

## Early Kingdoms and Republics

### E. Long-answer questions;

1. Explain why Magadha emerged as a powerful kingdom.
2. Write about the administration of republican states.
3. Differentiate between the government of the monarchical states and the republican states.
4. Explain the *varna* system.

## Solutions

### E. Long-answer questions:

1. Magadha emerged as a powerful kingdom because favourable geographical location enabled it to control the whole lower Gangetic plain. The rivers Ganga and Son flowed through it. Because of this, there was plenty of water and fertile soil for agriculture. Also, the thick forests in Bihar were a source of timber and elephants. Timber was required for buildings, carts and chariots. Elephants were required for the army. Another asset was the rich deposits of copper and iron ore using which superior weapons of war and tools for agriculture could be made.  
The old capital of Rajagriha was fortified and could resist enemy attack. Later, the capital was shifted to Pataliputra and Magadha got control over all the river traffic and increased trade. Due to all these factors, Magadha became more stable and steadily allowed all other existing states.
2. The republic states were known as gana-sanghas. Here the territory was governed by an assembly. Power was vested in the hands of the heads of the leading kshatriya families. These heads called themselves rajas. There could be thousands of rajas. They usually met once a year in an assembly to discuss important issues and elect their leader. The ganas were named after the ruling Kshatriya clan. The gana-sanghas had two divisions in society one was the ruling class - the kshatriya families called rajkula. The other was the labourer class called karmakara. The ruling families had all the

powers whereas the karmakaras had no rights. Women, slaves and karmakaras were not allowed to participate in any assemblies or discussion.

**3.** Two types of government existed in the mahajanapadas. One was monarchical and the other was republican. Monarchical government was hereditary. The power passed on from the king to the son. In the republican types government, the head was elected and was not hereditary. Also the monarchical government maintained a standing army whereas republican government did not maintain a standing army.

**4.** The society was divided into four groups or varnas. Each Varna had a different role in society. The four groups were the Brahmins, the kshatriyas, the vaishyas and the shudras. This division of Varna was strictly observed. The Varna was decided by the birth of the individual. If the child was born to a kshatriya, he would automatically become a Kshatriya.

The Brahmins were the most powerful and enjoyed a respectful position in society. They performed all rituals and sacrifices and thus had an important place in society. They could study and teach the Vedas. They claimed to belong to the highest varna. Next to the priests came the kshatriyas who were the warriors. They had to protect the people. These two upper varnas had many privileges. They were not required to pay taxes and were never given severe punishments. The vaishyas were the cultivators, traders and artisans. They paid the taxes. Both the kshatriyas and the vaishyas could perform sacrifices.

The last were the shudras. They lived a cursed life. They performed all menial jobs and served the upper classes. They could not listen to the Vedas or participate in any religious ceremonies. They lived in the outskirts of the villages. They could not even take water from the same well as the other people. Some people were below the shudras position. These were the untouchables. They were the people who performed burials and cremations. Untouchables were barred entirely from temples, and sometimes were not even allowed to set foot on temple grounds. If the shadow of an untouchable touched a Brahmin, he/she would be polluted, so untouchables had to lay face-down at a distance when a Brahmin passed.