

# Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)  
Supplementary Study Material

Module 9: The Satavahana Phase

-Arti Chhawari



### Political History

- The most important of the native successors of the Mauryas in the north were the Shungas followed by the Kanvas. In the Deccan and in central India, the Satavahanas succeeded the Mauryas, although after a gap of about 100 years.
- The Satavahanas are considered to be the same as the Andhras mentioned in the Puranas. Gradually the Satavahanas extended their power over Karnataka and Andhra.
- Their greatest competitors were the Shakas, who had established power in the upper Deccan and western India. The fortunes of the family were restored by Gautamiputra Satakarni (AD 106–30) who called himself the only brahmana.
- He defeated the Shakas and destroyed many kshatriya rulers. He claimed to have ended the Kshaharata lineage to which his adversary Nahapana belonged. This claim is true because over 8000 silver coins of Nahapana, found near Nasik, bear the marks of having been restruck by the Satavahana king.
- He also occupied Malwa and Kathiawar which were controlled by the Shakas. It seems that the empire of Gautamiputra Satakarni extended from Malwa in the north to Karnataka in the south, and he possibly also exercised general authority over Andhra.
- The successors of Gautamiputra ruled till AD 220. The coins and inscriptions of his immediate successor Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (AD 130– 54) have been found in Andhra, and show that by the middle of the second century this area had become a part of the Satavahana kingdom. He set up his capital at Paithan or Pratishtan on the Godavari in Aurangabad district.
- The Shakas resumed their conflict with the Satavahanas for the possession of the Konkan coast and Malwa. Rudradaman I (AD 130–50), the Shaka ruler of Saurashtra (Kathiawar), defeated the Satavahanas twice, but did not destroy them because of shared matrimonial relations.

- Yajna Sri Satakarni (AD 165–94) was the last great king of the Satavahana dynasty, and recovered north Konkan and Malwa from the Shaka rulers. He was a patron of trade and navigation, and his coins appear not only in Andhra but also in Maharashtra, MP, and Gujarat.
- The successors of Yajna Sri Satakarni were unable to retain the Satavahana kingdom which was destroyed by AD 220.

### Aspects of Material Culture

- The material culture of the Deccan under the Satavahanas was a fusion of local elements and northern ingredients. The megalith builders of the Deccan were fairly well acquainted with the use of iron and agriculture.
- At a site in Karimnagar district, even a blacksmith's shop is found. The Satavahanas may have exploited the iron ores of Karimnagar and Warangal, for these districts show signs of iron working that dates to the megalithic phase in the first millennium BC.
- Evidence of ancient gold workings has been found in the Kolar fields in the pre-Christian centuries and later. The Satavahanas may have used gold as bullion, for they did not issue gold coins as did the Kushans.
- In Peddabankur (200 BC–AD 200) in Karimnagar district, we find regular use of fire-baked bricks, and that of flat, perforated roof tiles. Although roof tiles were found in Kushan constructions, they were more widely used in the Deccan and western India under the Satavahanas.
- It is remarkable that as many as twenty-two brick wells belonging to the second century have been discovered at Peddabankur.

### Social Organization

- The Satavahanas originally seem to have been a Deccan tribe. They however were so brahmanized that they claimed to be brahmanas. Their most famous king, Gautamiputra Satakarni, described himself as a brahmana and claimed to have established the fourfold varna system which had fallen into disorder.
- The Satavahanas were also the first rulers to make land grants to brahmanas. Among the artisans, the *gandhikas* or perfumers are repeatedly mentioned as donors. At a later stage, the term *gandhika* became so general as to connote all kinds of shopkeepers. The modern title Gandhi is derived from this ancient term.
- It was customary for their king to be named after his mother. Such names as Gautamiputra and Vashishthiputra indicate that in their society the mother enjoyed a great deal of importance.

### Pattern of Administration

- The Satavahanas retained some administrative structures of Ashokan times. Their district was called *ahara*, as it was known in the time of Ashoka, and their officials were known as *amatyas* and *mahamatras*, as was the case in Maurya times.
- Their administrative divisions were also called *rashtra*, and their high officials were styled *maharashtrikas*. The administration in the rural areas was placed in the hands of a *gaulmika*, the head of a military regiment consisting of nine chariots, nine elephants, twenty-five horses, and forty-five foot-soldiers. The head of this regiment was posted in the countryside to maintain peace and order.

- The military character of Satavahana rule is also evident from the common use of such terms as *kataka* and *skandhavara* in their inscriptions. These were military camps and settlements which served as administrative centres when the king was there. Thus, coercion played a key role in the Satavahana administration.
- The Satavahanas started the practice of granting tax-free villages to brahmanas and Buddhist monks. The Satavahana kingdom had three grades of feudatories. The highest grade was formed by the king who was called *raja* and had the right to strike coins. The second grade was formed by the *mahabhoja*, and the third grade by the *senapati*. It seems that these feudatories and landed beneficiaries enjoyed some authority in their respective localities.

## Religion

- The Satavahana rulers were brahmanas, and they represented the march of triumphant Brahmanism. From the very outset, kings and queens performed such Vedic sacrifices as *ashvamedha*, and *vajapeya* paying liberal sacrificial fees to the brahmanas. They also worshipped a large number of Vaishnava gods such as Krishna and Vasudeva.
- Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in AP became important seats of Buddhist culture under the Satavahanas, and more so under their successors, the Ikshvakus. Similarly, Buddhism flourished in the Nasik and Junar areas in western Deccan in Maharashtra, where it seems to have been supported by traders.

## Architecture

- In the Satavahana phase, many *chaityas* (sacred shrines) and monasteries were cut out of solid rock in north-western Deccan or Maharashtra with great skill and patience.
- The two common religious constructions were the Buddhist temple which was called *chaitya* and monastery which was called *vihara*. The *chaitya* was a large hall with a number of columns, and the *vihara* consisted of a central hall entered by a doorway from a verandah in front.
- The most famous *chaitya* is that of Karle in western Deccan. About 40 m long, 15 m wide, and 15 m high, it is a most impressive specimen of massive rock architecture.
- The *viharas* or monasteries were excavated near the *chaityas* for the residence of monks during the rainy season. At Nasik there are three *viharas*.
- Since they carry the inscriptions of Nahapana and Gautamiputra, they belong to first–second centuries AD. Rock-cut architecture is also found in Andhra in the Krishna–Godavari region, but the region is really famous for independent Buddhist structures, mostly in the form of stupas.
- The most famous of them are those of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The stupa was a large round structure erected over some relic of the Buddha.
- The Amaravati stupa was begun in around 200 BC but was completely reconstructed in the second half of the second century AD. Its dome measured 53 m across the base, and it seems to have been 33 m in height.
- The Amaravati stupa is full of sculptures that depict various scenes from the life of the Buddha. Nagarjunakonda prospered most in the second–third centuries under the patronage of the Ikshvakus, the successors of the Satavahanas.
- It possesses both Buddhist monuments and the earliest brahmanical brick temples. Nearly two dozen monasteries can be counted here. Together with its stupas and *mahachaityas*

Nagarjunakonda appears to have been the richest area in terms of structures in the early centuries of the Christian era.

### Language

- The official language of the Satavahanas was Prakrit. All their inscriptions were composed in this language and written in the Brahmi script, as was the case in Ashokan times. Some Satavahana kings may have composed Prakrit books.
- One Prakrit text called *Gathasattasai*, or the *Gathasaptasati*, is attributed to a Satavahana king called Hala. It consisted of 700 verses, all written in Prakrit.

