

Ancient Indian History UPSC CSE

(Prelims + Mains)
Supplementary Study Material

Module 4: Rise of Mahajanapadas

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Territorial States and the Rise of Magadha

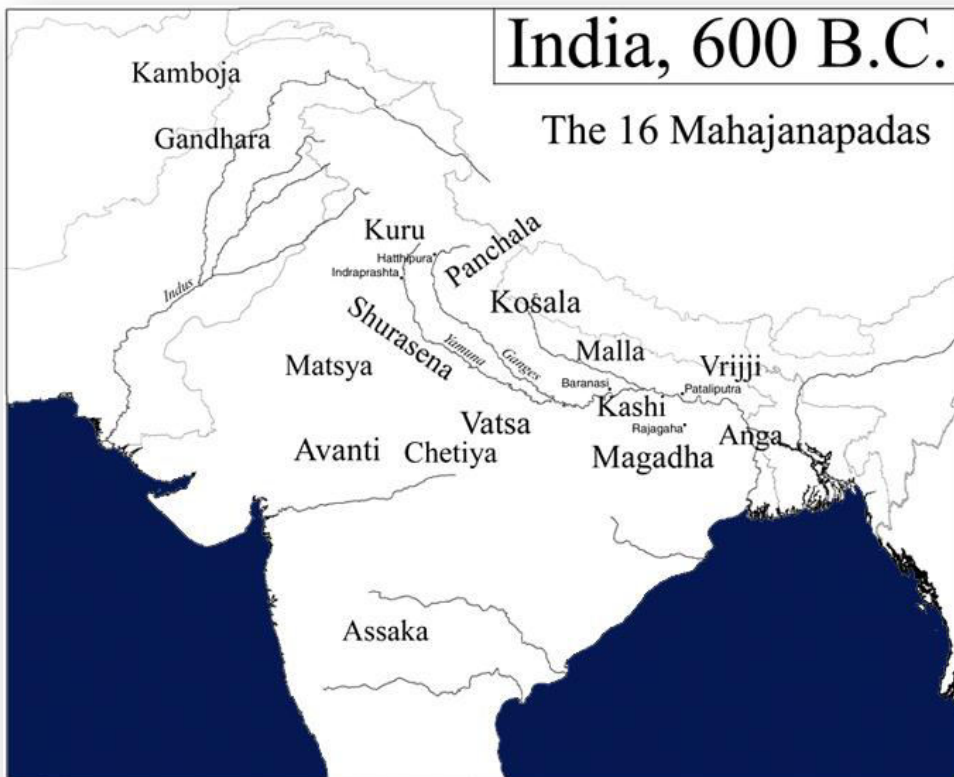
Conditions for the Rise of Large States

The rise of large states with towns as their base of operations strengthened the territorial idea. People owed strong allegiance to the *janapada* or the territory to which they belonged rather than to their *jana* or tribe.

- The word *janapada* literally means the land where the *jana* set its foot, and settled down.

The Mahajanapadas

- Around 450 BC, over forty *janapadas* covering even Afghanistan and south-eastern Central Asia are mentioned by Panini.
- The Pali texts show that the *janapadas* grew into *mahajanapadas*, that is large states or countries.
- In the age of the Buddha we find sixteen large states called *mahajanapadas*. Most of these states arose in the upper and mid- Gangetic plains, including the doab area covered by the Ganges, Yamuna, and their tributaries.



