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**The idea of India in ancient Indian texts: *āryāvarta*, *jambudvīpa*, *bhāratavarṣa*
and the relation with non-*āryas*
Giacomo Benedetti**

Abstract

This article reflects on the idea of India and its inhabitants in ancient South Asian sources, starting from the concept of ārya opposed to dāsa, dasyu, śūdra and mleccha in its different senses (social, ethnic/linguistic and moral/spiritual) in Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist contexts. We analyze then the notion of āryāvarta or abode of the āryas in Vedic Dharmasūtras and Manusmṛti (proposing parallels with archaeological cultures), and the analogous concept of āryāyatana and Central Region in Buddhist texts. In the second paragraph we consider a later notion comparable to that of modern India, that of Jambudvīpa and especially Bhāratavarṣa, with its unique characteristics in ancient Indian cosmology when compared with other regions of the world. In the third paragraph we observe how the land of the āryas was seen as a model of universal conduct, and also as the place of origin of barbarian peoples regarded as degraded Kṣatriyas, and finally we will consider how the ancient ethnic and geographical concepts can help us about the question of the origins of Indo-Aryans.

The idea of India and the concept of region of the Āryas in ancient India

The concept of India, as is known, is of Greek origin, derived from the name of the Indus River, from the Persian term *Hinduš*. Therefore, it is a concept connected with the westernmost area, as also Herodotus showed. He maintained that the eastern part of the Indian country was a sandy desert, evidently making allusion to the Thar Desert (Her. III.98). According to Tarn (1984: 154), still to Alexander ‘India’ meant only the Indus region, which Darius had ruled. Megasthenes then widened the knowledge of the Indian subcontinent, with his lost work, so that Eratosthenes (cited by Strabo XV.10-11) placed India between the Indus River and the Ocean. This is the idea of India that European culture has inherited, which was included in British India, while, after the Partition, the modern state called ‘India’ does not include anymore a great part of the course of the Indus River that has given its name. Today it is a political entity, a nation, more or less unified, but we have to wonder if in the ancient ‘Indian’ culture existed an idea similar to the one that the Greeks had elaborated about India, and to a ‘national’ identity opposed to the Other, the Foreigner. The autochthonous name, adopted also in the Constitution of India¹ and still used, is *Bhārata* or *Bharat*, indicating the descendance from king Bharata,² a name already well known in the *Ṛgveda*, where the *bharatas* are the main tribe, especially in the most ancient books (Maṇḍalas II-VII),³ so that Agni is called *bhārata* (‘belonging to the *bharatas*’),⁴ and in the *Āprī* hymns, that are present in most of the Maṇḍalas, a goddess *bhārātī* is

¹ For the history of the name and the political debate, see Clémentin-Ojha 2014. The first article of the Constitution recites: “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.”

² The most important king with this name is Bharata Dauḥṣanti or Dauṣyanti, mentioned already in AiBr 8.23 as a great conqueror of the Earth who offered many horses in sacrifice on Yamunā and Ganges. Cf. ŚBr 13.5.4.11-14; Keith and Macdonell 1912: II, 94-97; MBh 12.29.40-44, where, besides Yamunā and Ganges, also the river Sarasvatī is mentioned in relation with his horse sacrifices.

³ See RV III.33.11-12; III.53.12 (*bhāratam janam*); 24 (*bharatasya putrā*); V.11.1; VII.33.6.

⁴ See RV II.7.1; 5; IV.25.4; IV.16.19; 45.

regularly invoked. However, their name is not yet used to indicate a geographical entity, and does not encompass all the races or ethnicities mentioned in the hymns.

What is clear is that the most general self-definition of the ‘people’ of the poets of the *Ṛgveda* is *ārya*, often opposed to *dāsa* or *dasyu*. Therefore, these terms have been interpreted as indicating the aborigines conquered by the ‘Aryans’, the Indo-European invaders. The fact that the meaning of *dāsa* is normally that of ‘slave’ was explained by the fact that the aborigines were enslaved.⁵ But this interpretation is very debatable: we can propose to the contrary that *dāsa* originally meant ‘slave’ (perhaps from the verb *das* ‘to become exhausted’),⁶ and consequently it was applied as a derogatory epithet to demons⁷ and non-Aryan peoples, similarly to English *villain* that from ‘servant of the farm (*villa*)’ has come to indicate an evil person. *Ṛgvedic* culture is clearly aristocratic, and the duality noble/servant must have been a central category of the ideology, that from society could be reflected also on the mythical cosmos and the peoples perceived as foreign and barbarous. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that in post-*Ṛgvedic* texts *dāsa* is replaced by *śūdra* in opposition to *ārya*, apparently because *śūdra* was still not used in the *Ṛgvedic* hymns (it appears only in the late *Puruṣasūkta*, RV X.90), and because it acquires a specific classificatory value in the social order. It is also reinforced by the fact that foreign peoples, as we will see, were considered *śūdras*, as earlier they were considered *dāsas*. The term *dasyu*, maybe etymologically connected to *dāsa*,⁸ in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* is used to indicate non-Aryan peoples of eastern and southern India,⁹ and it remained in use also in the post-Vedic age to indicate barbarians and castes that were out of the system of the four *varṇas*: in the *Manusmṛiti* the outcasts called *caṇḍāla* are presented as an example of *dasyu*,¹⁰ and in 10.45 we read:

⁵ “Since the Dāsas were in many cases reduced to slavery, the word Dāsa has the sense of ‘slave’ in several passages of the Rigveda.” (Keith and Macdonell 1912: I, 357).

⁶ Cfr. also Greek δοῦλος, Mycenaean *doero* (**dohelos*) ‘slave’, perhaps from *dos-* (KEWA II: 39), Persian *dāh* ‘servant’, Sogdian *d’y(h)* (**dāhy-*) ‘female slave’ (Vogelsang 2011; Yakubovich 2011: 172). To be considered is also the term *dahaka*, referred to negative persons opposed to priests, chariot warriors and farmers in Y 11.6: *nôit ahmi nmâne zânâite âthrava naêdha rathaêshât naêdha vâstryô fshuyās, âat ahmi nmâne zayânte dahakâ ca mûrakâ ca pouru-saredha varshnâ ca* “In his house is born no fire-priest, warrior ne’er in chariot standing, never more the thrifty tiller. In his home be born Dahâkas, Mûrakas of evil practice, doing deeds of double nature.” (Mills 1887: 245).

⁷ A possible comparison can be found in the name of the Avestan demon *Azi Dahâka*.

⁸ The term *dasyu* appears to be derived from the root *das-* with the Vedic suffix *-yu*, like *yâjyu* ‘pious’, *sâhyu* ‘strong’. Grassmann (1976: 584) explains it as derived from *das* in a causative sense (*verschwächen machen, erschöpfen*, ‘to make perish, to exhaust’). It should be noticed that *dasyu* does not indicate a slave but it can indicate a robber, cf. Pāli *dassu* ‘enemy, foe; robber’; Ardhamāgadhī *dassu* ‘thief’. Cf. MBh 12.98.8: *yo bhūtāni dhana-jyānād vadhāt kleśāc ca rakṣati / dasyubhyaḥ prāṇa-dānāt sa dhana-dah sukha-do virāt* // “He who protects people from plunder of wealth, slaughter, and affliction, in consequence of the protection of life from robbers, is a sovereign giver of wealth and happiness.”

⁹ AiBr 7.18: *ta ete ’ndhrāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ Śabarāḥ Pulindā Mūtibā ity udantyā bahavo bhavanti Vaiśvāmītrā dasyūnām bhūyiṣṭhāḥ* “They are these numerous peoples beyond the borders (of Āryāvarta), called Andhra, Puṇḍra, Śabara, Pulinda, Mūtiba; most of the *dasyus* are descendants of Viśvāmītra.” Cf. MBh 12.162.30, 28-44, where a Brahmin from the Central Region (*madhya-deśa*, see below) goes to the northern region among barbarians called *mleccha* (st.28), *dasyu* (st.30, 35-37; 39-40) and *śabara* (st.34). The Brahmin, living among them as a hunter, is degraded to the state of a *dasyu* (*dasyu-bhāva*, st.44).

¹⁰ Manu 5.131: *śvabhir hatasya yan māmsaṃ śuci tan manur abravīt / kravyādbhiḥ ca hatasyānyaiś caṇḍālādyaish ca dasyubhiḥ* // “Manu has declared that the meat (of an animal) killed by dogs is pure, and also (that of an animal) killed by carnivorous animals or by outcasts like Caṇḍālas and so on.”

mukha-bāhūru-paj-jānām yā loke jātayo bahiḥ / mleccha-vācaś cārya-vācaḥ sarve te dasyavaḥ smṛtāḥ //

All those castes in this world, which are excluded from (the community of) those born from the mouth, the arms, the thighs, and the feet (of Brahman), are considered *dasyus*, whether they speak the language of the barbarians or that of the Āryas.

In this stanza we see that the term *ārya* could have a connection with a specific language,¹¹ but also that, at least in this Brahmanical context, the fact of using the same language as the *āryas* is not sufficient to identify someone as such (obviously also *śūdras* spoke an Indo-Aryan language, even if Prakrit, and evidently also many outcasts). We also find another category opposed to the Aryans, which is clearly linguistic, the category of *mleccha*, that derives from the verb *mlich*, *mlecchati* ‘to speak indistinctly’, similarly to the etymology of Greek βάρβαρος ‘foreign, barbarous’, but originally ‘stammering’.¹² An interesting example is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (3.2.1.23-24):

te 'surā ātta-vacaso he 'lavo he 'lava iti vadantaḥ parābabhūvuḥ. tatraitām api vācam ūduḥ upajijñāsyām sa mlecchas tasmān na brāhmaṇo mleched asuryā haiṣā...

The Asuras, being deprived of speech, were defeated, crying: ‘He 'lavaḥ! he 'lavaḥ!’¹³ Such was the enigmatical¹⁴ speech, which they then uttered, and he

¹¹ Cf. also Yāska’s *Nirukta*, that belongs to the late Vedic age, and already distinguishes between the language of Āryas and that of Kambojas (Nir 2.2): *athāpi prakṛtaya evaikesu bhāṣyante / vikṛtaya ekesu / śavatiḥ gati-karmā kaṃbojeshv eva bhāṣyate / [...]* *vikāram asyāryeṣu bhāṣante / śava iti /* “Moreover, primary forms alone are used in speaking among some people, derived forms among others. (The verb) *śavati*, (meaning) the action of going, is used only among the Kambojas. (Those who live) among the Āryas use in speaking its derivative (noun) *śava*.”

¹² Mayrhofer (EWA: 339), confirms that the way of speaking is primary in this root, and cites a comparison with Latin *blaesus* (possibly derived from **mlais-*, while Skt. *mleccha* should come from **mlaisk-*) ‘lisp, stammering’. In Greek, βλαίσός means ‘bent, distorted’. We can also consider Greek βλάσ-φημος ‘speaking ill-omened words, blasphemous’, from a root *blas-* < **mls-* connected with **mel-* ‘to fail; to deceive’ (Pokorny 1959: 719-720). On the other hand, Pokorny (1959: 719) cites Old Church Slavonic *mlčati*, Russian *molčátʹ* ‘to be silent’ from an alleged root **melə-k-*, **mlāk-* ‘soft, weak, goofy’ giving also Greek βλάξ ‘stolid, stupid’. The Pāli form *milakkha/milakkhu* (Ardhamāgadhī *milakkhu*) is close to this root, although it should come from **mlakṣa/mlakṣu-*.

