

Economic Advancement of the Patna State: A case Study of the Chauhan Dynasty in western Odisha

Padmini Padhan

Research Scholar, P.G. Department of History Sambalpur University

Abstract

The research paper focuses on the economic development and agricultural structure of Patna state during the Chauhan rule, spanning from medieval times to the post-independence period. The study highlights the importance of agriculture as the foundation of the region's economy, with rice as the main crop, along with the growth of trade and commerce with neighboring areas. The Chauhan rulers significantly promoted agricultural practices by introducing new farming methods and supporting the development of infrastructure like irrigation systems. They also encouraged trade, supported local industries, and nurtured a vibrant artisanal culture. The economic policies of the Chauhan Dynasty were well-organized, featuring fair taxation systems that funded administrative and development projects. Regulated markets and cooperative societies were set up to help farmers. Additionally, the study provides a comparative analysis of Odisha's economic history under various ruling powers, showcasing the complex interaction of policies that influenced the state's economic path.

Keywords: Agriculture, Chauhan, Handicraft Industry, Patna, Trade and Commerce

1. Introduction

During the Chauhan dynasty in western Odisha, Patna state achieved a good balance in its economy. It had a strong agriculture sector, a thriving trade and commerce network, and a wealth of handicraft industries. These characteristics defined the Chauhan lineage. The Chauhan rule in Patna was marked by a lineage of powerful rulers whose influence endured for centuries. Patna State, situated in western Odisha, was a significant princely state ruled by the Chauhans since the 14th century AD. The dynasty was founded by Ramai Deo, who established his authority by becoming the head of eighteen Garhs (fortified estates) in the region.

Initially, the capital of Patna State was located at Patnagarh. However, it was later shifted to Balaramgarh, which eventually came to be known as Balangir (Sahu, J.K., 1971). This shift marked a new chapter in the state's history, with Balangir emerging as an important center under the Chauhan rulers.

The history of the Chauhan rulers in West Odisha, particularly in Patnagarh, is illuminated by two important literary works: the "*Kosalananda Kavya*" by Pandit Gangadhar Misra and the "*Jaya Chandrika*" by Prahallad Dubey. Scholars regard these texts, along with inscriptional evidence (Nayaka, P.M., 2011), as significant sources for reconstructing the early history of the Chauhan dynasty in the region.

According to these accounts, Ramai Deva a scion of the Chauhan family from Mainpuri established Chauhan rule in Patnagarh around 1360 A.D. The narratives describe how Ramai

Deva usurped power from eight chieftains and became the sole ruler of Patnagarh, laying the foundation for the dynasty's enduring legacy.

Under the Chauhan rulers, Patna State flourished and enjoyed a glorious past. Historical sources suggest that it was once a powerful kingdom ruled by Kusha (Sing Deo, J.P., 1967), son of King Ramachandra. The kingdom exercised control over 72 states and served as the fountainhead of confederacies known as Athara Gadajats (Sarangi, S.P., 2021), highlighting its political and strategic significance in regional affairs.

In the subsequent years, Patna State underwent significant changes in governance. It came under the possession of the Marathas of Nagpur before eventually falling under the control of the East India Company. During British rule, the state was included in various administrative divisions and agencies, reflecting the shifting political landscape of the period.

The Chauhan rule came to an end in 1948 with the merger of the kingdom of Patna into the state of Odisha (Sarangi, S.P., 2017). Following this integration, the district of Balangir was formed, and its boundaries were later adjusted to their present configuration (Kuanr, D.C., 1966).

2. Area of Present Study

The former Patna State, now known as Balangir, was once part of the South Kosala empire. Situated in the Mahanadi Valley of the Sambalpur area, it covered a portion of what is today the Balangir district in Odisha, spanning an area of 2,530 square miles. Its borders touched Sambalpur District and Sonepur State to the north, Sonepur State, Boud State, and Kalahandi State to the east, and Sambalpur District to the west. The capital of the state was Balangir.

Geographically, Balangir is flanked by the Gandhamardan hills to the northwest and the river Tel to the southeast. The region is renowned for its rich cultural and historical heritage, which includes Tantric influences, religious temples such as the Chausathi Yogini, and the ruins of forts that reflect its former glory and significance as a kingdom. The district is also celebrated for its natural beauty, characterized by hill streams, dense forest cover, and a diverse range of wildlife, including tigers, bison, sambar, and deer (Chauhan, B.S., 1954).

