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Political relations between the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas

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Abstract

Satavahana's or Shaliwahana's dynasty has played an important role in the history of South India, when fortunes of Indian culture were flourished. Satavahana dynasty has contributed a great deal for enriching Indian culture. Arun Bhattacharjee has rightly observed that "It was the Satavahanas who were the first to build up an empires and political unity in south India for three long centuries. They left behind a political and cultural legacy. The Andhra Satavahanas ruled for four centuries and a half in the Deccan. During their rule they came into contact with their neighbouring kingdoms, the prominent of which was that of the Western Kshatrapas. During the Indo-Parthian rule, the Satraps or Governors were appointed to rule over various areas conquered by them. One of those satrapal seats was Malwa and Saurashtra. The chronology of the Satavahanas and the early phase of the Kshatrapa rule have been controversial. The Kshatrapa rule includes that of the Kshaharatas like Bhumaka and Nahapana and of the Kardanaka family from Chashtana onwards. Of the Kshaharatas, Bhumaka was the first ruler. From the paleography of his coin legends, he is regarded as the predecessor of Nahapana; but the actual relationship between the two is not known. The coins of Bhumaka mention him as a Kshaharata Kshatrapa. The coins show the symbol of the Lion-capital. These coins were found in Gujarat and rarely in Malwa which might indicate the area of rule of Bhumaka. The figure of the thunder-bolt appearing on Nahapana's coins resembles that of the Mathura Kshatrapas. It is also known that some of the inscriptions of the Mathura Kshatrapas were incised on a lion capital.

Keywords: Satavahana, kshatrapa, political relations, Andhra, Malwa

Introduction

Satavahana's or Shaliwahana's dynasty has played an important role in the history of South India, when fortunes of Indian culture were flourished. Satavahana dynasty has contributed a great deal for enriching Indian culture. Arun Bhattacharjee has rightly observed that "It was the Satavahanas who were the first to build up an empires and political unity in south India for three long centuries. They left behind a political and cultural legacy. It was they who having extirpated the foreign rules of the Sakas, Pahlavas and Yavanas, saved the purity of Indian cultures from the hands of foreign tormentors." The role, relevance and efficiency of Satavahanas dynasty lies in their cultural contribution. The cultural contribution of Satavahanas is the focal point of this study. Further it has been observed that "The capital Pratisthan was the focal point of Indian culture and civilization. In Ptolemy's geography and Gunadhya's Brihatkatha are recorded the contribution of Pratisthan to the culture, religion, art and literature of India." Pratisthan or Paithan has also revealed remains of Indian cultural heritage. Satavahana or Andhra Empire was a royal Indian dynasty based from Dharanikota and Amaravathi in Andhra Pradesh as well as Junnar (Pune) and Prathisthan (Paithan) in Maharashtra. The territory of the empire covered much of India from 230 BCE onward. Although there is some controversy about when the dynasty came to an end, the most liberal estimates suggest that it lasted about 450 years, until around 220 CE. The Satavahanas are credited for establishing peace in the country, resisting the onslaught of foreigners after the decline of Mauryan Empire. Satavahanas started out as feudatories to the Mauryan dynasty, but declared independence with its decline. They are known for their patronage of Hinduism and Buddhism which resulted in Buddhist monuments from Ellora (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to Amaravathi. The Satavahanas were one of the first Indian states to issue coins struck with their rulers embossed. They formed a cultural bridge and played a vital role in trade as well as the transfer of ideas and culture to and from the Indo-Gangetic Plain to the southern tip of India. They had to compete with the Sungas and then the Kanvas of Magadha to establish their rule.

