

12th Standard History

Kinship, Caste and Class Early Societies

- A number of important changes occurred in the economic and political life of India during the period from 600 BCE to 600 CE.
- The changes occurred during this period had left a deep mark on the contemporary society.
- A new change began to occur with the expansion of agriculture.
- Emergence of different crafts and distinct social groups also witnessed during this period.
- Social disparities began to increase as a result of unequal distribution of wealth.
- Historian made use of textual tradition for many reasons.
- According to the text written in ancient the most popular and famous is Mahabharata, which was composed between 500 BCE and 500 CE.
- Historians believed that it was written by Ved Vyasa, but most of the Historians think that it is the creation of many authors.
- In the beginning, Mahabharata was known by the name of Jail and held only 8800 verses. Later on the number of verses increased to one lakh.
- An important work began in 1919 under the leadership of V.S. Sukthankar, a famous Sanskrit scholar who took up cudgels to prepare a critical edition of Mahabharata.
- Many types of social institutions existed in this period these were as follows;

- Monogamous family
 - Polyandrous family
 - Polygons family
 - Consanguineous family
 - Patrilineal family
 - Matrilineal family
 - Neolocal family
 - Rural family
 - Urban family
 - Joint family
 - Nuclear family
- Kinship is a system of relation between such relatives which determine our relationship on the basis of lineage. These relations were based on lineage or vansha are developed by a family.
 - Patriliney means that the descent which is traced from father to son, then grandson and great grandson.
 - Patriliney was prevalent even before the Mahabharata, yet Mahabharata strengthen it.

Historians often use textual traditions to understand the socio-economic changes of the society. In this case, it is very necessary to keep in mind who composed what and for whom. The language and the ways in which the text is circulated are also important.

Kinship, Marriage Rules and Different Practices:

- Families usually form parts of larger network of people defined as relative or 'Kinfolks' while familial ties are often regarded as 'natural' and based on blood they are defined in many different ways.
- It is more difficult to reconstruct the familial relationships of ordinary people than elite families.
- Mahabharata reinforced the ideal of patriliney as valuable. Under patriliney, sons could claim the throne or other resources of their fathers when the latter died.
- The idea of patriliney is also accepted in the Rigveda.
- Daughters had no claims to the resources of the household. Also marrying them into families outside the kin was desirable. Kanyadan or the gift of a daughter in marriage was an important religious duty of the father.
- From 500 BCE, codes of social behaviour were compiled in Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras written in Sanskrit. The most important Dharmashastra was Manusmriti compiled between 200 BCE and 200 CE.
- Codes of social behaviour were given by the Brahmanas. There were eight forms of marriage, of which the first four were considered as good, while the remaining were condemned.
- People were classified according to their gotras. Two important rules about gotras were:
- Women were expected to give up their father's gotra and adopt their husband's gotra.

- Members of the same gotra could not marry
- In case of Satavahana rulers, it was evident that many of the wives of Satavahana rulers retained the names of their father's gotra as against Brahmanical rule.
- Endogamy or marriage within the kingroup was prevalent among several communities in South India.

Social Differences:

- The Dharmashastras and Dharmasutras contained rules about the ideal 'occupations' of the four categories or varnas.
- Brahmanas were supposed to study and teach the Vedas, perform sacrifices and get sacrifices performed; Kshatriyas were to engage in warfare, protect people and administer justice; Vaishyas were engaged in agriculture, pastoralism and trade; and Shudras were assigned to serve the three 'higher' varnas.
- According to the Shastras, only Kshatriyas could be the kings. But in reality political power was effectively open to anyone who could muster (assemble) support and resources and rarely depended on birth.
- Gotami-puta Siri-Satakani was a Brahmana who destroyed the pride of Kshatriyas. He ordered that there was no inter-marriage amongst members of the four varnas.
- Jatis which shared a common occupation or profession were sometimes organised into shrenis or guilds. There were other categories like Nishada (people living in forest) beyond the four varnas in society. Ekalavya is supposed to have belonged to this class.

- Sometimes those who spoke non-Sanskrit languages were labelled as Mlechchhas and looked down upon.
- Brahmanical scriptures developed a sharper social divide by classifying certain social categories as 'untouchable'.
- Those who performed 'polluting' activities like, handling corpses and dead animals were designated as 'Chandalas'.
- The Manusmriti laid down the duties of Chandalas, these were—they had to live outside the village, use discarded utensils and wear clothes of the dead and ornaments of iron.
- Historians got hints of different social realities about the Chandalas from the non-Brahmanical texts.

