

Sātavāhanas : Date, Origin, and Early Rulers

- The history of the *dakṣiṇāpatha*, after its conquest by Aśoka, remains shrouded in mystery for a long time.
- A major part of the northern *dakṣiṇāpatha* continued to remain under the political influence of the successors of Aśoka, and the Śuṅgas after them, till the rise of the Sātavāhanas, called Andhras or Andhrabṛityas in literature.
- There is a suggestion that Andhra might have been the lineage of these rulers, and that the ruling family was named Sātavāhana, after the eponymous founder, King Sātavāhana.

Date

- The rule of the Sātavāhana dynasty came to an end *c* 225 AD.
- According to the *Matsyapurāṇa*, the Sātavāhanas ruled for 460 years.
- If this information be accepted, the Sātavāhanas would have started ruling around 235 BC.
- But that was the time of Aśoka and his successors.
- According to the puranic tradition, the Mauryas ruled for 137 years, the Śuṅgas, for 112 years, and the Kāṇvas for 45 years.
- According to the puranic tradition, Simuka established the rule of the Sātavāhanas by ousting Suśarman, the last Kāṇva ruler.
- This would imply that Simuka brought the rule of the Kāṇvas to an end, (137+112+45 =) 294 years after 324 BC (the initial year of Maurya rule), that is *c* 30 BC.
- The Sātavāhanas would, thus, have started ruling some time around the middle of the first century BC.

Origin

- The *Aitareyabrāhmaṇa* refers to the Andhras as dasyus, and Indian tradition refers to Simuka as *vṛishala*.
- However, in the Nasik cave inscription of year 19 of Vāsishṭhīputra Pulumāvi, Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi is referred to as *eka brāhmaṇa*, that is the 'unique brāhmaṇa'.
- According to the *Dvātriṃśatputtalikā*, the Sālivāhana (= Sātavāhana) were of mixed brāhmaṇa and Nāga lineage.
- This would, perhaps, explain the claim of brāhmaṇahood for Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi in the Nasik cave inscription, and the reluctance of the orthodox brāhmaṇas to grant brāhmaṇa status to the Sātavāhanas.

Original Home

- According to Indian tradition, and the information provided by Ptolemy, the Sātavāhanas are known to have ruled from Pratishṭhāna (modern Paithan, on the Godavari, near Aurangabad in Maharashtra).

- The epigraphic records and coins of the early Sātavāhana rulers, too, were, for a long time, known only from northern Maharashtra, and from Vidiśā in Malwa.
- On this basis, it was suggested that their original home was situated somewhere in northern Maharashtra or central *dakṣiṇāpatha*.
- However, the use of the terms, Andhra or Andhrabṛitya, for the Sātavāhanas in literature, led to the suggestion that they originally hailed from Andhradeśa.
- The recent discovery of the coins of some early rulers of the dynasty, like Simuka, from places like Karimnagar in Andhra Pradesh, has been cited as evidence in support of this view.

Early Rulers

- The rule of the Sātavāhana dynasty appears to have been established by Simuka, who, according to the purāṇas, ‘violently extirpated’ the Kāṇva ruler, Suśarman, and destroyed the remaining power of the Śuṅgas.
- He seems to have conquered the territories around Vidiśā from the later Śuṅgas.
- But there is no evidence to show that he wrested Magadha, or any other part of northern India, from the Śuṅgas or the Kāṇvas.
- In all likelihood, Simuka exercised authority over parts of the *dakṣiṇāpatha* and central India.
- He might also have captured some parts of western India, from the Indo-Greeks, or from the Śuṅgas or Kāṇvas.
- According to the purāṇas, the next ruler of the dynasty was Kṛiṣṇa, the brother of Simuka, who ruled for 18 years.
- He is also known from an inscription from Nasik, which records the excavation of a cave, for the use of Buddhist monks, by one of his high officials.
- The findspot of his inscription would show that, during his rule, the Sātavāhana dominions extended as far west as Nasik.
- The purāṇas refer to Sātakarṇi I, the successor of Kṛiṣṇa, as a son of the latter.
- However, on the basis of the absence of the figure of Kṛiṣṇa, between those of Simuka and Sātakarṇi I, at Naneghat, some scholars have concluded that Sātakarṇi I might have been a son of Simuka himself.
- Epigraphic and numismatic evidence seems to suggest that Sātakarṇi I ruled over a considerable part of northern *dakṣiṇāpatha*, and parts of central and western India.
- Northern Konkan and Saurashtra were, perhaps, within the sphere of his political influence.
- He married Nāganikā, who belonged to the powerful Mahārāṭhī family, and was, perhaps, a daughter of Mahārāṭhī Tranakayiro Kalalāya of the Aṃgiya or Ambhiya family.
- This matrimonial alliance might have helped him in his subsequent career.
- This Nāganikā is known from her Naneghat inscription and some silver coins bearing her name along with that of her husband.

- Sātakarṇi I appears to have performed a number of vedic sacrifices, including two *aśvamedhas*.
- It seems that, at the time of his death, his sons, Vediśrī and Śaktiśrī, were minors.
- His widow, Nāganikā, administered the Sātavāhana kingdom as a regent for some time.
- This is, however, not acceptable to V V Mirashi.

Eclipse of Sātavāhana Power after Sātakarṇi I

- In the period of about a century, intervening between the close of the reign of Sātakarṇi I and the accession of Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi, the power of the Sātavāhanas was eclipsed, perhaps due to the rise of the Western Kshatrapas.
- In this period, the different lists of Sātavāhana rulers, found in the various purāṇas, mention 10, 12, 13, 14, and even 19 rulers.
- This confusion was, perhaps, the result of some purāṇas including in their lists, not only the rulers of the main branch of the Sātavāhana, but also those of the collateral branches.
- Among these rulers, mention may be made of Sātakarṇi II, Āpīlaka, Kuntala Sātakarṇi, and Hāla.