

Palanquin – the wheel-less luxury cart

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Abstract

A palanquin, also called palki, is a covered sedan chair on four shafts carried by two, four or more men (Kaahar). Palkis have been mentioned in the Indian epics. A beautifully decorated and covered cart protected its passenger from the heat and dust, sometimes luxuriantly plated with gold and silver, the covering and cushions inside made of fine silk. History recalls the use of palanquins during *pardah* or the concealment of women from men usually before marriage. Palanquins were a popular means of travel for royal and noble women up to the second quarter of the 20th Century before automobiles became popular in India. Travelling by palanquin has always been expensive and so the emperors, nobles and some travelers have mostly used this mode of conveyance. The *doli* of the Indian bride was a cot suspended by the four corners from a bamboo pole carried by two or four men. Smaller palkis could be open chairs carried by two or more carriers. Spacious ones were mostly used by royalty for longer travel. Individual palanquins were highly customizable depending on the need, social status, and/or journey for which they were commissioned. Amenities for reading, writing, eating and sleeping were provided. In addition, depending on the mood of the traveler, readers, singers, dancers or storytellers accompanied. Palkis are still used, but only at ceremonies and in uneven mountain zones. We may find the depiction of palanquin in Indian art in different forms such as, on Gopuram at Amritagateswarar-Abirami temple at Thirukkadaiyur, Tamil Nadu, in paintings like Mughal painting, Garhwal painting, Company painting, engraving, aquatint, painting from Mysore, Marwar painting, etc. Moreover, there are royal palanquins in fort museums of Rajasthan. The present paper will discuss the palanquin, its structure, its use and depictions in Indian art.

Key Words: *Palanquin, Palki, Doli, Kaahar, Palanquin in Indian art*

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