



Kings, Farmers and Towns



INTRODUCTION

- After the end of Harappan Civilisation, during a long span of 1500 years, there were several developments in different parts of the sub-continent.
- This was also the period during which the **Rigveda** was composed by people living along the Indus and its tributaries.
- **James Prinsep, an officer in the mint of the East India Company, deciphered Brahmi and Kharosthi. These scripts were used in the earliest inscription and coins.**
- Most of these mentioned a king referred to as **piyadassi— meaning ‘pleasant to behold’**. There were a few inscriptions which also referred to the king as Asoka.

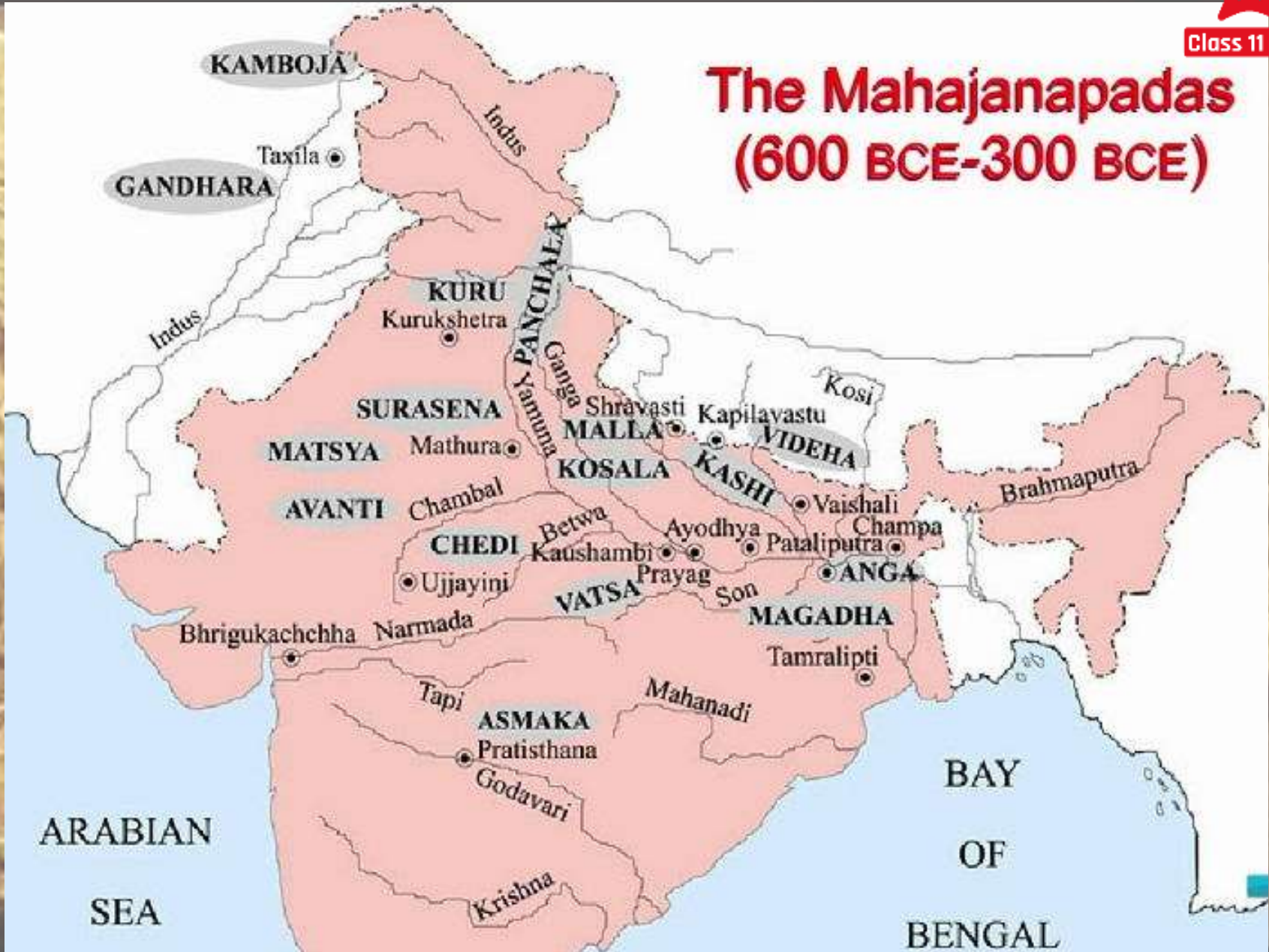


THE EARLIEST STATES

THE SIXTEEN MAHAJANAPADAS

- The 6th century BCE is often regarded as a major turning point in early Indian history.
- Early Buddhist and Jaina texts mention, sixteen states known as ***Mahajanapadas***.
- Janapada means the land where a jana (a people, a clan or tribe) sets its foot or settles. It is a word used in both Prakrit and Sanskrit.
- Most *Mahajanapadas* were ruled by kings, which some known as ***ganas or sanghas***, were ***oligarchies***, where power was shared by a number of men collectively called ***rajas***.
- Each *Mahajanapada* had a capital city, which was often fortified.

The Mahajanapadas (600 BCE-300 BCE)



THE SIXTEEN MAHAJANAPADAS





THE EARLIEST STATES

FIRST AMONGST THE SIXTEEN : MAGADHA

- Between the 6th and the 4th centuries BCE, Magadha (in present day Bihar) became the most powerful *Mahajanapada*.
- Magadha was a region where agriculture was especially productive. Iron mines (in present-day Jharkhand) were accessible and provided resources for tools and weapons.
- Initially, Rajagriha was the capital of Magadha which later shifted to Pataliputra (presently Patna) in 4th century BCE.

- Chandragupta Maurya founded the Mauryan empire in c 321 BCE.
- He extended his control as far North-West upto Afghanistan and Baluchistan.

