
UNIT 4 NON-MONARCHICAL POLITICAL FORMATIONS IN ANCIENT INDIA¹

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to grasp the following:

- the meaning and different interpretations of the term *ganasangha*;
- the emergence and re-emergence of various non-monarchical states in ancient India;
- the distinction between monarchical and non-monarchical forms of polity;
- several characteristic features of non-monarchies;
- the correlation between the rise of non-monarchical states and the development of religious reformation in the sixth century BCE; and
- the factors contributing to their final dissolution.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Early Vedic texts refer to many *janas* (Aryan tribes) who would engage themselves in intra-tribal conflicts and, also, they would fight with non-Aryan tribes for cattle and green pastures which signified wealth during this time. The tribal political formation of the Rig Vedic period facilitated the advent and growth of the *janapadas* which were named after the respective *janas* who inhabited there. There were two types of *janapada*. In the monarchical type, the king was the head of the state with the centralization of power while the other category included the states which allowed sharing of power. The celebrated grammarian Panini records in his work *Ashtadhyayi*

the prevalence of the rule of *ekaraja* or one king in 19 *janapadas* and, also, there were *janapadas* which were ruled by a group of rulers respectively. The period from c. 600 BCE to 300 BCE is characterized as the 'Second Urbanization' in ancient Indian history. There was an expansion in geographical setting of the Aryans. They moved from the north-west region to the Indo-Gangetic Plain. This period is also known as the age of *Mahajanapadas* when we come across 16 (*shodash*) *mahjanapadas*. The sixth century BCE in ancient India is a significant historical period which saw the emergence of a number of different political formations – kingdoms, oligarchies and chiefdoms. There was no uniform political system and we observe the continuity of this tradition till the arrival of the Gupta age in the early fourth century CE.

While studying about the non-monarchical states in ancient India one should be careful not to superpose the notion of modern democratic republics (with universal adult suffrage and where the power of the government is held by the people who elect their leaders to represent them) on them. The idea is to highlight some elements of egalitarianism that existed between most of the constituent members of the non-monarchical states (*ganasanghas*) and rule by discussion and consensus in an assembly or a council despite the fact that the membership of the assemblies was restricted to a certain group and not all citizens could participate or elect their representatives. But, in contrast to the existing monarchical states the non-monarchical states endowed the scope of enfranchisement to the people.

4.2 SOURCES

The sources available to us for the study of the non-monarchical states in ancient India include indigenous as well as foreign literary sources, along with coins and archaeological findings. Numerous references have been made to various types of non-monarchical states, particularly in Buddhist and Jain accounts which can be corroborated by the Greek writings by Greek historians of Alexander's invasions in some part of the Indian subcontinent. The *Ashtadhyayi*, which is considered to be the oldest surviving Sanskrit grammar, written by Panini – a Sanskrit grammarian – provides information related to the non-monarchical states as well as monarchies, though we do not find detailed descriptions, as Panini was more concerned about describing the science of phonetics and the rules of grammar of Sanskrit. From Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and other Brahmanical treatises, too, we find some information on non-monarchical institutions. But substantially, the Brahmanical sources did not write much about them since they accorded kingship a central position. The moral philosophers and lawgivers like Manu advocated monarchical rule as a means to provide a social order based on *varna* (caste). The Brahmins recognized that this form of government could secure their privileges and, hence, they extended their support to it by formulating rituals and ideologies that provided political legitimacy to the monarch and this resulted into a symbiotic relationship between the two.

It is primarily the Buddhist and Jain sources such as the *Anguttara Nikaya*, the *Mahaparibbana Sutta*, the *Suttanipat Atthakatha*, the *Mahavagga*, the *Kullavagga*, the *Paramatthajotika*, the *Jatakas*, the *Ayaranga Sutta* etc. that help us to gain insight into the other types of political organization in ancient India. With the aid of these sources and by studying some prominent Buddhist and Jain personalities, particularly the Buddha who was born and raised in a *ganasangha* or *ganarajya* we

gather information with respect to the functioning of the assemblies, the rise of rivalries over access to and use of natural resources, the efforts of the Buddha to settle disputes between *ganasanghas* and, also, counselling them on how to defend themselves against the expansionist policy of monarchies.

