

Chapter-3

Kinship, Caste and Class (600 BCE to 600CE)

Textual sources : Written records including books and inscriptions

Importance of Textual sources to understand social behavior of early historic period

1. Texts lay down norms of social behavior
2. Texts describe about social situations and practices.
3. Mahabharata is one of greatest textual source

Mahabharata

- Mahabharata helps us to understand social histories.
- *Mahabharata* is a colossal epic over 100,000 verses
- Mahabharata was composed over a period of about 1,000 years (500 BCE to 500CE)
- Mahabharata depicts a wide range of social categories and situations.
- The central story is about two sets of warring cousins. (Kouravas and Pandavas)
- The Kouravas and Pandavas fought over land and power
- The text also contains sections laying down norms of behavior for various social groups.

The Critical Edition of the Mahabharata

- The critical edition of the Mahabharata was prepared by a team of scholars of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Pune (1919)
- A noted Indian Sanskritist, V.S Sukthankar was leader of the team

- ➔ They collected manuscripts of the text, written in a variety of languages, from different parts of the country.
- ➔ The team compared verses from each manuscript.
- ➔ They selected the verses that appeared common to most versions
- ➔ Published these in several volumes, running into over 13,000 pages.
- ➔ The project took 47 years to complete.
- ➔ There were several common elements in the Sanskrit text
- ➔ They found regional variations of the text
- ➔ These variations were documented in footnotes and appendices to the main text.

Families during the period of Mhabharatha

- The family was basic unit of society
- All families were not identical
- Different numbers of members
- Share food and other resources
- Perform rituals together
- Families are parts of kinfolk

Terms and Meanings

Kula	Families
Jnati	Kinfolk
Vamsha	Lineage
Patriliney	Descent from father to son, grandson
Matriliney	Descent through mother

The ideal of Patriliney

- ➔ Patriliney existed before Mahabharata
- ➔ Patriliney followed from 6th century BCE
- ➔ It is a Male dominated system
- ➔ Only Sons could claim resources from family

- Throne to eldest son

- Yudhishthira eldest of Pandavas ascended the throne after kurukshetra war

- The idea of patriliney strengthened by Mahabharata

- Patriliney followed by wealthy families and Brahmanas

- Prayer to Indra for 'fine sons' found in Rigveda

- Adi Parvan of Sanskrit Mahabharata describes Why kinfolk quarreled and the ideas of patrilineal succession of throne

Rules of marriage

- Sons were important and daughters had no claims to the resources of the household.

- Marrying them into families outside the kin was considered desirable. (exogamy)



Kanyadana or the gift of a daughter in marriage was an important religious duty of the father

Four Types of Marriages

- 1 Endogamy - Marriage within a unit (kingroup, caste, group in a locality)
- 2 Exogamy- Marriage outside a unit
- 3 Polygyny- A man having several wives
- 4 Polyandry A woman having several husbands

Eight forms of Marriage refers by Dharmashastras

1. Brahma Vivah.

The Gift of a daughter after dressing her in costly clothes and honoring her with presents and jewels to a man learned in the Veda whom the father himself invites

2. Prajapatya Vivah.. -Father gives his daughter to groom without dowry and bride price

3. Arsha Vivah. -Father gives his daughter to groom after receiving a pair of bull and cow

4. Diva Vivah Father gives his daughter to a priest groom

5. **Gandharva Vivah.** Traditional love marriage
6. **Asura Vivah.** Father receives bride price from groom and gives daughter to groom
7. **Rakshasa Vivah.** Capturing the girl and forcible marriage by groom
8. **Paishacha Vivah** Cheating by a man and forces the girl to marry him

Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras

- ➔ Brahmanas compiled codes of social behaviour and norms in Sanskrit texts known as the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras
- ➔ The most important of such works, the Manusmriti, (200 BCE and 200 CE)
- ➔ They recognized as many as eight forms of marriage.
- ➔ The first four were considered as “good” while the remaining were condemned

The Gotra

- Brahmans classified people in terms of *gotras*.
- Each *gotra* was named after a Vedic seer.

Two Gotra rules for women

- a) Women were expected to give up their father's *gotra* and adopt that of their husband on marriage
- b) Members of the same *gotra* could not marry.

Satavahana practices opposed by Brahmanical texts

- 1 Satavahana queens had their father's *gotras* even after the marriage.
- 2 Some of these Queens practiced endogamy.

3 Satavahanas also had marriage relations with Shakhas, Who were considered as out castes.

Were mothers important in early societies?

→ story in Mahabharata 'Gandhari's advice to Duryodhana'

→ Satavahana rulers were identified through matronymics.

eg:Goutami puta Satakarni

→ Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contained list of teachers and students by matronymics

→ In the case of the Satavahanas succession to the throne was generally patrilineal.

