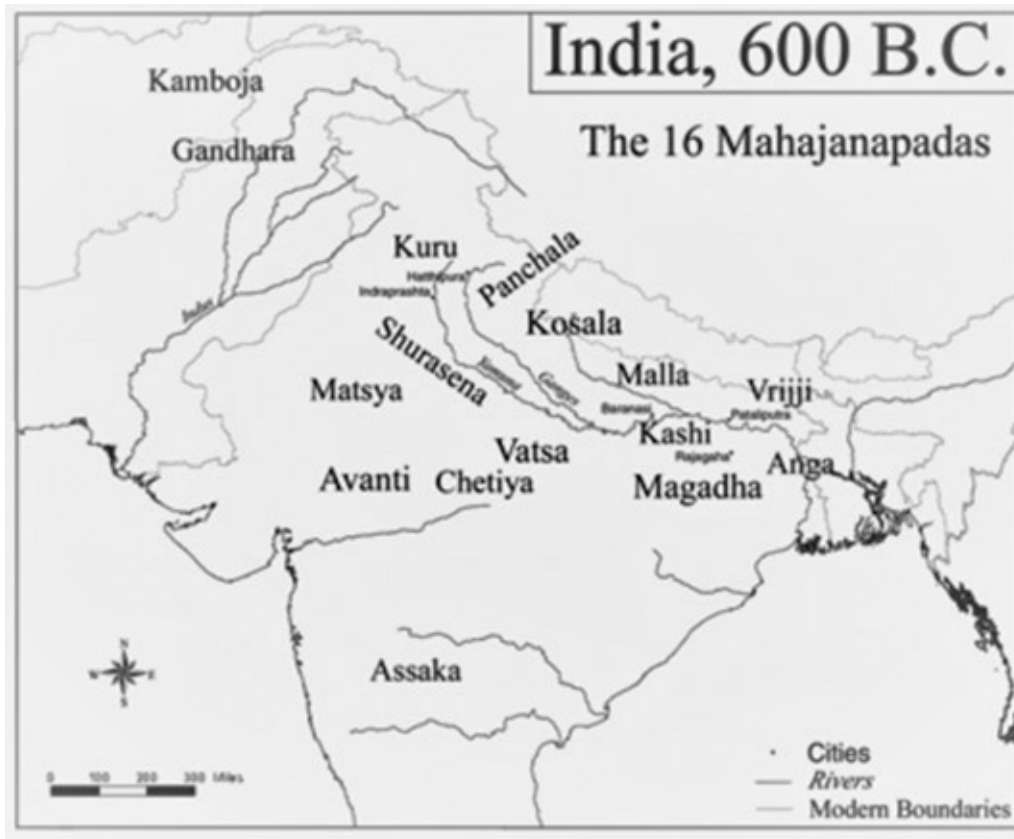


4

THE MAHAJANAPADAS OF THE
INDO-GANGETIC PLAIN (c. 600–
300 BCE)

The sixth century BCE is known as an era of 'Second Urbanisation' in the Indian Subcontinent. After the decline of the Harappan towns and nearly after a gap of more than a thousand years, urban centres emerged again but not in the Indus plain. The centre of economic and political activity shifted from the North-West, Punjab, Haryana, and Western UP, to Eastern UP and Bihar (Ganga Basin). This region was not only fertile on account of better rainfall and river systems, but was also closer to the iron production centres. As has been detailed in the earlier chapters, in the Later Vedic period, people had started agriculture, which made them settle down at a particular place. The new iron agricultural tools and implements (such as the ploughshare) enabled the people to clear thick forest cover and cultivate the hard soil of this area. Also, iron weapons made the warrior class more important, and slowly, people gained a strong allegiance to the territory they belonged to rather than the *Jana* or tribe. These permanent settlements led to the foundation of the Janapadas or territorial states, under the control of the king. The use of better iron tools and weapons enabled some territorial states to become very large, and they came to be called **Mahajanapadas** (large territorial states) in North India (cities and states became visible in South India a few centuries later). Most of the Mahajanapadas were situated in the north of Vindhyas, between Bihar in the east to the north-west frontier of the subcontinent. From c. 600 BCE, the political history of India is the history of struggles between these states for supremacy. According to Buddhist texts, *Anguttara Nikaya* (the land between Himalayas and Narmada) was divided into **16 independent states (Mahajanapadas):**



Mahajanapadas

State	Capital	King/Other related unique aspect(s)
Anga (Modern districts of Monghyr and Bhagalpur, Bihar)	Champa (located at the confluence of Ganga and Champa rivers)	Champa was an important commercial centre on the trade routes and merchants sailed from here to Suvarnabhumi (South-East Asia).
Kashi	Varanasi (Modern Benaras)	Kashi was eventually captured by Kosala.
Kosala (Eastern U.P., included Ayodhya and the tribal republican territory of Shakyas of	Sarayu river divided the state into two parts: Northern part's capital: Shravasti and	King: Prasenjit (Buddha's contemporary) The tribal republic of the Shakyas of Kapilavastu included Lumbini, which

Kapilavastu)	Southern part's capital: Kushavati	is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha.
Vajji* (North of Ganga in the division of Tirhut) *Confederacy of eight or nine clans of which the Lichchhavis (capital: Vaishali), Videhans (capital: Mithila), Jnatrikas (based in Kundapura), and Vajjis (capital: Vaishali) were important.	Vaishali (Modern Basarh in North Bihar)	King: Chetaka [Brother of Trishala (mother of Mahavira) and father of Chellana (wife of Magadha King Bimbisara)]. Mahavira belonged to the Jnatrikas Clan. The Vajjis were defeated and assimilated in the Magadha empire by Ajatshatru.
Mallas	Kushinara and Pava	Kusinara and Pava are very important in the history of Buddhism, since Buddha took his last meal and was taken ill at Pava, and went to his Mahaparinirvana at Kusinara.
Cheti or Chedi (Eastern part of Bundelkhand in Central India)	Shuktimati or Sothivatinagara	King: Shishupala According to certain Puranas, he is considered as an ally of Jarasandha of Magadha and Duryodhana of Kuru. He was a rival of Vasudeva Krishna, who was his uncle's son. He was killed by Vasudeva Krishna during the <i>Rajasuya</i>