¹³ The correct form, according to the gloss of Sāyaṇa, should be *he 'rayo he 'rayaḥ* ‘Oh, the enemies!’ (from *ari* ‘enemy’, although the normal Vedic form of the nominative/vocative plural is *aryaḥ*). In the Kāṇva recension, IV.2.1.18 (Vatsyayan 2000: 30 f.), we read: *te hāttavāco 'surā hailo haila ity etām ha vācam vadantaḥ parābabhūvus tatrāpy upajijñāse 'nyām vācam upajijñāsanta sa mlecchas tasmād brāhmaṇena na mlecchitavyam asuryā hy eṣā vāg...* “Those Asuras, being deprived of speech, saying this utterance: “*hailo hailaḥ*”, were defeated. Then too, they wished to invent (thinking) “I wish to invent another speech.” He (who speaks another speech) is a barbarian. Therefore a Brahmin should not speak in a barbarous way. For this (kind of) speech is proper to the Asuras.” It is not clear what *ila* means here, Eggeling (1885: 31, n.3) proposed *ilā* in the sense of ‘speech’.

A third version is found in Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* (Kielhorn 1892: 2, 7-8): *te 'surā helayo helaya iti kurvantaḥ parābabhūvuḥ / tasmād brāhmaṇena na mlecchitavai nāpabhāṣitavai / mleccho ha vā eṣa yad apaśabdaḥ /* “Those Asuras, uttering “*He 'lavo! He 'layaḥ!*”, were defeated. Therefore a Brahmin should not speak in a barbarous way, in an incorrect way. In fact, this barbarous (way of speaking) is incorrect speech.” The term *apaśabda* indicates ‘vulgar speech, ungrammatical language’, and the form *alayaḥ* looks like an eastern Prakrit modification of *aryaḥ* ‘enemies’, as well as *alavaḥ* of the ŚBr (cf. Parpola 1975: 213; Hock 1993: 221 f.). In this context, *mleccha* would thus be connected with Prakrit corrupted dialects rather than with non-Indo-Aryan languages.

(who speaks thus) is a barbarian. Hence a Brahmin should not speak in a barbarous way, since this is (the speech) of the Asuras.

We see thus that the *mleccha* language is identified with the Asuras, the enemies of the gods. In the Brahmanical law there is also the prohibition of learning a foreign language: *na mleccha-bhāṣāṃ śikṣeta* ‘(a Brahmin) should not learn the language of the barbarians’ (VāDhS 6.41; KūrmP 2.16.61).

In a Buddhist context, *ārya* (*ariya* in Pāli) has mostly a precise spiritual meaning, indicating those who have achieved the direct understanding of the four ‘noble truths’ or ‘truths of the noble ones’ (*ariya-saccāni*, *ārya-satyāni*) and follow the ‘noble eightfold path’ (*ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*, *āryāṣṭāṅga-mārga*), in opposition to ordinary persons (*puthu-jjana*, *prthag-jana*). However, we find the compound *ariya-vohāra* in the Pāli commentaries to indicate the Aryan language (first of all the language of Magadha¹⁵), and in the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins the compound *dasyu-vāc* (MSV I 258) ‘barbarian language’ is opposed to *āryā vāc*.¹⁶ In the *Abhidharmakośa* (170) we read that all the gods speak in the Aryan language (*sarve devā ārya-bhāṣā-bhāṣiṇaḥ*).

In a Jain context, the *Pañṇavaṇā-sutta* mentions various kinds of *āriya*, among which there is also the *bhāsāriya* ‘Ārya for speech’, identified as someone who speaks Ardhamāgadhī and uses the Brāhmī script.¹⁷

Therefore *ārya* had also a linguistic value, designating what we would call an ethnic identity, as the ancient Persian *ariya* and the Avestan *airya*, although it had also a social value, less evident in the Iranic context. Summing up, in a social context (with possible extensions to the ethnic domain) we have the opposition *ārya/dāsa* and *ārya/sūdra*, in an ethnic and linguistic context *ārya/dasyu* (which has however a social meaning in *Manusmṛti*) and *ārya/mleccha*.

What remains constant is the self-definition *ārya*, that also gave rise to the idea of a region, the *āryāvarta* ‘abode or land of the *āryas*’. In its earliest attestation,¹⁸

¹⁴ The term used is *upajijñāsyā*, literally meaning ‘to be excogitated or found out’, therefore ‘enigmatical’. As we have seen in the previous note, the Kāṇva recension has a different use of the verb *upa-jñā*.

¹⁵ CPD: 429. Cf. *Pārājjikakaṇḍa-aṭṭhakathā* 54 (ChS): *Tattha ariyakam nāma ariya-vohāro, māgadha-bhāsā. Milakkhakaṃ nāma yo koci anariyako andha-damiḷādi*. “Here, *ariyaka* is the Aryan mode of speech, the language of Magadha. *Milakkhaka* is whatever (language) that is non-Aryan, Andhra, Tamil, and so on.” *Kaṅkhāvitaraṇipurāṇa-ṭīkā*, I. 881 (ChS): *ariyakena vā vadati, milakkhakena vā... Ettha ca ariyakam nāma māgadha-vohāro. Milakkhakaṃ nāma anariyako andha-damiḷādi*. “He speaks in the Aryan or in the barbarian (language)... Here *ariyaka* is the language of Magadha. *Milakkhaka* is the non-Aryan (language), Andhra, Tamil, and so on.” Cf. *Abhidhānappadīpikā-ṭīkā* 186 (ChS): *Milakkha abyattiyam vācāyam, milakkhanti abyatta-vācam bhāsanti ti milakkhā*. “*Milakkha* (means) ‘in an unintelligible speech’, *milakkhanti* ‘they speak an unintelligible speech’ (therefore they are called) *milakkha*.”

¹⁶ Cf. the opposition between *dasyu-jana* and *ārya-jana* in SBV I 36, in relation with the ‘Central Region’ (*madhya-deśa*), that is ‘deprived of *dasyu* people’ (*dasyu-jana-vivarjitaḥ*) and ‘inhabited by *ārya* people’ (*ārya-janādhyuṣitaḥ*); cf. also AdSPG II 107: *dasyuṣu mleccheṣu pratyanteṣu vā janapadeṣu upapadyeta iti*. “He is born among foreigners, barbarians, in the border countries.”

¹⁷ Deshpande 1993: 9-13. At p.14 is also cited the statement of the *Bhagavai-sutta* that the Ardhamāgadhī is the language of the gods.

¹⁸ On the other hand, Nir 6.32 has already the concept of a region inhabited by *anāryas*: *kīkaṭā nāma deśo ’nārya-nivāsaḥ* / “Kīkaṭa is the name of a country, an abode of non-Āryas.” Kīkaṭas were mentioned in RV III.53.14 as a people that does not follow Vedic rites, and according to BhP 1.3.24 the Buddha will appear among them (*kīkaṭeṣu*), which the commentator explains *madhye gayā-pradeśe*

in the late Vedic *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* (BauDhS I.2.9-12)¹⁹ we find this description of the *āryāvarta*:

*prāg ādarśāt pratyak kanakhalād [K: kālaka-vanād] dakṣiṇena himavantam udak
pāriyātram etad āryāvartam / tasmin ya ācāraḥ sa pramāṇam //*
gaṅgā-yamunayor antaram ity eke //
athāpy atra bhāllavino gāthām udāharanti //
paścāt sindhur vidharaṇī sūryasyodayanam puraḥ /
yāvat kṛṣṇā vidhāvanti tāvad dhi brahma-varcasam // iti //

The region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears, west of Kālaka forest,²⁰ south of the Himalayas, and north of Pāriyātra mountains is the land of the Āryas. The practices of that land alone are authoritative.

According to some, the land of the Āryas is the region between the rivers Ganges and Yamunā. In this connection, moreover, the Bhāllavins cite this verse: ‘The boundary river in the west and land of the rising sun in the east—between these as far as the black antelope roams, so far does vedic splendour extend.’ (Olivelle 1999: 134).

Opinions were various enough as we can see, but the region mentioned first was comprised in a territory to the north of Pāriyātra mountains (identified with the Aravallis, the *Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* adds the Vindhya), south of the Himalayas, east of the place where the Sarasvatī disappears,²¹ west of Kālakavana. This ‘dark forest’

“in the region of Gayā”, in Bihar (Muir 1871: 350). Cf. GarP 1.83.1ab: *kīkaṭeṣu gayā puṇyā puṇyam rājagrhaṃ vanam /* “Among the Kīkaṭas, the auspicious Gayā, and the auspicious forest of Rajgir.”

¹⁹ Cf. VāDhS I.8-15: *āryāvartaḥ prāg ādarśāt pratyak kālakavanād udak pāriyātrād dakṣiṇena himavataḥ // uttareṇa ca vindhyasya // tasmin deṣe ye dharmā ye cācārās te sarvatra pratyetyāḥ // na tv anye pratilomaka-dharmāṇām // gaṅgā-yamunayor antare 'py eke // yāvad vā kṛṣṇa-mṛgo vicarati tāvad brahma-varcasam ity anye // athāpi bhāllavino nidāne gāthām udāharanti // paścāt sindhur vidharaṇī sūryasyodayanam puraḥ / yāvat kṛṣṇo 'bhīdhāvati tāvad vai brahma-varcasam iti //* “The region east of where the Sarasvatī disappears, west of Kālaka forest, north of Pāriyātra mountains, and south of the Himalayas is the land of the Āryas; or else, north of the Vindhya mountains. The Laws and practices of that region should be recognized as authoritative everywhere, but not others found in regions with Laws contrary to those. According to some, the land of the Āryas is the region between the Ganges and Yamunā. According to others, vedic splendour extends as far as the black antelope roams. The Bhāllavins, moreover, in their Book of Causes cite this verse: ‘Vedic splendour extends only as far as the black antelopes roam east of the boundary river and west of where the sun rises.’” (Olivelle 1999: 248).

Cf. PatMbh I.475: *kaḥ punaḥ āryāvartaḥ. prāg ādarśāt pratyak kālakavanāt dakṣiṇena himavantam uttareṇa pāriyātram.* PatMbh III.173: *kaḥ punaḥ āryāvarttaḥ. prāg ādarśāt [R adarśanāt] pratyak kālakavanāt dakṣiṇena himavantam uttareṇa pāriyātram.*

²⁰ The variant reading mentioning Kanakhala (a Tīrtha near Haridwār, see MBh 3.88.19) is not attested in the versions of VāDhS e PatMbh, and Olivelle (1999: 379, n.) remarks: “Hultsch’s second edition of B reads *kanakhalād*, ‘from Kanakhala’. But this reading is supported only by two manuscripts. The evidence of Patañjali shows that the correct reading should be *kālakavanād*.”

²¹ The term *ādarśa*, that commonly means ‘mirror’ and indicates also a mountain. Olivelle (1999: 379, n.): “The meaning of *ādarśa* is unclear. Bühler (on Va 1.8) takes it to mean a mountain range called Ādarśa. In all likelihood, however, the term is a secondary derivative of *adarśa*, ‘non-seeing’, and refers to the place where the sacred river Sarasvatī disappears in the Punjab. This place gets the name *vinaśana* (‘perishing’) in later texts: M 2.21.” According to Keith and Macdonell (1912: II, 300), *Vinaśana* was in the Patiala district of Punjab, citing as source the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (XXII, 97), but what is written in that journal, at the entry about the Sarasvatī, is that this river joins the Ghaggar in the Patiala territory, after having disappeared in the sands and emerged again twice in present Haryana. However, *Vinaśana* refers to a place west of the confluence of Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī (see PBr XXV.10.1; 12-16), which can be placed near Hanumangarh in Rajasthan (Kar and Ghose 1984: 223 f.). Near Fort Derawar in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, the river terminated in an inland delta with numerous Harappan sites, although the subsequent abandonment of the area suggests that

is not mentioned out of these definitions of *āryāvarta*, but Manu 2.21 gives us an analogous definition of *madhya-deśa*, the central region:²²

*himavad-vindhyayor madhyam yat prāg vinaśanād api /
pratyag eva prayāgāc ca madhya-deśaḥ prakīrtitaḥ*

(That region) that lies between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas, east of Vinaśana (where the Sarasvatī disappears), and west of Prayāga, is celebrated as Central Region.

