

5 . MAHAJANAPADA AGE

(600 B.C. to 325 BC)

Mahajanapada Age was from 600 BC to 325 BC that is about 2600 years ago. In this period, there were several big and small republics and monarchies. Several new religious ideologies originated in this age. There was progress in agriculture, trade and commerce and development of cities. Several significant changes came in the political and social fields. In this chapter, we shall read about what these changes were and how they came about.



Pic 5.1 Buddha

In the previous chapter we had learnt that farming had started in the Gangetic plains and several janapadas had come into existence.

1. **What is a Janapada ?**
2. **Into how many parts was the society of the Janapadas divided ?**

MAHAJANAPADA

With time the Janapadas developed rapidly. Agriculture had prospered in the fertile Gangetic plains. Mineral deposits (specially iron) which were found in Southern Bihar (now Jharkhand) were used in making tools and weapons. The Janapadas of this area had become powerful. Their trade and commerce flourished increasing the habitation of the people. They wanted to increase their strength and income, so they started gaining control over other areas. These big and powerful Janapadas were called Mahajanapadas.

What changes must have come about in the lives of the people in this Age ?

REMEMBER

Jana- Tribe of one lineage.

Janapada- The area where people of one jana lived and practiced farming.

Mahajanapada - Big and powerful Janapada.

Thus there were several Janapadas and Mahajanapadas in 600 B.C. Some of them were republics and some were monarchies. From the literature of that era, we learned that there were altogether 16 Mahajanapads. All these Mahajanapadas were very influential.



Map 5.1

In the map 5.1 identify the Mahajanapadas which were situated near the Ganga river.

Magadha, Kosala, Anga, Kashi etc. were monarchies. Here the post of a king was hereditary, that is after the death of a king his elder son would become the king.

But Vajji (Vaishali), Shakya (Kapilvastu) Malla etc. were republics. Republics were ruled by a general assembly of male members of a lineage. The members would elect any one among them as their king. The post of the king was not hereditary. Women, slaves, businessmen and people not belonging to the same lineage had no participation in the governing body. Republican form of governments continued for a



long time in small republics. Important republics like Vajji had come to an end because of the policy of expansion which was adopted by the monarchies like Magadha.

REMEMBER

Hereditary- When son gets the position after his father.

Monarchy - Form of government where king or queen rules.

Republic- Form of government where elected candidates rule for a fixed time period. What is the main difference between monarchies and republics?

What is the difference in governance between the republics of today and those of the Mahajanapada Age?

RISE OF MAGADHA

The period from 544 B.C. TO 323 B.C. was known as the Age of the Mahajanapadas. In the early period Kosal, Vajji and Magadha were powerful states. Avanti was another important state. Its capital was Ujjain. There were frequent wars among the Mahajanapadas to expand their area. Ultimately Magadha emerged as a major power in this struggle. In this its natural resources played a major role. It had fertile areas so agriculture prospered. In its southern region there were iron ore deposits. It provided iron for making tools and weapons. Thus natural resources made Magadha very powerful.

BIMBISARA

Bimbisara was the first great ruler of Magadha. He built a strong army to make Magadha powerful. He used both his army and his policies to achieve his ends. First of all he married the princess of Kosal and got the state of Kashi in dowry. Then he got the support of Vaishali by marrying its princess. He maintained friendly relations with other states. He captured Champa, the capital of Anga, after a war of conquest.

ADMINISTRATION OF BIMBISARA

Bimbisara was an able ruler. He made Rajagriha- which was surrounded by mountains on all sides- his capital. He was a good administrator. The culprits would get severe punishment. Taxes were collected regularly from the farmers and businessmen. The expenses of the army, employees and the kings were taken care of by these taxes. But his son, Ajatashatru, killed him and became the king.



How did Bimbisara make Magadha powerful ?

Why did Bimbisara collect taxes from his people? How did the natural resources help in the development of Magadha ?