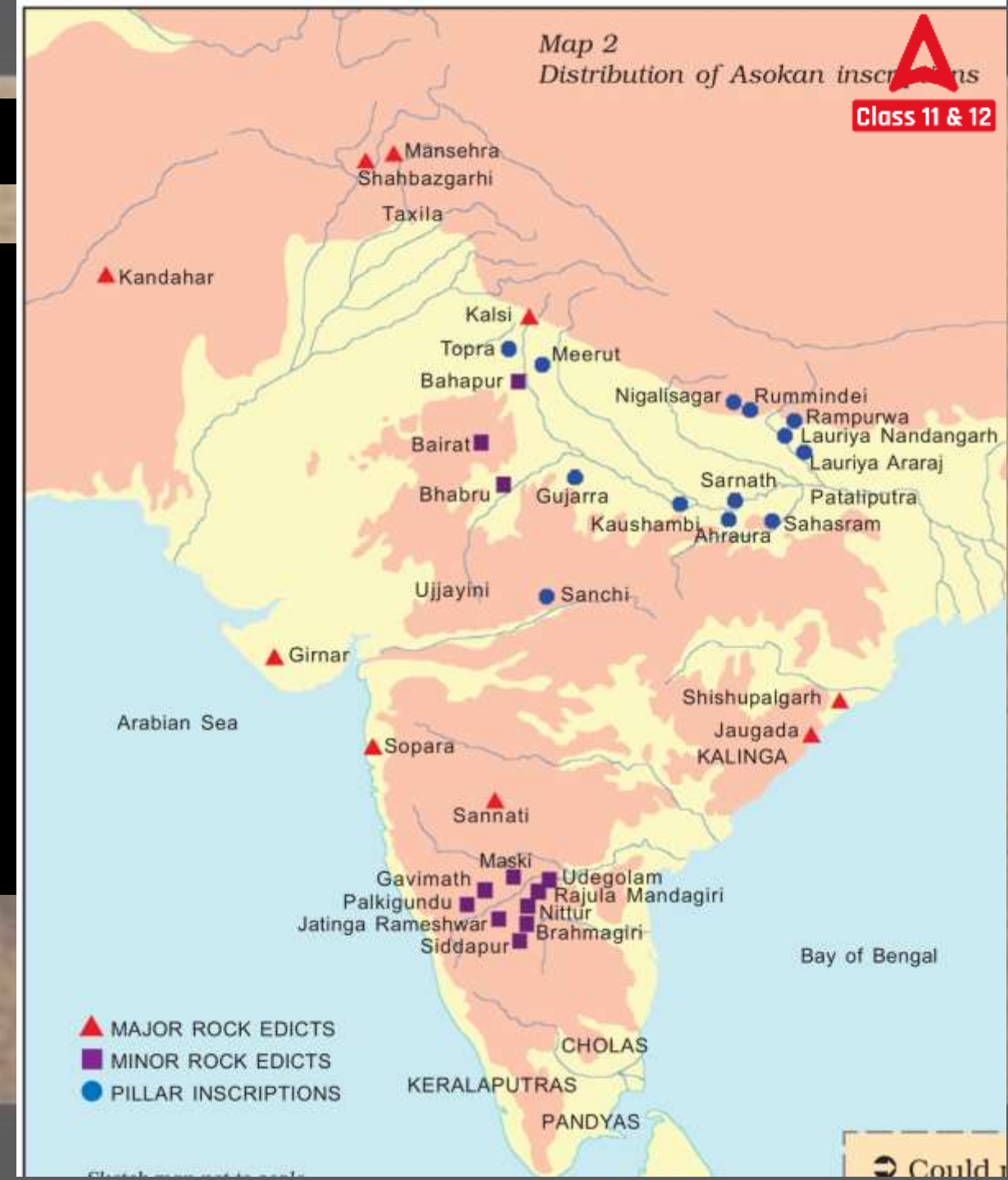
FINDING OUT ABOUT THE MAURYAS

- Historians have used a variety of sources to reconstruct the history of the Mauryan Empire. These include archaeological finds, especially sculpture.
- Kautilya or Chanakya has mentioned about the Mauryan Empire in the **Arthashastra**.
- Buddhist, Jaina and puranic literature as well as inscription of Asoka, gives information about the empire.
- Inscriptions also mention about the Mauryan empire. These are writings engraved on hard surfaces such as stone, metal and pottery. These are the permanent records, some of which carry dates.

MAURYAN EMPIRE

ADMINISTRATION OF MAURYAN EMPIRE

- There were **five major political centres** in the empire i.e. the capital Pataliputra the provincial centres of Taxila, Ujjayini, Tosali and Suvarnagiri.
- The administrative control was strongest in areas around the capital and the provincial centres.
- Communication along both land and riverine routes was vital for the existence of the empire.



MAURYAN EMPIRE



IMPORTANCE OF EMPIRE

- In nineteenth century, the history of early India including that of Mauryan empire was discovered.
- Asoka came to be regarded as inspiring figure by nationalist leaders. He was more humble than later rulers who adopted grandiose (magnificent) titles.





NEW NOTIONS OF KINGSHIP

CHIEFS AND KINGS IN THE SOUTH

- A chief was a powerful man whose position may or may not be hereditary. He receives gifts from his sub-ordinates (unlike Kings who usually collect taxes) and often distributes these amongst his supporters.
- The new kingdoms that emerged in the Deccan and further South, included the chiefdoms of the Cholas, Cheras and Pandyas in **Tamilakam** (the name of the ancient Tamil country).





NEW NOTIONS OF KINGSHIP

DIVINE KINGS

- Kings often tried to identify themselves with a variety of deities in order to claim high status. This strategy was used by the **Kushanas** (*c. 1st century BCE 1st century CE*), who ruled over a vast kingdom extending from Central Asia to North-West India.
- **Colossal statues of Kushana rulers have been found** installed in a shrine at Mat near Mathura (Uttar Pradesh).
- By the 4th century evidence of larger states, including the Gupta Empire, have been found. Many of these depended on ***samantas***, ***men who maintained*** themselves through local resources including control over land.



