

Nagaur: A Thriving Centre of Trade and Commerce during the 15th Century

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This process of urbanization increased in certain regions under the provincial ruler's after the dissolution of the Delhi Sultanate in 1398. The founder's of regional kingdoms and principalities took keen interest in the economic development of their respective territories and cemented their relations with the local people by constructing large tanks, step wells and other buildings of public utility. The town's and cities which the regional ruler's chose or founded as their administrative headquarters developed into centre of Islamic culture and played an important role in sustaining not only the Islamic institutions and the traditional Indian arts and crafts but also the arts and crafts that had developed in Delhi, under the influence of foreign immigrants during the 13th and 14th centuries. This is illustrated by the study of Nagaur, which emerged as the capital of an independent principality, founded by Shams Khan Dandani. In the fifteenth century, under the fostering care of its ruler's Nagaur developed from a small town into an important centre of learning and commerce. An attempt has been made in this chapter, to describe transformation of Nagaur into a centre of Islamic learning and culture, improvement in trade and commerce, social relations and the cultural and political influence that it exercised on the satellite towns and villages included in the principality.

The city of Nagaur:

It is very difficult to say anything definite about the early history of Nagaur, under the Rajputs. Garrick based on local tradition says that Nagaur was founded by Rai Bisal, who was sent there for that purpose by the Chauhan king Raja Prithvi. Nagaur came under the contact of Muslim influence in later Ghaznavide period when Sultan Bahram Shah led two expeditions against Mohammed Bahalim the rebel governor of Lahore. Muhammad Bahalim perished along with his ten sons in the battle fought against Ghaznavide Sultan. Mohammad Bahalim is credited of having built the fort of Nagaur in the province of Siwalik and establishing a nucleus of Muslim settlement in the heart of Rajasthan. According to "*saroorus sadur*" the nature of conquest was such that Sheikh Raziuddin Hasan Sanghvi had to change his clothes while moving in that region. This shows that there was hardly Muslim settlement in that region. Nagaur came under effective control of Muslims after the second battle of Tarain when Ali Nagauri was appointed as the *muqta* of Nagaur. This is corroborated by an inscription of Muhammad bin Sam dated A. H. 594-1196 A. D. found on the upper wall of the fort of Nagaur. Thus, it is clear that it was during the reign of Muhammad bin Sam that Nagaur became centre of Muslim army in the region.

An incidental reference in the *malfizat* of Shaikh Hamiduddin shows that Nagaur had not developed in to town. Shaikh Hamiduddin wrote long and acrimonious letters to Suhrawardi saint Sheikh Bahauddin Zakaria that saint hood could not be reconciled with possession of material means. Enraged at this blatant criticism of his father's behavior, a son of Shaikh Bahauddin Zakaria traveled all the way from Multan to Nagaur and criticized Shaikh Hamiduddin for not offering Friday prayers. The Shaikh had settled down in a village called Suali in the vicinity of Nagaur. The distance between the village and the town does not seem to have been considerable and therefore the son of Zakaria comes to raise objection to Nagauri's non-participation in the Jama Mosque in the town. Later the village became a part of the town. "Nagaur is not a town and so Friday prayers cannot be held here" declared Shaikh Hamiduddin. Nagaur however, underwent socio-economic change and began to grow into city during the period of Tughlaqs. There are epigraphic evidences to show that under the Tughlaqs mosques, wells, *khanqahs* and *serais* were constructed in Nagaur. There is an inscription on the gateway of the tomb of famous thirteenth century saint Shaikh Hamiduddin Chishti, which record the construction of the shrine in 1333 by the order of reigning king Muhammad, son of Tughlaq Shah. There is a document of the reign of Mohammed bin Tughlaq, appended to a manuscript copy of *sarur-us-sudur*, which record the construction of gateway to the *khanqah* of the Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri Chishti in 1332.

The archival material relating to the trade routes and transportation covers a long period starting from Delhi Sultanate to Mughal empire. These records were compiled from the various categories of rural-urban and commercial papers from the states of Rajasthan and provide valuable information about different commodities, taxes, markets, trade and commerce etc. The study is based primarily on the primary sources such as parvanas

(sanad,parvana,bahi and khasruk,kaparwana,bahi), zakat/Jagat bahisand kharitas. The available material provide us an insight into the rural-urban commercial life, specially the functioning of the market, money lending transactions and inter-regional trade of the state of Rajasthan. Besides, these documents offer welcome information about market rates of commercial goods, trade routes, business centres, means of transport, trade fairs, rate of commercial taxes etc. With the help of these unpublished archival sources, an attempt has been made in this paper to study the trade routes and its connections with Nagaur, known as a Trading Junction in Medieval Rajasthan.