4.3 *GANASANGHA*: MEANING AND INTERPRETATION

Ganasanghas, as Romila Thapar points out, were an ‘alternative polity’ to the monarchies. The term *ganasangha* is a compound word which is a union of two words *gana* (meaning a group of people) and *sangha* (assembly, organization or association). The word *gana* occurs in the *Aitareya Brahmana*. In Panini’s text *sangha* implies a corporate or organization and he equates the *sangha* to *gana*. In the Buddhist and Jain accounts the references to *gana* show sharp contrasts between this type of polity and monarchical polity. During the time of the Buddha we find the existence of the non-monarchical states such as Vriji, Malla, Kuru, Panchala and Kamboja and the smaller states such as:

- 1) the Shakyas of Kapilvastu,
- 2) the Videhas of Mithila,
- 3) the Lichchhavis of Vaishali,
- 4) the Bhaggas (Bhargas) of Keraputta Hill,
- 5) the Bulis of Allakappa,
- 6) the Koliyas of Ramagama,
- 7) the Moriyas of Pippalivana, and
- 8) the Kalamas of Kesaputta.

These states either consisted of a single tribe or a number of tribes as in the case of the Vriji confederacy.

In the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya the *sanghas* are described as republics. Kautilya mentions two kinds of republics:

- 1) The *raja-sabdopajivinah* i.e. those who lived by the title of *raja* such as the Licchivika, Vrijika, Mallaka, Madraka, Kukura, Kuru and Panchala and had the provision for the ‘king consul’ in their constitution.
- 2) The *varta-sastropajivinah* (military-cum-mercantile republics) i.e. the *kshatriya Shrenis* (corporations of warriors) e.g. the Kambojas and the Surastras who lived by agriculture, trade, cattle-breeding and fighting. Historians have called them as ‘Nations-in-arms’ or ‘Martial Republics’. Panini, too, talks of them but the *Ashtadhyayi* describes the *varta-sastropajivinah sanghas* as *ayudhajivinah sanghas*. In contrast to the ‘king consul’ republics, in the *varta-sastropajivinah* republics the citizens were required to obtain military skill as well as engage themselves in agricultural and trade activities. Therefore, they were not essentially military.

There is no unanimity among the historians on the translation and interpretation of the word *ganasangha*. It is difficult to ascertain whether it was a republic, democracy, aristocracy, confederacy or an oligarchy, or perhaps a government by discussion. Some scholars are of the opinion that the only form of government prevalent in ancient India was monarchical in nature and they contested the idea of republic states during this time which they considered as just tribal states. Accordingly, the Malava *gana* and the Yaudheya *gana* were not republics but the tribes of the Malavas and Yaudheyas. However, the argument has been criticized as being untenable. T. W. Rhys Davids, an English Pali scholar, in *Buddhist India* (1903) highlighted the fact that during this time there were some clans who made public decisions in assemblies and that the origin of these 'republics' can be traced to the post-Vedic period. Thus, this observation facilitated the reconstruction of non-monarchical polity in ancient India. Nationalist historiography exaggerated their republican features. Nevertheless, their works in the 1910s were significant from the perspective that they showed that ancient Indian society was not politically static as emphasized by many western scholars.

D. R. Bhandarkar in *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity* describes the different types of political structures in ancient India:

- 1) monarchy and dyarchy,
- 2) *ganasanghas* of the *Kshatriyas* such as the Lichchhavis,
- 3) Naigamas (civic democracies), and
- 4) *janapadas* (country democracies).

K. P. Jayaswal, a nationalist historian, regarded *ganasanghas* as a form of democracy. However, the view has been contended, as the *ganasanghas* were ruled by a set of people and not all inhabitants could participate in the policy-making process. J. P. Sharma describes the *ganasanghas* as a republic or a type of oligarchic polity where a group of people ruled and within this group a few or some had the real power, whereas Romila Thapar regards them as proto-states. Hence, there is lack of unanimity among historians on whether these *ganasanghas* should be understood as a democratic institution, an oligarchy, a proto-state or a republic.

4.4 GANASANGHAS IN THE AGE OF THE BUDDHA

During the time of the Buddha (sixth century BCE) there were some *mahajanapadas* which were also the *ganasanghas*. The Malla *Mahajanapada*, situated to the north of the Vajji Confederacy, was believed to have been ruled by as many as 500 chiefs. The territory was divided into two with their political headquarters *viz.* Kushavati or Kushinara (present-day Kasia in Gorakhpur district, Uttar Pradesh) and Pava (identified with Padrauna) as their capitals, each with its own *santagrah* (an assembly or a council). H. H. Wilson in 1854 made the identification of the ancient Kushinara with Kasia which was accepted by Alexander Cunningham, the founder of the Archaeological Survey of India (1861) and its first Director-General. It was at Pava that the Buddha had his last meal (*shukarmaddava*) which was offered to him by a smith named Chunda Kummaraputta before he fell sick and attained *mahaparinirvana* at Kushinara. The remains of his physical body were distributed. Some were given to the seven *ganasanghas* (the Shakas, the Koliyas, the Moriyas, the Mallas of Kushinara, the

Mallas of Pava, the Lichchhavis and the Bulis) and also to the monarchical Magadhan empire. The Mallas built *stupas* over the relics of the Buddha that they received. Kushinara and Pava are now considered important Buddhist sites.

