

APPSC GROUP-I MAINS — STUDY NOTES

SATAVAHANAS

Administration & Contributions | Deccan Power • Amaravati • Trade • AP Heritage

Paper II — History, Culture & Geography | Day 12 (11 Apr 2026)

SECTION 1: SUMMARISED NOTES

1.1 Origin & Political History

The Satavahanas (also called Andhras in Puranic literature) were the first major dynasty to rule the Deccan after the Mauryan decline. They dominated from c. 1st century BCE to 3rd century CE, ruling from Maharashtra to eastern Andhra. Their capital shifted between Pratishthana (Paithan, Maharashtra) and Dhanyakataka/Amaravati (AP). They are THE most important dynasty for APPSC because they represent AP's state formation and cultural golden age.

- **Simuka:** Founder (c. 60 BCE per some chronologies). Established Satavahana power by defeating the Kanva dynasty (Shungas' successors in Magadha). Jain patron.
- **Satakarni I:** Performed two Ashvamedha (horse sacrifice) yajnas, asserting Vedic Brahmanical sovereignty. Conquered western Malwa. His wife Nayanika's Nanaghat inscription (Maharashtra) records his achievements and is one of the earliest known inscriptions of a queen.
- **Gautamiputra Satakarni (106–130 CE):** The GREATEST Satavahana ruler. Called 'Ekabrahmana' (peerless Brahmin) in the Nasik inscription by his mother Gautami Balashri. Described as the 'destroyer of Shakas, Yavanas (Greeks), and Pahlavas (Parthians)' — recovered territories lost to Western Kshatrapas (Shakas). Restored Satavahana glory. Established Brahmanical social order while patronising Buddhism. Controlled territory from Nashik to Krishna-Godavari delta.
- **Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (130–154 CE):** Son of Gautamiputra. Lost western territories to Shaka ruler Rudradaman I (who defeated him twice, per Junagadh inscription). But maintained control over eastern Deccan (AP). Amaravati stupa expanded during his reign. Coins found in AP and as far as Southeast Asia (indicating maritime trade).
- **Yajna Sri Satakarni (174–203 CE):** Last great Satavahana ruler. Recovered some western territories. Known for extensive maritime trade — ships depicted on his coins. After him, the dynasty fragmented into local successors, including the Ikshvakus in AP.

1.2 Administration

- **Central Administration:** King was the head. Used metonymic titles (Gautamiputra = son of Gautami, Vashishthiputra = son of Vashishthi) — indicating matrilineal naming convention (though society was patriarchal). Amatyas (ministers) assisted. Senapati (commander) and Mahasenapati titles found.
- **Provincial:** Empire divided into Aharas (districts), governed by Amatyas or Mahabhojas. Rashtrikas (provincial governors) mentioned in inscriptions.

- **Local:** Village administration through Gaulmika (military commanders of small units) and Gramika (village heads). Trade guilds (Nigamas/Srenis) had significant self-governing authority.
- **Feudatory System:** The Satavahanas used feudatory rulers extensively: Maharathis, Mahabhojas, and Mahasenapatis governed semi-autonomously. This decentralised system was a precursor to later feudalism in Indian polity.
- **Revenue:** Land tax was the primary revenue. The king donated tax-free villages (agrahara) to Brahmins and tax-free lands to Buddhist monasteries — both attested in numerous inscriptions. Trade taxes were collected at markets and ports.

1.3 Economy & Trade

The Satavahana period witnessed a trade boom connecting India with Rome and Southeast Asia:

