



Mughal Emperors: Modes of Travelling and Transport

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The present article focuses on *the Mughal Emperors: Modes of Travelling and Transport as they were* great fond of travelling. They moved constantly with great pomp, whether touring, hunting or campaigning. They travelled with their horses, elephants, camels and an entourage of thousands, making it a magnificent spectacle. It was intended to inspire people to show respect and admiration for the emperor and to intimidate those contemplating rebellion. Even on ordinary hunting parties, Akbar was accompanied by 100 elephants, 500 camels, 400 carts, 100 bearer a thousand 'Farrash' who laid carpets, 100 water carriers, 50 carpenters, tent makers, and at 150 sweepers.ⁱ When the emperor went on a longer journey, his retinue was even longer stretched over. According to Monserrateⁱⁱ Akbar's retinue stretched over one and a half mile when on the move.ⁱⁱⁱ During his journey to Kashmir in December 1662, his retinue had the appearance of an advancing army. If the emperors were passing through a new route, new roads were constructed, Sarais were also built.

The distances travelled per day depended on the mode of travelling, the season and the number of men and beasts in the party. Tavernier^{iv} records that an ordinary caravan or a small party of travelers could normally traverse thirteen cos (26 miles) in one day. But the emperors and nobles with a large retinue travelled at a much slower pace.^v

Carriages and Transport

The most common means of moving men and goods was by bullock carts, camels, horses and oxen. Men of means used Palkis, elephants and horse carriage. In Aurangzeb's time, no Hindu

except the Rajput could ride an Arab or Iraqi horse. It is difficult for an ordinary Indian to maintain a good horse.^{vi}

Oxen, which played the leading role, pulled carts and also travelers and carried packs. Sebastian Marrique^{vii} noticed that Shahjahan maintained 6300 Gujrati oxen.^{viii}

The cart drawn by oxen, called a 'bahal', was of two types: the Chatridar and Open. The Chatridar was covered with four or more poles supporting a canopy. The other was open to the elements. The enclosed carts were beautifully decorated and made as comfortable as possible. The oxen were also decorated. Bells were hung round their necks so that they could be heard at a distance. They were kept in an excellent condition as they were fed a special rich diet.^{ix} Oxen were shod, like the horses, for travel in rough country, both on account of pebbles and because of the heat. The rentals for oxen, ox carts or coaches variety.

Like oxen, elephants, camels, horses and mules were used as mounts pack animals and draught animals. Elephants were used by the emperor and his royal family and also by nobles. At mounts, they set the emperors above the subjects and symbolized their power. The Mughals took them on every tour and campaigns. The ladies of the Imperial household were carried in a closed litter set on the back of the elephant and kept in place by a stout rope passed around the animal's middle. Called an Imari, the litter had the facilities of a small coach and resembled a doomed roofed throne. Beautifully gilded and painted, Imari, was spacious enough to sleep with comfort. Under Akbar one hundred and one elephant were kept constantly ready for his use.^x

There was also a great demand for horses and camels. Stables were kept well stocked. Horses were imported in large number, particularly from Persia and other Muslim countries. In the imperial establishment horses were carefully looked after. In Akbar's stables there were at least 12,000 horses.^{xi}

Camels

Camels were used for tours and campaigns to carry the impedimenta of the Imperial establishment. Peter Mundy, during his journey from Burhanpur to Agra, saw 150 camels with litters on the back in which women and slaves rode.^{xii} Camels were also used to draw carriages. They had to be used in desert areas. They could endure great hardships and live without water for a long time. Fast she-camels were used for carrying messages. Camels were in great demand from Agra to Surat, in Sind and Baluchistan. An astonishing number of camels were used in Imperial Camps. Carari estimated those in Aurangzeb's at 50,000.^{xiii}

Palkis

Those conscious of their own importance and with means usually travelled in 'Palkis'. These were carried on the shoulders of four bearers, called Kahar. The Palki was the most comfortable and leisurely way of travelling. According to Tavernier, Palki was a kind of bed, of 6 or 7 feet long and 3 feet wide, with a small rail all around.^{xiv} The best Palkis were made in Tatta.

Moving Throne

The Takht-i-Ravan (Moving Throne) was especially used by the Emperor or by rich nobles. It was a decorative as well as useful. Bernier^{xv} describes it thus. "A species of magnificent tabernacle with painted and gilt pillars and glass windows that are kept shut when the weather is bad. The four poles of this litter are covered either with scarlet or brocade and decorated with fringes of silk and gold. At the end of each pole are stationed two short and handsomely dressed men who are relieved by eight other men constantly in attendance."^{xvi}

Kahar

"Kahar" carried the litters and according to Abul Fasil, formed a class of servants peculiar to India. They carry heavy loads on their shoulders and travel through mountains and villages. With their Palkis, they walk so evenly that the man inside is not inconvenienced by jolting. These are many in this country but the best come from Dakkin and Bengal. At court several thousand of them are kept."^{xvii}

It appears that 'Kahars' The Palki Bearers, were trained from an early age to carry heavy loads on their shoulders. When very young they were given small sticks and later log or a bamboo to carry. In this way they became accustomed to carry heavy loads on their shoulders. Kahars were employed, as the situation demanded. Mundy^{xviii} saw them carrying cold water in earthen pots for the emperor.^{xix} Kahars were not paid high wages. On short journey they were paid less. When the journey lasted longer than six days, they were paid between four and five rupees each per month.^{xx}

Elephants, Camels, Horses, Bullocks, Bullock-Carts and Mules were the usual mode of transportation and travelling during the Mughal period. The use of Elephants as means of conveyance was reserved for the sovereign or to those whom he granted permission to use them.