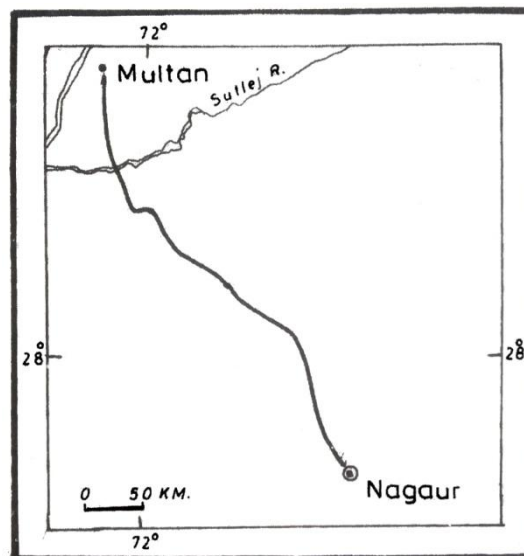
There are many factors for the expansion of trade routes in this region. The geographical conditions was conducive for the promotion of travel facilities, the volume of trade, increased many fold with passage of time. Besides this, an important element in the trade system were the travelers and the merchants, who play a vital role in the exploration of routes. A close study of the routes shows that by and large it was by the same routes that the invaders passed and the merchant travelled. Many of the early epigraphic records of 10th to 14th century, mentions that since the early medieval period there were several routes in Rajasthan, which were connected to the various towns of Marwar.. The epigraphic source further mentions that Madhya Desh-region lying between the Himalayas on the North, the Vindhya on the South, Sindh on the West, Prayag on the East, were connected with almost the whole of Rajasthan.

Owing to the growth in agricultural, industrial and other economic field, new commercial marts emerged, especially after the advent of the Turks in India. The trade in Rajasthan expanded. There was a heavy flow of goods, to and fro from the neighbouring provinces like Punjab, Delhi, Agra, Malwa, Gujarat, Kashmir, Sindh and Multan. In addition to this due to the above progress several new routes came into existence.

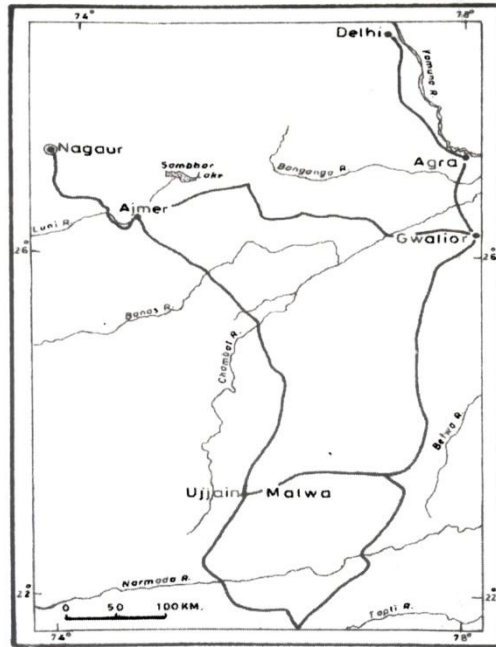
Nagaur was one of the important trade centre of Rajasthan. A trader of Nagaur carried mustard (sarso) and til (sesamum) from Nagaur, sold it to Multan, and further carried cotton from Multan, which was sold to Nagaur. The importance of that particular trader is also mentioned in the Persian sources that he was involved as a mediator for the correspondence between Bahauddin Zakaria Suhrawardi of Multan and Shaikh Hamiduddin Chishti of Nagaur. This information proves that Nagaur was involved with Multan by trade route in 13th century .Besides this, many more routes were extremely important both for battles and trading point of views were also passing through Nagaur. A route from Delhi to Malwa was connected with Gwalior and Nagaur. The important routes that passed through Nagaur can be shown below;

