

Representations of Forests and Forest-dwellers in the Early Purāṇas

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KUNDAN KUMAR RAJ



**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067**

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled “**REPRESENTATIONS OF FORESTS AND FOREST-DWELLERS IN EARLY PURĀṆAS**”, submitted by **KUNDAN KUMAR RAJ** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other university; this is entirely his own work.

Kundan Kr. Raj
KUNDAN KUMAR RAJ

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for further evolution.

Y. K. Chakrabarti
PROF. KUNAL CHAKRABARTI
(CHAIRPERSON)

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

Y. K. Chakrabarti
PROF. KUNAL CHAKRABARTI
(SUPERVISOR)



Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110 067, INDIA

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The word forest is derived from the Latin word 'foris', which stands for outside, the reference being to a village boundary or fence, and it must have included all uncultivated and uninhabited land.¹ It suggests that the term forest originated with specific spatial connotation, and was used to define as much itself as to the other spaces. This contrasting nature of the forest and the cultivated and habited areas, i.e. settled spaces, finds expression in the dichotomous notions of the *vana* and the *kṣetras* existing in early Indian literary sources.² These mutually contrasting notions did not just pertain to the physical representation of the spaces, but also included living beings inside these two different spaces.

Human beings started their journey of civilisation from and through the forests, but once they started settling down and took up cultivation, their dependence on forests decreased. This constantly changing relationship between forest and settled society reached a new phase with the coming of the empires/states in early India and the demarcation between the settled society and the forest dwellers became sharp. These changes got reflected in the ancient Indian literary traditions.

This study is an attempt to explore a specific genre of ancient Indian literary tradition, i.e. the Purāṇic literature, with an aim to analyse the different notions of forest and forest dwellers in early India. Analysing various myths and stories from the early *Purāṇas*, the study has interpreted different attributes and features associated with forest. It has studied the pattern and context of their occurrence, variations in the narratives and their symbolic

¹ K. P. Sagreiya, '*Forests and Forestry*', New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1967, p. 1.

² Gunther-Deitz Sontheimer, 'The vana and the kṣetra: the tribal background of some famous cults', in H. Bruckner, A. Feldhaus and A. Malik eds., *Essays on Religion, Literature and Law*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2004.

meaning in the overall Purāṇic structure. The peculiar nature of the *Purāṇas* provides us the opportunity to look for the areas that were outside the domain of settled society and the people inhabiting those areas. In the discussion of cosmology, it gives a comprehensive picture of the world and different kinds of forests. This creates an interesting opportunity to study a hitherto less explored aspect of early Indian past, i.e. forest and forest dwellers.

Today forest and forest dwellers are much more exposed to 'the civilized society'. But for a long time they belonged to the realm of the others. These others were almost outside the pale of civilized society. From the sources we come to know that there existed interaction between the communities that lived in the forests and settled society. The 'forest dweller' was never a monolithic category and the term indicated different social groups living in the forest. Here, the forests are seen as the abode of two types of communities: human forest dwellers, like the Niṣādas, the Kirātas, etc. and the mythical forest dwellers, like the rākṣasas, asuras, nāgas, etc. Both the human and mythical beings are historically silent people, because their voices never got represented in any literary sources. This study is about the representation of the others: as a space and inhabitants of the space.

Edward W. Said has argued that in a socio-cultural system negotiating with a range of differences, the dominant set of socio-cultural norms subordinate the weaker ones.³ This understanding provides a valuable paradigm to explore the history of the marginalised others in the overarching brāhmaṇical structure, and helps to question and critique the idea of the other as well. Further his argument that every culture creates its own 'others', help us analyse the existing assumptions behind the constructions of categories such as the dasyus, Paṇis, mlecchas, heretics etc.

³ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001.

