

## 6<sup>th</sup> – Kingdoms, Kings and an Early Republic



**How Some Men Become Rulers?** Choosing leaders or rulers by voting is something that has become common during the last fifty years or so. How did men become rulers in the past? Some of the rajas we read in chapter 5 were probably chosen by the Jana, the people .but around 3000 years ago, we find some changes taking place in the ways in which rajas were chosen. Some men now became recognized as rajas by performing very big sacrifices.

The ashvamedha or horse sacrifice was one such ritual. A horse was let loose to wander freely and it was guarded by the raja's men. If the horse wandered into the kingdoms of other rajas and they stopped it, they had to fight .if they allowed the horse to pass; it meant that they accepted that the raja who wanted to perform the sacrifice was stronger than them. These rajas were then invited to the sacrifice, which was performed by specially trained priests, who were rewarded with gifts .the raja who organized the sacrifice was recognized as being very powerful, and all those who came brought gifts for him.

The raja was central figure in these rituals. He often had a special seat, a throne or a tiger skin. His charioteer, who was his companion in the battle field and witnessed his exploits, chanted tales of his glory. His relatives, especially his wives and sons, had to perform a variety of minor rituals. The other

Rajas were simply spectators who had to sit and watch the performance of the sacrifice. Priests performed the rituals including the sprinkling of sacred water on the king. The ordinary people, the vish or vaishya, also brought gifts. However, some people, such as those who were regarded as shudras by the priests, were excluded from many rituals

**Janapadas:** The rajas that performed these big sacrifices were now recognised as being rajas of janapadas rather than janas. The word janapadas literally means the land where the jana set its foot, and settled down. Archaeologists have excavated a number of settlements in these janapadas, such as purana qila in Delhi, Hastinapura near Meerut, and Atranjikhhera, near Etah (the last two are in uttar Pradesh). They found that people lived in huts, kept cattle as well as other animals. They also grew a variety of crops - rice, wheat, barley, pulses, sugarcane, sesame and mustard.

**Mahajanapadas:** About 2500 years ago, some Janapadas became more important than others, and were known as mahajanapadas. Most mahajanapadas had a capital city, many of these were fortified. This means that huge walls of wood, brick or stone were built around them.

Forts were probably built because people were afraid of attacks from other kings and needed protection. It is also likely that some rulers wanted to show how rich and powerful they were by building really large, tall and impressive walls around their cities. Also in this way, the land and the people living inside the fortified area could be controlled more easily by the king.

The new rajas now began maintaining armies; soldiers were paid regular salaries and maintained by the king throughout the year. Some payments were probably made using punch marked coins

According to the Buddhist texts Anguttara Nikaya and Digha Nikaya, by around 600 BC, there 16 mahajanapadas. Of these, Magadh emerged the most powerful of all. The other powerful mahajanapadas were Avanti. Vatsa and Kosala.

## 6<sup>th</sup> – Kingdoms, Kings and an Early Republic



**Monarchies and Republic:** The 16 Mahajanapadas were concentrated in the Gangetic Plains and they were mostly monarchies i.e. ruled by kings or monarchs. The King became more powerful, and the kingship was now passed from father to Son. i.e., it became Hereditary. The king was considered divine. The king imposed taxes to administer the land. The army was under his command and he was the lawmaker too. The other political system that existed during the same period was that of the republics. In a republic the people chose or elected their rulers. Power lay with the people of the state, not with the ruler. The republics were also known as gana-sanghas. These republics were located in the less fertile tracts of land. They were mostly concentrated at, for example, the foothills of the Himalayas, in North western India and in Punjab.

Some well-known republics were those of the Shakyas, Mallas, Vrijis and Yadavas. These republics were ruled by a chief known the ganapati and the office was not hereditary. The ganapati was considered a chief rather than a king.

### Taxes:

As the rulers of the mahajanapadas were ,buildings huge forts, maintain big armies, they needed more resources. And they needed officials to collect these. So instead by people, as in the case of the raja of the janapadas, 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 1/6<sup>th</sup> 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. For example, a weaver or a smith may have had to work for a day every month for the king.
- 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.

### Changes in Agriculture

There were two major changes in agriculture. One was the growing use of iron ploughshares. This meant that heavy, clayey soil could be turned over better than with a wooden ploughshare, so that more grain could be produced. Second, people began transplanting paddy.

This meant that instead of scattering seed on the ground, from which plants would sprout, saplings were grown and then planted in the fields. This led to increased production, as many more plants survived. However, it was back breaking work. Generally, slave men and women, and landless agricultural labourers had to do this work.

### Magadha

Magadha became the most important mahajanapada in about two hundred years. Many rivers such as the Ganga and Son flowed through Magadha.

This was important for

- (a) transport,
- (b) water supplies
- (c) making the land fertile.



## 6<sup>th</sup> – Kingdoms, Kings and an Early Republic



Parts of Magadha were forested. Elephants, which is lived in the forest could be captured and trained for the army. Forests also provided wood for building houses, carts and chariots. Besides, there were iron ore mines in the region that could be tapped to make strong tools and weapons.

Magadha had two very powerful rulers, Bimbisara and Ajatasattu, who used all possible means to conquer other janapadas. Mahapadma Nanda was another important ruler. He extended his control up to the north- west part of the subcontinent. Rajagriha (present-day Rajgir) in Bihar was the capital of Magadha for several years. Later the capital was shifted to Pataliputra (Present-day Patna). More than 2300 years ago, a ruler named Alexandra, who lived in Macedonia in Europe, wanted to become a world conqueror. Of course, he didn't conquer the world, but did conquer parts of Egypt and West Asia, and came to the banks of the Beas.

When he wanted to march, further eastwards, his soldier refused. They were scared, as they had heard that the rulers of India had vast armies of foot soldiers, chariots and elephants.

### Vajji

While Magadha became a powerful kingdom, Vajji, with its capital at Vaishali (Bihar), was under a different form of government, known as Gana or Sangha. In a Gana or a Sangha there were not one, but many rulers.

Sometimes, even when thousands of men ruled together, each one was known as a Raja. These Rajas performed rituals together.

They also met in assemblies, and discussion and debate. For example, if they were attacked by an enemy, they met to discuss what should be done to meet the threat. However, women, Dasas and Kammakaras could not participate in these assemblies. Both the Buddha and Mahavira belonged to Gana or Sanghas.

Some of the vivid descriptions of life in the Sanghas can be found in Buddhist books. Rajas of powerful kingdoms tried to conquer the Sanghas were conquered by the Gupta rulers.

