

Satavahana Dynasty

The reign of the Satavahana Dynasty began in the mid-1st century BCE and came to an end in the early 3rd century CE. The area of the Satavahana Dynasty is debated where some historians argue that the Satavahanas initially established their hold over the area around Pratishthana (modern Paithan) in the western Deccan, and expanded from there into the eastern Deccan, Andhra, and the western coast. The topic is important for Ancient History preparation in the [IAS Exam](#). Read on to know about the Satavahana empire, its rulers and coinage for UPSC preparation.

Origin & Development of the Satavahana Dynasty

The [Sunga dynasty](#) came to an end around 73 BCE when their ruler Devabhuti was killed by Vasudeva Kanya. The Kanya dynasty then ruled over Magadha for about 45 years. Around this time, another powerful dynasty, the Satavahanas came to power in the Deccan area.

The term "Satavahana" originated from the Prakrit which means " driven by seven" which is an implication of the Sun God's chariot that is driven by seven horses as per Hindu mythology.

The first king of the Satavahana dynasty was Simuka. Before the emergence of the Satavahana dynasty, a brief history of the other dynasties are mentioned below:

Kanya Dynasty:

- According to the Puranas, there were 4 kings of the Kanya dynasty who were, Vasudeva, Bhumimitra, Narayana and Susarman.
- The Kanyas were said to be Brahmins.
- The Magadha Empire had declined by this time to a great extent.
- The Northwest region was under the Greeks and parts of the Gangetic plains were under various rulers.
- Susarman, who was the last Kanya king, was killed by a Satavahana (Andhra) king.

Read in detail about the [Kanya Dynasty](#) in the linked article.

Chedi Dynasty:

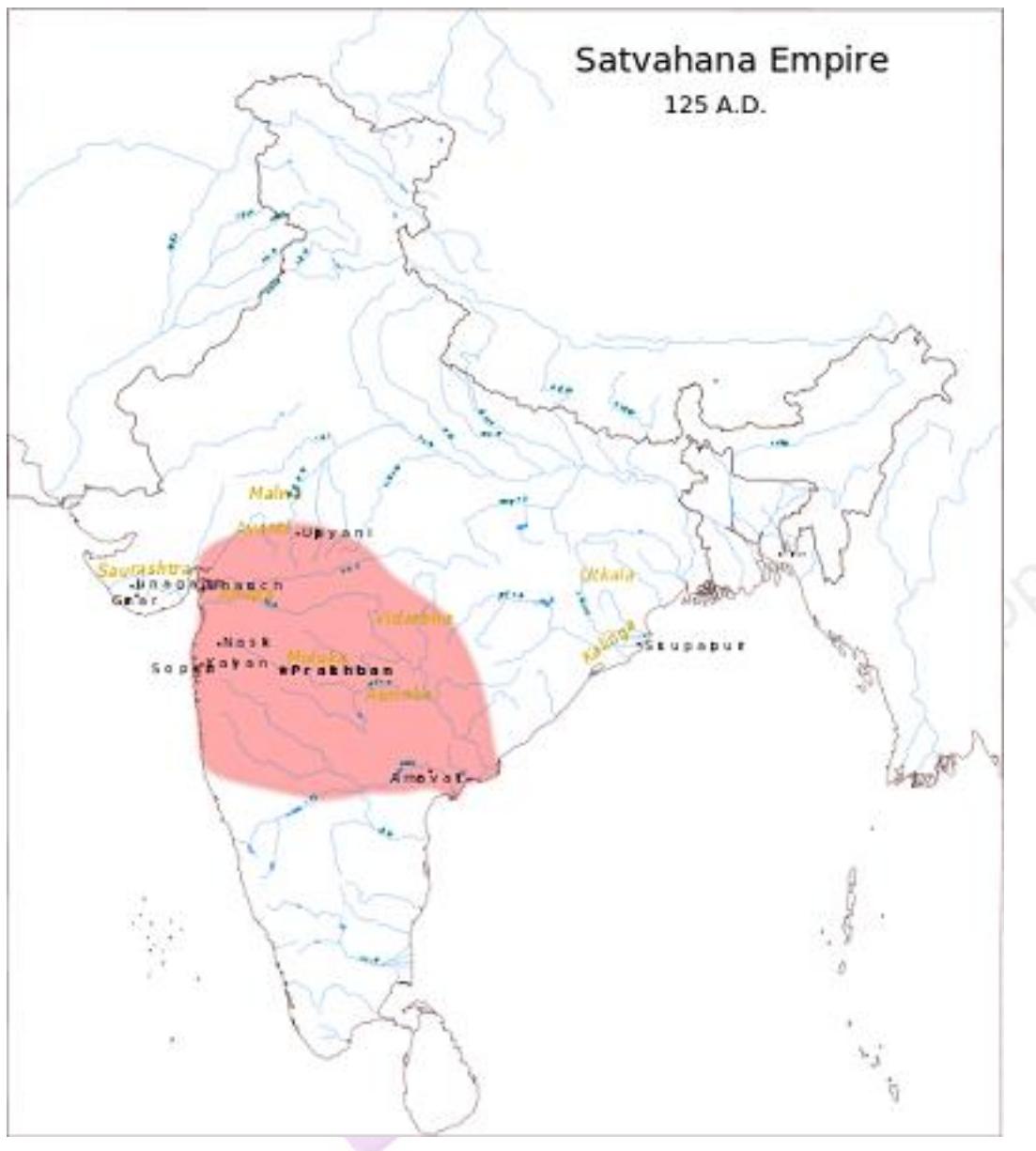
- The Chedi/Cheti dynasty rose in Kalinga in the 1st century BCE.
- The Hathigumpha inscription situated near Bhubaneswar talks about this.
- This inscription was engraved by king Kharavela who was the third Cheti king.
- King Kharavela followed [Jainism](#).
- Chedi dynasty was also known as Cheta or Mahameghavahana or Chetavamsa.