		sacrifice of the Pandava king Yudhishtira.
<p>Vatsa* (on the banks of river Yamuna) *Vatsa was known for its fine cotton textiles</p>	<p>Kaushambi (at the confluence of the Ganga and Yamuna, near Allahabad)</p>	<p>King : Udayana Udayana was the hero of three Sanskrit dramas, viz., <i>Svapnavasavadatta</i> of Bhasa, <i>Priyadarshika</i>, and <i>Ratnavali</i> of Harsha. Legends recount a rivalry between Udayana and Pradyota of Avanti, and refer to a love affair between Udayana and Vasavadatta (Pradyota's daughter).</p>
<p>Kuru (Western U.P.)</p>	<p>Indraprastha</p>	<p>The epic poem, the Mahabharata, tells of a conflict between two branches of the reigning Kuru clan.</p>
<p>Panchala (Western U.P.)</p>	<p>Ganga river divided the state into two parts: Northern part's Capital: Ahichchhatra (modern Bareilly, U.P.) and Southern part's Capital: Kampilya (modern Farukhabad, U.P.)</p>	<p>The famous city of Kannauj was situated in the kingdom of Panchala.</p>

Matsya (Jaipur, Alwar and Bharatpur area of Rajasthan)	Viratanagara (Modern Bairat)	Founder: Virata
Shurarena	Mathura (on banks of Yamuna)	King: Avantipura Disciple of Buddha
Avanti (Central Malwa)	Divided by the Vindhya North Avanti Ujjain and South Avanti Mahishmati	King : Pradyota Father-in-law of Udayana.
Gandhara (Modern Peshawar and Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Valley)	Takshashila/Taxila (Major centre for trade and learning)	King: Pushkarasarin Had cordial relation with Magadha and waged a successful war against Avanti. The Behistun Inscription of the Achaemenid Emperor Darius mentions that Gandhara was conquered by the Persians in the later part of 6th century BCE.
Kamboja [Rajori and Hajra (Kashmir) and North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan]	Pooncha	The Kambojas were famous in ancient times for their excellent breed of horses and as remarkable horsemen located in the Uttarapatha or North-West.
Ashavaka/Assaka (Located on the banks of the Godavari river, between the rivers Godavari and	Potali (Modern Bodhan, district Nizamabad, and parts of Adilabad	It was the only Mahajanapada situated to the south of the Vindhya Range , and was in Dakshinapatha.

Manjira)	in Telangana)	
Magadha (Modern Patna and Gaya)	Rajagriha or Girivraja	Haryanka Dynasty

It should be noted that the most powerful states in the 6th century were Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa, and Avanti and two of the Mahajanapads, the Vajji and Malla were *Gana-Sanghas*. The *Gana-Sanghas* (literally meaning an assembly of Gana, those who claim to be of equal status) were an alternative polity to the kingdoms. Unlike kingdoms where they had a single hereditary monarch, the *Gana-Sanghas* had a government by assembly and within this assembly too, they had an oligarchy. Some of the *Ganas* were of one clan, e.g., the Shakyas and the Mallas; while the others were confederation of several clans, e.g., Vajjis.

Gana-Sanghas (Chiefdoms and Oligarchies)	Kingdoms
a) The chief office was not hereditary and was known as <i>Ganapati</i> or <i>Ganaraja</i> . The power was vested in an aristocratic council comprising heads of leading Kshatriya families and the authority structure of <i>ganas</i> had greater elements of tribal organisation.	a) Kingdoms registered a centralised government with king as Sovereign and all the power was vested in him and ruling family. The ruling family became a dynasty with hereditary succession and mostly following primogeniture.
b) Most of the <i>ganas</i> were located in or near the Himalayan foothills in eastern India, which also suggests that probably their establishment predated the transition to kingdoms as clearing wooded low-lying hills was comparatively easier than the marshy	b) Major Kingdoms generally occupied the fertile alluvial tracts of the Ganga valley.

jungles of the plain.	
c) The corporate aspect of government was a major attribute of <i>Gana-Sanghas</i> . They were based in smaller geographical areas and had more representative government. The discussion matters were placed before the assembly who met in a hall, called <i>Santhagara</i> . <i>Gana- Puraka</i> was responsible for ensuring quorum required for major deliberations. The council discussed and debated the issues and they were put to vote , if a unanimous decision could not be reached. Voting was done with the pieces of wood known as <i>salakas</i> and <i>salaka-gahapaka</i> (the collector of votes) ensured honesty and impartiality.	c) Political power was concentrated in the king who was advised and assisted by ministers, advisory councils such as <i>Parishad</i> and <i>Sabha</i> . However, with the emergence of the concept of 'divinity of king' and more emphasis on priestly rituals, the centrality of the popular assemblies was reduced.
d) The <i>Gana-Sanghas</i> had only two strata—the <i>kshatriya rajakula</i> (ruling families) and the <i>dasa-karmakara</i> (slaves and labourers).	d) Clan loyalty weakened in the kingdoms and more focus was on caste loyalties and loyalty towards the king.
e) <i>Gana-Sanghas</i> were more ready to tolerate unorthodox views and more open to individualistic or independent opinion than the kingdoms. This tolerance was the major reason that two of the most venerated gurus of the heterodox sects, i.e., Mahavira (Jainism, belonged to Vajji confederacy) and Buddha (Buddhism, belonged to Shakya clan) were able to propagate their philosophy in a more unrestricted way in <i>Gana-Sanghas</i> as compared to kingdoms.	e) The Brahmanical political, social and religious theory was more deeply entrenched in kingdoms.



POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND THE PRE-EMINENCE OF MAGADHA

The political conflict among the Mahajanapadas ultimately led to the emergence of **Magadha** as the most powerful state and the centre of a vast empire. **Magadha's rise to political supremacy began with Bimbisara**, who belonged to the **Haryanka dynasty**, and ruled for 52 years, from 544 to 492 BCE. In the **Mahavamsa**, it is stated that he was anointed as the king by his father at the age of 15, which suggests that he was not the founder of his dynasty. He was a **contemporary** of both **Buddha** and **Mahavira**, and paid equal respect to them. Through his conquests and diplomacy, Bimbisara made Magadha the paramount power. He pursued a **three-pronged policy**, namely, **matrimonial alliances**, **friendship with strong rulers**, and **conquest of weak neighbours** to expand the empire.



Haryanka Dynasty (Magadha)

Founder: Probably the grandfather of Bimbisara (566 BCE)

Actual foundation by **Bimbisara** (544–492 BCE)

- Contemporary of Buddha and Mahavira.
- Capital at **Rajgriha (Girivraja)**, which was an impressive city and almost **impregnable** as **surrounded by five hills**, the openings in which were closed by stone walls on all sides.
- Earlier, had rivalry with Avanti's king Pradyota, but later became friends and Bimbisara even sent his royal physician **Jivaka** to Ujjain (along **Dakshinapatha to Avanti**) when Pradyota had jaundice.
- Conquered Anga (East Bihar) by defeating its ruler Brahmadatta. Anga, and especially its capital, Champa,

were important for inland and maritime trade.

- Strengthened his position by **three matrimonial alliances**. Marriage relations with the different princely families gave enormous diplomatic prestige and paved the way for expansion of Magadha westward and northward. He took three wives:
 - His first wife was from Kosala named **Mahakoshala** (sister of Prasenjit), who brought in dowry the territory of Kashi, which yielded a revenue of 1,00,000 coins.
 - **Lichchhavi Princess Chellana** from Vaishali, who gave birth to Ajatashatru.
 - **daughter** of the **chief of the Madra clan** (Punjab).

Ajatashatru (492 BCE – 460 BCE)

- Son of Bimbisara, being impatient to rule Magadha, is believed to have killed his father and seized the throne.
- Most **powerful** and **aggressive ruler** of Haryanka dynasty and followed his father's expansionist policy through military conquest.
- **Annexed Kosala** (ruled by Prasenjit). He first came into conflict with his maternal uncle Prasenjit, who was aggrieved by the treatment meted out to Bimbisara. He asked Ajatashatru to return the territory of Kashi, which was given to his mother in dowry. Ajatashatru refused, and it was only after a fierce battle that Prasenjit agreed to leave Kashi with Magadha. Similarly, he fought with his maternal grandfather, Chetak, the chief of Vaishali and after 16 long years of war Ajatashatru succeeded in breaking the might of Vaishali. Therefore, he not only **retained Kashi**, but also **added Vaishali** to Magadha.
- Used two **innovative military weapons**:
 - War engine, which was used to those stones like catapults (**Mahashilakantaka**).
 - Chariot with mace for mass-killing (**Rathamusala**).
- Began the fortification of Rajgriha to meet the danger of invasion posed by the ruler of Avanti (who had earlier

- defeated the Vatsas of Kaushambi.)
- The **Buddha died** during his reign.
- Arranged the **first Buddhist council**.

Udayabhadra (Udayin) (460 BCE – 444 BCE)

- Founded the **new capital** at **Pataliputra** (modern Patna), situated at the **confluence of Ganga and Son rivers**. Pataliputra had a very strategic location as it lay at the centre of the Magadhan kingdom, which then extended from the Himalayas in the north to the Chhotanagpur Hills in the south.
- Probably was murdered at the instigation of Palaka, the king of Avanti.



Shishunaga Dynasty (around 413 BCE – 345 BCE)

Shishunaga

- Shishunaga was earlier a Viceroy/*Amatya* (high ranking official) at Varanasi (Banaras), and it is believed that the people of Magadha, outraged by the successive parricides of the successors of Udayin, appointed Shishunaga as king.
- Temporarily **shifted capital** to **Vaishali**.
- The **most important achievement** of Shishunaga was to **defeat Avanti** (Pradyota Dynasty) and make it a part of **Magadha**. This brought an end to 100-year-old rivalry between Magadha and Avanti.

Kalasoka

- Son and successor of Shishunaga.
- Also known as Kakarvarna (according to the Puranas).
- **Second Buddhist Council** held at **Vaishali**.



Nanda Dynasty (First non-Kshatriya dynasty)

(345 BCE – 321 BCE)

Mahapadma Nanda

- Also called **Ugrasena** in Pali texts, because of his large army.
- According to the Brahmanical texts, he **belonged** to a **low caste** or at least a **non-Kshatriya caste**, while according to the Puranas, he was the son of a king of the Shishunaga dynasty by a Shudra woman, and thus the Nandas were considered **adharmika** (those who do not follow the norms of Dharma). Buddhist texts describe the Nandas as belonging to **annatakula** (of unknown lineage).
- The **first empire builder** of India, and claimed to be the **ekarat**, the sole sovereign who destroyed all other ruling princes, and **sarva-kshatrantaka**, uprooter of the Kshatriyas.
- **Added Kalinga to Magadha** and brought an image of **Jina** as a victory trophy.
- Also **acquired Kosala**, which had, in all likelihood, rebelled against him.
- Made methodical collection of taxes by regularly appointing officials. He also built canals and did a lot of irrigation work.

Dhanananda

- Last important king of the Nanda dynasty.
- Identified with the **Agrammes** or **Xandrames** of Greek classical writers.
- Credited with a huge army; it is believed that **Alexander attacked Punjab** during his reign but his huge army checked them from advancing towards Magadha.
- Credited with the invention of **Nandopakramani** (a particular measuring standard).
- He is believed to be an **arrogant** and **oppressive ruler who imposed heavy taxes** on the common man. His greed and exploitation made him quite unpopular among the masses, and ultimately **Chandragupta Maurya** under the able

guidance of **Kautilya**, took the advantage of this public resentment and uprooted the Nanda rule and set up the Maurya empire.