Therefore, in the same position as Kālakavana we find here Prayāga, the confluence of Ganges and Yamunā, that according to some delimited *āryāvarta* itself. The Gangetic valley to the east of the confluence was covered by forests and was gradually colonized, and we can observe that in Rām 2.83.21 the *prayāga-vana* (‘forest of Prayāga’) is mentioned.²³

It is a limited area of Northwest India that does not include the Indus valley, suggesting that in the Brahmanical tradition the *ārya* identity did not develop there nor was associated with western regions, as would be expected if a recent migration of Indo-Aryans arrived from there or, on the other hand, if the Indus Valley civilization had been purely ‘Vedic’. It can be significant that the most relevant hint of a Vedic religious practice in ‘Harappan’ sites, namely, the so called ‘fire altars’, were found in special structures in Kalibangan in Rajasthan and Banawali in Haryana,²⁴ both sites associated with the ancient course of the Sarasvatī river. On the other hand, although the Sarasvatī is the sacred river in the most ancient books of the R̥gveda (VI and VII), the Sindhu/Indus is quite present in the later books I, IV, V, VIII and X, especially in the *Nadī Sūkta* (X.75) where it is the most celebrated river, although also Ganges, Yamunā and Sarasvatī are mentioned. It is possible that the Indus valley lost the connection with the Brahmanical culture in late Vedic times because of foreign invasions: as Pargiter (1922: 285 f.) remarks, the Purāṇic tradition of the dynasties after the battle of the *Mahābhārata* does not include the countries to

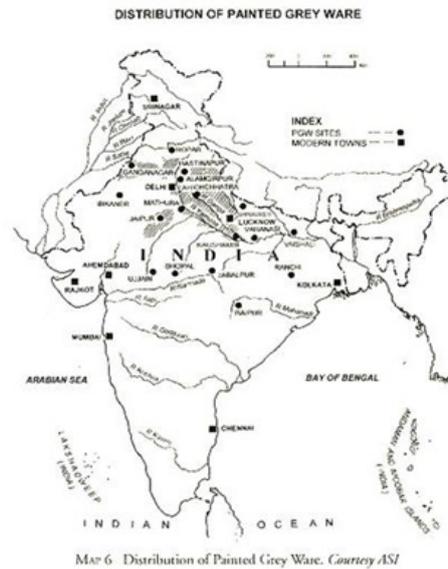
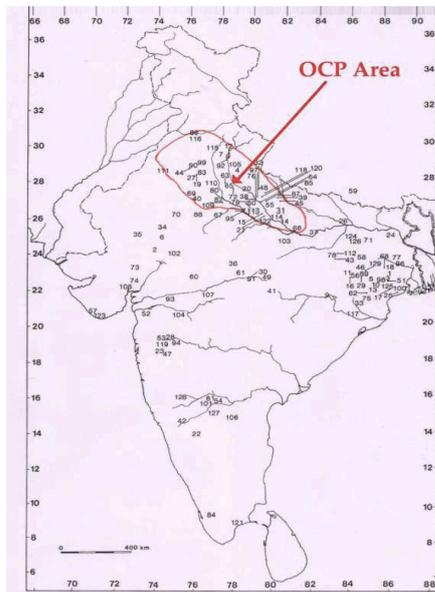
after the Mature Harappan period the flow was no more sufficient to reach the delta (Possehl 2002: 239). However, Vinaśana must have been between Hanumangarh (the place of the confluence) and Derawar, also in the Mahābhārata period, when the Dṛṣadvatī continues to be mentioned as the southern border of Kurukṣetra (MBh 3.81.175).

²² The earliest attestation of the concept of a central region is in AiBr 8.14.3: *asyām dhruvāyām madhyamāyām pratiṣṭhāyām disi ye keca kuru-pañcālānām rājānaḥ sa-vaśośīnarānām rājyāyaiva te bhiṣicyante, rājety enān abhiṣiktān ācakṣata*. “In this firm central stable region, whatever kings (there are) of the Kuru-Pañcālas, of Vaśas and Uśīnaras, they are anointed for kingship, ‘king’ they call them when anointed.” Cf. Keith and Macdonell 1912: II, 125. The stress on stability of this region is noteworthy, since it suggests that it was a region inhabited for a long time and without significant political and ethnic changes in the late Vedic period. Also to be noted is the presence of Uśīnaras of Punjab, that later disappear from the concept of central region (Keith and Macdonell 1912: II, 126), showing that at the time of AiBr Punjab was still considered part of it. In MBh 13.33.20 (see below), Uśīnaras are among degraded Kṣatriyas. Cf. VP 2.3.15: *ime kuru-pañcālā madhya-deśādāyo janāḥ /* “These Kuru-Pañcālas, the people of the Central Region and so on.”

²³ See Guruge 1991: 60-62. A geographical name that is found in the Epics is also *yamunā-vana* ‘forest of the Yamunā’.

²⁴ See Singh (2008: 173), where he mentions also the fire altars of Lothal and Vagad in Gujarat, Amri in Baluchistan and Rakhigarhi in Haryana, but stating that “only at Kalibangan and Banawali they may have signified some community event; in the other cases, they seem to have been associated with domestic rituals. Again, as in the case with female figurines, the fact that the ‘fire altars’ have been found at a few sites but are absent at most, indicates variations in religious practice within the vast area of the Harappan culture.”

the west of the Kurus (Haryana) and Avanti (western Madhya Pradesh), and in the *Mahābhārata* the Punjab nations are ‘unsparingly reprobated’.²⁵



After the ‘Mature Harappan’ period, in the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, the *āryāvarta* of Baudhāyana and Patañjali was inhabited by people of the Ochre Coloured Pottery culture²⁶ and later of the Painted Grey Ware (1300-300 BC), as shown in the maps above. Although these two traditions were quite different, the first one closer to the Harappan tradition, the second to the Gangetic one,²⁷ it seems that there was a long-lasting cultural area, which, according to the Indian historical tradition, was occupied by Paurava kingdoms. Moreover, Painted Grey Ware started from the Ghaggar (Sarasvatī) valley, the core area of Vedic and Brahmanical culture where also the Bara-OCP cultural complex originated (Uesugi 2018: 9-12).

The definition of the Doab between Ganges and Yamunā as *āryāvarta* could belong to a late Vedic age, when the political and cultural center was in the Kuru-Pañcāla region, but it seems that it remained a minority view.²⁸ The definition of the

²⁵ See MBh 8.27-30, e.g.: *madrakāḥ sindhu-sauvīrā dharmam vidyuh katham tv iha / pāpa-deśodbhavā mleccā dharmānām avicakṣaṇāḥ* “How, indeed, would the Madrakas and the Sindhu-Sauvīras know the (religious) Norm, being born in a sinful country, being barbarians and ignorant of duties?”

²⁶ See Kumar 2017: 102-105. As the author says, there is a common material culture characterized by Ochre Coloured Pottery (and ‘copper hoards’) from Bara in Punjab to Faizabad (Ayodhya) in Uttar Pradesh, and the map (at p.104) clearly shows the eastern end around the confluence of Ganges and Yamunā. Also the subsequent Painted Grey Ware had a similar extension (as shown in the dark area in the map on the right, retrieved from <http://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/the-later-vedic-phase-transition-to-state-and-social-orders/2149>).

²⁷ See Uesugi 2018: 11-12 and 18, where it is said: “The progressive colonisation of the vast alluvial plain of the Ganga valley resulted in the emergence of regional societies represented by PGW and BRW/BSW. The primary colonisation of the region was done by the Neolithic community local to the Ganga valley, but the expansion of the Bara-OCP cultural complex into the western part of the region may have facilitated the colonisation process. It is not unlikely that the spread of BRW/BSW into the western part of the Ganga valley in the mid- to late second millennium BCE was triggered by the expansion of the Bara-OCP cultural complex.” This means that first there was the eastward expansion of Bara-OCP people, then a westward expansion of Gangetic people and culture, but we can suppose that the first expansion created a cultural area that was not eliminated by the second wave, and PGW, although influenced by Gangetic culture, moved from the west (Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh).

²⁸ An interesting comparison is MBh 1.82.5, where the land between Ganges and Yamunā is identified with the center of the earth: *yayātir uvāca / gaṅgā-yamunayor madhye kṛtsno 'yaṁ viṣayas tava /*

Bhāllavins actually does not concern the *āryāvarta* but the area of Vedic culture (*brahmavarcas*). It is interesting that the ‘boundary river’ (*sindhu vidharaṇī*) in the west seems to refer to the Indus that was the border of India according to Hellenistic authors, as we have seen. The reference to the habitat of the black antelope widens much the horizon, including, if taken to the letter, great part of India, considering that such habitat extended also to the zones not covered by forests of southern India and Bengal. However Baudhāyana in the continuation (I.2.13-15) indicates as polluting the simple fact of going to several regions outside the *āryāvarta* in a strict sense:

*avantayo 'ṅga-magadhāḥ surāṣṭrā dakṣiṇāpathāḥ /
upāvṛt-sindhu-sauvīrā ete saṁkīrṇayonayah //
āraṭṭān kāraskarān puṇḍrān sauvīrān vaṅgān kaliṅgān prānūnān iti ca gatvā
punastomena yajeta sarvaprṣṭhayā vā //
athāpy udāharanti / padbhyāṁ sa kurute pāpaṁ yaḥ kaliṅgān prapadyate /
rṣayo niṣkr̥tiṁ tasya prāhur vaiśvānaraṁ haviḥ //*

The inhabitants of Avanti, Aṅga, Magadha, Surāṣṭra, the Deccan, Upāvṛt, and Sindh, as well as the Sauvīras, are of mixed blood. If someone visits the lands of the Āraṭṭas, Kāraskaras, Puṇḍras, Sauvīras, Vaṅgas, Kaliṅgas, or Prānūnas, he should offer a Punastoma or a Sarvapṛṣṭha sacrifice.

Now, they also quote:

When someone travels to the land of the Kaliṅgas he commits a sin through his feet. The seers have prescribed the Vaiśvānarī sacrifice as an expiation for him. (Olivelle 1999: 134).

This clearly shows that most of the regions around the *āryāvarta*, in central India (Avanti, Kāraskara), southern India (Deccan), eastern India (Aṅga, Magadha, Puṇḍra, Vaṅga, Kaliṅga), of Gujarat (Surāṣṭra), Sindh (Sindhu-Sauvīra) and Punjab (Āraṭṭa) were seen as foreign and polluting. As a matter of fact, in the Brahmanical worldview, the Other, the non-Ārya, was also impure, because he did not follow the Brahmanical norms that, according to Baudhāyana, were present in the *āryāvarta*. Also this goes against a recent origin outside South Asia, and against an origin of Brahmanical culture in the Indus valley, which was not seen as a place of origin, but as a peripheral area inhabited by people of mixed blood. This idea of a region inhabited by pure *āryas* between Haryana and Prayāga implies a long tradition of settlement that reaches the age of Baudhāyana and Vāsiṣṭha (2nd-1st centuries BC). Some centuries later, the idea has changed, because Manu 2.22-24 gives us a different definition of the region of the Āryas:

*ā samudrāt tu vai pūrvād ā samudrāc ca paścimāt /
tayoṛ evāntaraṁ giryoṛ āryāvartaṁ vidur budhāḥ //*²⁹

madhye pṛthivyās tvaṁ rājā bhrātaro 'ntyādhipās tava // “Yayāti said: ‘This whole country between the rivers Ganges and Yamunā is yours. You are king in the middle of the Earth, while your brothers are lords of the outlying (regions).” Cf. MatP 36.5, where we find the same verses, with a difference in the last *pāda*: *bhrātaro 'nte 'dhipās tava //* “your brothers are lords at the border.” Cf. also MBh 13.67.3: *madhyadeśe... gaṅgāyamunayoṛ madhye* “in the Central Region [...] between Ganges and Yamunā.”

