

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: 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 villages of Penamakuru, Dokur and Penugolu? Give your reasons.

This plain is called the Gangetic Valley (as the Ganga and Yamuna rivers flow between the Himalayas 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.

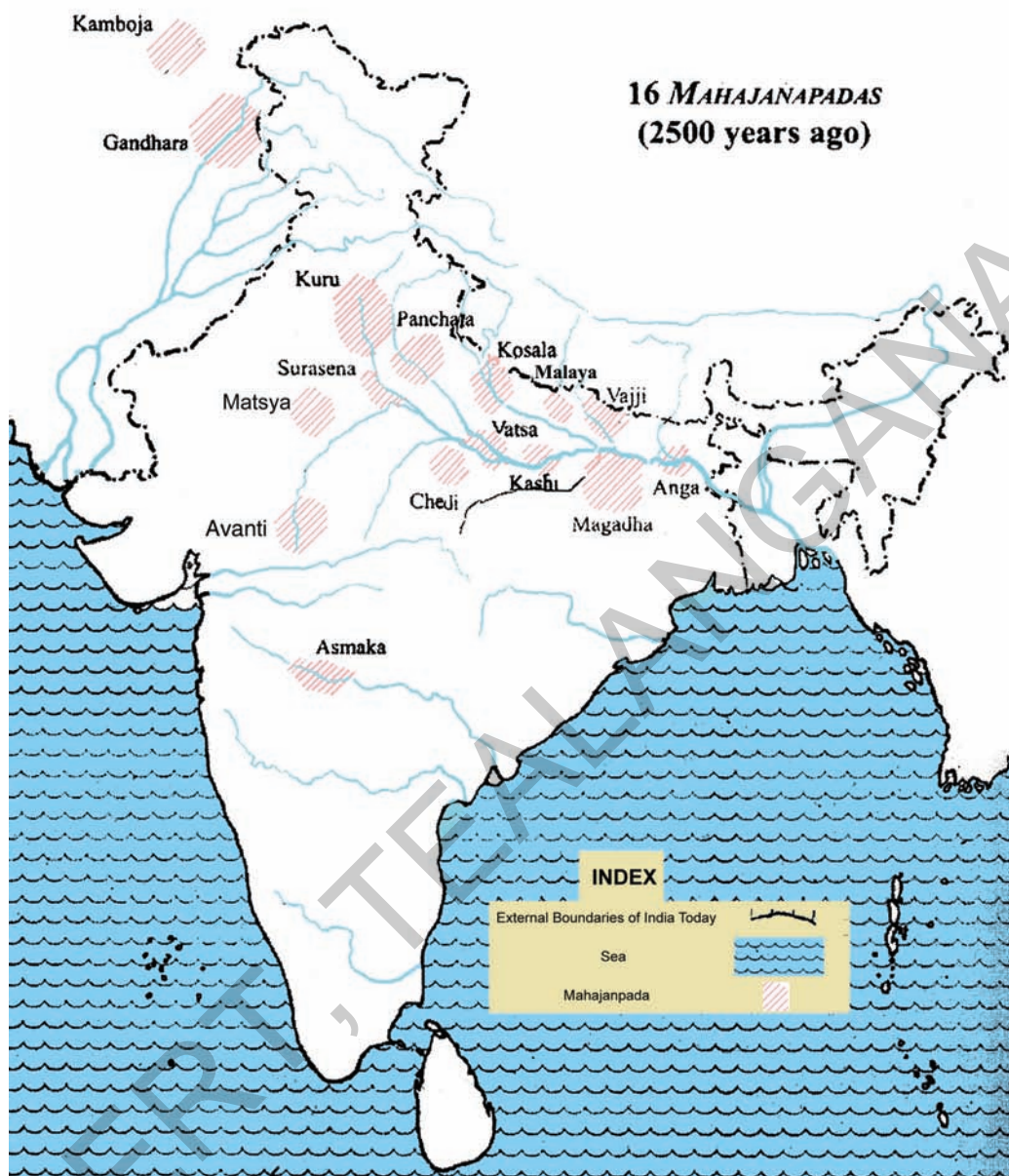
Initially, the people of different tribes settled down to practice agriculture in convenient parts of the valley. These tribes were called '*jana*' in Sanskrit and the place where they settled was called Janapada.

People began to settle along these rivers in large number about 4000 years ago. The use of tools made of stone, copper, bronze and iron led to gradual clearing of forests, settlements and tilled the land to grow paddy and other crops. Large villages and towns developed in these parts and they 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 names of a few janas (tribes) who initially settled down in the Indo-Gangetic Plain?
- ♦ What do you mean by Janapada? How is it 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 archaeological excavations in different places and from the books composed during that period. Archaeo-



Map 1: Mahajanapadas

- ♦ Look at the map of India 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 and the cities which were situated on the Ganges valley.