The Vajji Republic was established before the conquests of Kashi by Koshala and Anga by Magadha, as the *Anguttara Nikaya* lists the names of Kashi and Anga along with Vajji among the sixteen *mahajanapadas*. As per Rhys David and Cunningham, the Vajjis were made up of *atthakulas* (eight confederate clans) and the Videhans and the Lichchhavis were the most prominent of them. Videha was initially a monarchy but later it became part of the Vajji confederacy. However, historians like Yogendra Mishra and Jagdish P. Sharma refute the notion that there were eight-member states in the Vajji confederacy as propounded by Cunningham. He explains that Patanjali in his *Mahabhasya* regarded the Videhas as a republic and, so, it was assumed that during the period of *mahajanapadas* too they would have been republicans. The *Anguttara Nikaya* mentions the name of Vajji and not Videha as one of the sixteen *mahajanapadas*. The omission of Videha has been taken as evidence for its inclusion in the Vajji *Sangha*. He argues that the *Dipavamsa* reveals that there were rulers at Mithilaganara even after Kalarajanaka and that it was the Videha kingdom that was later occupied by the Magadha empire.

Vaishali (now Besarh, Muzaffarpur district, Bihar) was the capital of the Lichchhavis and also the headquarters of the confederacy. Buddha is said to have often visited it. Mahali, a Lichchhavi commander of the Vajji confederacy, was the first Lichchhavi disciple of the Buddha. It was at Vaishali that the second Buddhist Council was held under the patronage of Kalashoka of Shishunaga dynasty of Magadha empire. Trishala, the mother of Mahavira (the 24th Jain tirthankara), was a sister of a Lichchhavi chief named Chetaka whose daughter was married to king Bimbisara of Magadha while Trishala was wedded to Siddharta, the chief of the Jnatrika tribe. Owing to the Jnatrikas' close geographical proximity to Vaishali, Yogendra Mishra doubts that they could have survived as a separate republic and that, probably, the Lichchhavis had received assistance from them in the rise of the Vajji confederacy. The Vajjis have been mentioned by Panini. Kautilya distinguishes them from the Lichchhavis. Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist monk who travelled to India in the seventh century, too, identifies Fu-li-chih (Vajji) and Fei-she-li (Vaishali) as two separate states which shows that Vajji was not only a confederacy but also one of the constituent clans. The *Arthashastra* records the Lichchhavis and the Vajjis as two different republics, suggesting that they were separate.

There are several conjectures on the origin of the Lichchhavis. Some historians believe them to be of foreign extraction and regarded them as Scythians, Kolarians, Tibetans and Persians. V. A. Smith states that they were of Tibetan origin, based on their judicial system and their method of disposing the dead bodies. S. C. Vidyabhushana is of the opinion that they were Persians in origin and had migrated from Nisibi (the Persian city). The Buddhist and Jain texts, on the other hand, tell us that they were *Kshatriyas* and that they had no foreign origin. In the *Paramatthajotika* (Pali commentary) the genealogy of the Lichchhavis is traced back to a queen of Banaras. H. C. Raychaudhari infers that the foreign tribes who were hostile to the Brahmins could not have been accepted as *Kshatriyas* and, so, he concluded that the Lichchhavis were indigenous *Kshatriyas* and their position was lowered in Brahmanical literature by calling them *vratyas*.

Out of all the clans of the *Vajji Sangha* only the power of the Lichchhavis endured and they reemerged later and we find that Samudragupta adopted the epithet of *Lichchhavidauhitra* (the son of the daughter of the Lichchhavis). His father Chandragupta I – the first independent ruler of the Gupta empire – married a Lichchhavi princess Kumaradevi and expanded the territorial extent of his kingdom. The marriage was commemorated on coins which were issued either during the reign of Chandragupta-I or Samudragupta. Obverse of the coins bears the figures and names of the king and queen while the reverse has an image of a goddess seated on a lion along with the legend *Lichchhavayah*. R. C. Majumdar opines that the marriage resulted into the union of the Gupta principality with the Lichchhavi state and the adoption of the epithet *Lichchhavayah* by Samudragupta was a calculated political move to accentuate his right of succession to the dual monarchy. P. L. Gupta remarks that the matrimonial alliance aided the rise of the Guptas. V. A. Smith proposes that as dowry Kumaradevi brought to Chandragupta-I valuable influence which, in due course of time, helped him to attain a paramount position in Magadha and the adjoining areas.

