

## 5. Janapadas and Republics

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### 5.1 'Jana' and Janapadas

Vedic people used the term *Jana* to designate a group of people, united under a common bond of singular kinship structure. Their settlement was known as 'Grama'. A cluster of gramas consisting of the same jana was known by the name of that particular jana. In the beginning, however, the concept of jana included only an extended family (*kul*), its settlement (*grama*) and the cattle-pen (*goshtha-gotra-gaulwada*). The concept of jana was not yet inclusive of the concept of territoriality. Hence, the geographic boundaries of a jana were not defined.

In the last lesson we saw that the Vedic people migrated and spread from the Saptasindhu region to the delta region of the Ganga. Vedic janas gradually began to settle in the new region. The concept of jana increasingly acquired the sense of territoriality. The sense of territoriality instilled the sense of geographic boundaries among the janas. It resulted into the emergence of informal local administrative structures among the janas. Thus, independent Janapada came into existence. A region occupied by a janas was called as *Janapada*. Gradually the Janapadas had more formal administrative structures transforming them into independent states. These were the first well-established states of ancient India. However, this does not necessarily mean that every Janapada evolved into an independent state.

### 5.2 Janapada

The term 'janapada' occurs in the Brahmana texts for the first time. Thereafter, it is frequently used in the Vedic literature and the epics – Mahabharata and Ramayana, as also in the Jain and the Buddhist literature. Considering the ancient Indian geographic perception with reference to the janapadas, the said literature seems to divide the Indian subcontinent into five sections : 'Praachya'- of the east, 'Praatichya'- of the west, 'Udichya' - of the north, 'Dakshina' - of the south, 'Madhyadesha' - The central region.

However, this division does not include the entire subcontinent. It mainly focuses on the region to the north of the Vindhya ranges. The geographic awareness seems to have expanded in the Puranic literature. The Purana texts mention the regions to the south of the Vindhyas also. These are, 'Dakshinapatha' and 'Aparanta', that is the coastal region of Konkan.

#### 5.2.1 Territoriality and Autonomous Functioning

It may be noted, that the sense of **territoriality** and the ensuing awareness of **autonomy** were the main factors responsible for the formation of ancient janapadas in India. However, their administrative system was not much different from that of the janas in the Rigveda. Two assemblies known as 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' were at the apex of all administrative decision making process, since the very beginning of the Vedic period. The chief of the janapada was known as 'Rajan'. The Sabha and Samiti had the authority either to elect or to remove the chief. However, the administrative objectives and policies, the norms of social organisation, etc. were flexible enough to accommodate changing socio-geographic milieu.

When the successive generations got established in a geographic periphery, the newly emerging social organisation was also changing. Now, it was not confined only to the basic kinship structure. People from the outside of the kinship framework also got included in the janapadas. The social organisation of the janapadas, which was based on collective functioning began to change and one's immediate family became more important. Accordingly, the social organisation came to revolve around the head of the family and family based rituals. Co-operation at individual level and among the families became the base of the social organisation.

This period also saw the rise of the warrior class. These people were well-trained in warfare. This class of warriors played a major role in the shift of the primary organisation of the janapadas to more complex state organisation. Janapadin is a term mentioned in Panini's Ashtadhyayi, used to indicate the warrior class.

### 5.2.2 Expansion and Development of the Janapadas

The expansion and development of the janapadas seem to have occurred in three different ways:

1. Expansion and development of a society formed into a Jana by uniting of a number of generations of a singular kula (family). For example, the janapadas, namely, Matsya, Chedi, Gandhara, Kashi, Kosala, etc.

2. Janapadas rising out of the union of more than one kula. For example, the Panchala janapada. Who were the five janas united under the name of Panchalas, is not exactly known. According to the renowned historian, Hemchandra Raychaudhuri following were the janas who merged together as Panchalas : Krivi, Turvasha, Keshi, Shrinajaya and Somaka. Later, Kurus and Panchalas are mentioned together as Kuru-Panchalas. By the time of Mahabharata the

kula (clan) known as the Bharatas in Rigveda, got merged with the Kurus. The two kulas united to such extent that the people in Bharata clan came to be regarded as the ancestors of the Kurus.

3. The more powerful janapadas conquered the less powerful ones.

**For additional information:** Some of the ancient janapadas and the literary texts that mention their names.

- Praachya : Anga, Magadh (Atharvaveda)  
: Kikata (Rigveda and Atharvaveda)  
Pundra (Mahabharata)
- Praatichya : Anu, Alin, Bhalan, Druhyu, Parashu, Pakhta, Puru, Turvasha, Yadu (Rigveda), Gandhara (Rigveda and Athrvaveda), Shalva (Mahabharata)
- Udichya : Krivi, Vaikarna (Rigveda)  
Balhik (Atharvaveda)
- Dakshina : Andhra (Mahabharata)  
Pulinda (Emperor Ashoka's edicts)
- Madhyadesha : Aja, Chedi, Bharata, Matsya, Shigru, Trutsu, Ushinara, Yakshu (Rigveda), Kuru, Shrinjaya (Rigveda and Atharvaveda)

### 5.3 Federation of States (Ganarajya)

The Later Vedic literature, Jaina and Buddhist literature indicate that most of the janapadas were monarchic states. However, some of the janapadas were of oligarchic type. The ancient literature mentions different types of states. Terms like Rajya, Svaarajya, Bhaujya, Vairajya, Maharajya, Saamrajya and Parmeshthya occur in this context. However, nothing more can be said about the nature of these states. We get to know that

Uttar Kuru and Uttar Madra were of 'Vairajya' type. It means that the state was not ruled by a monarch but the members of the janapada run the state collectively. The ancient literature mention such type of states as 'ganasangha or sangharajya' (oligarchy/ republic).

