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MHI-104

Political Structures in India

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By: Gaurav Sahni



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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA

M.H.I.-104

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: Attempt at least **two** questions from each Section. In all you have to answer **five** questions. All questions carry equal marks.

SECTION-I

Q. 1. Discuss the nature of the Kushana State.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 17, 'Nature of Kushana State' and Page No. 18, Q. No. 1.

Q. 2. Comment on Ganasanghan during and after the time of Buddha.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 23, Q. No. 1.

Q. 3. How did the rise of feudatories contribute to the disintegration of the Gupta Empire?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 28, 'Nature of State Under the Guptas' and 'Rise of Feudatories' and 'Disintegration of Gupta Empire'.

Q. 4. Is the 'epicentre perspective adequate to explain the major socio-cultural and historical transformation in early medieval India? Comment.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 33, 'Transformation to Early Medieval India: Various Perspectives' and Page No. 35, Q. No. 1.

Q. 5. Discuss the 'imperial' ideology under Akbar.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 87, 'Imperial Ideology Under Akbar' and Page 88, Q. No. 1.

SECTION-II

Q. 6. How did the exigencies of war prioritize the Military development of the East India Company?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 126, Q. No. 1.

Q. 7. Discuss the process of modernization in the princely states during the rule.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-22, Page No. 132, 'Bureaucratisation and Process of Modernisation' and Page No. 135, Q. No. 3.

Q. 8. Discuss the nature of the administration under the Pandyas.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-30, Page No. 138, 'The Pandyas' and Page No. 141, Q. No. 2.

Q. 9. Discuss the classification of law into civil and criminal law during the colonial period.

Ans. The classification of law into civil and criminal in colonial India was a complex process shaped significantly by British imperial ambitions and administrative strategies. The British aimed to establish a legal framework that would facilitate their control over the Indian sub-continent while introducing legal concepts that were relatively foreign to indigenous practices. Here's a closer look at how civil and criminal laws were developed and implemented during the British colonial period in India:

1. Civil Law: Civil law in British India covered areas like property, contracts, and personal disputes. These laws were crucial in managing commercial activities and land relationships, which were central to the colonial economy. Key developments in civil law included:

Codification of Laws: The British undertook the codification of Indian civil laws to ensure a more manageable and predictable legal system. Laws such as the Indian Contract Act (1872), the Indian Succession Act (1925), and the Transfer of Property Act (1882) were introduced to regulate civil matters according to British legal principles.

Land Laws: The British introduced several land tenure systems, such as the Zamindari, Mahalwari, and Ryotwari systems, which redefined land ownership patterns and revenue obligations. These laws often disrupted traditional landholding patterns and cemented the economic exploitation of the rural populace.

Personal Laws: The British adopted a policy of non-interference in the personal laws of Hindus and

Muslims initially but later codified these to an extent for administrative convenience. The Hindu Law of Inheritance was codified, and efforts were made to delineate and formalize Muslim personal law.

2. Criminal Law: Criminal law in colonial India was more directly controlled by the British and was used as a primary tool for enforcing colonial authority. The Indian Penal Code (IPC), drafted by Lord Macaulay and enacted in 1860, is a landmark document that continues to form the basis of criminal law in India today. Aspects of criminal law during the colonial period included:

Indian Penal Code (IPC): The IPC codified criminal laws in India, introducing definitions and punishments for a wide range of offenses in a manner that was systematic and, for the first time, uniformly applicable across diverse regions. It was designed to impose British notions of justice and morality.

Police and Judiciary Systems: To enforce these laws, the British overhauled the police and judicial systems. The establishment of a formal police force in 1861 and restructuring of the judiciary helped in implementing these laws effectively.

Laws to Suppress Political Dissent: The British also used criminal law to suppress political dissent and freedom movements. Laws like the Sedition Act were specifically tailored to curb the activities of freedom fighters and to silence opposition against British rule.

Interaction Between Civil and Criminal Law

The interaction between civil and criminal law in colonial India often reflected the broader colonial strategy of control and extraction. Civil law was used to facilitate economic exploitation through land and tax laws, while criminal law was used to suppress resistance and maintain public order. The British administration made efforts to adapt these laws to the Indian context, but often the application was skewed to benefit colonial interests rather than to provide justice.

