



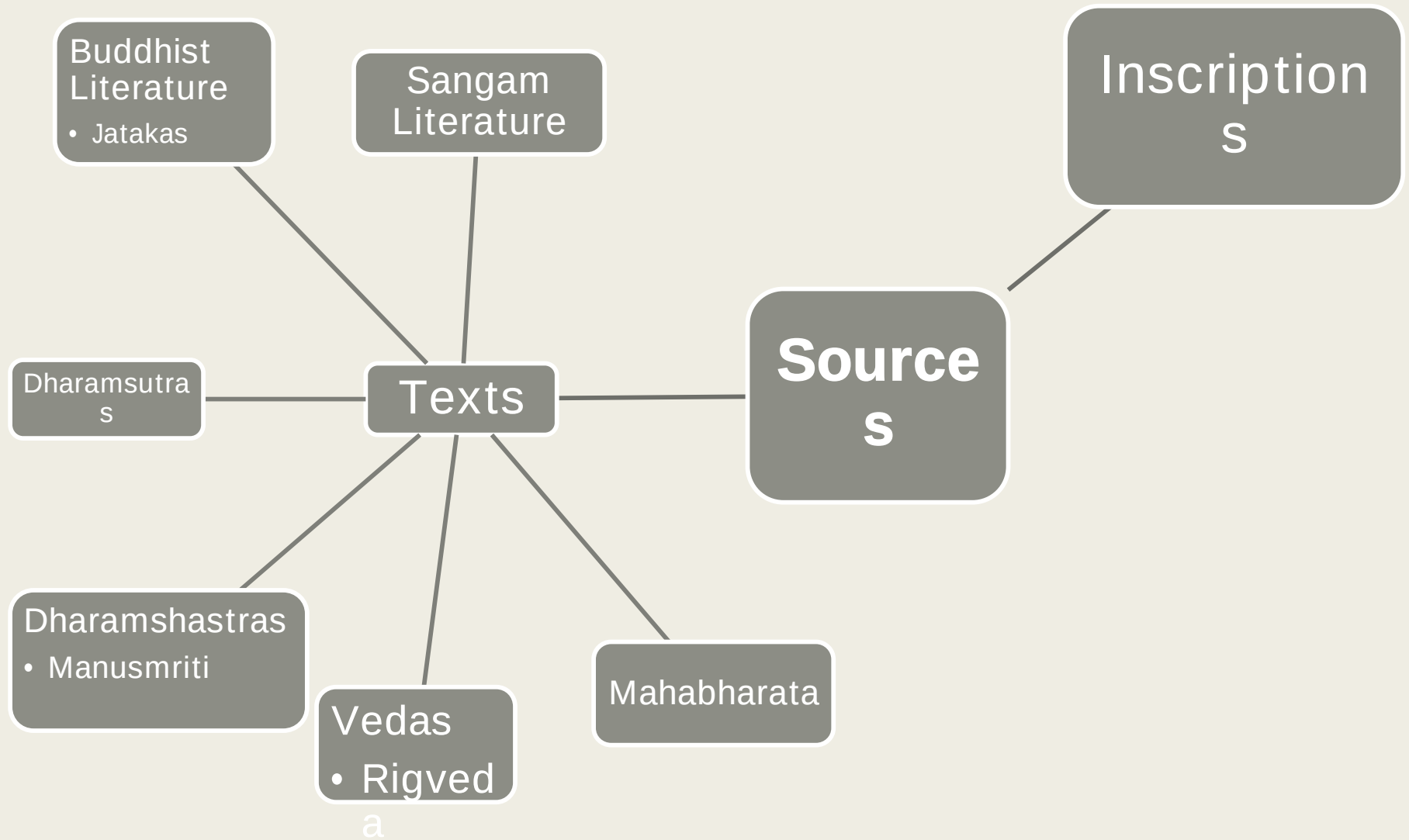
KINSHIP, CASTE AND CLASS

Early Societies
(600 BCE- 600 CE)



Introduction

- Changes in Economic life affected social life
 1. Extension of agriculture into forested area (Land Grants)
 - *Transformation of the lives of forest people*
 2. Emergence of Craftsperson (example: guilds, shrenis)
 - *Formation of distinct social groups*
 3. Unequal distribution of wealth
 - *Sharpening/ creating a social divide in the society*



- Dharam shastras, Dharam sutras and Manu smriti are all Sanskrit texts.
- Dharam Sutras are derived from Vedas. (form of strings: concise statement of general truth)
- Dharam shastras- poetic verses, based on Dharam sutras
- Manu smriti- Manav Dharam Shastra- ancient legal text- 200 BCE- 200 CE

What do these texts tell us?