Facts about Satavahana Dynasty

In the northern region, the Mauryas were succeeded by the Sungas and the Kanyas. However, the Satavahanas (natives) succeeded the Mauryas in Deccan and in Central India.

- It is believed that after the decline of the Mauryas and before the advent of the Satavahans, there must have been numerous small political principalities that were ruling in different parts of the Deccan (for about 100 years).
- Probably the Rathikas and the Bhojikas that have been mentioned in the Ashokan inscriptions gradually progressed into the Maharathis and Mahabhojas of pre-Satavahana times.
- The Satavahanas are considered to be identical with the Andhras who are mentioned in the Puranas, but neither the name Andhra appears in the Satavahana inscriptions nor do the Puranas mention the Satavahanas.
- According to some Puranas, the Andhras ruled for 300 years and this period is assigned to the rule of the Satavahana dynasty, with their capital at Pratishthana (modern Paithan) on the Godavari in Aurangabad district.
- The Satavahana kingdom majorly comprised present **Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana**. At times, their rule also included parts of Gujarat, Karnataka as well as Madhya Pradesh.
- The kingdom had different capitals at different times. Two of the capitals were Amaravati and Pratishthana (Paithan).
- The earliest inscriptions of the Satavahans belong to the first century BCE when they defeated the Kanvas and established their power in parts of Central India.
- It is important to mention that the early Satavahana kings appeared not in Andhra but in Maharashtra, where most of their early inscriptions have been found. Gradually they extended their power over Karnataka and Andhra.
- Their greatest competitors were the Shaka Kshatrapas of western India, who had established themselves in the upper Deccan and western India.
- The Satavahans were Brahmanas and worshipped gods like Vasudeva Krishna.
- The Satavahana kings used matronymic names like Gautamiputra and Vaishishthiputra, although they were not matriarchal or matrilineal in any sense.
- They assumed the title of Dakshinapatha Pati (Lord of Dakshinapatha).
- The Satavahanas are known for starting the practice of giving royal grants of land to Brahmins and Buddhist monks.
- **Simuka was the founder** of the Satavahana Dynasty.
- The Satavahanas were the first native Indian kings to have issued their own coins which had the rulers' portraits on them. Gautamiputra Satakarni started this practice which he imbibed from the Western Satraps after vanquishing them.
- The **coin legends were in Prakrit**. Some reverse coin legends are in Tamil, Telugu and Kannada also.
- They **patronised Prakrit** more than Sanskrit.
- Even though the rulers were Hindus and claimed Brahmanical status, they supported **Buddhism** also.
- They were successful in defending their areas from foreign invaders and had many battles with the **Sakas**.

The Satavahana Dynasty map is given below:



Important Rulers of the Satavahana dynasty

Simuka

- Considered to be the founder of the Satavahana dynasty and was immediately active after Ashoka's death.
- Built Jain and Buddhist temples.

Satakarni I (70- 60 BC)

- Satakarni I was the 3rd king of the Satavahanas.
- Satakarni I was the first Satavahana king to expand his empire by military conquests.
- He conquered Kalinga after the death of Kharavela.
- He also pushed back the Sungas in Pataliputra.
- He also ruled over Madhya Pradesh.