Maurya Dynasty (321 BCE)



Causes of Magadha's Success

Magadha could gradually establish its dominance over all other Mahajanapads on account of several factors. **Firstly**, Magadha enjoyed an **advantageous geographical position**. Due to its **proximity** and **control over richest iron deposits** (found around south Bihar), Magadhan **weapons** were **far superior** and effective. **Also**, both of its capitals, **Rajgriha** and **Patliputra**, were situated at **strategic points**. Girivraja or Rajgriha was surrounded by five hills, which helped it to provide natural fortification and was almost impregnable. Similarly, **Pataliputra** was more like a **water fort**, since it was situated at the confluence of the rivers Son and Ganga. **Secondly**, Magadha lay at the centre of the middle Gangetic plain, which had fertile alluvium and received heavy rainfall. Thus, this area could be made more productive even without much irrigation. These **fertile river plains** provided a vast amount of **agricultural surplus**, which was essential for raising a vast **standing army**. Further, forests in southern areas provided it timber and elephants, which gave a special **military advantage** to Magadha as all the other Mahajanapads effectively used horses and chariots in warfare. **Magadha was the first state to use elephants on a large scale against its neighbours**. Elephants could be used in storming fortresses and in marching over areas lacking roads or other means of communication. **Thirdly**, Magadha certainly benefitted from numerous **able** and **ambitious rulers** such as **Bimbisara**, **Ajatashatru**, and **Mahapadma Nanda**. They employed all fair and foul means at their disposal to enlarge their kingdoms. **Fourthly**, because of the rise of trade, towns, and metal money, **the tolls levied** too added to the **treasury** of Magadhan kings, which again helped them to maintain the huge army. **Finally**, the **unorthodox character** of Magadhan society infused in it more

enthusiasm for expansion than any other kingdoms.



NORTH–WEST INDIA: PERSON AND MACEDONIAN INVASIONS

In north-east India, Magadha emerged as a formidable power and gradually smaller principalities and republics merged within it. The situation in north-western India did not allow for such consolidation. The Mahajanapads of Kamboja, Madra, and Gandhara were continuously fighting with each other. Thus, a powerful kingdom like Magadha could not emerge in the north-west frontier. Taking advantage of this political disunity, the Persian (Iranian) empire in the 6th century BCE penetrated into north-western India. The Achaemenid king Cyrus (558–529 BCE) was the first ruler to invade the sub-continent. He led a military expedition that destroyed the city of Kapisha (lying south east of the Hindu Kush mountains) and received tribute from the people of Kamboja and Gandhara. Later, Persian king Darius, in 516 BCE, annexed Punjab, the west of Indus, and Sindh. The Greek historian Herodotus (considered as the father of Western history-writing) mentions about Gandhara that *this area was the twentieth and the most prosperous satrapy (province) of the Persian empire, and paid a tribute of 360 talents of gold, which was not only more than that from all other 28 provinces put together, but was also about one-third of the total revenue of Iran from its Asian provinces. Indian provinces provided mercenaries for the Persian armies fighting against the Greeks in the 5th century BCE. In fact, the army of Xerxes (the successor of Darius) included soldiers from Gandhara.* It appears that till Alexander's invasion of India (around c. 330 BCE), the north-western part of the subcontinent was under Persian rule.



Persian Impact on India

The 200 years of Indo-Persian contact resulted in not only political influence, but also socioeconomic acculturation. Along with providing impetus to Indo-Persian trade and commerce, it resulted in forging cultural ties. The introduction of the Kharoshthi script, which was derived from Aramaic (the official script of the Persian empire, written right to left like Arabic) in north-western India is a fine example highlighting the Persian impact. Some of the Ashokan inscriptions in north-western India are written in this script. Persian sigloi-type coins were copied in India. It is possible that the rock inscriptions used by Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE was inspired by the Persian King Darius. The monuments of Ashoka's time, especially the bell-shaped capitals and the preamble of Ashoka's edicts, have a lot of Iranian influence.



Alexander's Invasion (327–326 BCE)

Alexander (356–326 BCE) was the son of Philip of Macedonia (Greece), who invaded India in 326 BCE. It is considered that in the 4th century, the Greeks and the Persians fought for the supremacy of the world. After decisively defeating the Persian army led by Darius, the Macedonian conqueror marching across the Persian empire, entered the Indian provinces. Alexander was attracted towards India not only because of its fabulous wealth, but being a passionate student of geographical inquiry and natural history, he also wanted to solve the problem of the ocean, the limits of which were a puzzle to Greek geographers. The political situation of north-western India suited his plans, as at that time, the region was split up into a number of small independent states like Taxila, Punjab (Kingdom of Porus), Gandhara, etc., and no major united and strong resistance was put across to Alexander. Alexander entered India through the Khyber Pass in 326 BCE. Except Porus, who fought the famous battle of Hydaspas (on Jhelum), all other kings submitted meekly. King Ambhi of Taxila was the first to surrender. When Alexander reached Beas, his soldiers, being war-weary, homesick and diseased, refused to go further. Therefore, he was forced to retreat. To mark the farthest point of his advance, he erected 12 huge stone altars on northern bank of Beas. He remained in

India for 19 months and on his way back home, had military encounters with *Gana-Sanghas* such as the Malloi (Malavas). He died at **Babylon** (in 323 BCE). Since he barely had time to organise his conquests in India, most of the conquered states were restored to their rulers who submitted to his authority, and his territorial possessions were divided into three parts, each placed under a Greek governor.