(A) External Trade Routes

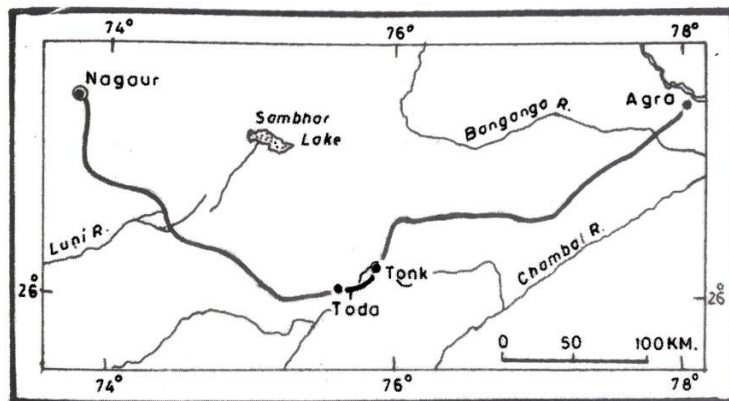
- (1) Nagaur to Multan : This routewas frequently used by trader in 13th century (Map-1).
- (2) Delhi to Malwa : Gwalior and Nagaur connected with this route (Map-2).
- (3) Agra to Nagaur : Agra-Tonk-Toda²⁶-Nagaur (Map-3).
- (4) Mewat to Bikaner : Mewat Region-Nagaur-Bikaner (Map-4).



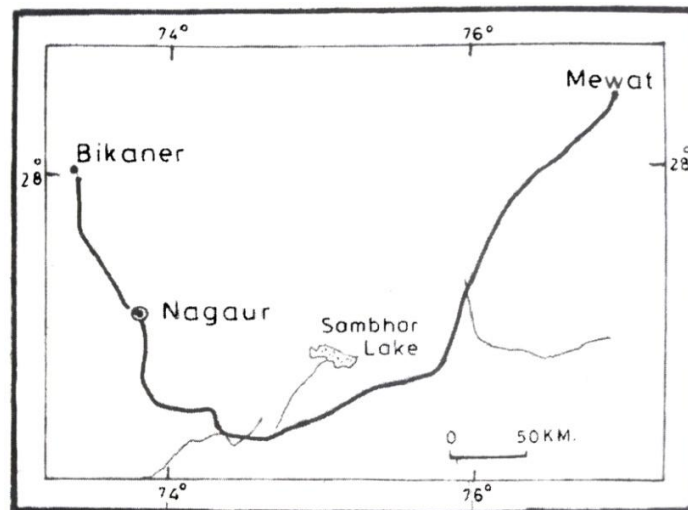
**Nagaur to Multan
Map-1**



**Delhi to Malwa
Map-2**



**Agra to Nagaur
Map-3**



**Mewat to Bikaner
Map-4**

(B) External Trade Routes

- (1) Multan to Jodhpur : Multan-Bahawalpur-Pugal-Bikaner-Nagaur-Jodhpur.
- (2) Jodhpur to Kashmir : Jodhpur-Nagaur-Hardesar-Nohar-Sirsa-Bhatinda-Amritsar-Kashmir.
- (3) Bikaner to Deccan : Bikaner-Nagaur-Merta-Bundi-Kota-JhalaraPatan-Ujjai-Deccan.
- (4) Delhi to Ahmadabad / Gujarat : Delhi-Narayana-Narhad-Reni-Nagaur-Ajmer-Gujarat³¹ Ahmadabad/Gujarat.
- (5) Agra to Ahmadabad / Gujarat : Agra-Nagaur-Ahmadabad/Gujarat.³²
- (6) Ajmer to Ahmadabad : Nagaur was connected to this route.
- (7) Nagaur to Ayodhya : Nagaur-Ajmer-Ayodhya.
- (8) Ajmer to Jodhpur : Ajmer-Nagaur-Bikaner-Jodhpur.

(C) Internal Trade Routes

Sanad Parwana Bahi is the important source which provides us an important information to study the internal trade routes, which connected to the important towns of Rajasthan with each other. The routes were highly beneficial to the traders, banjaras, and provided such type of other transport facilities. The important internal routes were as follows:

- (1) Nagaur to Pugal : Nagaur-Bikaner-Pugal.
- (2) Kota to Nagaur : Kota-Bundi-Deoli-Ajmer-Merta-Nagaur.
- (3) Bikaner to Jaipur : Bikaner-Nagaur-Rupnagar-Jaipur.
- (4) Bikaner to Jodhpur : Bikaner-Nagaur-Khiwasar-Jodhpur (Mandor).
- (5) Bikaner to Pali : Bikaner-Nagaur-Jodhpur-Pali.
- (6) Bikaner to Udaipur : Bikaner-Nagaur-Pali-Desuri-Udaipur.
- (7) Rajgarh to Pali : Rajgarh-Churu-Nawalgarh-Didwana-Nagaur-Pali.
- (8) Jaisalmer to Jaipur : Jaisalmer-Pokaran-Phalodi-Nagaur-Rupnagar-Jaipur.
- (9) Jhunjhunu to Pali : Jhunjhunu-Fatehpur-Ladnun-Didwana-Nagaur-Pali.

