

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Satavahana - Post Mauryan Period [Ancient Indian History Notes for UPSC]

The Sunga dynasty came to an end in around 73 BC when their ruler Devabhuti was killed by Vasudeva Kanva. The Kanva 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 “Satvahana” 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 the Hindu mythology.

Origin & Development of Satvahana dynasty

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

Kanvas (73 BC – 28 BC)

- As per the Puranas, there were four kings of the Kanva dynasty namely, Vasudeva, Bhumimitra, Narayana and Susarman.
- The Kanvas were Brahmins.
- The Magadha Empire had diminished by this time considerably.
- Northwest region was under the Greeks and parts of the Gangetic plains were under different rulers.
- The last Kanva king Susarman was killed by the Satavahana (Andhra) king.

Cheti Dynasty

- The Cheti or Chedi dynasty emerged in Kalinga in the 1st century BC.
- The Hathigumpha inscription situated near Bhubaneswar gives information about it.
- This inscription was engraved by king Kharavela who was the third Cheti king.
- Kharavela was a follower of Jainism.
- Other names of this dynasty are Cheta or Chetavamsa, and Mahameghavahana. [/su_box]

Satavahanas

- The Satavahana rule is believed to have started around the third century BC, in 235 BC and lasted until the second century AD.
- Some experts believe their rule started in the first century BC only.
- They are referred to as Andhras in the Puranas.

- The Satavahana kingdom chiefly comprised of modern-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra. At times, their rule also included parts of Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh.
- Their capital cities varied at different times. Pratishthana (Paithan) and Amaravati were its capitals.
- Simuka founded the dynasty.
- They were the first native Indian rulers to issue their own coins with the portraits of the rulers. This practice was started by Gautamiputra Satakarni who derived the practice from the Western Satraps after defeating them.
- The coin legends were in Prakrit language. Some reverse coin legends are in Telugu, Tamil and Kannada.
- They patronised Prakrit more than Sanskrit.
- They supported both Buddhism and Brahminism although they were Hindus and claimed Brahminical status.
- They successfully defended their territories against foreign invaders and had many on-going battles with the Sakas (Western Satraps).



Important Rulers of the Satvahana dynasty

Satakarni I (180 – 124 BC)

- Satakarni I was the third Satavahana king.
- 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 was Nayanika who wrote the Naneghat inscription which describes the king as Dakshinapathapati.
- He performed Ashvamedha and revived Vedic Brahminism 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 Gunadhya composed Brihatkatha.

Gautamiputra Satakarni (106 – 130 AD or 86 – 110 AD)

- He is considered the greatest king of the Satavahana dynasty.
- He defeated the Greeks, Pahlavas (Indo-Parthians) and the Sakas.
- 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.
- He defeated Nahapana, an important king of the Western Satraps.
- He is also called Ekabrahmana.
- His mother was Gautami Balasri and hence his name Gautamiputra (son of Gautami).
- He was succeeded by his son Vasisthiputra Sri Pulamavi or Pulamavi II.

Administration of the Satvahana dynasty

The administration of the Satvahana dynasty was entirely based on the Shastras which has the following structure:

1. Rajan or the king who is 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 Satakrni threw some light on the bureaucratic structure of administration. However, clarity on the detailed structure is still awaited by historians.

Economy

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

Religion & Language

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

The Language used during that period was "Prakrit" which is a modern version of the Indo-Aryan Language. Political inscriptions also threw some light on the rare use of Sanskrit Literature.

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.