

**“Political Condition of India During The Time of Six Century BCE:
As Description of Sixteen Mahajanpadas”**

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The History of Ancient India is very significant, not only for its historical and cultural parameters but also for its incredible political paradigm. The period of sixth century B.C. is like second elevation phase, which known as “the time of second urbanization in India”. At that time, many sovereign powers came in existence, which result we can see in the form of sixteen Mahajanpadas.

Overabundance and use of iron, development of stable urbanization, agriculture, industries, trade engendered sixteen Mahajanpadas, in the history of Ancient India. In this way, sixth century B.C. is often regarded as a major turning point of ancient history.

Mahajanpadas literally means “great kingdom”. Mahajanpadas refer to one of the sixteen monarchic and oligarchy republic that existed in Ancient India from sixth to fourth century B.C.

Ancient Buddhism text Anguttra Nikaya and Jain Text Bhagavati Sutra make frequent reference about these sixteen Mahajanpadas. These mahajanapadas get evolved and flourished in the Indian sub continental, belt stretching from Gandhara region in the North to Assaka in the south and Anga

in the East to Matsya in the west. Archaeologically, this period corresponds to the Northern Black Polished Ware Culture.

Literary evidence:-

1. In Buddhist text Anguttra Nikaya mentions these sixteen Mahajanpadas as follows:

1. Anga 2. Magadha 3. Kosala, 4. Kashi, 5. Vriji 6. Milla, 7. Chedi, 8. Vatsa, 9. Kuru, 10. Panchala, 11. Matsya, 12. Sursena, 13. Assaka (or Asmaka) 14. Avanti, 15. Gandhara, 16. Kamboja.

2. However, Buddhist text Digha Nikaya mentions only the first twelve Mahajanpadas of this list and encloses the last four Janpadas in above list.

3. Buddhist text Chulla Vagga, adds Kalinga in this list and substitutes “Yona” for Gandhara, thus listed the Kamboja and the Yona as the only Mahajanpadas of Uattrapatha.

4. The Jain text Bhagvati sutra gives a slightly different list of sixteen Mahajanpadas viz, 1. Anga, 2. Bangs(vAnga), 3. Magadha, 4. Malaya, 5. Malavaka, 6. Accha, 7. Vaccha, 8. Kochcha (kachcha?), 9. Padha, 10. Ladha (lata), 11. Bajji(vajji), 12. Moli (malla), 13. Kasi, 14. Kosala, 15. Avaha, 16. Sambhuttara.

Although, The Bhagavati Sutra list has focused on the countries of Madhyadesha and of the Far East and Southern region but according to hemchandra rai chaudhary some of these mahajanpadas are later origin than Anguttra nikaya list, so this list is less reliable.

The descriptions of sixteen Mahajanpadas are as mentioned-

1. ANGA:-

The kingdom of Anga Mahajanpada corresponded to the region of modern Bhagalpur, Monger districts of Bihar and some parts of Bengal. The Capital of Anga was Champa. Champa River (modern Chandan) created boundary between Magadha in the West and Anga in the East. Anga bounded by the river Kosi from the North.

The earliest reference of Anga occurs in Atharvaveda, where it finds with the first group of Aryan people. According to Mahabharta and Harivansham, formerly Champa known as “Malini”.

According to Digha Nikaya and Mahaprinirvana Sutra “it was a very flourishing city and referred as one of six principal cities viz, Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saket, Kaushami and Banaras”. Other important cities of Anga were Assapura and Bhadraka.

According to Digha Nikaya “the urban planning of this city was made by great Architect Mahagovind”. Buddhayana dharma Sutra groups the Angas, with people of mixed origin and Mahabharata mentions Anga prince as a Mlechchha or a barbarian. The Vidhura Pandita Jatak describes Rajgriha (Capital of Magadh) as the city of Anga. Mahabharta refers that “a sacrifice performed by the king of Anga at the mountain Vishnupada (at Gaya).” Brahmadata was the king of Anga but around middle of 6 century B.C. Haryanka dynasty king Bimbisara of Magadha region, killed him and captured Anga region. Bimbisara made it headquarters and his son Ajatashatru ruled over it. Therefore, Anga became an integral part of growing Magadha Empire.

