



Trade during the Kakatiyas(12th to 14th century)

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Abstract

This paper examines the growth and development of trade and commerce in Andhradesa during the Kakatiya period, with particular reference to the factors that contributed to its prosperity and expansion. Trade, which evolved from the exchange of agricultural surplus through the barter system, gradually emerged as a significant economic activity supported by merchant communities, guild organizations, and royal patronage. The study traces the foundations of trade in the pre-Kakatiya period through inscriptional evidence, highlighting the activities of merchant guilds such as Nakaramu, the influence of Vaisyas, Balanjas, Telikis, and Tamil merchants, and the cordial relations maintained between traders and ruling dynasties.

The paper further analyzes the temporary decline of trade caused by political instability during the later Chalukya-Chola period and examines the revival brought about under the Kakatiya rulers, particularly Ganapatideva. The Kakatiyas promoted trade by developing commercial centers, improving road and river transportation networks, establishing weekly markets (Santas), issuing trade licenses, and maintaining a favorable taxation system. Special attention is given to the role of merchant guilds and their regulatory framework known as “Samaya Dharma,” which ensured discipline and stability in commercial activities.

The study also explores the flourishing foreign trade conducted through major ports such as Motupalli, Krishnapatnam, Chinaganjam, Hamsaladivi, and Machilipatnam. The Motupalli Inscription and the accounts of Marco Polo provide valuable evidence regarding overseas trade relations with China, Java, Sumatra, Malaya, Burma, and other regions of Southeast Asia. The famous “Abhaya Sasana” of Ganapatideva offered protection and incentives to foreign merchants, thereby strengthening maritime commerce.

The paper concludes that trade constituted a vital pillar of the Kakatiya economy and significantly contributed to the social, cultural, and religious development of the region. Through efficient administration, merchant-

friendly policies, and strategic geographical advantages, the Kakatiyas transformed Andhradesa into a vibrant center of inland and overseas commerce, leaving a lasting legacy in the economic history of medieval South India.

Keywords: Kakatiyas, Andhradesa, Trade and Commerce, Merchant Guilds, Motupalli, Ganapatideva, Foreign Trade, Samaya Dharma, Medieval Andhra, Maritime Trade.

Introduction

One may say that the concept of Trade evolved from agriculture if one analyses the origin of trade. Initially man had taken up agriculture to feed his family, but subsequently new methods, new areas and use of new implements led to surplus production which he exchanged at nearby villages or towns in return of the items he needed; it was called barter system. Then procuring and selling was undertaken by a set of people who were later on called merchants or traders. Subsequently they formed into guilds to streamline system of trading and formulated their own laws to exercise discipline in the trade. Introduction of coins further boosted their activities.

Their substantial role in economic progress was recognised by the kings by extending them patronage and incentives. Thus trade became a big source of revenue for the king. Resultantly trade centres were opened, transport and road communications were improved and special privileges like concessions in taxes were extended. Thus the traders received further boost to their activities. They carried out in-land trade not only across the country but also extended further outside the country, primarily with West Asia and Central Asia. Some adventurous traders ventured into overseas trade and established trade contacts with South Asia, South East Asia and Africa. Thus many trade towns and ports sprang up along coastal line. By medieval time trade and commerce became a major source of income for the state. The rich merchants of the era engaged themselves in charity work and contributed to social and religious developments. By this way the trade played an important role not only in economic progress of the state but in social and religious advancement.

Andhradesa - Kakatiyas

Andhradesa, by virtue of its geography and geographical location, naturally generated an environment to promote its trade activities. Bounded by Bay of Bengal on East, Orissa and Chhattisgarh on North, Maharashtra and Karnataka on West, and Tamilnadu on South, Andhra had extensive coastal-line of approx 960 kms, with a large number of ports and port cities backed up by well developed road communication¹. Located between North and far South and proximate to Deccan and with fine riverine system, Andhra had all potential ecosystem for trade to grow. That's why Andhra had been in the center of conflicts among all major powers of the times in the South.

Whether it was Badami-Chalukyas, the branch of which ruled coastal Andhra as Vengi or Eastern-Chalukyas, or the Rashtrakutas or subsequent Western-Chalukyas, the objective remained the control of Andhradesa with its rich resources. The Kakatiyas, who founded an independent kingdom in the wake of fall

of initially Rashtrakutas and later on of Western-Chalukyas, also expanded East to take control of coastal Andhra.

Trade during the Kakatiya period was prosperous and was mainstay of flourishing economy. Although the Kakatiyas focused on agriculture initially for revenue sources, as their political power extended towards coastal region, trade also became one of major sources of income for the state. Inscriptional evidence is major source for construction of Kakatiyas' history, so also for the activities of trade of the period. Even the evidence available from the inscriptions is not direct. Most of it in the inscriptions is found in the form of donations, gifts and other charity activities the trading communities of the period were engaged in.

