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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## TRADE AND COMMERCE OF THE RASHTRAKUTA DYNASTY

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### ABSTRACT

The Rashtrakuta Dynasty (c.8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century) played a vital role in substantially influencing the economic and commercial landscape of medieval India. From Manyakheta as their capital, the Rashtrakutas ruled over a major portion of the Deccan region and built a thriving economy based on trade networks, agriculture, taxation, and active commerce. Both domestic and international trade were stimulated by their administration's promotion of economic stability. The empire's economy was based on agricultural output, which was bolstered by irrigation systems and fertile soil; artisans, merchants, and guilds greatly aided urban economic expansion. Through maritime ports along the Arabian Sea, the dynasty also kept up flourishing international trade, connecting India with Southeast Asia, Persia, and the Arab world. These marine connections enhanced economic prosperity and encouraged the import and export of important commodities. Furthermore, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty made significant contributions to Indian history during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries through trade, commerce, and maritime connections, thereby expanding regional and global trade networks.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century) emerged as one of the most significant political powers in early medieval India. The Rashtrakutas, who came to prominence under Dantidurga's rule in the middle of the eighth century, built an enormous empire that stretched into northern and southern India and covered a sizable portion of the Deccan region. Manyakheta, their capital, developed into a significant political, cultural, and commercial hub. During the eighth and tenth centuries, trade, commerce, and naval operations flourished because of the Rashtrakuta monarchs' stability and administrative effectiveness (Altekar 1967). Agriculture was the backbone of the Rashtrakuta Empire's predominantly agrarian economy. Crops like rice, wheat, millet, sugarcane, and cotton were grown in fertile river valleys with sophisticated irrigation systems. An important factor in promoting trade and sustaining urban marketplaces was agricultural surplus. Land taxes and commercial levies were the state's primary sources of income, strengthening the empire's finances and allowing the rulers to maintain the military and administrative infrastructure (Mandal & Yakar 2025). Due to their prime position in the Deccan plateau, which linked northern and southern India, trade and commerce prospered during Rashtrakuta rule. Important inland trade routes made it easier for products to flow between regions by passing through important cities and market hubs. A further significant component of the Rashtrakuta economy was its maritime relations.

Access to international marine routes across the Arabian Sea was made possible by India's western coast. Merchants from the Rashtrakuta kingdoms conducted international trade with the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and portions of Southeast Asia through coastal ports. Arab traders regularly travelled to Indian ports to exchange goods, including sandalwood, textiles, precious stones, spices, and ivory (Bhandare 2020). The Rashtrakuta monarchs promoted economic activity. In addition to boosting economic growth, this promoted cross-cultural encounters and the sharing of concepts, innovations, and creative traditions. Furthermore, trade, the economy, commerce, and maritime ties all significantly expanded during the Rashtrakuta Dynasty, which lasted from the eighth to the tenth century. Strategic inland routes, thriving maritime trade, strong merchant guilds, and agricultural production all contributed to the Rashtrakuta Empire's wealth and power (Chakravarti 2022). The Rashtrakuta period was a significant stage in early mediaeval India's economic history because of these commercial and economic advancements, which Thus, between the 8th and 10th centuries, the Rashtrakuta period's trade, economics, commerce, and maritime relationships were vital in strengthening the empire's prosperity and connecting the Deccan to major global trade networks.

**Objectives of the Study:** The major objectives of Trade and Commerce of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8th-10th century) were:

1. To enhance the dynasty's economic wealth and power through trade and commerce of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty;
2. To control significant ports and trade routes on the western coast, facilitating maritime trade with the Arab world, Persia, and East Africa of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty;
3. To trade goods like spices, textiles, and precious stones of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty;
4. To generate revenue through taxation on trade, customs, and duties on imported and exported goods of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty;
5. To expand the dynasty's influence in the region and beyond through trade relationships and diplomatic ties of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty;
6. To protect merchants and traders of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty and
7. To encourage maritime trade and cultural exchange of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty.