Notes:

- They were mostly situated north of the Vindhyas and extended from the north-west frontier to Bihar.
- Magadha embraced the former districts of Patna, Gaya, and parts of Shahabad, and grew to be the leading state of the time. Its earlier capital was Rajgir, and later Pataliputra.
- The most powerful dynasty was that of the Lichchhavis with their capital at Vaishali which is coterminous with the village of Basarh in Vaishali district.
- Further west the kingdom of Kashi with its capital at Varanasi. Excavations at Rajghat show that the earliest habitations started around 500 BC,
- Koshala embraced the area occupied by eastern UP and had its capital at Shravasti, which is coterminous with Sahet–Mahet on the borders of Gonda and Bahraich districts of UP.
- Koshala also included the tribal republican territory of the Shakyas of Kapilavastu. The capital of Kapilavastu is identified with Piprahwa in Basti district.
- Lumbini, which is situated at a distance of 15 km from Piprahwa in Nepal, served as another capital of the Shakyas. In an Ashokan inscription, it is called the birthplace of Gautama Buddha.
- In the neighbourhood of Koshala lay the republican clan of the Mallas, whose territory touched the northern border of Vajji state. One of the capitals of the Mallas was at Kushinara where Gautama Buddha passed away. Kushinara is coterminous with Kasia in Deoria district.
- Further west was the kingdom of the Vatsas, along the bank of the Yamuna, with its capital at Kaushambi near Allahabad. The Vatsas were a Kuru clan who had shifted from Hastinapur and settled at Kaushambi.
- In central Malwa and the adjoining parts of MP lay the state of Avanti. It was divided into two parts, the northern part with its capital at Ujjain, and the southern part at Mahishamati.
- In the north-west, Gandhara and Kamboja were important *mahajanapadas*. Kamboja is called a *janapada* in Panini and a *mahajanapada* in the Pali texts. It was located in Central Asia in the Pamir area which largely covered modern Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, the remains of a horse, chariots and spoked wheels, cremation, and svastika, which are associated with the Indo-Aryan speakers dating to between 1500 and 1000 BC, have been found. Around 500 BC, both Sanskrit and Pali were spoken in Kamboja, which was connected with Pataliputra by the *uttarapatha*.
 - While most *mahajanapadas* were ruled by kings, some, known as *ganas* or *sanghas*, were oligarchies where power was shared by a number of men, often collectively called *rajas*.

Notes:

The Rise and Growth of the Magadhan Empire

- Magadha came into prominence under the leadership of Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty and a contemporary of the Buddha. 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 Ajatashatru at Champa. He also strengthened his position by marriage alliances.
- Bimbisara's first wife was the daughter of the king of Koshala and the sister of Prasenajit, the son and successor of the Koshalan king.
- The Koshalan bride brought Bimbisara as dowry a Kashi village yielding a revenue of 100,000 which suggests that revenues were collected in terms of coins. His second wife, Chellana, was a Lichchhavi princess from Vaishali who gave birth to Ajatashatru, and his third wife was the daughter of the chief of the Madra clan of Punjab.
- The earliest capital of Magadha was at Rajgir, which was called Girivraja at that time. It was surrounded by five hills.
- According to the Buddhist chronicles, Bimbisara ruled for fifty-two years, roughly from 544 to 492 BC. He was succeeded by his son Ajatashatru (492–60 BC). Ajatashatru killed his father and seized the throne for himself. His reign saw the high watermark of the Bimbisara dynasty.
- Ajatashatru was succeeded by Udayin (460–44 BC). 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 Nandas extended the Magadhan power by conquering Kalinga from where they brought an image of *jina* as a victory trophy. All this took place during the reign of Mahapadma Nanda.
 - They started collecting regular *taxes*. Taxes on crops were the most important. This was because most people were farmers. Usually, the tax was fixed at 1/6th of what was produced. This was known as *bhaga* or a share. There were taxes on crafts persons as well. These could have been in the form of labour. Herders were also expected to pay taxes in the form of animals and animal produce. There were also taxes on goods that were bought and sold, through trade. And hunters and gatherers also had to provide forest produce to the *raja*.

Causes of Magadha's Success

- 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.
- Pataliputra was situated at the confluence of the Ganges, the Gandak, and the Son, and a fourth river called the Ghaghra joined the Ganges not far from Pataliputra.
- The princes of Magadha also benefited from the rise of towns and use of metal money.

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