

Emergence of Kingdoms and Republics

In the previous chapter we read about how tribal societies manage their affairs. You would also have heard about kings and emperors who ruled large kingdoms. Let us find out how they came into being in early times.

The Ganges Valley 2700 years ago - from Janapadas to Mahajanapadas

- Look at the map of India and identify the plains through which the Ganga and Yamuna rivers flow. Identify the modern cities of Delhi, Allahabad, Varanasi, Lucknow, Kanpur and Patna. Do you think this area will be similar to the village of Penamakuru or Salakamcheruvu or the Bison hill of Konda Reddys? Give your reasons.

This plain is called the Gangetic Valley (as the Ganga and Yamuna rivers flow between the Himalayan Mountains and the hills of the Deccan Plateau). As this plain receives very high rainfall, it is very fertile. These rivers bring silt from the Himalayas and flow throughout the year.

Initially the people of different tribes settled down to practice agriculture in convenient parts of the valley. These tribes were called 'jana' in Sanskrit and the place where they settled was called Janapada.

People began settling down along these rivers in large numbers some 2700 years ago. They cut down the forests with the help of iron tools and tilled the land to grow paddy and other crops. Large villages and towns developed in these parts and these were inhabited by many people – probably belonging to many different tribes. Large groups of such villages and towns were called 'Mahajanapadas' or big 'Janapadas'.

- Find out the name of a few janas (tribes) with the help of your teacher who initially settled down in the Indo-Gangetic Plain?
- What do you mean by Janapada? How is this different from Mahajanapadas?

How do we know about the Mahajanapadas?

We get to know much about these villages and towns from two kinds of sources – from archeological excavations in different places and also from the books composed during this period.

Archeologists have excavated hundreds of sites in the Ganges Valley and have tried to know about the lives of people of those days. The books during that period were mostly composed by Brahmins, Buddhists and Jaina monks. Even though they are religious books, they tell us a lot about the towns and villages and also about the kings and rulers of those times. Some books were even written by people of distant countries like Greece. Here you have the information drawn from different sources.

Some important archeological sites of the time of Mahajanapadas: Delhi, Atranjikhera, Kausambi (Near Allahabad), Patna, Ayodhya, Rajgir, etc.

Some important books written during this period: Upanishadas, Dharmasutras, Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Herodotus' History, and Strabo etc.,

- If an archeologist would dig up the villages and towns of our times, after two thousand years, what do you think they will find?
- How would they decide if a site was a village or a town?
- If a book said that such and such a town was entirely built of gold and silver and that thousands of people lived in large palaces, how will you check whether this is mere imagination or a fact?

Villages in the times of Mahajanapadas

We learn from the books of those times that agriculture was managed by landowners called Grihapatis or Gahapatis, who usually

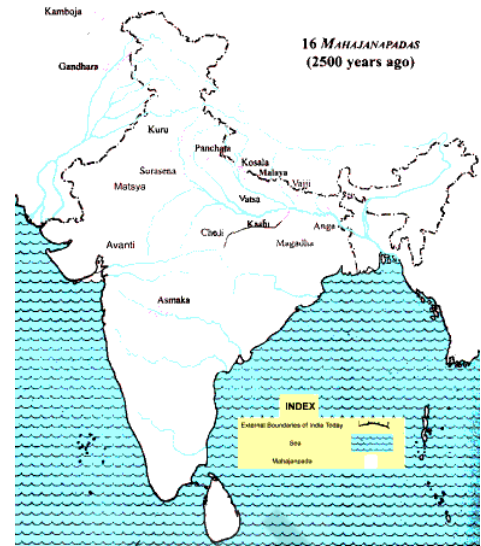
worked along with their family members on the fields. But they also employed 'dassas' or slaves (who were probably captured in wars and sold to farmers) and workers 'bhrtu kas' or who worked on their fields and homes in return for wages. Some wealthy grihapatis had more land and slaves to work for them. Usually the largest landowner became the headman of the village. He was the leader of the village like the Gond Patla and he was also used by the king to collect taxes from other villagers. He also acted as the judge and sometimes as a policeman to maintain law and order in the village.