Q. 10. How did the liberal project of remaking of India in the image of Britain fare under the colonial rule?

Ans. The liberal project of remaking India in the image of Britain under colonial rule involved imposing Western political ideals, legal systems, educational methods, and cultural norms onto Indian society. This was motivated by a combination of Enlightenment values, such as rationality, progress, and modernity, and imperial ambitions to create an administrative and economic structure that mirrored British interests. The outcomes of this project were multifaceted and

complex, with significant implications for Indian society, politics, and culture.

Political and Administrative Overhaul

The British sought to transform India's political landscape by instituting a bureaucracy that mirrored the British system. This included the introduction of a civil service that was heavily influenced by British practices, where Indian civil servants were often placed in subordinate roles under their British counterparts. The ICS (Indian Civil Service), although theoretically open to Indians following reforms in the late 19th century, remained dominated by the British and served primarily to enforce colonial rule rather than foster democratic governance.

Legal and Judicial Reforms

As part of the liberal project, the British implemented a comprehensive overhaul of the Indian legal system. This involved the codification of laws, such as the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Indian Civil Procedure Code, which were inspired by British legal principles. The establishment of a structured judiciary and a common law system was intended to reflect British justice, but in practice, it often served to consolidate colonial control and integrate Indian economies into the global capitalist system under British dominance.

Educational Changes

The introduction of English education and the establishment of institutions modeled after British universities were aimed at creating an educated Indian elite who could assist in administering the colony. The education system promoted English language and literature, science, and Western philosophies. Figures like Thomas Macaulay advocated for creating a class of people who were "Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." However, this system also led to a disconnect between the educated elite and the masses, and eventually became a tool for fostering a new consciousness that contributed to the rise of nationalist movements.

Economic Transformation

The economic policies implemented by the British were geared towards transforming India into a market for British goods and a source of raw materials for British industries. The deindustrialization of India's traditional industries and the focus on cash crops adversely affected the Indian economy and led to significant socio-economic changes. The introduction of railways, telegraphs, and other infrastructure projects were aimed at economic integration and control but

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POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN INDIA

Pre-state to State

1

INTRODUCTION

The formation of states is not an easy process. Of course, we are indebted to the modern historians and scholars, who after a great effort have brought to light the various social backgrounds which led to the formation of states. Actually, the state is not a monolithic structure that is super-imposed from the above. Of course, the formation of a state is a transitional process that achieves its aim by means of the stratification of society. There are differences between the state formation of North India and that of South India. The first state in North India emerged in the mid-1st millennium B.C. when the Aryans conquered parts of North India, and the society bearing the structured forms came out. The regions of North India evolved with the Kshatriya class as the ruling class and the peasantry as the producing group. Hence, the stratification of the society produced kingdoms bestowed with the institutional structures. However, the process of state formation in South India lies in the differences and conflicts among the local groups. In this chapter, all those functions, apart from the essential factors of state formation, have been discussed in detail, which makes it an interesting chapter on the formation of states in India. Further, students are also made familiar with the basic trends of state formation in South India.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

OUR SOURCES PRE-STATE TO STATE IN EARLY NORTH INDIA

The Harappan evidence, the Vedic texts, Archaeological evidence, etc., are the important sources that are available to us for the study of the transition from pre-state to state in early North India

How Important is the Harappan Evidence?

Some scholars have expected that the Harappan culture was endowed with some kind of state-like structures, but in the absence of textual evidence and

any clear-cut idea about the nature of the state that had ever existed, we cannot rely on them. Further, it is difficult to link the features of the Harappan culture with the post-Harappan culture.

Vedic Texts

The early and later Vedic literature secure our purposes to a great extent. The Rig-Veda is the earliest form of the Vedic literature, and the *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharaveda*, together with the Brahmanas and the earliest sutra literature, make the domain of the later Vedic literature. It is hoped these texts might have been composed between 1500-500 B.C. The four Vedas store the prayers and chants while the Brahmanas and earliest sutras make an excellent discussion on them. The myths, rituals, and legends contained in them are of great help to scholars studying the development of political processes in ancient India.

Archaeology

Of course, our textual evidence is sustained by the archaeological evidence. We find several correspondences between the later Vedic texts and the painted Greyware culture. Both of these evidences relate to the mid-Ganga valley besides having similarities in the extent of the geographical area. Several prevalent features of culture have similarities in the areas of agriculture, pastoralism, small castles, and dug huts. Besides, these cultures were familiar with a little use of iron, too. The presence of pottery further boldens our idea about the importance of archaeological evidence and its historical relevance.