²⁹ Cf. MBh 14.96.15d@004_2494-5: *ā samudrāc ca yat pūrvād ā samudrāc ca paścimāt / himavad-vindhyayoṛ madhyam āryāvartaṁ pracakṣate*. Cf. *Amarakośa* 2.1.17: *āryāvartaḥ puṇya-bhūmīḥ madhyam vindhya-himālayoḥ* “The region of the Āryas, the auspicious land, is between the Vindhya and the Himalayas.”

*kṛṣṇa-sāras tu carati mṛgo yatra svabhāvataḥ /
sa jñeyo yajñīyo deśo mleccha-deśas tv ataḥ paraḥ //
etān dvi-jātayo deśān samśrayeran prayatnataḥ /
śūdras tu yasmin kasmin vā nivased vṛtti-karśitaḥ //*

But (the region) between the eastern ocean and the western ocean, and between those two mountains (Himalayas e Vindhya), the wise know as region of the Āryas. That land where the black antelope naturally roams, must be known to be fit for sacrifices, while what is different from that is a country of barbarians. Twice-born men should diligently dwell (only) in those countries; but a Śūdra, distressed for subsistence, may reside anywhere.

We see that Manu widens the *āryāvarta* compared to Baudhāyana, Vāsiṣṭha and Patañjali, but he does not include the southern Dravidian India, which apparently was not a place suitable for the Āryas. The definition here could be mainly ethnic and linguistic, but it certainly implies also the lack of the Brahmanical normative system. The late *Viṣṇu Smṛti* (84.4) clarifies that *āryāvarta* is where the system of the four *varṇas* is present:

*cātur-varṇya-vyavasthānaṃ yasmin deśe na vidyate /
sa mleccha-deśo jijñeya āryāvartas tataḥ paraḥ*

The country where the differentiation of the four classes is not found, should be known as a country of barbarians; (the country that is) different from that (should be known) as region of the Āryas.³⁰

This, as Deshpande (1993: 85) observes, implies that a region can be ‘aryanized’ bringing the system of the four *varṇas*, that was surely perceived as distinctive of the Indian world, in contrast with, for instance, Greeks and Iranians, as also the *Assalāyana Sutta* of the Buddhist Pāli Canon says (MN II 149): *Yonas* (Greeks) and *Kambojas* and other peripheral countries (*pacchantimesu janapadesu*) have only two classes (*vaṇṇa*), freemen or masters (*ayya*)³¹ and slaves (*dāsa*).

It remains, however, to wonder how much the notion of Aryan land outside the Brahmanical ideology was more ethnolinguistic than normative (that is, based on a social order). We have already seen how in a Jain context it was possible to be Ārya for language, and another category was that of the Āryas for region (*khettāriya*), with a long list of regions going from Sindh (*Sindhusovīra*), to Gujarat (*Suratṭha*), to Bengal (*Vaṅga*), to Orissa (*Kaliṅga*), thus including territories regarded as impure by Baudhāyana (Deshpande 1993: 10-11). Among the barbarians (*milakkhu*) we find non-Indian peoples like the Greeks (*Javaṇa*) and the Scythians (*Saga*), but also Dravidian peoples (*Damila*, *Pulinda*),³² what confirms that also for Jains there was no

³⁰ Cf. *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* 93: *pūrvāparayoḥ samudrayor himavad-vindhyayoś cāntaram āryāvartataḥ / tasmimś cātur-varṇyaṃ cātur-āśramaṃ ca*. “(The land that is) between the eastern and the western ocean, the Himalayas and the Vindhya, is the region of the Āryas, there are the four classes and the four stages of life.”

Cf. *Abhidhānappadīpikā-ṭīkā* 186 (ChS): *Byavatthā catu-vaṇṇānaṃ, yasmimś dese na vijjate; Milakkha-deso so vutto, majjha-bhūmi tato paraṃ*. “That country where the distinction of the four classes is not found, is called ‘country of barbarians’, (the country that is) different from that (is called) ‘central land’.”

³¹ Pāli *ayya* corresponds to Sanskrit *arya* ‘lord, master’ (CPD: 412).

³² Deshpande 1993: 9.

special difference between non-Aryans living in India and those outside the subcontinent, and suggests that the *āriya* identity of a region was based on linguistic and cultural affinities.

However, the Jain attitude was inclusive: in the *Aupapātika-sūtra* / *Ovavāiyasutta* and in the *Samavāyāṅga-sūtra*, Mahāvīra teaches to *āriyas* and *aṇāriyas* in Ardhamāgadhī, but miraculously everyone understands in its own language.³³ Moreover, among the various categories of *āriyas* we find also those based on purely ethical and spiritual qualities: Ārya or rather noble for wisdom (*ñāṇāriya*), for realization (*daṃsaṇāriya*) and for conduct (*carittāriya*).

In a Buddhist context, rather than *āryāvarta*³⁴ the term *āryāyatana* (Pāli *ariyāyatana*) is used, identified with the central region(s) (*madhya-janapada-*, *majjhima-desa*, *majjhima-janapada-*).³⁵ The most frequent opposition is with the border or peripheral countries (*pratyanta-janapada-*, *paccantima-janapada-*) inhabited by barbarians (*dasyu*, *mleccha*, *milakkha*).³⁶ In the Theravāda Vinaya³⁷ and

³³ Alver 2015: 71; Deshpande 1993: 13-14.

³⁴ An exception is Mvu II.262: *na khalu punar bhikṣavaḥ sa pṛthivī-pradeśo pratyantikehi janapadehi samstihati atha khalu... anumajjhimehi janapadehi samstihati / na khalu... mlecchehi janapadehi samstihati atha khalu... āryāvartehi janapadehi samstihati* / “That place of the earth, monks, (where the Bodhisattva reaches enlightenment) is not situated in peripheral provinces, but... in central provinces... it is not situated in barbarian provinces, but... in provinces of the land of the Āryas.”

³⁵ Śbh I 10: *āryāyatane pratyājātiḥ katamā / yathāpīhaikatyo madhyeṣu janapadeṣu pratyājāto bhavati, pūrvavad yāvad yatra gatiḥ sat-puruṣāṇām / iyam ucyate āryāyatane pratyājātiḥ*. “What is rebirth in the abode of Āryas? Because anyone here takes rebirth in the central regions, as aforesaid, as far as there is the place (of rebirth) of virtuous people, this is called ‘rebirth in the abode of Āryas’.” Here *ārya* has a moral connotation, since it is identified with *sat-puruṣa* ‘virtuous, good man’, consistently with the Buddhist tradition (cf. PTSD: 680, about *sappurisa*). AN III 441,6: *ariyāyatane paccājāti dullabhā lokasmiṃ*. “Rebirth in the abode of Āryas is difficult to obtain in the world.” Mp: *ariyāyatane ti majjhima-dese*. “ ‘In the abode of the Āryas’ (means) ‘in the central region’.” Sv: *Yāvata ariyaṃ āyatanan ti yattakaṃ ariyaka-manussānaṃ osaraṇa-tthānaṃ nāma atthi*. “ ‘As far as there is the Aryan abode’ (means) ‘as far as there is the place visited by Aryan men’.” As we have seen in n.15, *ariyaka* has a specific ethnolinguistic meaning, distinct from the moral and spiritual meaning that *ariya/ārya* has usually in Buddhism.

³⁶ AN I 35,15-17: *evam eva kho bhikkhave appakā te sattā ye majjhimesu janapadesu paccājāyanti, atha kho ete va sattā bahutarā ye paccantimesu janapadesu paccājāyanti aviññātāresu milakkhesu* “So, monks, few are those beings who are reborn in the central regions, but more numerous are these beings who are reborn in the peripheral countries, among barbarians who do not understand.” Cf. above n.16.

³⁷ Vin I 197, 20-29; 31-34: *tatr’ime paccantimā janapadā: puratthimāya disāya kaṇḍalāya nāma nigamo, tassa parena mahāsālā, tato parā paccantimā janapadā, orato majjhe. puratthima-dakkhināya disāya sallavatī nāma nadī, tato parā paccantimā janapadā, orato majjhe. dakkhināya disāya setakaṇṇikaṃ nāma nigamo, tato parā paccantimā janapadā, orato majjhe. paccimāya disāya thūnaṃ nāma brāhmaṇa-gāmo, tato parā paccantimā janapadā, orato majjhe. uttarāya disāya usīra-ddhajo nāma pabbato, tato parā paccantimā janapadā, orato majjhe... avanti-dakkhinā-pathe bhikkhave kaṇhuttarā bhūmi kharā go-kaṇṭaka-hatā. anujānāmi bhikkhave sabba-paccantimesu janapadesu gaṇaṃ-gaṇūpāhanaṃ*. “In this passage the following are the border countries referred to. To the East is the town Kagaṅgala, and beyond it Mahāsālā. Beyond that is border country; this side of it is the Middle country. To the South-east is the river Salalavatī. Beyond that is border country; this side of it is the Middle country. To the South is the town Setakannika. Beyond that is border country; this side of it is the Middle country. To the West is the Brāhman district of Thūna. Beyond that is border country; this side of it is the Middle country. To the North is the mountain range called Usīradhaga. Beyond that is border country; this side of it is the Middle country. [...] In the Southern country and in Avanti, O Bhikkhus, the soil is black on the surface and rough, and trampled by the feet of cattle. I allow the use, in all the border countries, O Bhikkhus, of shoes with thick linings.” (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1882: 38-39). The translation “In the Southern country and in Avanti” is actually wrong, since *avanti-*

in the *Divyāvadāna*³⁸ we find a definition of the borders of such central region, some of them of difficult identification, but even southern Avanti in present Madhya Pradesh was excluded, analogously to the *āryāvarta* of Baudhāyana. On the other hand, this central region clearly extended much more to the east, possibly up to Bangladesh,³⁹ while to the west it should be up to Kurukṣetra (Thaneswar).⁴⁰ In terms of archaeological cultures, it includes both the area of Painted Grey Ware and the core area of Northern Black Polished Ware in the eastern Gangetic valley around the mid-first millennium BC. The two areas finally merged in a unified North Indian cultural region over the Gangetic valley in the following centuries, when Buddhism was developing (Uesugi 2018: 11; 14-17).

The linguistic aspect seems here to be not completely relevant, since many of the excluded regions should have been mainly inhabited by Indo-Aryan speakers: the differences that are remarked in the Vinaya lie in the difficulty to find *bhikkhus* for the ordination, in the uneven soil and different customs, like the use of animal skins. According to the Pāli commentaries, it is in this *majjhima-desa* that Buddhas, *paccekabuddhas*, great disciples, Cakravartins, other Kṣatriyas and Brahmins appear.⁴¹

dakkhiṇā-patha means ‘Southern Avanti’, having as capital Māhissati (Māhiṣmatī) (cf. DPPN; CPD: 456).