Social Status and Right to Property:

- According to the Manusmriti, the paternal estate was to be divided equally amongst sons after the death of the parents, with a special share for the eldest.
- Women had no claim in her paternal estate, but were allowed to retain the gifts they received on the occasion of their marriage as stridhana.
- According to Brahmanical text, apart from gender, criterion for regulating access to wealth was varna. The only 'occupation' prescribed for Shudras was servitude (slavery), while a variety of occupations were listed for men of first three varnas.
- The Buddhists recognised the differences in society, but did not regard these as natural or inflexible. They rejected the idea of claims to status on the basis of birth.

- There were other possibilities as well; situations where men who were generous were respected, while those who were miserly were criticised.
- The Buddhists developed an alternative understanding of social inequalities and the institutions required to regulate social conflict.
- The institution of kingship was based on human choice, with taxes as a form of payment for services rendered by the king.

The Mahabharata:

The Great Indian Epic

- VS Sukthankar, a noted Indian Sanskritist, with his team initiated the task of preparing a critical edition of the Mahabharata. It involved collecting Sanskrit manuscripts of the texts written in a variety of scripts, from different parts of the country.
- First historians accepted the texts written in Sanskrit as the main source, but later they also relied on works in Pali, Prakrit and Tamil to reconstruct social histories.

The Singificance of Mahabharata:

- Historians examine whether texts were written in Prakrit, Pali or Sanskrit languages. They try to find out about the authors whose perspectives and ideas shaped the text.
- The Sanskrit used in the Mahabharata is far simpler than that of the Vedas.

- Historians classify the contents of the text under two broad heads, , narrative containing stories and didactic containing prescription and social norms.
- Mahabharata has been written in many phases. It is not the work of a single author. However, it is traditionally attributed to a sage named Vyasa.
- Mahabharata contains vivid descriptions of battles, forests, palaces and settlements.
- One of the most challenging episodes in the Mahabharata is Draupadi's marriage with five Pandavas.
- It suggests polyandry (the practice of a woman having several husbands) among ruling elites.
- Some historians think that polyandry is undesirable from the Brahmanical point of view, but it was prevalent in the Himalayan region due to a shortage of women during war times.

Different Versions of Mahabharata:

- The versions of the Mahabharata were written in a variety of languages.
- Several stories from specific regions were added in the epic. The story of the epic was often retold in different ways.
- Writers like Mahashweta Devi interprets the stories of the Mahabharata differently.

Important terms:

- **Kinship:** The person belonging the same family.
- **Polity:** The form or process or system of government.
- **Kinfolk:** Persons of blood relation.
- **Patriliney:** System of tracing descent from father to son, grandson and so on.
- **Matriliney:** System of tracing descent from mother side.
- **Adi Parvan:** Adi Parvan is the first section of the Sanskrit version of the Mahabharata.
- **Indra:** A god of warfare, rains and valour, one of the principal deities in the Rigveda.
- **Dharmasutras:** These are the texts composed in Sanskrit by Brahmanas.
- **Mlechchhas:** Shakas were regarded as Mlechchhas. They were the Central Asian people who had migrated and settled in the northwestern part of the Subcontinent.
- **Majjhima Nikaya:** It is a Buddhist text. It forms a part of a dialogue between a king named Avantiputta and a disciple of Buddha, named Kachchana.
- **Gotras:** People of the same kind and same vama.
- **Shrenis:** Unions of craftsmen and traders in Ancient India. It was also called guilds.
- **Chandals:** Untouchables of the ancient India who did menial works.
- **Mahasammata:** It means the great elect. A person chosen by the whole people.

- **Nishad:** A hunting community.
- **Epic:** A long poem about the deeds of great men and women or about a nation's past history.
- **Dwij:** During Later Vedic period, people who adopted sacred thread system was called Dwij.
- **Endogamy:** It refers to the system of marriage within the unit such as caste.
- **Polygamy:** Practice of having more than one wife.
- **Polyandry:** Practice of having more than one husband.
- **Vamasha:** Sanskrit word meaning lineage of a person.

Time Line:

- 500 BCE Ashfadhya of Panini, a work of Sanskrit grammar.
- 500-100 BCE Early Buddhist texts including the Tripitaka (in Pali)
- 500 BCE-400 CE Ramayana and Mahabharata (in Sanskrit)
- 200 CE onwards Compilation of the Puranas (in Sanskrit)
- 300 CE Natyashastra of Bharata, a work on dramaturgy (in Sanskrit)
- 400-500 CE Sanskrit plays a valuable role in the compilation of Kalidasa's works on astronomy and mathematics by Aryabhata and Varahamihira (in Sanskrit).