A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF KINGS

- Historians have examined stories contained in anthologies such as the Jatakas and the Panchatantra.
- The *Jatakas* were written in Pali around the middle of the first millennium CE.
- One story known as the *Gandatindu Jataka* describes the condition of the subjects of a wicked king. These included elderly women and men, cultivators, herders, village boys and even animals.





A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE



STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING PRODUCTION

- From 6th century BCE, ploughing agriculture became prevalent. It was used in fertile alluvial river valleys such as those of Ganga and Kaveri.
- The iron ploughshare led to a growth in agricultural productivity, but its use was restricted to certain parts of the sub-continent only.





A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

DIFFERENCES IN RURAL SOCIETY

- With an increase in production, there was a growing difference amongst people engaged in agriculture like landless agricultural labourers, small peasants and large landholders.
- The term ***gahapati*** was often used in Pali texts to designate the second and third categories.
- Early Tamil literature (the Sangam texts) also mentions different categories of people living in the villages i.e. large landowners or ***vellalar***, ploughmen or ***uzhavar*** and slaves or ***adimai***.

A CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

LAND GRANTS AND NEW RURAL ELITES

- Grants of land were started from the early centuries of the Common Era, many of which were recorded in inscriptions.
- The records that have survived are generally about grants to religious institutions or to Brahmanas.
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TOWNS AND TRADE



NEW CITIES

- The urban centres emerged in several parts of the sub-continent from *c. 6th century BCE*.
- All major towns were located along routes of communication, e.g., **Pataliputra was on riverine routes.**
- Others, such as **Ujjayini, were along land routes** and yet others, such as **Puhar, were near the coast**, from where sea routes began.





TOWNS AND TRADE

URBAN POPULATIONS : ELITES AND CRAFTSPERSONS

- The artefacts recovered from excavation includes fine pottery bowls and dishes, with a glossy finish, known as **Northern Black Polished Ware**, probably used by rich people.
- The artefacts also include ornaments, tools, weapons, vessels, figurines, made of a wide range of materials-gold, silver, copper, bronze, ivory, glass, shell and terracotta.
- Organisations of craft producers and merchants were known as **guilds or shrenis**. **These guilds** probably procured raw materials, regulated production and marketed the finished product.





TOWNS AND TRADE

TRADE IN THE SUBCONTINENT

- From the 6th century BCE, land and river routes crossed the sub-continent and extended in various directions both overland and overseas.
- Those who travelled these routes included peddlers who probably travelled on foot and merchants who travelled with caravans of bullock carts.
- There were also seafarers, whose ventures were risky, but highly profitable. Successful merchants were designated as ***masattuvan in Tamil and setthis and sathavahas in Prakrit.***

TOWNS AND TRADE

COINS AND KINGS

- **Punch-marked coins made of silver and copper (c. 6th century BCE onwards) were amongst the earliest to be minted and used.**
- Numismatists have studied these and other coins to reconstruct possible commercial networks.
- **The first gold coins were issued in 1st century CE by the Kushanas. These were virtually identical in weight with those issued by contemporary Roman emperors and the Parthian rulers of Iran.**
- Coins were also issued by tribal republics. Some of the most spectacular gold coins were issued by the Guptarulers.





DECIPHERING INSCRIPTIONS

DECIPHERING BRAHMI

- Most scripts used to write modern Indian languages are derived from Brahmi script.
- From the late 18th century, European scholars with the help of Indian pandits could study several Manuscripts in Bengali and Devanagari and compared their letters with older letters.
- Scholars who studied early inscriptions sometimes assumed that these were in Sanskrit, although the earliest inscriptions were, in fact, in Prakrit.
- It was only after decades of careful investigations by several epigraphists that James Prinsep was able to decipher **Asokan Brahmi in 1838**.