³⁸ Divy 13: *tatra katamo 'ntaḥ katamaḥ pratyantaḥ? pūrveṇopāli puṇḍa-varḍhanaṃ nāma nagaram, tasya pūrveṇa puṇḍa-kakṣo nāma parvataḥ, tataḥ pareṇa pratyantaḥ / dakṣiṇena śarāvātī nāma nagarī, tasyāḥ pareṇa sarāvātī nāma nadī, so 'ntaḥ, tataḥ pareṇa pratyantaḥ / paścimena sthūnopasthūnakau brāhmaṇa-grāmakau, so 'ntaḥ, tataḥ pareṇa pratyantaḥ / uttareṇa uśīra-giriḥ so 'ntaḥ, tataḥ pareṇa pratyantaḥ.* “At this regard, what is border, and what is bordering (country)?” “To the east, Upāli, (there is) the town called Puṇḍavardhana, to the east of it the mountain called Puṇḍakakṣa, beyond that it is a bordering country. To the south (there is) the town called Śarāvātī, beyond that the river called Śarāvātī, that is a border, beyond that is a bordering country. To the west, the two villages of Brahmins Sthūṇa and Upasthūṇaka, that is a border, beyond that is a bordering country. To the north, Uśīragiri is a border, beyond that is a bordering country’.”

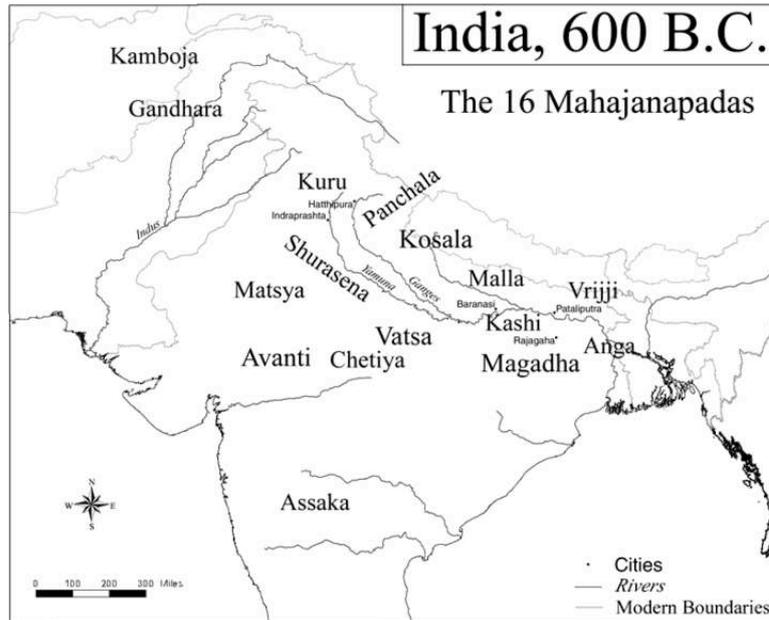
Cf. Vins 7.1-5: *maryādā madhya-deśasya / pūrveṇa puṇḍa-kaccho nāma dāvaḥ purataḥ puṇḍa-varḍhanasya / śarāvatyās tad-upākhyā nadī dakṣiṇetra / paścimena sthūnopasthūṇau brāhmaṇa-grāmakau / uśīra-girir uttareṇa.*

³⁹ Kajaṅgala has been identified with Kankjol near Rajmahal in Jharkhand, close to the border of Bangladesh (Majumdar 1943: 64; 411-413). Churn Law (1932: 28, n.18) reports that Xuanzang placed it at a distance of above 400 li (129 km.) east from Champā (Bhāgalpur in Bihar). Puṇḍavardhana or Puṇḍravardhana of the *Divyāvadāna* is instead more to the east, in the Bogra district of Bangladesh, on the river Karatoyā (Majumdar 1943: 5).

⁴⁰ Thūṇa in Ud I 78 is a village of Brahmins of the Mallas (*Thūṇaṃ nāma Mallānaṃ brāhmaṇa-gāmo*), who lived to the east of Kosala, a region that surely belonged to the *majjhima-desa* since it is one of the most frequented by the Buddha, particularly Sāvattī/Śrāvastī, where is set this speech itself in the Theravāda Vinaya and in the *Divyāvadāna*. So, if that village is really meant in the Vinaya passage, there is probably a mistake in the tradition of the text. Churn Law (1932: 2, n.2; 34), cites Mazumdar’s proposal that Thūṇa is actually to be identified with Thaneswar (in present Haryana), since it was indicated as the westernmost part of the Buddhist central region by Xuanzang. Cf. Churn Law 1932: xxi, about the geography of India in Xuanzang: “Central India comprised the whole of the Gangetic provinces from Thaneswar to the head of the Delta, and from the Himalaya mountains to the banks of the Nabadā.” We can also add that the Buddha went also to the realm of the Kurus, where some important Suttas were pronounced (see DPPN, under the entry ‘Kuru’; cf. Churn Law 1932: 17 f.).

⁴¹ Sv, *Bodhisattadhammatāvāṇṇanā* (ChS): *Majjhimadeso nāma – ‘puratthimāya disāya gajaṅgalaṃ nāma nigamo’ ti ādinā nayena vinaye vuttova. So āyāmato tīṇi yojana-satāni, vitthārato adḍha-teyyāni, parikkhepato nava-yojana-satānīti. Etasmiṃhi padese buddhā pacceka-buddhā agga-sāvaka āsīti mahā-sāvaka cakkavatti-rājāno aññe ca mahesakkhā khattiya-brāhmaṇa-gahapati-mahāsālā uppajanti.* “The Central Region: ‘In the eastern direction, the town called Gajaṅgala’, and so forth, is said in the Vinaya. In length it is of three hundred Yojanas, in breadth two and a half (hundred Yojanas), its circumference is nine hundred Yojanas. In this region Buddhas, Paccekabuddhas, the

The concepts of Jambudvīpa and Bhāratavarṣa



However, the geography of the Pāli Canon (e.g. AN I 212 f., etc.) mentions 16 *mahājanapadas*: Kāsī, Kosala, Aṅga, Magadha, Vajji, Mallā, Cetiya (Cedi), Vamśā (Vatsa), Kuru, Pañcāla, Macchā (Matsya), Sūrasena, Assaka (Aśmaka), Avanti, Gandhāra and Kamboja (see the map above⁴²). They comprise a great part of ‘Indo-Aryan’ northern and central India, the first 14 according to Churn Law (1932: 2 f.) may be included in *majjhimadesa*, while the last two, Gandhāra e Kamboja, may be considered part of the northern region.⁴³ The *majjhima-desa* was part of *jambu-dīpa*⁴⁴ (‘continent of the rose-apple tree’, Sanskrit *jambu-dvīpa* or *jambū-dvīpa*), essentially corresponding to our geographical concept of India, thus existing at least at the time of the formation of the Pāli Canon. It was conceived as the subcontinent to the south of mount Meru in Buddhist cosmology⁴⁵ (and in the *Mahābhārata*⁴⁶), while in Purāṇic

main disciples, the eighty great disciples, the Cakravartin kings, and the other powerful Kṣatriyas, Brahmins, rich householders are born.”

⁴² Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ancient_india.png.

⁴³ However, at p.3, n.1, he remarks that Assaka and Avanti should be placed in the Dakkhināpatha or Southern country because “both the settlements that are found mentioned in Buddhist sources lay outside the borders of the Madhyadeśa” (cf. pp.21-23). It is noteworthy that they are placed after the others and before the northern countries. On the other hand, Mvu I.198 refers to the *madhyadeśas* (in the plural) in connection with the 16 *mahājanapādas*: the *devas* of Tuṣita are invited to be reborn in the 16 great provinces, in the central regions (*soḍaśahi mahājanapadehi madhyadeśehi upapadyatha*). This probably reflects a later geographical concept similar to that of the *āryāvarta* of the Manusmṛti.

⁴⁴ In Mp, *Ekadhammapāḷi-catutthavaggavaṇṇanā* (ChS), we read another view, after the usual quotation of the borders of the central region from the Vinaya: *Sakalo pi hi jambu-dīpo majjhima-padeso nāma, sesa-dīpā paccantimā janapadā*. “Even the whole continent of the rose-apple tree is indeed the Central Region, the remaining continents are peripheral regions.” This means that at the time of this commentary (5th century CE or later) in some Buddhist milieus the whole Indian subcontinent was considered a uniform reality, identified as the Central Region of civilization.

⁴⁵ Cf. AKBh 161-162: *catvāro dvīpās caturṣu sumeru-pārśveṣu... jambūdvīpo... pūrveṇa sumeru-pārśve pūrva-vidheho dvīpaḥ... paścimena sumeru-pārśve ’para-godānīyo dvīpaḥ... uttareṇa sumeru-pārśve uttara-kuru-dvīpaḥ* “At the four sides of Sumeru there are the four continents: Jambudvīpa... to the east, at the side of Sumeru, there is the continent Pūrvavideha... to the west, at the side of Sumeru, the continent Aparagodānīya... to the north, at the side of Sumeru, the continent Uttarakuru.”

cosmology Jambudvīpa is the central continent that includes the Meru region (*Ilāvṛta*) in the middle and eight regions (*varṣa*) in different directions. In this context, India is rather to be identified with the *bhāratam varṣam*, the southern part of Jambudvīpa. This name appears in the *Mahābhārata*⁴⁷ and Purāṇas and is clearly connected with the royal race of the Bhāratas that evidently was able to establish itself as the main one for the definition of India, as if it were their own possession. VP 2.1.28-31 explains that it is so called because it was given by king Ṛṣabha to his son Bharata before devoting himself to asceticism in the forest,⁴⁸ and was transmitted then to his descendants. It is so defined in VP 2.3.1-2:

*uttaram yat samudrasya himādreś caiva dakṣiṇam /
varṣam tad bhāratam nāma bhārātī yatra samtatiḥ //
nava-yojana-sāhasro vistāro 'sya mahā-mune /
karma-bhūmir iyaṃ svargam apavargam ca gacchatām //*

The country that lies north of the ocean, and south of the Himalayas, is called Bhārata, where (dwells) the Bhārata lineage. It is nine thousand Yojanas in extent, great sage, this is the land of (meritorious) works, of those who go to heaven, or obtain emancipation.

The last statement is clarified later (VP 2.3.19-20; 22):

*catvāri bhārata varṣe yugāny atra mahā-mune /
kṛtam tretā dvāparam ca kaliś cānyatra na kvacit //
tapas tapyanti yatayo juhvate cātra yajvinaḥ /
dānāni cātra dīyante para-lokārtham ādarāt //*

*atrāpi bhāratam śreṣṭham jambū-dvīpe mahāmune /
yato hi karma-bhūr eṣā hy ato 'nyā bhoga-bhūmayāḥ //*

Here in Bhāratavarṣa there are four ages, great sage: Kṛta, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali, elsewhere (they are not found) anywhere. Here hermits practice asceticism, and sacrificers offer oblations; and here gifts are distributed, for the sake of the other world. [...] And Bhārata is the best part of Jambudvīpa, for this is the land of (meritorious) works, while the others are lands of enjoyment (of the fruit of meritorious works).

India is presented as the only place where it is possible to accumulate merits for paradise, in the other places life lasts thousands of years, there is neither old age nor the decay of the four Yugas, but also the distinction between *dharma* and *adharmā* is

⁴⁶ MBh 6.7.11: *tasya pārśve tv ime dvīpās catvāraḥ samsthitāḥ prabho / bhadraśvaḥ ketu-mālaś ca jambū-dvīpaś ca bhārata / uttarās caiva kuravaḥ kṛta-punya-pratiśrayāḥ* “Beside this (mount Meru) are situated, O lord, these four continents: Bhadrāśva, Ketumāla, Jambudvīpa, O descendant of Bharata, and Uttarakuru, which is the abode of those who have accomplished meritorious acts.”

