



- The period c.600-300 BCE marks the beginning of the early historical period in north India.
- For the first time in Indian history, several territorial political entities emerged. These were called the mahajanapadas, and they spread over most of north India.
- Cities & city life, which declined after the Harappan civilization, emerged once again along the Ganga valley and spread to the far reaches of the northwest.
- A number of new religious groups & thoughts emerged to counter the ritual and religious supremacy of the brahmanas.
- Foremost among these movements, were Buddhism & Jainism. Cities emerged and trade expanded.
- The use of metallic money, along with the emergence of affluent classes, guilds, deluxe potteries, usury, increase in population, craft and specialization, reading and writing made this period a vibrant phase
- These simultaneous and interrelated changes in the political, material and cultural life, in north India in particular are called the 'Second Urbanization' in Indian history.

SOURCES: LITERARY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL

- The period 600 BCE - 300 BCE has rich evidence from both literary and archaeological sources
- Early Buddhist literature is generally divided into canonical and non-canonical texts.
- Canonical texts are the books which lay down the basic tenets and principles of a religion or sect. The canonical literature is primarily the Tripitaka books (The Three Baskets/ Collections).
- The Tripitakas consists of three books — the Sutta, Vinaya, and Abhidhamma.
- The Sutta Pitaka contains the Buddha's discourses on various doctrinal issues in dialogue form.
- The Vinaya Pitaka has rules for monks & nuns of the sangha (monastic order).
- The Abhidhamma Pitaka is a later work, and contains a thorough study & systemization of the teachings of the Sutta Pitaka through lists, summaries, and questions and answers.
- The Jatakas dealing with the stories of the previous births of the Buddha are part of the Sutta Pitaka.
- The composition of the basic core of the Pali Tripitaka is dated to between the 5th & 3rd centuries BCE.
- The Buddhist canon can be roughly situated geographically to the middle Ganga valley, i.e., modern day Bihar & eastern Uttar Pradesh.

- The Brahmana texts deal with the methods of performing Vedic rituals. Similarly, the Upanishads dealing with philosophical problems are also considered a part of the Vedic literature.
- These texts were composed from 800 BCE onwards. They refer to many Janapadas & Mahajanapadas and provide us insights into the settlement of agricultural communities.
- Particularly significant are the two types of pottery used in this period – Black-and-Red Ware (BRW) & Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW).
- The NBPW in particular is considered a deluxe pottery and noted for its technological excellence
- The evidence from NBPW sites includes an early series of punch-marked coins, which mark the beginning of the use of money in the subcontinent
- Many sites mentioned in the texts have been excavated such as Ahichchhatra, Hastinapura, Kaushambi, Ujjaini, Shravasti, Vaishali etc.
- Material evidence which is useful for this period are house remains, objects used by the people, potteries, coins etc.

EMERGENCE OF KINGDOMS

- The term janapada literally means the place where a group of people, or a tribe/ clan (jana) place their foot (pada). The janapadas were thus well-defined territories inhabited by people over whom ruled a political authority
- The transition from chiefships to kingdoms is linked to two phases. First is the performance of major sacrifices, yajnas, where the priests bestowed a divine status on the chief (raja). The second phase is the emergence of the state in the form of janapadas & mahajanapadas.
- The mahajanapadas were larger & more powerful than janapadas, and their rulers exercised greater power & enjoyed more prominence than the rulers of the janapadas.
- Around the sixth century BCE, several cities and states emerged in a belt stretching from Gandhara in the north-west to Anga in eastern India, extending into central India and the Deccan.
- Buddhist canonical texts in Pali, like the Anguttara Nikaya, enlist 16 powerful states, the solasa-mahajanapadas which existed in the lifetime of the Buddha.

IN THE MIDDLE GANGA VALLEY :- ANGA

- Anga roughly corresponds to present day Bhagalpur and Monghyr districts of eastern Bihar.
- Located at the confluence of the Ganga & Champa rivers, its capital city of Champa is identified with modern day Champagnagara or Champapura village near Bhagalpur.