Camels were much better suited for both personal conveyance and transpiration of goods. These were employed for personal transport, especially when the travelers were pressed for

time. The she-camel, Jamaza, excel in swiftness of speed. Camels used for transportation could carry an average of the mounds of weight. Often Agra goods were sent to Surat in huge camel caravans. Overland transportation of goods was conducted on camels as there were exceptionally suited for the terrain.^{xxi} Todd refers to lines of camels passing through Hyderabad, Rori, Shikarpur.

The use of Horses in journeys was more common. Nobility used horses. Common people also used horses for a journey in the sixteen and seventeenth century. Horses were also employed for postal service. The efficiency and promptitude of postal service owed largely to the well organized relay of swift horses.

Mules and Asses were commonly employed as beasts of burden in the North-Western and Western regions as these were less expensive and more suited for the conveyance of goods through uneven paths.

Bullocks were the most convenient and important means of transportation. The sixteenth – seventeenth century of Mughal period in India. By virtue of their adaptability to traverse long distances over paved, unpaved or even uneven roads. They were eminently suited to every heavy loads or drive wheeled carriages.

Individuals and Merchants employed bullocks as beasts of burden because they could carry eight means of weight each bullock. Riding in bullocks was a common practice. These would move from Lahore and Agra in the north to Burhanpur in the South and from the Eastern border of Bihar to Sindh in the West, transporting mainly grani and salt from surplus to deficit areas. Ox-driven carriages were also used for passenger conveyance and also for transportation of goods. The passenger carts, accommodating two or three persons were available in the areas of Ajmer, Gujarat and Orissa.

Palanquins were in the main used for conveyance of ladies. The bearers belonged to a particular caste of Hindus called 'kahars'. They are carried their burden with such skill that the occupants inside were not horrible with any folting.^{xxii} When not engaged in their special profession, the palanquin bearer used their free time in performing porter's jobs.

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- ⁱⁱ Antonio Monserrate (1536–1600) was a Portuguese priest who accompanied two other priests, Father Rodolfo Acquaviva and Father Francisco Enriquez, on the first Jesuit mission to the court of the Emperor Akbar (1556–1605)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Monserate, FST The Commentary on His Journey to the Court of Akbar, PP.78-79
- ^{iv} Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605 – 1689) was a 17th-century French gem merchant and traveler. He visited India between the years 1630 and 1668.
- ^v Tavernier, Jean Baptist, *Travels in India*, Translation V. Ball, revised by Crooke, Vol. I, London, P. 89
- ^{vi} Jadunath Sarkar, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 224
- ^{vii} Manrique (c. 1590 – 1669) was a Portuguese missionary and traveler. He traveled around countries of the East for about sixteen years during 1628–1643. In 1653, he published his work, titled *Itinerario de la India Oriental*, in Rome.
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- ^x Brij Narain and Sri Ram Sharma (Ir.), *A contemporary Dutch Chronicle of Mughal India*, Calcutta 1957, p. 35
- ^{xi} *Ibid.*, PP. 34-35
- ^{xii} Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia*, Vol.II, P. 114
- ^{xiii} Rev. B.N., Journey from Marwar to Fatahpur beyond Jalabad in 17th century A.D., Indian Historical Record Commission, Vol. XXII October 1945, P. 218
- ^{xiv} Tavernier, Jean Baptist, *Travel in India*, Translation V. Ball, revised by Crooke Vol. I, p. 45
- ^{xv} Bernier, François (1620-1688) *travels in the Mughal Empire* from 1656-1668 A.D.
- ^{xvi} Bernier, Francois, *Travel in Mogul Empire*, ed. Archibald Constable, Reprint. Delhi, 1968, P.

^{xvii} *Ain-i-Akabri*, Translation, Jerret, P. 264

^{xviii} Peter Mundy (fl.1600–1667) was a seventeenth-century British merchant trader, traveller and writer. He was the first Briton to record, in his *Itinerarium Mundi* ('Itinerary of the World'), tasting Chaa (tea) in China and travelled extensively in Asia, Russia and Europe.

^{xix} Peter Mundy, *The Travels of Peter Mundy in Europe and Asia*, Vol. II. P,114

^{xx} Moreland, H., (Ed), *Relations of Golenda*, 1930, p. 27

^{xxi} Todd, *Badooni*, p. 47

^{xxii} *Ain-i-Akabri*, Translation, Jerrett, P. 264