

CC-1/GE-1: HISTORY OF INDIA FROM EARLIEST TIMES UP TO 300 CE

V. TERRITORIAL STATES AND THE RISE OF MAGADHA, CONDITIONS FOR THE RISE OF MAHAJANAPADAS AND THE CAUSES OF MAGADHA'S SUCCESS.

The period of about three centuries (600-300 BCE) is a major landmark in Indian history as several changes of far-reaching consequences occurred. These changes are simultaneously visible in political, material and cultural life. For the first time in Indian history, emerged several territorial political entities, known as mahajanapadas in ancient textual sources and located mostly in north India. Greater parts of north India also experienced urbanization. Cities and city life once again appeared in the subcontinent after the decline of the Harappan civilization, which marked the first phase of urban development in the subcontinent. The Ganga valley, the heartland of north India witnessed the complexities of socio-economic and cultural life associated with urban life. The period between 600 and 300 BCE marks the second urbanization in Indian history.

From the 6th century BCE onwards, the outlines of the political history of north India become clearer, and kings and religious teachers mentioned in different literary traditions can be identified as real, historical figures. State polities and societies emerged in the 6th/5th century BCE in a belt stretching from Gandhara in the north-west to Anga in eastern India, also extending into the Malwa region.

Buddhist and Jaina texts list 16 powerful states (solasa-mahajanapada) that flourished in the early 6th century BCE. Apart from these, there must have been smaller states, chiefdoms, and tribal principalities.

The Anguttara Nikaya enlists 16 large territorial polities (solasamahajanapadas):-

<u>MAHAJANAPADA</u>	<u>CAPITAL</u>
1. KASHI	VARANASI
2. KOSALA	SRAVASTI
3. ANGA	CHAMPA
4. MAGADHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAJAGRIHA-GIRIVRAJA (FIRST CAPITAL) • PATALIPUTRA (LATER CAPITAL)
5. VRIJI	VAISHALI
6. MALLA	PAVA
7. CHEDI	SUKTIMATI
8. VATSA	KAUSAMBI
9. MATSYA	VAIRAT
10.SURASENA	MATHURA
11.KURU	HASTINAPURA
12.PANCHALA	I. AHICHHATRA II. KAMPILYA
13.ASMAKA	GOVARDHANA
14.AVANTI	I. UJJAYINI II. MAHISMATI
15.GANDHARA	TAKSHASHILA
16.KHAMBOJA	-

Two kinds of states are included in the list of mahajanapadas—monarchies (rajyas) and non-monarchical states known as ganas or sanghas. Gana and Sangha were oligarchies, where power was exercised by a group of people.

The kingdom of **Kashi** was bounded by the Varuna and Asi rivers to the north and south respectively. It is from the names of these two rivers that its capital city Varanasi (modern Benaras), on the banks of the Ganga, got its name. At one time, one of the most powerful states of north India, Kashi was eventually absorbed into the Kosalan kingdom.

Kosala embraced the area occupies by eastern Uttar Pradesh and had its capital at Sravasti. There was a long standing rival between Kashi and Kosala. Kosala succeeded in conquering Kashi

Anga corresponded roughly to the present-day Bhagalpur and Monghyr districts of Bihar. Its capital Champa was one of the greatest cities of the 6th century BCE.

The kingdom of **Magadha** roughly covered the modern Patna and Gaya districts of Bihar. Its capital was initially Girivraja or Rajagriha, near modern Rajgir, later it was shifted to Pataliputra.

The principality of the **Vajji** (Vriji) was in eastern India, north of the Ganga, extending up to the Nepal hills. Most historians consider the Vajji a confederacy of eight or nine clans.

The **Malla** principality was located to the west of the Vajjis and consisted of a confederacy of nine clans. There were two political centres—at Kusinara and Pava.

The **Chedi** kingdom was situated in the eastern part of Bundelkhand in central India. Its capital was Sotthivatinagara, probably the same as the Shuktimati or Shuktisahvaya of the Mahabharata.

Vatsa or Vamsa, south of the Ganga, was noted for its fine cotton textiles. Its capital was Kaushambi, identified with Kosam village on the right bank of the Yamuna.

According to Buddhist tradition, the **Kuru** kingdom was ruled by kings belonging to the Yuddhitthila gotra, i.e., the family of Yudhishtira, from their capital at Indrapatta (Indraprastha).

The kingdom of **Panchala** included the Rohilkhand area and part of the central doab region, and was divided into two parts by the Ganga. The capital of Uttara (north) Panchala was Ahichchhatra (identified with modern Ramnagar in Bareilly district, UP), and that of Dakshina (south) Panchala was Kampilya (identified with Kampil in Farukhabad district, UP). The famous city of Kanyakubja or Kanauj was located in this kingdom.

The principality of the **Matsyas** was located in the Jaipur area in Rajasthan, extending into the Alwar and Bharatpur areas as well. Their capital was Viratanagara.

The **Shurasenas** had their capital at Mathura (also known as Madura) on the Yamuna.

Texts such as the Ashtadhyayi, Markandeya Purana, Brihatsamhita, and the Greek accounts suggest that the **Assaka (Ashmaka/Ashvaka)** kingdom was situated in the northwest. However, the Assaka of Buddhist texts is firmly located on the Godavari river. Its capital was Potana/Podana or Potali, identified with modern Bodhan.