Alexander's Invasion of India



Effect of Alexander's Invasion

Alexander's invasion was the first occasion when ancient Europe came into close contact with ancient India and it produced significant outcomes. One of the most important outcomes of the invasion was the establishment of direct contact between India and Greece in different fields. Alexander's historians have left valuable geographical and historical/ chronological accounts of ancient Indian history. The clearly dated accounts of Alexander's campaign enabled us to build the Indian chronology for subsequent events on a definite basis. The crucial socio-economic information provided in these travellogues help us know and understand diverse ancient societal practices such as 'autonomous cities' (probably referring to the *Gana-Sanghas*), sati system, the sale of girls in market places by poor parents, the fine breed of oxen in north-western India (in fact, it is said that Alexander ordered 2 lakh oxen to be sent to Macedonia), and so on. One of the other long-term effects of Alexander's campaign was that he exposed India to Europe by opening up four distinct lines of communication — three by land and one by sea (as Alexander sent his admiral Nearchus via sea route to Iran). It paved the way for Greek merchants and craftsmen to establish trade between India and Greeks. Another significant cultural development was the establishment of a cosmopolitan school of arts at Gandhara. An indirect effect of Alexander's invasion was that it paved the way for unification of north India under Chandragupta Maurya, as the destruction of the small states and principalities of the north-west by Alexander not only aided the Mauryan empire's easy expansion, but also motivated the Mauryas to believe that capturing north-western frontier is feasible and a project worth undertaking.



SOCIAL AND MATERIAL LIFE IN THE AGE OF THE MAHAJANAPADAS

Archaeologically, 6th century BCE is marked by the **beginning of NBPW phase** and the **second urbanisation** in India (after the Harappan Civilisation). This is derived on the basis of literary testimony of the early Buddhist Pali texts, Sanskrit Sutra literature, and archaeological evidence from early NBPW sites. **NBPW** refers to **Northern Black Polished Ware**, which was a **glossy, shining type of pottery made from very fine fabric** and probably used as tableware by the wealthy. It is rather interesting to note that **NBPW is not always black** (as it is found in other shades and colours too), also found in Southern India (identified at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh, though there is a concentration of sites in northern India), and not necessarily always polished (although it is well-fired, wheel-made, deluxe pottery, having a glossy surface). The NBPW is usually **unpainted**, but there are some **instances of designs** like wavy lines, concentric and intersecting circles, bands, dots, etc., painted on in yellow and light vermillion. The NBPW phase also marks the **beginning of the use of money** in the sub-continent, as early series of **punch-marked coins** have been excavated from NBPW Sites. **Along with metal money, burnt bricks and ring wells too appeared in the middle of the NBPW Phase.**

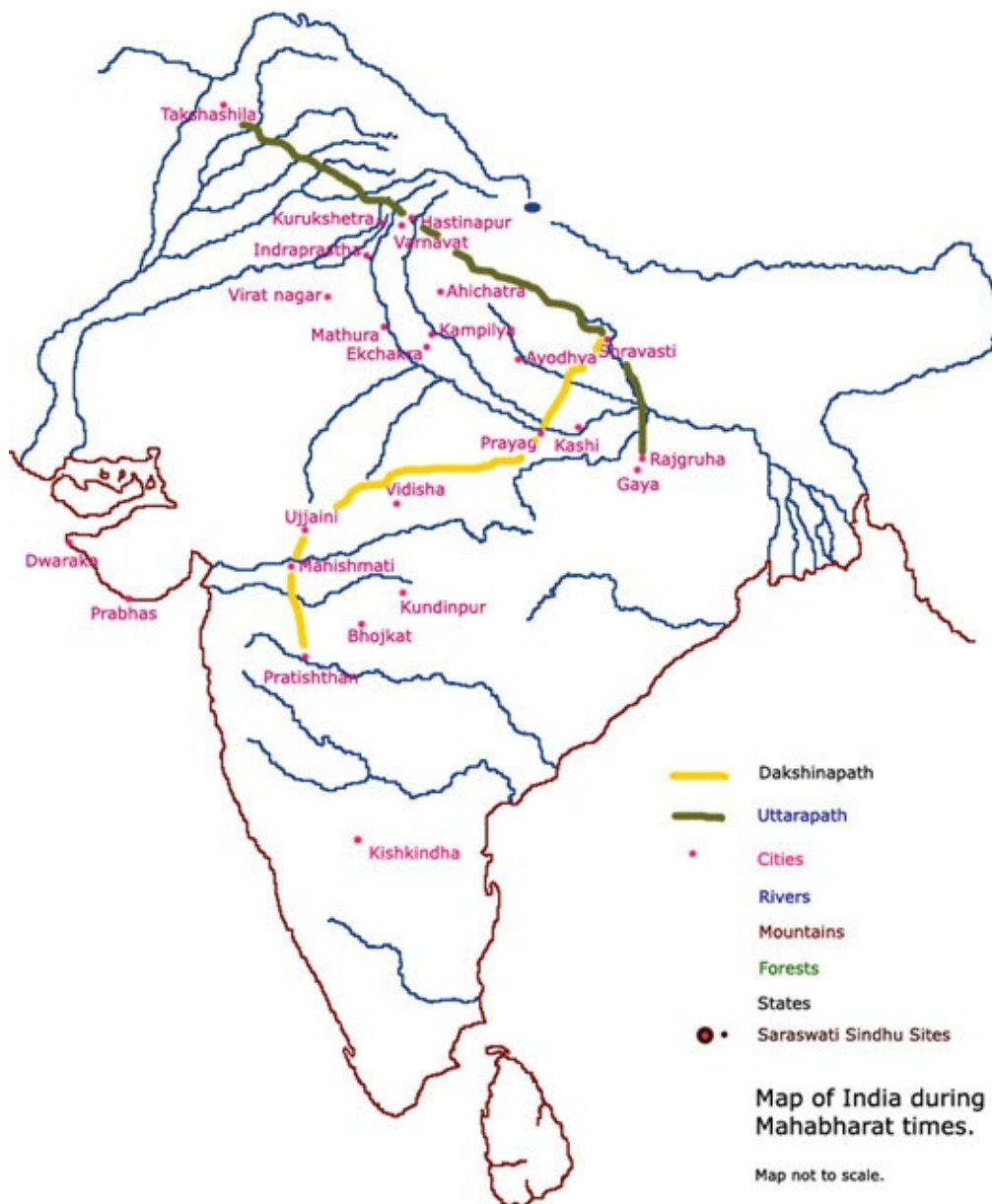


Image of NBPW Pottery

During c.600 300 BCE, there was **significant expansion** in the **number** and **size of village** settlements, **towns**, and corresponding population growth in the Ganga Valley. Numerous villages and towns are mentioned in the Pali and Sanskrit texts. There was a great degree of differentiation in case of towns. **Pura** or **nagara** meant a fortified town

