

## GIST OF N.C.E.R.T TERRITORIAL STATES AND THE FIRST MAGADHAN EMPIRE

### The Mahajanapadas

In the age of the Buddha we find 16 large states called Mahajanapadas, They were mostly situated north of the Vindhya and extended from the north-west frontier to Bihar. Of these Magadha, Koshala, Vatsa and Avanti seem to have been considerably powerful. Beginning from the east we hear of the kingdom of Anga which covered the modern districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur. It had its capital at Champa, Eventually the kingdom, of Anga was swallowed by its powerful neighbour Magadha.

Magadha embraced the former districts of Patna, Gaya and parts of Shahbad, and grew to be the leading state of the time. North of the Ganga in the division of Tirhut was the state of the Vajjis which included eight clans. But the most powerful were the Lichchavis with their capital at Vaishali which is identical with the village of Basarh in the district of Vaishali. The Puranas push the antiquity of Vaishali to a much earlier period, but archaeologically Basarh was not settled until the sixth century B.C.

Further west we find the kingdom of Kashi with its capital at Varanasi. In the beginning Kashi appears to be the most powerful of the states, but eventually it had to submit to the power of Koshala.

Koshala embraced the area occupied by eastern Uttar Pradesh and had its capital at Shravasti, which is identical with Sahet-Mahet on the borders of Gonda and Bahraich districts in Uttar Pradesh. But we see the beginnings of a mud fort. Koshala contained an important city called Ayodhya, which is associated with the story in the Ramayana. Koshala also included the tribal republican territory of the Shakyas of Kapilvastu. The capital of Kapilvastu has been identified with Piprahwa in Basti district. Lumbini, which lies 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 and it was here that he was brought up.

In the neighbourhood of Koshala lay the republican clan of the Mallas, One of the capitals of the Mallas

lay at Kushinara where Gautama Buddha passed away. Kushinara is identical with Kasia in Deoria district.

Further west lay 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 down at Kaushambi. Kaushambi was chosen because of its location near, the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna

We also hear of the older states of the Kurus and the Panchalas which were situated in western Uttar Pradesh, but they no longer enjoyed the political importance which they had attained in the later Vedic period.

In central Malwa and the adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh lay the state of the Avantis. It was divided into two parts. The northern part had its capital at Uggain, and the southern part at Mahishamati.

### Rise and Growth of the Magadha Empire

Magadha came into prominence under the leadership of Bimbisara, who belonged to the Haryanka dynasty. He was a contemporary of the Buddha. He started 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. He took three wives. His first wife was the daughter of the king of Koshala and the sister of Parsenajit. His second wife Chellana was a Lichchavi princess from Vaishali who gave birth to Ajatashatru and his third wife was the daughter of the chief of the Madra clan of Punjab.

Magadha's most serious rival was Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. Its king Chanda Pradyota Mahasena fought Bimbisara, but ultimately the two thought it wise to become friends. Later when Pradyota was attacked by jaundice, at the Avanti king's request Bimbisara sent the royal physician Jivaka to Ujjain.

The earliest capital of Magadha was at Rajgir, which

was called Girivraja at that time. It was surrounded by five hills, the openings in which were closed by stone-walls on all sides. This made Rajgir impregnable.

According to the Buddhist chronicles, Bimbisara ruled for 52 years, roughly from 544 B.C. to 492 B.C. He was succeeded by his son Ajatashatru (492-460 B.C.). Ajatashatru killed his father and seized the throne for himself. Throughout his reign he pursued an aggressive policy of expansion. This provoked against him a combination of Kashi and Koshala. There began a prolonged conflict between Magadha and Koshala. Ultimately Ajatashatru got the best of the war, and the Koshalan king was compelled to purchase peace by giving his daughter in marriage to Ajatashatru and leaving him in sole possession of Kashi.

