

Kinship, Caste and Class Early Societies

NCERT TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED

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

Ans. Patriliney is the system through which descent from father to son and grandson is traced. The principle of patriliney would have been essential for the elite families for the following reasons:

Continuity of Dynasty: As per the Dharmashastras, it was an established belief that the son carried forward the dynasty. That was the main reason that the families wished for sons not for daughters. A couplet of Rigveda also substantiates this view. In this couplet, a father at the time of the marriage of his daughter wishes that she should have best sons with the grace of Lord Shiva.

Inheritance: In royal families, the acquisition of throne was included in the inheritance. After the death of a king, his eldest son was supposed to inherit the throne. After the death of the parents, the property was to be equally divided among all the sons. In fact, parents avoided disputes in the family after their death. Most of the royal families followed the patriliney since 600 B.C. But sometimes this system had exceptions also.

- The brother of the king ascended the throne in case the former had no son.
- Relatives also claimed inheritance of the throne.
- In some special cases, women also ascended the throne like Prabhavati Gupta.

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

Ans. As per the Dharmashastra, only Kshatriyas were supposed to be the kings. But it was also to be noted that many important ruling lineages perhaps had different origins. Mauryas were considered Kshatriyas by many people. Some Brahmanical texts described Mauryas as of low origin. The Shungas and Kanvas who were immediate successors of the Mauryas were Brahmanas. In fact those sections of the society controlled the political power which enjoyed support and resources. It did not depend on the question of being born as Kshatriya. . There were other rulers like Shakas who came from Central Asia. But the Brahmanas

considered them as mlechchhas, barbarians and outsiders. Similarly, Gotami-putra Satkarni, the best known ruler of the Satavahana dynasty, became a destroyer of the pride of Kshatriyas. This we see that the Satavahanas claimed to be Brahmanas whereas the Brahmanas were of the opinion that the king should be Kshatriyas.

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

Ans. Drona: Drona was a Brahmana. As per the Dharmashastras, it was the duty of the Brahmana to impart education. It was considered a pious deed of the Brahmanas. Drona was also following that system. He was imparting education. He taught archery to the princes of the Kuru Dynasty. In those days, people of low caste were not entitled to get education. Keeping this view in mind, Drona refused imparting education to Ekalavya. But in the course of time, Ekalavya learnt archery and acquired great skill. But Drona demanded right thumb of Ekalavya as his teaching fee. This was against religious norms. In fact, Drona did this just to ensure that no one could be better archer than Arjuna in the field of archery.

Hidimba: Hidimba was a lady demon, that is rakshasini. In fact, all the rakshasas were man-eaters. One day her brother asked her to catch Pandavas so that he may eat them. But Hidimba did not follow this. She fell in love with Bhima and married him. A rakshasa boy was born to him, named Ghatotkacha. In this way, Hidimba did not keep the norms of rakshasas.

Matanga: Matanga was Boddhisattva who was born in the family of a chandala. But he married Diti Mangalika who was the daughter of a merchant. A son was born to him named Mandavya Kumara. In the course of time he learnt three Vedas. He used to offer food to sixteen hundred Brahmanas every day. But when his father appeared before him dressed in rags with a clay alms bowl in his hand, he refused to offer food to him. The reason was that, he considered his father as outcaste and his food was meant for Brahmanas only. Matanga advised his son not to be proud of his birth. After saying this, he disappeared into the air. When Diti Mangalika knew this incident, she went after Matanga and begged his forgiveness. This way acted like a true wife. She performed her duty religiously. A donor is considered generous. But Mandavya failed to follow the norms of religion and generosity.

4. In what ways was the Buddhist theory of a social contract different from the Brahmanical view of a society derived from the Purusha Sukta?(VBQ)

Ans. The Purusha Sukta of the Rig Veda says that the four Varnas emerged because of the sacrifice of Purusha, the primeval man. The four varnas were Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. These Varnas had different jobs. The Brahmanas had supreme position in the society. They were also considered as teachers. Kshatriyas were considered warriors. They also ran the administration. The Vaishyas were the masters of trade. The Shudras were at the lowest strata. Their duty was to serve the above three varnas. Under this Brahmanical system, birth was the only criteria to judge the status and prestige in the society.

But the Buddhist theory of a social contract was different. As per the Buddhist concept, there was inequality in society. But they also opined that this inequality was neither natural nor permanent. They did not favour the idea of birth being the criteria of social status.

5. The following is an excerpt from the Mahabharata in which Yudhishthira, the eldest Pandava, speaks to Sanjaya, a messenger:

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.

Ans. Not only age, gender and kinship ties but there were other factors too which were considered to prepare the list.

The Brahmana, the Purohitas and the Gurus were bestowed the highest honours. They all were widely respected.



Fraternal kins were also given respects who were considered like parents. People who were of equal age of younger were placed at the third rank. In the next order, the young Kuru warriors were respected. Women also received due place. Wives, mothers, daughters-in-law and daughters came in this order. Orphans and handicapped had also been taken care of. Yudhisthira also greets them.

6. This is what a famous historian of Indian literature, Maurice Wintemitz, wrote about the Mahabharata: "Just because the Mahabharata represents more of an entire literature.... and contains so many kinds of things....(it) give(s) us an insight into the most profound depths of the soul of the Indian folk." Discuss.

Ans. Plenty of literary sources are available to reconstruct the ancient Indian history.