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Later, they played a crucial role to protect a huge part of India against foreign invaders like the Sakas, Yavanas and Pahlavas. In particular their struggles with the Western Kshatrapas went on for a long time. The great rulers of the Satavahana Dynasty Gautamiputra Satakarni and Sri Yajna Satakarni were able to defeat the foreign invaders like the Western Kshatrapas and stop their expansion. In the 3rd century CE the empire was split into smaller states and later on it disintegrated. Satavahanas ruled for a long time and when they were at the peak of power they were catholic and tolerant rulers. Bhandarkar is of the view that the names Gopala, Vasudeva, Vishnupalita occurring in the epigraphs of the period indicate the development of Vaishnavism in this period." Thus the Satavahana rulers were followers of Vaishnav religion, but during their reign Buddhist art and architecture had flourished a great deal. All round development in art, architecture and literature was recorded and the period witnessed peace and glory in different walks of life. Satavahana's were the first solid and strong dynasty of south India. The Satavahanas ruled for more than four centuries and provided peace and glory towards the history of Deccan, while there were uncertainty and instability in south India. R.C. Majumdar and others have observed that "The southern potentate who put an end to the rule of the Sungas and the Kanvas is described in the Puranas as an Andhra a name applied to the people of the Telugu speaking tract at the mouth of the Godavari and the Krishna." In Puranas this dynasty is referred as Andhrabhrati. Some scholars ascribe them to Andhras and the others to Kanadas. It has been observed that "In contemporary epigraphic records, however, kings of this line are invariably referred to as Satavahana and a district of the Satavahanas has been proved to lie in the neighborhood of Bellary in the Kanarese area of the Madras Presidency." However the historical records and archaeological remains prove that the origin home of Satavahanas was Pratisthan or Modern Paithan in Marathwada region of Maharashtra, which was earlier up to 1948 in Hyderabad state. It has been further observed that "The memory of the dynasty lingers in the story of the king Salivahana famous in Indian folk lore. This legendary hero seems to have appropriated to himself the glorious deeds of several distinguished members of a long line of emperors of the Deccan. Among all the factors cultural contribution was mostly significant. Satavahanas contributed a great deal in the field of art, literature, and culture. They not only ruled south India but also they ruled entire sub-continent and which was vast geographical and cultural expression. Pratisthan or Paithan was a capital of this dynasty and it was epi-centre of socio economic and cultural change, which continued for more than three hundred years. Hermann Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund have noted that the central Indian empires of the Satavahanas dynasty showed a much greater continuity and stability. The Purana texts even maintain that the dynasty ruled for 460 years, but these texts do not always provide reliable historical evidence. Scholars feel difficult to search antecedents of this dynasty which belong to the great central India.

The Satavahana - Western Kshtrapa Relations

The Andhra Satavahanas ruled for four centuries and a half in the Deccan. During their rule they came into contact with their neighbouring kingdoms, the prominent of which was that of the Western Kshatrapas. During the Indo-Parthian rule, the Satraps or Governors were appointed to rule over

various areas conquered by them. One of those satrapal seats was Malwa and Saurashtra. The chronology of the Satavahanas and the early phase of the Kshatrapa rule have been controversial. The Kshatrapa rule includes that of the Kshaharatas like Bhumaka and Nahapana and of the Kardanraka family from Chashtana onwards. Of the Kshaharatas, Bhumaka was the first ruler. From the paleography of his coin legends, he is regarded as the predecessor of Nahapana; but the actual relationship between the two is not known. The coins of Bhumaka mention him as a Kshaharata Kshatrapa. The coins show the symbol of the Lion-capital. These coins were found in Gujarat and rarely in Malwa which might indicate the area of rule of Bhumaka. The figure of the thunder-bolt appearing on Nahapana's coins resembles that of the Mathura Kshatrapas. It is also known that some of the inscriptions of the Mathura Kshatrapas were incised on a lion capital. These show that the two families were alike. There are scholars who conclude from these resemblances that the Kshatrapa Kshaharatas were originally subordinates of the Mathura Kshatrapas and that they declared themselves independent after the death of the great Mathura Kshatrapa Rajula in 17 A.D.

Nahapana succeeded Bhumaka on the western Kshatrapa throne. During his rule, the kingdom seems to have been extended, as is known from the inscriptions. An inscription at Nasik refers to the gifts given by Ushavadata, the son-in-law of Nahapana at places like Govardhana, Sopara, Dasapura, and Prabhasa. Barulachhgh and Pushkara. Nahapana's inscriptions were discovered at Nasik, Karle and Junnar. These taken together show that in the north Nahapana's empire extended up to Rajasthan and in the south to Maharashtra.

The Periplus of the Erythrean Sea composed in 60 A.D records the hegemony of Nahapana in this area and refers to the trade activity of Western India with the Red Sea ports, which was grabbed by Nahapana after defeating the Satavahana rivals probably Sundara Satakarni and Chakora Satakarni, The Satavahana ports like Kalyani and Sopara lost their commercial importance to Barygaza.

In the inscriptions, mention of Nahapana's years 41-46 was made. There has been a controversy with regard to the era to which these years should be assigned. Scholars like R.G. Bhandarkar, D.R. Bhandarkar, Prof. Rapson, Roy Chowdhuri, D.C. Circar and V.D. Mirashi assign them to the Saka era. Another set of scholars like Cunningham, V.S. Bakhle, K.A.N. Sastry and G.V. Rao think that they were dated in the Vikrama era. But the difficulty in these two propositions is that Nahapana would be placed either in the 2nd century A.D. or in the 1st century B.C. respectively, both of which are improbable in view of evidence of the Periplus. The evidence of the Periplus leading to a 1st century A.D. date for Nahapana has to be accepted. The difficulties in the assignment of Nahapana's years to one of the two eras have been exposed by scholars like R.D. Banerji, A.S. Altekar etc. Taking these years as the regnal years of Nahapana, these scholars placed him in the second half of the 1st century A.D. There is also a belief that these years could be the independent years of rule of the Kshaharatas in Malwa and Saurashtra, probably when there was weak succession on the Mathura Kshatrapa throne. Anyway Nahapana's rule cannot be extended beyond 60 or 70 A.D. because at the time when Periplus was writing, Nahapana's power was at its zenith. Likely that the years

referred to in the inscriptions could be equivalent to 60 or 70 A.D.