- One of the greatest cities of the sixth century BCE, the capital city of Champa was an important commercial centre located on the trade routes of the time.
- Excavations at Champa have revealed the city being surrounded by defensive fortifications including a moat.
- Travel accounts often describe merchants as sailing overseas from Champa to Suvarnabhumi (a possible reference to Southeast Asia).

IN THE MIDDLE GANGA VALLEY : – MAGADHA

- The kingdom of Magadha was to become the foremost political entity by the 4th century BCE.
- The kingdom roughly covered the areas of modern day Patna & Gaya districts of Bihar.
- It was bound by the Ganga, Son & Champa rivers on the north, west, and east respectively & the Vindhyan range on the south.
- Its first capital was Girivraja or Rajagriha, modern Rajgir. This city was closely associated with the lives of the Buddha as well as Mahavira
- Excavations at Rajagriha have revealed a number of defense structures like stone fortification walls dating to about the times of Bimbisara and Ajatashatru, i.e., the 6th-5th centuries BCE.

IN THE MIDDLE GANGA VALLEY: – VAJJI / VRIJJI

- The Vrijji ganasangha was in eastern India, north of the Ganga with its capital at Vaishali.
- It has been identified with the area of Basadh, near Muzaffarpur area in Bihar. The Vrijji confederacy is counted as one among the most prominent mahajanapadas during the age of the Buddha.
- Magadha under the king Bimbisara also established marriage alliances with the Vrijji ganasangha.
- Most historians consider the Vrijjis/Vajjis as a confederacy of eight or nine clans.
- This means that in this confederacy the clans maintained an equal, and independent status, thus closely preserving their own identity even within the confederation.
- While gana sanghas, especially the Vrijjis, have often been described in Buddhist & Jaina texts as kshatriya clans; However they did not observed a varna society.
- They retained more of the clan tradition than did the kingdoms. They governed through an assembly representing the clan, even if the assembly was restricted to the heads of clans or families.

IN THE MIDDLE GANGA VALLEY: – MALLAS

- The Mallas, located further west to the Vajjis, were a confederacy of nine clans. There were two main political centres within this principality – Kusinara & the capital Pava.
- Kusinara has been identified with Kasia about 77 km east of Gorakhpur.
- While some historians identify Pava with modern day Pawapuri in Bihar, yet others identify it with Padrauna village about 26 km north-east of Kasia.

- The Mallas were close allies of the Vajjis. However, there were occasional conflicts between them as well.

IN THE WEST OF GANGA : – KASHI

- One of the earliest mahajanapadas to gain political prominence was the kingdom of Kashi.
- It was bound by the Varuna river in the north and the Asi river in the south. It is from these two rivers that its capital city Varanasi, on the banks of the Ganga, got its name.
- The Jatakas refer to a long-standing rivalry between the kingdoms of Kashi & Kosala. Eventually under the reign of Kosala king Prasenjit (Pasenadi in Pali), the feud ended with Kashi getting absorbed into the Kosalan kingdom.
- Kashi today is identified with the area adjoining Benaras in Uttar Pradesh.

IN THE WEST OF GANGA : – KOSALA

- The powerful kingdom of Kosala was bound by the Sadanira (Gandak) on the east & the Gomati on the west, the Sarpika or Syandika (Sai) on the south, and the Nepal hills to the north.
- The capital of north Kosala was Shravasti, identified with the modern-day twin villages of Sahet Mahet, and the capital of south Kosala was Kushavati.
- Maheth was a city and Saheth has been identified as the site of the ancient monastery of Jetavana.
- According to the Buddhist tradition, Jetavana was gifted by the lay devotee Anathapindika to the Buddhist sangha.
- Saket & Ayodhya were the other two important centres within the kingdom
- Pasenadi (Prasenajit) was an immensely popular ruler of Kosala, and a contemporary of the Buddha.
- Kosala today can be identified with the areas of Lucknow, Gonda, Faizabad, Bahraich of Uttar Pradesh

IN THE WEST OF GANGA :- VATSA

- Vatsa or Vamsa was a kingdom known for its fine cotton textiles. Its capital was situated at Kaushambi, near modern Prayagraj.
- Kausambi was an important point on the trade routes connecting the Deccan, the Ganga valley and the north-west.
- Excavations here have revealed imposing defense structures dating to about the 600 BCE
- Vatsa was a powerful mahajanapada under the leadership of the famous king Udayana. Around the same time, king Pradyota was ruling Avanti.
- The rivalry between the two is the subject of many legends.
- In fact king Udayana featured as the protagonist of at least three Sanskrit dramas from later periods – the Svapnavasavadatta of Bhasa and the Ratnavali and Priyadarshika of Harsha.