or city; *nigama* referred to a market town which was at an intermediate level between *grama* and *nagara*; *rajdhani* referred to capital city; *nagarka* was a small town and *mahanagara* was a big city. Some of the prominent towns (*mahanagaras*) were Kashi, Kaushambi, Rajgriha, Pataliputra, Shravasti, Ayodhya, Vaishali, Champa, and Kapilavastu. Not only were these towns *seats of government*, but they also served as *major hubs of trade and commerce* and were inhabited by many artisans and merchants who were organised into their respective *guilds*. The *sethi* was a high level businessman, associated with trade and money lending. Both artisans and merchants lived in fixed localities in towns known as *vessas* (merchant streets). Generally crafts were hereditary, and the son used to learn his family trade from his father.

Craft products like textile goods, ivory products, pots, etc., were exported over long distances by merchants. All the major cities were situated on river banks and trade routes, and were connected with each other. The *two major trans-regional routes* of the time were known as *Uttarapatha* (of northern India, stretching from the north-west across the Indo-Gangetic plains to the port city of Tamralipti on the Bay of Bengal) and *Dakshinapatha* (of southern India, stretching from Pataliputra in Magadha to Pratishthana on the Godavari, and connected to ports on the western coast).



The internal trade routes joined the external trade routes, and there are evidences of flourishing trade of the subcontinent along both eastern (Bengal with Myanmar) and western (Taxila with Afghanistan, Iran and Mesopotamia) regions. The major items of **import** included **precious stones** such as gold, lapis lazuli, jade, silver, etc., while **finished crafts, textile goods, sandalwood, and pearls** were major items of **export**. Pali texts also mention sea travel and trade. Custom officials (*Kammikas*) and Toll officials (*Shaulkika/Shulkadhyaksha*) levied taxes on merchandise, and special royal officials called *Rajabhatas* were deputed to safeguard the lives and property of travellers. Trade was facilitated by

use of money termed *Nishka* and *Satamana*. The earliest coins are punch-marked (called so as pieces of metals were punched with certain marks such as hill, tree, bull, fish, crecent, elephant, etc.) and made of silver, though a few copper coins are also found. The Pali texts further refer to the plentiful use of money and its use to pay wages and prices. Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* also mentions wage (*vetan*) and wage-earners (*vaitanika*).

Both towns and villages mutually supported each other as the non-agriculturists living in towns were fed by the agriculturists living in villages, and in return, artisans and traders living in towns made tools, cloth, etc., available to rural folk. The Pali texts (especially the *Vinay Pitaka*) suggests three types of villages (*grama*):

- (a) Typical villages, inhabited by various castes, communities and headed by a headman called *gramabhojaka*, *gramini* or *gramakas*. The majority of the villages belonged to this category. The village headman enjoyed considerable importance and had direct links with the kings. They not only collected taxes from the villagers, but also maintained law and order in their locality.
- (b) Suburban villages, which were in the nature of craft villages. For example, carpenters' village (*vaddhaki-grama*), reedmakers' village (*nalakara-grama*), saltmakers' village (*lonakara-grama*), and chariotmakers' villages are mentioned in the texts of the period. These villages served as markets for other villages and linked the towns with the countryside.
- (c) Border villages (*aramika-grama*), which were situated on the periphery of the countryside and merged into forests. People living in these villages were mainly hunters and fowlers, who mostly lived on primitive subsistence methods like food gathering.

The village lands were divided into cultivable plots and were allotted family-wise, though the size of landholdings varied. The plots were cultivated by the family on its own as well as with hired agricultural labourers (*dasa-kammakara*). Rich peasants were known as '*Gahapati*'. Irrigation channels were dug collectively under the supervision of

village headman. **One-sixth (1/6)** of the **produce** was paid by peasants as **tax**, which was collected by royal agents. There were generally **no intermediaries** between peasants and the state, though some villages were granted to Brahmanas (**brahmadeyas**) and big merchants for their own use. It should be noted that the beneficiaries were **granted only the revenue** of these lands and **not administrative authority**. There was an **emergence of the notion of private property**, as there are references to the gift and sale of land. It is equally noteworthy that during this period, because of the use of the **iron ploughshare** and **good fertility of alluvial soil**, agriculture made great advances. Perhaps for the first time, there was land and **agrarian expansion**, which aided in the emergence of an advanced food-producing economy. **Rice was the staple cereal and paddy transplantation was widely practiced**. Along with rice, barley, pulses, millets, cotton, and sugarcane were also produced. The excavated site of **Atranjikhhera** (Etah, UP) provides valuable information about the transition from rural to urban life.



Administrative System

The king enjoyed the highest official status and ruled with the help of officials. **Higher officials called Mahamatras/Amatyas**, who probably had executive, judicial, and military functions such as those of judge, chief accountant, head of the royal household, minister (**Mantrin**), and commander (**Senanayaka**), and were assisted by **Ayuktas**. It appears that high officers and ministers were largely recruited from the priestly class of Brahmanas, and yielded considerable authority. The Buddhist text *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* mentions an influential minister named **Vassakara** of Magadha, who enabled Ajatashatru to conquer the *Gana-Sangha* of Vajjis by effectively creating dissension in the ranks of the Lichchhavis of Vaishali. The real increase in state power is indicated by the formation of a large professional army. In order to sustain such a huge army, a robust fiscal system was required. **Bali**, a **voluntary payment** made by the tribesmen to their chiefs in the Vedic times, **became a compulsory payment**, and special officers called **balisadhakas** were appointed to collect it. As mentioned earlier, it was 1/6th of the

produce. The **advent of writing** may have helped in the assessment and collection of taxes. In addition to taxes, peasants, artisans, and traders were subjected to forced labour for royal purposes. Popular assemblies like the *sabha* and the *samiti* almost **disappeared**, and instead, a small body called the *parishad*, consisting exclusively of the Brahmanas, served as an **advisory council** to the king.