Nahapana's rule was put to an end by Gautamiputra Satakarni, the first of the later Satavahanas. His main credit was the destruction of Kshaharata power and the restoration of the fortunes of the Satavahana family. The Nasik Prasasti issued in his son's reign gives a good description of the achievements of Gautamiputra over the Kshaharatas and the Sakas, Yavanas and the Pahlavas. It is not known as to whether the Scythe-Parthian who ruled until the establishment of Kushana power effectively in northern India, came to the rescue of the Kshaharatas who were definitely defeated by Gautamiputra. In addition to the achievements recorded by Gautamiputra at a later time, we have a little information from one of the inscriptions. The Nasik inscription dated in the 18th year was issued from the battle field after his success over an unnamed enemy. The same inscription also records the grant of the land to the Buddhist monks and it is stated that the land was in possession of Ushavadata earlier. From this, scholars conclude that the erstwhile Kshaharata possession went into the hands of Gautamiputra by his 18th regnal year. The list of areas mentioned in his son's inscription shows that Saurashtra, Aparanta, Malwa and parts of Rajasthan were occupied by Gautamiputra. After this victory, he seems to have restruck the coins of Nahapana as is known from the Jogelthambi hoard of coins. Gautamiputra retained all these areas during his life time. He died in circa dated 87 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Vasisthiputra Pulomavi. The latter ruled for 28 years, i.e. from 87 A.O. to 115 A.D. Till his 19th regnal year, the areas of rule under Gautamiputra must have been retained by Pulomavi, because the Nasik inscription of that year refers to Gautamiputra's areas of rule and also styles Pulomavi as 'Dakshinapatheswara'. During the last 9 years of rule, he must have lost the Malwa region to Chashtana, who was the founder of the Kardamaka line. The Kardamakas were at first sub ordinates to the Kushans. Later on they might have become independent.

According to Ptolemy, Chashtana of Ujjain was ruling the time when Pulomavi was ruling at Paithan. So the seizure of some of the Satavahana possessions must have taken place between 106 A.D. and 114 A.D. The clashes between the Kardamakas and Satavahanas continued during the rule of Siva Sri and Siva Skanda on one side and Chashtana and Jayadaman on the other. During these conflicts must have occurred the death of Jayadaman who predeceased his father Chashtana. The latter could have obtained the territory in between Malwa and Kutch including Saurashtra by about 130 A.D. The Andhra inscriptions of Chashtana issued along with his grandson Rudradaman show the western limit of the Kardamaka Empire. Meanwhile by 129 A.D., Yajna Sri Satakarni came to the Satavahana throne. During his rule, he had to contend again the power of Rudradaman who came to the throne in or after 130 A.D. In the Girnar inscription of Rudradaman, dated in the year 72 corresponding to 150 A.D., the king is said to have defeated the 'Dakshinapathapati' Satakarni and liberated because of his non-remote relationship. This ruler could have been Yajna Sri Satakarni. The Aparanta region seems to have been the arena of conflict between the two empires. Yajna Sri's defeat must have occurred after his 16th year of rule because his inscription dated in that year comes from Kanheri. The Aparanta territory thenceforth became a Kshatrapa possession after the reign of Yajna Sri, the rulers

of the Satavahana family could not regain these areas and had to be contended with parts of the Andhra area. While there had been conflicts throughout between the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas, evidence also points to one matrimonial alliance between the two families (Kardamakas and Satavahanas). This is known from an inscription at Kanheri which mentions the daughter of one Mahakshatrapa Rudradaman, who was the queen of one Vasisthiputra Satakarni. The identity of Vasisthiputra Satakarni and his relationship with Yajna Sri are problematic. Scholars like Rapson and Smith identify him with Vasisthiputra Pulomavi. This is improbable because of the contemporaneity of Vasisthiputra Pulomavi with Chashtana. It is likely that Vasisthiputra Satakarni was a successor of Pulomavi who must have had some clashes with the other Satavahana rulers for succession to the throne and who thereby must have entered into this matrimonial alliance with the Kshatrapas. This might also explain the absence of reference to his name in the Puranic list of the Andhra kings. He must have been benefitted by this alliance as an inscription at Nanaghat was issued by him in his 13th year which indicates that the Aparanta region went into the hands of Vasisthiputra Satakarni with the consent of his father-in-law Rudradaman.

Conclusion

Thus during the first and second centuries A.D., fortune favoured for a time the Kshaharatas, later the Satavahanas and afterwards the Kardamakas in the possession of Western India. There had been throughout a conflict between the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas. The areas that were conquered by Rudradaman to a large extent retained by his successors. The Satavahanas confined themselves to the Andhra region for nearly a quarter of a century more when their power eclipsed finally.

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