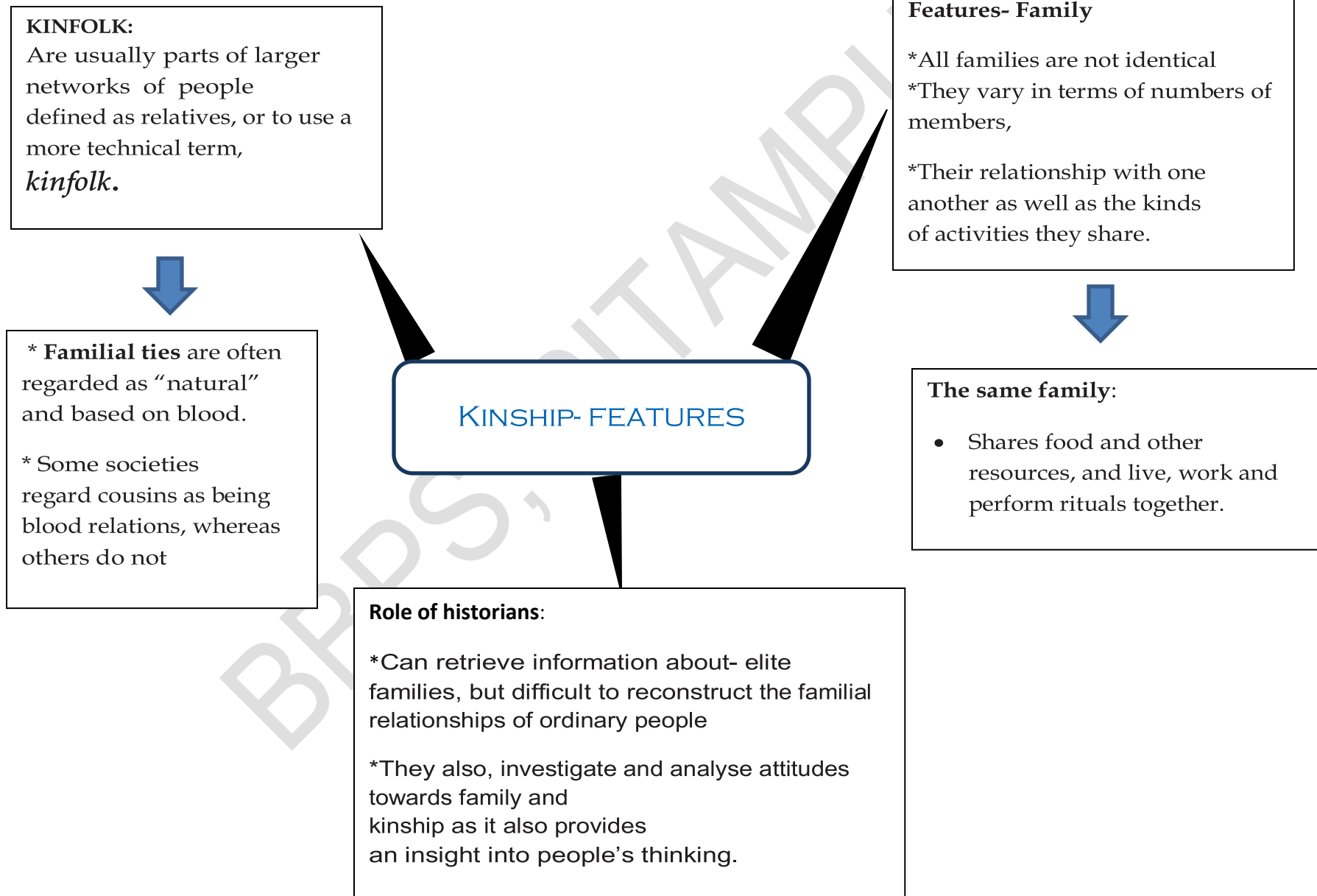


## Theme III – KINSHIP, CLASS, CASTE



### Patriliney -

means sons could claim the resources (including the throne in the case of kings) of their fathers when the latter died.