FURTHER WEST :- KURU

- The Kurus were settled in the modern day Ganga-Yamuna Doab region. According to the Buddhist

tradition, the Kuru kingdom was ruled by kings belonging to the Yuddhitthila gotra (gotra), i.e., the family of Yudhishtira, with their capital at Imdapatta (Indraprastha).

- In the Epics, the Kuru capital was located at Hastinapura till a flood led to its being shifted to Kaushambi.
- The Jaina text, Uttaradhyayana Sutra refers to a Kuru king named Isukara who ruled from the town of Isukara.
- The Kurus up to the time of the Buddha were a monarchy. Subsequently they become a gana sangha. They established matrimonial relations with the Yadavas, Bhojas, & Panchalas.

FURTHER WEST :- PANCHALA

- The Panchala mahajanapada included the present day Rohilkhand area and was divided into two parts by the river Ganga.
- The kingdom also had two capitals – the capital of Uttara (north) Panchala was Ahichchhatra, (Ramnagar in Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh) & capital of Dakshina Panchala was Kampilya, (identified with Kampil in Farrukhabad district, UP).
- According to the Arthashastra, the Panchalas were initially a monarchical state and later switched to a non-monarchical form of government. The mahajanapada had important urban centres, such as Kanyakubja or Kanauj.

EASTERN RAJASTHAN : – MATSYA

- The Matsyas were situated near the eastern parts of present day Rajasthan, comprising of areas in and around Jaipur, Alwar and Bharatpur.
- Their capital was Viratnagar (modern Vairat), named after the founder of the kingdom, king Virata.
- Buddhist texts usually associate the Matsyas with Surasenas.

YAMUNA DOAB

- The Surasenas were also located in the Yamuna doab region, with their capital at Mathura.
- According to the Buddhist tradition, one Surasena king, Avantiputra was a Buddhist disciple. The meaning his name was 'son of Avanti' hints at a matrimonial alliance between the Surasenas & Avanti.
- Like many other political centres, Mathura too was an important junction on the trade routes, connecting the north to the Deccan as well as to the western coast.

IN THE NORTHWEST REGION : – GANDHARA

- The kingdom of Gandhara comprised modern day Peshawar & Rawalpindi districts in Pakistan.
- Its capital, Takshasila or Taxila was a major centre of trade and learning. Excavations at Taxila have revealed three major settlements — the Bhir mound, Sirkap, and Sirsukh.

- The Bhir mound represents the oldest city. In the earliest levels of Bhir mound, silver punch marked bar coins and other coin types have been found.
- Around the sixth century BCE, Gandhara was being ruled by king Pukkusati or Pushkarasarin, who successfully waged a war against Avanti. He also maintained cordial relations with Magadha.

KAMBOJ :- HAZARA DISTRICT OF PAKISTAN

- Closely associated with Gandhara was the kingdom of Kamboja. Kamboja included the present day area of Rajouri, which is in the Hazara district of Pakistan.
- The Kambojas were a monarchy till about the 6th century BCE, but the later text Arthashastra refers to them as a gana sangha.

CENTRAL & DECCAN :- AVANTI

- The mahajanapada of Avanti was located in the Malwa region of central India. Avanti had two capitals, one at Ujjayini (Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh) & the Mahishmati (Mandhata in the western MP).
- Both the cities were important centres on the trade routes that connected north India with the Deccan & also with the ports on the western coast.
- Avanti was well known for its famous king Pradyota, under whose reign Avanti entered into military conflicts with Vatsa, Magadha, and Kosala.