Social Differences: Within and Beyond the Framework of Caste

The "right" occupation

- ✓ The Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras 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, and give and receive gifts.

- ✓ **Kshatriyas** were to engage in warfare, protect people and administer justice, study the Vedas, get sacrifices performed, and make gifts.

- ✓ **Vaishyas** were expected to engage in agriculture, pastoralism and trade.

- ✓ **Shudras** were assigned only one occupation - that of serving the three “higher” *varnas*.

The Brahmanas evolved many strategies for enforcing right occupation norms.

1. They asserted that the *varna* order was of **divine origin**.
2. They **advised kings to ensure** that these norms were followed within their kingdoms.
3. They **attempted to persuade people** that their status was determined by birth.
4. They reinforced these **norms by stories told in the *Mahabharata* and other texts.**

Eg: **Story of Ekalavya in Adiparvan in Mahabharata (read text book)**

Purushasukta hymn of Rigveda mentions varna system

“The Brahmana was his mouth
of his arms was made the Kshatriya
His thighs became vaishya
of his feet the shudra was born”

Non-Kshatriya kings and their varnas

1. Mauryas -Brahmanical texts described that Mauryas were of “low” origin
2. The Sungas -Brahmanas.
3. Kanvas -Brahmanas.
4. Shakas -regarded as *mlechchhas*, (barbarians)
5. Satavahana -Brahmanas(ruler of the Satavahana dynasty, Gotami-puta Siri-Satakani, claimed to be both a unique Brahmana and a destroyer of the pride of Kshatriyas.

Jatis and social mobility

Jati

- In Brahmanical theory, jati, like varna, was based on birth.
- However, while the number of varnas was fixed at four, there was no restriction on the number of jatis.
- Whenever Brahmanical authorities encountered new groups used jati to classify them.

Shrenis/Guilds

- Jatis which shared a common occupation or profession were organized into Shrenis or guilds.
- One inscription Mandasor in Madhya Pradesh records the history of a guild of silk weavers

3 Examples of Social mobility

- 1 Some members of Shreni/guilds could adopt other occupations.
- 2 In Sanskrit text Mrichchakatika written by Shudraka 4th century CE hero Charudatta described as both Brahmana and Merchant (means Vaisya's profession done by Brahmana)
- 3 5th century inscription describes two brothers donated temples as Kshatriya vaniks(vanik -vaisya's profession)

➤ In many situations occupation was not based on caste

Beyond four Varnas: integration

- ✓ Beyond four varnas there were Forest dwellers ,hunters,nishadas,nomadic pastoralists ,some were called 'rakshasas'by Brahmanas
- ✓ People who spoke non sanskrit languages labelled as mlechhas
- ✓ But sharing of ideas and belief existed between these people(integration)eg:Bhima Hidimba story in Mahabharatha

Beyond four varnas :Subordination and Conflict

The Chandalas

- Handling of Corps and dead bodies considered as polluting by Brahmins
- Chandalas performed such activities (example for subordination)
- The touch or even sight of Chandalas considered polluting
- Chandalas placed at the bottom of society
- Manusmriti asked Chandalas to live outside the village, use discarded utensils and wear cloths of dead and ornaments of iron
- Chandalas had to serve as executioner
- Fa Hien 5th century Chinese traveler wrote that untouchables had to sound a clapper in the street while walking

- Huan Tsang 7th century Chinese traveler wrote that executioners and scavengers were forced to live outside the city
- Some Chandalas dared to accept occupation denied to them
eg; Bodisatta story in Matanga Jataka (example for conflict)
(See text book for story of Bodisatta as Chandala)

Beyond Birth: Resources and status

Gendered access to property

- ➔ Mahabharata episode of Staking Droupadi (read text) reveals issues of ownership and gender inequality)
- ➔ According to the Manusmriti, the paternal estate was to be divided equally among sons with a special share for the eldest.
- ➔ Women could not claim a share of these resources.
- ➔ However, women were allowed to retain the gifts they received on the occasion of their marriage as stridhana (literally, a woman's wealth).

- Wealthy women such as the Vakataka queen Prabhavati Gupta may have had access to resources, land, cattle and money were generally controlled by men.
- Social differences between men and women were sharpened because of the differences in access to resources.