Then, there were those *ganasanghas* which were monarchies during the time of the Buddha but later became *ganasanghas*. The *Arthashastra* tells that Kamboja, Kuru and Panchala were monarchies in the beginning and, later, they switched to the *ganasangha* type of polity. The Kambojas/Ashvakans were located in the Hindukush region. The capital of the eastern branch was Rajapura (now in Pakistan) and the western branch had its capital at Kapisi (present-day Kapisa, Afghanistan). They were skilled cavalrymen (*ashva yuddha kushalah*) and owned magnificent breed of horses. They assisted other states, too, in wars and, therefore, the Kamboja clans of the Kunar and Swat valleys have also been addressed as Assakenoi and Aspasioi (from the Old Pali term *aspa* meaning horse) in classical writings and in the *Ashtadhyayi* the Kambojas are referred to as the Ashvakayanas and Ashvayanas (from the Sanskrit *ashva*). The Assakenoi and Aspasioi tribes of Kamboja resisted the invasion by Alexander-III of Macedon but Alexander defeated them. He captured 40,000 Aspasioi men and 23,000 oxen, as we know from the account of Kautilya that they were also proficient in cattle breeding and agriculture. Alexander sent the best of them to Macedon to farmers for agriculture. The Assakenois surrendered after much resistance², for Alexander promised them their lives on doing so. But, he had them executed after they surrendered.

4.6 GANASANGHAS IN THE POST-MAURYAN AGE

From the Mauryan period onwards the *ganasanghas* were weakened. Even in the pre-Mauryan era the monarchies were in a stronger position and were comparatively more common. There are different theories regarding the origin of the Mauryans. The ancient Buddhist text *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* mentions that Chandragupta Maurya belonged to the Moriya clan of a small republic named Pippalivana. But, with the decline of the Mauryan empire we find the growth of many regional states including the non-monarchical ones in northern and western India. Megasthenes noticed the existence of such form of government in the region and that there were numerous tribes which had no kings. The *Anabasis of Alexander* of Arrian, written in the second century CE, describes about various kingdoms as well as self-governed states. Arrian also

²After the chief of the tribe was killed in a battle, his mother Kripa or Cleophis commanded the tribe.

mentioned a small oligarchical state called Nyasa. According to this account, some significant *ganarajyas* were:

- 1) the Malavas,
- 2) the Arjunayanas,
- 3) the Yaudheyas, and
- 4) the Madrakas.

Each had the head of the state called *maharaja* or *mahasenapati* who were elected. The Madrakas established themselves in the central parts of the Punjab, between the two rivers: Ravi and Chenab. Their capital was Sakala (now Sialkot, Punjab province, Pakistan), which during the reign of Menander-I in the second century BCE, became the capital of the Indo-Greek kingdom. According to some historians the Madrakas were part of the kingdom of king Porus or Paurava at the time of the Macedonian invasion when Porus fought against Alexander in the Battle of Hydaspes on the banks of the present-day Jhelum river in 326 BCE. To reconstruct the history of the Madrakas we do not have enough numismatic and epigraphic evidence. The Samudragupta pillar inscription informs us that the Madrakas were one of the kingdoms subjugated by Samudragupta.

To the south of the Madarakas, in the present-day Punjab and Haryana regions were the Yaudheyas. In the *Mahabharata* Yaudheya is the son of Yudhishtira and, hence, it has been argued that the Yaudheyas claimed descent from the son of the eldest Pandava brother. But, in the Epic they are shown fighting in the Kurukshetra war on the side of the Kauravas. Panini describes them too as *Ayudhajivi kshatriyas*. Rohitaka was their capital and it had two provinces – Maru and Bahudhanyaka. Prof. Jaya Chandra Vidyalankar identifies Rohitika with modern Rohtak (Haryana). Their territorial extent can be ascertained by the finds of their coins and moulds. Yaudheya coin moulds have been unearthed in Rohtak in substantial quantity which proves that one of their mints was at Rohtak. Their coins bear the figure of Kartikeya, suggesting that they worshipped the deity. They lost their independence under the Mauryan empire but after the decline of the empire they once again regained their sovereignty, issuing their own coinage. Then, they were subjugated by Rudradaman-I, the Shaka ruler of the Western Kshatrapa dynasty. They regained their independence after the end of Rudradaman's reign and expanded the territory to Bijayagadh. They have been mentioned in the Bijayagadh stone inscription of Bharatpur. When the Kushanas came into power they were again subjugated and when the Kushanas were weakened they reappeared. From the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta we learn that the Yaudheyas had accepted the overlordship of this Gupta ruler.

Like the Yaudheyans, the Arjunayanas, too, emerged in the second century BCE. Both were neighbouring tribes and had cooperated each other to fight against the invasions of the Indo-Greeks, Shakas, Parthians and, afterwards, the Kushanas. The power of the Arjunayanas was eclipsed with the coming of the Shakas and Kushanas.