Legal and Social System

This period marks the **origin of the Indian legal and judiciary systems**. Earlier, people were governed by tribal law, which did not recognise any class distinction, but now since the caste groups and the *varna* system were strongly entrenched in social life, the legal system was also partially disposed towards the higher *varnas*. The **civil and criminal law** was **based** on the *varna* division. The higher *varnas* were considered purer, and a higher order of moral conduct was expected from the higher *varnas*. All **disabilities** were **imposed** on **Shudras**. They were not only relegated to lower positions of the society but also deprived of religious and legal rights. **Crimes committed by Shudras against Brahmanas** and others were **punished severely**, while **crimes committed against Shudras** were **punished lightly**. Civil and criminal law was administered by royal agents, who followed **retributive law** (criminal offences were governed by the idea of revenge, i.e., ‘**a tooth for a tooth**’ and ‘**an eye for an eye**’).

Despite the emergence of socio-economic disparities, kinship ties continued to be extremely important, and were eventually incorporated in the caste hierarchy. **Extended kin groups** were referred as *Nati* and *Nati-kulani*. *Kula* denoted **extended the patrilineal family**, while *Natakas* included relatives on both mother and father's side. The importance of kinship ties can be gauged by the fact that although Buddhist monks were supposed to have renounced family ties, monastic rules were bent to make allowances for them. The strengthening of **patriarchal control** within the household led to the **increased subordination of women**. Strict control over women's sexuality was considered essential for not only the patrilineal transmission of property,

but also for maintaining and perpetuating **endogamous caste** system. Different Brahmanical, Buddhist, and Jain texts point towards the **low status** of **women**. They prescribe an **ideal code of conduct** for **women** and **define their expected roles**. Given the increasingly patriarchal nature of the household, it is not surprising that the preference for sons over daughters continued. The son was considered necessary for the continuation of lineage, and the performance of the father's and ancestors' funerary rites. In the **Samyutta Nikaya**, the Buddha is presented as consoling Prasenjit (king of Kosala), who was upset at the birth of a daughter. Buddha tells him, *"Don't worry, she may prove better than a male offspring. She may grow up wise and virtuous. She will honour her mother-in-law and will be faithful to her husband. The boy she may bear may do great deeds."* These words sum up the expected roles associated with womanhood.

The society was clearly divided into **four varnas—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras**. The functions of each *varna* were clearly laid down. According to this system, rulers and warriors were called Kshatriyas, priests and teachers formed the Brahmanical order, peasants and taxpayers were called Vaishyas, and those who served all classes were called Shudras. Members of higher *varnas* not only avoided the company of the Shudras, but also refused to enter into marital relations with them. A Shudra was not allowed to be appointed to any higher post, and was meant to only serve the **dvijas** (Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) as a slave, artisan, and agricultural labourer.



Practice Questions (Prelims)

1. Match the following:

A. Mahamatras

B. Balisadhaka

C. Gahapati

D. Setthi

i. Tax collector

ii. Wealthy landlord

iii. High-ranking official

iv. Rich merchant

- (a) A ii, B i, C iii, D iv
 (b) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv
 (c) A iv, B iii, C ii, D i
 (d) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv
2. Consider the following statements and mark the option which is correct.
- (i) The first coins were punch-marked silver and copper coins.
 (ii) The main crops of the Age of the Mahajanapads were wheat and barley.
 (iii) The PGW phase was followed by NBPW phase.
 (iv) The tax was collected by the *Senanayaka*.
- (a) i and iii
 (b) All of these
 (c) ii, iii and iv
 (d) None of these
3. Match the following:
- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| A. Magadha | i. Champa |
| B. Anga | ii. Varanasi |
| C. Kosala | iii. Rajgriha |
| D. Kashi | iv. Shravasti |
- (a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv
 (b) A iii, B iv, C i, D ii
 (c) A iii, B i, C iv, D ii
 (d) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i
4. Consider the following statements about the NBPW phase, and mark the option which is correct.
- (i) Rice was the staple diet of the NBPW phase.
 (ii) Peasants knew about paddy transplantation.
 (iii) The NBPW phase marked the beginning of the second urbanisation.
 (iv) Burnt bricks and ring wells were used in the NBPW phase.
- (a) All of these

- (b) ii and iii
(c) None of these
(d) i, ii and iii
5. Match the following:
- | | |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| A. Bimbisara | i. Matrimonial alliances |
| B. Ajatashatru | ii. Aggressive policy |
| C. Udayin | iii. Built Fort at Pataliputra |
| D. Shishunaga | iv. Shifted Capital to Vaishali |
- (a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv
(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv
(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i
(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D iii
6. Consider the following statements and choose whether it was a result of Persian influence:
- (i) Bell-shaped capital of Ashoka's rock edits.
(ii) The Kharosthi script written from right to left in one line and then from left to right in the next line.
(iii) The Influence on Mauryan Sculpture.
- (a) All of these
(b) ii and iii
(c) i and iii
(d) None of these
7. Consider the following statements about the religious practices of the people of the Mahajanapadas.
- (i) The people worshipped gods in the forms of trees and animals.
(ii) Generally, people believed in the Brahmanical order and Shudras were exploited by all.
(iii) The Society was clearly divided into four varnas.
(iv) There is sufficient evidence of the prevalence of the *sati* system and the sale of girls by poor parents.
- (a) i, ii and iv