Varna and access to property

- Kings and priests were rich(Kshatriyas and Brahmanas)
- The only“occupation” prescribed for Shudras was servitude, while a variety of occupations were listed for men of the first three varnas. .
- The Buddhists recognized that there were differences in society, but did not regard these as natural or inflexible.
- Budhists also rejected the idea of claims to status on the basis of birth

eg :Story of wealthy shudra in Budhist text Majjhima nikaya(see text)

An alternative social scenario:

Sharing wealth in Ancient Tamilakam

- In ancient Tamilakam 2000 years ago men who were generous were respected, while those who were miserly or simply accumulated wealth for themselves were despised.
- Story of poor generous chief in Purananuru -A Tamil Sangham work (see text)

Explaining social differences : A Social contract

- Social contract between king and citizens (story in Suttapitaka)
- The king gained power as a result of contract between king and citizens
- Originally All human beings lived in an idyllic state of peace, taking from nature only what they needed for each meal
- Later human beings became increasingly,greedy, vindictive and deceitful
- This led them to select Mahasammatha(the great elect) to rule them

- This story suggests that the institution of kingship was based on human choice
- It reveals recognition of human agency in economic and social relations.
- It reveals if human beings were responsible for the creation of the system, they could also change it in future.

Handling Texts :Historians and Mahabharatha

The Elements historians consider when they analyses texts.

- They examine whether texts were written in Prakrit, Pali or Tamil, languages that were probably used by ordinary people, or in Sanskrit, a language meant almost exclusively for priests and elites.
- They also consider the kinds of text. Were these mantras, learnt and chanted by ritual specialists, or stories that people could have read, or heard, and then retold if they found them interesting?
- They try to find out about the author(s) whose perspectives and ideas shaped the text, as well as the intended audience, as, very often, authors keep the interests of their audience in mind while composing their work.

- They try and ascertain the possible date of the composition or compilation of the texts as well as the place where they may have been composed.

Language and Content of Mahabharata

- Language of Mahabharata -Sanskrit
- Content of Mahabharata

2 sections

- 1) The narrative sections contain stories
- 2) The didactic sections contain prescriptions about social norms

- Itihasa means 'thus it was "

Author of Mahabharata

- Composition of Mahabharata traditionally attributed to sage Vyasa
- According to modern historians Mahabharata was not a work of single author
- Mahabharata originally consisted of less than 10000 verses later grew to 100000 verses
- The original story was probably composed by charioteer bards known as Sutas

Date of composition of Mahabharata -Three phases

First phase -5th century BCE

- ✓ The phase Brahmanas started writing Mahabharata
- ✓ Period of chiefdom (Kurus and Panchalas) becoming kingdoms.

Second phase -200 BCE to 200 CE

- ✓ The worship of Vishnu was growing in importance
- ✓ Krishna, was coming to be identified with Vishnu.

Last phase -200 CE to 400 CE

- ✓ Large didactic sections resembling the Manusmriti were added.
- ✓ Mahabharata grew to 100,000 verses.

The search for convergence

(B.B.Lal`s excavation and findings in Hastinapura)

- In 1951-52, the archaeologist B.B. Lal excavated a village named Hastinapura in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh).
- B.B. Lal found evidence of five occupational levels in Hastinapura, of which the second and third are important.
- B.B. Lal noted about the houses in the second phase (c. twelfth-seventh centuries BCE)

a) There were no definite plans of houses found.

b) The walls were made of mud and mud-bricks.

c) some of the houses had reed walls plastered over with mud.

■ In the third phase (c.sixth-third centuries BCE), B.B. Lal noted-

a) Houses of this period were built of mud-brick as well as burnt bricks.

B) Soakage jars and brick drains were used for draining out refuse water.

C) Terracotta ring-wells may have been used both as wells and drainage pits.

■ The description of the city Hastinapura in the epic **added after the main narrative** or it was a flight of poetic fancy

eg:City of Hastinapura (see text)

Droupadi s Marriage AND polyandry

- Draupadi's marriage with the Pandavas, an instance of polyandry in Mahabharata
- Polyandry may have been prevalent among ruling elites
- Polyandry gradually fell into disfavor among the Brahmanas, who reworked and developed the text through the centuries.
- Polyandry was prevalent in the Himalayan region.
- There may have been a shortage of women during times of warfare, and this led to polyandry.
- Creative literature does not always literally reflect social realities but just used to create interest for readers.

Droupadi s marriage (see text)

Mahabharata is a Dynamic Text

- ✓ Over the centuries, versions of the Mahabharata were written in a variety of languages
- ✓ Several stories that originated in specific regions or circulated amongst certain people found their way into the epic.
- ✓ At the same time, the central story of the epic was often retold in different ways.
Eg: kunthi o nishadhi written by Mahaswetha Devi
(see text for story)
- ✓ Episodes of Mahabharata were depicted in sculpture and painting.
- ✓ They also provided themes for a wide range of performing arts - plays, dance and other kinds of narrations