


Chapter- 6

The Early States- Janapadas to Mahajanapadas

STUDY NOTES

INTRODUCTION

By 600 BCE, the Aryans had spread out over the Indo- Gangetic Plains. The Aryan absorbed several local words into their language, and learnt practices like ploughing from the original inhabitants of the land. The Aryan religious practices and culture made a lasting impact on the local inhabitants. This period of the Aryan expansion into the Indo Gangetic Plain is called the Later Vedic period.



India, 600 B.C.
The 16 Mahajanapadas

EARLY VEDIC PERIOD	LATER VEDIC PERIOD
1. King's position was not hereditary	1. King's position became hereditary
2. King received booty from the war and voluntary gift as Bali	2. Officials appointed for regular collection of revenue from people.
3. Sabha and samiti had great importance	3. Sabha and Samiti lost their importance.
4. Rudimentary administration system developed	4. Effective administrative system
5. King's position not ritualised.	5. A no. of rituals and sacrifices performed to strengthen the position of king

JANAPADAS TO MAHAJANAPADAS

The Aryans started leading settled lives as cultivators, their settlements usually consisted of a single jana or tribe. These tribal settlements were the first states. They were called janapadas. The janapadas were ruled by rajans or chiefs. It was also headed by a janapati.

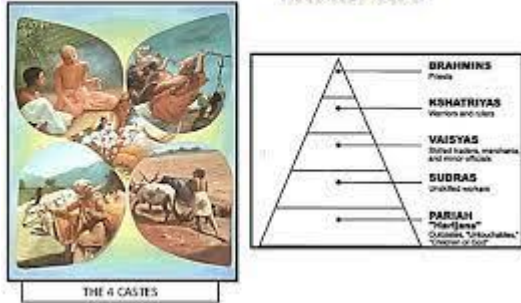
The powerful states that emerged after defeating the smaller states or janapadas came to be known as mahajanapadas.

According to the Buddhist texts Anguttara Nikaya, and Digha Nikaya, by around 600 BCE, there were 16 Mahajanapadas.

WHAT IS A STATE?

A state is an organisation that has a sovereignty over a geographical area- ie, the government is free from outside control. The rajan or the chief of the janapada had control over the area where the tribe lived. The early states were of two types- monarchies and republics.

LATER VEDIC AGE SOCIAL LIFE



MONARCHIES AND REPUBLICS

The Mahajanapadas were governed in two different ways. They were either governed by monarchs or had a republican form of government.

In monarchical mahajanapadas, the king was the most powerful and used to have hereditary system where after the death of the father the son took over the throne and was made the king. Kosala, Vatsa, Magadha and Avanti became the most powerful monarchical mahajanapadas.

The republican mahajanapadas were ruled by a group of people who were elected by the people. Shakyas and Lichchhavis were the prominent and powerful republican mahajanapadas of that time.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Our main sources of information for this period are various Buddhist, Jain and Vedic texts, like the Jataka tales, the Brahmanas, the Upanishads and the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

LIFE IN THE MAHAJANAPADAS

Growth of new crafts: As the people settled down to a life of agriculture and surplus food was produced by the cultivators, some people could now take up other crafts like pottery, carpentry, blacksmithing, weaving etc. Pots of different colours have been found at many sites.

Growth of trade and the formation of guilds: Trade increased and spread. For the first time people started using coins as payment for trade, instead of bartering goods. Punch –marked coins found from the sites which were used as currency.

The crafts people were organised into guilds known as shrenis. Each shreni had prescribed rules and regulations and a code of conduct too.

Growth of Urban Settlement: Most of the settlements which became towns and cities were the capitals of the mahajanapadas and janapadas. Pataliputra, Kosambi, Rajgir, Varanasi were some of the important cities. The mahajanapadas had capital cities as the seat of power and authority, those capital cities had walls of wood or brick or stone around them. This is known as fortification. The forts were built around the capital city for two reasons:

- i) To show the power and prosperity of the mahajanapadas.
- ii) To provide a safe and secure environment to people, where they could live without the threat of raids and invasions from outside.

Imposition of taxes: In Vedic India, taxes were imposed by the rulers on the revenue or income earned by the people of the kingdom.

The rajan of the mahajanapadas collected the taxes to administer the land and to maintain a large army for defending the kingdom.

- The farmers were required to pay $1/6^{\text{th}}$ of their agricultural produce as tax.
- Craftsmen paid taxes either by supplying craft items or possibly by working for a certain number of days for the king.
- The herders and hunters used to provide a portion of their produce as tax.
- The traders also paid a portion of their income from trade as tax.

CASE STUDY: MAGADHA



Magadha was one of the 16 mahajanapadas or kingdoms in ancient India. Its first capital was at Rajgriha, but was shifted to Pataliputra. The empire extended along the Ganges River and the kingdoms of Kosala and Kashi were annexed. The first known ruler of this kingdom was Bimbisara, belonged to Haryanka Dynasty. The Magadha empire gained much power and

importance during the rule of king Bimbisara and his son successor Ajatshatru. Bimbisara was a capable ruler, an excellent administrator and a devotee of Buddhism and Jainism.

Why did Magadha emerge so powerful?

- Magadha became the most powerful mahajanapada as its land was very fertile and it lead to prosperity.
- There were a large deposits of iron ore which was used for making weapons, tools, etc.
- The many rivers flowing in this region provided water for irrigation, means of transportation also helped to defend the territory from invaders.
- The forests in this region provided timber which was used to make chariots and provided animals like elephants which were effective war resources.
- With an unmatched military force, the Magadha Empire had an advantage over other kingdoms in conquering neighbourhood kingdoms and spreading its territory.
- The powerful rulers used the benefits of land and resources to their advantage and maintained efficient administration.

CASE STUDY –VAJII (VRIJJI)

The Vajji was another mahajanapada, but this was very different from the Magadha Empire. It was a republic or gana-sangha. It was located in Bihar, north of the Ganges River with its capital Vaishali.

This mahajanapada consisted of eight clans or janas to form a confederation. It consisted of several sanghas. In a sangha there were many rulers, they all came together to perform various rituals and used to take major policy decision together. The chairman of the assembly was called the ganapramukh. The main clans of the Vajii confederacy included the Lichchhavis, the Vajjis etc.