3. Aims and Objectives

1. To provide an overview of the historical profile of the Chauhan dynasty in Patna State, western Odisha.
2. To evaluate the economic profile of the Chauhan dynasty, including agricultural practices as well as modes of trade and commerce.
3. To describe the nature of craftsmanship and the role of artisans during the Chauhan rule.
4. To examine the economic policies and taxation system implemented under the Chauhan dynasty.
5. To analyze the patterns of land settlement during the Chauhan period.

4. Materials and Methodology

4.1 Agricultural Practices

The former Patna State, presently part of Balangir district in Odisha, relied predominantly on traditional and subsistence agriculture. The agrarian economy was shaped by a mix of small-scale farming and a land revenue system controlled by local rulers. Agriculture was primarily rain-fed, with farmers depending on the monsoon for irrigation. Major crops included rice, millets, pulses, oilseeds, and some vegetables and fruits, all of which were well-suited to the local climate and soil. Paddy rice, in particular, was the dominant crop and staple food, owing to the fertile plains and favorable climate.

4.2 Farming Methods and Tools

Agricultural practices during this period were mainly labour-intensive. Farmers used traditional tools like wooden ploughs and sickles, with little to no adoption of modern techniques or technology. Crop success was closely tied to the adequacy and timing of monsoon rains. As in much of India, the region saw both Kharif (summer) and Rabi (winter) cropping seasons.

4.3 Diversity of Crops

While rice formed the backbone of the local diet and economy, other important crops included various millets (such as finger millet, pearl millet, and sorghum), pulses (chickpeas, lentils), oilseeds (mustard, sesame), and tobacco, which served as a significant cash crop. The region also produced cotton, supporting the local textile industry, as well as assorted vegetables and fruits. This diversity reflected a self-sustaining agrarian system, providing food security and economic stability.

4.4 Livestock and Animal Husbandry

Animal husbandry and dairy farming were integral to the rural economy. Farmers commonly raised cattle, goats, and poultry, which supplemented their income and contributed to household needs.

4.5 Agrarian Structure and Land Revenue

Patna State's agrarian system was essentially feudal. Local landlords and rulers exercised control over land and collected revenue from peasants. Tax was typically levied as a share of agricultural produce or as a fixed amount based on cultivated land area. This system was deeply ingrained in the socio-economic fabric and influenced agricultural practices for generations.

4.6 Initiatives by the Chauhan Rulers

The Chauhan dynasty played an active role in promoting agricultural development. They constructed irrigation systems, including tanks and canals, to ensure a steady water supply for farming lands around Patnagarh and Balangir. Land reforms were introduced to protect farmers' rights and reduce tax burdens, encouraging greater agricultural investment. The rulers also promoted agricultural research, introduced improved farming techniques, and supported

trade and commerce to boost the local economy. Financial assistance and incentives were provided to farmers, and livestock rearing was encouraged to further enhance productivity.

4.7 Forests resources

Forests in the region were important for both economic and environmental reasons. They provided timber, fuelwood, fiber, and various non-timber forest products vital to rural livelihoods. The area under the control of the forest department was substantial, with 441,489 acres (690 sq. miles) of reserved, protected, and village forests particularly in the Saintala Range, which saw a modest increase in forest area during this period. Only one block, Deojhar in the Saintala Range, was officially demarcated.

5. Trade and Commerce under the Chauhan Dynasty in Patna State

The rise of the Chauhan Dynasty in Balangir (formerly Patna State) marked a pivotal era in the economic history of the region, especially in the spheres of trade and commerce. Spanning from medieval times through the post-independence era, this period witnessed remarkable advancements in agriculture, industry, and commercial activities.

5.1 Agricultural Surplus and Economic Foundations

Agriculture served as the backbone of Patna State's economy. The Chauhan rulers actively promoted innovative farming techniques and constructed vital irrigation systems, such as canals and tanks, to boost agricultural productivity. The resulting surplus in food production created the foundation for vibrant trade, as excess produce could be exchanged locally and with neighboring regions.

5.2 Expansion of Trade Networks (15th–18th Centuries)

Between the 15th and 18th centuries, Patna State saw a significant expansion of its trade networks. Strategically located, the region acted as a crucial link between coastal areas and the hinterland, facilitating the exchange of goods and commodities. The Chauhan rulers ensured a safe and secure environment for merchants, developing and maintaining organized trade routes that connected Patna State to distant markets.