Mahajanapada	City

logists have excavated hundreds of sites in the Ganges Valley and have tried to know more about the lives of the people of those days. The books during that period were mostly composed by the followers of Vedic traditions, Buddhists and Jain monks. Even though they are religious books, they tell us a lot about the towns and villages and 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 archaeological sites of the time of Mahajanapadas: Delhi, Atranjikhhera, Kausambi (Near Allahabad), Patna, Ayodhya, Rajgir, etc.

Some important books written during this period: Upanishadas, Dharmasutras, Dighanikaya, Majjhimanikaya, Herodotus' History, and Strabo etc.

- ◆ If archaeologists dig up the villages and towns of our times after two thousand years, what do you think will they 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 'dasas' or slaves (those who were surrendered and made to serve) and workers 'bhrutakas' 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 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 craft 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 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 Mahajanapads 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 cities in the table you have made. What kind of people do you

think lived in them? Cities of those times, like today, were mainly inhabited by poor workers. 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 clothes which were bought by rich people of other mahajanapads also. They made gold and silver jewellery. They made vessels and tools of bronze, copper and iron. They made wooden carts and furniture. There were also innumerable other kinds of professionals like soldiers, accountants, masons, horse trainers, sweepers, water carriers, wood and ivory carvers. Of all the things made by craftpersons, only a few articles (like pots, bricks, iron and copper objects) have come out in excavations. We also know about them from books written in these times.



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

There were great traders who purchased the produce of the crafts persons and grihapatis and sold them in distant lands at a 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. They travelled day and night for weeks and months across rivers, plains, hills and deserts. They made so much profit that they could live in palaces 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 town people 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 attacked 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 a lot of money. The soldiers and their families had to be provided for; the brickmakers who made lakhs of bricks had to be paid for and thousands of men and women who worked to construct these public buildings had to be paid wages.

- ♦ How do you think did the kings manage to get the wealth needed for all this?



Fig. 10.2: The fort of Kaushambi city

The Gond Patla also had to defend the village from outsiders. At such times, all the villagers would come 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 obey 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?

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 craft persons and traders. If anyone refused to pay taxes, they could be punished by the soldiers of the king. These officers and army were employees of the king. Therefore, they were bound to follow his orders and the king could ensure that his commands were obeyed by the common people.

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

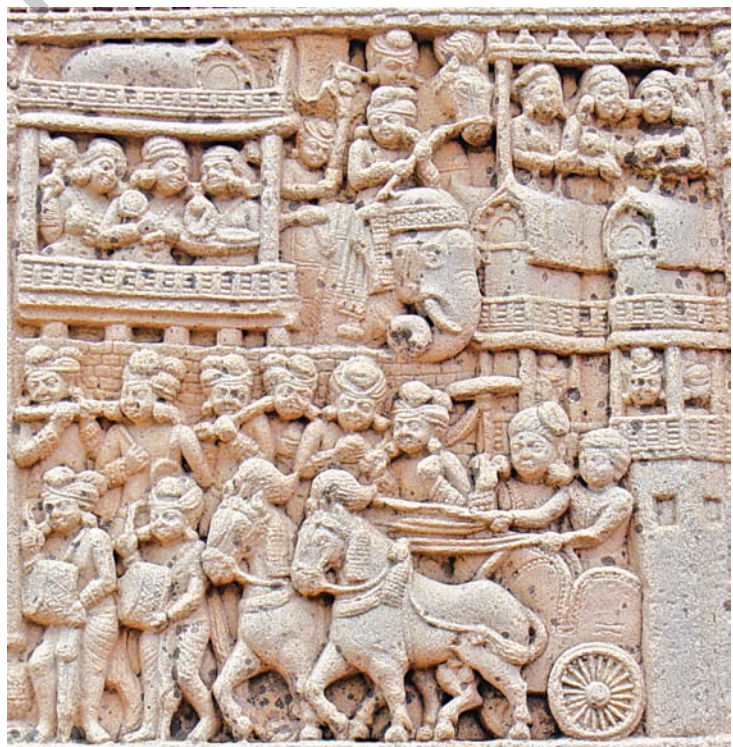


Fig. 10.3: A king riding out of a town fort

Many kings wanted to be more powerful and wealthy. They could do this in two ways: by increasing the taxes imposed on the people and 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 one 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 hide, wood etc. In this way, the kings had a variety of goods with them 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 is forced to give away a part of their earnings as tax, how does it affect their lives?
- ♦ Why do you think they agreed to pay the taxes? Do you think they benefitted in any way from the new arrangements?
- ♦ What is *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 would get more taxes. Similarly, they may have encouraged the 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 they also harmed ordinary people by destroying crops and burning villages or looting them. Often, people of the defeated kingdoms were enslaved and sold off to Grihapatis, traders and officials.