CENTRAL & DECCAN :- CHEDI

- Capital Suktimati, located in the area around present-day Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.
- The Chedi kingdom was situated in the eastern part of Bundelkhand in central India.
- The ancient cities of Tripuri in the Narmada valley near Jabalpur, and the Airakina (Eran) near Sagar were also probably part of the Chedi kingdom

CENTRAL & DECCAN :- ASSAKA / ASMAKA

- Capital Govardhana, near Nanded in the Godavari valley in Maharashtra. The kingdom of Assaka finds mention in a range of texts such as Panini's Ashtadhyayi, the Markandeya Purana, the Brihat Samhita.
- Buddhist texts locate Assaka along the Godavari river in Maharashtra. Its capital was Potana/Podana, and is identified with modern Bodhan (Telangana)
- The Jatakas suggest that Assaka at some point had come under the sway of Kashi, and that it achieved military victory over Kalinga in eastern India



- There existed minor variations in the enumeration of these 16 states in different sources
- Broadly these lists covered two kinds of state formations, the monarchical kingdoms & the non-monarchical polities called the gana-sanghas.
- Most of the monarchical mahajanapadas were concentrated in the fertile Ganga plains.
- In contrast, the gana-sanghas lay around their periphery, in the Himalayan foothills, or in north-western India, Punjab and Sindh or central and western India.
- Their location suggests that the gana-sanghas probably pre-dated the kingdoms, since the low-lying hills would have been easier to clear than the marshy jungles in the plains.
- It is also possible that they were established by individuals with a liberated mindset who moved from the plains up towards the hills to establish communities with more egalitarian traditions since they were not satisfied with the growing orthodoxy and the rigid caste system of the plains.
- In fact, teachers of the two most important heterodox sects came from these gana-sanghas: Mahavira, associated with Jainism, belonged to the Jantrika clan, a part of the Vriji confederacy; and the Buddha, who was born in the Sakya clan.
- Historians have understood the gana-sanghas variously as republics or oligarchies. In the gana-sanghas, unlike the monarchical kingdoms, power was diffused, i.e., power was exercised collectively, by a group of people.
- The ganas were closely associated with the kshatriyas and were named after the ruling kshatriya clan; members were linked to each other through real or claimed kinship ties.
- Social stratification in these polities was limited. The gana-sanghas had only two strata – the kshatriya rajakula, i.e., the ruling families, and the dasakarmakara, i.e., the slaves and labourers.

- Land was owned collectively by the clan, but was worked on by labourers and slaves, the dasakarmakaras.
- While kinship ties bound the clan together, the labouring class of the kamakaras were non-kin labour.
- In terms of governance, there was no single hereditary monarch, but instead a chief known as the ganapati, or ganaraja, or sanghamukhya.
- However most of the mahajanapadas were monarchies & were ruled by a sovereign king.
- Power was concentrated in one ruling family, which became a dynasty. Succession to kingship became hereditary, based generally but not always, on primogeniture.
- Moreover the most powerful monarchies of the time developed a standing army – a permanent corps of troops recruited and maintained by the state.
- The emergence of these states and proto-states was a process deeply interlocked with the process of urbanization. The foundations of this process however must be traced to changing subsistence patterns. By the time of the sixth century BCE, society had become familiar with settled agriculture for some time

FOUNDATIONS OF URBANIZATION

- The term janapada also denoted the countryside, distinct from urban centres like pura or nagara.
- It was an area rich in resources, especially agrarian. Most of mahajanapadas emerged in the fertile Ganga plains.
- The formation of states was dependent, amongst other things, on not just agrarian resources, but the production of an agrarian surplus.
- The managing and redistribution of this surplus became the basis of power.
- By the sixth century BCE, settled agrarian society had become well-established in the Indo-Ganga divide, the upper Ganga valley and the Ganga-Yamuna doab.
- High rainfall, along with its fertile alluvial soil made the region particularly well-suited for paddy cultivation.
- Panini's grammar treatise also displays in-depth agricultural knowledge. For example, the grammarian mentions that a well ploughed land was called suhali.
- A vaiheya type of plot was the most suitable for cultivation of paddy (vrihi), yavya for growing wheat (yava), and tilya for sesame (tila)
- All sources however considered paddy as the principal crop, and the best kind of paddy was known as sali.
- The growth in production would have increased collection of agricultural taxes by the kings of the mahajanapadas.