- Understand social behaviour of the period
- Norms of social behaviour, Code of Conduct
- Wide range of social practices prevalent in society (perhaps sometimes exaggerated)
- Various social groups, social players, etc.

Major Questions to ask

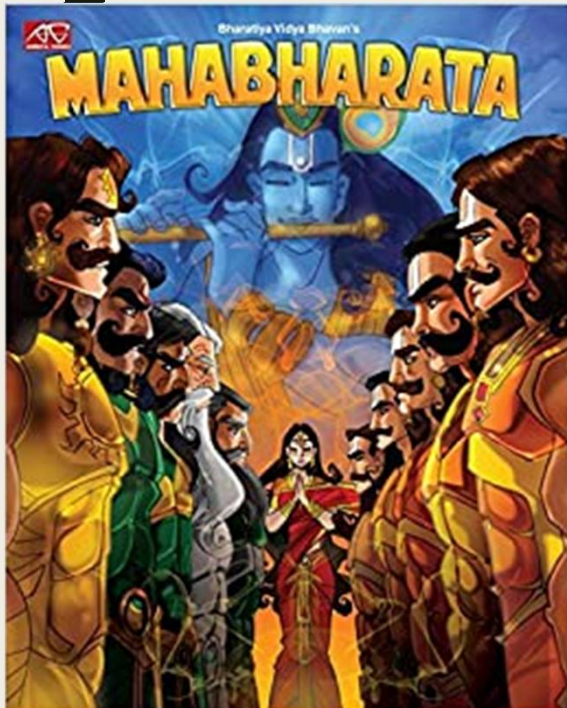
- Who composed it? (perspective of author?)
- Who was the audience? (for whom the text was written/ what does the author want to convey?)
- Language used? Writing style? (who reads it?/ to cater to the audience?)
- Circulation of text? (Orally?/ was the audience literate, reading culture?)