### There were variations in practice:

Sometimes there were no sons, then brother's kinsmen succeeded or in exceptional circumstances women exercised powers- Prabhavati Gupta

### Even Followed by:

Ruling class  
Wealthy people  
Brahmans

## KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE MANY RULES AND VARIED PRACTICES

### Rule of marriage:

Sons- important for the continuity of the patrilineage,

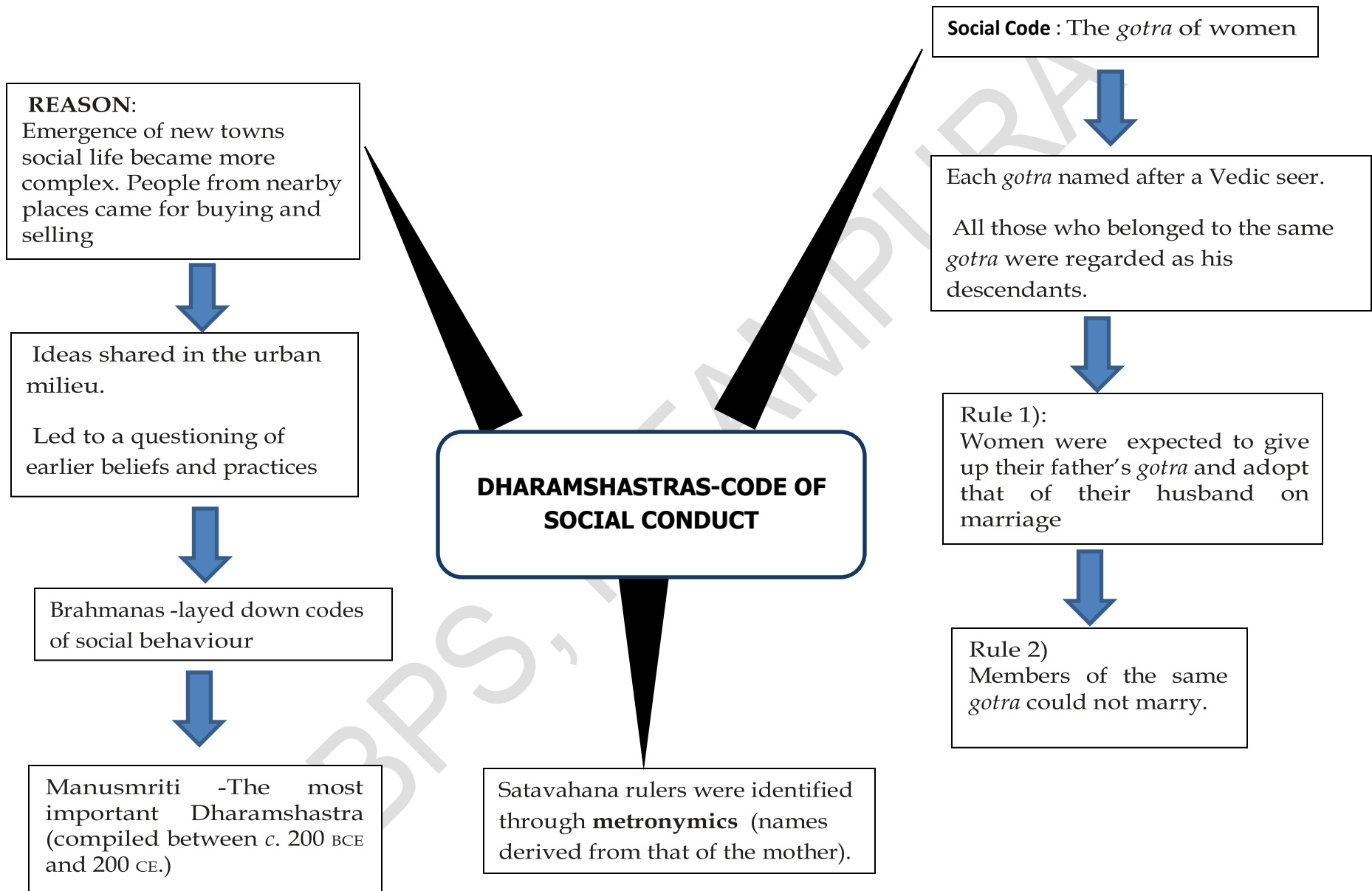
Daughters-They had no claims to the resources of the household, exogamy (literally, marrying outside) practiced



### Marriage- regulated

women were married at the "right" time and to the "right" person.