5.3 Growth of Urban Centers and Markets

The increased commercial activity led to the growth of towns and urban centres, further fuelling economic development. The Chauhan rulers supported the establishment of regular markets and large trade fairs, attracting traders from various regions and creating a vibrant commercial atmosphere. These marketplaces became hubs for the exchange of regional and imported goods.

5.4 Infrastructure Development

To facilitate trade, the Chauhan dynasty invested in infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and rest houses. These improvements made transportation and communication easier for traders and travellers, further strengthening the commercial network of Patna State.

5.5 Commodities Traded

Patna State became renowned for trading a wide range of agricultural and forest products, including:

Exports: Paddy, rice, mung, biri (black gram), kulthi (horse gram), gurji, ragi (finger millet), sun-hemp, til (sesame), onion, gram, linseed, kendu leaves, timber, graphite ore, and hill brooms.

Imports: Cloth, yarn, salt, wheat, sugar, groundnut, coconut oil, kerosene, cement, potato, dry fish, molasses, hardware, and fancy goods.

5.6 Challenges and External Influences

Despite its prosperity, Patna State's trade and commerce faced challenges. Occasional conflicts and invasions sometimes disrupted economic activities. The advent of European colonial powers, especially the British, altered traditional trade routes and market patterns, impacting local commerce and leading to shifts in economic structures (Report, 1943a).

6. Craftsmanship and Artisans

During the 16th to 18th centuries, Patna State (now Balangir, Odisha) flourished as a center of remarkable craftsmanship and artisanal activity, significantly contributing to the region's economic and cultural vibrancy. The Chauhan dynasty's patronage, along with support from local nobility, fostered an environment where skilled artisans thrived and their crafts reached new heights of excellence.

6.1 Handloom Textile

Patna State was renowned for its handloom weaving, producing high-quality cotton and tassar silk textiles. The excellence of local weaving is evident from the apparel depicted on stone figures in medieval temples. Even today, the district's reputation for fine handwoven textiles endures, suggesting a deep-rooted tradition dating back to the Chauhan era.

6.2 Metalwork and Blacksmith

The region had a longstanding tradition of metalworking, particularly iron smelting and blacksmithing. Archaeological evidence, such as old dumps of slag around Bangomunda, indicates that smelting of iron ore was a well-established cottage industry. Blacksmiths produced agricultural implements like ploughshares, sickles, axes, and ancient weapons such as swords, daggers, arrowheads, and shields. This craft has persisted into modern times, with village blacksmiths continuing to make essential tools and implements.

Artisans in Patna State excelled in creating intricate gold and silver jewelry, often adorned with precious stones. Their finely crafted ornaments were highly prized, both locally and in distant trade centers.

6.3 Pottery and wood work

Pottery and the making of bricks were integral industries. The existence of medieval temples and ruined brick structures at sites like Ranipur Jharia, Titilagarh, and Tusra point to the skill of local potters and bricklayers, who molded and fired bricks for large-scale construction. Artisans produced ornate and functional wooden furniture, often commissioned by the nobility for use in palaces and temples.

6.4 Other Industries

Brass and bell metal images of deities are found in old temples and were commonly sold in village markets (“hats”). Local braziers were particularly skilled in metal casting, creating religious icons and household utensils that remain valued to this day.

Despite occasional challenges and changing economic circumstances, the artisanal traditions of Patna State remained resilient. The continued practice of many of these crafts today speaks to a lasting legacy of skill, creativity, and cultural pride that began under the Chauhan dynasty.

7. Economic Policies

The Chauhan Dynasty in Patna State under Chauhan dynasty, implemented a range of progressive economic policies aimed at ensuring prosperity, stability, and sustained growth for the region.

The rulers prioritized agricultural expansion, encouraging the cultivation of new lands and investing in vital irrigation projects. The construction of tanks, canals, and other water management systems helped enhance agricultural productivity and safeguard crops against the uncertainties of the monsoon.

Trade and commerce flourished under the Chauhans, who actively developed and regulated trade routes and markets. Strategic locations such as Titilagarh, Kantabanji, and Binka became important commercial hubs. The state invested in crucial infrastructure roads, bridges, and rest houses to facilitate the movement of goods and people, further boosting economic activity.

A key feature of the Chauhan economic policy was a fair and balanced taxation system. Taxes on agricultural produce and trade were designed to be equitable and not excessively burdensome, thereby encouraging productivity and commerce while ensuring state revenue.

The Chauhan rulers extended patronage to artisans and craftspeople, fostering the growth of local industries. This support not only generated employment opportunities but also enhanced the economic and cultural vitality of Patna State.

