

Chapter 03 Kinship, Caste and Class

Early Societies

Q1. Explain why patriliney may have been particularly important among elite families.

1. In ancient India, elite families followed the system of patriliney which is a system through which descent from father to son is traced.
2. According to this system, the sons could claim the resources (including the throne in case of kings) of their father when the latter died.
3. In manusmriti it is mentioned that the eldest son would get a special share.
4. In Dharmashastras it was believed that only son can carry forward the dynasty and not daughters, and pray for son as a child.
5. The acquisition of throne was included in the inheritance. After the king's death his elder son is supposed to inherit the throne. Most of the royal families followed the patriliney since 600 B.C.
6. Elite families followed this system because it is mentioned in the mantras of Rigveda and it possibly conflicts among the sons after their father's death.

Q2. Discuss whether kings in early states were invariably Kshatriyas.

1. According to the [shastras](#), only kshatriyas could be kings.
2. However several important ruling lineages probably had different origins, for example the [Mauryas](#), who ruled over a large empire, were probably of "Low Origin". Mauryas were considered Kshatriyas by many people.
3. The [Shakas](#) who came from central Asia were regarded as [Mlechchhas](#), barbarians and outsiders.
4. The best known ruler of the [Satvahana dynasty](#), [Gotami -Putra](#) Siri Satakani, claimed to be a unique Brahmana and [destroyer of the pride of Kshatriyas](#). At the same time he also entered into a marriage alliance with the king of Rudra Daman (a Shaka ruler) in fact, the political power was effectively open to anyone who could muster support and resources, and rarely depended on birth as a Kshatriya.

Q3. Compare and contrast the dharma or norms mentioned in the stories of Drona, Hidimba and Matanga.

1. DRONA- a. In the story of Eklavya, drone being a Brahmana, his dharma was to teach archery to Kshatriyas not to Nishada or any one from any other Varna.

b. According to the Brahmanical text norms Drona taught Archery only to the Pandavas who were the kshatriyas and refused to teach Eklavya – a Nishada.

c. Thus, Drona exercised his Dharma successfully.

2. HIDIMBA – a. In the case of Hidimba , she failed to practise dharma and broke the laws of marriage.

b. as per the marriage rules, laid down in Manusmriti, the bride's father was supposed to choose the bridegroom and give consent to marriage.

c. contrastingly Hidimba herself proposed to Bhima to marry her and also tried to convince Kunti Bhima's mother to give consent to their marriage.

3. MATANGA- a. In the story of Matanga also the norms of Dharma were not followed.

b. Matanga was a chandala who dared to break the laws of the varna system as well as the rules of marriage.

c. not only did he read religious books, despite belonging to lower varna, but also married a girl of higher caste (vaishya community). According to the rules of marriage mentioned in Brahmanical texts, intercaste marriage was strictly prohibited.

Q4. In what ways was the Buddhist theory of a social contract different from the Brahmanical view of society derived from the Purusha sukta?

1. Brahmanical view of the society according to Purusha Sukta:-

a. according to Purusha Sukta, all the elements of the universe, including the four social categories were of "Divine Origin" and supposed to have emanated from the body of "Brahma" – the Brahmins from his mouth, Kshatriya from his arms, his thighs became the Vaishyas and of his feet the Shudra were born.

b. the occupations of the four categories or varnas were also decided accordingly. Brahmanas were supposed to study and teach the Vedas and perform sacrifices. The Kshatriyas were to engage in warfare, protect people and administer justice. The Vaishyas were expected to engage in agriculture, pastoralist and trade. Shudras were supposed to serve the three higher varnas.