Although his mother was a Lichchhavi princess, this did not prevent him from making war against Vaishali. He created dissensions in the ranks of the Lichchhavis and finally destroyed their independence by invading their territory and by defeating them in battle. It took him full 16 years to destroy Vaishali. Eventually he succeeded in doing so because of a war engine which was used to throw stones like catapults. He also possessed a chariot to which a mace was attached, and it facilitated mass killings. The Magadhan empire was thus enlarged with the addition of Kashi and Vaishali.

Ajatashatru faced a stronger rival in the ruler of Avanti. Avanti had defeated the Vatsas of Kaushambi and now threatened an invasion of Magadha. To meet this danger Ajatashatru began the fortification of Rajgir. The remains of the walls can be still seen. However, the invasion did not materialize in his lifetime.

Ajatashatru was succeeded by Udayin (460-444 B.C.) His reign is important because he built the fort upon the confluence of the Ganga and Son at Patna. This was done because Patna lay in the centre of the Magadhan kingdom, which now extended from the Himalayas in the north to the hills of Chotanagpur in the south.

Udayin was succeeded by the dynasty of Shishunagas, who temporarily shifted the capital to Vaishali. Their greatest achievement was the destruction of the power of Avanti with its capital at Ujjain. This brought to an end the 100 year old rivalry between Magadha and Avanti. From now onwards Avanti became a part of the Magadhan

empire and continued to be so till the end of the Maurya rule.

The Shishunagas were succeeded by the Nandas, who proved to be the most powerful rulers of Magadha. So great was their power that Alexander, who invaded Punjab at that time, did not dare to move towards the east. The Nandas added to the Magadhan power by conquering Kalinga from where they brought an image of the Jina as a victory trophy. All this took place in the reign of Mahapadma Nanda. He claimed to be ekarat, the sole sovereign who destroyed all the other ruling princes. It seems that he acquired not only Kalinga but also Koshala which had probably rebelled against him.

The later Nandas turned out to be weak and unpopular. Their rule in Magadha was supplanted by that of the Maurya dynasty under which the Magadhan empire reached the apex of glory.

#### THE AGE OF THE MAURYAS

##### Chandragupta Maurya

THE MAURYA dynasty was founded by Chandragupta Maurya, who seems to have belonged to some ordinary family. According to the brahmanical tradition he was born of Mura, a shudra woman in the court of the Nandas. But an earlier Buddhist tradition speaks of the existence of a kshatriya clan called Mauryas living in the region of Gorakhpur adjoining the Nepalese terai. In all likelihood, Chandragupta was a member of this clan. He took advantage of the growing weakness and unpopularity of the Nandas in the last days of their rule. With the help of Chanakya, who is known as Kautilya, he overthrew the Nandas and established the rule of the Maurya dynasty. The machinations of Chanakya against Chandragupta's enemies are described in detail in the Mudrarakshasa, a drama written by Vishakhadatta in the ninth century. Several plays have been based on it in modern times.

Justin, a Greek writer, says that Chandragupta overran the whole of India with an army of 600,000. But Chandragupta liberated north-western India from the thralldom of Seleucus, Chandragupta thus built up a vast empire which included not only Bihar and good portions of Orissa and Bengal but also western and northwestern India, and the Deccan. Leaving Kerala, Tamil Nadu and parts of north-eastern India the Mauryas ruled over the whole of the subcontinent. In the north-west they held sway over certain areas which were not included even in the British empire.



### Imperial Organization

The Mauryas organized a very elaborate system of administration. We know about it from the account of Megasthenes and the Arthashastra of Kautilya. Megasthenes was a Greek ambassador sent by Seleucus to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. He lived in the Maurya capital of Pataliputra and wrote an account not only of the administration of the city of Pataliputra but also of the Maurya empire as a whole. The account of Megasthenes has been published in the form of a book called Indica, which throws valuable light on the administration, society and economy of Maurya times.

The account of Megasthenes can be supplemented by the Arthashastra of Kautilya. Arthashastra gives authentic information about the Maurya administration and economy. On the basis of these two sources we can draw a picture of the administrative system of Chandragupta Maurya.

If we believe in a statement of the Arthashastra, the king had set a high ideal the happiness of his subjects lay his happiness and in their troubles lay his troubles. According to Megasthenes the king was assisted by a council.

