



# Satavahana Kingdom: Origins And Cultural Heritage In Karnataka, South India

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to the **Satavahanas** kingdom ruled over a vast region of Maharashtra, Andhra and **Karnataka**, Parithan. Maharashtra was the capital of the **Satavahanas**. According to one theory, the word "Satavahana" (Brahmi : □□□□□□ *Sādavāhana* or *Sātavāhana*, IAST: *Sātavāhana*) is a Prakrit form of the Sanskrit *Sapta-Vahana* ("driven by seven"; in Hindu mythology, the chariot of the sun god is drawn by seven horses). This would indicate that the Satavahanas originally claimed association with the legendary solar dynasty, as was common in ancient India. According to Inguva Kartikeya Sarma, the dynasty's name is derived from the words *sata* ("sharpened", "nimble" or "swift") and *vahana* ("vehicle"); the expression thus means "one who rides a nimble horse". Another theory connects their name to the earlier Satiyaputa dynasty. Yet another theory derives their name from the Munda words *Sadam* ("horse") and *Harpan* ("son"), implying "son of the performer of a horse sacrifice". Several rulers of the dynasty bear the name or title "Satakarni". Satavahana, Satakarni, Satakani and Shalivahana appear to be variations of the same word. Damodar Dharmanand Kosambi theorised that the word "Satakarni" is derived from the Munda words *sada* ("horse") and *kon* ("son"). Tamil epic *Silappatikaram* mentions a "Nurruvar Kannar", who helped Chera king Senguttuvan during his Himalaya campaign. The direct translation of the term Nurruvar Kannar is "the hundred Karnas" or "Satakarni", hence the Nurruvar Kannar has been identified with the Satavahana dynasty. The Kathasaritsagara ascribes a mythical etymology in which a widowed, childless king named Deepakarni was prophecied to find a lion-riding child as his heir. During a jungle hunt, he found such a child riding a yaksha-turned-lion named Sāta. After adoption, the child became the king eventually and came to be known as Sātavāhana or Sāta-supported.

The Satavahanas patronised the Prakrit language instead of Sanskrit. The Satavahana king Hāla is famous for compiling the collection of Maharashtri poems known as the Gaha Sattasai (Sanskrit: *Gāthā Saptashatī*), although from linguistic evidence it seems that the work now extant must have been re-edited in the succeeding century or two. Through this book, it was evident that agriculture was the main means of livelihood. Also many sorts of superstitions had prevailed. Additionally, Gunadhya, the minister of Hala, was the author of Brihatkatha.

Key words: Satavahana Kingdom, Prakrit, Satakarni, cultural heritage

## Introduction

The Satavahanas (Sādavāhana or Sātavāhana, IAST: Sātavāhana), also referred to as the Andhras in the Puranas, were an ancient Indian dynasty based in the Deccan region. Most modern scholars believe that the Satavahana rule began in the late second century BCE and lasted until the early third century CE, although some assign the beginning of their rule to as early as the 3rd century BCE based on the Puranas, but uncorroborated by archaeological evidence. The Satavahana kingdom mainly comprised the present-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra. At different times, their rule extended to parts of modern Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka. The dynasty had different capital cities at different times, including Pratishthana (Paithan) and Amaravati (Dharanikota).

The origin of the dynasty is uncertain, but according to the Puranas, their first king overthrew the Kanva dynasty. In the post-Maurya era, the Satavahanas established peace in the Deccan region and resisted the onslaught of foreign invaders. In particular their struggles with the Saka Western Satraps went on for a long time. The dynasty reached its zenith under the rule of Gautamiputra Satakarni and his successor Vasisthiputra Pulamavi. The kingdom fragmented into smaller states by the early 3rd century CE.

The Satavahanas were early issuers of Indian state coinage struck with images of their rulers. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade and the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India. They supported Hinduism as well as Buddhism and patronised Prakrit literature.

Madhukar Keshav Dhavalikar writes that "The Satavahana sculptures unfortunately has never been recognized as an independent school in spite of the fact it has its own distinctive characteristic features. The earliest in point of time is that in the Bhaja Vihara cave which marks the beginning of sculptural art in the Satavahana dominion around 200BC. It is profusely decorated with carvings, and even pillars have a lotus capital crowned with sphinx-like mythic animals." Dhavalikar also writes that in Chankama "the panel occurring on the west pillar of Northern Gateway portrays a very important event in Buddha's life. It depicts votaries, two each on either side of what looks like a ladder which actually is the promenade which Buddha is supposed to have walked. It is said that Buddha, after attaining Enlightenment, spent four weeks near the Bodhi tree. Of these, the third week he spent walking along the promenade (chankama) to and fro."

Along with some of the above major Satavahana sculptures some more sculptures existed—namely, Dvarapala, Gajalaksmi, Shalabhanjikas, Royal Procession, Decorative pillar, etc. The Puranas use the name "Andhra" for the Satavahanas. The term "Andhra" may refer to the ethnicity or territory of the dynasty (see Original homeland below). It does not appear in the dynasty's own records.