- (b) ii, iii and iv
 (c) i and iii
 (d) All of these
8. Consider the following statements about the Alexander's Invasion and state which is correct.
- (i) Through the Persians, the Greeks came to know about the great wealth of India.
 (ii) Alexander invaded India around 326 BCE.
 (iii) The ruler of Taxila, Porus, fought gallantly with Alexander, while King Ambhi submitted meekly before Alexander.
 (iv) Alexander conquered Magadha.
- (a) i, ii and iv
 (b) ii, iii and iv
 (c) i and ii
 (d) All of these
9. Consider the following statements about the Persian invasion and state which is correct.
- (i) Indo-Persian contact lasted almost for 200 years before the Greeks invaded India.
 (ii) Cyrus was the first ruler to invade India.
 (iii) The north-western province of Gandhara was the 20th *satrapy* of Persian empire.
 (iv) Indian subjects were also enrolled in the Persian Army.
- (a) i, ii, and iv
 (b) ii, iii, and iv
 (c) i and iii
 (d) All of these
10. Match the following:
- | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| A. Bimbisara | i. Haryanka Dynasty . |
| B. Ajatashatru | ii. Shifted capital to Vaishali. |
| C. Ashoka | iii. Maurya Dynasty |
| D. Shishunaga | iv. Probably killed his father. |

(a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv

(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv

(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i

(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D ii

11. Match the following:

A. i. Birth place of Buddha, Lumbini, is situated.

Kosala

B. ii. Buddha passed away at Kusinara, which is a part of this
Mallas kingdom.

C. iii. Mahavira belonged to this confederacy of clans.

Vajjis

D. iv. King Udayin is from this place, who the hero of three
Vatsa major dramas.

(a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv

(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv

(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i

(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D ii

12. Match the following:

A. Pataliputra i. Capital of Kosala

B. Rajgriha ii. Water fort

C. Ujjain iii. Impregnable, as surrounded by five hills

D. Shravasti iv. Capital of Avanti

(a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv

(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv

(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i

(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D ii

13. Consider the following statements and mark the option which is incorrect.

(i) Iron implements and technology aided in the development of large kingdoms.

(ii) The four most powerful Mahajanapads were that of Magadha, Kosala, Vatsa, and Avanti.

(iii) The Mahajanapads were mostly situated in the north of the Vindhya.

(iv) The people now had allegiance to *Janapada* rather than the *Jana*.

(a) i and iii

(b) All of these

(c) ii, iii, and iv

(d) None of these

14. Consider the following statements and mark the option which is correct.

(i) The founder king of the Haryanka dynasty was Bindusara (or Bimbisara).

(ii) Ajatashatru added Vaishali to his kingdom.

(iii) Shishunaga's greatest achievement was the destruction of the power of Avanti.

(iv) Mahapadma Nanda took the title of *Ekarat*.

(a) i and iii

(b) All of these

(c) ii, iii and iv

(d) None of these

15. Consider the following statements and mark the option which justifies the reason behind Magadha's success:

(i) Magadha had a high income on account of the fertile plains of Ganga basin.

(ii) The first capital of Magadha, Rajgriha, was a water fort.

(iii) The second capital, Pataliputra, was located in a strategic position on the confluence of Ganga and Son.

(iv) The unorthodox character of Magadhan people too aided in the state's rise to glory.

(a) i, iii, and iv

(b) All of these

(c) ii, iii, and iv

(d) None of these

16. Match the following:

A. *Nishka*

i. Coin

B. *Vessas*

ii. State official

C. *Gramini*

iii. Village Head

D. *Ayuktas*

iv. Merchant streets

(a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv

(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv

(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i

(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D ii

17. Match the following:

A. Cheti

i. Shishupala

B. Magadha

ii. Bindusara

C. Taxila

iii. Ambhi

D. Avanti

iv. Pradyota

(a) A i, B ii, C iii, D iv

(b) A iii, B i, C ii, D iv

(c) A ii, B iii, C iv, D i

(d) A i, B iv, C iii, D ii

18. Consider the following statements and mark the option which is incorrect.

(i) The Shishunagas were succeeded by the Haryankas.

(ii) Ajatashatru fought with Alexander

(iii) Shishunaga's greatest achievement was the destruction of the power of Avanti.

(iv) Mahapadma Nanda acquired Kalinga.

(a) i and ii

(b) All of these

(c) ii, iii, and iv

(d) None of these

19. Consider the following statements and mark the option which is correct.

- (i) Bimbisara sent his royal physician, Jivaka, to Ujjain for helping the king of Avanti, who was suffering from jaundice.
 - (ii) Ajatashatru introduced two new military weapons in his fight against Vaishali.
 - (iii) Magadhans were the first to use elephants on big scale.
 - (iv) Mahapadma Nanda defeated Udayin.
- (a) i, ii, and iii
 - (b) All of these
 - (c) ii, iii, and iv
 - (d) None of these
20. Consider the following statements about the social life of pre-Mauryan times and mark the option which is correct.
- (i) The legal and social system was partially biased against the Shudras.
 - (ii) Women were highly respected and enjoyed considerable freedom.
 - (iii) The popular assemblies of *Sabha* and *Samiti* lost their importance.
 - (iv) The polity and social life of the *Gana-Sanghas* was not as rigid as that of the kingdoms.
- (a) i and iii
 - (b) i, iii, and iv
 - (c) ii, iii, and iv
 - (d) None of these



Answers

- 1. (d)
- 2. (a)
- 3. (c)
- 4. (a)
- 5. (a)
- 6. (c)

7. (b)
8. (c)
9. (d)
10. (d)
11. (a)
12. (c)
13. (d)
14. (c)
15. (a)
16. (d)
17. (a)
18. (a)
19. (a)
20. (b)



Practice Questions (Mains)

1. The 6th Century BCE saw the rise of big territorial states called the Mahajanapads. What were the reasons facilitating the rise of such big states? Which were the major Mahajanpadas and which emerged the most powerful amongst them? Explain giving suitable examples.
2. Describe the effects of Persian and Macedonian invasion on India
3. Discuss the reasons behind Magadha's success, specially outlining the role of its major rulers.
4. Describe the social, political, and administrative life of pre-Mauryan times. Was trade a major factor in the second urbanisation? If yes, then what were the major routes followed by traders and what were the general trading goods? Address all these issues in your answer.
5. How did the *Gana-Sanghas* differ from the kingdoms? Elucidate.