Through these well-rounded and pragmatic economic policies, the Chauhan dynasty transformed Patna State into a flourishing center of economic activity and cultural exchange during their rule (Report, 1943a).

8. Revenue and Taxation

The Chauhan rulers established an organized and efficient revenue and taxation system. Taxes were imposed on agricultural produce as well as on trade and commercial activities, ensuring

a steady flow of income to the state. These revenues supported both administrative functions and developmental projects. Although the tax rates were generally fair and not overly burdensome, misuse of authority or excessive taxation sometimes resulted in dissatisfaction among the populace.

8.1 Wholesale Markets and Assembling Centres:

In Patna State, key wholesale markets such as Kantabanji, Titilagarh, and Bolangir played pivotal roles in managing agricultural produce and streamlining the flow of goods. In addition to these, assembling centres like Tusura, Tarbha, Binka, Bhainsa, and Sonapur further contributed to economic growth by facilitating the collection and distribution of products from smaller producers.

8.2 Regulated Market and Co-operative Society:

Kantabanji set up a regulated market, overseen by a marketing committee, to manage the purchase, sale, and auction of agricultural produce. This initiative led to improved transparency and income for farmers in the region. The ruler of Patna State also promoted the formation of co-operative societies, which helped organize farmers and traders, further enhancing economic opportunities and regional prosperity.

During this period, Patna State experienced significant progress in agriculture, trade, and commerce. The state supported research and experimentation in agricultural practices to boost crop yields and encourage better cultivation methods. Its advantageous location fostered trade connections with neighboring regions, allowing commerce to flourish. Through a combination of regulated markets and co-operative societies, the rulers of Patna State worked to strengthen the local economy and ensure sustained growth for the region.

9. Land Settlement Pattern in Patna State:

During the Chauhan rule through to the British period, Patna State's land settlement system was fundamentally agricultural. The administration organized land settlements into three main units: Sadar Balangir, Titilagarh, and Patnagarh. Taxation was based on land quality, with distinct categories developed to determine rates. The formal land settlement process began in 1932, and by 1937, magistrates from the Bihar and Odisha provinces managed its implementation. The British colonial era saw the introduction of the Zamindari system, with state-appointed Zamindars controlling areas such as Bangomunda, Loisingha, Jarasingha, Atagaon, and Agalpur (Report, 1943b).

10. Result

The Chauhan Dynasty's economic condition in Patna was primarily agrarian, supported by prosperous agriculture and supplemented by trade, crafts, and taxation. While the region benefitted from fertile land and strategic trade routes, its prosperity was periodically disrupted by warfare and political upheaval. The Chauhan dynasty's economic system showed resilience but also faced challenges, including periodic droughts, invasions, and shifts in political power. The later phases of Chauhan rule saw increasing interaction with the Marathas and the British,

leading to administrative and economic transformations, especially in land tenure and revenue collection.

11. Discussion

From the 16th to 18th centuries, Odisha's economic landscape was shaped by successive dynasties and powers. The Gajapati Dynasty presided over a flourishing period of trade, particularly with Southeast Asian countries, and advanced economic growth through patronage of art, literature, and construction of temples and forts. The Marathas, though indirect rulers, introduced administrative reforms that stimulated local economic activity but sometimes caused instability through military campaigns. Under the Mughal Empire, Odisha became part of the Bengal Subah, and while their revenue collection system could be exploitative, their investments in infrastructure and commerce promoted development. The British East India Company's eventual control brought significant changes—revenue extraction practices and the introduction of modern industries fundamentally altered Odisha's economy. The region's economic history thus reveals a complex interplay of prosperity and challenge under changing regimes.

12. Conclusion

This analysis offers a comprehensive view of the economic development and agrarian structure of Patna State from the Chauhan rule through the post-independence period. Agriculture served as the backbone of the region's economy, with rice as the principal crop. The emergence and expansion of trade and commerce, particularly with neighboring regions like Titlagarh, Kantabanji, Sambalpur, Sonapur, and Raipur, further strengthened economic growth.

The Chauhan rulers played a pivotal role in this transformation by promoting advanced agricultural techniques and investing in infrastructure such as irrigation systems. Their encouragement of trade, urbanization, and artisanal industries led to the flourishing of towns and the rise of a vibrant local culture. Their well-structured economic policies, especially balanced taxation, ensured steady revenue for administration and development. Additionally, the establishment of regulated markets and marketing co-operative societies under their rule provided farmers with greater stability and improved income, laying the foundation for sustainable economic progress in Patna State.

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