- **Internal Trade:** Connected the Deccan with the Gangetic plain and western coast. Towns like Tagara (Ter, Maharashtra), Pratishthana, Dhanyakataka, Banavasi flourished. Guilds (Srenis) of weavers, potters, oil pressers, and metal workers were powerful economic and social institutions.
- **Roman Trade:** The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st century CE Greek text) lists Satavahana ports: Sopara, Kalyan, Bharuch (west coast) and Machilipatnam/Masulipatnam (east coast, AP). Exports to Rome: spices (pepper, cardamom), muslin, ivory, precious stones, pearls, iron (Indian 'Wootz' steel). Imports from Rome: gold coins, wine, olive oil, coral, glass. Roman gold coins found extensively in the Deccan and AP.
- **Maritime:** Yajna Sri Satakarni's coins depict ships, indicating state interest in maritime commerce. East coast ports (AP) connected to Southeast Asia — early Indianisation of SE Asia began during this period.
- **Coinage:** Satavahanas issued: lead coins (unique), copper coins, and some silver coins. Bilingual legends (Prakrit + Tamil on some southern coins). Roman coins (gold denarii/aurei) circulated alongside Satavahana coins.

1.4 Society & Culture

- **Varna System:** Satavahanas upheld the four-varna system. Gautamiputra Satakarni is praised for preventing varna-sankara (inter-caste mixing). But Brahmins and merchants were the privileged classes.
- **Women:** Metronymic naming (Gautamiputra, Vashishthiputra) suggests mothers' importance. Nayanika's Nanaghat inscription shows queens played public roles. But society was patriarchal.
- **Religion:** Uniquely, Satavahanas were Brahmanical (performed Vedic yajnas like Ashvamedha, Rajasuya) while simultaneously patronising Buddhism. Buddhist stupas at Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, and Goli (all in AP) flourished under Satavahana patronage. This dual patronage is a distinctive Satavahana characteristic.
- **Language:** Official language: Prakrit. Used Brahmi script. Satavahana inscriptions are among the most important epigraphic sources for early Deccan history. Hala (17th Satavahana king) compiled the Gathasaptashati (Gaha Sattasai) — 700 Prakrit verses, one of the earliest anthologies of love poetry.

1.5 Art & Architecture — AP's Buddhist Heritage

1.5.1 Amaravati Stupa (Krishna District, AP)

One of the largest and most ornate stupas in the ancient world. Originally an Ashokan foundation (3rd century BCE), expanded massively by the Satavahanas (2nd–3rd century CE). Diameter ~50 metres. Encased in exquisite marble/limestone sculptural panels depicting: Jataka tales, Buddha's life events, daily life scenes, and decorative motifs (lotus, animals, celestial beings). The Amaravati school of sculpture is distinct from both Gandhara (Greek-influenced) and Mathura (red sandstone) — it uses white/green marble with dynamic, flowing narrative compositions. Many Amaravati sculptures were removed to the British Museum (London) and Chennai Government Museum in the 19th century, creating a repatriation debate.

1.5.2 Other Buddhist Sites in AP

- **Nagarjunakonda (Guntur):** Ikshvaku dynasty capital (3rd–4th century CE, Satavahana successors). Extensive Buddhist remains: stupas, monasteries, chaityas, university, amphitheatre. Named after philosopher Nagarjuna. Partially submerged under Nagarjuna Sagar dam — key artefacts preserved on an island museum.
- **Jaggayyapeta (Krishna):** Early Buddhist stupa with distinctive sculptural style. Satavahana period. Important for studying evolution of Buddhist art.
- **Goli (Guntur):** Buddhist stupa. Satavahana period sculptures.
- **Salihundam (Srikakulam):** Buddhist complex with stupas and monasteries (2nd century BCE – 6th century CE). Northeast AP's most significant Buddhist site.
- **Bhattiprolu (Guntur):** Buddhist stupa. Contains a variant Brahmi script (Bhattiprolu script) — considered by some scholars as the ancestor of Southeast Asian scripts (Pallava-Grantha family). Significant for AP's cultural influence on SE Asia.
- **Ghantasala (Krishna):** Ancient port + Buddhist stupa. Identified with 'Kantakasola' mentioned in early texts. Trade and religion together.