In view of above it is imperative to know the status of trade during pre-Kakatiya period also to appraise the level it reached during the period of Kakatiyas. Prior to Ganapatideva (1199-1261 AD), the kings like Prola-II (1117-1150 AD) and Rudradeva (1150-1195 AD) had essayed to take control of Vengi region under which fertile Krishna-Godavari delta and rich coastal-line existed. In the process, Prola-II had laid down his life too. Rudradeva was partially successful as he was able to set his foot in Andhra but could not realize his objective of controlling coastal-line. However it was Ganapatideva who not only extended Kakatiya power right into the heart of Andhra but also firmed it up with his statesmanship. It was under him the trade witnessed the best days.

Trade during Pre-Kakatiya Period

With regard to trading activities of this period, inscriptions are major sources and there are many but of all, under mentioned are the most important ones to know about the level of trade, traders and traders relations with the royals of the period.

- a) Cheruvu Madhavaram plates of Eastern Chalukya king Kali Vishnuvardhana of 9th century (847-848)²
- b) Ahadanakaram plates of the same king's period³
- c) Kakumranu grant inscription of Eastern Chalukya Bhima-I of 10th century⁴
- d) Peruru inscription dated 1119 AD, of Tribhuvanamalladeva (Vikramaditya-VI-Western-Chalukyas)⁵
- e) Peruru inscription, undated, of Bhimana Choda Maharaja, (Kanduri Choda)⁶

From above inscriptions it can be known not only trading activities, both internal and external, which were active, but also the relations between the kings and traders which were harmonious. The Cheruvu Madhavaram plates reflect the wealth and power of Vaisyas, the trading community and their influence over the king. The Ahadanakaram plates convey brisk in-land and over-sea trade and the traders' power to punish the defaulters of their diktats. They also indicate the migration of Tamil merchants to Telugu country. The Kakumranu grant inscription reveals the extent of in-land trade had spread, it reached as far as Prayaga where the trader known as Polayana Setti constructed Bhimeswara temple after his king Bhima-I for which he received gift of Village Kakumranu, tax-free from the king. This vividly vindicates the cordial relations existed between the traders and the royals.

The Peruru inscriptions denote the prosperous trade centres of the period and also the 'Nakaramu', trade guild formed on the lines of modern corporate model. They also mention the existence of separate Nakaramus for Tamil merchants and Telugu merchants, known as 'AruvaNakara' and 'Telugunakara' respectively. However both Nakaramus functioned with mutual cordiality. This shows Tamil migration into Andhra and their entrenchment in Telugu trade centres.

Slump in trade

With changing political scenario, the status of trade declined. Eastern-Chalukyas, the lords of Vengi, lost their past glory and turned subordinates to the Cholas of Tamil country. But Western-Chalukyas contested the influence of the Cholas in Andhra and essayed to take control of coastal region but in vain. Weak central Govt allowed the Samnathas or subordinate kings to assert independence. Establishment of Chola-Chalukya dynasty, after Rajendra of Eastern-Chalukya ascended the throne of Cholas as Kulottunga-I, at Vengi did not improve the conditions. The Cholas, being engaged in incessant wars against Western-Chalukyas, paid no attention to Vengi and coastal region. They changed the rulers frequently resulting in political disorder and decline of power. Such a chaotic situation deeply undermined the trade in Andhra, especially external trade. Local chiefs remained interested in looting the ships that reached the coast after being hit by natural calamities like storms. This maltreatment meted out to the traders led to disruption of external trade and also internal trade that depended on goods coming from external trade⁷.

Under these circumstances, the Kakatiyas under Ganapatideva established their power in Andhra region by defeating Velanadu Chodas who became powerful ruling Vengi after decline of Chola-Chalukya dynasty. Again under Ganapatideva, the trade witnessed the revival⁸.

Trade during the Kakatiyas

The trade activities and the merchant guilds which were active during Pre-Kakatiya period continued to function more or less in similar way during the period of Kakatiyas also. Prominent trading communities of the period were, Telikis, Balanjas, Tamil merchants, who migrated from neighbouring Tamil country and Vaisyas, also known as Komitis. They dominated entire economic and trade landscape of the era by forming their own guilds. All trade guilds strictly followed and enforced discipline in trade and code of conduct called "Samaya Dharma" violation of which was taken seriously, and severe punishment was awarded by the guild⁹. Even the king didn't interfere in enforcement of what was called their Dharma. Consequently, the trade continued smoothly and remained a cause of economic prosperity of the period.

Steps taken by Kakatiyas for trade development

Kakatiya rulers took lot of interest in trade activities and extended facilities to facilitate flourishing trade in the kingdom. They even appointed a Royal Setti from 'Komati' community, which was principally a trading community, then to dispose of the Government's share of grain received as tax from the farmers¹⁰. They developed many trade centres like Panugallu, Alampur, Peruru, Tripurantakam, Penugonda,

Nellore etc. for the convenience of merchant community throughout the kingdom. Orugallu, the capital, was also one of them¹¹.