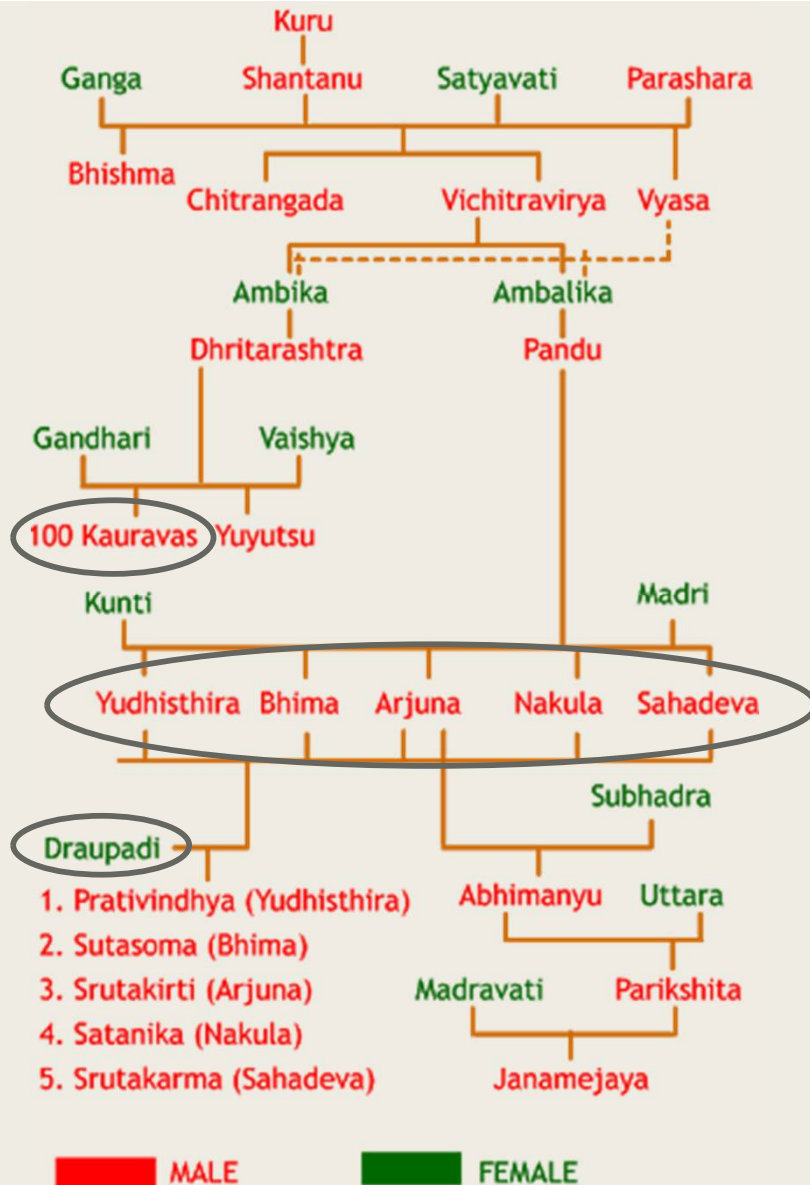
Mahabharata

- Colossal Epic- great in size
- Over 100,000 verses, composed over a period of 1000 years
- Depicts a number of social categories and situations
- Richest text of the sub- continent
- Norms of behaviour for various social categories. The story also shows exceptions, conformations and denial of these norms.

Mahabharata

- Story of two sets of Cousins engaged in war for throne.





Other Important Characters:

- Sage Vyasa
- Ganesh
- Eklavya
- Guru Drona
- Hidimba
- Ghatotkacha

Critical Edition Of Mahabharata

Why Was it Required?

- Mahabharat is the oldest epic.
- Hand written copies.
- Copies of Sanskrit texts as well as translations into various languages.
- Led to addition of various shlokas
- Many editions, Different number of shlokas, different versions.

Critical Edition of Mahabharata

- Project- in 1919- leadership of V. S. Sukthankar (Indian Sanskritist)
- Took 47 years to complete. (enormity of task)
- Preparing the critical edition of Mahabharata



Collecting various Sanskrit manuscripts of texts

Collecting texts in other languages

Collecting texts from various parts of India

Collecting texts in multiple scripts

Compare the verses from each manuscript

- How was the content compared?
 - *Selected verses which were common to maximum number of editions. These were then published in a volume*
- Result:
 - *Several common elements in the Sanskrit version of the story*
 - *Regional Variations*
 - Intermingling of the local culture with the dominant one.
 - Complex processes
 - Dialogue between dominant tradition and local ideas
 - Sometimes conflicting ideas, at other times, consensus

Basis of understanding

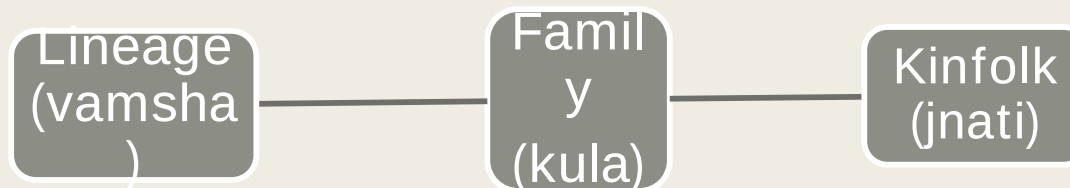
- Texts written in Sanskrit- Brahmanas
- Myth in 19th and 20th centuries: everything written was practiced.
- When read other works
 - *Although ideas in Sanskrit texts were recognised as authoritative*
 - *Yet were challenged frequently and questioned too, even rejected.*
- Hence important to critically examine the sources

Why require these texts?

- C. 500 BCE onwards
- Manu smriti- 200 BCE- 200 CE
- Interchange of new ideas due to trade
- Questioning of old beliefs and practices
- To be followed by everyone in general
- Although, due to regional diversity, these were not followed universally.