2. MAGADHA:-

Magadha was one of the most prominent and prosperous Mahajanpadas. The core of the kingdom corresponded the South portion of Bihar specially Patna, Gaya district, major part of the Ganga river, Eastern Uttar Pradesh and conquest region of Licchavi and Anga Mahajanpadas. Its Capital was Rajagriha or Girivajra (modern Rajgir) but later on its Capital converted into Patliputra (modern Patna). The alluvial plains of this region and its proximity to the iron rich areas helped the kingdom to develop good quality weapons and support the agrarian economy. During Buddha’s period, its boundary included the Anga. The other name of this city was Magadhpura, Brihadrathpura, Vasumati, Kushagrapura and Bimbisarpuri. It was an active centre of Jainism. The first Buddhist council was held at Rajgriha in the Vaibhara hills during the time of Haryanka king Ajatshatru.

From starting to end of Ancient period Magadh ruled by many of strongest dynasties viz: 1. Haryanka dynasty 2. Shishunaga dynasty 3. Nanda dynasty 4. Maurya dynasty 5. Shunga dynasty 6. Kanva dynasty.

3. KASHI:-

Modern Varanasi and its suburb area were known as Kashi Mahajanapada. The capital of Kashi was Varanasi. The city was bounded by river Varuna from the North and Asi from the South, which named it Varanasi. The Jatakas of Buddhist period speak of long rivalry of Kashi and Kosala and Anga and Magadh. Brahmadata was its strongest king, who won Kosala but later on Kosala king, Kansa won Kashi and incorporated it into Kosala. Matsya Purana and Muslim writer Alberuni read Kashi as Kausika and Kaushaka respectively. According to Sonnanda Jataka, "Magadh, Anga and Kosala were under the possession of Kashi." According to Jatakas the dimension of this city was three hundred league.

4. KOSALA:-

Kosala was an Ancient Aryan kingdom, corresponded to the region of Oudh. Its Capital was Savathi (Sravasti) which was about 60 miles north of modern Ayodhya and at the border of Gonda and Behraich district of Sahet-Mahet region. Kosala was located in the North-West of Magadh region. It was beleaguered by river Ganga from the South, Gandak (Narayani) from the East and Himalayana Mountain from the North. It finds mention as the centre of Vedic dharma. Its kings allied with the Devatas Kula (origin), which were against to Asura, Raksha. Ikshvakuvansha (Raghuvansha) dynasty was the longest continuous dynasty of this region. Historically, Lord Rama was the king of this dynasty. In Buddha's period, Kosala divided into two regions viz; North kosala, which Capital was Saket and South Kosala, which Capital was Saravasti. During the era of Mahavira and Buddha, this kingdom ruled by the famous king Prasenjit and followed by his son Vidudab. Prasenjit's sister married to Haryanka dyanasty king Bimbsara, wherein a part of Kashi gave as dowry. Kosala merged into Magadhan Empire when Vidudab was its ruler.

5. MALLA:-

Malla Mahajanapada was situated in modern Devariya region of gorkhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. Malla was a republican city, which known as "Gana". It was divided into two confederation parts, which were its Capital also. First One is Malla of Kushinara (modern Kasia, Gorakhpur) and the second Malla of Pava (modern Padrauna), both are very vital in the history of Buddhism and Jainism. Buddha and Mahavira took their nirvana respectively. In Manusmriti, Mallas are mentioned as Vratya Kshatriya, which called as Vasishthas (Vasetthas) in Mahaparinirvana sutra.

Earlier, Mallas had monarchic form of government but later they switched into one Sangha (republic), which members called themselves Rajas. According to Kush Jatak, Okkkas was the king of Malla but later this Janapada turned into republican state. In Buddha's time, Mallas formed an alliance with the Licchavis for their self-defense but the Magadhan Empire annexed their dominions.

