(a) Scope of Study:

The Andhras have left some glorious monuments which are cherished with reverence and pride by the people of the country and it will be in fitness of things if the history and religious and cultural ideals of their founders are studied in more scientific manner and in greater detail. The pre-Chalukyan history of the Andhra Desa since the disappearance of the Satavahanas is a period of fragmentary events of royal dynasties. In less than four and half centuries it saw the Ikshvakus, the Brihatphalayanas, the Salankayanias, the Ananda gotrins and the Vishnukundins rise and fall in quick succession. Of all the dynasties that ruled Andhra Desa after the fall of mighty Satavahanas except the Vishnukundins proved to the most powerful monarchs. The history of the Vishnukundins like that of the other dynasties that bore sway over our country in ancient times is not recorded in any ancient chronicle, the Puranic or the other, but it is reconstructed on the basis of information furnished by the inscriptions.

The Vishnukundins played an important part in the political cultural and art history of the Andhra Desa. The credit of placing them in the map of Indian art goes to the talented French scholar Dr. G.J. Dubreuil who first brought to the notice of the scholarly world the importance of the Vishnukundin art and especially architecture.
G. J. Dubreuil's "Ancient History of the Deccan", D.C. Sircar's "The Successors of the Satavahanas in lower Deccan"; K. Gopala- 
chari's "Early History of the Andhra Country"; B. V. Krishnarao's "Early Dynasties of Andhra Desa"; N. Venkataramanayya's "The 
Vishnukundins"; Sankaranarayanan's "The Vishnukundins and their times" are some of the works on the subject but none 
of them have attempted to bring to light the cultural achievements of the Vishnukundins, particularly their contribution 
to art and architecture, religion, language, etc., in a comparative way based on the archaeological evidences.

(b) Sources:

Excavations carried out by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Andhra Pradesh at several places, viz., Keesara-
gutta, Yeleswaram, Gollathagudi, Gummadam, Nelakondapalli, Rajahmundry etc., in the recent past brought to light the 
valuable evidences belonging to the Vishnukundin period. Therefore an attempt has been made in this study to bring out 
a full account of the dynasty, their contribution to art and architecture, religion, language, fully utilising the material 
from the excavations at Keesaragutta, Yeleswaram etc.

Besides the archaeological evidences, literary and epigraphical sources have also been consulted and utilised 
wherever necessary. Sanskrit Texts like Brhat-Samhita, Manasara, Arthasastra of Kautilya, Matsya purana, Satapatha 
Brahmana, and other Silpa Sastras have also been consulted.
Andhra forms a distinct territorial and cultural unit in our country. It has made rich contributions to the stream of Indian History. Traversed by the Eastern Ghats, watered by rivers like the Godavary, the Krishna, the Pennar and the Tungabhadra and enjoying a long maritime coast with its numerous sea port towns, Andhra has been from the earliest times a centre of great political, economic and cultural activity. Situated as it is on the highway between the Aryavarta of the north and the Dravida of the south, it has played a prominent part in the fusion of the cultures of the north and the south and in the development of the Indian culture.

The fertility of its soil, its vast mineral resources, the skill of its artisans and the adventurous spirit of its merchants have always made it one of the richest tracts of the country.

The Andhras have left some glorious monuments which are cherished with reverence and pride by the people of the country. It will be in the fitness of things if the history and religious and cultural ideals of their founders are studied in a more scientific manner and in greater detail. Our heritage, and in particular that of the Andhras are rich enough in vitality. Several scholars are devoted to historical, cultural and antiquarian research of the Andhras.
The term Andhra is of hoary antiquity. In ancient literature references abound to the Andhra people, their country and capital. The earliest reference is that in the 'Aitareya Brahmana' where the Andhras have been referred to as the descendants of Sage Visvamitra, they having been cursed by him, lived on the borders of the Aryan settlements along with the Pundras, Subaras, Pulindas and Matibas.¹

R.G. Bhandarkar is of opinion that the Pulindas and Sabaras were wild tribes living round the Vindhyas and the two rivers Narmada and Tapti.²

The epic Ramayana the present form of which must be traced to the early centuries before the Christian era refers to the Andhras as a tribe living in the South of Aryavatara and associates them with Pundras, Cholas, Pandyas and Keralas.³