1.6 Satavahana Legacy for AP

The Satavahanas are AP's civilisational anchor:

- **State Formation:** They created the first Deccan-wide political entity, integrating what is now AP into a pan-regional state. AP's political identity begins with the Satavahanas.
- **Buddhist Heritage:** The concentration of Buddhist sites in AP (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, Salihundam, Ghantasala) is a direct Satavahana legacy — making AP one of the richest Buddhist heritage regions in Asia.
- **Maritime Trade:** AP's east coast ports (Machilipatnam/Masulipatnam) connected the Deccan to Rome and SE Asia. AP's maritime trading tradition dates to the Satavahana period.
- **Cultural Influence:** Bhattiprolu script's possible link to SE Asian scripts suggests AP's cultural influence extended to Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia during the Satavahana period. The Indianisation of SE Asia has AP roots.

SECTION 2: KEY DIMENSIONS TO COVER

Examiner angles.

1. **Key Rulers:** Simuka (founder), Satakarni I (Ashvamedha, Nanaghat), Gautamiputra Satakarni (greatest — destroyer of Shakas, Nasik inscription), Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (Amaravati, defeated by Rudradaman), Yajna Sri (maritime, ship coins). KNOW ALL 5.
2. **Administration:** Metronymic titles. Aharas (districts). Feudatory system (Maharathis, Mahabhojas). Guilds (Srenis). Land grants (agrahara). Decentralised governance.
3. **Trade:** Roman trade (Periplus). Ports: Machilipatnam (AP), Bharuch, Sopara. Exports: spices, muslin, ivory. Imports: Roman gold. Maritime (Yajna Sri ships on coins).
4. **Art:** Amaravati stupa (marble, narrative, distinct school). Nagarjunakonda (Ikshvaku). Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, Salihundam, Ghantasala. AP = one of Asia's richest Buddhist heritage regions.
5. **Religion:** Dual patronage: Brahmanical (Ashvamedha, varna, Ekabrahmana) + Buddhist (Amaravati, monasteries). Unique synthesis.
6. **Literature:** Prakrit language. Brahmi script. Hala's Gathasaptashati (700 Prakrit love poems). Nasik/Nanaghat inscriptions.
7. **Shaka Rivalry:** Gautamiputra destroyed Shakas; Vashishthiputra defeated by Rudradaman. Ongoing Satavahana-Western Kshatrapa conflict shaped western Deccan.
8. **AP Connection:** State formation + Buddhist sites + maritime trade + cultural export (Bhattiprolu → SE Asia scripts). MOST important dynasty for APPSC.

SECTION 3: PRELIMS MUST-REMEMBER FACTS

Crisp.

1. Satavahanas: Also called 'Andhras' in Puranas. Deccan dynasty. c. 1st century BCE – 3rd century CE. Capitals: Pratishthana (Paithan) + Dhanyakataka/Amaravati (AP).
2. Simuka: Founder. Defeated Kanva dynasty. Jain patron.
3. Satakarni I: Performed 2 Ashvamedha yajnas. Nanaghat inscription (Queen Nayanika). Vedic Brahmanical assertions.
4. Gautamiputra Satakarni (106–130 CE): GREATEST. Nasik inscription: 'Ekabrahmana,' 'destroyer of Shakas, Yavanas, Pahlavas.' Mother: Gautami Balashri. Restored Satavahana power.
5. Vashishthiputra Pulumayi (130–154 CE): Expanded Amaravati stupa. Defeated twice by Rudradaman I (Shaka). Coins found in SE Asia = maritime trade.
6. Yajna Sri Satakarni (174–203 CE): Last great ruler. Ships on coins = maritime trade interest. Recovered some western territories.
7. Metronymic titles: Gautamiputra = son of Gautami. Vashishthiputra = son of Vashishthi. Mother's name used (matrilineal naming convention).
8. Administration: Aharas (districts). Feudatories: Maharathis, Mahabhojas. Guilds (Srenis/Nigamas) = self-governing. Land grants (agrahara) to Brahmins.
9. Language: Prakrit (official). Brahmi script. Hala (17th king): Gathasaptashati (Gaha Sattasai) = 700 Prakrit love poems. Earliest Prakrit literary anthology.
10. Religion: DUAL patronage = Brahmanical (Ashvamedha, varna) + Buddhist (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda stupas). Unique characteristic.
11. Amaravati Stupa: Krishna district, AP. Ashokan foundation, expanded by Satavahanas. ~50m diameter. White/green marble. Narrative sculptures. Distinct from Gandhara + Mathura.
12. Amaravati sculptures: Many in British Museum (London) + Chennai Govt Museum. Repatriation debate ongoing.
13. Nagarjunakonda: Guntur, AP. Ikshvaku dynasty (Satavahana successors). Buddhist university. Partially submerged (Nagarjuna Sagar dam). Island museum.
14. Bhattiprolu: Guntur, AP. Buddhist stupa. Variant Brahmi script — possibly ancestor of SE Asian scripts (Pallava-Grantha family). AP's cultural export.
15. Other AP Buddhist sites: Jaggayyapeta (Krishna), Goli (Guntur), Salihundam (Srikakulam), Ghantasala (Krishna — port + stupa).
16. Roman Trade: Periplus (1st CE Greek text). AP port: Machilipatnam. Exports: spices, muslin, ivory, precious stones. Imports: Roman gold coins, wine, coral, glass.
17. Lead coins: Satavahanas issued lead coins (unique in Indian numismatics). Also copper + some silver. Bilingual (Prakrit + Tamil) on southern coins.
18. Satavahana-Shaka rivalry: Gautamiputra defeated Shakas. Rudradaman I (Shaka) defeated Vashishthiputra twice (Junagadh inscription). Ongoing western Deccan contest.
19. Ikshvakus: Satavahana successors in eastern Deccan (AP). Nagarjunakonda was their capital. Patronised Buddhism. 3rd–4th century CE.

