IV: TRADE & COMMERCE

In Patna-Gaya region, trading activities were carried on at three different levels. Rural or local trade was the base of all trading activities. In terms of commodity exchange, local trade meant the movement of goods between town and country. This mode of trading activities also included exchange of commodities among different rural localities. In the Patna-Gaya region, rural trade was primarily concerned with the collection of produce from the primary producers, i.e., peasants and artisans and their distribution within the local orbit. In rural trade there was limitation of market and mobility of the primary producer. Therefore for the movement of the commodity, intermediaries were needed. These intermediaries like pykars and gomashtahs in Patna-Gaya region, were involved in it. This movement of goods from one level to other served as stimulator to regional or interregional trade.

1 Irfan Habib, Agrarian System of Mogul India, Bombay, 1967, p. 75.
3 Kumkum Chatterjee, p. 38.
4 H.R. Ghoshal, p. 56.
Nature of market was different for the movement of commodities at local level. Requirement of the local economy was main consideration of local trade. Wide varieties of commodities constituted the market of local trade. Livestock, vegetable, fruits, ivory, cloths were the commodities of trade at this level. This suggests that requirements of the regional economy were the main consideration of local trade.

In this local trade, primary producers themselves sold it in the market. Village artisans like blacksmiths, carpenters, cotton beaters, weavers, etc, they all were producers as well as the seller of their commodities.

Prices of the commodities in the market were always determined by the economy of the region and its consumers. As stated earlier, the prices of the commodities were low in this region. Artisans were part of this agronomy and their commodities were byproducts of the agricultural product. Therefore, while they themselves became sellers, they kept the prices of the commodities low. Prices of the food grains were also low because bania or mahajan themselves purchased it at harvest rates.

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5 Buchanan, pp. 183-99.
6 See Chapter in Agricultural Product.
7 Buchanan, pp. 180-82.
In local and regional trade agricultural products, chiefly grain was an important component of trade. At village level there were the *grihastha beparis* who were often *mandal* or rich peasants. Being an influential person in the village society,\(^8\) they used to lend money and grains to the farmers. They used to purchase the commodities from their neighbours, and either sell them to the *Baldiya beparis* or carry themselves to the market.\(^9\) *Baldiya beparis* were often called as *ladu Beldiya* or *Telibeparis*. These *Beldiya beparis* purchased the commodities from the *Grihastha beparis* at villages and then carried it to the adjacent towns, where they sold it to *paikars*. These *Beldiya beparis* usually travelled in company for security. For carrying the commodities they pooled their cattle. Very often one who possessed one or two oxen only assisted their wealthy companion and received ‘reward’ for it.\(^10\) The *Beldiya beparis* were of impure caste because they hired their cattle.\(^11\) From these *Beldiya beparis*, commodities were purchased by *paikars*. The *paikars* lived in towns. They were men of pure births therefore they were not supposed to use oxen. They considered it sacred beast.\(^12\)

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\(^8\) Buchanan, p. 266; P. Robb, *Hierarchy and Resources*.

\(^9\) Buchanan, p. 692.

\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Ibid.
In Patna *dalal* or brokers were found. They bargained for others and received commission for their bargain. This led to the enhancement of price of that commodity. They were so much effective that in every purchase their interference was required.\(^\text{13}\) Golders were another people who were involved into brokering but they were different from *dalals*.\(^\text{14}\)

*Artiyas* dealt with considerable amount of commodities. They used to keep commission warehouses.\(^\text{15}\) They received 1 \(\frac{1}{2}\) percent as commission on iron and 1 percent on other goods. Being a person of some capital they were involved in purchasing cloths through their agents for profits sell.\(^\text{16}\) These *Artiyas* were stationed at Gaya and Daudnagar, granted bills for cash in Patna and Benaras. They charged half percent to one percent as a commission of this exchange.\(^\text{17}\) In this business of exchange, there were 24 bankers or *kothiwals* in Patna. They discounted bills which was payable at Calcutta, Benaras and other big cities.\(^\text{18}\) These *Kothiwals* along with *sarrafs*, who was also in this business of exchange

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\(^\text{13}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid, p. 697.

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{16}\) Ibid, p. 698.

\(^\text{17}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{18}\) Ibid.
money, were rich. They supplied cash to the zamindars and paid their revenue.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Hats} or weekly markets were the place where the exchange of commodities took place at village level. In it zamindars were exercising their authority and collected a tax tola. This tola was a small charge on everything sold.\textsuperscript{20} These hats were very useful for the rural population. “They were unable to dispose of their produce or to provide themselves with food or articles of clothing”.\textsuperscript{21} In city particularly in city like Patna, Ganjs or small regulated markets were important. These ganjs were situated in those areas that served as “emporium for grain and other necessaries of life”. Major ganjs handled the trade of the region, lesser ganjs served the needs of their localities or their neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{22}

In the region for the inter-regional and trans-regional trade, Patna served as the centre. It received the commodities from its hinterland and for local consumption and inter-regional trade; it further conveyed the commodities to the Calcutta port, through its water ways, connected with

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 699
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{21} Home, \textit{Public Programs}, no. 252, June, 1873.
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the other port of India. It functioned as the chief commercial mart of the province. It remained the focal point of the Himalayan trade and emerged in a new role as the main distributing centre for European goods which came in Patna through Calcutta after the introduction of railways.

Buchanan reported that local trading community has played important role in trade. Because of the changed political and economic situation no scope was left for them, therefore, their economic condition declined. Opium, cotton, textile, saltpeter, sugar and rice were the important commodities of trade. The first were operated under state monopoly. And there was special consideration by the state for other commodities as well. Therefore this became very difficult for these native merchants to compete with merchant state. Further coming of the railways brought structural change in the nature of trade in the region. New localities connected with railways emerged as new centers of trade (e.g. Khagaul) and shift from the waterways to railways further led to the decline in importance of Patna.

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.