The latter three kingdoms are too well known, and the Pundras were a tribe in Eastern India. Cunningham would have the Paundra-desa around the city of the Pubna while some others identified it with Burdwan. A distinction is also sought to be made between Pundra and Paundra which is unsatisfactory.⁴

We can understand the mention in the Aitareya Brahmana of Non-Aryan tribes like the Pundras and Sabaras with the Andhras as they were all living on the borders of the Aryan settlements, but there is no reason why the Pundras should be mentioned by Sugriva in his description of the Kingdoms of the South. Beginning with the famous Bandakaranya, the quest is directed through the Andhra and other kingdoms to the tracts about the Debyeshti enf.
Sahyadri and Kaveri and thence to the Malay and Tamraparni. The Pundras and their country in this connection seems to be a geographical anomaly.

The Mahabharata, according to one recension mentions the Andhras, with Pundras, Dravidas, Odras and Kalingas.\(^5\) Could it be that there was a mere jumbling up of the various kingdoms which Sahadeva conquered without reference to strict geography? Or could it be that the Pundras or a branch thereof migrated to Southern India from their abode in the east?\(^6\) The latter view appears to be more plausible as the evidence of Ramayana and Mahabharata support each other. The Mahabharata couples the Andhras and Kalingas together and the Andhras are mentioned with Odras and Kalingas as tribes living near the Northern coast.\(^6\) We can thus safely assert that the Andhras have been referred to as a South Indian tribe both in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The Mahabharata (Aranyaparvam Ch.188) further mentions that the Andhra, Saka, Pulinda, Yavana, Kambhoja, and Bahlika kings were not followers of the sacred Aryan dharmas; and this is supported by similar references to them in the Sutras of Bodhayana and the Institutes of Manu.\(^7\)

The works of Panini, Katyayana and Patanjali next come in for our consideration. The Sutras of Panini refer to the terms Kosala and Kalinga and the Aryans of his time were not fully conversant with Dakshinapatha or Deccan. Panini lived about 7th century B.C. Katyayana however refers to Pandyas, Kambhojas and Cholas and to the Mahishmati country while
Patanjali goes still further and mentions Kanchipuram and Kerala with Mahishmati and Viderbha. G. Bhandarkar concludes, referring to the Edicts of Asoka and the works of the Grammarians, that about a hundred years before Patanjali, 'the whole of the Southern peninsula up to Cape Comorin was in direct communication with the North.' But both Katyayana and Patanjali not to speak of Panini are significantly silent about the Andhras or their country.

The light thrown by classical writers and the Edicts of Asoka on contemporaneous history is immense. Megasthenes describes the Andhras as a powerful nation living in the neighbourhood of Calingae, Modogalingae, Modubae (Mutibas), and Uberae (Sabaras). He also mentions that from the mouths of Ganges, one can travel 625 miles along the coast and reach the Cape of Calingaon and the town of Dandagula. The former has been identified with the promontory of Coringa now an inland town and the latter with Dantapura, capital of Kalinga. Cunningham identifies Dantapura with Rajamahendri but this is doubtful. Pliny mentions that the Andhras possessed numerous villages, thirty cities defended by walls and towers, and supplied its king with an army of one hundred thousand infantry, two thousand cavalry, and one thousand elephants. The Andhra nation as such possessed a military force second only to that of Chandragupta Maurya. It is clear that whatever might be the political or social status of the Andhras in the days of the Brahmanas, as compared with that of the Aryans, they were a
powerful nation with a wide territory and extensive fortifications in the Mauryan period. It has also been assumed by scholars that the descriptions of Megasthenes referred only to the independent powers of his time.

The Thirteenth Rock Edict of Asoka couples the Andhras with the Bhoja-Petenikas on the one hand and with the Pulindas on the other. From the enumeration of the various people in the Edict, it would appear that the Andhras were, 'border people' living in an outlying province of Asoka's empire like the Yavanas, Kambhojas and others. A distinction is sought to be drawn by separating the word Petenikas and interpreting it as meaning the people of Paithan, but this is rejected by some scholars. Rapson in the Cambridge History takes the former view. Adopting the suggestion of E. Senart, a geographical continuity is inferred in the enumeration of the various outlying provinces. The opinion of J. Burnell that there were no Telugu Kingdoms during the days of Asoka and that the country was then inhabited by wild tribes is an error based on insufficient information and has been rightly discredited.