The empire was divided into a number of provinces, and each province was placed under a prince who was a scion of the royal dynasty. The provinces were divided into still smaller units, and arrangements were made for both rural and urban administration. Excavations The administration Pataliputra, which was the capital of the Mauryas, was carried on by six committees, each committee consisting of five members. These committees were entrusted with sanitation, care of foreigners, registration of birth and death, regulation of weights and measures and similar other functions.

The most striking feature of Chandragupta's administration is the maintenance of a huge army. According to the account of a Roman writer called Ptolemy, Chandragupta maintained 600,000 foot-soldiers, 30,000 cavalry and 9000 elephants the Mauryas also maintained a navy. The administration of the armed forces, according to Megasthenes, was carried on by a board of 30 officers divided into six committees, consisting of five members.

Ashoka (273-232 B.C.)

Chandragupta Maurya was succeeded by Bindusara, whose reign is important for continued links with the Greek princes. His son, Ashoka, is the greatest of the Maurya rulers. According to

Buddhist tradition he was so cruel in his early life that he killed his 99 brothers to get the throne. But since the statement is based on a legend, it may well be wrong. His biography, prepared by Buddhist writers, is so full of fiction that it cannot be taken seriously.

### Ashokan Inscriptions

The history of Ashoka is reconstructed on the basis of his inscriptions. These inscriptions, numbering 39, are classified into Major Rock Edicts, Minor Rock Edicts, Separate Rock Edicts, Major Pillar Edicts and Minor Pillar Edicts. The name of Ashoka occurs only in copies of Minor Rock Edict I found at three places in Karnataka and at one in Madhya Pradesh. All the other inscriptions mention only devanampiyadasi, dear to gods, and leave out the word Ashoka. The Ashokan inscriptions are found in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Altogether they appear at 47 places, and their total number is 182. They were generally placed on ancient highways. Composed in Prakrit, they were written in Brahmi script in the greater part of the subcontinent. But in its north-western part they appeared in Aramaic language and Kharoshthi script, and in the Afghanistan they were written in both Aramaic and Greek scripts and languages. He is the first Indian king to speak directly to the people through his inscriptions which carry royal orders. The inscriptions throw light on the career of Ashoka, his external and domestic policies, and the extent of his empire.

### Impact of the Kalinga War

The ideology of Buddhism guided Ashoka's state policy at home and abroad. After his accession to the throne, Ashoka fought only one major war called the Kalinga War. According to him, 100,000 people were killed in this war, several lakhs perished, and 150,000 were taken prisoners. At any rate it seems that the king was moved by the massacre in this war. So he abandoned the policy of physical conquest in favour of policy of cultural conquest. In other words, bherighosha was replaced with dhammaghosha. We quote below the words of Ashoka from his Thirteenth Major Rock Edict:

Ashoka no longer treated foreign dominions as legitimate areas for military conquest. He tried to conquer them ideologically. He took steps for the welfare of men and animals in foreign lands, which was a new thing considering the condition of those days. He sent ambassadors of peace to the Greek kingdoms in West Asia and Greece. He sent missionaries for the propagation of Buddhism to

Sri Lanka and Central Asia. As an enlightened ruler Ashoka tried to enlarge his area of political influence through propaganda.

It would be wrong to think that the Kalinga war made Ashoka an extreme pacifist. On the other hand he adopted a practical policy of consolidating his empire. He retained Kalinga after its conquest and incorporated it into his empire. There is also nothing to show that he disbanded the huge army maintained from the time of Chandragupta Maurya. Within the empire he appointed a class of officers known as the rajukas, who were vested with the authority of not only rewarding people but also punishing them, wherever necessary.

#### Internal Policy and Buddhism

Ashoka was converted to Buddhism as a result of the Kalinga war. According to tradition he became a monk, made huge gifts to the Buddhists and undertook pilgrimages to the Buddhist shrines. The fact of his visiting the Buddhist shrines is also suggested by the dhamma yatras mentioned in his inscriptions.