2. Buddhist theory of Social Contract:-

- a. In the Sutta Pitaka there is an alternative understanding of social inequalities.
- b. According to them, originally human beings did not have fully evolved bodily forms. All beings lived in an idyllic state of peace deriving from nature only what they needed for each meal.
- c. However, there was a gradual deterioration of this state as human beings became increasingly greedy, vindictive and deceitful.
- d. Then they decided to select a person who would get angry on seeing something wrong; who would censure (criticize) that person who deserves to be censured (criticized); and banish that person who deserves to be banished.
- e. Such a selected person would be known as THE MAHASAMMATA - the great elect and all the people would give him a proportion of rice.
- f. Thus, according to Buddhist traditions the institution of kingship was based on human choice and they recognised the role of human agency in creating and institutionalising economic and social differences.
- g. And since human beings were responsible for the creation of the system they could also change it in the future.

Q5, The following is an excerpt from the Mahabharata, in which Yudhisthira, the eldest Pandava, speaks to Sanjaya, a messenger:

Sanjaya, convey my respectful greetings to all the Brahmanas and the chief priest of the house of Dhritarashtra. I bow respectfully to teacher Drona ... I hold the feet of our preceptor Kripa ... (and) the chief of the Kurus, the great Bhishma. I bow respectfully to the old king (Dhritarashtra). I greet and ask after the health of his son Duryodhana and his younger brother ... Also greet all the young Kuru warriors who are our brothers, sons and grandsons ... Greet above all him, who is to us like father and mother, the wise Vidura (born of a slave woman) ... I bow to the elderly ladies who are known as our mothers. To those who are our wives you say this, "I hope they are well-protected"... Our daughters-in-law born of good families and mothers of children greet on my behalf. Embrace for me those who are our daughters ... The beautiful, fragrant, well-dressed courtesans of ours you should also greet. Greet the slave women and their children; greet the aged, the maimed (and) the helpless ...

Try and identify the criteria used to make this list – in terms of age, gender, kinship ties. Are there any other criteria? For each category, explain why they are placed in a particular position in the list.

In addition to age, gender and kinship ties there were several other factors too which were well thought-out to prepare the list. For example respect towards teachers, warrior, slaves and other people of different social status.

The Brahmana, the Purohita and the Gurus were bowed the chief honours. They were all widely respected. Fraternal kins that were considered like parents were also given respect. Women also received due place. Wives, others, daughter-in-law and daughter came in this order. Orphans and handicapped had also been taken care of and respected. Yudhishthira also greets them.

Q6. This is what a famous historian of Indian literature, Maurice Winternitz, wrote about the Mahabharata: “just because the Mahabharata represents more of an entire literature ... and contains so much and so many kinds of things, (it) gives(s) us an insight into the most profound depths of the soul of the Indian folk.” Discuss.

There are plenty of literary sources available to us to reconstruct the ancient Indian history. Mahabharata is one of them which is the most important historical literary sources available to us. Its importance has been recognized by foreign writers like Maurice Winternitz. He believes that Mahabharata represents an entire literature.

This great and colossal epic is full of various aspects of Indian life. This reading gives us a profound depth of Indian folk soul. It is written in simple Sanskrit hence making it possible to easily understand.

The content of the Mahabharata is classified under two sections by the historians. They are narrative and didactic. Narrative section contains stories and didactic sections contain prescriptions about social norms. But at some instances, there were a merger also.

Many historians believe that the Mahabharata was a spectacular moving story and that the didactic portions were a later interruption. We get several different views about the authorship about Mahabharata. It was believed that the original stories were composed by Sutas. They were the Charioteer bard. They accompanied Kshatriya warriors to the battlefield and composed poems celebrating their achievements and orally transmitted the stories and poems. From fifth century BCE onwards Brahman took over the story and started writing it and compiling all these oral information together.

This great epic contains vivid description of battles, forests, palaces, settlements, culture, tradition and many more things. It also describes kingship, political life of then period, social priority and mobility. Major features of the family like such as Patriliney, different forms of marriage and rules related with marriage, position of women in the society. Social differences in the Indian society under jati and varnas can be traced back to the period of Mahabharata thus Mahabharata represents more of an entire literature and it contains so much and so many kinds of things and gives us an insight into the most profound depths of the soul of the Indian folk.