AJATASHATRU

After becoming the king Ajatashatru followed the policies of his father and further expanded his empire. He created a split among the people of the republic of Vajji and then annexed it. During his reign the first Buddhist conference took place at Sataparni cave near Rajagriha. Several other rulers who came after Ajatashatru kept on expanding the kingdom of Magadha.

NANDA DYNASTY

The first ruler of the Nanda dynasty was Mahapadma Nanda. With his strong army he conquered several states in north India and Kalinga (Orissa) in the south. Magadha became a huge empire in his time. The last king of the Nanda dynasty was Dhana Nanda. His subjects were very distressed as he inflicted atrocities on them while collecting the taxes. At this time Chandragupta Mourya attacked Magadha with the help of Chanakya. Dhana Nanda was killed in battle, after which the rule of the Maurya dynasty started.

LIFE IN THE MAHAJANAPADAS

In the Mahajanapadas the king was very powerful. He would rule and give justice to his people. He appointed ministers, commanders of the army and other employees to help in the administration. During this period, a village was administered by the village headman- who was the link between the king and the villagers. People in the villages mainly depended on farming and cattle-rearing. Villages, which had a large number of craftsmen with good workmanship like- carpenters, sculptors, blacksmiths - and many businessmen- slowly started becoming cities. There were several famous cities like Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), Champa, Vaishali, Rajgriha (in Bihar) etc. They were called mahanagar (metropolis). On excavation it was found that the houses in these cities were made of wood, bricks and stones. Several craftsmen lived here. Craftsmen of the same trade or craft formed shrenis or guilds where they worked together.

Trade had also flourished in the mahajanapada age. Trade was based on barter system. In this age the use of coins (made of copper and silver) had started. Coins were made by punch marking the metal pieces. Trade was made easy by the use of coins.



Pic. 5.2 The Coins of Mahajanapadas

At that time people had to pay taxes. Farmers had to give one-sixth of their produce as tax. Craftsmen had to give something of whatever they made, as tax. Businessmen too paid taxes in cash and kind.

Several changes were seen with regard to religion too. We shall read about them in the next chapter.

Do the craftsmen and artisans today form any organization to work together ?

While the Magadha empire had control over the north of India, there were several small kingdoms in the Punjab. These kingdoms were defeated by the rulers of Iran and Greece.

ALEXANDER

Alexander was the ruler of Macedonian state in Greece. He started conquering the world. After conquering several countries of middle Asia he reached and attacked the kingdoms of Punjab. He came across a king called Porus. It is said that after being defeated when king Porus was brought before the victorious Alexander he was asked by him- “How should you be treated ?”

Porus replied- “Just as one king treats another king.” Alexander was very impressed with his reply and made Porus his ally.



After this, Alexander desired to move towards Magadha. But his army refused to move forward. So he was forced to return. New relations developed between Greece and the Indian kingdoms. There were exchanges of thoughts and trade relations were established.

Not only this, many Iranians and Greeks started settling down in the North Western areas of India. Later on they played an important role in Indian history.

EXERCISE

I. Fill in the blanks-

1. In the republics power lay in the hands of the people of one _____.
2. In the Mahajanapada Age the capital of Magadha was _____.
3. There were _____ Mahajanapadas in ancient India.
4. _____ was the famous republic in the Mahajanapada Age.

II. Say whether it is right or wrong-

1. The king was hereditary in the republics.
2. The king was not hereditary in a monarchy.
3. Farmers had to pay a part of their produce as taxes.
4. Alexander was the ruler of Iran.

III. Answer the following questions -

1. How many years ago were called mahajanpada age?
2. Why where the people of Dhana nand sad?
3. How were Mahajanapadas formed?
4. How the cities were developed in Mahajanapadas?
5. What was the importance of taxes in the Mahajanapadas?
6. Describe the administrative system of the Republics and the Monarchies?
7. What was the role of Bimbisar in making Magadha powerful?

ACTIVITY

Ask your parents if they pay taxes! If yes, then which taxes do they pay? How do they pay their taxes - in cash or in things?

