



Satavahana Dynasty and Culture

For Prelims: [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#), [Inscriptions](#), [Gautamiputra Satakarni](#), [Mahayana Buddhism](#), [Karle Chaitya](#), [Nasik Viharas](#), [Amaravati Stupa](#), Coins.

For Mains: Contribution of Satavahana dynasty in polity, economy, inscriptions, religious patronage, and cultural sphere.

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

The [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) has documented **11 ancient inscriptions** in Peddapalli, Telangana belonging to the **Satavahana dynasty**.

- Written in Brahmi script and Prakrit language, these **1st BCE-6th CE inscriptions** offer key insights into the **Satavahana era** and early **Deccan** politics and culture.
- The inscriptions confirm **Telangana** as part of **Asmaka**, one of the sixteen [Mahājanapadas](#), highlighting its historic role and early ties to major **dynasties**.

What are the Key Facts Regarding the Satavahana Dynasty?

- **About:** The Satavahanas (1st century BC to the early 3rd century AD) succeeded the **Mauryas** in the **Deccan** and **central India**, with early rule centered in **north Maharashtra** (upper **Godavari valley**) and later expanding to **Karnataka** and **Andhra**.
 - They are identified with the **Andhras** mentioned in the Puranas, though inscriptions do not use this name.

Satavahans



▪ Important Rulers:

Ruler	Reign Period	Key Achievements
Simuka	60 BC- 37 BC	Founder of the Satavahana dynasty and is mentioned as the first king in a list of royals in a Satavahana at Naneghat inscription .
Gautamiputra Satakarni	AD 106-130	Regarded as the greatest Satavahana ruler .
		Defeated the Shakas and destroyed the Kshaharata lineage (ruled by Nahapana).
		The empire extended from Malwa in the north to Karnataka in the south.
		Coins of Nahapana (Kshaharata ruler) were re-struck by Gautamiputra, symbolizing conquest.

Vashishthiputra Pulumayi	AD 130-154	Shifted capital to Paithan (Pratishthan) on the Godavari.
		Brought Andhra into the Satavahana fold. Rudradaman (Western Kshatrapas dynasty) fought many wars with the Satavahanas, but to stop the conflict, Vashishtiputra Satakarni , son of King Pulumavi , married Rudradaman's daughter.
Yajna Sri Satakarni	AD 165-194	Regained lost territories in north Konkan and Malwa .
		Patron of trade and navigation ; his coins depict ships .
		His reign marked the peak of maritime trade .