The dynasties of the Andhras and Andhra-bhrityas are mentioned in the Matsya, Vayu and other Puranas. The Brahmanda refers to the Andhras along with the Konkanas and Kuntalas of the South. The genealogy of the Mauryas, Sungas, Kanvas and the Andhras given in the Puranas is accepted to a great extent by historians and utilized by them in the reconstruction of the Early history of India. The Skanda Purana which is chronologically assigned to a later date mentions that the Andhras were...
one of the five people residing south of the Vidhyas but
draws a distinction between the Andhras and Trillingas. The
later evidently is a modern distinction. One of the Sunga
Kings is also named Andhraka or Odraka.

The Buddhist literature has also some references to the
Andhras and their country. In Sorivanija Jataka a city called
Andhrapura on the banks of the Telavaha river is referred to.
The river is now identified with River Tel or Telingiri on the
confines of the Central Provinces. The Jataka stories further
mention a brahmin youth who completed his education in Takshasila
and went to the Andhra Country to gain practical experience.
The Vinaya Texts refer to a city called Satakarnika in the
Madhya desa and south of the city lay the Dakshina Janapada.
The term is said to refer to the Satakarnis though the name of
such a town is not met with elsewhere. There is one reference
to Andhrakavindra near Rajagriha and another to Andhavana near
Sravasti in Mahavagga but these cannot be taken to be explicit
references to the Andhra domination of Magadha as assumed by
some scholars. Several Buddhist Texts refer also to the
Andhaka Monks who were so named after the country to which
they belonged.

The Early Tamil Literature of the Sangam period does not
help us as nowhere in it the Andhras are referred to by name.
There are very many references to Vadugar, Vaduka, Desa or
Vadugavali, meaning thereby the northerners of their country.
There seems to have been no distinction between the Telugu and
Canarese people in that period though by the time of
Silappadikaram their existence was recognised.

Kalidasa in his Raghuvamsha describes how Raghunath vanquished the Vangas, Utkalas and Kalingas and proceeded south to the banks of the Kaveri but makes no mention of the Andhras or their ruler. Whatever date we might assign to Kalidasa, whether in the 4th century B.C. or 4th century A.D., it is inexplicable why the Andhra country should not have been mentioned by name. There may be political reasons for this deliberate omission. Kalidasa would seem to be the court-poet of the Guptas, who were allies of the Vakatakas, Kadambas and the Andhras (Vishnukundins). Kalidasa would seem to have flourished in the 5th century A.D. The earliest date would fall within the Satavahana period while the latter would be proximate to the date of the expedition of Samudra Gupta to the South; and the latter's pillar inscription mentions Mahendra of Kosala, Vyaghraraja of Mahakantara, Mantaraja of Kurala, Mahendra of Pitapura, Svanidatta of Kottura, Damana of Brandapalla, Vishnugopa of Kanchi, Milaraja of Avamukta, Hastivarma of Vengi, Ugrasena of Palakka and Kubera of Devarashtra. The inscription makes no mention of the Andhra King as such as there was no paramount ruler of the entire territory and there were only petty chieftains ruling over separate tracts thereof. It is now certain that the terms Brandapalla and Davarashtra refer to the tracts of country about Chicacole, and Yellamanchili.

Varahmihira in his Brihat samhita mentions the Andhra country along with the Vidarbha, Vatsa and Chedi countries.
Vatsyayana whose date is uncertain, the later limit being placed at 400 A.D. throws a flood of light on the social life of the period including that of the Andhras and mentions that a king named Kutatala Satakarni unwittingly killed his wife with a kartari during an amorous sport. The author of the commentary Jayamangala of the 10th century comments on the word Andhra and says that the country south of the Narmada in the Dakshinapatha and east of the Karnataka country therein is the country of the Andhras.

The Dasa Kumara Charita of Dandin refers to an Andhranagar within a few days journey from Kalinga ruled by Jayasimha with a very big lake near to it. The book further mentions that the ruler of Kalinga became a joint ruler of Andhra and Kalinga countries. The city Andhranagara with a big lake in its neighbourhood points unmistakably to the capital city of Vengi, and the lake referred it is the Kolleru. Attempts have no doubt been made to locate the same further north near Warangal but it is ludicrous to think of Warangal or its confines in the 6th or 7th century A.D. when the capital city of Vengi was enjoying its pristine glory.