In ancient times the areas south of the Godavari river including southern districts of modern Maharashtra, northern districts of modern Karnataka and south Karnataka districts of Shimoga and Chitradurga were collectively called Kuntala. An inscriptional passage the upper valley of the Krishna points to this theory. In the Sanskrit work Udayasundarikatha of Soddhala (11th cent. A.D.) Pratishthana on the Godavari is said to be the capital of the Kuntala country. In early times Kuntala was probably included in the larger country called Maharashtra. The Aihole inscription of Pulakeshi II includes all these areas mentioned in Kuntala as Maharashtra. This designation of the entire area seems to be confirmed in Chinese notes as well. During these times, Kuntala came to denote the predominantly Kannada-speaking country, further corroborating views of historians such as Dr. Altekar and Dr. P.B. Desai. The Early Chalukyas of Badami and the Later Chalukyas of Kalyani were known as Kuntalashvaras or lords of Kuntala. All their inscriptions are in Kannada and Sanskrit and their regal

capitals at different times, Badami, Manyakheta (Malkhed in Gulbarga district) and Kalyani were also in present day Karnataka, which historically would be southern Kuntala. During these times however, the districts of Kolhapur, Satara, Sholapur, Ahmadnagar and Bid which are now Marathi-speaking, were included in Kuntala, indicating that Kannada country spread much further north of today's political boundaries. The Kannada classic Kavirajamarga calls the entire region between the Godavari and Kaveri rivers as Karnataka indicating Kannada country at one time extended far north and east of present day boundaries. Perhaps this was the region that embraced Hale Kannada as the official language. It is well known that during these times, Kannada and Telugu were written in Hale Kannada script. The Early Rashtrakuta, who were ruling over this territory as feudatory of the Chalukyas, were known as Kuntaleshvaras as well and their inscriptions call their overlords at that time as Karnataka Bala. Much later their imperial empire would rule large parts of India from regal capital Manyakheta in present day Karnataka, though as their empire grew they had many provincial capitals. Their oldest inscription is found in Satara district of Maharashtra belonging to 6th century. In it Rashtrakuta king Avidheya has donated a village to learned Brahmins. The inscription is in Sanskrit written in Brahmi script. This has confirmed their origin at above place generally called Kuntala. From above theories it is clear that the ancient regional names such as Kuntala, Karnata or Maharashtra may have covered large common areas in the Deccan at different times in Indian history

### Objective:

This paper intends to explore and analyze **Satavahana Dynasty** an ancient Indian Dynasty based in the Deccan; Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra. The dynasty's inscriptions and coins, and foreign (Greek and Roman) accounts that focus on trade. Also multiple theories about the Satavahana chronology.

### Satavahanas: the origins

The Satavahanas were the political successors of the Mauryas in the Deccan and their rule lasted for four and a half centuries from about 230 B.C. their empire seems to have extended from the Konkan Coast in the West to the Godavari and Krishna Deltas in the East, while to the South it must have reached as far as Chandravalli. We can see this claim comes only with reference to Puranas. Those who claim Satavahana as Andhra's cite the Puranas as the only source. Let us see the various Puranas.

1. No where in the Puranas Satavahana's is mentioned.

2. No where we have any references to Satavahana kings.

- Matsya Purana: Sisuka Vishnu Purana: Sivraka
- Vayu Purana: Sindhuka Bhagvatha Purana: Vrsola Bali (i.e. Strong Sudra)
- Brahmanda Purana: Chismaka
- All this is supposedly to refer to King Simuka who established Satavahana dynasty.
- All Purana's refer second king as Krishna
- Third is given as
- Matsya: Sri-Mallakarni Vayu, Brahmanda, And Vishnu: Sri Satakarni
- Bhagvatha: Sri-Santakarna

### Names in Matsya Purana

1.Sisuka (Chimuka)-23 years, 2.Krishna-18 yrs, 3.Sri Mallakarni (Satakarni I)-10yrs, 4.Purnotsanga-18 yrs, 5.Skandhastambhi-18 yrs, 6.Satakarni (Satakarni II)-56 yrs, 7.Lambodara-18 yrs, 8.Apilaka-12 yrs, Meghasvati-18yrs, 9.Svati-18 yrs, 10.Skanasvati 7 yrs, 11.Mrgendra Svatikarna-3yrs, 12.Kuntala Svatikarna 8 yrs, 13.Svatikarna-1 yr, 14.Pulumavi (Pulumavi I)-36 yrs, 15.Riktavarna-25 yrs, 16.Hala-5 yrs, 17.Mandalaka-5 yrs, 18.Purindrasena-5 yrs, 19.Sundara Satakarna-1 yr, 20.Chakora Svatikarna-6 months,21.Sivasvati-28 yrs,22.Gautamiputra Satakarni-21 yrs,23.Pulumavi(Pulumavi II)28 yrs,24.Sivasri-7 yrs,25.Sivaskanda Satakarni-7 yrs,26.Yajnasri Satakarni-29 yrs,27.Vijaya-6 yrs,28.Chandasri Satakarna-10 yrs, and 29.Pulumavi(Pulumavi III).