Later, they rose again only to be subjugated anew, this time by Samudragupta. They have been mentioned by Panini, Kautilya; in the *Mahabharata*, the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta and in the *Brihat Samhita* of Varahamihira. To the south of the Arjunayanas were the Malavas. It seems that they migrated from the Punjab to the Jaipur area. They were also subjugated by the Kushanas and, later, by Samudragupta.

Bordering the Yaudheyana state was the Kuninda Republic. Some Kuninda coins bear the name of Amoghabhuti. It has been suggested that he was one of their chiefs. They issued silver coins in a large number. Their silver coins have two scripts (Brahmi and Kharoshti) as they were used for trading with the regions where Kharoshti was used while the copper coins were issued only in Brahmi, primarily for local circulation. In their coins they are called Kuninda while literary references show that they were also known as Kulinda, Kauninda, Kaulinda etc. Ptolemy in *Geography* writes that their territory was called Kulindrene. Their coins have been discovered from Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Apart from these republican states, there were others too, such as the Bhadrakas (at Sialkot), Shibis, Trigartas, Audumbras (the Kangra valley and the districts of Gurdaspur and Hoshiarpur in Punjab) and in Central India there were the Abhiras, the Kokas, the Karaparikas and the Prarjunas. All these states were subsequently annexed by the Gupta rulers. Thus, we see the resilience of these republics who managed to spring up and reassert their authorities in the absence of a paramount state. After the disintegration of the Mauryan empire there was an influx of several small monarchical and non-monarchical states and as the Shakas and, later, the Kushanas became politically dominant many small states were brought under their control. The Rabatak Inscription (at Rabatak, Afghanistan) provides information regarding the reign of Kanishka (c. 127-150 CE) who is considered to be the greatest Kushana ruler. The inscription states that Kanishka controlled the whole domain of the *Khastriyas*. Many scholars think that probably these *Kshatriyas* were the *Kshatriya* republican states of northern India. The fall of the Kushanas revived the power of these states again but they lost their independence when the Gupta empire dominated much of the Indian subcontinent.

4.7 FEATURES

In Vedic texts we find some features of *ganasanghas* which shows that they had their roots in an earlier system. The *ganasanghas* in the Indus basin, as R. S. Sharma points out, may have been “the remnants of the Vedic tribes”. In the *Aitreya Brahmana* of the *Rig Veda* the terms *sabha* (aristocratic council) and *samiti* (assembly of the people of the clan) appear and it records that the Uttarakurus and the Uttaramadaras had a *virat* or kingless state. Some were ruled by kings who were either appointed or elected by the *samiti*. There was also another type of *sanghas* which were ruled by a *sabha* comprising of powerful members of the clan. There were some *sanghas* which functioned through the means of both – the *sabha* and the *samiti*. The members of the *sabha* had either showed their merits on the battlefields or were eloquent orators, learned men or affluent members of the tribe. There were also states ruled by a group of kings or nobles and the *samiti*. In all of these the idea of rule by one single ruler was not conspicuous.

Likewise, in non-monarchical states the power was not concentrated in the hands of a single hereditary ruler; rather, a chief or chiefs (if there was more than one clan) governed. The chief was called:

- 1) *ganapati*,
- 2) *ganajyestha*,

- 3) *ganaraja, or*
- 4) *sanghamukhya.*

And, then, there were the Lichchhavis who had 7707 *rajans* (probably, the chiefs of their respective territories) as per the *Chullakalinga Jataka*. Along with these thousands of *rajans* there were a similar number of *uparajas* (subordinate kings), *senapatis* (military leaders) and *bhandagarikas* (treasurers). There was a *santhagara* (assembly) where discussions were held and the members of the assembly would vote on various matters to decide and solve the issues. It was the assembly which had sovereign power and it could give punishments. The Lichchhavis had a big assembly and its members met once a year on their spring festival to elect their leader for a fixed term and also to conduct public business. Daily administrative issues were handled by a small assembly of nine members. Women could not be the members of these assemblies. The government was dominated by the *Kshatriyas*. A. S. Altekar observes that in some non-monarchical states the power was distributed among all *Kshatriya* families. But, trade and economic growth gradually expanded the enfranchised group and, thus, in some, as R. C. Majumdar explains, *shrenis* (guilds) became part of the armed force and they also had jurisdiction over their members and, so, they gained some access to the political process. But, largely speaking, there was few or no political representation of the people who were not *Kshatriyas*. The *ganasanghas* were named after the ruling *Kshatriya* clan.