Important feature of the time was issuance of trade licenses to conduct the trade within the state especially at local level¹². This not only systematised trade but also earned revenues for the state. They encouraged trade at local level by permitting to establish what was called “Santa” or a weekly fair at villages. These Santas played a dominant role in rural economy¹³. “Sunka” means tax was collected from the traders for bringing the goods to the Fair and also for selling. They facilitated ware houses too on payment of nominal prices. “Kochcherla Kota” inscription of Kakatiya General Desarinayaka, dated 1310 AD fairly gives account of fairs and taxes¹⁴.

Trade Routes

Proper and well-connected routes are vital for active and flourishing trade. Therefore the Kakatiyas paid special attention to development of road communication. The routes comprised two categories: internal and external.

With regard to internal routes, “Orugallu” the capital of Kakatiyas was connected with all trade centres in the country. Similarly, all coastal towns were connected with the capital. Coming to external routes, “*Andhrabhashabhushanam*” a treatise on grammar, by Telugu poet Ketana of 13th century contains information that a route existed between Kanchi and Ayodhya passing through Nellore and Orugallu¹⁵. This route suggests that trade connections between the South and the North were deep and intense. In general traders moved in caravans to avoid robberies enroute.

Rivers were another mode of transport to carry goods for the trade. Perennial rivers like Godavari, Krishna, Thungabhadra, and Penna provided excellent river communication to ferry the goods. A tax known as “*Revusunkam*” was collected depending upon the type and quantity of merchandise by the local tax collectors¹⁶.

Foreign Trade

Long coastal line facilitated prosperous ports where foreign trade was briskly conducted. *Motupalli Inscription* issued by Ganapatideva in 1244 AD bears testimony to this. In fact, sea-borne foreign trade existing prior to Kakatiyas received set back owing to indifferent attitude of Chalukya and Choda rulers and also due to harassment caused by local chiefs when the ships reached without permission, but it was rejuvenated by Ganapatideva by his “*Abhaya Sasana*” a charter of protection which assured foreign merchants of not only protection but also minimal taxation. Ganpatideva allowed traders to take goods to any place in the kingdom after paying taxes which were generally low¹⁷. The Motupalli port was an active port which was borne out by Venetian traveller Marco Polo who visited the town at the time of Rani Rudrama Devi. The Motupalli inscription also reveals the items traded in elaborate way.

Other Ports for trade

Krishnapatnam in Nellore Dist, Chinaganjam in Prakasam Dist, Hamsaladivi and Machilipatnam in Krishna Dist were some of prominent ports of the period where Warehouses were made available for the benefit of traders¹⁸.

Countries traded with

Motupalli inscription provides information about the countries with which trade was conducted. China was mentioned therein, and other countries like Indonesia, Java, Sumatra, Malaya, and Burma also had trading relations with Andhra¹⁹.

The information available indicates that the trade contacts existed during pre-Kakatiya period had continued during the Kakatiya period also. They continued even during post-Kakatiya period.

The state interfered in mercantile activities as and when the interests of public were ignored by the merchants for the sake of own profits. Otherwise in general merchant guilds enjoyed freedom in organising their activities. This in fact suited the traders and without fear or favour they endeavoured to extend the trade to all corners of the state and even beyond.

Conclusion

What was started to dispose of surplus production in agriculture led to evolution of trade which expanded over a period of time on account of rich incentives, royal patronage, well laid out road communication, improved transport facilities and flourishing trade centres and ports. Andhradesa witnessed extensive trade activities due to geographical advantage and even Tamil people migrated and settled in Andhra owing to conducive atmosphere for the trade. During Pre-Kakatiya period it is known from available sources that trade was a rich profession and received honours from the royals and traders earned a reputation for their charity works in the society. Guilds, formed to exercise control and discipline, were active and enforced strictly their own laws. Vaisya community, besides Balanjas, Telikis and Tamil merchants, was generally engaged in trade, yet it is interesting to note that even non-Vaisya community was involved in trade due to probably richness of the profession.

During Kakatiya period the scope of trade was widened and improved. It remained as active and intense as Pre-Kakatiya period. Guilds functioned effectively and followed their code of conduct called “Samay Dharma” strictly, any violation of which was met with dire consequences. Royal patronage was extended to them immensely which is known from “Abhaya Sasana” laid by Kakatiya King, Ganapatideva. Trade routes were improved to connect all port cities with the capital, Orugallu. Interestingly a trade route existed from Kanchi to Ayodhya via capital. Important feature of the period is issuances of licences to permit trade at local level called “Santa” which played a significant role in economy at village level. The state didn’t interfere in trade activities and they resorted to action only when public interest was at stake. In fact this freedom incentivised the traders to spread the trade all over.

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