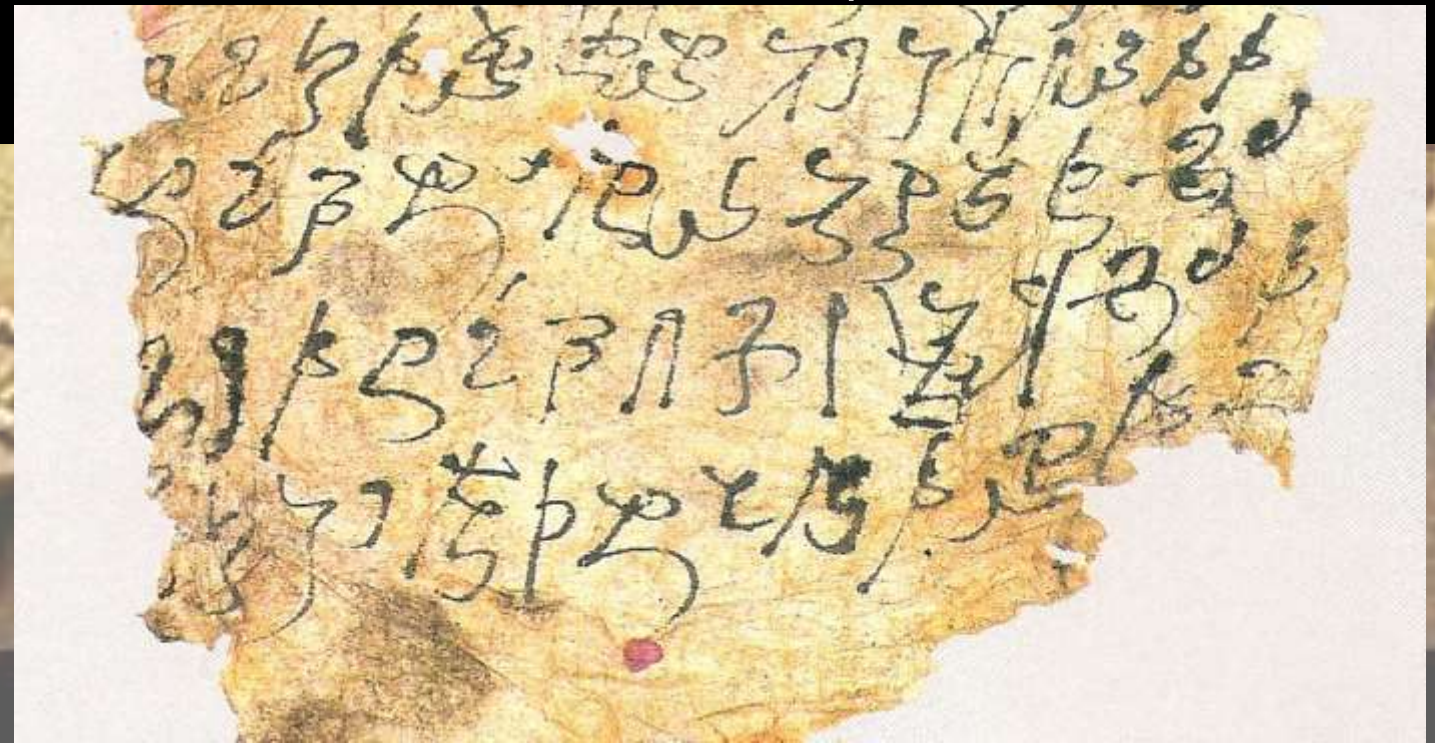
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DECIPHERING INSCRIPTIONS

DECIPHERING KHAROSTHI

- The Kharosthi script used in inscriptions in the North-West. Here, coins of Indo-Greek Kings are found who ruled over the area (c. 2nd-1st centuries BCE).
- These coins contain the names of kings written in Greek and Kharosthi scripts, later Prakrit was identified on these coins.





DECIPHERING INSCRIPTIONS

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FROM INSCRIPTIONS

- According to the inscriptions, *Devanampiya*, often translated as ‘beloved of the gods’ and *piyadassi* as ‘pleasant to behold’ were the titles adopted by the Asoka.
- Most of the inscriptions were in Prakrit language. And most Prakrit inscriptions were written in Brahmi script.
- After examining all these inscriptions and finding that they match in terms of content, style, language and palaeography, epigraphists have concluded that they were issued by the same ruler.





THE LIMITATIONS OF INSCRIPTIONAL EVIDENCE

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