- **Material Culture:** Iron tools like **hoes, ploughshares**, and **arrowheads** were widespread, with smelting sites in **Karimnagar** and **Warangal**.
- **Agriculture:** Iron tools and **paddy transplantation** boosted farming, making the **Krishna-Godavari delta** a major rice region.
 - **Cotton** production, noted by **Pliny (author of Natural History)**, was a hallmark of **Andhra**.
- **Urbanisation and Trade:** **Peddabankur** (200 BCE–200 CE) featured **brick structures, wells**, and **covered underground drainage**. **Pliny** noted 30 **walled towns** in the eastern **Deccan** (Andhra region).
 - The surge in trade is reflected in the spread of **Roman** and **Satavahana** coins in the **Krishna-Godavari** region.
- **Coins:** Coins featured **Prakrit inscriptions** and symbols like **ships with two masts, elephants** (strength), **lions** (power), **star pattern, Chaitya**, and **Dharmachakra**.
 - Coins were issued in **lead, potin (a mixture of copper, lead, and tin), copper**, and **bronze**, while **gold** was used as bullion.
- **Social Organization:** The **Satavahanas**, originally a **Deccan tribe**, became **brahmanized**, with **Gautamiputra Satakarni** re-establishing the **varna system** disrupted by **Shakas**.
 - The **Satavahana** dynasty showed **matrilineal influence**, with kings named after their mothers, but it remained **patriarchal**, with succession passing to the male heir.
 - Craft and commerce flourished, with **merchants, and artisans**, especially **gandhikas (perfumers)** donating to Buddhist causes.
- **Administration:** The **3-tier feudal system** consisted of the **Raja** (King), who could issue coins, the **Mahabhoja** (second-rank rulers), and the **Senapati** (military chiefs with local authority).
 - **Districts (Ahara or Rashtra)** governed by **Mahamatras (officials)**.
 - **Military-based governance:**
 - **Senapati (commander)** acted as **provincial governor**.
 - **Gaulmika** (military officer) maintained **rural law and order**.
 - **Military camps (Kataka, Skandhavara)** served as administrative centers.
 - The Roman historian **Pliny** noted that the **Andhra kingdom (Satavahanas)** had a **large army** with infantry, cavalry, and elephants, reflecting their military strength.
- **Religion:** The **Satavahana rulers**, as **Brahmanas**, promoted **Brahmanism**, performing **Vedic sacrifices** like **ashvamedha** and **vajapeya**, and worshipping **Vaishnava gods** such as **Krishna** and **Vasudeva**.
 - The **Satavahanas** supported **Buddhism**, granting land to monks in **Nagarjunakonda** and **Amaravati**, where **Mahayana Buddhism** thrived.
 - The **Satavahanas** were the **first to grant land to Brahmanas**, but they granted land more often to **Buddhist monks**.
- **Architecture:** The **Satavahanas** are known for their **rock-cut architecture**, with notable examples like the **Karle Chaitya** and **Nasik Viharas**.
 - The **Amaravati Stupa** was reconstructed during the Satavahana period, featuring intricate sculptures of the **Buddha's life**.
 - The **Satavahanas patronised Buddhist art and architecture**, as seen in the **Ajanta Caves 9 and 10**, and actively **promoted the Amravati School of Art**, known for its intricate and narrative sculptures.
 - Inscriptions from **Naneghat in Maharashtra** highlight the dynasty's **religious patronage**, particularly towards Buddhism, mentioning **tax exemptions** on lands granted to Buddhist monks.
 - **Nagarjunakonda** prospered most in the **second-third centuries** under the patronage of

the **Ikshvakus**, the **successors of the Satavahanas**.

- **Language:** The **official language** of the Satavahanas was **Prakrit**, and their inscriptions were written in the **Brahmi script**.
 - **Gathasattasai (Gathasaptasati)**, a **Prakrit text** attributed to **King Hala**, is an important literary work from this period, containing **700 verses**.
- **Decline:** The dynasty declined around the **3rd century AD**, and was **succeeded by the Ikshvakus** in eastern Deccan, who continued several Satavahana traditions, especially in Buddhist patronage.
 - Later, the **Pallavas** rose to prominence in the southern region.

Conclusion

The discovery of **Satavahana inscriptions** in **Telangana** provides valuable insights into the dynasty's **political, religious, and cultural** impact. The **Satavahanas**, renowned for their **military strength**, support for **Buddhism**, and **matrilineal influences**, significantly contributed to the development of **trade, urbanization**, and the shaping of early **Deccan history**. After their decline, the **Ikshvakus** emerged as their successors in the eastern Deccan, continuing many of their **administrative and cultural traditions**, especially the patronage of Buddhism.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Examine the socio-political structure of the Satavahana dynasty, focusing on their administration, military system, and feudal relationships.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Who among the following rulers advised his subjects through this inscription? (2020)

“Whosoever praises his religious sect or blames other sects out of excessive devotion to his own sect, with the view of glorifying his own sect, he rather injures his own sect very severely.”

- (a) Ashoka
- (b) Samudragupta
- (c) Harshavardhana
- (d) Krishanadeva Raya

Ans: (a)

Q. In which of the following relief sculpture inscriptions is ‘Ranyo Ashoka’ (King Ashoka) mentioned along with the stone portrait of Ashoka? (2019)

- (a) Kanganahalli
- (b) Sanchi
- (c) Shahbazgarhi
- (d) Sohgaure

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q. Discuss the Tandava dance as recorded in the early Indian inscriptions. (2013)

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