### Coins and inscriptions

Chimuka, Krishna, Satakarni I, Satakarni II, Sata, Apilaka, Hala, Gautamiputra Satakarni, Vasistiputra Sri Pulumavi, Vasistiputra Sivasri Satakarni, Vasistiputra Satakarni, Sivasri Pulumavi, Skanda Satakarni, Gautamiputra Yajna Satakarni, Vijaya Satakarni, Vasistiputra Chandra Satakarni, Pulumavi, Kausikiputra Satakarni, Saka Satakarni, Rudra Satakarni, Kumba Satakarni and Karna Satakarni.

Puranas were written between 300AD to 1000AD. A difference of around 500 years, significant time for discrepancies to creep in. which is why it misses out on many names and many characteristics of Satavahana's. The reason why they were Andhra's has crept in.

Some writers like V.S. Sukthankar, H. C. Raychaudhury and K. P. Jayaswal have not accepted the identification of Satavahanas with the Andhras.They have argued that the inscriptions mention these rulers as Satavahanas and not as Andhra's, and that the language of the inscriptions is Prakrit and not Andhra. Moreover, the early evidences of the Satavahanas rule are not found in Maharashtra, and they might only have drifted into Andhradesa towards the end of their rule.

Some of these kings are not listed in the Puranas. It may be relevant to note that except for Chimuka no other Satavahana king called himself as Satavahana. Most others called themselves as Satakarnis or Pulumavis after their great early rulers of that name. No purana ever mentioned a king by the name as Satavahana or Sadavahana.

**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 Shakas 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 Shakas, 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 Vasisthiputra Sri Pulamavi/Pulumavi or Pulamavi II. (Alternatively spelt Pulumayi.)

1. Contemporary inscriptions at Hathigumpha (150BC) referred to them as **Satavahanas**

2. Line four of Hathigumpha inscription refer him as Satakamni

3. Epigraph of Visitthiputta Ananda of (1st Century BC) refer him as Satakani

4. Nasik Inscription of (1st century BC) refer him as Sadakani

5. Nanghat inscription refer Satakani

6. Coins issued by Satavahanas refer as Satakani, Satakamni

Vahana and kanni means same that is son, so we can reasonably assume sata as dynastic name. It means Sata's Son, only in purana's you can see Andhra Tag that is also not to the same names. So we can clearly see Satavahana's are not Andhra's.

1. Satavahan's have their capital in Paithan. The ancient city of Pratisthan now Paithan was the seat of Satvahana dynasty who ruled from 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD. This is in ancient Kuntala (Karnataka country) and not Andhra.

2. Chutu's (another line of Satkarnis) occupied most of the western Karnataka with a capital at Vijayantipura (Banwasi). Even though one more line of Satakarni's ruled Andhra, but Chutu's are called Kannada rulers.

3. Kuntala Satakarni denotes the king is from Kuntala not Andhra.

4. Satavahanas never called themselves Andhra's

5. Sukthankar held the view that Bellary district was the original home of the Satavahanas

6. Satavahan's were more interested in western region than in eastern Andhra region showing they were not from the region. So Satavahan's are of Kuntala and Kannada origin not Andhra Origin

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.

## Conclusion

Amongst the small states and chieftaincies that emerged in the Central India and Deccan in the wake of the decline of the Mauryan and Sungan empire, the Satavahanas emerged as a powerful power in about first century BC. It replaced the local/Kanva rulers in the Narmada Valley, local rulers at Tripuri, local 'bhadrā' and 'mitra' rulers in Vidarbha, local 'bhadrā' and 'gopa' rulers at Kotalingala (Telangana) and so on and established a powerful empire. At other places in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra, there existed many other ruling dynasties like the Kuras, Sidakanas, Ananadas, Kumaras, Sadas, Hathis etc., who were contemporaries of the Satavahanas initially and were later annexed to the Satavahana Empire. 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 display traces of a matrilineal social structure. There were also certain military and feudal traits in their administration. Their kingdom had three grades of feudatories. The Satavahana rulers were brahmanas, and they represented the march of triumphant Brahmanism. All their inscriptions were composed in Prakrit and written in the Brahmi script.

Most of the historical information about these dynasties are obtained from the coins issued by them. An important characteristic of the coins of the Satavahanas, their predecessors, contemporaries and feudatories is that they were predominantly issued in cheaper metals like copper, bronze, lead etc. Only from the time of a ruler named Vasisthiputra Pulumavi (first-second century AD), the Satavahana rulers also issued coins in silver. Another distinguishing feature of their coinage is that for different areas under their control.

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