SOME PROBLEMS TO KEEP IN MIND

While studying the sources of history to analyze the formation of the state, we must guard ourselves against certain things. That means we must give importance to the factors that correlate to the different periods. If we study the emergence of the Magadha empire separately, it means we are not assisted by the sources contained in the Vedic or later Vedic literature, which are deeply concerned with the political processes of the later Vedic society. Further,

there are some terms in history that went on changing their meaning in terms of the period. For instance, the Bali, in the beginning, was a simple offering, which later became some kind of offering made to the chief. However, in the later Vedic period, the existence of Bali was completely altered. Then, it became a kind of regular tax. Therefore, such terms have their own significance and the students must be conscious while applying them in their analysis of the historical facts.

THE EARLY VEDIC CONTEXT

From the prayers inherent in the *Rig-Veda*, we come to know that the dominant class of the society was dependent on pastoralism, especially cattle rearing for subsistence. We find that in such a society, the horse had acquired a special position, and the chariot drawn by horses, of course, symbolized power. Similarly, the term *gopathi* was the protector of cattles and also related to deities. In early Vedic society, various terms borne the essence of human contexts.

Some prayers are dedicated to the cattle raids, which might be led by the chiefs and the booty, thus recovered used to be distributed in the assemblies called the Vidatha. It is expected that these booties might be distributed among the chiefs, his supporters, and the priests as they had a powerful role in the success of the chiefs. We find many terms to denote a particular thing in the early Vedic period, such as *Agni* symbolizing the fire God, and *Vispati* was the leader of the *Vis*, which was basically a social unit. It seems that the society was based on a sense of shared existence in which responsibility and resources were borne by the community as a whole.

THE LATER VEDIC SCENARIO

Later Vedic texts make us familiar with the complicated social and political relations and the role played by the priests and their respective rulers to regulate these social and political relations by means of grand rituals like: *Rajasuya*, *Vajapeya* and *Asvamedha*.

The Brahmana and the Raja

Of course, the varna system dominated the scene of the later Vedic society. We find an ideal relationship among the three upper varnas of the later Vedic society. However, the relationship between the Brahmanas and the Rajas/Kshatriyas was marked by a sense of tension as well as competition. Their main conflicts lie in the areas of rituals where the Brahmanas had declared themselves the specialists of performing these rituals. And the Kshatriyas were the patrons of these rituals and had some different ideas about them. Actually, it was a question of sharing resources between the Rajas and the Brahmanas, who valued wealth and had no

limit to their greed. However, when the Kshatriyas were the patrons of these rituals, it was a pertinent question of social status for them.

What Happened to the Vis?: The *Vis*, of course, symbolized the entire community. But when the sacrificer was transformed into the Raja through major rituals like *Rajasuya* and the *Asvamedha*. The *Vis* was also identified as a particular category that was absolutely different from the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas. Then, the *vis* became a soft target of exploitation for the Rajas. They were considered to be supportive as well as subordinate to the Raja. Besides, the Rajas were entitled to appropriate the resources generated by the *Vis*.

Complex Rituals and their Implications: The *Rajasuya*, *Asvamedha*, and *Vajapeya* are complex rituals that have been elaborately discussed in later Vedic texts. The *Asvamedha* was the horse sacrifice ritual in which a horse with a band of guards was allowed to move for over a year. During this period, rituals continued in sacrificial places. Of course, these rituals were quite extended and always involved lots of resources, which might have been either received as gifts or by show of force. These rituals were mainly performed with the objective of showing power. The remarkable point contained in the *Vajapeya* was that the chariot race was pre-destined to be ended in the victory of the Rajas/Kshatriyas. Besides, these victories were connected with the divine power which the Raja was expected to earn. Hence, the rituals were the devices to show the power of the Kshatriya and, at the same time, earn the subordination of the Vaisayas, leaving the Brahmanas.

The 'Jewels' of the Realm: The 'Jewels' of the Rajas were also known as the *Ratinamhavirsi*. They were the very important functionaries who were responsible for carrying out the functions of the Rajas. For instance, the caretaker of the sacrificial horse in the *Asvamedha* was always chosen from these *Ratmins*. Besides, the *purohita* or the *gramani* also formed the *ratmins* of the Rajas. The charioteer or *suta*, the *ratmins*, who helped the Rajas in the battles and used to praise their achievements.