6. Vajji or Vriji:-

Vajji Mahajanpada was also one of the principal republican Mahajanapada. The territory of the Vajji Mahajanapada was located on the North of the Ganga River and extended up to terrain region of Nepal and major parts of Northern Bihar was come under Vajjis. The Vajji clan had included by eight confederated clans wherein four were most important viz, the Vajjis, the Licchavis of Vaishali, the Videhas of Mithila and the Jnatikas of Kundgram but the identity of other four clans are not certain. However, historically, it reckons that the Ugra, the Bhoga, the Kaurava and the Ikshvakus were associated with the Vajjis. The Capital of this Mahajanapada was Vaishali, which was very significant. Other important cities of this Janapada were Kundapura or Kundagrama (a suburb of Vaishali), Bhoganagara and Hatthigama.

7. Chedi:-

The Chedis, Chetis, Chetiyas had two distinct settlement, of which one was in the mountains of Nepal and the other was related to the Bundelkhand, Ruhelkhand, Bareilly and Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh. Its Capital was Suktimati or Sotthivati. According to the Rigveda the Chedis were an Ancient people of India. Sisupala, who was an ally of Jarasandh of Magadh and Duryodhan of Kuru, ruled the Chedi kingdom. According to Hathigumpha Inscription of Kharvela "A branch of Chedis founded as a royal dynasty in the kingdom Kalinga."

8 .KURU:-The Purana traces the origin of Kuru from the Puru-Bharta family. Aitareya Brahmana locates the Kuru in Madhyadesha and refers the Uttarakurus as living beyond the Himalayas. The country of the Kurus roughly corresponded to modern Haryana specially Kurukshetra, Thaneshwar district of Delhi and Merrut and Ahichatra district of Uttar Pradesh. According to Jatakas its Capital was Indrapratha (modern Delhi). The Atharvaveda refers Parikshita as the king of Kuru.

According to later Vedic literatures, Kuru was associated with the Panchalas. According to Buddhist text Sumangavilasini “the people of Kururastra came from the Uttarakuru.” Vayu Purana mentions that Kuru, (the son of Samvarsana of Puru lineage) was the eponymous ancestor of the Kuru and the founder of Kururastra (Kurukshetra).

During Buddha’s time, Rathapala (son of the Kuru ruler) embraced Buddhism in this region. Buddha taught his important discourse in Kurukshetra, which later on recorded in the Mahasatipatthana sutra (the great discourse on the foundation of mindfulness), Mahanidana sutra (the great discourse on causation) and Anenjasappaya sutra (the way to imperturbable). Other discourses, as recorded in the Pali Canon of this region are Mahagiya sutra, Sammhapala sutra, Sammasa sutra and Dutiya Ariyavasa sutra.

The Kurus had matrimonial relationship with Yadavas, the Bhojas and the Panchalas. According to Astadhyayi of Panini, Kuru was one of the most powerful Janpadas and Hastinapur was its Capital. Arthashastra of Kautilya (4th century B.C.) also attests the Kuru as the Rajashabdopajivin constitution (monarchic government).

9. PANCHALA :-

The Panchala occupied the place to the East of the Kurus. It roughly corresponded to the region of modern Badaun, Farrukhabad district of Uttar Pradesh. The Janpadas was divided into two regions, first, Uttar or north Panchala which Capital was Ahichatra or Chatravati (modern Ramnagar, Uttar Pradesh) and second, Dakini or South Panchala which Capital was Kampilya or Kampil (modern Farrukhabad, Uttar Pradesh). Kannauj or Kanyakubj was the famous city of Panchala. The Shaunaka and Taittiriya Vedic schools were located in the area of Panchala. The great Indian epic Mahabharata explains that Draupadi was the princess of Panchala, who’s another name was Panchali.

10. **VATSA :-**The Vatsya, Vamas or Vachchas were stated an offshoot of the Kurus. The Vatsa or Vamsa country corresponded with the territory of modern Allahabad of Uttar Pradesh. Its Capital was Kausambi. According to Vishnupurana, the king of Hastinapur, “Nikshu” after washing away of Hastinapur in the flood settled his second Capital at Kausambi.

