

# Change and Continuity in the Economy of Bikaner State AS Reflected in the Bahis (1746–1828 AD)

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This thesis seeks to describe and analyse the economy of the erstwhile state of Bikaner which was a Rathore principality of the Rajputana in the Thar desert. It is an attempt to examine the changes and continuity in the 'Mughal Succession State' of Bikaner during the period 1746–1828 A.D. after being separated from the Mughal empire.

The thesis contains ten chapters in all, the first and the last being the introduction and the conclusion. The Bibliography alongwith a Glossary has also been appended to.

The state of Bikaner with harsh desert conditions had survived for about more than seventy years carrying an independent status. Moreover, it was a period of re-formation and reorganization of the state in the intervening phase of autonomy between the period of the Mughals and the Britishers, as it had to be subsequently under the British paramountcy. It is interesting to explore the after-effects of the decline of the Mughal empire in its economy. Despite some traces of increase in commercial centres, the general trend of the state economy showed a trend of decline and deficit, the result we see in the form of request to the Britishers for another patronage in 1818 A.D. The study has largely been done through the contemporary unpublished archival source material comprising mainly the *Bahis*. These are the accounts or ledger books and are record of state accounts, commercial transactions and details of the administrative and revenue system etc. These *Bahis* have been preserved in the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner. Thus, Chapter-I deals in detail, about the theme, scope and source material of this thesis.

Chapter-II surveys the geographical, ecological and historical conditions of the state. Geography has played an effective role in its economy, therefore, the details of physiography with a map, ecology and economic resources have been discussed in detail. The historical background with administrative changes and political developments have also been discussed.

Chapter-III deals with the Agricultural economy. The state being pre-dominantly depending on an agricultural economy, therefore, the various principal aspects of the agricultural sector viz. the agricultural production – its extent, crops, the land revenue, agricultural taxes and cesses have been analysed in detail. In the desert the state made efforts of rehabilitating depopulated villages on account of famines and otherwise. This aspect alongwith state's efforts to motivate and help development of cultivation has also

been discussed in length.

The desert state had very meagre resources of income from agriculture. So, to supplement its income, the state had to depend on non-agricultural sources. This is more significant when one recalls that the state had to part from the income generated by *Tankhwah Jagirs* which earlier they had received from the Mughals. So the state had to innovate various indigenous alternative resources. It would be interesting to ascertain its various sources of income. Chapter-IV deals with non-agricultural sources of income. In this chapter the income has been classified on two accounts i.e. commercial and non-commercial income.

Chapter-V deals with Trade and Commerce, which was of immense significance to this desert state. This could prove a viable and alternative sources for enhancing its income. Geographically, it was located at an advantageous position being surrounded by the prosperous provinces of the Punjab, Multan, Sindh, Delhi, Agra, Gujrat and Malwa. Therefore, the aspects related to trade and commerce have been dealt in detail viz. the trade routes with a map, the internal and external trade, state's import and exports as well as transit trade and also the state's policy in relation to traders and merchants. The minting of the currency of their own was a significant feature in the economy of the state in the post-Mughal area. The coinage, its discounting and exchange have been discussed and also the varying weights and measurements.

Chapter-VI deals with the *Mandis* (the commercial centres). A significant feature of the post-Mughal economy was the *Mandi* system which developed prominently in the state. It has been analysed in detail with its functions, administrations, infrastructure and the system of revenue realization therein. A focus on the *Sadar Mandi*, Bikaner has been put to examine its income and expenditure pattern during the period.

In the Chapter-VII comparative analysis of the prevailing prices of various essential commodities and the luxury items have been discussed to ascertain the trends of the prices. These prices have been compared for different years spread over in a period of about 133 years, from 1687 to 1820 A.D. The relevant price indices and the graphs have been drawn out to represent the trends of the prices both numerically and graphically.

The Chapter-VIII covers in detail, the social composition of the commercial groups of the state, its various categories and their activities and role in the commercial pursuits of significance. The state had a heterogenous merchant class with a dominance of the *Bania* community. The towns of the state in the period under study had become the places of considerable mercantile activities and a set pattern of marketing had emerged in them. The merchants are divided into various categories of wholesalers, retailers, bankers, dallals and other intermediaries.

An important sector of the economy i.e. the Crafts and Artisans and the aspects of rural and urban based craft production have been discussed in detail in the Chapter-IX. The wages of the artisans and labourers, state's policy towards them, the development of various crafts and cottage industry have been analysed. The social status and economic obligation have also been discussed.

Chapter-X is the conclusion. It sum up the analysis of the aspects of economy of the state and specify the continuity and the changes in these aspects. The implications of the decline of the Mughal empire over the economy of the state, which was not positive, has been pointed out in the period under study after the detachment from the Mughals.

A bibliography with details about the nature and significance of the indigenous source material has been appended, enlisting the secondary sources, articles, journals relevant to the study.

To make the study more meaningful, I have appended maps and graphs at the appropriate places with a list of these in the beginning to facilitate the reader.