EARLY HISTORICAL TAMIL POLITY AS DESCRIBED IN SANGAM LITERATURE

Sangam literature is concerned with the corpus of ancient Tamil heroic poems composed during the early historic period of South India popularly known as the Sangam Age. The composers of these heroic poems constructed the Sangam polity on the grounds of the political ideas they expressed in those poems. According to them, Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas, who

PRE-STATE TO STATE / 3

have been given special treatment in these poems, were the ruling lines of South Indian polity, and they represented the monarchical concepts of polity.

The Cheras: The South-western part of Tamilakam was ruled over by the Cheras. The Cheras regions were predominated by the heavy presence of hills and forests, which are given special treatment in the Sangam literature.

The Cheras were the great performers of Velvi, which were the Vedic sacrifices and they worshipped Korrvai, the War Goddess and Murugan. In the heroic poems they have been compared with the Vedic Gods such as *Surya*, *Agni*, *Marut*, the *Pancabhutas*, the constellations and the navagrahas. Of course, it shows a degree of influence related to the Vedic Brahmanic as well as the Buddhist culture.

The 'Jewels' of the Realm: The 'Jewels' of the Rajas were also known as the ratnins. They were the very important functionaries who were responsible for carrying out the functions of the Rajas. For instance, the caretaker of the sacrificial horse in the *Asvamedha*.

The Cholas: In the heroic poems the Chola is addressed as 'Kavira Kilavon'. The Chola ruled over the land located in the Kaveri delta which was famous for paddy and sugarcane. We find that some poems have been composed in praise of chiefs, enati Tirukkuttuvan, enati, Tirukkili and enati Tirukkannam. Certainly, these enatis had served the Chola in various ways. Besides, we learned that Pannam and Aruvantai were the Chola subordinates and were responsible for the Chola military assistance. During the Chola rule, the Ventar who played the role of a revenue collector as the ventar was involved in collecting paddy from the people. Moreover, some poems are also dedicated to the exploits of warriors during the Chola. In these poems the Chola rulers are highly praised.

The Pandyas: The Pandyas ruled over the regions which were rich in pastoral and coastal fields. In the poems, they are referred to as the rulers who possess excellent resources. We came to know from the relevant sources that Nakan and Nampi were the Pandya subordinates, and they provided the Pandyas with military help whenever they needed it. Moreover, the Pandya rulers had a high regard for their subjects. There were some Pandya rulers like Maran Valuti, who were famous for their might and valour. Who had even challenged the North Indian kings once. Of course, he was one of the most important Pandya rulers besides Mutukutumi Peruvaluti.

The Political Structures: Historical Perspectives: The historians of old generation have

opined that the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas endowed with some kind of centralized political structure on the basis of the epics, *puranas* and the *Arthashastra* as they have been expressed in the poems. These historians have constructed the form of central and provincial administration bearing a high sense of typical monarchy. Ministers, the Council of officials, standing army of fourfold divisions, delimited territory, periodic taxations and officialdom were the essential parts of the political structures during their reign. N. Subrahmanian has also favoured the existence of such a political machinery during the reign of the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas.

PRE-STATE SITUATION IN SOUTH INDIA

In the conventional writing of history, the ruling class, like the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas, have been assigned the status of dynasties and kingly rule. However, modern scholars have concentrated on the nature of chiefdoms as their knowledge is based on the socioeconomics and political condition of the period, which is conducive to the pre-state formation. Hunting, rearing animals, agriculture, and craft production were the main forms of subsistence found in the social and political processes of Tamilakam. Further, primitive agriculture and animal keeping were under the deep influence of political regulation. The Tamil heroic poems throw sufficient light on the subsistence pattern, socio-cultural ideas, and institutions found in the regions where the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas had established their dominance.

CHIEFDOMS OF TAMILAKAM

The historians of old generation have opined that the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas endowed with some kind of centralized political structure on the basis of the epics, Puranas and the Arthashastra as they have been expressed in the poems. These historians have constructed the form of central and provincial administration bearing a high sense of typical monarchy. Ministers, the Council of officials, standing army of fourfold divisions, delimited territory, periodic taxations and officialdom were the We come to know about the knowledge of the chiefdoms of Tamilakam from the Tamil heroic poems. The Ashokan edicts of the 3rd century B.C. have also described the Cheras, Cholas, and Pandyas as the chief chiefdoms of South India. The heroic poems describe the different levels of power prevalent among the chiefdoms, and they are known as the Killar, Velir and Ventar. Actually, these three levels of power symbolize the three systems of power sharing among the chiefdoms of Tamilakam.

