



Study notes for History topic Mahajanapadas

Presently we will be studying about 16 great kingdoms or Mahajanapadas. Let's get started then.

Angutara Nikaya, a Buddhist scripture mentions 16 great kingdoms or Mahajanapadas at the beginning of the 6th century BCE in India. They emerged during the Vedic Age. The history of the emergence of Mahajanapadas can be linked to the development of eastern Uttar Pradesh and western Bihar during the 6th to 4th century BCE where agriculture flourished due to the availability of fertile lands and iron production increased due to availability of iron ore in large quantities. This resulted in the expansion of the territories of the Janapadas (due to the use of iron weapons) and later addressed as 16 highly developed regions or the Mahajanapadas.

The **Janapadas** were the major kingdoms of Vedic India. During that period, Aryans were the most powerful tribes and were called 'Janas'. This gave rise to the term Janapada where Jana means 'people' and Pada means 'foot'. In addition, this is regarded as the second urbanization period following the Harappan civilization. During this time, the political center changed from the Indo-Gangetic plains' west to its east. This was related to higher land fertility brought on by more rivers and rainfall. Additionally, it was nearer to regions that produced iron.

16 Mahajanapadas

1. Anga:

- Champa was the capital.
- It can be found in West Bengal and Bihar of the present.
- Suvarnabhumi was a major trading hub on the commerce routes, therefore merchants travelled there (South East Asia).

2. Magadha:

- Rajagriha was the capital.
- Magadha is mentioned in the Atharva Veda.
- It was separated from Anga in present-day Bihar by the Champa River.

3. Kasi:

- Varanasi was the capital.
- This city was given its names from the rivers Varuna and Asi, according to the Matsya Purana.

4. Vatsa:

- The capital was called Kausambi or Kaushambi (which was at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna).
- It was situated on the banks of the Yamuna.
- This Mahajanapada had a monarchical form of government.

5. Kosala:



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- Shravasti (northern) and Kushavati (southern) was the capital.
- The region also includes Ayodhya, an important city with ties to the Ramayana.
- The tribal republican territory of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu is also a part of Kosala.

6. Shurasene:

- Its capital, Mathura, was situated along the Yamuna River.
- This place served as a hub for Krishna devotion during Megasthenes' period.
- Also influential were the Buddha's followers.

7. Panchala:

- Ahichchatra (modern Bareilly), its capital for northern Panchala, and Kampilya, its capital for southern Panchala (modern Farrukhabad).
- The renowned city of Kannauj was situated in the Panchala Kingdom.

8. Kuru:

- Indraprastha was the capital.
- Kuru Mahajanapada was born close to Kurukshetra.
- Republican governance was implemented.

9. Matsya:

- Viratanagara was the capital.
- It was located south of the Kurus and west of the Panchalas.
- It is situated in the Jaipur, Alwar, and Bharatpur region of Rajasthan.

10. Chedi:

- Sothivathi was the capital.
- It is currently situated in the Bundelkhand region (Central India).

11. Avanti:

- Ujjaini or Mahishmati was the capital.
- Avanti had a significant part in the development of Buddhism.
- It situated in what is now Madhya Pradesh and Malwa.

12. Gandhara:

- Taxila was the capital (Takshashila).
- Gandhara is mentioned in the Atharva Veda.
- In terms of world trade, it was significant.
- A strong king is Pushkarasarin..

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13. Kamboja:

- Poonch was the capital.
- It is situated in the Hindukush and Kashmir of the present.
- Kamboja was a republic, according to several literary sources.

14. Asmaka:

- Potali/Podana was the capital.
- It was located along the Godavari River.
- In Dakshinapatha, which is situated south of the Vindhya Range, it was the sole Mahajanapada.
- The Pratisthan or Paithan region is included.

15. Vajji:

- Vaishali was the capital.
- The most powerful clans were the Lichchhavis (Capital – Vaishali), Videhans (Capital – Mithila), and Jnatrikas (based in Kundapura).
- Mahavira belonged to the Jnatrikas family.

16. Malla:

- The capitals are Kusinara and Pava.
- It is mentioned in the Mahabharata as well as Buddhist and Jain texts.
- A democratic republic existed in Malla.
- Its area reached the northern frontier of the Vajji state.

The Mahajanapadas were sixteen oligarchic republics or kingdoms that existed in ancient India between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, during the second urbanisation era. A collection of sixteen ancient Indian kingdoms was known as the Mahajanapadas. With the decline of the Vedic civilisation, **Magadha empire** rose to power whose timeline is from 680-320 BCE. The Magadha Empire encompasses the rule of three dynasties over time – **Haryanka Dynasty, Shishunaga Dynasty and Nanda Dynasty**. The four Mahajanapadas – Magadha, Kosala, Avanti and Vatsa were vying for supremacy from the 6th century BCE to the 4th century BCE. Finally, Magadha emerged victorious and was able to gain sovereignty. It became the most powerful state in ancient India. Magadha is situated in modern Bihar. The **NBPW phase** marked the beginning of the second urbanisation in India. With the appearance of the towns in the middle Gangetic basin in the 6th century BCE, a second urbanisation began in India. Houses were mostly made up of mud brick and wood. Structures excavated are not really impressive but together with other material remains they indicate a huge population when compared with the Painted Grey Ware settlements. This period 600-200 BCE also saw the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. During the 5th-6th centuries BC two new religions emerged in the form of Jainism and Buddhism.

This was all about Mahajanapadas. Hoping your all queries got cleared.