## METHODS AND MATERIALS

**Research Design:** The present study aimed at systematically examining the Rashtrakuta Empire's trade activities, maritime commerce networks, and economic system. To comprehend the evolution of trade and commerce during the period of 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, the study adopts a historical & qualitative research design, focusing on the interpretation of primary and secondary historical sources. Data Collection Method: Data was obtained from documentary research, including the assessment of historical manuscripts, inscriptions, and archaeological relics. Relevant data concerning trade networks, economic policies, and maritime activities is also gathered from published academic research and archival documents. To study the trade, economic systems, commercial entities, and maritime connections of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty, the study framework combines historical analysis and documentary research. This systematic method helps reconstruct the economic circumstances of the empire during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**To enhance the dynasty's economic wealth and power through trade and commerce of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** The Rashtrakuta Dynasty (c. 753–973 CE) was one of the most powerful kingdoms in India during the early medieval period. Effective commercial networks, tax systems, and control over significant trade routes were the main pillars of their wealth. The Rashtrakuta Dynasty's primary objective in enhancing its economic prosperity and authority through trade and commerce is explained in detail below.

- The Rashtrakutas facilitated maritime trade with the Arab world, Persia, and East Africa by controlling important ports on the western coast, including Bharuch, Sopara, and Chaul.
- To ensure favourable conditions and safe trade routes, they signed trade agreements with nearby kingdoms and foreign powers.
- By standardising weights and measurements, the Rashtrakutas fostered efficiency and confidence in business dealings.
- They ensured the safe passage and security of commodities while protecting traders and merchants.
- The dynasty made substantial money by imposing tariffs on imported and exported goods, trade taxes, and customs duties.
- The Rashtrakutas expanded trade by importing horses, gold, and luxury goods and exporting textiles, spices, and valuable stones.

The Rashtrakuta economy benefited greatly from trade and commerce, which promoted expansion and wealth. The dynasty's power in the area and beyond grew through its control over important ports and commercial routes. Indian culture is transferred through commerce, which also influenced trade methods, art, and architecture.

The dynasty's influence was bolstered by the substantial revenue from trade taxes and assessments.

**To control significant ports and trade routes on the western coast, facilitating maritime trade with the Arab world, Persia, and East Africa of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** The Rashtrakuta Dynasty (c. 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century CE) derived most of its economic dominance from its marine trade. The Rashtrakutas made their empire affluent and influential by dominating key ports and trade routes on India's western coast, which connected the Indian subcontinent to the Arab world, Persia, and East Africa. A vital aspect of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty's economic and political strategy was its control over important ports and trade routes on the western coast. Here's a comprehensive discussion following:

- Bharuch, a significant port on the western coast, served as a center for marine trade with East Africa, Persia, and the Arab world.
- Sopara, another significant port, enabled trade with the Middle East and Southeast Asia.
- Chaul was an important port and naval base that contributed significantly to the Rashtrakuta's maritime trade and naval might.
- The Rashtrakutas had access to the western seaboard of the Arabian Sea, as they controlled a sizable portion of the Deccan Plateau. They were able to dominate significant sea routes connecting India with West Asia and Africa because of their location.
- During Rashtrakuta's reign, a number of ports on the western coast prospered i.e., a) One of the oldest ports in India, Bharuch Port (Broach) is crucial for trade with Persia and the Middle East. b) Sopara Port is a historic port that has been utilised for maritime trade since antiquity. c) A major hub for international trade is Chaul Port. d) Thane Port is an important economic center that links maritime trade with inland markets. The Rashtrakutas were able to control maritime trade, collect customs taxes, and bolster their finances thanks to their ports.
- The Rashtrakuta economy benefited greatly from control over important ports and commercial routes. Indian culture was propagated by maritime trade, which also influenced trade practices, art, and architecture. And the Rashtrakutas became a significant naval power in medieval India through their control of important ports and trade routes.

The Rashtrakutas carved out a potent trading network by dominating key ports on the western coast and keeping close maritime ties with Arabia, Persia, and East Africa. This maritime commerce greatly enhanced their economy, political clout, and cultural prosperity.

**To trade goods like spices, textiles, and precious stones of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** Trade between countries played a major role in the development of a strong economy during the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE). In areas such as the Arab world, Persia, and East Africa, merchants shipped rich goods from their ports, including textiles, precious stones, and high-demand spices. The main trading goods are detailed below.

