



Economic Conditions of Karnataka During Rashtrakuta Rule

KEYWORDS

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Introduction:

Karnataka has a hoary past. It is blessed with innumerable inscriptions, memorial stones and monuments of rich historical and cultural heritage. Many of the rulers such as Gangas of Talakad, Kadambas of Banavasi, Rastrakutas of Malkhed, Chalukyas of Kalyana, Sevunas of Deogiri, Hoysalas of Dwarasamudra, Vijayanagar rulers, Adilshahi dynasty of Bijapur, Mysore rulers, Bahamani Kingdom were ruled Karnataka till the British invasion into India. Of these rulers, Karnataka was at its peak in economic and cultural conditions during the rule of Rastrakutas of Manyakheta (present Malkhed in Gulbarga district).

Rastrakutas of Malkhed (753 A.D-973 A.D):

In 753, Dantidurga, the Rastrakuta feudatory of the Chalukyas, overthrew the Chalukyan king Keerthivarman II and his family inherited the fortunes of the Chalukyas. He claims that he did this by defeating the 'Karnatabala' of the Chalukyas, described as 'invincible' in those days. We owe the engraving of the celebrated monolithic Kailasa temple at Ellora (now in Maharashtra) to Dantidurga's uncle, Krishna I (756-774). Krishna's son, Dhruva (780-793) crossed the Narmada, and after defeating the celebrated princes like Vatsaraja of the Gurjara Pratihara family Dharmapala, the Gouda King of Bengal and extracted tribute from the ruler of Kanauj, 'the seat of India's Paramountcy'. His son Govinda III (793-814) also repeated the feat when he defeated Nagabhata II, the Gurjara Pratihara and Dharmapala of Bengal and again extracted tribute from the king of Kanauj. His 'horses drank the icy liquid bubbling in the Himalayas' says a record, testifying to his victorious march in the North. The achievements of the Chalukyas of Badami and Rastrakutas by defeating the rulers of Kanauj have made the name of their era the "Age of Imperial Kanauj", a misnomer. Instead it should be called the "Age of Imperial Karnataka".

Amoghavarsha Nripatunga (814-878 A.D) son of Govinda III, had to face the threat of the Eastern (Vengi) Chalukyas, who challenged his very existence. But he succeeded in subduing them after defeating Vengi Chalukya Vijayaditya II at Vinagavalli. He was a peace-loving monarch who used matrimony as one of the weapons in diplomacy. Although he killed as many as six contemporary political potentates who created trouble for him, he did not conduct Digvijayas like his father and grandfather. He succeeded in maintaining the Empire intact. Himself a scholar, Amoghavarsha patronized scholarship and great Jaina savants like Veerasena, Jinasena, Gunabhadra, grammarian Shaktayana and Mathematician Mahaveera adorned his court. Adipurana and commentaries on the Shatkhandagamas called as Dhavala, Jayadhavala and Mahadhavala written in his court was the great Jaina works of all India importance. Kavirajamarga, the first extant Kannada work is of his times composed by his court poet Srivijaya in C. 850 A.D. His great grandson Indra III (914-29) even captured Kanauj and held it under his control for two years. One of his feudatories, Arikesari of Vemulavada patronised Sanskrit writer Somadeva (of Yashastilaka fame) and the famous Kannada poet Pampa.

Rastrakuta Krishna III (936-967) subdued the Cholas in the South and established a pillar of victory at Rameshwaram. In fact the so-called 'Age of Imperial Kanauj' was the Age of Imperial Karnataka, when the prowess of the Kannadiga was felt all over India. Even Rajashekara, the celebrated Sanskrit writer, has called the Karnatas as great experts in the techniques of war. Soldiers from Karnataka were employed by the Palas of Bengal. One such Kannada warrior founded the Sena Dynasty of Bengal and the other Karnata Dynasty of Mithila (modern Tirhath in Bihar). The Rastrakutas sponsored the engraving of many Hindu rock-cut temples on the Buddhist model like the Dashavatara Shrine at Ellora, the Jogeshwara near Bombay and the one at the Elephanta Island. (Some scholars ascribe the last named to their Kalachuri feudatories). Arab traveller Suleiman tell us that the Rastrakuta Empire was the largest in India and he ranks it with greatest Empires of the world namely the Eastern Roman, the Arabic and the Chinese Empires. He visited India in 851 A.D. The Rastrakutas constructed many tanks and their temples are found at places like Sirivala, Sulepet, Gadikeshwar, Adaki, Sedam, Handarki etc., in Gulbarga district; Naragund, Ron and Savadi in Gadag district and at Hampi also. These two dynasties viz., the Chalukyas of Badami and the Rastrakutas popularised animal husbandry by donating cows in thousands. The stones commemorating such grants (gosasakallu) are seen all over.