- Revenue from these taxes would have been crucial for maintaining the administrative and military apparatus. Thus, it was the foundational basis of a State system.
- Studies have shown that rice consuming societies have higher fertility rates. Thus paddy production in the fertile Ganga valley would have led to demographic growth.
- This increased population was necessary for the emerging urban centers.
- Agricultural surplus was necessary to sustain those townspeople who did not grow their own food
- The city was inhabited by a range of non-agrarian professionals such as physicians, scribes, entertainers, craftsmen, artisans, etc

SECOND URBANISATION

- The period of about three centuries, from 600 BCE to 300 BCE is marked by what is called the 'Second Urbanization' in Indian history.
- Nearly a millennium after the Harappan urbanism, cities and city life emerged once again around the sixth century BCE in north India.
- Evident in this second phase was a noticeable shift in the geographical context of urbanization.
- The site of urbanization shifted from the Indus Valley (in the first phase) to the Ganga valley (in the second phase). The same process was slightly later for south India.
- The emergence of towns and cities was not uniform. Some, like Hastinapura, Rajagriha in Magadha, Shravasti in Kosala, and Kaushambi in Vatsa, grew up as political and administrative centres, as hubs of power
- Yet others were important nodal points for trade and operated as exchange centres for the surrounding hinterland
- Some cities became important junctures on trade routes that were moving more expensive and prestigious goods, such as Ujjain.
- Some urban centres also emerged as sacred centres, where people would often gather for various ritual purposes, as was the case with Vaishali.
- A concentration of people, and a wider scope of occupations and products became defining features of urban centres.
- According to the narratives available from textual sources, cities often emerged from a group of villages specializing in professions such as blacksmithing, pottery, carpentry, cloth-weaving, basket-weaving, etc.
- Specialized craftsmen tended to congregate at places which offered either proximity to raw material (such as clay for potters or timber for carpenters) or proximity and accessibility to market for distribution of their crafted items.
- Their concentration in a particular area set the foundation for the evolution of a town; a

concentration of craftsmen in turn gave boost to production and distribution, pushing the town into becoming a commercial centre.

- Cities such as Vaishali, Shravasti, Champa, Rajagriha, Kaushambi and Kasi are great examples of such commercial centres, boosting the economy of the Ganga valley.
- Similarly cities such as Ujjain, Taxila and the port of Bharuch provided a geographical gateway to markets beyond the Ganga plains.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCES OF URBANISATION

- Most often, the town would be enclosed by a moat or a rampart, and was sometimes fortified. The ramparts were either filled with earth, as in Rajghat, or later built with bricks as at Kaushambi
- For the town bordering rivers the ramparts would have also served as protection against floods, in addition to their function as primary line of defense
- Why towns need military protection? : – Other than being administrative centres, the town was where all the revenue was collected from adjoining areas and stored in the treasury. This increased their vulnerability to attack and thus necessitated fortified defense structures. These fortifications also worked as a physical boundary, clearly demarcating the town from the village.
- Facilities such as burnt bricks, drainage, ring wells and soakage pits, markedly different in form from those found in Harappan cities.
- Houses were better built than in the previous ages.
- At the Bhir mound for instance, houses were built around a courtyard. Scholars have postulated that rooms that opened directly on to the streets could have been shops (Thapar, 2002: 141)
- The streets themselves were levelled, indicating that wheeled traffic was in use.
- The most important archaeological evidence associated with urbanism is the pottery called Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)
- Excavations at Purana Qila in Delhi have revealed NBPW levels dating to 4th-3rd centuries BCE.
- Some of the artefacts found from these levels include terracotta figurines of humans and animals, a fragment of a sculpted ring stone, a clay sealing, a terracotta piece depicting a horse and an armoured rider
- Similarly, the NBPW phase at Hastinapura, labelled Period III, is marked with an element of planning, burnt-brick structures and terracotta ring well. Thus, the NBPW levels at excavated sites were clearly associated with urban features.