Commerce:

Nagaur was known for its numerous productions. Its indigenous products were being exported to the several centres of India in general and Rajasthan in particular. The products of Nagaur were also sent abroad. Nagaur was also importing goods from the different corners of the country and from abroad as well. A close study of contemporary sources would indicate that Nagaur was an important trade centre in Marwar. The caravans from one place to another were passing through Nagaur, therefore, it was considered as the nodal centre of Rajasthan for trade. According to one of the important sources, Sawa-mandi-sadar-Bahi of Bikaner, there is a reference to the export of 30 bullocks from Nagaur to Multan, because Nagaur was known for its sturdy bullocks. There was a great demand for Nagauri bullock in Multan, Sindh and in the other principalities of Rajputana. According to Nainsi Nagaur was a centre of woolen and cotton cloth industry. During the Mughal period woolen business was very prosperous and rich in Nagaur because of this town itself was known for the woolen industry. In this town, at least twenty types of woolen cloths were being produced. According to R.P. Vyas, wool was being mostly exported to Bikaner and Nohar, and transmitting further in the north.

Nagaur had in its locality the minerals like red stone, salt, mica and gypsum which had raised considerable revenue to the area of Marwar. Nagaur was also an important centre for the manufacture of a large number of goods such as; cotton cloths (locally known as kori-cloths), blanket, ivory toys, utensils of iron, copper and brass etc. These items had universal demand all over the Rajputana.

There is ample of information in the contemporary sources and in the depositaries about the local and outside traders, who were engaged in internal and external trade about their daily activities and their names and resident (permanent and non permanent) during 18th century. One of the sources mention that Navneet Roy Messrs Sahib Ray, Thakur Das Bhiwani, Bhawani Das Meghani were the prominent traders and were living in Nagaur. Similarly Shah Ram Nagauri, and Akhai Ram were well reputed local traders actively involved in trading activities.

A close analysis of export-import items, shows that a large number of goods were being received to Nagaur Mandi from north region through Bikaner. These items were; woolen cloths, alum, sindha/sendha salt, lac, asafetida, dry fruits, harde, nutmeg, fullers' earth, dry ginger, piper, aniseed. Some items viz. lead, iron and flax had been imported to Nagaur from Pali while pashmina from Kashmir. It is interesting to note that Nagaur was not only importing goods but a large number of items were being exported from this centrally placed qasba viz. copper and brass utensils, blankets, iron goods, ivory toys to Jodhpur; silk and wool to Nohar, iron, leads, cloths (kori-cloths), mica, indigo, kasumba, chilly, borax, zinc, coconuts, vermilion, catechu etc. to Bikaner.

Epigraphic sources indicate that among the business communities of Nagaur, the Jains were prominent. Jains were primarily community of merchants and tradesman. The Jains, are reported to have attained high positions in the Sultan's service from the reign of Alauddin Khalji. For instance Pheru Jain, an expert demonologist, was appointed superintendent of royal mint in Delhi by Sultan Alauddin khalji. He retained his position till the reign of Sultan Mohammad bin Tughlaq and with so much influence that he could recommend men of his community to the Sultan. Mohammad bin Tughlaq went out of his way to befriend the Jain community along with other non-Muslims. The tradition set by the fourteenth century Sultans in conferring favour on Jains seem to have been followed by regional Sultans and chiefs after the dissolution of Delhi Sultanate. In Gujrat and Nagaur, Jain rose in social hierarchy under the patronage of Muslim governors. They had close and friendly relations with the member's of Muslim elite and both communities appear to have cooperated with each other in social matter. Like Muslim aristocrats, the Jains spent money on constructing schools where children were instructed in the traditional sciences. Under the Khanazads of Nagaur large number of Jain, temples were constructed and number of new scripts were written. During the period of Muhammad Khan a copy of manuscript named "Sarasvataprakriya" was written by Devaratna for the reading of Kashantiratna. In 1519, the copy of yogarastram was caused to be written by Muni Gunaratna. Devanandi, pupil of Shuvanakirati¹, wrote the copy of Sravagacharita in 1528. In spite of Nagaur, being under the control of Muslims, the Jains were allowed to perform the installation ceremony of the images. In 1467 Srivanta and Sivarata of Adityanaga Gotra performed the installation ceremony of Sumatinatha through Kakka Suri of Upakesa Gachchha. The land grants made by Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1488-1517) to a Jain saint, Jambuji earlier also tend to suggest that the Jain community had acquired much importance in western Rajasthan.

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