'Gana' means the ruling class comprising members of equal social status. Similarly sangha means a state formed by many kulas or janapadas by coming together. By 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. many sangharajyas had come into existence.

There were three main types of the ancient federation of states in India.

- (1) Ganarajya of the members of the same kula. For example, Malava and Shibi.
- (2) Ganarajya created by more than one kulas coming together. For example, Vajji Ganasangha. It included eight kulas. Vajji, Lichchhavi, Dnyatruk and Videha were the important ganas among them. Lichchhavi was most influential gana of them.
- (3) More than one ganrajyas coming together to create a sangharajya. For example Yaudheya-Kshudrak Sangh.

We can get a glimpse of the administrative system of the ancient ganasanghas in the Buddhist texts. Each ganasangha had its own system of decision making and its implementation. We may find approximate parallels of these systems in the following types:

**1. Democratic States :** Some of the ganasanghas were divided into regional zones called 'Khanda'. They functioned through a group of elected individuals, who were found capable. Each of the elected members represented his respective khanda. These elected members were installed with collective authority for the smooth running of the ganasangha. This was a democratic system. Ganasanghas which functioned in this democratic way existed in Punjab and Sindh at the time of Alexander's invasion.

**For additional information :** Ancient Indian literature mentions two more types of ganasanghas. 'Ayudhjivi' sangh and 'Varta-Shastropajivi' sangh. They existed in the northwest regions of the Indian subcontinent. The ganasangha of the Trigartas was mentioned as Ayudhajivi. These people were skilled warriors and warfare was the means of their livelihood. For example Yaudheya, Malava and Kshudraka. 'Varta' means trade and commerce. The people in the Varta-Shastropajivi ganasanghas lived by trade and commerce, agriculture and animal husbandry, as well as their skills in warfare. People in the Kamboj and Surashtra ganasanghas earned their livelihood by these means.

Each elective representative of respective regional zone was designated as 'Ganamukhya'. Every ganamukhya was the member of the assembly known as 'ganaparishada'. Ganaparishada was the highest decision-making authority concerning all the administrative matters of the ganasangha. The decisions made by the ganaparishada, were implemented by designated functionaries of various cadre. The ganapramukha was the principal functionary presiding over the administrative system. He was known as the 'Adhyaksha' or 'Raja'. The rest of the main designated functionaries included, Uparaja (Upadhyaksha), Senapati and Bhandagarika (Koshadhyaksha).

**2. Oligarchic States :** In this type the elite class in the society held all the powers of decision-making and administration. Panini and Kautilya mention them as 'Rajshabdopajivi' sangh. Panini includes Vajji, Andhaka, Vrishni, Yaudheya in the Rajshabdopajivi type. Kautilya includes the Vrijji or Vajji, Madrak, Kuru, Panchala, etc. in this type. This type of ganasanghas were more prevalent in the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

**By the Way :** The ganasanghas of Vajji, Shakya, Lichchhavi and Malla were closely associated with the life of Gautama Buddha. Gautama Buddha was born in the Shakya family. His father Shuddhodan was an elected president (Rajan) of the Shakya Ganaparishad.

We have seen that the janapadas mainly emerged as the result of the sense of geographic boundaries (territoriality) and autonomous functioning. Some of the powerful janapadas expanded and developed to the extent that they were acknowledged as 'Mahajanapadas' by the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. In the next lesson we will study the sixteen mahajanapadas of ancient India.

### Exercise

#### Q.1 (A) Choose the correct alternative and write the complete sentences.

- 'A region occupied by the 'janas' was called as .....  
 (a) Ganarajya (b) Ganasangha  
 (c) Janapada (d) Gotra
- The principal functionary of a ganasangha was known as .....  
 (a) Senapati (b) Bhandagarika  
 (c) Raja (d) Uparaja
- The author of the 'Ashtadhyayi', which mentions 'janapadin', was .....  
 (a) Kautilya (b) Panini  
 (c) Chanakya (d) Vyas
- The sense of territoriality and the ensuing awareness ..... were the main factors responsible for the formation of ancient janapadas in India.  
 (a) of unity (b) of authority  
 (c) of autonomy (d) of public authority

#### (B) Find the incorrect pair from set B and write the correct ones.

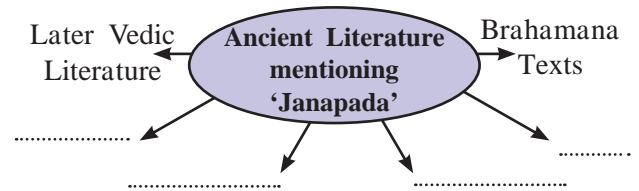
Set 'A'      Set 'B'

- Praachya      of the east
- Praatichya      of the west
- Udichya      of the north
- Aparanta      the region to the north of Vindhya ranges

#### Q.2 Choose the correct reason and complete the sentence.

- The ganasangha of the Youdhey, Malav, Kshudraka were mentioned as Ayudhajivi. Because –
- it was in the northeast region of the Indian subcontinent.
  - these people were skilled warriors and warfare was the means of their livelihood.
  - they were skilled in trade and commerce.
  - these were the ganasanghas depended on agriculture and animal husbandry.

#### Q.3 Complete the concept chart.



#### Q.4 Explain the concept with examples.

- Ganarajya and Sangharajya
- Vartashastropajivi ganasangh
- 'Jana' and 'Janapada'

#### Q.5 Answer the following question in detail.

Describe the democratic and oligarchic states in ancient India.

#### Activity

Present an act in the class, based on the simulation of the administrative system of an oligarchic state.