The light thrown by the Travels of Hiuen Tsang on the geography of India at about this time is illuminating. The pilgrim reached Orissa and from thence marching south-west through forests reached the countries of Konyodha and Kalinga. From Kalinga, he went north-west and reached Southern Kosala and passing south-east from it, he went to the kingdom of Andhra and described a large Sangharama by the side of its capital Ping-ki-lo, which is identified with Vengi. Going south, he
reached Dhanakataka or Maha Andhra and described the two Sanghramas of Puravasila and Avarasila to the east and west of the city. This description indicates that in the 7th century A.D., the Kingdoms of Andhra and Dhanakataka were distinct with separate capital cities.

At about this time, Kumarila Bhatta, the Commentator of Jaimini's Purva-Mimamsa Sutras refers to the Andhra Dravida Bhasha, and critics have taken the term to mean the Vernaculars prevalent in the Andhra and Dravida countries and assumed that the division of Andhra into Telugu and Canarese must have taken place at a later period. Whatever might be the origin of Telugu and Canarese, the view of Kumarila that there was an Andhra language prevalent in his time seems to be beyond dispute. This is supported by Huen Tsang who says there was a different language prevalent in the Andhra country, but the script was the same as in the North. A Jain work Jina Vijaya in referring to Kumarila says that he was an Andhra born in a village called Jayamangala situated in the border land of Utkal and Andhra countries.

Early Inscriptions mention the Andhrapatha or Andhramandala which was merely a portion of Dakshinapatha, the territory south of the Vindhyas. The earliest inscription available is the Mayidavolu Prakrit Inscription of Sivakkandavarman, about the 4th century A.D. The grant was issued from Kanchipura the capital, and bestows a village Vizipara in the Andhrapatha to two Brahmins and conveys the information to the King's governor at Dhanakataka. Some scholars have taken the view that
Sivaskandavarman was a contemporary of the later Satavahanas of the 2nd century A.D. This is the earliest inscription available to us which mentions the Andhrapatha. Early Tamil grants have always described the country as Vadugavali and the Andhras as Vadugar (Northerners). The Udayendiram plates of Vikramaditya II which by some is assumed to be spurious, and another Bana grant of the fourth century mention the country of the Andhras. The latter even goes to the extent of including the Kolar District in the Andhrasmandala.

The references so far mentioned clearly indicate that the Andhras were a powerful nation ruling over a portion of the Deccan, south of the Vindhyas ever since the Mauryan period even earlier from the days of the Brahmanas.

According to A. Smith the Andhras in the days of Megasthenes was situated in the delta of the Godavari and Krishna rivers and possessed a military force second only to that of the Mauryas.

In the opinion of Smith the Andhras were a Dravidian people, now represented by the large population speaking the Telugu language, who occupied the deltas of the Godavari and the Krishna. P.T.Srinivasa Iyengar argues that the Andhras were originally a Vindhyan tribe and that the extension of Andhra power from the west to the east down to Godavari and Krishna Valleys.

The name Andhradesa evidently derived its name from the people. From the earliest times the Andhras were one single entity, ethical and cultural. The ancient Andhra Desa is the
territory bounded on the north by Kalinga, on the south by the southern part of the Nellore District and extending from the coast far into the mainland in the west.

Pliny (died in 79 A.D.) speaks of several tribes known to have lived in the Deccan proper. Among these must be included the Asmaji--Asmakas on the Godavari the Calingas nearest the sea (doubtless identical with the Kalingas of the eastern coast) the Andhraee or the Andhras, occupying the deltas of the Godavari, and the Krishna, the Mohindaee, Ubarao, Surie, Madubae probably corresponding to the Pulindas, Savaras and Mutibas of the Aitareya Brahmana. The Andhra people are described as a powerful race, which possesses numerous villages, and thirty towns defended by walls and towers, and which supplies its kings with an army of 1,00,000/- infantry, 2,000 cavalry and 1,000 elephants.

As stated earlier the Mayidavolu inscription of about fourth century A.D. locates their country (Andhra patha) in the lower valley of the Krishna in the District round Dhanakada or Amaravati.

The Chezerla inscription connects the Andhras with Krishna.

In the days of Huien Tsang (seventh century A.D.) An-to-lo, or Andhra, had its capital at Ping-ki-lo or Vengipura, identified with Pedda-vengi, about seven miles north of Ellore in the West Godavari district and ten miles north-west from Colair lake.

