

16 Mahajanapadas

UPSC Notes

What are Mahajanapadas?

Mahajanapadas are the kingdoms that rose to fame from the 6th century BC onward. Mahajanapadas signify the tribes came together to form various groups and later gave rise to permanent settlement areas called 'states' or 'Janapadas'.

- In Vedic India, Janapadas were the main kingdoms. At that period, Aryans were the most powerful tribes and they were referred to as 'Janas'.
- By the 6th century BCE, there were 22 distinct Janapads,
- The increasing Socioeconomic achievements, political & religious advances, and increased use of iron instruments led to the establishment of Mahajanapadas from small kingdoms known as Janapadas,
- After Harappan Civilisation, it is considered the 2nd urbanization era.

16 Mahajanapadas with Capital

Below we have provided a complete list of the 16 Mahajanapadas with capital

16 Mahajanapadas	Capital of 16 Mahajanapadas
Anga	Champa
Magadha	Girivraja Rajagriha
Kasi	Kasi
Vatsa	Kausambi
Kosala	Sravasti
Saurasena	Mathura
Panchala	Ahichchatra and Kampliya
Kuru	Indraprastha
Matsya	Viratnagar
Chedi	Sothivati
Avanti	Ujjaini or Mahismati

Gandhara	Taxila
Kamboja	Pooncha
Ashmaka or Assaka	Pratisthan/ Paithan
Vajji	Vaishali
Malla	Kusinara

Facts on 16 Mahajanapadas

There are several kingdoms in ancient India in the 6th Century BC. This era saw socioeconomic growth along with political and religious developments. This resulted in the growth from Janapadas to Mahajanapadas. By 6th BC, the major focus of chief political activity shifted from the western part of Gangetic plain to the eastern part. The main reason behind the shift was for a better climate, fertile lands, and topography conditions bestowed with rainfall and rivers. Additionally increased use of iron tools empowered the development of small states as a kingdom and which later was known as Mahajanapadas.

Anga

- It finds its reference in Atharva Veda and Mahabharata
- Anga was taken over by Magadha Empire during the Bimbisara rule.
- It is currently located in Bihar and West Bengal

Magadha

- Atharva Veda mentions the Magadha was semi-Brahmanical habitation
- Magadha became a center of Jainism.

Kasi

- Kasi was located in Varanasi
- It got its name from the rivers Asi and Varuna

Vatsa

- It is also known as Vamsa
- This Mahajanapada followed the monarchical form of governance
- The capital of Vatsa is Kausambi
- Vatsa was the center of economic activities at that time

Kosala

- Its capital was Sravasti and it was situated in the modern Awadh region of UP.

Saurasena

- Saurasena was the center of Krishna worship, and this region also saw dominant followership of Buddha.

Panchala Mahajanapada

- It is located in the present day Uttar Pradesh
- In the later period, the nature of governance shifted from monarchy to republic.

Kuru

- Kuru moved to a republic from a governance

Matsya Mahajanapada

- Matsya is situated in the present-day Jaipur
- It was located to the west of Panchalas and south of the Kurus

Chedi

- Chedi was located in the Rigveda

Avanti

- It has a huge relation to the rise of Buddhism
- It was located in the present-day Malwa and Madhya Pradesh

Gandhara

- Here the people were trained for war, and it was an ideal place for international commercial activities.

Kamboja

- According to some literary sources Kamboja was a republic.

Malla Mahajanapada

- It was a republic, and it finds its mentions in the Jains Texts, Buddhist texts, and Mahabharata.

Vajji

- Vajji included main races like Licchavis, Vedeans, Jnatrikas, and Vajjis.

Ashmaka or Assaka

- This Mahajanapada was located on the bank of Godavari

16 Mahajanapadas and their Modern Location

Below we have provided the list of 16 Mahajanapadas with their modern locations.

16 Mahajanapadas	Modern Location of 16 Mahajanapadas
Anga	Munger and Bhagalpur
Magadha	Gaya and Patna
Kasi	Banaras
Vatsa	Allahabad
Kosala	Eastern Uttar Pradesh
Saurasena	Western Uttar Pradesh
Panchala	Western Uttar Pradesh
Kuru	Meerut and Southeastern Haryana
Matsya	Jaipur
Chedi	Jaipur
Avanti	Malwa and Madhya Pradesh
Gandhara	Rawalpindi
Kamboja	Rajori and Hajra
Ashmaka or Assaka	Bank of Godavari
Vajji	Bihar
Malla	Deoria and Uttar Pradesh

The Most Powerful Mahajanapada

Magadha was the most powerful Mahajanapada of that time. It had to compete with Kosala, Avanti, and Vatsa for supremacy but in the end, it became the most powerful Mahajanapada.

Types of Government in Mahajanapadas

In Mahajanapadas, there were two types of Government- Monarchy and Republic. The major differences between the Monarchy and Republic are given below.

Features	Monarchy	Gana-Sangha (Republic)
Government	Centralized and Hereditary	Decentralized and was not hereditary
Location	Most of them are based in the foothills of the Himalayas	Most of them are located in the Great alluvial plains of Ganga and its tributaries
Decision-making	Through debate, discussion, and voting in the assembly called Santhagara	Through King, who was advised by Mantri-Parishad (ministers)
Views	Tolerant towards unorthodox views	The Brahmanical system did not tolerate other views

Features of Mahajanapadas

The seven features of the Mahajanapadas are listed below.

1. The King
2. The Minister
3. The Country
4. Treasury
5. Army, and
6. Ally
7. Fortified City