

CHAPTER – 2

IDEAS AND EARLY STATES

1. "The 6th century BCE is considered a turning point in Indian history that witnessed the emergence of new ideologies like Jainism and Buddhism. Explain the material factors in the Ganga basin that facilitated the rise of these new ideas."

Answer:

- The use of iron tools enabled people to clear the dense forests of the Ganga basin and cultivate the land more effectively.
- Better farming techniques led to an increase in food production, which supported the growth of trade and the first urban centers (cities).
- The Vedic practice of animal sacrifice conflicted with the needs of the new agricultural economy, which required cattle for plowing.
- Wealthy traders (Vaishyas) and landowners (Gahapathis) emerged; they sought a social status that reflected their economic power, which the old Varna system denied them.
- Jainism and Buddhism promoted *Ahimsa* (non-violence), which protected cattle and provided a peaceful environment for trade to flourish.

2. Explain the major teachings and features of Jainism that emerged in the 6th century BCE.

Answer:

Jainism

Jainism gained popularity under the leadership of **Vardhamana Mahavira**, who was the 24th Tirthankara.

Main Teachings:

- **Triratnas** : Mahavira taught three paths to attain liberation: Right Faith, Right Knowledge, and Right Conduct.
- **Ahimsa (Non-violence)**: This is the most important principle of Jainism. It forbids harming any living being, including animals and insects.
- **Lifestyle**: Jains were expected to lead a very disciplined and simple life.
- **Equality**: Jainism stood against the rigid Varna system and rituals of the Vedic period, making it popular among common people and traders.

3. What are the 'Four Noble Truths' taught by Buddha?

Answer:

Gautama Buddha taught four basic truths to help people overcome suffering:

- **Life is full of suffering:** Every person experiences some form of sorrow in life.
- **Desire is the cause of suffering:** The main reason for human unhappiness is the constant craving for things.
- **Suffering can be ended:** One can find peace by getting rid of these desires.
- **The Eightfold Path leads to the end of suffering:** Following a specific path of right living helps one overcome desire and reach Nirvana.

4. Why did Buddhism become more popular than the existing Vedic religion?

Answer:

Several factors helped Buddhism spread quickly among the common people:

- **Language of the people:** Buddha preached in **Pali**, which everyone understood, while Vedic texts were in difficult Sanskrit.
- **Simple and inexpensive:** Buddhism did not require costly animal sacrifices or complex rituals like the Vedic religion.
- **Equality for all:** It rejected the caste (Varna) system and treated all people as equals, attracting those who were treated poorly in society.
- **Support from Merchants:** The idea of non-violence (Ahimsa) helped trade grow peacefully, so wealthy merchants (Gahapathis) gave it financial support.

5. Explain the role and importance of the 'Sanghas' in the spread of Jainism and Buddhism.

Answer:

The Sanghas

The Sanghas were organizations or monastic orders established by Mahavira and Buddha for those who left their homes to seek knowledge.

- **Democratic Functioning:** The Sanghas functioned based on democratic principles, where decisions were often made through discussion and consensus.
- **Equality:** People from all castes and social backgrounds were admitted into the Sanghas, emphasizing the message of equality.
- **Role of Monks and Nuns:** The members (monks and nuns) led a simple life and traveled from place to place to preach the teachings of their masters.

- **Centers of Learning:** Over time, these Sanghas developed into important centers of education and culture.
 - **Viharas:** During the rainy season, when travel was difficult, the members stayed in permanent shelters called Viharas, which later became great centers of learning.
6. **Explain how the transition from 'Janapadas' to 'Mahajanapadas' occurred in the 6th century BCE and list their main characteristics.**

Answer:

- **The Rise of Mahajanapadas :** In the 6th century BCE, the focus of Indian history shifted to the Ganga basin. This period saw the transformation of small tribal settlements into large territorial states.
 - **From Janapadas to Mahajanapadas:** Tribes (Janas) settled in specific areas known as 'Janapadas.' As these Janapadas expanded through wars and alliances, they became larger territorial states called 'Mahajanapadas.'
 - **Number of States:** According to ancient texts, there were **16** major Mahajanapadas during this time.
 - **Governance:** While many were monarchies (ruled by kings), some like the **Vajji** were 'Gana-Sanghas' (republics) where power was shared by a group of elders.
 - **Capital Cities:** Each Mahajanapada had a fortified capital city to protect the kingdom from invasions.
 - **Military and Administration:** Kings maintained large, permanent armies and established a system to collect taxes (**Bali** and **Bhaga**) from the people to maintain the administration.
 - **Dominance of Magadha:** Among the 16, **Magadha** eventually emerged as the most powerful empire due to its fertile soil, iron mines, and strategic location.
7. **Analyze the factors that contributed to the rise of Magadha as the most powerful Mahajanapada in ancient India.**

Answer:

While there were 16 Mahajanapadas, Magadha emerged as the supreme power due to several strategic and geographical advantages:

- **Fertile Soil:** Magadha was located in the Ganga basin, where the soil was extremely fertile. This led to high agricultural production, which provided a steady income for the state through taxes.
- **Iron Ore Deposits:** The presence of iron mines in the region allowed Magadha to manufacture strong weapons and effective agricultural tools.

- **Natural Protection:** The first capital, **Rajagriha**, was surrounded by hills, making it difficult for enemies to attack. The later capital, **Pataliputra**, was situated at the confluence of rivers, providing a "water fort" (Jaladurga) protection.
 - **Military Strength:** Magadha was one of the first kingdoms to use elephants on a large scale in its army, which gave them a significant advantage over enemies.
 - **River Transport:** The rivers Ganga and Son provided cheap and easy transport for trade and the movement of the army.
 - **Powerful Rulers:** Ambitious kings like Bimbisara and Ajatashatru followed policies of conquest and marriage alliances to expand the kingdom.
8. **Explain the administrative system of the Mauryan Empire and the significance of Ashoka's 'Dhamma' in governing the state.**

Answer:

The Mauryan Administration

The Mauryans established the first large-scale centralized administration in India, reaching its peak under Emperor Ashoka.

- **Centralized Power:** The King was the supreme authority, but he was assisted by a council of ministers (Mantriparishad) to manage the vast empire.
 - **Bureaucracy:** A complex system of officials was appointed to collect taxes from farmers, traders, and artisans, which funded the large army and administration.
 - **Espionage:** The Mauryan kings maintained a well-organized spy system to keep track of both the public and the officials.
 - **Ashoka's Dhamma:** After the Kalinga War, Ashoka abandoned the policy of physical conquest (Berighosa) and adopted the policy of cultural/moral conquest (Dhammaghosa).
 - **Principles of Dhamma:** Ashoka's Dhamma was not a religion but a code of conduct. It emphasized:
 - Respect for elders and parents.
 - Kindness towards animals (Ahimsa).
 - Religious tolerance and living in harmony with others.
 - **Dhamma Mahamattas:** Ashoka appointed special officers called 'Dhamma Mahamattas' to spread these ideas and ensure the welfare of the people.
9. **Why is Athens often referred to as the "Cradle of Democracy," and how was its government organized?**

Answer:

Athens and Democracy

Athens is famous for developing the first known democratic system in the world.

- **People's Participation:** In Athens, citizens had the right to participate directly in the affairs of the state and the decision-making process.
- **The Assembly (Ecclesia):** The supreme power was vested in the Assembly, where all adult male citizens met to discuss and vote on important issues, such as declaring war or passing laws.
- **Rule of Law:** Instead of a single king making all the rules, Athens moved toward a system where written laws governed the people.
- **Cultural Center:** Beyond politics, Athens was a hub for art, literature, and philosophy, fostering a spirit of free thinking and debate.
- **Limitations:** It is important to note that this early democracy was limited; women, enslaved people, and foreigners were not allowed to participate in the Assembly.