According to tradition the Buddhist council (Sangiti) was held by Ashoka and missionaries were sent not only to south India but also to Sri Lanka, Burma and other countries to convert the people there. Brahmi inscriptions of the second and first centuries B.C. have been found in Sri Lanka.

Ashoka set a very high ideal for himself, and this was the ideal of paternal kingship. He repeatedly asked his officials to tell the subjects that the king looked upon them as his children. As agents of the king, the officials were also asked to take care of the people. Ashoka appointed Dhammamahatras for propagating dharma among various social groups including women. He also appointed rajukas for the administration of justice in his empire.

He disapproved of rituals, especially those observed by women. He forbade killing certain birds and animals, and completely prohibited the slaughter of animals in the capital. He interdicted gay social functions in which people indulged in revelries.

#### Ashoka's Place in History

It is said that the pacific policy of Ashoka ruined the Maurya empire, but this is not true. On the contrary Ashoka has a number of achievements to his credit. He was certainly a great missionary ruler in the history of the ancient world. He worked with great zeal and devotion to his mission and achieved a lot, both at home and abroad.

Ashoka brought about the political unification of the country. He bound it further by one dharma, one language and practically one script called Brahmi which was used in most of his inscriptions. In unifying the country he respected such scripts as Brahmi, Kharoshthi, Aramaic and Greek. Evidently he also accommodated such languages as Greek, Prakrit and Sanskrit and various religious sects. Ashoka followed a tolerant religious policy. He did not try to foist his Buddhist faith on his subjects. On the other hand he made gifts to non-Buddhist and even anti-Buddhist sects.

Ashoka was fired with zeal for missionary activities. He deputed officials in the far-flung parts of the empire. This helped the cause of administration and also promoted cultural contacts between the developed Gangetic basin and the backward distant provinces. The material culture, typical of the heart of the empire, spread to Kalinga and the lower Deccan and northern Bengal.

Above all Ashoka is important in history for his policy of peace, non-aggression and cultural conquest. He had no model in early Indian history for pursuing such a policy; nor did such an example exist in any country except Egypt where Akhnaton had pursued a pacific policy in the fourteenth century B.C. But it is obvious that Ashoka was not aware of his Egyptian predecessor.

However, Ashoka's policy did not make any lasting impression on his viceroys and vassals, who declared themselves independent in their respective areas after the retirement of the king in 232 B.C. Similarly, the policy could not convert his neighbours, who swooped on the north-western frontier of his empire within 30 years of Ashoka's exit from power in 232 B.C.

#### THE RISE AND GROWTH OF THE GUPTA EMPIRE

##### Background

AFTER THE break-up of the Maurya empire, the Satavahanas and the Kushans emerged as two large political powers. The Satavahanas acted as a stabilizing factor in the Deccan and south to which they gave political unity and economic prosperity on the strength of their trade with the Roman empire. The Kushans performed the same role in the north. Both these empires came to an end in the middle of the third century A.D.

On the ruins of the Kushan empire arose a new empire, which established its sway over a good part of the former dominions of both the Kushans and Satavahanas. This was the empire of the Guptas,

who may have been of vaishya origin. Although the Gupta empire was not as large as the Maurya empire, it kept north India politically united for more than a century from A.D. 335 to 455. The original kingdom of the Guptas comprised Uttar Pradesh and Bihar at the end of the third century A.D. Uttar Pradesh seems to have been a more important province for the Guptas than Bihar, because early Gupta coins and inscriptions have been mainly found in that state. If we leave out some feudatories and private individuals, whose inscriptions have been mostly found in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh will stand out as the most important area in respect of the finds of the Gupta antiquities. Hence Uttar Pradesh seems to have been the place from where the Guptas operated and fanned out in different directions. Probably with their centre of power at Prayag they spread in the neighbouring regions.