Historiography

Although there exists no comprehensive work that deals with the topic of my study, there are some works that partially touch upon different aspects of the theme. Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer⁴ has tried to locate the relationship between the *vana* and the *kṣetra*; i.e., the forest and the settlement, by emphasizing the opposing nature of these two. He understood the *vana* as wild space, forest or jungle, and *kṣetra* as inhabited, well settled place. “On the social level the *kṣetra* is a rigid and stratified social system...but the normal rules of social behaviour did not apply in the *vana*...the rules were *anācāra* (or *niśācāra*), rather than *ācāra*.”⁵

The *kṣetra* attempted to spread into the *vana* and integrate tribal people and their cults. These processes were very slow but steady. In course of time, “the impure and dangerous became ritually pure and pacified”. He showed the influence of the *kṣetra* on the *vana* through the examples of the pastoral deity Mallāri in the Deccan, the famous Pāṇḍuraṅga or Viṭhobā in Maharashtra or lord Jagannāth in Orissa. Even the *daśāvatāras* show gradual movement from the *vana* to the *kṣetra*. Sontheimer believes that Śiva was the great integrator of the *vana* and the *kṣetra* in mythology and rituals, while Viṣṇu stood on the other side.

However, in the classical Sanskrit texts, the forests were seen as impure and dangerous. Despite this, he believes that the forests were the very place which offered direct access to the divine beings as compared to the *kṣetra*. Sages lived there, performed penances and got boons from the Devas. The renouncers left the *kṣetra* and entered into *vana*. “In the

⁴ Gunther-Deitz Sontheimer, ‘The vana and the kṣetra: the tribal background of some famous cults’, in H. Bruckner, A. Feldhaus and A. Malik eds., *Essays on Religion, Literature and Law*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2004, pp. 353-382.

⁵ Ibid., p. 362.

forest, unity and renewal of life are achieved in many respects on many levels.”⁶ Sontheimer had discussed the importance of forests in brāhmanical religion. “With the slow spread of the *kṣetra* and the reduction of the *vana*...tribes were reduced to castes and assigned a place in the hierarchical system of the *kṣetra*”⁷.

Romila Thapar⁸ has commented on the work of Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer. She says that the dichotomy is not merely between the *vana* and the *kṣtra*. It also exists between the *grāma* and the *nagara* with the emergence of urban centres in the early centuries A.D., and between the jungle and the *anūpa* - the forest and the marshland. Although the dichotomy existed for many centuries, she argued that it was neither static nor uniform. Even the perception of forests changed with the course of time.

In the context of early India, Thapar looks at the forest as the place of hunt, hermitage and exile. Descriptions of hunts are found in various texts. Sometimes the hunts were carried out to claim territory. In course of hunts, the settled society encountered forest dwellers, mythical as well as historical. The king killed them or subordinated them.

Subordination was not achieved only with the help of violence. Cultural subordination happened simultaneously. As Thapar argues the hermitage was itself an intrusion into the territory of the forest dwellers. The environment created by the sages around the hermitage was different from the settlements, because “its way of life was a denial of that associated with the settlement”⁹. It was also close to the life-style of forest dwellers, as they were dependent on whatever the forests provided. They cultivated, but at a marginal level.

⁶ Ibid., p. 365.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 373-374.

⁸ Romila Thapar, ‘Perceiving the forest: Early India’, *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17, 1, (2001), pp. 1-16.

⁹ Ibid, p. 7.

She also discussed the nature of exile. Forest was never far away from habitation and, as the place of exile; it became the place for exploration. Forests also constituted an imagined space. In this manner it provided enough opportunity to the narrators to create accounts of acculturations. The epics are the most important examples of such narratives. The *Arthaśāstra*, Aśoka's inscriptions, and the Allahabad praśasti of Samudragupta are some of the most famous examples that refer to the state's subordination of forest dwellers. Land grants add another dimension to this process of subordination. It creates a space for cultural marginalization and the submersion of the marginalized people within the brāhmanical hierarchical system.

Through the above mentioned activities, the process of inclusion of the 'unfamiliar forest dwellers' like the Niṣādas, the Śābaras, the Pulindas etc. into a low caste status took place. It shows that over the years attitudes towards forests and forest dwellers changed. Although "many of the earlier attitudes persisted... ..Rākṣasas and apsarās are less in the forefront in courtly literature than in the folk narratives"¹⁰. However, these perceptions coexisted at various levels. For instance, 'the *vana*', was essential for the reconstruction of its the other 'the *kṣetra*'.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya¹¹ has discussed the nature of perception of the states towards forests. Expansion of the existing states and the emergence of new states in the forest regions, bring the forests and forest dwellers within the ambits of complex societies. Exploitation of resources as well as subordination of forest dwellers occurred simultaneously. They became important sections of a state's population and were assimilated within the hierarchy of brāhmanical social order, but only as untouchables.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 14.