In most villages there were crafts persons like blacksmiths who made tools necessary for agriculture (like ploughshares, sickles, axes, arrows etc), potters who made pots for cooking and storing grains, carpenters who made carts, ploughs, furniture etc, and weavers who wove cloth for the villagers. Probably the grihapatis gave them grains in return for their products. These craft products were necessary for agriculture, but the grihapatis may not have had the time or skill to make them.

- Compare the villages of tribes like Gonds and the villages of the Mahajanapadas to find out the similarities and differences.
- Describe the relationship between Grihapatis and crafts persons of the village.

Cities of Mahajanapadas

Look at the list of the cities in the table you have made. What kind of people do



Map 1: Mahajanapadas

- Look at the India map given above. It shows you the broad area of some Mahajanapadas. It also gives the name of the major city associated with a Mahajanapada. You can also find out the name of the river which flows through this Mahajanapada.

Make a list of the Mahajanapadas which were situated on the Ganges Valley and also their cities.

Mahajanapada	City

Free Distribution by Govt. of A.P.

Emergence of Kingdoms and Republics 89

you think lived in them? Cities of those times like today were mainly inhabited by poor people who worked hard for others to earn their living. Some of them were slaves and servants while most of them were crafts persons who made goods for sale. What did they make? They made beautiful and fine pots which were in great demand in all the great towns. They wove fine cloths which were bought by rich people of other mahajanapadas also. They made gold and silver jewelry. They made vessels and tools of bronze, copper and iron. They made wooden carts and furniture. There were also innumerable kinds of professionals like soldiers, accountants, masons, horse trainers, sweepers, water carriers, wood and ivory carvers. While only a little of these articles (like pots, bricks, iron and copper objects) have come up in excavations, we also know about them from the books.



Fig. 10.1. Painted Grey Ware. Plates and bowls are the most common vessels made out of Painted Grey Ware. These are extremely fine to touch. These were found before the time of Mahajanapadas.

And then there were great traders who purchased the produce of the crafts persons and grihapatis and sold them in distant lands at huge profit. They also bought the special articles of those lands and sold them in their own mahajanapadas. They took their merchandise in caravans with a large number of animals like oxen, donkeys and camels and travelled day and night for weeks and months across the rivers, plains, hills and deserts. They made so much profit that they could live in palatial buildings with dozens of servants and slaves serving them.

- The people of the towns would have needed grain, milk, meat etc. How do you think they got them if most of the people of the towns were not doing any farming?

Kings, army and taxes

Most of the Mahajanapadas were ruled by kings. These kings had an army of their own to ensure that people followed their orders and no other king would attack their kingdom. They lived in capital cities and tried to build strong fortresses of wood, stone, brick and mud (See Fig.10.2). All this required huge expenditure – the soldiers and their families had to be provided for, the brickmakers who made lakhs of bricks had to be paid for, thousands of men and women who worked to construct these public buildings had to be paid wages.

- How do you think the kings managed to get the wealth needed for all this?

Free Distribution by Govt. of A.P.

Emergence of Kingdoms and Republics 91



Fig. 10.2 The fort of Kaushambi city

The Gond Patla too had to occasionally defend the village from outsiders – at such times all the villagers would get together and fight on behalf of the village.

We also saw that he met the expenses of entertaining guests and holding festivals from the extra income he got from the one day labour of the villagers on his fields. But such income was far too little for a tribal headman to become rich or powerful. The ordinary people of the tribe would only support the headman or agree to his commands if they were convinced that it was in the interest of all.

The picture (Fig. 10.3) is from sculpture panels of Sanchi Stupa which were made about 2000 years ago. How can you identify the king?



Fig. 10.3 A king riding out of a town fort.

The kings of Mahajanapadas were different from such tribal headmen or chiefs. The kings collected taxes from the people. They had officers who would collect taxes from the grihapatis, the crafts persons and traders. If anyone refused to pay taxes they could be punished by the soldiers of the king. These officers and army men were employees of the king and were therefore bound to follow his orders. The king could also ensure that all his commands for the common people were obeyed by them.

- Why did the kings of Mahajanapadas need armies?
- What are the differences between the Gond Patla and the King of Mahajanapada in terms of their income and expenditure?