The Guptas were possibly the feudatories of the Kushans in Uttar Pradesh and seems to have succeeded them without any wide time-lag. At many places in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar the Kushan antiquities are immediately followed by the Gupta antiquities. It is likely that the Guptas learnt the use of saddle, reins, but-toned-coats, trousers and boots from the Kushans. All these gave them mobility and made them excellent horsemen. In the Kushan scheme of things, horse-chariots and elephants had ceased to be important. Horsemen played the main part. This also seems to have been the case with the Gupta on whose coins horsemen are represented. Although some Gupta kings are described as excellent and unrivalled chariot warriors, their basic strength lay in the use of horses.

The Guptas enjoyed certain material advantages. The centre of their operations lay in the fertile land of Madhyadesha covering Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. They could exploit the iron ores of central India and south Bihar. Further, they took advantage of their proximity to the areas in north India which carried on silk trade with the Eastern Roman empire, also known as the Byzantine empire. On account of these favourable factors the Guptas set up their rule over Anuganga (the middle Gangetic basin), Prayag (modern Allahabad), Saketa (modern Ayodhya) and Magadha. In course of time this kingdom became an all-India empire. The Kushan power in north India came to an end around A.D. 230 and then a good part of central India fell under the rule of the Murundas, who were possibly the kinsmen of the Kushans. The

Murundas continued to rule till A.D. 250. Twenty-five years later, in about A.D. 275, the dynasty of the Gupta came to power.

#### Chandragupta I (A.D. 319-334)

The first important king of the Gupta dynasty was Chandragupta I. He married a Lichchhavi princess most probably from Nepal, which strengthened his position. The Guptas were possibly vaishyas, and hence marriage in a kshtriya family gave them prestige. Chandragupta I seems to have been a ruler of considerable importance because he started the Gupta era in A.D. 319-20, which marked the date of his accession. Later many inscriptions came to be dated in the Gupta era.

#### Samudragupta (A.D. 335-380)

The Gupta kingdom was enlarged enormously by Chandragupta I's son and successor Samudragupta (A.D. 335-380). He was the opposite of Ashoka. Ashoka believed in a policy of peace and non-aggression, but Samudragupta delighted in violence and conquest. His court poet Harishena wrote a glowing account of the military exploits of his patron. In a long inscription the poet enumerates the peoples and countries that were conquered by Samudragupta. The inscription is engraved at Allahabad on the same pillar which carries the inscriptions of the peace-loving Ashoka. The places and the countries conquered by Samudragupta can be divided into five groups. Group one includes princes of the Ganga-Yamuna doab who were defeated and whose kingdoms were incorporated into the Gupta empire. Group two includes the rulers of the eastern Himalayan states and some frontier states such as princes of Nepal, Assam, Bengal, etc., who were made to feel the weight of Samudragupta's arms. It also covers some republics of Punjab, The republic, which flickered on the ruins of the Maurya empire, were finally destroyed by Samudragupta. Group three includes the forest kingdoms situated in the Vindhya region and known as Atavika raiyas; they were brought under the control of Samudragupta. Group four includes twelve rulers of the eastern, Deccan and south India, who were conquered and liberated. Samudragupta's arms reached as far as Kanchi in Tamil Nadu, where the Pallavas were compelled to recognize his suzerainty. Group five includes the names of the Sankas and Kushans, some of them ruling in Afghanistan. It is said that Samudragupta swept them out of power and received the

submission of the rulers of distant lands. The prestige and influence of Samudragupta spread even outside India. According to a Chinese source, Meghavarman, the ruler of Sri Lanka, sent a missionary to Samudragupta for permission to build a Buddhist temple at Gay a This was granted, and the temple was developed into a huge monastic establishment. If we believe the eulogistic inscription from Allahabad, it would appear that Samudragupta never knew any defeat, and because of his bravery and generalship he is called the Napoleon of India. There is no doubt that Samudragupta forcibly unified the greater part of India under him, and his power was felt in a much larger area.