⁴⁷ MBh 6.7.6ab: *idaṃ tu bhāratam varṣam tato haimavatam param*. “This is the Bhārata land, beyond this (Himālaya) is the Haimavata (country).”

⁴⁸ VP 2.1.28-31: *abhiśicya sutam vīram bharatam prthivīpatiḥ / tapase sa mahābhāgaḥ pulahasyāśramam yayau [...] tataś ca bhāratam varṣam etal lokaṣu gīyate / bharatāya yataḥ pitrā dattam prātiṣṭhatā vanam*. “(Ṛṣabha) having anointed as lord of the earth his son, the heroic Bharata, went to the hermitage of Pulaha for asceticism. [...] The country is called Bhārata here in the world from the time that it was given to Bharata by his father, on his retiring to the forest.” Cf. Pargiter 1922: 131. This tradition corresponds to the Jain genealogy from Nābhi to Ṛṣabhadeva to the Cakravartin king Bharata (Sangave 2001: 105-106).

absent.⁴⁹ Therefore, the difference between India and the other countries is really profound: only in India, one would say, there is history and civilization; the remaining part of the continent is immersed in a mythical reality out of time.

Bhāratavarṣa is divided into nine parts, and the Indian peninsula can be more precisely identified, within Bhāratavarṣa, with the ninth *dvīpa*, surrounded by the ocean,⁵⁰ and VP 2.3.8-9 adds:

*yojanānām sahasraṃ tu dvīpo 'yaṃ dakṣiṇottarāt /
pūrve kirātā yasyānte paścime yavanāḥ sthitāḥ //
brāhmaṇāḥ kṣatriyā vaiśyā madhye śūdrās ca bhāgaśaḥ /
ijyāyudha-vañijyādyair vartayanto vyavasthitāḥ //*

This continent is a thousand Yojanas from north to south. On its eastern border dwell the Kirātas; on the western border, the Yavanas; in the center Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras, established according to their divisions, subsisting on sacrifice, arms, trade, and so on.⁵¹

Again, the system of the four *varṇas* is looked upon as a distinctive feature of the central region, while Yavanas (Bactrian Greeks) and Kirātas (the Tibeto-Burman people of the mountains) are on the fringes, evidently excluded from this system. Moreover, among the peoples inhabiting the continent there are non-Aryans, as is explicitly said in the sixth book of the *Mahābhārata*, where we learn that *āryas* and *mlecchas* as well as people resulting from a mix of both drink the waters of the rivers of Bhāratavarṣa.⁵² We see thus that within India remained an internal distinction

⁴⁹ VP 2.1.24-26ab: *yāni kimpuruṣādīni varṣāṇy aṣṭau mahā-mune / teṣāṃ svābhāvīkī siddhiḥ sukha-prāyā hy ayatnataḥ // viparyayo na teṣv asti jarā-mṛtyu-bhayaṃ na ca / dharmādharmāu na teṣv āstāṃ nottamādhama-madhyamāḥ // na teṣv asti yugāvasthā kṣetreṣv aṣṭasu sarvadā /* “These eight countries, Kimpuruṣa and the rest, great sage, have natural prosperity, abounding in happiness without effort. In them there is no alteration, nor the dread of decrepitude and death: there are not law and unrighteousness, nor (difference of degree of) highest, lowest and intermediate. In those eight regions there is never the entrance into the state of (one of the four) ages.” VP 2.2.52-54: *yāni kimpuruṣādyāni varṣāṇy aṣṭau mahā-mune / na teṣu śoko nāyāso nodvegāḥ kṣud-bhayādīkam // svasthāḥ prajā nirātānkāḥ sarva-duḥkha-vivarjitāḥ / daśa dvādaśa-varṣāṇām sahasrāṇi sthirāyusaḥ // na teṣu varṣate devo bhaumāny ambhāṃsi teṣu vai / kṛta-tretādīkā naiva teṣu sthāneṣu kalpanā //* “In these eight realms of Kimpuruṣa and the rest (except for Bhārata), great sage, there is no sorrow, nor weariness, nor anxiety, nor hunger, nor fear, and so on; their inhabitants are healthy, free from disease, exempt from all (kinds of) pain, and live a stable life for ten or twelve thousand years. The god never sends rain upon them, since there are waters coming from the earth. In those places there is no formation of Kṛta, Tretā, and so on.”

Later on it is also said that in Plakṣadvīpa there are no Yugas, everything is fixed at the level of Tretāyuga. VP 2.4.13-14: *apasarpīṇī na teṣāṃ vai na caivotsarpīṇī dvija / na tv evāsti yugāvasthā teṣu sthāneṣu saptasu // tretā-yuga-samaḥ kālah sarva-daiva mahā-mate /* “They have neither decrease nor increase, Brahmin, neither is there the entrance into the condition of (various) ages in these seven places (of Plakṣadvīpa): the time is there always similar to that of the Tretā age, great sage.”

⁵⁰ VP 2.3.6-7: *bhāratasyāśya varṣasya nava bhedān niśāmaya / indra-dvīpaḥ kaseruś ca tāmra-parṇo gabhastimān // nāga-dvīpas tathā saumyo gāndharvas tv atha vāruṇaḥ / ayaṃ tu navamas teṣāṃ dvīpaḥ sāgara-saṃvṛtaḥ* “Learn the nine parts of this Bhāratavarṣa: Indradvīpa, Kaseru, Tāmraparṇa, Gabhastimat, Nāgadvīpa, Saumya, Gāndharva, and Vāruṇa; and this is the ninth continent among them, surrounded by the ocean.”

⁵¹ Cf. MatP 114.11-12: *dvīpo hy upaniviṣṭo 'yaṃ mlecchair anteṣu sarvaśaḥ / yavanāś ca kirātās ca tasyānte pūrva-paścime //* “This continent is inhabited by barbarians on the borders on all sides, Yavanas and Kirātas are on its eastern and western border.”

⁵² MBh 6.10.5ab: *atra te varṇayīṣyāmi varṣaṃ bhārata bhāratam; 6.10.12cd-13: āryā mlecchās ca kauravya tair miśrāḥ puruṣā vibho // nadīḥ pibanti bahulā gaṅgāṃ sindhuṃ sarasvatīm / godāvarīm narmadām ca bāhudām ca mahānadīm...* “I will now describe, O descendant of Bharata, the Bhārata

between racial or cultural entities that could be mixed but not merged into a ‘national’ unity.

On the other hand, the system of the four *varṇas* is not necessarily exclusive of India in Purāṇic geography, because it is found in the other *dvīpas*, the continents surrounding Jambudvīpa, even if with other names,⁵³ with the exception of the most extreme Puṣkaradvīpa, that is literally defined as a terrestrial paradise (*bhauma-svarga-*), free of classes, religious norms and punishments, disease and old age.⁵⁴

Foreign peoples as degraded Āryas

According to the *Manusmṛti* (2.17-20) in that heart of Brahmanical India that are *brahmāvarta* and *brahmarśideśa* are found the correct norms for all men on earth:

17. *sarasvatī-dṛṣadvatyor deva-nadir yad antaram /
taṃ deva-nirmitaṃ deśaṃ brahmāvartaṃ pracakṣate*
18. *tasmin deśe ya ācāraḥ pāraparya-kramāgataḥ /
varṇānāṃ sāntarālānāṃ sa sad-ācāra ūcyate*
19. *kuru-kṣetraṃ ca matsyāś ca pañcālāḥ śūra-senakāḥ /
eṣa brahma-rṣi-deśo vai brahmāvartād anantaraḥ*
20. *etad-deśa-prasūtasya sakāśād agra-janmanaḥ /
svaṃ svam caritraṃ śīkṣeran pṛthivyāṃ sarva-mānavāḥ*

17. That land, created by the gods, which lies between the two divine rivers Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī, (the sages) call Brahmāvarta.

18. The conduct handed down in regular succession in that country, of the (four chief) classes and the mixed (castes), is called the virtuous conduct.

19. Kurukṣetra, (the country of the) Matsyas, (of the) Pañcālas, and Śūrasenakas, this is, indeed, the country of the Brahmanical Ṛṣis, contiguous to Brahmāvarta.⁵⁵

20. From the presence of a Brahmin, born in that country, all men on earth should learn their own conduct.

This shows that Brahmanical India was ideally conceived as a model of behaviour for every human being, as already implicit in the concept of *pramāṇa* ‘right measure, standard, authority’ attributed to the practices of the *āryāvarta* by BauDhāyana.

country. [...] Āryas and barbarians, O descendant of Kuru, and many people mixed of these (races), mighty (lord), drink the waters of the (following) rivers: the wide Ganges, Indus, Sarasvatī, Godāvarī, Narmadā and the great river Bāhudā...”

Cf. MatP 114.20: *tair vimiśrā jānapadā āryā mlecchāś ca sarvataḥ / pibanti bahulā nadyo gaṅgā sindhuḥ sarasvatī.*

⁵³ Among these, apparently inspired by real names are only *āryaka* and *kurava*, the name of Brahmins and Kṣatriyas in Plakṣadvīpa (KūrmP 1.47.9; VP 2.4.17), and *maga*, the name of Brahmins in Śakadvīpa (derived from the Zoroastrian Magi) (MBh 6.12.33-34; VP 2.4.69).

⁵⁴ VP 2.4.83-84: *varṇāśramācāra-hīnaṃ dharmācaraṇa-varjitaṃ / trayī-vārtā-daṇḍa-nīti-śuśrūṣā-rahitaṃ ca yat // varṣa-dvayaṃ tu maitreya bhaumaḥ svargo 'yam uttamaḥ / sarvasya sukha-daḥ kālo jarā-rogādi-varjitaḥ /* “It is deprived of the institute of classes and life stages, exempt from the practice of religious Law, bereft of the three Vedas, profession, administration of justice, and service. This is, in both its divisions, Maitreya, an excellent terrestrial paradise, where time yields happiness to all (its inhabitants), exempt from old age, sickness and so on.”

⁵⁵ This region corresponds to a great part of the *āryāvarta* of BauDhS, VāDhS and PatMbh; it extends from Haryana (Kurukṣetra) to northern Rajasthan (Matsya) to western Uttar Pradesh (Pañcāla and Śūrasenaka). As already noticed, this region was occupied first by Ochre Coloured Pottery and later by Painted Grey Ware, before the unification of material culture in North India in the late 1st millennium BC (cf. Uesugi 2018: 14-19), that corresponds to the *āryāvarta* of the *Manusmṛti*, extending from the Himalayas to the Vindhya.

Not only, barbarian peoples are often looked upon as degraded descendants of the *āryas* of the central region. In the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (7.18), fifty sons of Viśvāmitra were cursed by their father for not having approved the adoption of the Brahmin Śunaḥśepa as elder brother; consequently they had to inhabit the borders of the Earth, and are identified as Andhra, Puṇḍra, Śabara, Pulinda e Mūṭiba, *dasyu* peoples of southern and eastern India.⁵⁶

According to MBh 1.80.26, because of the curse of Yayāti, the Yavanas descend from his son Turvasu, while from the other son Anu descend *mleccha* tribes.⁵⁷

In MBh 14.29, fleeing from the wrath of Rāma Jāmadagnya to forests and mountains many Kṣatriyas lost their status because they were deprived of Brahmins, and their descendants became barbarians like Dravidas, Khasas, Puṇḍras and Śabaras.⁵⁸ Compared to the list above, we have the addition of the Khasas of the Himalayas, but we are still in the domain of the Indian subcontinent.