Many kings wanted to be more powerful and wealthy. They could do this in two ways: firstly, by increasing the taxes on their subjects and secondly, by conquering neighbouring kingdoms. The kings began to collect regular taxes from the grihapatis who cultivated the land. The grihapatis had to divide their crops into six equal parts and give one part to the king. This was called *bhaga*. Craft persons also had to pay taxes, often by working free of charge for the king for a day every month. Herders of cattle and sheep too had to give the animal produce to the king in the form of tax. Traders were also made to pay taxes on the goods they sold. Hunters and gatherers in the nearby forest areas too had to bring forest produce like hides, wood, etc. In this way the kings had a variety of goods which they obtained as taxes. During this period the use of coins had just begun. Some of the taxes were probably in the form of coins.

- If everyone was forced to give away a part of their hard earned produce by way of tax, what impact would it have had on their lives?
- Why do you think they agreed to pay the taxes? Do you think they benefited in any way from the new arrangements?
- What was *bhaga*? Does the government of our times take the produce of farmers in a similar way?

Historians feel that these kings would have persuaded the farmers to grow more crops and adopt better methods of cultivation and irrigation so that production would increase and they can get more taxes.

Similarly they may have encouraged traders of their kingdoms to trade more in distant places. The kings also wanted the village headmen to collect taxes on their behalf. This may have helped many headmen to increase their power and resources in the villages.

The kings were also constantly waging wars against each other so that they could bring more territories under their rule. These wars were probably fought by paid armies but these armies also harmed ordinary people by destroying crops and burning villages or looting them. Often people of defeated kingdoms were enslaved and sold off to Grihapatis and traders and officials.

- Try to write a story of a village which was affected by war and also had to pay taxes to the king. Keep in mind all that you know about the villages of those times while writing this story.
- Why were the kings of Mahajanapads keen to increase craft production and trade?
- How did the headmen of the villages benefit from the imposition of taxes by the kings?

Magadha – a powerful kingdom

Do you have Magadha in your list above? You may have noted that it spread on both sides of the Ganga River. The rivers made the land very fertile and the grihapatis could irrigate their lands easily. The rivers were also used for transporting goods and armies. Parts of the Magadha were forested. Elephants were captured from there and



Fig. 10.4. Scene of war from Sanchi Panel

trained for fighting in the armies. Wood from the forests was used for building fortresses and palaces and chariots. In the southern parts of Magadha there were iron ore deposits which could be used for making weapons etc.

All this enabled Magadha to emerge as a very powerful kingdom. Bimbisara and his son Ajatasatru were early kings who built the power of Magadha. Mahapadma Nanda was another powerful ruler of Magadha. All these kings used their armies to conquer other kingdoms. During the time of Mahapadma Nanda the kingdom extended from the northwest part of India to Odisha.

We should remember that not all Mahajanapadas were ruled by kings as in Magadha. In some the kings were more like Gond headmen who relied upon the ordinary people and performed rituals and festivals for the welfare of the entire kingdom.

- In what way do you think the kings of Magadha used the natural wealth of the region to build a powerful kingdom? Write a couple of lines on each of the natural resources of Magadha and how it could have been used by the kings.

Vajji – a Gana

The Vajji Mahajanapada was to the North of Magadha and it had a Gana form of government. In a Gana there is no single ruler but a group of rulers. Sometimes even thousands of men ruled together and each of them called themselves a 'raja'. They performed rituals, met and decided upon issues of common interest in assemblies through discussion and debate. However, women, slaves and wage workers could not participate in these assemblies.

Buddha and Mahavira belonged to ganas and became famous teachers respected in all the Mahajanapadas. Even though the kings tried to conquer the ganas they remained active for more than 1500 years.

Key words

Kingdom,
Republic,
Janapada,
Mahajanapada,
Dasas,
Bhrtukas,
Grihapatis.



Fig. 10.5.A Gana assembly scene from Sanchi.

Improve your learning

1. What do you mean by Gana? How were they different from the kingdoms ruled by kings?
2. Compare the ganas with Gond Panch – what similarities and differences do you see between them?
3. Write a story about a slave of a Gahapati who travelled from the village to the city of Pataliputra with his master.
4. Can you point out the difference between the way villages are managed today and how they were managed in the time of Mahajanapadas?
5. Find out how the crafts persons are taxed by the government today. Is it the same way as in the times of Mahajanapads?