Organization of Administration:

The Rastrakuta Empire was divided into several provinces called rashtras under the control of rashtrapatis. They were further divided into vishayas or districts governed by vishayapatis. The next subdivision was bhukti consisting of 50 to 70 villages under the control of bhogapatis. These officers were directly appointed by the central government. The village administration was carried on by the village headmen. However, the village assemblies played a significant role in the village administration.

The kingdom divided into Mandala or Rashtras (provinces). A Rashtrapathi ruled a Rashtra who, on occasion, had been the emperor himself. Amoghavarsha I's empire had 16 Rashtras. Under a Rashtra sat a Vishaya (district) overseen by a Vishayapathi. Trusted ministers sometimes ruled more than a Rashtra. For example, Bankesha, a commander of Amoghavarsha I headed Banavasi-12000, Belvola-300, Puligere-300, Kunduru-500 and Kundarge-70, the suffix designating the number of villages in that territory. Below the Vishaya, the Nadu looked after by the Nadugowda or Nadugavunda; sometimes two such officials administered, with one assuming the position through heredity and another appointed centrally. A Grama or village administered by a Gramapathi or Prabhu Gavunda occupied the lowest division.

The Rastrakuta army consisted of a large infantry, numerous horsemen, and many elephants. A standing army always stood ready for war in a cantonment (*Sthirabhuta Kataka*) in the regal capital of Manyakheta. The feudatory kings, expected to contribute to the defense of the empire in case of war, maintained large armies. Chieftains, and all the officials,

served as commanders whose postings could transfer if the need arose.

Economics Conditions:

Natural and agricultural produce, manufacturing revenues and moneys gained from its conquests sustained the Rashtrakuta economy. Cotton constituted the chief crop of the regions of southern Gujarat, Khandesh and Berar. Minnagar, Gujarat, Ujjain, Paithan and Tagara stood as important centers of textile industry. Paithan and Warangal manufactured Muslin cloth; Bharoch exported the cotton yarn and cloth. Burhanpur and Berar manufactured White calicos, exporting it to Persia, Turkey, Poland, Arabia, and Cairo. The Konkan region, ruled by the feudatory Silharas, produced large quantities of betel leaves, coconut and rice while the lush forests of Mysore, ruled by the feudatory Gangas, produced such woods as sandal, timber, teak and ebony. The ports of Thana and Saimur exported incense and perfumes.

The Deccan soil, though less fertile than the Gangetic plains, had rich minerals. The copper mines of Cudappah, Bellary, Chanda, Buldhana, Narsingpur, Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Dharwar constituted an important source of income and played an important role in the economy.

Diamonds' mines in Cuddappah, Bellary, Kurnool and Golconda yielded abundant diamonds; the capital Manyakheta and Devagiri had been important diamond and jewelry trading centers. The leather industry and tanning flourished in Gujarat and some regions of northern Maharashtra. Mysore with its vast elephant herds proved important for the ivory industry. The economy was also in a flourishing condition. There was an active commerce between the Deccan and the Arabs. The Rashtrakuta kings promoted the Arab trade by maintaining friendship with them. Following are the basic elements of Rashtrakuta's economy.

A. Coins of Rashtrakutas:

The Rashtrakutas issued coins (minted in an *Akkashale*) such as *Suvarna*, *Drammas* in silver and gold weighing 65grains, *Kalanju* weighing 48 grains, *Gadyanaka* weighing 96grains, *Kasu* weighing 15grains, *Manjati* with 2.5grains and *Akkam* of 1.25grain.