A longer list is found in MBh 13.33.19-20,⁵⁹ where also Greeks (Yavanas) and the Iranic Śakas and Kambojas are included among the populations that were

⁵⁶ *tasya ha Viśvāmitrasyaika-śatam putrā āsuh pañcāśad eva jyāyāṃso Madhu-chandasah pañcāśat kaniyāṃsas tad ye jyāyāṃso, na te kuśalam menire. tān anuvyājahārāntān vah prajā bhakṣiṣṭeti. ta ete 'ndhrāḥ Puṇḍrāḥ Śabarāḥ Pulindā Mūṭibā ity udantya bahavo bhavanti Vaiśvāmitrā dasyūnām bhūyiṣṭhāḥ.* “Viśvāmitra had a hundred and one sons, fifty older than Madhuchandas, fifty younger. Those that were older did not think this right. Then he cursed (saying) ‘Your offspring shall inherit the ends (of the earth).’ These are the (people), the Andhras, Puṇḍras, Śabaras, Pulindas, and Mūṭibas, who live in large numbers beyond the borders; most of the barbarians (*dasyu*) are the descendants of Viśvāmitra.” (Keith 1920: 307).

⁵⁷ MBh 1.80.26: *yados tu yādavā jātās turvasor yavanāḥ sutāḥ / druhyor api sutā bhojā anos tu mleccha-jātayah.* “From Yadu the Yādavas are born, from Turvasu the Yavanas, from Druhyu the Bhojas, while the *mleccha* tribes (come) from Anu.” Cf. MatP 34.30: *yados tu yādavā jātās turvasor yavanāḥ sutāḥ / druhyoś caiva sutā bhojā anos tu mleccha-jātayah.* Pargiter 1922: 260, n.1, observes: “which seems unintelligible compared with all other tradition, and is probably late and certainly very doubtful.” The compound *mleccha-jāti* here apparently indicates a remaining group of unspecified non-Ārya populations, besides the Yavanas. Bhojas are well known as a branch of the Yādavas and their connection with Druhyu appears to be a pure invention, contrasting with the different geographical position and with the usual genealogy of Druhyu that includes Gandhāra and Pracetas, whose sons became kings in northern *mleccha* realms (cf. Pargiter 1922: 108; MatP 48.6-9; VP 4.17).

⁵⁸ MBh 14.29.14-16: *tatas tu kṣatriyāḥ ke cij jamadagniṃ nihatya ca / viviśur giri-durgāṇi mrgāḥ śimhārditā iva // teṣāṃ sva-vihitam karma tad-bhayān nānutiṣṭhatām / prajā vṛśalatām prāptā brāhmaṇānām adarśanāt // ta ete dramidāḥ kāśāḥ puṇḍrās ca śabaraiḥ saha / vṛśalatvaṃ parigatā vyutthānāt kṣatra-dharmataḥ //* “Then, some of the Kṣatriyas, having assailed Jamadagni, entered mountain fastnesses, like deer afflicted by the lion. Of them that were unable, through fear of him (Rāma), to discharge the duties ordained for their order, the progeny attained the state of Śūdras owing to the absence of Brahmins. They are these Dravidas, Khasas, Puṇḍras, together with the Śabaras, who came to the state of Śūdras because they fell away from the duty of the Kṣatriyas.” In MBh 2.66.12d@039_0090-91 we have a more convincing variant of the first stanza: *tatas tu kṣatriyā rājan jāmādnāya-bhayārditāḥ / viviśur giri-durgāṇi mrgāḥ śimha-bhayād iva //* “Then, the Kṣatriyas, O king, afflicted by the fear of Jāmadagnya, entered mountain fastnesses, like deer because of the fear of the lion.”

⁵⁹ Cf. the very similar passage in MBh 13.35.17-18, where some more tribes are added: *mekalā dramidāḥ kāśāḥ puṇḍrāḥ kollagirās tathā / śauṇḍikā daradā darvās caurāḥ śabara-barbarāḥ // kirātā yavanās caiva tās tāḥ kṣatriya-jātayah / vṛśalatvaṃ anuprāptā brāhmaṇānām adarśanāt.* In MBh 12.200.39-42 is also said that northern barbarous races arose in Tretā Yuga: *uttarā-patha-janmānaḥ kīrtayisyāmi tān api / yauna-kāmoja-gāndhārāḥ kirātā barbaraiḥ saha // ete pāpa-kṛtas tāta caranti prthivīm imām / śva-kāka-bala-grdhrāṇām sadharmāṇo narādhipa // naite kṛta-yuge tāta caranti prthivīm imām / tretā-prabhṛti vartante te janā bhārata-rṣabha.* “Those that are born in the northern region, I shall also mention: Yavanas, Kambojas, Gāndhāras, Kirātas together with Barbaras. These, O sire, are sinful, and move on this Earth, characterized by practices similar to dogs, crows, and vultures.

originally Kṣatriyas, but because of the absence of Brahmins were degraded to Śūdras:

*śakā yavana-kāambojās tās tāḥ kṣatriya-jātayaḥ / vṛṣalatvaṃ parigatā brāhmaṇānām
adarśanāt // dramīlās ca kaliṅgās ca pulindās cāpy uśīnarāḥ / kaulāḥ sarpā
māhiṣakās tās tāḥ kṣatriya-jātayaḥ // vṛṣalatvaṃ parigatā brāhmaṇānām adarśanāt /*

Śakas, Yavanas, Kāambojas, various Kṣatriya tribes, have come to the state of Śūdra because of the absence of Brahmins. Dravidas, Kaliṅgas, Pulindas and Uśīnaras, Kolisarpas, Māhiṣakas, various Kṣatriya tribes, have come to the state of Śūdra because of the absence of Brahmins.

Also the *Manusmṛti* (10.43-44) shows a similar concept:

*śanakais tu kriyālopād imāḥ kṣatriya-jātayaḥ /
vṛṣalatvaṃ gatā loke brāhmaṇādarśanena ca //
pauṇḍrakās caudra⁶⁰-draviḍāḥ kāambojā yavanāḥ śakāḥ /
pāradā-pahlavās cīnāḥ kirātā daradāḥ khaśāḥ //*

But in consequence of the omission of the sacred rites, and of the absence of Brahmins, these tribes of Kṣatriyas have gradually come in this world to the condition of Śūdras: the Pauṇḍrakas, the Coḍas, the Dravidas, the Kāambojas, the Yavanas, the Śakas, the Pāradas, the Pahlavas, the Cīnas, the Kirātas, the Daradas and the Khasas.

Some Purāṇas give also another mythical explanation, like VP 4.3.27-32,⁶¹ where Sagara defeats and kills the Haihayas, and their allies Śakas, Yavanas, Kāambojas, Pāradas and Pahlavas seek refuge in the *guru* of the king, Vasiṣṭha, who consents and explains to the king that he will separate them from Brahmins and from their own *dharma*. Sagara then imposes on them a distinctive mark: Yavanas will have the head shaven (*muṇḍita-śiras*), Śakas half-shaven (*ardha-muṇḍa*), Pāradas will keep

In the Kṛta age, O sire, these (peoples) did not wander on this Earth. It is from the Tretā age that those people exist, O bull of the Bharatas.”

⁶⁰ A variant reading is *puṇḍrakās coḍa-* (Yano and Ikari 1996).

⁶¹ VP 4.3.27-32: *tataḥ pitṛ-rājya-haraṇāmarṣito haihaya-tālajaṅghādi-vadhāya pratijñām akarot |
prāyasaś ca haihayāṅ jaghāna || śaka-yavana-kāamboja-pārada-pahlavā hanyamānās tat-kula-gurum
vasiṣṭhaṃ śaraṇam yayuḥ || athaitān vasiṣṭho jīvan-mṛtakān kṛtvā sagaram āha | vatsālam ebhir jīvan-
mṛtakair anumṛtaiḥ || ete ca mayaiva tvat-pratijñā-paripālanāya nija-dharma-dviija-saṅga-parityāgam
kāritāḥ || sa tatheti tad guru-vacanam abhinandya teṣāṃ veśānyatvam akārayat yavanān muṇḍita-
śiraso 'rdha-muṇḍāṅ chakān pralamba-keśān pāradān pahlavāṃś ca śmaśru-dharān niḥ-svādhyāya-
vaṣaṭ-kārān etān anyāṃś ca kṣatriyāṃś cakāra || te ca nija-dharma-parityāgād brāhmaṇaiś ca
parityaktā mleccatāṃ yayuḥ ||* “Upon hearing which he was highly incensed, and vowed to recover his patrimonial kingdom; and exterminate the Haihayas and Tālajaṅghas, by whom it had been overrun. Accordingly when he became a man he put nearly the whole of the Haihayas to death, and would have also destroyed the Śakas, the Yavanas, Kāambojas, Pāradas, and Pahlavas, but that they applied to Vasiṣṭha, the family priest of Sagara, for protection. Vasiṣṭha regarding them as annihilated (or deprived of power), though living, thus spake to Sagara: “Enough, enough, my son, pursue no farther these objects of your wrath, whom you may look upon as no more. In order to fulfil your vow I have separated them from affinity to the regenerate tribes, and from the duties of their castes.” Sagara, in compliance with the injunctions of his spiritual guide, contented himself therefore with imposing upon the vanquished nations peculiar distinguishing marks. He made the Yavanas shave their heads entirely; the Śakas he compelled to shave (the upper) half of their heads; the Pāradas wore their hair long; and the Pahlavas let their beards grow, in obedience to his commands. Them also, and other Kṣatriya races, he deprived of the established usages of oblations to fire and the study of the Vedas; and thus separated from religious rites, and abandoned by the Brahmans, these different tribes became Mlechchhas.” (Wilson 1840: 374-375).

pendulous hair (*pralamba-keśa*), Pahlavas will wear a beard (*śmaśru-dhara*). All these Kṣatriyas are deprived of the recitation of the Vedas, abandon their *dharma* and are abandoned by Brahmins, thus attaining the state of *mleccha*.

This legend is clearly an etiological myth explaining the origin of the ways of wearing hair and beard of these non-Indian peoples, however it reveals a conviction: that at least some foreign tribes were originally part of the Vedic and Brahmanical civilization, but they left it because they lost, by compulsion or by choice, the knowledge of the Vedas and Brahmins. The purpose of these statements and myths is to stress the necessity of Brahmins for Kṣatriyas, and perhaps also to invite invaders to honour Brahmins and adopt their religion,⁶² but they also reveal an ethnocentric perspective, that can be the cultural background of the contemporary Indocentric theory of Indian nationalists, who often advocate a South Asian origin of Indo-Europeans, in opposition to the theory of the Aryan invasion of India from the West, brought by the British and still dominant in the academic context. In the last legend, one could even notice that only Greeks and Iranic peoples are mentioned, that is, Indo-Europeans, but this is probably due to the fact that they were the main invaders and best known foreigners of the period. The other statements cited above about the degraded Kṣatriyas do not distinguish between Indo-European or non-Indo-European peoples (like Dravidians, Cīnas and Kirātas). This shows that there was no precise historical or linguistic basis behind this conviction, and that quite different human populations were all derived from Kṣatriyas (possibly because they appeared as warrior races), without trying to give different genealogical branches, except for the aforementioned vague and isolated statement about the origin of Yavanas and *mlecchas* from Turvasu and Anu.

A more precise mythical tradition is that of several Purāṇas,⁶³ where seven sons of Priyavrata, son of Manu, become lords of the seven continents, and the nine sons of Āgnīdhra, who was lord of Jambudvīpa, receive the nine regions of this continent. However, most of these nine sons bear simply the names of the nine *varṣas*, therefore this myth appears to be essentially geographical, without ethnic implications.