- After annexing the Godavari Valley, he assumed the title of ‘Lord of Dakshinapatha’.
- His queen Nayanika wrote the Naneghat inscription which describes the king as Dakshinapathapati.
- He performed Ashvamedha and revived Vedic Brahmanism in the Deccan.

Hala

- King Hala compiled the Gatha Saptashati. Called Gaha Sattasai in Prakrit, it is a collection of poems with mostly love as the theme. Around forty of the poems are attributed to Hala himself.
- Hala’s minister Gunadhyā composed Brihatkatha.

Gautamiputra Satakarni of Satavahana Dynasty (106 – 130 AD or 86 – 110 AD)

- He is considered the greatest king of the Satavahana dynasty.
- It is believed that at one stage, the Satavahanas were dispossessed of their dominions in the upper Deccan and western India. The fortunes of the Satavahanas were restored by Gautamiputra Satakarni. He called himself the only Brahmana who defeated the Shamas and destroyed many Kshatriya rulers.
- He is believed to have destroyed the Kshaharata lineage to which his adversary Nahapana belonged. More than 800 silver coins of Nahapana (found near Nasik) bears marks of being restruck by the Satavahana king. Nahapana was an important king of the Western Satraps.
- His kingdom ran from Krishna in the south to Malwa and Saurashtra in the north and from Berar in the east to the Konkan in the west.
- In a Nasik inscription of his mother Gautami Balashri, he is described as the destroyer of the Shamas, Pahlavas and the Yavanas (Greeks); as the uprooter of the Kshaharatas and the restorer of the glory of the Satavahanas. He is also described as Ekabrahmana (a peerless Brahmana) and Khatiya-dapa-manamada (destroyer of the pride of Kshatriyas).
- He was given the titles Rajaraja and Maharaja.
- He donated land to the Buddhist monks. The Karle inscription mentions the grant of Karajika village, near Pune, Maharashtra.
- In the later part of his reign, he probably lost some of the conquered Kshaharata territories to the Kardamaka line of the Shaka Kshatrapas of western India, as is mentioned in the Junagadh inscription of Rudradaman I.
- His mother was Gautami Balasri and hence his name Gautamiputra (son of Gautami).
- He was succeeded by his son Vasishthiputra Sri Pulamavi/Pulumavi or Pulamavi II. (Alternatively spelt Pulumayi.)

Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (c. 130 - 154 CE)

- He was the immediate successor of Gautamiputra. The coins and inscriptions of Vashishthiputra Pulumayi are found in Andhra.
- According to Junagadh inscriptions, he was married to the daughter of Rudradaman I.
- The Shaka-Kshatrapas of western India recovered some of their territories due to his engagements in the east.

Yajna Sri Satakarni (c. 165 - 194 CE)

- One of the later kings of the Satavahana dynasty. He recovered north Kokan and Malwa from the Shaka rulers.
- He was a lover of trade and navigation, as is evident from the motif of a ship on his coins. His coins have been found in Andhra, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.

Satavahana Dynasty Administration

The administration of the Satavahana dynasty was entirely based on the Shastras, and it had the following structure:

1. Rajan or the king who was the ruler
2. Princes or Rajas who had their names inscribed on coins
3. Maharathis, who had the power of granting villages and also had the privilege of maintaining marital relations with the ruling family.
4. Mahasenapati
5. Mahatalavara

The inscription of the ruler Guatamipurna Satakarni throws some light on the bureaucratic structure of administration. However, clarity on the detailed structure is still awaited by historians.

Features of Satavahana Administration

- The king was represented as the upholder of dharma and he strove for the royal ideal set forth in the Dharmashastras. The Satavahana king is represented as possessing the divine qualities of ancient gods such as Rama, Bhima, Arjuna, etc.
- The Satavahanas retained some of the administrative units of Ashokan times. The kingdom was divided into districts called ahara. Their officials were known as amatyas and mahamatras (same as in Mauryan times). But unlike Mauryan times, certain military and feudal elements are found in the administration of the Satavahanas. For instance, the *senapati* was appointed provincial governor. It was probably done to keep the tribal people in the Deccan who were not completely brahmanised under strong military control.
- The administration in the rural areas was placed in the hands of gaulmika (village headman) who was also the head of a military regiment consisting of 9 chariots, 9 elephants, 25 horses and 45 foot soldiers.
- The military character of the Satavahana rule is also evident from the common use of terms like 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 an important part 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 - Raja (who had the right to strike coins), Mahabhoja and Senapati.

Economy of Satavahana Empire

Agriculture was the backbone of the economy during the rule of Satavahana kings. They also relied on trade and production of various commodities within and outside India.