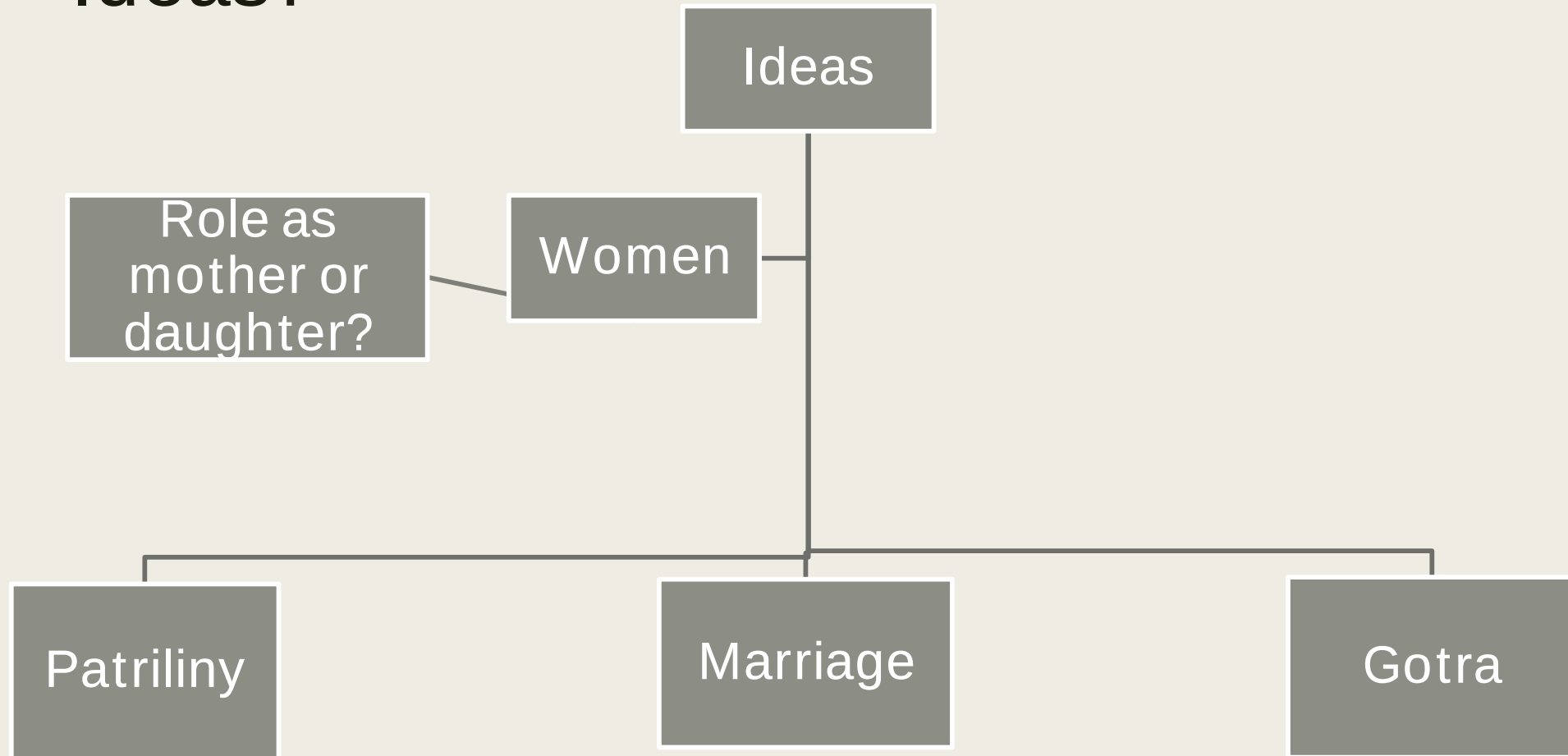
Social Life

- Family as an important unit.
- How to reconstruct the social lives of common people?



- Ideas and thinking shape the action. What were these ideas? Where do we find out about them?

Ideas?



Patriliney

- Tracing descent from father to son and so on.
- Opposite: Matriliney: tracing descent from mother
- Example: Mahabharata
- Idea of succession from father's side.
- Father's resources are transferred to his son.
- Daughters?- No claim on resources
- Exceptions/ variations in practice:
 - *Given to brother such as Pandu to Dhritrashtra*
 - *Given to next of kin*
 - *Women (rare cases) example: Prabhavati Gupta*
- Rich and poor alike?
- Kshatriya and Brahmanas?

