

## The Satavahana Phase

### 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. The Puranas speak only of Andhra rule and not of Satavahana rule, and the name Andhra does not figure in Satavahana inscriptions. Pre-Satavahana settlements are indicated by the finds of red ware, black-and-red ware, and russet-coated painted ware at many sites in the Deccan. Most of these are associated with the iron using megalith builders who were stimulated to new activity by contacts with the material culture from the north. The use of the iron ploughshare, paddy transplantation, the growth of urbanism, writing, etc., created conditions for state formation under the Satavahanas. According to some Puranas, the Andhras ruled altogether for 300 years although this period is assigned to the rule of the Satavahana dynasty. The earliest inscriptions of the Satavahanas relate to the first century BC, when they defeated the Kanvas and established power in parts of central India. The early Satavahana kings ruled not 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. Their greatest competitors were the Shakas, who had established power in the upper Deccan and western India. At one stage the Satavahanas were dispossessed of their dominions by the Shakas in Maharashtra 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 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.

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 Pratishthan 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. His enthusiasm for navigation and overseas trade is demonstrated by the representation of a ship on his coins.

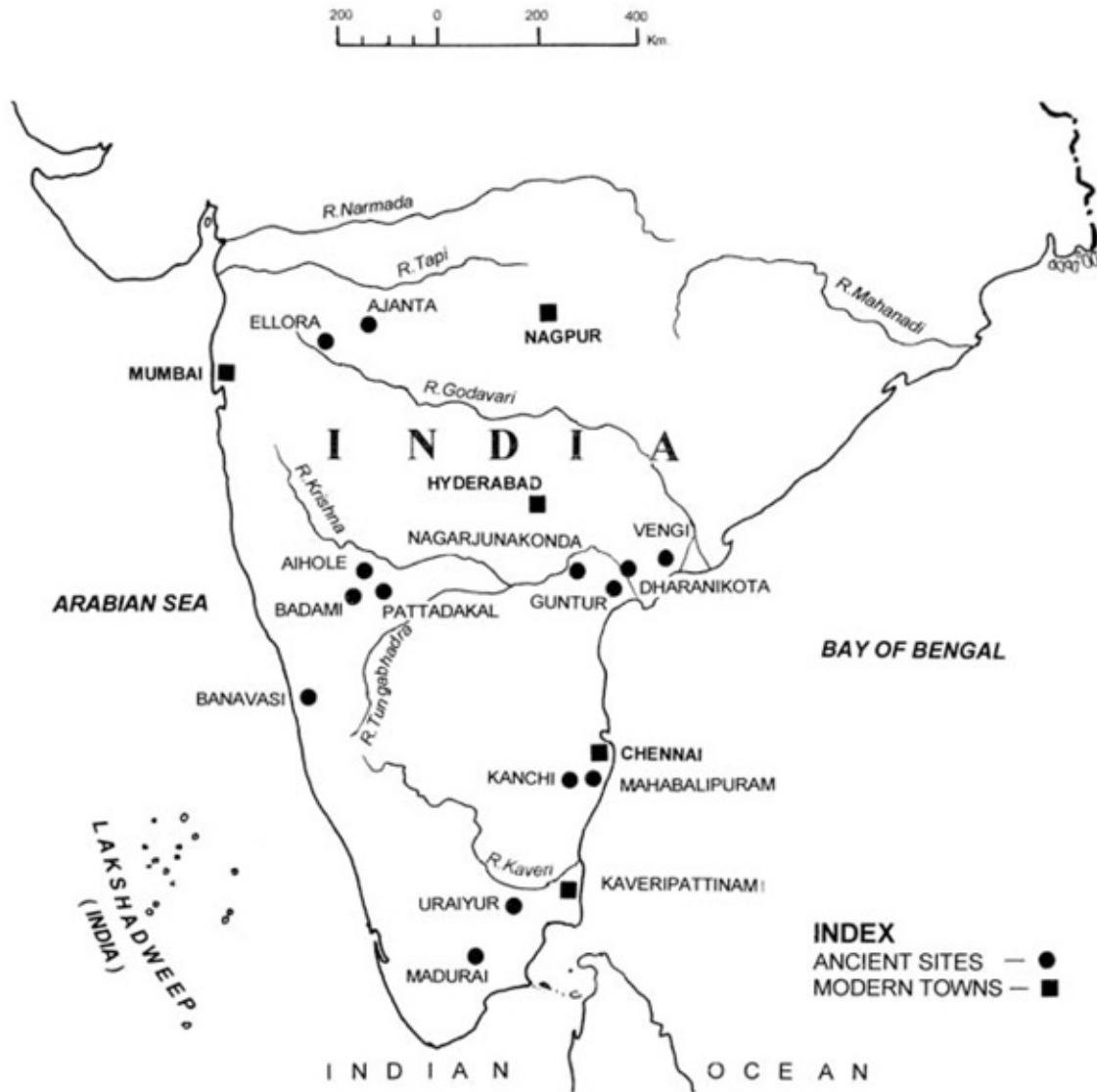
The successors of Yajna Sri Satakarni were unable to retain the Satavahana kingdom which was destroyed by AD 220.