Kausambi was most important and prosperous city. A large number of millionaire merchants were resided there. In sixth century B.C., Udayana was the ruler of the Vatsa. Yet, Udayana was opposed to Buddhism but later he became a lay follower of Buddha and made Buddhism the state religion.

11. MATSYA :-

The country of Matsya or Machcha tribe lay to the South of Kurus and West of Yamuna. It corresponded to the region of Jaipur, alwar and Bhartpur in Rajasthan. The Capital of Matsya was Virat Nagar (Vairat) and its king was Virata. In Pali literature, Matsya was associated with Sursenas. King Sujata ruled over both, the Chedis and Matsyas. Thus, it proves that any time the Chedi kingdom was the part of Matsya Mahajanapada.

12. SURASENA :-

The country of the Surasena lay to the East Matsya and West of Yamuna. It corresponded to the Mathura or Brij region of Uttar Pradesh. Its Capital was Mathura. Avantipur the king of surasena, was the first chief disciple of Buddha. According to Majjhima Nikaya, Avantiputra was the son of Avanti's king Pradhyota's daughter. The Ashtadhyayi of Panini referred the Andhaka and Vrishnis people of Matura. The Vrishnis, Andhakas and other allied tribes of the Yadavas, formed a Sangha, which sangha-pramukhya (president) was vasudeva (Krishna). The Surasena kingdom had lost its independence after annexation by Magadhan Empire.

13. AVANTI :-

Avanti (modern Malya) was an important kingdom of central-western India. It corresponded to the region of Malva, Nimar and North-Western region of Madhya Pradesh. Vetravati River divided Avanti into North and South region. Ujjain was the Capital of North Avanti and Mahisati (Mahishamati) was the Capital of South Avanti. Both Mahisati and Ujjain stood on the South high road called Dakshinapatha extending from Rajagriha to Pratishtana (modern Paithan). According to Pali literature Pradhyota was the king of Avati. Ujjain was very rich in iron industry. Avanti later became part of Magadhan Empire.

14. ASSAKA / ASMAKA:-

The country of Assaka or the Asmaka was located in Dakshinapatha or Southern India. In buddha's time, Assaka was located on the bank of the river Godavari (South of Vindhyan range). The Capital of the Assaka was Potana or Patil, which corresponds to Paudanya of Mahabharata. According to Cullakalinga Jataka Asmaka king Arun defeated the king of Kalinga. The Godavari River separated the country of the Assakas from the mulakas. It was the only Mahajanapada situated to the South of Vindhayan ranges and was in Dakshinapath. The Buddhist text Mahagovinda Suttanta mentions about a ruler of Assaka, Brahmadata who ruled from Potana. Later the people spread southward to territory of the Rshtrakua Empire.