Mahabharata is one of them. It is an important literary and historical source. Its importance has been recognised even by the foreign writers. Its importance has also been recognised by Maurice Wintemitz because in his opinion the Mahabharata represents an entire literature. This great epic is full of various examples of different aspects of the Indians life. The reading of the Mahabharata gives a profound depth of the soul of the Indian folk. It has been written in simple Sanskrit and therefore widely understood.

Generally, historians classify the contents of the Mahabharata under two sections. They are narrative and didactic. Narrative section contains stories and didactic sections contains prescriptions about social norms. But at some instances, there were intermingling also. Many historians believe that the Mahabharata was a dramatic, moving story and that the didactic portions were a later interpolation.

We get several different views about the authorship of the Mahabharata. It was believed that the original stories were composed by Sutas. Sutas were charioteer bards. They accompanied Kshatriya warriors to the battle field and composed poems celebrating their victories other achievements. These compositions were circulated orally. From the fifth, century BCE onwards, Brahmanas took over the story and started writing story. This great epic contains vivid descriptions of battles, forests, palaces and settlements.

It describes kinship, political life of the said period, social priority. Major features of the family life such as patriliney, different forms of marriage and rules related with marriage, position of women in the society, social differences of the Indian society can be traced back to the period of the Mahabharata. This great epic also describes social mobility.

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

Ans. There are so much views about the author of the Mahabharata. Following views have been put forward regarding the authorship of the Mahabharata.

- It is believed that the original story was written by the charioteer-bards known as sutas. They generally accompanied Kshatriya warriors to the battle field and composed poems celebrating their victories and other achievements.

- It is also believed that in the beginning the text of the Mahabharata was orally circulated. Scholars and priests carried it from one generation to another. From the fifth century BCE, the Brahmanas took over the story and started writing.

This was the time when Kurus and Panchals were gradually becoming kingdoms.

The story of the Mahabharata also revolved round them. Some parts of the story reflect that old social values were replaced by the new ones.

- C. 200 BCE and 200 CE is another phase in the composition of the Mahabharata.

During this period worship of Vishnu was gaining ground Krishna came to be identified as Vishnu. Large didactic sections resembling the Manusmriti were added during the period between C 200 and 400 CE. These interpolations made the Mahabharata an epic consisting of 100,000 verses. This enormous composition is traditionally attributed to a sage named Vyas.

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



Ans. It is seen that in early societies families were generally patrilineal. Patrilineal means tracing descent from father to son and to grandson and so on. Matrilineal family was generally not in use. But exception was also available. As exception, Satavahanas of Andhra can be mentioned. Historical sources mention the name of some rulers from inscriptions associated with the names of the mothers of the king. As Gotami-putra means 'son of Gotami'. Gotami and Vasistha are the females of Gotama and Vasistha. Sons were considered important for the continuity of the family. Attitudes towards daughter were different. They had no claims towards the resources of the household. But marrying them into the families outside the kin was considered desirable. This system of marriage was called exogamy. According to this system, the lives of the young 'girls and women belonged to those families which claimed that high status were often carefully regulated to ensure that they were married at the right time and to the right person. This gave rise to the tradition that in marriage Kanyadana was an important religious duty of the father.

After marriage women were supposed to give up their father's gotra and adopt their husband's. As per Manusmriti, the paternal state was to be divided equally amongst sons after the death of parents, with a special share for the eldest. Women were not given any share in this state.

But women were allowed to keep the gifts with themselves which they received at the [time of their marriage. This was called stridhana. This could be inherited by their children and the husband had no claim over it. But at the same time Manusmriti also told women not to hoard family property or even their own valuables without the permission of their husband.

In fact, social differences were sharpened because of the differences in access of resources. Many texts suggest that while upper class women may have access to resources but land, cattle, money were generally controlled by the men. Vakataka queen Prabhavati Gupta was a rich woman.

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

Ans. Brahmanical prescription about kinship and marriage:

Prescription about kinship:

According to Sanskrit texts the term "kula" was used to designate families and jati for the larger network of kinfolk. The term 'vamsha' was used for lineage. Very often people belonging to the same family share food and other resources they live, work and perform rituals together. Families were considered as the part of larger networks of people defined as relatives a technical term used to define them was kinfolk. While familial ties were considered "natural" and based on blood they can be defined in different ways.

For instance, some societies regard cousins as being blood relations, whereas others, do not regard as from. Historians retrieve information about elite families fairly easily from it is very hard to reconstruct the familial relationship of ordinary people. Historians also try to analyse their attitudes towards family and kinship. These are important, because they provide an insight into people's thinking. It is also expected ideas would have shaped their action because their actions may have led to changes in their attitudes.

Prescription about marriage:

For the continuity of the patrilineage the sons were considered important the daughters could not over the resources of their household. They were married into families outside the kin. This system was known as exogamy which means marrying outside one's kin or gotra. The women of high status families were married to the right persons at right time. Kanyadana or the gift of a daughter in marriage was considered as an important religious duty of the father. With the emergence of new means of communication people came into contact with each other and they began to share their view. So the Brahman laid down codes of their social behaviour. These codes regarding social behaviour were later on enshrined in Dharmashastra. These texts recognised eight types of marriage. Among these types of marriage the four were considered as good while the rest four as condemnable. Satvahana ruler did not follow exogamy of Brahmins.