## 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. Although prior to c. 200 BC we find some iron hoes, the number of such tools increased substantially in the first two or three centuries of the Christian era. We do not notice much change in the form of hoes from the megalithic to the Satavahana phase, except that the hoes in the latter were fully and properly socketed. Besides socketed hoes, sickles, spades, ploughshares, axes, adzes, razors, etc., relate to the Satavahana layers of the excavated sites. Tanged and socketed arrowheads as well as daggers have also been discovered. 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. By and large they issued coins of lead which is found in the Deccan. They also issued potin, copper, and bronze money. The Ikshvakus, who succeeded the Satavahanas in the early third century AD in eastern Deccan, also issued coins. Both the Satavahanas and Ikshvakus seem to have exploited the mineral resources of the Deccan.

# DECCAN AND SOUTH INDIA (A D 300–750)



MAP 8 Deccan and South India. *Courtesy ASI*

The people of the Deccan were aware of the art of paddy transplantation, and in the first two centuries of the Christian era, the area between the Krishna and the Godavari, especially at the mouths of the two rivers, formed a great rice bowl. The people of the Deccan also produced cotton. In foreign accounts, Andhra is considered to be famous for its cotton products. Thus, a substantial part of the Deccan developed a very advanced rural economy. According to Pliny, the Andhra kingdom maintained an army of 100,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry and 1000 elephants. This presupposes a large rural population, and apparently the peasants produced enough to support this military strength.

Through contacts with the north, the people of the Deccan learnt the use of coins, burnt bricks, ring wells, the art of writing, and the like. These components of material life became quite important in the Deccan. 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. All this must have contributed to the longevity of constructions. It is remarkable that as many as twenty-two brick wells belonging to the second century have been discovered at Peddabankur. These naturally facilitated dense habitation. The site also shows covered underground drains to channel waste water into soakage pits. Towns developed in Maharashtra by the first century BC when we find several crafts, but in eastern Deccan they developed a century later. Pliny informs us that the Andhra country in eastern Deccan included thirty walled towns, besides numerous villages. Several towns of the second and third centuries in this area are known from inscriptions and excavations. Increasing trade is indicated by numerous Roman and Satavahana coins which appeared about a century later in eastern Deccan in the Godavari–Krishna area.

## 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. He boasted that he had put an end to the intermixture between the people of different social orders. Such confusion was probably caused by the Shaka infiltration and by the superficial brahmanization of the tribes living in the Deccan. The absorption of the Shakas in brahmanical society as kshatriyas was facilitated by intermarriage between the Shakas and the Satavahanas. Similarly, the indigenous tribal people were increasingly acculturated by the Buddhist monks who were induced by land grants to settle in western Deccan. It is suggested that traders too supported the Buddhist monks, for the earliest caves seem to have been located on the trade routes. The Satavahanas were also the first rulers to make land grants to brahmanas, although we find more instances of such grants being made to Buddhist monks.