In the Eastern Chalukyan records the name Andhra is applied to a very wide region bounded on four sides by the
Eastern Ocean (the Bay of Bengal), the Kalahasti Hill (between Mellore and Chittoor) the Mahendra mountain (in Ganjam) and Srisailam (in Kurnool).

The Sakti Sangama Tantra draws a distinction between the Andhra country and another land which it calls Tailangadesa.

The name Trilings, a variant of Tailanga, is traditionally derived from three shrines, namely those at Kaleswaram, Srisailam and Draksharama all of which are located within the territory defined as the Andhra country.

Hien Tsang the Chinese pilgrim of the seventh century A.D. must have regarded Vengi and Andhra identical, since he mentions ping-ki-lo or Vengipura as the capital of An-to-lo (Andhra). However, he draws a distinction between this territory and Te-ba-ka-che-ka (Dhanyakataka, i.e. the Amaravati region) to which a note is added in the pilgrim's text applies the name 'Great Andhra'. This Great Andhra must have virtually corresponded to the Andhrapatha of an early Pallava charter.

The antiquity of the word 'Desa' goes back to the days of the Vajasaneyi samhita of the Yajurveda. Though its occurrence in the early Vedic texts is very rare it is more common in the Buddhist texts where it is used as a synonym of "Janapada". In the Asokan inscriptions it appears both singly, as in the fourteenth Rock Edict, and as part of the compound expression desavutika, which occurs in the Second separate Rock Edict. Pallava records mention the desa-dhikritas while those of the Salankayanas refer to desa-dhipatis. It is clear that desa had become the designation of an administrative unit possibly
as early as the time Asoka, and certainly in the early Pallava age. In the post-Pallava period desa is at times used as a bigger unit than a 'vishaya'. At times desa and Vishaya seem to have been used as synonyms. Desa, sometimes meant only a country without any administrative significance, such as Andhra-desa, Kalinga-desa, Karnataaka-desa etc.

Andhra country stretches from the Sahyadri-parvat or Sahyadri range, and the expense of hill and plateau that connects it with Mahendragiri, and forms the water shed between the Mahanandi and the Godavari in the north, to the Krishna and the Tungabhadra in the south to the Bay of Bengal in the east. The area lies roughly between 13°50' and 20°33' north latitude and 77° and 84°50' east longitude. It covers a wide expanse of territory which presents infinite varieties, of soil and scenery. Wide downs, rolling plains smiling tors and logams, luxiriant forests, rivers tumbling over precipices and leaping in wild water falls and streams foaming in wild torrents along their rugged rocky beds, Combine in one superb panorama the varying aspects of awe and beauty.

The great central upland has an elevation of from 1,000 to 3,000 feet above the sea level with depressions that coincide with the valleys of rivers. It has hills and spurs here and there rising to 3,500 feet and descend by a succession of terraces from the western Ghats towards the east. Geologically the plateau is divided into large areas. The Godavari and its affluent the Nanjira cut off the trappean region in the north and the west, covered with luxuriant vegetation, from the
granitic and calcareous country with bare rocks and a sandy soil. The eastern coast line is on the whole unsheltered and deficient in natural harbours safe for ships of deep draught throughout the year. Here, not very far from the mouth of the Krishna, Ptolemy located the point of departure (Apheterion) for ships bound for Khryse or Suvarnabhumi, the 'golden lands' of Trans-Gangetic India and the islands lying scattered in the neighboring sea. The great rivers of the country, the Godavari and the Krishna, break through the line of the ghats and form rich deltas which are the granaries of the south.

The series of hills that form the eastern flank of the Deccan plateau and overlook the Bay of Bengal are known as the Eastern Ghats.

The hills and mountains of the Deccan are, especially in the trappean region, often covered with luxuriant vegetation, primeval forests lie to the east of the Godavari.

Within the State of Hyderabad vast areas are thickly wooded. Hiuen Tsang speaks of a jungle infested by troops of murderous highwaymen between the Dravida country and Kung-kan-na-pu-lo or Kung-te-na-pu-lo in the Kanarese area, and a great forest ravaged by wild beasts and harried by bands of robbers, on the way from the last mentioned country of Maharashtra.28

According to S.N.Venkatarasimayya29 Andhrapatha or the country of the Andhras extended along the banks of the Krishna and the Tungabhadra from the Bay of Bengal to Parigi in the Hindupur taluk of the Anantapur District.
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