

Kinship and Marriage Many Rules and Varied Practices

- Families are usually parts of larger networks of people defined as relatives, or to use a more technical term, kinfolk. While familial ties are often regarded as “natural” and based on blood, they are defined in many different ways.
- Historians also investigate and analyse attitudes towards family and kinship. They provide an insight into people’s thinking.
- Mahabharata describes a feud over land and power between two groups of cousins, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, who belonged to a single ruling family, that of the Kurus, a lineage dominating one of the janapadas. At the end the Pandavas emerged victorious. After that, patrilineal succession was proclaimed.
- While patriliney had existed prior to the composition of the epic, the central story of the Mahabharata reinforced the idea that it was valuable. Under patriliney, sons could claim the resources (including the throne in the case of kings) of their fathers when the latter died.
- Most ruling dynasties (c. sixth century BCE onwards) claimed to follow this system, with variations in case of no son.
- The concern with patriliney was not unique to ruling families. It is evident in mantras in ritual texts such as the Rigveda. It is possible that these attitudes were shared by wealthy men and those who claimed high status, including Brahmanas.
- Marriage: Daughters had no claims to the resources of the household. They were married into families outside the kin. This system was exogamy.
- Women were married at the “right” time and to the “right” person. This gave rise to the belief that kanyadana or the gift of a daughter in marriage was an important religious duty of the father.
- The Brahmanas laid down codes of social behaviour in great detail. These were meant to be followed by Brahmanas in particular and the rest of society in general. From c. 500 BCE, these norms were compiled in Sanskrit texts known as the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras. The most important of such works, the Manusmriti, was compiled between c. 200 BCE and 200 CE.

- **Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras recognised as many as eight forms of marriage. Of these, the first four were considered as "good" while the remaining were condemned.**
- **Gotra: From c. 1000 BCE, people (especially Brahmanas) were classified into different gotras. Each gotra was named after a Vedic seer, and all those who belonged to the same gotra were regarded as his descendants.**
- **Two important rules of gotras are: Women were expected to give up their father's gotra and adopt that of their husband on marriage and members of the same gotra could not marry.**
- **Satavahanas are one of the powerful ruling lineages, who ruled over parts of western India and the Deccan (c. second century BCE-second century CE). Some of the Satavahana rulers were polygynous.**
- **Satavahana rulers were identified through metronymics (names derived from that of the mother) but that succession to the throne was generally patrilineal.**