B. Traders and Businesses in Rashtrakuta:

Artists and craftsman operated as corporations rather than as individual business. Inscriptions mention guilds of weavers, oilmen, artisans, basket and mat makers and fruit sellers. A Saundatti inscription refers to an assemblage of all the people of a district headed by the guilds of the region. Some guilds had reputations as superior to others, the same with some corporations, and received royal charters determining their powers and privileges. Inscriptions suggest those guilds had their own militia to protect goods in transit and, like village assemblies, they operated banks that lent money to traders and businesses.

C. Society and Education:

The Hindu sects of Vaishnavism and Saivism flourished during the period of Rashtrakutas. Yet, they did not affect the progress of Jainism under the patronage of Rashtrakuta kings and officers. Almost one third of the population of the Deccan were Jains. There were some prosperous Buddhist settlements at places like Kanheri, Sholapur and Dharwar. There was harmony among various religions. There was a college at Salatogi, situated in modern Bijapur district. An inscription gives details of this educational centre. It was run by the income from the endowments made by the rich as well as by all the villagers on occasions of functions and festivals.

D. Taxation:

The government's income came from five principal sources: regular taxes, occasional taxes, fines, income taxes, miscellaneous taxes and tributes from feudatories. An emergency tax was imposed occasionally and were applicable when the

kingdom was under duress, such as when it faced natural calamities, or was preparing for war or overcoming war's ravages. Income tax included taxes on crown land, wasteland, specific types of trees considered valuable to the economy, mines, salt, treasures unearthed by prospectors. Additionally, customary presents were given to the king or royal officers on such festive occasions as marriage or the birth of a son.

The king have authority to determine the tax levels based on need and circumstances in the kingdom while ensuring that an undue burden was not placed on the peasants. The land owner or tenant paid a variety of taxes, including land taxes, produce taxes and payment of the overhead for maintenance of the Gavunda (village head). Land taxes were varied, based on type of land, its produce and situation and ranged from 8% to 16%. A Banavasi inscription of 941 mentions reassessment of land tax due to the drying up of an old irrigation canal in the region. The land tax may have been as high as 20% to pay for expenses of a military frequently at war. In most of the kingdom, land taxes were paid in goods and services and rarely was cash accepted. A portion of all taxes earned by the government (usually 15%) was returned to the villages for maintenance.

Taxes were levied on artisans such as potters, sheep herders, weavers, oilmen, shopkeepers, stall owners, brewers and gardeners. Taxes on perishable items such as fish, meat, honey, medicine, fruits and essentials like fuel was as high as 16%. Taxes on salt and minerals were mandatory although the empire did not claim sole ownership of mines, implying that private mineral prospecting and the quarrying business may have been active. The state claimed all such properties whose deceased legal owner had no immediate family to make an inheritance claim. Other miscellaneous taxes included ferry and house taxes. Only Brahmins and their temple institutions were taxed at a lower rate.

The Rashtrakuta Empire controlled most of the western sea board of the subcontinent which facilitated its maritime trade. The Gujarat branch of the empire earned a significant income from the port of Bharoch, one of the most prominent ports in the world at that time. The empire's chief exports were cotton yarn, cotton cloth, muslins, hides, mats, indigo, incense, perfumes, betel nuts, coconuts, sandal, teak, timber, sesame oil and ivory. Its major imports were pearls, gold, dates from Arabia, slaves, Italian wines, tin, lead, topaz, storax, sweet clover, flint glass, antimony, gold and silver coins, singing boys and girls (for the entertainment of the royalty) from other lands. Trading in horses was an important and profitable business, monopolised by the Arabs and some local merchants. The Rashtrakuta government levied a shipping tax of one golden *Gadyanaka* on all foreign vessels embarking to any other ports and a fee of one silver *Ctharna* (a coin) on vessels travelling locally.

Concluding Remarks:

To sum up, during Rashtrakuta's rule, trade and commerce was well developed. The trading of agricultural products, minerals, diamonds, etc was significant. The coinage of Rashtrakutas was also significant to determine the prices of different products, so as to promote trade. It is significant to note that different types of taxes were imposed on people based on their economic level. Foreign trade with Arabian countries was also emphasized by the Rashtrakutas. Hence, it can be concluded that Karnataka during Rashtrakuta's rule was a rich economy.

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