SECTION 4: MAINS MUST-WRITE POINTS

Each = paragraph.

- 1. AP's Founding Dynasty:** The Satavahanas are to AP what the Mauryas are to Magadha — the founding political entity. By creating the first Deccan-wide state, they gave AP its political identity. The concentration of Satavahana-era Buddhist sites (Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Bhattiprolu, Salihundam, Ghantasala) makes AP one of the richest Buddhist heritage regions in Asia. Dhanyakataka (Amaravati) as the Satavahana capital places AP at the centre — not the periphery — of ancient Indian civilization. Every APPSC aspirant should understand that AP's history does not begin with the Kakatiyas or Vijayanagara — it begins with the Satavahanas.
- 2. Amaravati — AP's Angkor Wat:** The Amaravati stupa was one of the largest and most artistically accomplished Buddhist monuments in the ancient world. Its marble narrative panels — depicting Jataka tales, Buddha's life, and daily life with dynamic, flowing compositions — constitute a distinct sculptural school (Amaravati school), different from both Gandhara (Greek-influenced) and Mathura (red sandstone). The tragic dispersal of Amaravati's sculptures to the British Museum and Chennai Government Museum in the 19th century represents one of India's greatest cultural losses. Amaravati's Buddhist heritage, combined with Nagarjunakonda and Bhattiprolu, gives AP a Buddhist tourism potential comparable to Sri Lanka or Myanmar.
- 3. Dual Patronage — When Kings Served Both Vedas and Buddha:** The Satavahanas' simultaneous patronage of Brahmanical religion (Ashvamedha sacrifices, upholding varna, Ekabrahmana title) and Buddhism (building/expanding stupas, donating to monasteries) is a uniquely Indian civilisational synthesis. This was not contradiction but pragmatism: Brahmanical rituals legitimised royal authority while Buddhist institutions served public welfare and trade-network connectivity. This dual patronage model — in which the king supports multiple religious traditions simultaneously — is a forerunner of India's constitutional secularism (equal respect for all religions, not separation of church and state).
- 4. Maritime Trade — When AP Connected India to Rome and SE Asia:** Satavahana-era AP was a maritime powerhouse. Machilipatnam (Masulipatnam) was a major port connecting the Deccan with Rome (via the Indian Ocean) and Southeast Asia. Roman gold coins found in AP archaeological sites attest to this trade's volume. Yajna Sri Satakarni's ship-motif coins show state investment in maritime commerce. The Bhattiprolu script's possible connection to Southeast Asian scripts suggests that AP's cultural influence (Buddhism, writing systems, Indianisation) travelled along these same trade routes to Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. AP's modern port development (Krishnapatnam, Kakinada, Ramayapatnam) echoes this ancient maritime heritage.