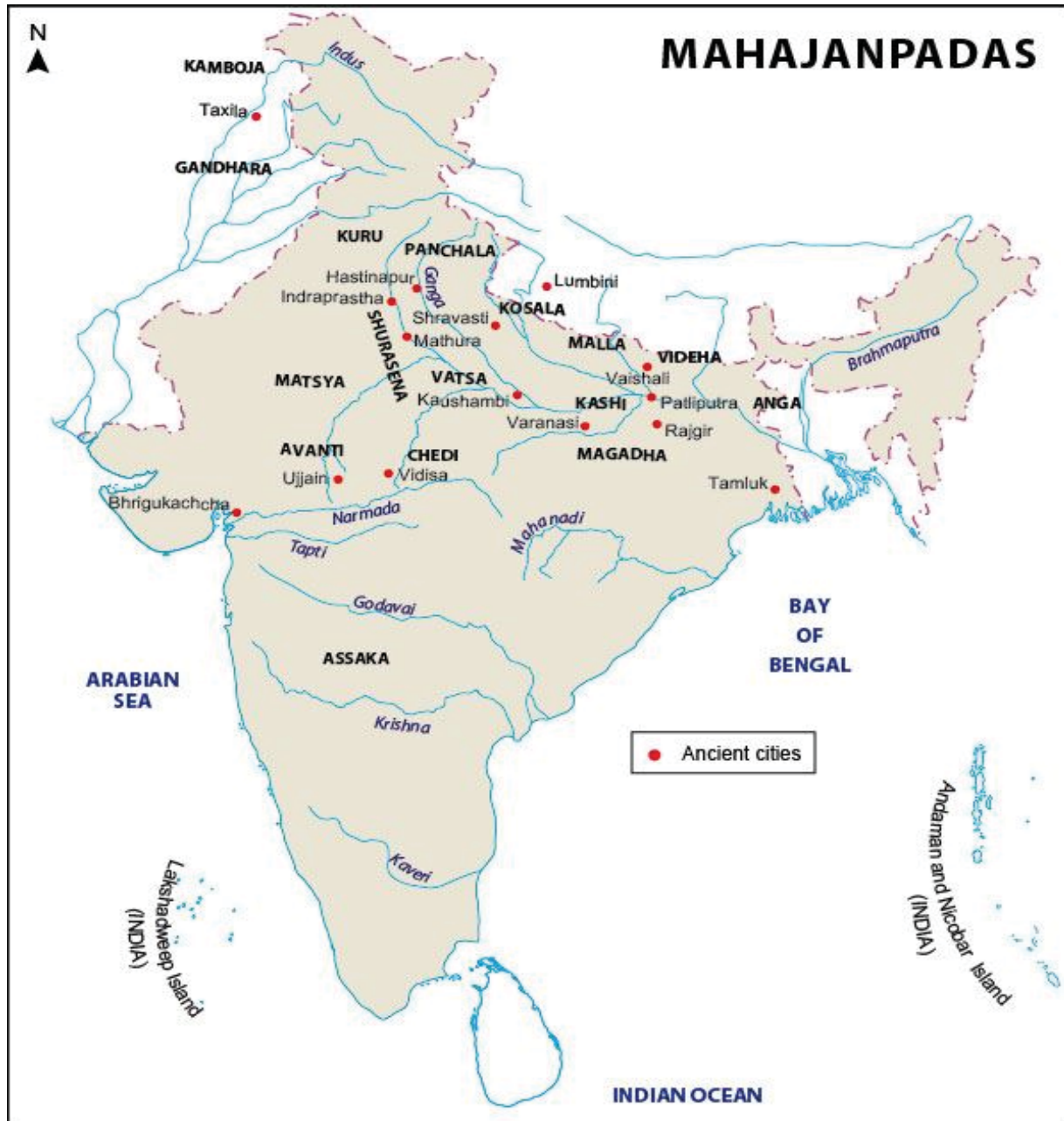
15. GANDHARA:-

Gandhara region roughly corresponded to modern Pakistan area of Peshawar and Rawalpindi. Its Capital was Taxila. According to Ramayana, Taksh, who was the son of Bharat, established Taxila. Another name of Taxila was Pushkalvati (Charsadda). In sixth century B.C., it was the main trade and educational centre. Its king was Pukkusati or Puskarsarini, who had sent an advisory committee in the court (darbar) of Haryanka dynasty king Bimbisara of Magadh region. In Buddhist Jataka we found Chandahara as another name of Gandhara. In Ancient time, Taxila University was a renowned centre of learning. The great genius of grammar, Panini and great diplomat Kautilya were the scholars of this university.

16. KAMBOJA:-

Kamboja Mahajanapada was also located in the Uttarapath. In Ancient literature, the Kamboja were associated with the Darada, Bahlika, Hindukush, South-Western Kashmir and Kapisha. The Capital of Kamboja was Rajpura (modern Rajori) or Hatak (in South-West of Kashmir). It was the neighbor state of Gandhara region. Earlier, in Kamboja, had monarchist system but later it converted into democratic. Kautilya mentioned Kambojas as Vartashastropajivi community means the community, which sustenance by agriculture, trade and arms.

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