

Gana or Sangha in Ancient India

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Ancient Indian texts acknowledge the difference between the political structure and character of states and ganas or unions. Two of the mahajanapadas, the Bajji and the Malla, were unions, Buddhist texts speak of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu, the Koliyas of Devada and Ramagrama, the Bulliyas of Allakappa, the Kalamas of Kesaputta, the Moris of Piplivan and the Bharga or Bhagga whose capital was located on the Sunsumara hill. All the ganas which were politically important were located in the foothills of the Himalayas while all the major states were located in the Gangetic valley.

Ganas were the successors of the early tribal organisations, their structure was quite complex compared to the tribal political organisations that existed earlier. Some Ganas or Sanghas were formed in the context of the rise of states and the suppression of smaller states. Videha was initially a state but later it was refined into a Gana. Ganas can be divided into two categories the first in which 11 single clan dominated like Shakya and Koliya the second category included those Sanghas which were groups of many clans like Vajji or Yadav Gana. The existence of Sanghas gives a sense of the separate political existence of these components.

The Sakyas considered themselves the successors of the Ichchhvakus or Surya dynasty. Their kingdom was surrounded by the Rohini river in the east, the Rapti river in the west and south, and the Himalayas in the north. There is still disagreement about the existence of Kapilvastu. Some scholars consider Tilaurakot to be Kapilvastu. While more logically, Pipharwa Ganwaria can be considered its correct location. Buddha belonged to Sakya Kutha, so a lot has been said about the Sakya clan in Buddhist texts. They had matrimonial relations with the Kaushal royal family. Details of Sakya Sabhas have been found in Buddhist texts in which important topics like treaty, war, peace talks, war were discussed.

Nationalist historians have done preliminary studies on Ganas and Sanghas and compared them with the republics of Greece and Rome and modern democratic institutions. The name of K.P. Jayaswal is notable in this. In Arthashastra, it has been said about the Chakravarti

emperors that when they want to defeat a Gana or Sangha, they will have to resort to a special strategy. Because it was a different type of organization, the strategy adopted to defeat monarchies does not apply to it. In this context, Acharya Kautilya's policy focuses on the internal conflicts of the Sanghas.

The ancient Indian Ganas or Sanghas were not like modern democracies. Power was concentrated in the hands of an oligarchy which was a group of powerful Kshatriya families of the region. There is no king based on a single hierarchy but there is a Ganapati, Ganajyeshtha, Ganaraj or Sampamukhiya who represented the assembly of representatives of a kulin system. They used to meet together in an assembly hall. The effective power of the executive or the routine of political binding of these Ganas or Sanghas was concentrated in a small group. The same was the case with the Greek republics which have been compared a lot with the Indian Ganas.

In Ekapanna Jataka, the capital of Lichchhavis is mentioned as Vaishali where the state administration was always run by 7707 kings. Such a number of viceroys, commanders and storekeepers were employed. It is not possible to accept such a number easily but there is definitely an indication that there used to be a big assembly of Lichchhavis. In which all the major Kshatriya families of that area were represented, who liked to be called kings. They usually used to gather once a year during the spring season and discuss important topics. During this time they used to choose their leadership. Regarding the subjects, it can be said that they must have been the eldest sons of the kings. In a similar assembly of Lichchhavis, There is a context of honouring Amrapali, the city bride of Vaishali. It is mentioned in Bhadrashal Jataka that every king used to take a bath in a sacred pond before sitting in the assembly. Lichchhavis had supreme power because they also had the power to execute punishments like death penalty, expulsion. Women were not represented in these assemblies. It appears that the Buddhist Sangha used to work on the system of these Ganas or Sanghas. Still, due to the difference in nature, similarity can be seen naturally in them, but both of them cannot be considered the same. Before the assembly in the Sabhagar, a protocol was decided, then the seating arrangement of the people was done according to the post. Voting was done with wooden pieces called Shalaka. The officer who collected the votes was called Shalaka-Gahapak. The responsibility of completing the quorum was of the Gana Purokar, which was considered necessary for important decisions.

In Brahmin texts, monarchy has been kept at the center for social and political ideals, while in Jain and Buddhist texts, Ganas have been discussed more. In Ganas, Brahmins or priests did not receive the same respect as they received in monarchy. Kshatriyas dominated in Ganas and Sangha and in these too, Brahmins, farmers, craftsmen, workers or slaves were given place, who were arranged in the lower category politically as well as socially and economically. And they probably did not have the right to name their clans.

The monarchies had established a strong military organization at that time and they used to have a permanent army which was run by the state. Such a military organization was not available in the Ganas. Although the army of the Lichchhavis was powerful, but in peacetime they used to engage in farming or other business. The question of land ownership in these two political systems can also be seen from different perspectives. The Kshatriya aristocrats living in the Ganas used to be large landowners. These aristocratic families had individual rights over the land. A story is popular in this regard among the Lichchhavis According to which, a very beautiful woman named Ambapali lived in their area, who did not have the right to marry, but all Lichchhavi men could get her.

Administration through dialogue or conversation is also the most important feature of the Ganas or Sanghas. On the other hand, this must have been their weakness also, because internal differences always remained. Especially during the invasion of monarchies, this difference must have deepened. It is told in Lalit Vistar that the potential Buddha in heaven was waiting to be born among the Lichchhavis. So the gods and the bodhisattvas thought over this and rejected the proposal of his birth among the Lichchhavis of Vaishali. They said that the people here do not talk properly among themselves, they do not follow religion and do not care about social class or age. They do not become followers of anyone. Everyone thinks that I am the king. It is said in Arthashastra that the Sangha will remain undefeated as long as there is mutual harmony in it. It is also mentioned in the Mahabharata, Megasthenes' Indica and other Greek accounts. The names of ganas like Malava, Arjunapana, Yaudheya and Uddehika can be seen in the coins of the early centuries. They are also mentioned in some inscriptions. Chandragupta-1 married the princess of Lichchhavis, Kumaradevi, and issued gold coins to commemorate this marriage. Samudragupta has been called "Lichchavaya grandson" in the inscriptions.

Certainly the Lichchhavis must have been a powerful political force at that time, and matrimonial relations with them must have been a matter of honour. Many ganas were destroyed in the military campaigns of Samudragupta and they fell into a state of political insignificance. The history of ganas in ancient India is of 1000 years. They kept getting defeated at the hands of various monarchies. The reason for this can be considered to be their administrative weakness and lack of military organisation. On the other hand, the political ambition of monarchical can be seen in the form of the popular use of terms like Chakravarti Samrat and Sarvabhoom. 'In later times, Magadha transformed this political ambition into reality.

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