In such states the Brahmins did not acquire any prominent position³ like in monarchies, as *ganasanghas* rejected the authority of the *Vedas*. Consequently, Brahmins accorded no significant recognition to them in their *Dharmashastras*. The Brahmins came to acquire a dominant position in the *varnashrama* system through the means of their 'ritual power'. The *Samhitas* of the Vedic corpus is a collection of hymns which were to be memorized accurately and transmitted orally. We find no mention of a script or seals in the *Rigveda* as we do in the Sindhu-Sarasvati civilization. While memorizing the hymns a great deal of emphasis was put on the correct articulation of the sound to make them efficacious. This meant that they would be limited to a select group of Brahmins and only they could perform the principal rituals. This enabled them to claim superior position in the *varna* system and, thence, they became the purest of all. They devised a series of rituals, accentuating the royal power and granting political legitimacy to kingship (through the concept of social contract) and to the kings. This way they became indispensable to the sustenance of royal power. In the Brahmanic traditions a state with no king was equated with lawlessness, disorder and chaos. Concerning the theories on the origin of monarchy it was believed that monarchy was ordained by a god who appointed the ruler in his own image in order to eliminate anarchy and establish law and order and in lieu of his kingly duties he was to receive a share of one-sixth of the produce (stated in *Rigveda, Taittiriya Brahmana* etc.) Monarchies came to be associated with Vedic lineages while *ganasanghas* were linked to *kshatriya* lineages.

However, in the *ganasanghas* too, like in monarchical states, the society recognized the distinction between free men and the slaves and the *shudras* were not placed on the same footing as the people who belonged to other *varnas*. The society was divided into:

³The *Ambattha Sutta* of the *Digha Nikaya* narrates an incident of a young *Brahmana* named Ambattha who was laughed at in the Shakyas assembly.

- 1) *kshatriya-rajakula*
- 2) *dasa-karmakara*

During the time of the Buddha (sixth century CE) the former had the right to vote and owned land but they could not own land individually since land was considered to be the property of the clan and, therefore, owned in common. On the other hand, the *dasa-karmakaras* were hired labourers (*karmakaras*) and slaves (*dasas*) who had no lands and, so, they worked on the lands of the *kshatriya rajakulas*. They were deprived of the voting rights. The ruling *Kshatriya* families were a very important element of the society, so much so that a division was prevalent between those who belonged to the *Kshatriya varna* and those who were non-*Kshatriyas*. But, later we find the influence of the Vedic social order on the *ganasanghas* as the economic and political power came to be concentrated in the hands of the *raja-kulas* and many *kulas* owned land separately. The social order of these clan-republics differed from the *ayudhajivis* which had two social groups viz. *arya* and *dasa* and this division was not rigid. It was flexible, as the same person could be an *arya* and a *dasa* at different times.

Further, the Lichchhavis recognized the ownership of a person too. Just like lands, people were considered as the property of the clan. To elucidate this the celebrated example of Ambapali can be cited. She was a *nagarvadhu* (it literally means the bride of the city), the property of the *ganarajya* and, thus, she was not permitted to marry. The archaeological remains of the sites of the *ganasanghas*, too, confirm the existence of social stratification in the society, as objects of luxury such as ornaments, semi-precious stone items etc. along with pottery⁴ of different types and houses of different shapes and sizes have been unearthed. But, as Romila Thapar says, in the *ganasanghas* the coercive authority and social stratification were not as considerable as in the kingdoms and this paved the way for the efflorescence of different unorthodox views and independent thinkers. The *Vinaya Pitaka* gives significant data on the organization of the Buddhist *sangha* established by the Buddha and it is believed that its rules and regulations were based on republican principles adopted from the *ganasanghas* of the time of the Buddha and Mahavira. The teachings of such heterodox sects were not often in harmony with the doctrines of Brahmanical faith. For instance, the Buddha stressed that the *varna* was based on action and not on birth as claimed by the Brahmins. The rise of heterodox sects has been viewed as *Kshatriya* reaction against the supremacy of the *Brahmanas* by a number of historians. The *ganasanghas* did not abide by the strict code of the Vedic *varnashrama* system. The *Manusmriti* calls the Lichchhavis and Mallas as *vratyas kshatriyas* and the Yadavas as *vratyas vaishyas*.

Most of the *ganasanghas* flourished in unfavourable geographical terrain with harsh climate. They were located in the Indus basin and in the Himalayan foothills in present-day eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar unlike the monarchical states which occupied the rich alluvial fertile flood plains of the Ganges. They were excluded from the more fertile regions by the stronger monarchical institutions. However, they were not insular regions and especially those located in the northwest region of India were part of the trade and commerce network, connecting North India to Central Asia. The *uttarapatha* linked the Gangetic plains, the foothills of the Himalayas and the northwest India to Central

⁴The general populace used the common red ware whereas the rich class used black slipped ware.