LITERARY REFERENCES OF URBAN CENTRES

- Literary authors often portrayed a sharp distinction between the pura (city) and the janapada (countryside) to reinforce the uniqueness and grandness of the city.
- This distinction manifested in various ways – the city & its ethos encouraged questioning of

established norms & symbols, brought together people from various social strata together to live in close vicinity rather than segregated and separated spaces.

- It was perhaps because of this heterogeneity the texts being extremely cautious of & sometimes even disdainful of the city.
- For example, the Apastamba Dharmasutra laid down that the study of the Vedas should be avoided in towns.
- It also urged the snataka (someone who had completed his studies as a brahmacharin) to not enter the town regularly
- On the other hand, Buddha and his fraternity of monks and even their lay supporters being extremely accustomed to the new ways of the city.
- According to, Buddhist sources, the city & the countryside did not present a simple dichotomy.
- Instead, human habitation was often described in a sense of a continuum, often expressed through the hierarchical expression grama, nigama, nagara.
- Here the grama was the countryside or the village, the nigama was a market town, often associated with commercial activities, and the nagara was the city.
- A graded hierarchy existed among cities as well. So for example, pura meant a town or a city, often associated with fortifications
- There were also fortified capitals in every kingdom, called Durga, which are described as a planned royal city. The durga was also connected to the rest of the country through royal highways called rajamarga.
- Literary references of mahanagaras.
- The Buddha's devoted disciple Ananda spoke of mahanagaras like Champa, Rajagriha, Shravasti, Saketa, Kaushambi and Benaras that were monumental and grand, fit enough to be the final resting place of the Buddha.
- Related to the nigama was the puta bhedana, literally meaning a place where lids (puta) of the boxes of merchandise or goods were broken or opened (bhedana).
- Thus places like nigama and putabhedana were essentially exchange centres and local markets.
- Places described as such include Pataligrama, described by the Buddha in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta as a putabhedana.
- Many of these exchange centres were often crossing-points on rivers, such as Sringerapuram (U.P.)
- The texts often refer to the walls, gates, and watch towers of cities and the hustle & bustle of urban life.

- Another word used for such grand cities was the agganagara.
- The Mahaparinibbana Sutta recounting the Buddha's visit to Pataligrama, narrates that the Master was quite impressed by the putabhedana and rightly assessing its potential, prophesied that soon it would become an agganagara, a premier city.

URBAN SOCIETY

- Buddhist sources for example speak appreciatively of distinctly urban occupations like physicians (vejja, bhisakka), surgeons (sallakata), and scribes (lekha).
- Accounting (ganana) and money changing were other urban occupations.
- There were also a range of entertainers, known from both Sanskrit and Pali sources, like actors (nata), dancers (nataka), magicians (sokajjayika), acrobats (langhika), drummers (kumbhathunika), and women fortune-tellers (ikkhanika).
- Some of them performed in fairs known as samajas, apart from other occasions.
- The Buddhist sources in particular show particular affinity for the accomplished courtesan (ganika), Ambapali, to whom was credited the prosperity of Vaishali.
- Some craft specialists may have lived in their own settlements on the margins of cities, supplying goods for an urban clientele.
- These included the vehicle maker (yanakara), ivory worker (dantakara), metal smith (kammara), goldsmith (suvannakara), silk weaver (kosiyakara), carpenter (palaganda), needle maker (suchikara), reed worker (nalakara), garland maker (malakara), and potter (kumbhakara).
- The city emerged as the central seat of monarchical power. It was often portrayed as an ideal space, built along an ideal structuring of moral and social order; one in which the king was central.
- The descriptions in texts showed the king's household and retinue as extremely diverse, employing a number of people
- These included a number of specialists such as soldiers of various kinds, foot soldiers, archers, members of cavalry, elephant corps, and charioteers.
- The king's staff also included ministers, governors (rathhikas), estate managers (pettanikas), the royal chamberlain (thapati), elephant trainers (hattirohas), policemen (rajabhatas), jailors (bandhanagarikas), slaves (dasas and dasis) and waged workers (kammakaras).