking of the waves. Produces were brought through the Chilika lake to Rambha, Parikud and Malud.²⁸ On the Chilika lake people use boats called *patwa*. There were flat bottomed boats and were specially made for shallow water. On the sea the fishermen use *masula* boats. The *masula* boats were large, flabby, flat-bottomed crafts of plants sewn together with cane strips. They were used close to the beach and were not fit for going out to sea.²⁹ Transportation through these water routes especially during the rains was extensive because it was less expensive and there was no fear

of wayside robbers and wild animals as in land routes. But since the opening of railway, the construction of bridges over the rivers and metalled roads, the river-borne trade has greatly diminished.

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