**Spices Trade:** During the Rashtrakuta period, spices were one of the most profitable products. In West Asia and Africa, they were most valued for their culinary, medicinal, and preservation properties. Kerala pepper was a highly sought-after spice that was exported to Europe, Persia, and the Arab East. Another valuable spice that the Rashtrakutas traded was cardamom, which was utilised in food, medicine, and perfumes. The coast of Malabar was the source of cinnamon, a highly valued commodity in international trade. Spices were perfect for maritime trade since they were lightweight and highly prized. Arab traders frequently bought spices in bulk and shipped them to marketplaces throughout the Mediterranean.

**Textile Trade:** Another significant export sector of the Rashtrakuta economy was textiles. Indian textiles were renowned for their

superior quality, vivid hues, and robustness. Fine cotton textiles, such as calicoes and muslins, were traded by the Rashtrakutas. Additionally, they traded silk fabrics, which were either made locally or imported from China, and the Rashtrakutas also traded woollen clothing.

**Precious Stones and Gems:** One of the most persuasive dynasties in medieval India was the Rashtrakuta Dynasty. Their empire developed into a significant hub for global trade, particularly between Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and India. The empire benefited greatly from merchants' trade in precious stones, textiles, and spices. During the medieval era, India was one of the world's main suppliers of valuable stones, and the Rashtrakutas profited from this commerce. Diamonds from the Golconda mines, which were highly prized in foreign markets, were handled by the Rashtrakutas. Another valuable stone that the Rashtrakutas traded was rubies from the Deccan region. They also traded emeralds from eastern India.

**Other Important Trade Goods:** Elephants in the Deccan region provided the ivory that the Rashtrakutas traded. Teak and sandalwood were significant commodities in trade. They exchanged metals, often from nearby mines, including iron, copper, and gold. The Rashtrakuta Dynasty had strong commercial ties with places like Persia and Southeast Asia through the trade in spices, textiles, and precious stones, which boosted the empire's wealth and economic expansion.

**To generate revenue through taxation on trade, customs, and duties on imported and exported goods of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** For the purpose of generating revenue, particularly from trade, customs charges, and taxes on imported and exported commodities, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty created an intricate taxation system. Commercial taxation became a significant source of state revenue because the kingdom dominated vital ports and trade routes and spanned a sizable portion of Deccan India. The Rashtrakutas made money through commerce and customs duties, as explained in detail below.

#### Taxation on Trade

- Trade taxes were significant due to: a) The empire was situated along important trading routes. b) Guilds of merchants were very active. c) India was linked to international markets through ports. d) Agricultural taxes were more difficult to collect than customs duties.
- Customs taxes, which usually ranged from 10% to 20% of the value of imported and exported goods, were levied by the Rashtrakutas on goods imported and exported through their ports. Sales taxes and transaction fees were among the charges they imposed on trade transactions. Roadways and canals used by the dynasty to transport goods were subject to tolls. The Rashtrakuta state maintained its empire for over two centuries (8th–10th century CE) due to this specific plan of action.

#### Types of Duties

- **Import Duties:** The type and value of goods carried into the empire determined the taxes imposed. Exceptional goods i.e., silk, horses, and valuable stones were subject to duties when imported from other countries.
- **Export Duties:** Taxes were also imposed on goods that left the empire. Among the exported goods such as spices, textiles, precious stones. Pepper and spices and Iron and steel.
- **Transit Duties:** Transit duties applied to goods passing through the Rashtrakuta regions. Road Taxes and Bridge and Ferry Taxes were known as transit duties, and they ensured that even domestic trade brought in revenue for the state.

#### Revenue Streams:

- **Port Revenues:** Ports were most significant revenue centers i.e., such as wharfage and anchorage fees, Harbour Tax, Cargo

Duty and Lighthouse and Navigation Fees brought in a substantial sum for the Rashtrakutas.

- **Customs Revenues:** A significant portion of the dynasty's income came from customs charges on both imported and exported products.
- **Trade-related Taxes:** The Rashtrakutas reigned over areas along important trade routes connecting China, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East with India. Taxes on trade transactions, including sales taxes and transaction fees, added to the revenue.

