

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Manisha Choudhary, *Trade, Transport and Tanda: Shifting Identities of Banjaras*

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The history of Banjaras and Tanda have been an enigmatic theme. It always has been fascinating to explore such kind of diverse history. The study of Banjaras necessitates a detailed analysis of the textual sources right from the period of the Sultanate to age of the British colonialism. The main sources of their identification are Chittiyat, Arzdasht and Arshatta documents archived at Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner and also some travelogues preserved in the libraries. The Banjaras have a shifting identity right from nomads to criminal tribes over a period of time but they were primarily a nomadic group whose emergence could be traced to period of Alauddin Khalji. He used their nomadism to transport grains from the country-side for smooth functioning of his market reforms. Later, they became an essential part of the Mughal economy who used their expertise of trade routes for transport and exchange of goods. In the era of the East India Company, Banjaras were not only the suppliers, traders or transporters but also served as the commissariat for the Mughals and John Company. With the introduction of railways in India their fate dwindled and it led to the marginalization of the Banjaras.

The book is divided into six chapters along with, Introduction, three appendices, the Bibliography and index. As the title suggests, the work is a survey of the history of Banjaras based on the textual sources. The six chapters of the book are: Chapter 1. Social Organization of Banjaras, Chapter 2. The Banjaras as Transporters, Chapter 3. The Commodity Structure of Banjara Trade, Chapter 4. Routes and En-Route Conflicts of the Banjaras, Chapter 5. Process of Criminalisation and Twilight of Banjaras, Chapter 6. Conclusion. The appendices are Banjara (poem), The Instances of Conflicts as catalogued in *Arsathas Records* and *Banjara ki Chhatri*.

In the Introduction, the author introspects the need for such a diverse study and argues that how ethnic and other social groups have been an important part of our social and economic fabric but much ignored in academics. The first chapter discusses the textual description of their social organization as envisaged through the different records. The nomenclature Banjara, its etymological description, social organization in different phases of history are the important themes of this chapter. The second chapter provides their role as a transporters. They moved in the caravans or *tandas* under leadership of the *nayakas*. They carried goods on the back of their bullocks and their movement looked like a single unit. The state provided full protection to them. The third chapter deals with the analysis of the commodity structure of Banjara trade. It is said that a large *tanda* may contain around 20000 bullocks which would have carried about 1600 to 2700 tonnes of goods at a time. Even for military supply they could arrange 100,000 bullocks or more.

The fourth chapter presents a comprehensive survey of the route and re-route conflicts of the Banjaras. It discusses trade routes which were providing survival base to wide nexus of the trade movement in the Indian subcontinent. The chapter five provides a critical view of the prevailing theories regarding process of criminalisation and twilight of the Banjaras. With the introductions of railways, the Banjaras were declared as a criminal community and their elimination from the economic panorama of Indian subcontinent was complete. The author has wonderfully summarized and concluded the chapters.

The present book provides a new holistic approach to study the fascinating history of the Banjaras and offers an excellent account of their history, culture and their role

in the economy of the Indian sub-continent through the ages. The book has meticulously been edited. The book is appealingly presented for wide readership including students, researchers, and as a reference.

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