SECTION 5: VALUE ADDITION

4 dimensions.

🔗 Interlinkages

- **Maurya (Day 6) → Satavahana:** Satavahanas emerged from the Mauryan provincial structure (Dakshinapatha province). Suvarnagiri's Mauryan administration provided the institutional foundation for Satavahana state-building.
- **Shakas (Day 10) ↔ Satavahanas:** Gautamiputra defeated Shakas; Rudradaman defeated Pulumayi. This rivalry shaped western Deccan politics for centuries.
- **Buddhism (Day 5) → Satavahana Art:** Satavahana Buddhist patronage created Amaravati school — distinct from Gandhara and Mathura. The art tradition reflects AP's unique cultural position.
- **Satavahana → Modern AP:** Maritime trade (Machilipatnam) → modern port development. Buddhist heritage → tourism potential. Prakrit literature → Telugu literary tradition. State formation → AP's identity.

🗂️ Current Affairs

- **Amaravati Capital City:** AP's new capital Amaravati (near the ancient Satavahana site) explicitly invokes this historical heritage. The name connects modern AP to its civilisational roots.
- **Buddhist Tourism:** AP promoting Buddhist heritage tourism: Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Salihundam. Potential to attract international visitors from Japan, S. Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka.
- **Sculpture Repatriation:** Ongoing debate about returning Amaravati marbles from British Museum. Part of global decolonisation discourse (Elgin Marbles, Benin Bronzes).

🕒 Way Forward

- **UNESCO Status:** Amaravati stupa site should be nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status. Would boost conservation funding and tourism.
- **Buddhist Circuit Integration:** AP's Buddhist sites should be integrated into the national Buddhist Tourism Circuit (Lumbini–Bodh Gaya–Sarnath–Kushinagar–Amaravati). International connectivity via Vijayawada/Vizag airports.

SECTION 6: QUICK REVISION BOX

Glance.

▶ Satavahanas = 'Andhras' in Puranas; Deccan dynasty	▶ Capitals: Pratishthana (Paithan) + Dhanyakataka (Amaravati, AP)
▶ Simuka: Founder; Satakarni I: 2 Ashvamedha; Nanaghat	▶ Gautamiputra: GREATEST; Nasik; 'destroyer of Shakas'
▶ Pulumayi: Amaravati expanded; defeated by Rudradaman	▶ Yajna Sri: Last great; ships on coins; maritime trade
▶ Metronymic titles: Gautamiputra = son of Gautami	▶ Admin: Aharas (districts); feudatories; guilds (Srenis)
▶ Dual religion: Brahmanical (Ashvamedha) + Buddhist (Amaravati)	▶ Hala: Gathasaptashati (700 Prakrit love poems)
▶ Amaravati: Marble stupa; distinct school; AP's crown jewel	▶ Nagarjunakonda: Ikshvaku; island museum; Guntur
▶ Bhattiprolu: Script → possible SE Asian script ancestor	▶ AP ports: Machilipatnam; Roman trade; spices/gold
▶ Lead coins (unique); Prakrit + Tamil bilingual (south)	▶ Roman gold coins found extensively in AP + Deccan

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDED SOURCES

Refer.

Source	What to Read	Why
R.S. Sharma — India's Ancient Past	Ch. 21–24: Satavahanas, Deccan, trade	Exam-oriented; administration + trade details
NCERT Class XII — Themes in Indian History	Ch. 2 & 4: Kings and Cultural developments	Trade routes, Amaravati, coins
NCERT Class XI — Indian Art	Amaravati school chapter	Sculptural tradition; distinct from Gandhara/Mathura
Upinder Singh — Ancient & Early Medieval India	Ch. 12–14: Satavahanas, Deccan polities	Academic depth; epigraphic + numismatic evidence