Asia. Their major source of income was agriculture. The *ganasanghas* situated in the foothills of the Himalayas and in the surrounding regions mainly engaged in wet rice cultivation. The *ganasanghas* of the Yauhedheyas, Malavas etc., which were referred to as *ayudhajivi*, practiced agriculture and animal husbandry. The *dasa-karmakaras* worked in agricultural land. The *Kunala Jataka* speaks of the tilling of lands of the Shakyas and the Koliyas by the *dasa-karmakaras* who also fought for their masters. But, most of the available information on slavery indicates the employment of the *dasas* in the domestic sphere rather than in production process.

There were frequent attempts by the monarchical states to subdue other kingdoms and the non-monarchical states. Some *ganasanghas* were forced to become tributary states of the powerful and expansionist kingdoms and, thereby, surrendered their sovereignty as we see in the case of the Shakyas and the Koliyas. The internal disturbances in such states were seen as opportunities by overlords to tighten their grip on them and, so, it was important for the *ganasanghas* to stay united. This can be well illustrated by a dispute that occurred between the Shakyas and the Koliyas. Shakyas and the Koliyas were situated on the opposite banks of the Rohini river. The *Suttanipat Atthakatha*, written by a fifth century Buddhist monk, speaks of the Rohini river water dispute between the two. The river became a bone of contention between them because as the population grew and more lands were brought under cultivation, the need for water also increased. Both accused each other for drawing excessive water from the river. Since these small states were the vassals of the powerful neighbouring Koshala kingdom, therefore, the disunity owing to the water sharing dispute was becoming a threat to their existence, as their unity was crucial to check the complete annexation of these small political units by the powerful ones. The Buddha, who himself belonged to the Shakya clan, tried to solve the issue amicably. He narrated the *Duddubha Jataka* to show how blind faith can damage a society. Listening to his discourse the Shakyas and the Koliyas reconciled. In gratitude they offered 250 princes from each state as *bhikkus* (meaning *bhikshus* in Pali) to the Buddha. Thus, the maintenance of unity among the *ganasanghas* was very crucial for them especially because they were not militaristic in nature and approach.

4.8 DECLINE

The *gansangha* polity was not concentrated on the policy of conquest and consolidation of territories like the monarchies. They also had a strong economy but they did not focus on resource extraction for military mobilization. Ajatashatru, the Magadhan king who was succeeded by Bimbisara of the Haryanka dynasty, pursued the aggressive policy of conquest and expansion like his royal father. Ajatashatru employed some innovative military weapons on battlefields. *Mahashilakantaka* was used to throw stones like catapults and *rathamushala* was a chariot with two maces attached to it. The use of elaborate terms such as *senanayaka* (defence minister/commander of the troops), *anikatta* (royal guard), *chaturini*⁵ etc. suggests the existence of professional army and well-organized military system. Ajatashatru was successful in defeating the Vajji confederacy. But, the Vajji union was also a powerful state and its strategic location made it part of a significant trade route. Its strength lied in the solidarity and cooperation

⁵*Chaturini* was an army which consisted of *hatthi*, *assa*, *ratha* and *patti* (elephants, cavalry, chariots and infantry).

among all its tribes. Ajatashatru had to make military and diplomatic preparations for 16 years before he could defeat and assimilate it into the Magadha empire. The *Mahaparinibbana-Sutta* informs that the Buddha emphasized on the significance of regularly holding assemblies in *ganasanghas* in order to promote unity and the smooth functioning of the states. The Buddha, who was well aware of the mutual antagonism between the Vajji confederacy and the Magadhan empire, preached at Vaishali that as long as the Vajjians remained united, met regularly in assemblies and preserved their principles of governance and system of justice they would not be defeated. But, Ajatashatru was eventually successful in creating dissension among its different tribes through his chief minister Vassakara. Thereafter, he attacked and annexed the Vajji territory. Later, the *Arthashastra* lays out the special strategies that could be utilized to wipe out the *ganarajyas*. H. C. Raychaudhuri views the success of Ajatashatru as the fulfillment of his motive to totally annihilate the *ganasangha* type of polity. Hence, the promotion and sustenance of unity among different tribes of a *ganasangha* and among the *ganasanghas* was crucial for their survival.