Customs duties on imports and exports, port taxes, transit duties, market taxes, merchant guild taxes, and licensing fees were all part of the intricate commercial taxation system used by the Rashtrakuta Dynasty to raise money. They made significant profits from both domestic and foreign trade thanks to their strategic control over ports and trade routes, which bolstered their political and economic might.

**To protect merchants and traders of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** The ancient city of Manyakheta, as the capital of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty, reigned over a sizable portion of the Indian subcontinent. Because trade and commerce were crucial to their economy, the monarchs created several safeguards for traders and merchants. Legal, military, administrative, and economic methods were used to safeguard them.

- To ensure that traders could travel safely, the Rashtrakutas kept highways and canals under strict watch.
- They backed merchant guilds, which offered their members financial support and protection.
- The king protected traders and merchants, and harming them was regarded as a grave offence.
- To uphold law and order and protect merchants from violence and theft, the Rashtrakutas maintained a strong police force.

Significantly protecting traders and merchants, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty significantly contributed to the growth of trade. The Rashtrakuta monarchs established a stable climate for trade by supporting merchant guilds such as Ayyavole 500, keeping trade routes safe, offering legal protection, and building secure ports and markets. As a result, trade between India and other countries increased, boosting the empire's economy and wealth.

**To encourage trade transactions of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty:** One of the most persuasive dynasties during early medieval India was the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (c. 753–973 CE). Their economic and cultural influence was significantly bolstered by the active promotion of both domestic and international trade by their emperors. A thorough description of how they promoted commercial transactions is provided below.

- Despite their capital at Manyakheta, a significant economic hub, the Rashtrakutas ruled over vital land trade routes connecting northern and southern India.
- Through west-coast ports like Bharuch and Sopara, they promoted international trade with China, Persia, and Arabia, and Strong commercial guilds like the Ayyavole 500, which coordinated long-distance commerce, were backed by the monarchs.
- They maintained market towns, safe highways, and stable governance, which facilitated trade and Coin usage, and organised markets contributed to an increase in business transactions.

Overall, by maintaining secure trade routes, assisting merchant guilds, and creating significant commercial hubs like Manyakheta, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty significantly promoted trade. Through ports like Bharuch, they promoted trade both domestically and internationally, helping to link India with places like Persia and Arabia. These initiatives strengthened the economy and enabled the Rashtrakuta Empire to succeed.

## CONCLUSION

During the Rashtrakuta Dynasty, there was a significant period of economic prosperity and the expansion of trade networks throughout

the 8th to 10th centuries. The Deccan area became a significant center of economic activity as a result of the administration's establishment of a stable political climate that promoted both domestic and international trade. The Rashtrakuta economy's well-organised agricultural foundation, which fuelled urbanisation and population expansion, was one of its main advantages. The state was able to regularly collect taxes thanks to fertile fields, irrigation infrastructure, and village-based production. The dynasty sustained markets, craftspeople, and trade guilds that were vital to the community's prosperity through its stable agricultural economy. Furthermore, the Rashtrakutas encouraged networks of long-distance trade throughout the Indian subcontinent. Their dominion facilitated the flow of commodities such as textiles, spices, precious stones, ivory, and metal goods along the northern and southern trade routes. By arranging trade caravans and keeping business ties with other areas, merchant guilds developed into significant economic organisations. The maritime ties cultivated at this time were equally significant. The Rashtrakutas maintained commercial connections with areas across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean through ports on India's western coast. Southeast Asian countries, Persia, and the Arabian Peninsula were trading partners for merchants. Horses, dates, and luxury goods were traded for Indian spices, textiles, and precious stones by foreign traders, particularly Arab traders, who came to Indian ports. India's economic growth and cultural exchanges with other countries were bolstered by these marine connections. Finally, Vital agricultural production, well-organised merchant guilds, and vast maritime networks all contributed to the thriving trading system of the Rashtrakuta era. Their initiatives linked the Deccan region to the larger Indian Ocean commercial world, promoted economic expansion, and facilitated international trade. Consequently, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty left a lasting mark on the history of trade and maritime activity and was instrumental in forming the economic and commercial environment of early medieval India.

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