

Boilanchi Gaddi (The Bullock Carriage)

Written by



BULLOCK CARRIAGE Parra, Goa - India (circa 1953) Replica Size 1:16 1/8" thick plywood *Hand-made by Tony Fernandes*

No saw, jig or scroll-saw used.

All parts hand-cut with sliding art-line cutters.

(Boil, Konkani, sing. : Bullock)

(Boilanchi, plu.: Of Bullock)

(Gaddi: Vehicle, Carriage)

(Boilanchi Gaddi: Bullock Carriage)

BOILANCHI GADDI

The 'boilanchi gaddi' is a kind of 2-wheeled passenger carriage drawn by trained bullocks commonly used in Goa until around the mid nineteen-fifties. It was constructed in a wood/iron combination. Its fastest travelling speed could be compared to the usual leisurely walk of a steer.

My earliest memorable experience in travelling on this sort of conveyance was at about 8 years of age, riding in it to St. Anne's Church in Parra, Bardez, to witness my cousin's Baptism. These quaint carriages were privately owned and this particular one was owned by a well-known person called Harichand who lived in Parra.

The two large wooden wheels served a dual purpose - as fly-wheels and riding wheels combined into one, giving it the required momentum once it got going. It seemed it was effortless for the bulls to haul these carriages once they got to a rolling start.

These carriages, although uncomfortable, provided a means of some convenient form of transportation for certain occasions such as the one mentioned above. The ride was bumpy, but the discomfort in riding in one of these could be attributed also to unpaved or pot-holed country roads. The axle passed through a hollow on the underside of the cab with a track width of about 6 feet. The wheels were of a diameter of about 6 ft. with large hubs (around 12" dia).

The cabin had longitudinal bench seating on either side, could sit 4 passengers and 2 small children snug and squeezed in between the passengers or on their laps. The passengers could communicate with the driver through a small window or a full opening in the front. The driver had his own comfortable seat unlike the 'gaddo'. This raised wooden seat was quite a

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comfortable perch providing him with an overall view. The seat was more like a wooden chest with hinges, fitted on top of the longitudinal beam. It doubled up as storage space for the driver's personal belongings, tools or vehicle accessories. The body had quite a reasonable headroom. The passengers were well protected from the elements like the sun and rain with an arched roof. The outside panels of the cabin were usually painted in a shade of off-white, mustard or yellow ochre, and the bordered timber framework finished in red, blue or brown oil-paint. The interior was finished in different colours like white or blue with varnished wooden seats.

Entry into the cab itself was by means of a hinged rear door, boarding into which was aided by a step fitted to the cab's base. Both sides and the back had windows. Some had wooden hinged doors, others had fixed or sliding glass and curtains in them.

The front end consisted of a double bow yoke that was placed on top of a wooden beam and fastened by means of a rope thereby giving it the flexibility of pivoting it to some degree, and giving it a marginal swivel action between the pair of bullocks. This feature aided tight turns. The yoke was harnessed over their necks in order to pull the carriage. The centre-piece curved and extended downward at the front so that, without the bulls, the cart would rest at a least possible slant.

Stopping or braking power was provided verbally, or with gently moderated 'ho-ho'. Braking on some of these carts was quite unique, provided by a cleverly designed device. It consisted of two wooden poles, parallel across the front and back of the wheels. They were connected into an intricate double acting trapezoidal contrivance of ropes. This device was in turn connected by a longer rope from the rear to the front. By means of applying pressure on this rope with his leg he would be able to slow down the cart with his weight, while going downward on a slope or try to slow it down in an emergency. The wooden poles that acted as brakes were slightly flattened at the point where they came in contact with the outer rims of the wheels. In action the whole system seemed very much like centrally-pulled caliper brakes of modern day. If parked on a slope the wheels were chocked with a stone. The rest of the maneuvering and negotiating was done by means of touch or contact conveyed to the bullocks by the driver with a stick. With a slight nudge here, and a slight tap there - on their backs the ever obedient bullocks hauled the carriage faithfully. They were mostly gentle in nature and never seemed to be in a hurry. These animals were held in reverence by the owner and his family members, and respected for the work and sustenance they provided.

The yoke rested over the necks of the bullocks, and in hauling it stopped short just before the ridge of their shoulder blades. Bells hung around the bulls' necks rang constantly as they passed by on the road. These bells had a distinct sound and acted as warning bells to others, or merely let the people know about the presence of the 'boilanchi gaddi' in the vicinity or area. The sound of the bells 'kinni-kinni' could be heard far away and long into the quietness of the night as the lone hard-working driver returned home. At night a gently swinging hurricane lamp hung low in front, beneath the main beam and between the bulls. The light from this lamp was more to warn others of its approach to oncoming motor vehicles rather than a light to guide itself or light up the road.

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I was too young to remember or to care how much the fare would have cost for a ride on these carriages of yesteryears, but my guess is they must have been quite affordable and probably would not have cost a fortune. They were taken out of service as their popularity declined due to their slow speed combined with the import of motor vehicles and taxis. They were mainly confined to their own districts and seldom made long trips over the hills.

Another impression stuck in my mind is that people walking briskly along the road often overtook them. Among my childhood memories are the ones that the bulls seemed to make a good team, faithful, quiet, with their downward and humble gaze, always seemingly engrossed in their own thoughts, and also the rare sight of the driver asleep, with the bridle reins and stick in his hands returning empty on his way home. There was certainly an advantage in having trained bullocks so that way the driver could be assured of reaching home safely by taking the shortest route possible after a long and hard day's work. Having trained bullocks was like having a GPS so that he could be assured of being on the right track. And in the absence of an Auto-pilot he could still reach home while he took a short nap.

The era of these types of slow but reliable vehicles made an exit for good, making way for modern transportation. Those were the days of innovative ways of another period of yore. It is now just a childhood memory - gone but not forgotten.

Tony Fernandes

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