Satavahana Coins

Some important points related to Satavahan coinage are mentioned below:

1. The coins of the Satavahanas have been excavated from Deccan, western India, Vidarbha, Western and Eastern Ghats, etc
2. Most of the coins in the Satavahana dynasty were die-struck.

3. Cast-coins too existed in the Satavahana empire and there were multiple combinations of techniques that were used to cast coins.
4. There were silver, copper, lead and potin coins in the Satavahana empire.
5. The portrait coins were mostly in silver and some were in lead too. Dravidian language and Brahmi script were used on portrait coins.
6. There were punch-marked coins too that were circulated alongside the Satavahana dynasty.
7. The importance of maritime trade was derived from the images of ships present on the Satavahana coins.
8. Many Satavahana coins bore the names of 'Satakarni' and 'Pulumavi.'
9. Satavahana coins were of different shapes - round, square, rectangular, etc.
10. Many symbols have appeared on the Satavahana coins, the major ones of which are:
 - Chaitya symbol
 - Chakra symbol
 - Conch Shell symbol
 - Lotus symbol
 - Nandipada symbol
 - Ship symbol
 - Swastik symbol
11. Animal motifs were found on the Satavahana coins.

Religion & Language of Satavahana Kingdom

The Satavahanas belonged to the Hindu religion and the Brahmanical caste. But, the interesting fact is their generosity towards other castes and religions which is evident from the donations made by them towards Buddhist monasteries. Many Buddhist monasteries were constructed during the rule of the Satavahana dynasty.

The official language of the Satavahanas was Prakrit, though the script was Brahmi (as was the case in the Ashokan times). Political inscriptions also threw some light on the rare use of Sanskrit Literature.

Satavahanas - Material Culture

The material culture of the Deccan under the Satavahanas was a fusion of local elements (Deccan) and northern ingredients.

- The people of the Deccan were fairly acquainted with the use of iron and agriculture. The Satavahanas probably exploited the rich mineral resources of the Deccan such as iron ores from Karimnagar and Warangal and gold from Kolar fields. They mostly issued coins of lead, which is found on the Deccan and also coins of copper and bronze.
- The paddy transplantation was an art well known to the Satavahanas and the area between the Krishna and Godavari, especially at the mouth of the two rivers, formed a great rice bowl. The people of the Deccan also produced cotton. Thus a good portion of the Deccan developed a very advanced rural economy.
- The people of the Deccan learnt the use of coins, burnt bricks, ring wells, etc. through its contacts with the north. There was regular use of fire-baked bricks and use of flat, perforated roof tiles which must have added to the life of the structures. The drains were covered and underground to lead wastewater into soakage pits. The Andhra in the east Deccan included 30 walled towns, besides numerous villages.

Satavahanas - Social Organizations

- The Satavahanas originally seem to have been a tribe of the Deccan. They, however, were so brahmanized that they claimed to be Brahmanas. The most famous Satavahana king Gautamiputra claimed to be a Brahman and thought it his duty to uphold the four-fold varna system.
- The Satavahanas were the first rulers to make land grants to the Brahmins and there are also instances of grants made to Buddhist monks, especially to Mahayana Buddhists.
 - Nagarjunakonda and Amravati in Andhra Pradesh and Nasik and Junar in Maharashtra became important Buddhist sites under the Satavahanas and their successors, the Ikshvakus.
- The artisans and merchants formed an important class of society due to flourishing trade and commerce.
 - Merchants took pride in naming themselves after the towns to which they belonged.
 - Among the artisans, the Gandhikas (perfumers) are mentioned as donors and later the term came to be used for all kinds of shopkeepers. The title 'Gandhi' is derived from this ancient term Gandhika.
- It was customary for their king to be named after his mother, (Gautamiputra and Vashishthiputra) which indicates that the women occupied an important position in the society.

Satavahana Architecture

In the Satavahana phase, many temples called chaityas and monasteries called viharas were cut out of the solid rock in the northwestern Deccan or Maharashtra with great precision and patience.

- The Karle chaitya is the most famous in western Deccan.
- The three viharas at Nasik carry inscriptions of Nahapana and Gautamiputra.
- The most important stupas of this period are Amravati and Nagarjunakonda. The Amaravati stupa is full of sculptures that depict the various scenes from the life of the Buddha. The Nagarjunakonda stupa contains Buddhist monuments and also the earliest Brahmanical brick temples.

The Decline of the Satavahanas

- Pulamavi IV is considered the last king of the main Satavahana line.
- He ruled until 225 AD. After his death, the empire fragmented into five smaller kingdoms.