According to the Dharmashastras, it was the function of the kshatriyas to rule, but the Satavahana rulers called themselves brahmanas. Gautamiputra boasted that he was the true brahmana. As the Andhras are identified with the early Satavahanas, they were probably a local tribe that was brahmanized. The orthodox brahmanas of the north viewed the Andhras as a mixed caste which would appear to indicate that the Andhras were a tribal people brought within the fold of brahmanical society as a mixed caste.

Increasing craft and commerce during this period brought many merchants and artisans to the fore. Merchants took pride in naming themselves after the towns to which they belonged, and both artisans and merchants made generous donations to the Buddhist cause and set up small memorial tablets. 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.

The most interesting detail about the Satavahanas relates to their family structure. In the Aryan society of north India, the father enjoyed greater importance than the mother, and the north Indian princes generally belonged to a patriarchal society. The Satavahanas however show traces of a matrilineal social structure. 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. Sometimes an inscription is issued both under the authority of the king and his mother. At present in peninsular India, the son's name includes a part of the father's name, and there is no place in it for the mother's, indicative of patriarchal influence. Queens made important religious gifts in their own right, and some of them acted as regents. However, the Satavahana ruling family was basically patriarchal because succession to the

throne passed to the male member.

## Pattern of Administration

The Satavahana rulers strove for the royal ideal set forth in the Dharmashastras. The king was represented as the upholder of dharma, and to him were assigned new divine attributes. The Satavahana king is represented as possessing the qualities of mythical heroes such as Rama, Bhima, Keshava, and Arjuna, and is compared in prowess and lustre to these legendary figures and to supernatural forces. This was evidently meant to attribute divinity to the Satavahana king.

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. However, their administrative divisions were also called *rashtra*, and their high officials were styled *maharashtrikas*.

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 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 *skandhavana* 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 cultivated fields and villages granted to them were declared free from intrusion by royal policemen, soldiers, and other royal officers. These areas therefore became small independent islands within the Satavahana kingdom. Possibly the Buddhist monks also preached peace and spelt out rules of good conduct to the people among whom they lived, and taught them to respect political authority and social order. The brahmanas, of course, helped enforce the rules of the varna system which promoted social stability.

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.

However, the Satavahana rulers promoted Buddhism by granting land to the monks. In their kingdom, the Mahayana form of Buddhism commanded a considerable following, especially amongst the artisan class. 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. In fact, the process had started about a century earlier in about 200 BC. 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, but it seems to have been finally re-touched much later, possibly after the sixth century.

## Chronology

(BC)

1 M

Karimnagar and Warangal districts (Deccan) show indications of iron working in the megalithic phase.

200

*Chaityas* and monasteries began to be built in northwestern Deccan. The Amaravati stupa began to be built.

200–AD 200

Regular use of fire-baked bricks and flat perforated roof tiles in Karimnagar district.

Pre-Christian centuries

Gold workings in Kolar fields.

and later

1 C

The earliest Satavahana inscriptions. Development of towns in Maharashtra.

(AD)

1–2 C

*Viharas* at Nasik with inscriptions of Nahapana and Gautamiputra Satakarni. Paddy transplantation in the Deccan.

106–30

Date of Gautamiputra Satakarni.

130–50

Date of Rudradaman I.

130–54

Date of Vashishthiputra Pulumayi.

165–94

Date of Yajna Sri Satakarni, the last great king of the Satavahana dynasty.

2 C

Twenty-two brick wells in Peddabankur in Karimnagar district. Reconstruction of Amaravati stupa.

2–3 C

Coins are known from inscriptions and excavations. Nagarjunakonda prospered most under the Ikshvakus, the successors of the Satavahanas.

220

End of the Satavahana kingdom.

3 C

Increasing trade is indicated by numerous Roman and Satavahana coins in the Deccan.

Post-6 C

Prakrit *Gathasattasai*, or *Gathasaptasati*, finalized.