

CC-1/GE-1: HISTORY OF INDIA FROM EARLIEST TIMES UP TO 300 CE

VIII & X. THE SATAVAHANAS PHASE: ASPECTS OF POLITICAL HISTORY, MATERIAL CULTURE, ADMINISTRATION, RELIGION

The most important of the native successors of the Mauryas in the north were the Shungas followed by the Knavas. 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. The use of the iron ploughshare, paddy transplantation, the growth of urbanisation, writing etc. created conditions for state formation under the Satavahanas. The early Satavahana kings ruled not only in Andhra but in north Maharashtra where their earliest coins and inscriptions have been found establishing power in the upper Godavari valley, which currently produces rich and diverse crops in Maharashtra. Gradually the Satavahanas extended their power over Karnataka and Andhra.

According to some Puranas, the Andhras ruled for 300 years with their capital at Pratishtana (modern Paithan) on the Godavari in Aurangabad district.

The First ruler of Satavahana dynasty, Simuka was the immediate successor of Ashoka. He built many Buddhist and Jain temples. Simuka's successor was his younger brother Kanha (Krishna) who extended the Kingdom upto Nasik in the west. The third King Sri Satakarni I was Simuka's son. He conquered western Malwa, Anupa (the Narmada valley) and Vidarbha (Berar). He performed some Vedic sacrifices including asvamedha and rajasuya and gave away to officiating priests large sums and thousands of cows and horses.

The Satavahanas suffered a temporary eclipse when the foreigners invaded the empire from all directions.

Their greatest competitors were the Sakas, who had established power in the upper Deccan and Western India. At one stage the Satavahanas were disposed from their dominions by the Sakas in Maharashtra and Western India.

The fortunes of the family were restored by Gautamiputra Satakarni (CE 106-30). He defeated the Sakas 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 bears the marks of having been re-struck 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.

Gautamiputra Satakarni's achievements are described and eulogised after his death, during his son Pulumayi II's reign, in a Nasik inscription of his mother Gautami Balasri.

The successors of Gautamiputra ruled till CE 220. The coins and inscriptions of his immediate successor Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (130-154 CE) have been found in Andhra and show that by the end of the second century this area has become a part of the Satavahana kingdom. He set up his capital at Paithan or Prathisthan on the Godavari in the Aurangabad district. The Sakas resumed their conflict with the Satavahanas for the possession of the Konkan and Malwa. Rudradaman I the Saka ruler of Saurashtra defeated the Satavahanas twice, but did not destroy them because of shared matrimonial relations.

Yajna Sri Satakarni was the last greatest king of the Satavahana dynasty, and recovered north Konkan and Malwa from the Saka rulers. He was a patron of trade and navigation, and his coins appeared not only in Andhra but also in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujrat. His enthusiasm for navigation and overseas trade is demonstrated by the representation of a ship on his coins.

The successors of Yajna Sri Satakarni were unable to retain the Satavahana kingdom which was destroyed by 220 CE.

POLITY AND ADMINISTRATION

The Satavahana king was represented as the upholder of dharma and he generally strove for royal and divine ideal set forth by the Dharmashashtra. In order to attribute divinity to kingship, most kings were represented as possessors of supernatural powers and of qualities of mythical heroes such Rama, Arjuna, Bhima etc. The Satavahanas retained some of the administrative unit of the Ashokan times. The kingdom was divided in aharas or rashtras meaning districts. There were also officers called amatyas/ mahamatras who were perhaps ministers or advisors of the king.

We notice certain military and feudal traits in the administration of the Satavahanas. It is significant that the senapati was appointed provincial governor. As the tribal people in the Deccan were not thoroughly Brahmanized and reconciled to the new rule, it was necessary to keep them under strong military control. The administration in the rural areas was placed in the hands of a gaulmika, the head of a military regiment consisting 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 village 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.

MATERIAL CULTURE

As the Satavahanas acted as a bridge between North and South India, similarly their material culture was a fusion of both local Deccan elements as well as northern ingredients. Through contacts with the north, the people of Deccan learnt the use of coins, burnt bricks, ringwells, the art of writing, and so on. There was regular use of fire-baked bricks and the use of flat, perforated roof tiles which must have aided in the longevity of the construction. For instance, in Karimnagar, as many 22 brick walls have been discovered. The drains were covered and were also underground to lead waste water into soakage pits. They were also fairly acquainted with the use of iron and agriculture. They probably exploited the rich mineral resources of Deccan such as iron ores from Karimnagar and Warangal and gold from Kolar fields. Unlike the gold coins of the Kushanas, they mostly issued lead coins (which they probably imported from the Romans) apart from copper and bronze coins. The Deccan developed a very advanced rural economy. The people knew about the art of paddy transplantation and especially the area on the confluence of the rivers Krishna and Godavari formed a great rice bowl. The Satavahanas also produced cotton and in different foreign accounts, Andhra was famous for its cotton products.

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.

However, the Satavahana rulers promoted Buddhism by granting land to the monks. Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati in AP became important seats of Buddhist culture under the Satavahanas.

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 skills and patients. The two common religious constructions were the Buddhist temple which was called chaitya and monastery which was called vihara. The most famous chaitya is that of Karle in western Deccan.

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 is full of sculptures that depict various scenes from the life of the Buddha.

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