The Killar chief was the hunter chief and the head of a certain groups known as Vetar and Kuravar. In the

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heroic poems, they have been described as the big men in the agricultural settlements bearing good influence in the killar society.

However, the power system held by the Velir system seems to be old-fashioned, as the Velir chiefs were quite conscious of their pedigree. In the heroic poems, the Velir chieftains are expressed as the hill chieftains, who were also the head of the family groups called Vetar, Itaiyar, and Kuravar. In these poems, we discover that Elilmalai was the more powerful chieftain of Kerala. Besides, the poem also describes several other hill chieftains at the same time. The pastoral chiefs are also expressed in the heroic poems.

However, in the absence of encouraging evidence, it becomes difficult to establish their real entity. In the heroic poems, the chiefs are still special cases while. They have been expressed in a beautiful way and given a good family status in these heroic poems. Hence, all the velir chiefs were not purely the hill chiefs. Sometimes, they were the chiefs having a good hold over the agrarian lowlands. The other class of political power was the ventar, and the ruling classes, like the Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas have been represented as the ventar chiefs.

TOWARDS STRATIFICATION

The old political machinery of the chieftains had no power to convert the agriculture labours into the power class. However, the agrarian societies of Tamilakam started showing the tendencies of becoming class structured in the 5th to 6th century B.C. The spread of agriculture and new relations of production are the two encouraging components that work behind this class intensification. In such a situation, the people of Tamilakam were categorized along the line of production, and the society was becoming stratified between the high-borns and the low-borns. It is natural, as it had happened in history, that most of the fruits of production were enjoyed by the highborns when its fruits are borne by the producing clans. Hence, the people divided between the two groups slowly started merging into the system of social differentiation within the society. Hence, the aggregate form of the society surfaced gradually and existed finally.

THE FORMATION OF THE STATE

The ruling houses like the Pallava, Pandya, Chera and Chola demonstrated the development of political control as a result of the birth of a new agrarian system in the sixth century A.D. Moreover, the spread of the new relations of production made the society become class structured and led to the formation of the political system to a possible stage. We cannot deny the fact that the form of the new political formation was quite

different from that of the mere chiefdom. In the initial level of the state formation it was a transition from kin-labour, to non kin-labour, multiple functionaries to hereditary occupation groups, clans to castes, simple clannish settlements to structured agrarian villages, and chiefdom to monarchy.

The Brahmana villages were re-established throughout the entire range of the fertile tracts under the royal patronage which is, of course, a new feature of the New Agrarian economy. We come to know from the relevant copper plate that several earlier villages were restored under the corporate control which undoubtedly, indicates the shift from the individual holding to the collective holding. Further, intensifying the social stratification. Such a step was indicative of the development of a new pattern of relations under the new political form and political encouragement.

EXERCISE

Q. 1. Explain the process by which social and political relations became complex in the later Vedic period.

Ans. Social and political relations, to a great extent, are determined by the complex rituals like *Rajasuya*, *Asvamedha* and *Vajapeya* in the Vedic period and these grand rituals are elaborately described in the later Vedic texts.

These rituals were undoubtedly extended over the years. For instance, in the rituals of *Asvamedha*, which was a horse sacrifice ritual, a horse was let loose under the supervision of armed men to roam for a year. And during this period the rituals were continued at the sacrificial site at the same time. The performance reminded me of the long line of ancestors by means of the rituals. Hence, the position of the sacrifices was elucidated through these rituals.

The great rituals during the later Vedic period always consumed a great deal of resources. These were, of course, the raw materials for the people whose presence was expected at these rituals, the sacrificial materials, particularly the animals and the other articles given to the Brahmanas as *daksina*. Undoubtedly, the performer would have received these things as voluntary gifts or obtained by coercive power. In the later Vedic society, these rituals also served as the ritualization of power, and the origin of the Yajamana was used to be linked with divine power. Such was the case in the ritual of *Vajapeya* that the sacrificer's victory was predetermined in the chariot race which