- ♦ Imagine and write a story of a village that was affected by war and also had to pay taxes to the king. Keep in mind 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. The rivers made the land very fertile and the grihapatis could irrigate their lands easily. The rivers were also used for transporting goods and



Fig. 10.4: Scene of war from Sanchi Panel

armies. Parts of the Magadha were forested. Elephants were captured from there and trained for fighting in the wars. 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 northwestern part of India to Odisha. We should remember that not all Mahajanapadas were ruled by kings as in Magadha. In some areas, 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.

- ♦ How do you think Magadha kings 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. Gana was ruled by a group of rulers instead of a single ruler. Sometimes even thousands of men ruled together and each of them was called a 'raja'. They performed rituals, met and took decisions on issues of common interest in assemblies through discussion and debate. However, women, slaves and wage earners could not participate in these assemblies.

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

Keywords

Kingdom
 Republic
 Janapada
 Mahajanapada
 Dasas
 bhrutakas
 Grihapatis

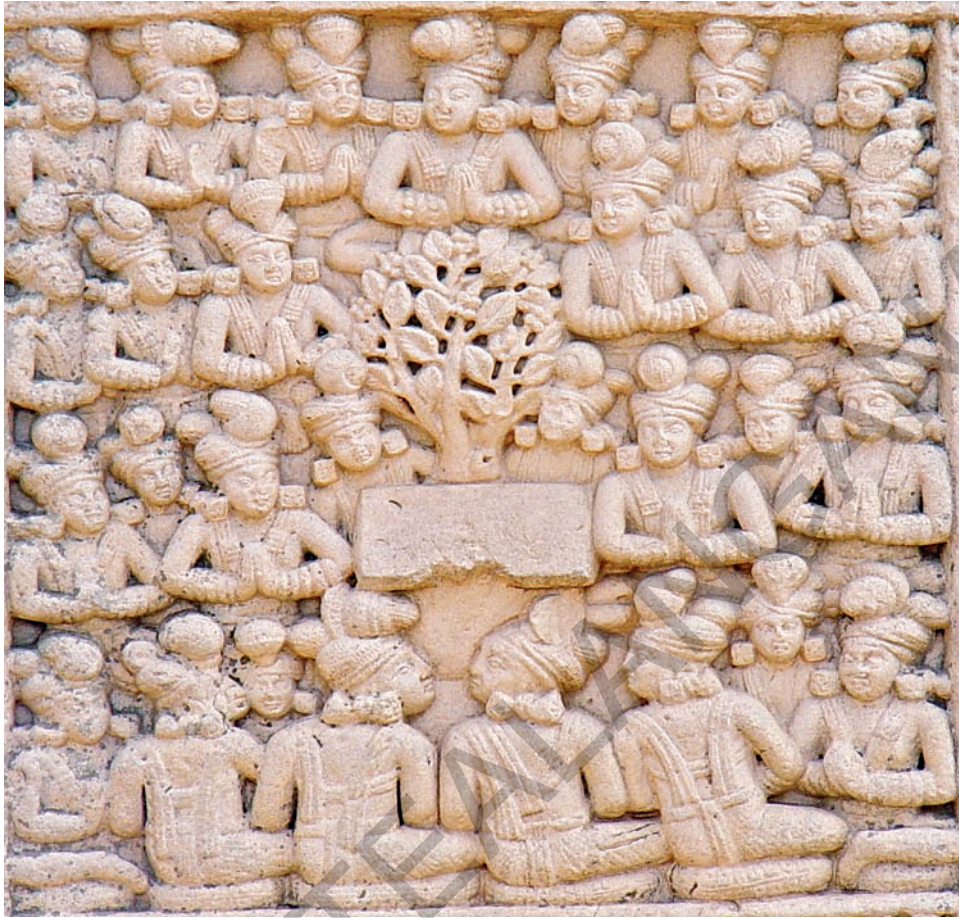


Fig. 10.5: A Gana assembly scene from Sanchi

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. Can you point out the difference between the way villages are managed today and in the time of mahajanapadas?
4. Find out how the crafts persons are taxed by the government today. Was it the same in the times of mahajanapads?
5. Read the para five in page 87 ‘In most villages....’ and write your comment.
6. Locate the 16 Janapadas on the map of India (Refer to the map 1 given on page 86).