#### Chandragupta II (A.D. 380-412)

The reign of Chandragupta II saw the high watermark of the Gupta empire. He extended the limits of the empire by marriage alliance and conquests. Chandragupta married his daughter Prabhavati with a Vakataka prince who belonged to the brahmana caste and ruled in central India. The prince died, and was succeeded by his young son. So Prabhavati became the virtual paler. As shown by some of her land charters, which betray the influence of the eastern Gupta writing, she promoted the interests of her father Chandragupta. Thus Chandragupta exercised indirect control over the Vakataka kingdom in central India. This afforded a great advantage to him. With this great influence in this area, Chandragupta II conquered western Malwa and Gujarat, which had been under the rule of the Shaka Kshtraps for about four centuries by that time. The conquest gave Chandragupta the wester sea coast, famous for trade and commerce. This contributed to the prosperity of Malwa, and its chief city Ujjain. Ujjain seems to have been made the second capital by Chandragupta II.

The exploits of a king called Chandra are glorified in an iron pillar inscription fixed near Qutb Minar in Delhi If Chandra is considered to be identical with Chandragupta II, it will appear that he established Gupta authority in north-western India and in a good portion of Bengal. But the epigraphical eulogy seems to be exaggerated.

Chandragupta II adopted the title of Vikramaditya, which had been first used by an Ujjain ruler in 57 B.C. as a mark of victory over the Shaka Kshatrapas of western India. The court of Chandragupta II at Ujjain was adorned by numerous scholars including Kalidasa and

Anairasimlia. It was in Chandragupta's time that the Chinese pilgrim Fahsien (399-414) visited India and wrote an elaborate account of the life of its people.

#### Fall of the Empire

The successors of Chandragupta II had to face an invasion by the Hunas from Central Asia in the second half of the fifth century A.D. Although in the beginning the Gupta king Skandragupta tried effectively to stem the march of the Hunas into India, his successors proved to be weak and could not cope with the Huna invaders, who excelled in horsemanship and possibly used stirrups made of metal. They could move quickly and being excellent archers they seem to have attained considerable success not only in Iran but also in India.

By 485 the Hunas occupied eastern Malwa and a good portion of central India where their inscriptions have been found. The intermediate regions such as Punjab and Rajasthan also passed under their possession. This must have drastically reduced the extent of the Gupta empire at the beginning of the sixth century. Although the Huna power was soon overthrown by Yashodharaman of Malwa who belonged to the Aulikara feudatory family, the Malwa prince successfully challenged the authority of the Gupta and set up in 532, pillars of victory commemorating his conquest of almost the whole of northern India, Yashodharman's rule was shortlived, but it meant a severe blow to the Gupta empire.

The Gupta empire was further undermined by the rise of the feudatories. The governors appointed by the Gupta kings in north Bengal and their feudatories in Samatata or south-east Bengal tended to become independent. The late Guptas of Magadha established their power in Bihar. Alongside them the Maukharis rose to power in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and had their capital at Kanauj. It seems that by 550 Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had passed out of Gupta hands. By the beginning of the sixth century we find independent princes issuing land grants in their own rights in northern Madhya Pradesh, although they use the Gupta era in dating their charters. The rulers of Valabhi established their authority in Gujarat and western Malwa. After the reign of Skandagupta, i.e. A.D. 467, hardly any Gupta coin or inscription has been found in western Malwa and Saurashtra. The loss of western India, which seems to have been complete by the end of the fifth century, must have deprived the Guptas of the rich revenues from trade

and commerce and crippled them economically. In north India the princes of Thanesar established their power in haryana and then gradually moved on to Kanauj.

The Gupta state may have found it difficult to maintain a large professional army on account of the growing practice of land grants for religious and other purposes, which was bound to reduce their revenues. Their income may have further been affected by the decline of foreign trade. The migration of a guild of silk-weavers from Gujarat to Malwa in A.D. 473 and their adoption of nonproductive professions show that there was not much demand for cloth produced by them. The advantages from Gujarat trade gradually disappeared. After the middle of the fifth century the Gupta kings made desperate attempts to maintain their gold currency by reducing the content of pure gold in it. But this proved of no avail. Although the rule of the Imperial Guptas lingered till the middle of the sixth century A.D., the imperial glory had vanished a century earlier.



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