The belief of *kanyadana* or the gift of a daughter in marriage was an important religious duty of the father.



**CASTE:** A set of hierarchically ordered social categories laid down in the Dharmasutras and Dharmashastras.

Brahmanas claimed that this order, in which they were ranked first, was **divinely ordained**.

Positions within the order were supposedly **determined by birth**.

## SOCIAL DIFFERENCES CASTE

### The “right” occupation

Rules about the ideal “occupations” of the four categories or *varnas*.



**Brahmanas:** study and teach the Vedas, perform sacrifices and get sacrifices performed, and give and receive gifts.

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

**Vaishyas :** The last three “occupations” were also assigned to the who were in addition expected to engage in agriculture, pastoralism and trade.

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

**Brahmanas** evolved two or three **strategies** for **enforcing** these norms:

- \*The *varna* order was of divine origin.
- \* Second, they advised kings to ensure that these norms were followed within their kingdoms.
- \* Third, they attempted to persuade people that their status was determined by birth.

Brahmanas considered some people as being outside the system, they also developed a sharper social divide by classifying certain social categories as “**untouchable**”.

Some activities were regarded as particularly “**polluting**”. These included handling corpses and dead animals.

Those who performed such tasks, designated as **chandalas**, were placed at the very bottom of the hierarchy.

**Beyond the four *varnas***  
**Subordination and conflict**

The *Manusmriti* laid down the “**duties**” of the *chandalas*:

- \*They had to live outside the village,
- \*Use discarded utensils, and wear clothes of the dead
- \*And wear ornaments of iron.
- \*They could not walk about in villages and cities at night.
- \*They had to dispose of the bodies of those who had no relatives and serve as executioners
- \* Sound a clapper in the streets so that people could avoid seeing them and were forced to live outside the city.

## Gendered access to property



According to *Manusmriti*:

- \* **Paternal estate** - divided **equally amongst sons** after the death of the parents, with a special share for the eldest.
- \* **Women** could **not claim** a share of these resources.
- \* **Women** were allowed to retain the gifts they received on the occasion of their marriage as *stridhana*.
- \* This could be **inherited** by their **children**, without the husband having any claim on it.
- \* At the same time, the *Manusmriti* warned **women against hoarding** family property, or even their own valuables, without the husband's permission.

## Beyond Birth Resources and Status

## Varna and access to property

- \*According to the Brahmanical texts, another criterion (apart from gender) for regulating access to wealth was *varna*.
- \*The only occupation" prescribed for **Shudras was servitude**,
- \*While a variety of occupations were listed for men of the first three *varnas*.
- \* The **wealthiest** men - the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas.

Historians consider **several elements** when they analyse texts :

\*They **examine** whether texts were written in languages used by ordinary people e.g Pali,Prakrit etc **OR**

\* **Languages** that were probably used by priests and elites.

\* They also **consider the kinds of text** e.g mantras, learnt and chanted by ritual specialists, or stories that people could have read, or heard, and then retold

\*Find out about the **author(s)** whose perspectives and ideas shaped the text

\***The interests** of the intended audience

\*The possible **date** of the composition or compilation and the **place** where they may have been composed.

**The text is described as an itihasa within early Sanskrit tradition.**

**Language and content:**

\*The Sanskrit used – is simple

\* Two broad heads -

- 1) Sections that contain stories- *narrative*
- 2) Sections that contain prescriptions about social norms - *didactic*.

\* The didactic sections include stories, and the narrative often contains a social message.

**Author(s) and dates:**

Charioteer -bards known as

\*sutas

\*Brahmanas,wrote Itihaas-5<sup>th</sup>century

\* The worship of Vishnu-between c. 200 BCE and 200 CE

\*Large didactic sections resembling were added-between 200 and 400 CE

**A Dynamic Text:**

\*Written in a **variety** of languages

\*Several stories that originated in specific regions or circulated amongst certain people **found their way into the epic.**

\*The **central story** of the epic was often retold in different ways.

\*Episodes were depicted in **sculpture and painting.**

\*Themes for a wide range of **performing arts** - plays, dance etc.

**Handling Texts**  
**Historians and the Mahabharata**

After making **these assessments**  
- The historians then draw on the content of texts to arrive at an understanding of their historical significance