Also, it appears that the *Kshatriyas* of some *ganasanghas* were reluctant to establish matrimonial alliances with *Kshatriyas* of the kingdoms and, sometimes, this would become a pretext of the latter's act of aggression. Both the Koshala kingdom and the Shakyas claimed that they belonged to the Ikshvaku dynasty. But, the Buddhist accounts claim that Vidudabha destroyed the Shakya *ganasangha* in retaliation for offering Vasabhakhattiya, a slave girl, in marriage to his father Prasenajit – the king of Koshala – whereas Prasenajit had demanded for a Shakya noblewoman as a wife in order to extend his influence amongst the Shakyas. So, after the realization that he was born of a slave girl by the means of a deceit, Vidudabha sought to invade the *ganasangha*. Vasabhakhattiya, who was passed off as a Shakya noblewoman, was born of the union between Mahanama (one of the cousins of the Buddha) and one of the female slaves of Mahanama. The *Kshatriyas* of the Shakya clan deemed the custom of marrying outside their clan beneath their dignity. However, it is to be noted that since the Shakyas were closely related to the Koliyas, therefore, there were intermarriages between the two. The Shakyas practiced endogamy and polygamy. Based on his study of Pali literature, A. M. Hocart in *Buddha and Devadatta* (1923) noticed that consanguineous marriage was a common feature of the Shakyan *ganasangha*. Later, the studies of G. S. Ghurye and others of the Bombay School too supported this view. The father of the Buddha – Siddhodana – married his close cousins Mahamaya and her sister Maha Pajapati Gotami. In accordance with this Shakyan practice no Shakyans of noble birth were willing to send a Shakyan noblewoman to Koshala but at the same time, they feared to dismiss the demand of the Koshalan ruler and, so, they resorted to treachery. However, the political aspirations of Vidudabha, who after becoming the king invaded not only the Shakya *ganasangha* but also the Koliya state based on the claim that they had once been part of the Koshala kingdom, cannot be ignored.

Thus, it was due to internal contradictions and mutual conflicts, and the rise of powerful monarchies such as the Magadhan and the Mauryan empires and their political motivations along with the foreign invasions and the establishment of powerful political entities from the Indo-Greeks to the Kushanas, the non-monarchical states from time to time were weakened but they fought to resist and survive and would resurface from time to time, as you read earlier. And, finally, with the founding of Gupta hegemony these states ceased to exist. We don't find references to such forms of government

after Samudragupta. However, the vestiges of the *ganasanghas*, which had retained greater vestiges of tribal polity than the monarchical states, could be seen in monarchies such as in the election of Harshavardhana and Gopala, in the local self-government institutions of the Cholas etc.

4.9 SUMMARY

To sum up, the origin of non-monarchical states can be traced to Vedic tribal tradition which they continued to practice whereas in the monarchical states the Rigvedic tribal assemblies lost significance and at their cost the power of the king increased. The royal power was further strengthened by the performance of various intricate rites and rituals such as the *rajasuya* sacrifice, the *vajapeya* (the chariot race), the *ashvamedha yajna* (horse sacrifice) etc. This helped the Brahmins to gain prominence in kingdoms. Whereas in non-monarchical states the practice of such rituals held no relevance as they rejected the Brahmanical rituals and followed more-or-less egalitarian traditions and, so, the Brahmins were not able to gain patronage of the *Kshatriya rajakulas*. Thus, the system of government which prevailed in *ganasanghas* was, in many ways, different from that of the monarchy. Power was not vested in the hands of one ruler but in ruling families. Their economy, social stratification, resource utilization, military organization etc. were not as complex and elaborate as in the monarchies. The *ganasanghas* gave an impetus to free thinkers and heterodox sects. However, with the passage of time the *ganarajyas* succumbed to powerful monarchical states with superior armies and with rulers pursuing the political aspiration of expanding their respective territories far and wide.

4.10 GLOSSARY

Vratya : There are different meanings of the term *vratyas*. The *Atharvaveda* defines the *vratyas* as Mahadeva or the Supreme Being from whom the *rajanyas* (the warrior class) and, also, the *Brahmanas* came into existence. Gradually, the *vratyas* began to be regarded as outcastes. The *Panchavimsa Brahmana* divides the *vratyas* into four classes: the *hinas* (who were the degenerated ones, living in the *Vrati* society and shunning *brahmacharya*), the *garagirs* (swallowers of poison), the *samanichamedhris* (those who had controlled their passion) and the *ninditas* (the hated ones). It also informs us that they did not study the *Vedas*. Sayanacharya calls them the inhabitants of foreign lands who did not practice the prescribed customs and rituals. A. B. Keith says that the Aryans who lived outside the Brahmanical culture were regarded as *vratyas*. It appears that the term became synonymous with rebels and outcastes who lived outside the fold of the Vedic society whereas in the Jain tradition they were seen as leaders (*vratyas rajanyas*) and heroes. Rishabhadeva, who is considered to be the first *tirthankara* in Jainism, is called *Mahavratya*. But, the Brahmanical religion also permitted the *vratyas* to return to the Brahmanical faith. The *Brahmanas* and the *Sutras* prescribe *vratyastomas* for such *vratyas*.

4.11 EXERCISES

- 1) Throw light on the *ganasanghas* either during the time of the Buddha or in the post-Mauryan period.
- 2) In what ways did the non-monarchical states differ from the monarchical states of ancient India?

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