Conclusion

What we can conclude is that an idea of what we presently call India or Bhārata in ancient Indo-Aryans developed gradually, through the extension of the *āryāvarta* in post-Vedic times, finally including the whole North India, and through the creation of the concept of Jambudvīpa and Bhāratavarṣa, that included the whole subcontinent. This was not considered ethnically uniform, but included *āryas* and *mlecchas* of various kinds, including recent invaders like Yavanas and Śakas. However, from the Brahmanical point of view, these invaders were not considered completely foreign: they had to descend from Āryas, although degraded because of the loss of Vedic rites and Brahmins. The same for the inhabitants of southern and eastern India that did not belong to the Central Region or *madhya-deśa*. The *ārya* identity of a region and its people was certainly based on language, but according to several texts the most important characteristics were the ideal rules of behaviour, and especially the social order of the four *varṇas*. In the plurality of languages and kingdoms, the social and religious system of *varṇāśrama-dharma* was felt as the unifying principle that made the land of the Āryas different from the Others, the *mlecchas*. Bhāratavarṣa itself was

⁶² Cf. Parasher 1979: 113-114.

⁶³ See e.g. VP 2.1; KūrmP 1.38.

a stable geographical entity, with some features like short duration of life and progressive decay, but Āryāvarta could change its borders, because it depended on cultural structure and, in the Brahmanical view, continuity of lineages within the *varṇas*, which is not the same as the modern concepts of nation and ethnicity. This fact can be due to the original meaning of *ārya*, that indicated the son of a freeman, a noble, rather than the member of a specific ethnic group. It was an essentially social concept, and the social structure of the three classes of the *āryas* with the class of *śūdras*, with all its rules and duties, was the cultural identity of Brahmanical India. In Buddhist and Jain contexts the linguistic aspect was apparently more important, and the distinction between Āryas and non-Āryas in worldly terms was based on language.

The modern concept of India or Bhārata, instead, goes beyond language distinctions, it includes speakers of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Munda and Tibeto-Burman languages, and it goes also beyond the traditional system of castes. It is based on common history and culture in a wide sense, which does not correspond to the ancient views. Sanskrit, the *ārya* language *par excellence* of Brahmins, of course has left traces everywhere in the country, including Dravidian languages, but is mainly a cultural point of reference that is also not shared with traditions of foreign origin. However, even before the arrival of Greeks, Śakas, Parthians, Huns, Parsis, Muslims and Christians, we have seen that unity was always a problem, except for a limited region of north India called *āryāvarta*, *āryāyatana*, *madhya-deśa*. Only in that core area, that seems to have its roots in the prehistorical cultures of the region between the Ghaggar/Sarasvatī river and the Ganges, a unity was felt and affirmed from the oldest attestations of Indo-Aryan culture. This concept should be considered by academic theories about Indo-Aryan migrations: if Indo-Aryans had come from the west in the 2nd millennium BC, it is not easy to explain why the land of the Āryas did not include originally the Indus valley, why Iranic peoples were not considered Āryas, although they used a similar designation, and why the relation with them appears to be completely forgotten. The fact that the *ārya* identity was placed in the central part of the Indo-Gangetic plain suggests a long development *in situ* instead of a recent invasion. Comparing the Iranic and the Indian tradition, we have the paradox of two lands of the Āryas that ignored each other, one in eastern Iran and central Asia,⁶⁴ the other in South Asia. The most likely explanation is that, like their language, they shared a self-designation *ārya/ariya* as free, noble and civilized people, but they were divided in a remote time, so that they forgot their relation and developed two different concepts of ‘land of the Āryas’. Archaeology shows a cultural continuum between Iran, central Asia, Indus valley and northwest India from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age; in this continuum, the Bactria-Margiana and Harappan civilizations, although linked by trade relations, developed strong local identities, that could be the roots of Iranic and Indo-Aryan cultures. Bara-OCP culture was close to the Harappan civilization, and could represent the central Indo-Aryan culture, that of the Pauravas and Bhāratas, characterized by Brahmanical and Vedic traditions. In the post-Harappan period of Painted Grey Ware, the affinity was with the Gangetic valley, and the relation with the West was broken: the opposite of what was believed in the past, when PGW was associated with the Aryan invaders. At that time, the late Vedic

⁶⁴ The Iranic concept of a region of the Aryans is known to us through Strabo (15.2.1) as Ἀριανή (*Arianē*). He, citing Eratosthenes, placed it from the Indus river west to Carmania and the Caspian Gates, adding (15.2.8): “The name of Ariana can be extended [west] as far as parts of the Persians and the Medes and, to the north, the Bactrii and Sogdiani, since they are speakers of, by and large, the same language (*homóglōttoi*).” (Brunner 2004).

period, the land of the Āryas was identified with the Doab and adjoining regions, and the far Iranic relatives had become foreigners and barbarians. Pargiter (1922: 300-302) and more recent Indocentric theorists have suggested that Iranians came from India, but also this is not supported by archaeology nor by the Avestan tradition. What is more likely is that both Iranians and Indo-Aryans had a long history in their respective countries, and it is clear that the Āryas of South Asia had completely identified with their land already in the Vedic period, so that every people coming from outside was equally foreign. Genetic studies on ancient DNA have shown so far that Harappans had mainly an Iranian farmer-related component mixed with an ancient ancestral South Indian component that became stronger with the spread towards south and east after the decline of the Indus valley civilization (Narasimhan et al. 2019). In this way, we can understand how there was a progressive fusion with other South Asian populations, and the bond with Bhāratavarṣa became indissoluble.

Chronology of the cited texts

The dating of ancient Indian texts is largely hypothetical, we present here a possible chronology of the main texts cited in the article in order to help the general reader:

- Ṛgveda*: 2nd mill. BC
- Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*: 800 BC
- Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*: 700 BC
- Nirukta*: 5th century BC
- Theravāda Vinaya*: 4th/3rd century BC
- Mahābhāṣya*: 150 BC
- Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*: 150 BC
- Vāsiṣṭha Dharmasūtra*: 1st century BC
- Manusmṛti*: 2nd/3rd century CE
- Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*: 2nd century CE
- Divyāvadāna*: 200-350 CE
- Matsya Purāṇa*: 200-500 CE
- Mahābhārata*: 4th century BC-4th/5th century CE
- Mahāvastu*: 2nd century BC-4th century CE
- Abhidharmakośa*: 4th century CE
- Śrāvakabhūmi*: 4th century CE
- Vinayasūtra*: 5th century CE
- Pañṇavaṇāsutta*: 4th/6th century CE⁶⁵
- Amarakośa*: 5th/7th century CE
- Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: 450 CE
- Kūrma Purāṇa*: 550-850 CE
- Viṣṇu Smṛti*: 700-1000 CE
- Bhāgavata Purāṇa*: 800-1000 CE
- Kāvyaṃimāṃsa*: 9th-10th century CE

⁶⁵ Deshpande (1993: 9) dates this Jain work “about the 1st century BC”, but the mention of Hūṇas among the *mleccha* peoples cannot be placed before the 4th century CE, when the Kidarites Huns invaded Bactria, and subsequently Gandhāra and parts of India, followed by Hephthalites or Alchon Huns who were repelled in the 6th century. Hūṇas are mentioned also in MBh 2.29.11; 2.47.19; 3.48.21; 6.10.64, and in VP 2.3.17 and KūrP 1.45.41 in the list of the peoples who live in Bhāratavarṣa.

Abbreviations

- AdSPG II: Conze, Edward (1974) *The Gilgit manuscript of the Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, chapters 70 to 82, corresponding to the 6th, 7th and 8th Abhisamayas*, Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- AiBr: Aufrecht, Th. (1879) *Das Aitareya Brāhmaṇa. Mit Auszügen aus dem Commentare von Sāyaṇācārya und anderen Beilagen*, Bonn. <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/ind/aind/ved/rv/ab/ab.htm>.
- AKBh: Pradhan, Prahlad (1975) *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Center.
- AN: *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Pāli Text Society edition.
- ChS: Chatṭha Saṅgāyana electronic edition of the Pāli Canon.
- BauDhS: *Baudhāyana-dharmasūtra*. Typed and analyzed by Masato Fujii & Mieko Kajihara. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/6_sastra/4_dharma/sutra/baudhd_u.htm.
- BhP: *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.
http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/3_purana/bhagp/bhp_01u.htm
- CPD: Trenckner, V. and Andersen, D. and Smith, H. (1924) *A Critical Pāli Dictionary*. Vol. I. Copenhagen: A.F. Høst.
- Divy: Vaidya, L. (1959) *Divyāvadāna*, Mithila. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/4_rellit/buddh/divyav_u.htm.
- DPPN: Malalasekera, G.P. (1937) *Dictionary of Pāli proper names*. London: Pali Text Society, retrieved at http://www.palikanon.com/english/pali_names/dic_idx.html.
- GarP: *Garuḍa Purāṇa*. Based on the edition Bombay: Venkatesvara Steam Press. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/3_purana/garup1_u.htm.
- KEWA: Mayrhofer, Manfred. (1956–1980) *Kurzgefasstes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- KūrmP: *Kūrma Purāṇa*. Part 2. Input by members of the Sansknet project. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/3_purana/kurmp2_u.htm.
- Manu: *Manusmṛti*. Typed, analyzed and proofread by M. YANŌ and Y. IKARI. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/6_sastra/4_dharma/smṛti/manu2p_u.htm.
- MatP: *Matsya Purāṇa*. Based on the ed. Calcutta: Caukhamba Vidyabhavan, 1954. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/3_purana/mtp176pu.htm.
- MBh: *Mahābhārata*. Electronic text (C) Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, India, 1999. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gret_utf.htm#MBh.
- MN: *Majjhima Nikāya*, Pāli Text Society edition.
- Mp: *Manoratha-puraṇī*, Buddhaghosa's commentary to the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.
- MSV I: *Mūlasarvāstivādinayavastu*. Dutt, N. (1947) *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. III, Part 1, Srinagar.
- Mvu: *Mahāvastu*. Based on the ed. by Émile Senart, 3 vols., Paris 1882-1897. http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/4_rellit/buddh/mhvastuu.htm.
- PatMBh: Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, Based on the edition by Franz Kielhorn (Bombay 1880-1885), revised by K.V. Abhyankar (Poona 1972-1996). http://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretel/1_sanskr/6_sastra/1_gram/pmbhasuu.htm.
- PTSD: Pali Text Society Dictionary. Rhys Davids, T.W. and Stede, William. (2001) *Pali-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.

Rām: *Rāmāyana*. Based on the text entered by Muneo Tokunaga et al. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/2_epic/ramayana/ram_1-7u.htm.

Śbh I: Śrāvakaḥmī Study Group. (1998) *Śrāvakaḥmī, The First Chapter, Revised Sanskrit Text and Japanese Translation*. Tokyo: Taisho University Sogo Bukkyo Kenyūjo.

SBV: Gnoli, Raniero. (1977-1978) *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Saṅghabhedavastu. Being the 17th and Last Section of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*. Roma: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.

Sv: *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī*, Buddhaghosa's Commentary to the Dīgha-Nikāya.

Ud: *Udāna*, Pāli Text Society edition.

VāDhS: *Vāsiṣṭhadharmasūtra*. Bombay Sanskrit and Prakrit Series 23. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/6_sastra/4_dharma/sutra/vasist_u.htm.

Vins: Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra*. Preliminary transliteration of the ms. found in Tibet by Rahula Sankrityayana. http://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/4_rellit/buddh/vinsutra.htm.

VP: Pathak, M. M. (ed.). (1997-1999) *The Critical Edition of the Viṣṇupurāṇam*. Vadodara : Oriental Institute.

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http://grettil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/grettil/1_sanskr/6_sastra/4_dharma/smṛti/manu2a_u.htm