Q7. Discuss whether the Mahabharata could have been the work of a single author.

The Mahabharata is a colossal epic, comprising about one lakh verses. This enormous composition is traditionally attributed to Sage Vyas. However, historians are of the view that the Mahabharata was composed over a period of 1000 years, so it can not be the work of a single author. Large didactic section resembling the manuscript was added during the period between 200C and 400CE. This outburst made Mahabharata an epic consisting of 100,000 verses.

The historian assume that the original story was composed by charioteer bards known as “Sutas”, who generally accompanied Kshatriyas warriors to the battle field and composed poems celebrating their victories and other achievements.

Then from 500 B.C.E. Brahmanas took over the story and began to commit it to writing, this was the time where chiefdoms of the Kurus and Panchalas were gradually becoming kingdoms, the kings of their new kingdoms also wanted there “itihasa” was also included in the Mahabharata, for e.g.; we find that during this time old social values were replaced by new norms and it shows the upheavals that accompanied the establishment of new kingdom.

We notice another phase in the composition of text between 200 BCE and 200 CE this was the period when the worship of “VISHNU” was growing in importance and “KRISHNA”, one of the important figures in the epic was identified with VISHNU.

Subsequently between C.200 and 400 C.E didactic sections resembling the Manusmriti were added to the Mahabharata.

All this shows that Mahabharata could not be the work of a single author.

Q8. How important were gender differences in early societies? Give reasons for your answer.

It was considered that early families were generally Patriliney. Matriliney Family was generally not in use but we could see some Historical sources mention the name of some rulers from inscriptions associated with the name of the mothers of the king.

Gender differences were very important in early societies due to the following reasons:-

1. There was gendered access to property. In ancient society patrilineal system of succession was followed; according to which the paternal state was divided equally amongst sons after the death of the parents. Women were not the part of the succession hence didn't get any share from it. Attitude towards daughters were different. They had no claims towards the resource of the household.
2. Access to property determined social status. Although women were allowed to retain the gifts they received on the occasion of their marriage as "Stridhana" but Manusmriti warned women against hoarding family property without the husband's permission both textual and epigraphic evidence suggest that all the resources- land, cattle and money were controlled by men.
3. Since women did not own property social differences between men and women sharpened.
4. Men enjoyed a higher status than women and this led to the domination of women both in power and in household.

Q9. Discuss the evidence that suggests that Brahmanical prescriptions about kinship and marriage were not universally followed.

1. The family system: - The Sanskrit texts use the term "Kula" to designate a family and familial ties that were to be based on blood relations. However some societies regarded cousins also as blood relations where as others do not.

2. The System of Patriliney: - According to the Brahmanical system only sons could claim the resources of their fathers when the latter died. However sometimes Brothers succeeded each other- like Kaurav and Pandavas and in very exceptional circumstances women such as "Prabhavati Gupta" also exercised power.

3. Rules of Marriage:- According to Brahmanical system "Exogamy, which refers to marriage outside the unit was the ideal form of marriage. It was the religious duty of the father to marry his daughter outside the unit to the right person at the right time.

However, the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras recognize "EIGHT" forms of marriage. Of these first four were considered "good" while the remaining were condemned. It is possible that these were practised by those who did not accept brahmanical norms.

4. The Gotra of Women: - There are two rules about the Gotra system:

Women were expected to give up their father's Gotra and adopt that of their husband on marriage and, members of the same Gotras could not marry.

However some Satavahana rulers adopted the Gotra of their mother for example Raja GOTAMI-PUTA-SIRI-SATAKINI. Some of the Satvahanas rulers were polygynous (had more than one wife).

A careful examination of the names of women who married Satavahana rulers indicate that they belonged to the same Gotras. For example Raja Gotami-Puta Siri- Vijaya- Satakani

All these evidences suggest that the brahmanical prescription about marriage and kinship were not followed universally.