Avanti, in the Malwa region of central India, was divided into a northern and a southern part by the Vindhyas. The two important towns of this kingdom were Mahishmati (identified with modern Maheshwar) and Ujjayini (near modern Ujjain), both of which are mentioned in ancient texts as its capital.

The kingdom of **Gandhara** comprised modern Peshawar and Rawalpindi districts of Pakistan and the Kashmir valley. Its capital Takshashila (Taxila) was a major centre of trade and learning.

Ancient texts and inscriptions usually associate the kingdom of **Kamboja** with Gandhara. Kamboja included the area around Rajaori, including the Hazara district of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

The most powerful states in the 6th century were Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa and Avanti. The political history of India from 6th century BCE onwards was one of struggles among these states for supremacy. Eventually the kingdom of Magadha emerged as the most powerful and founded as empire.

CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF MAGADHA

Magadha came into prominence under the leadership of Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty. He began the policy of conquest and aggression which ended with the Kalinga war of Ashoka. Bimbisara acquired Anga and placed it under the viceroyalty of his son Ajatasatru at Champa. Bimbisara also strengthened his position by making matrimonial alliances with Kosala, the Lichchhavis of Vaishali and the Madra clan of Punjab.

Through his conquest and diplomacy, Bimbisara made Magadha the dominant state in the 6th century BCE. The earliest capital of Magadha was Rajagriha which was called Girivaraja at that time. Bimbisara ruled roughly from 544 to 492 BCE. He was succeeded by his son Ajatasatru.

Ajatasatru killed his father and seized the throne for himself. His reign saw the high watermark of the Bimbisara dynasty. Throughout his reign he followed an aggressive policy of expansion. He got into conflict with the rulers of Kosala, Avanti and also the Lichchhavis.

Ajatasatru was succeeded by Udayin. His reign is important because he is said to have built a fort at the confluence of the Ganges and son at Patna.

Udayin was succeeded by the dynasty of Shishunagas, who temporarily moved the capital to Vaishali. Their greatest achievement was the destruction of the power of Avanti with its capital at Ujjain.

The Shishunagas were succeeded by the Nandas, who proved to be the most powerful rulers of Magadha. The founder of the Nanda dynasty was Mahapadma Nanda. The Nandas were fabulously rich and enormously powerful.

The Nanda kings built on the foundations laid by their Haryanka and Shishunaga predecessors to create the first great empire in North India.

The later Nandas proved to be weak and unpopular. Their rule in Magadha was supplanted by that of the Maurya dynasty under which the Magadhan empire reached the apex of glory.

The formation of the largest state in India during this period was the work of several enterprising and ambitious rulers such as Bimbisara, Ajatasatru and Mahapadma Nanda. Along with this there were some other important reasons behind the rise of Magadha.

Magadha enjoyed an advantageous geographical position in the age of iron, because the richest iron deposits were situated not far away from Rajgir the earliest capital of Magadha. Magadha enjoyed certain other advantages. The two capitals of Magadha, the first at Rajgir and the second at Pataliputra were situated at very strategic points. Rajgir was surrounded by a group of five hills and Pataliputra was surrounded by rivers on all sides. Thus, both the places enjoyed natural fortification.

Magadha lay at the centre of the mid-Gangetic plains, the Ganges providing a means of both transport and agricultural facilities. There was also an abundance of timber. The Prince of Magadha also benefitted from the rise of towns and use of metal money. Magadha enjoyed a special advantage in military organisation. It was Magadha who for the first time used elephants in large scales along with chariots and horses in its wars against its neighbours. Another important factor was the unorthodox character of the Magadhan society.

For all these reasons Magadha succeeded in defeating the other kingdoms and in founding the first empire in India.

ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

The three centuries from 600 to 300 BCE were witness to many significant changes in the social and economic life, especially in north India which witnessed the complex process of the formation of the state. The term Janapada stands not only for populated/settled territories of a state but strongly suggests a sedentary settlement of people. The Janapada is viewed as area rich in resources especially agrarian. Settled agrarian societies had become well established in the Indo-Gangetic divide, Upper Ganga Valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab area already by the later Vedic times (1000-600 BCE). The development of the agrarian sector of the economy continued during the succeeding three centuries, as Janapadas and Mahajanapadas proliferated in the Ganga valley, and more precisely in the middle Ganga Plains. Two environmental conditions fostered the agrarian development in the Ganga valley- a good amount a average annual rainfall and fertile alluvial soil.

The considerable development in agriculture in the Ganga valley was conducive to the sustenance of the non-agrarian economy sector, in which it is noticed the active presence of diverse craftsmen and professional groups and merchants.

One of the most significant development in crafts production id seen in the development of iron tools. Blacksmith frequently figures in Pali canonical texts. Good number of iron tools and implements have been found from archaeological sites Atranjikhhera, Noh, Kausambhi etc.

One of the traditionally famous crafts was certainly the manufacture of textiles. The Buddhist texts were aware of the excellence of textiles produced in Varanasi .

Apart from these diverse craftsmen North India during this time witnessed the advent of a few professionals like physician, surgeon, accountant, scribe, barber etc.

THE SECOND URBANIZATION

The most apparent aspect of the changing material life in north India was the emergence of urban centres. Almost after a millennium since the decline of the Harappan urbanism one witnessed the reappearance of cities in the subcontinent, bringing in the second urbanization in the subcontinent. There is of course a noticeable shift in the area of the rise of the cities since 6th century BCE onwards. The cities during the second urbanization are mainly located in the Ganga valley which did not witness urban development during the days of Harappan urbanism.

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