¹¹ B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'State's perception of the 'Forest' and the 'Forest' as State in Early India' in B. B. Chaudhuri and Arun Bandopadhyay, eds., *Tribes, Forest and Social Formation in Indian history*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2004, pp. 23-37.

Further, the nature of encroachment of the state also transformed the physical terrain of the forest dwelling communities. These were viewed as new states, *aṭavi-rājya*. Forests were transformed into kingdoms and “the forest space emerged as the nucleus of a forest kingdom”¹². This process was also helped by the practice of land grants.

N. N. Bhattacharyya¹³ studied some mythical categories of forest dwellers in his *Indian Demonology: the Inverted Pantheon*. He has dealt with the so called demons in Vedic, Buddhist, Jain, epic and Purāṇic texts. In Vedic demonology, the Rākṣasas are frequently mentioned and all forms of misdeeds are attributed to them. But Bhattacharyya argues that “they were originally humans neither evil spirits of hostile dead nor products of pure imagination, as the original term *rakṣa* denotes a protector”¹⁴. On the basis of the available data, he has come to the conclusion that they were the protectors of indigenous beliefs, cults and rituals from the hands of an alien culture, represented by ‘the *Aryan*’. They opposed the sacrificial religion of the Vedas, destroyed sacrificial ceremonies and killed the sages. He observes that this is the reason for their higher and more honourable position in Buddhism and Jainism, which also opposed the authority of the Vedas.

The case of the Dāsas and the Dasyus were no different. He has argued that although they were described as demons, they were indigenous tribes opposed to the Aryans. We can say that the Rākṣasas, Dāsas and Dasyus were the victims of the process of “demonization of the enemy”¹⁵. However some enemies were absorbed within the brāhmaṇical fold. It is interesting that the dasyus as demons become rare after the Atharva Veda. Compared to the brāhmaṇical demon-lore, the demons were not killed but were completely transformed within Buddhism and Jainism. “They became devotees of Buddha and under his all pervading

¹² Ibid, p. 30.

¹³ N. N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2004.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 41-42.

¹⁵ Romila Thapar, ‘The Tyranny of Labels’, in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.

influence used their special powers for the welfare of mankind.”¹⁶ The Jainas or Tirthankaras destroyed “their evil propensities and reemployed them in good works, a reward for their services to the Jainas, the converted demons and spirits were raised to the rank of gods”¹⁷.

Within the epic demonology, Bhattacharyya argues that “the attitude of the epic poets to the demons is rather ambivalent. Many individual Asuras maintain a very high standard of character and morality. Some demons are considered fallen angels or celestial entities...they believed in meditation, prayer and austerities...the demons had matrimonial alliances with human beings and also with the gods”¹⁸. However there are examples of their hostility towards gods. In the epics we find detailed descriptions of the demons. These are also incorporated into the *Purāṇas*. He has dealt Purāṇic demonology in great details.

Aloka Parasher-sen¹⁹ in her article ‘Of tribes, hunters and barbarians: Forest dwellers in the Mauryan period’ observed that a very close contact between different groups of peoples and cultures existed during the Mauryan period, because this period was marked by the expansion of empire, that required large resources. In such situation it is necessary to acquire territories and assimilate the tribes and frontier peoples. This is evident from Aśoka’s inscriptions and the *Arthaśāstra*.

She shows that in the Mauryan period, the state’s policies were directly concerned with agricultural expansion, the forest and the forest dwellers. Aśoka had no other option, but to interact with them and tame the ‘wild’ and the ‘semi-wild’ tribes located on the borders. The formation of *atavikabala* shows the close level of interaction.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 78.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 79.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 100-101.

¹⁹ Aloka Parasher-sen, ‘Of tribes, hunters and barbarians: Forest dwellers in the Mauryan period’, *Studies in History*, New Series, vol.14, 2, (1998), pp.173-191.

Parasher-sen has also highlighted the complexity involved in the conceptualisation of the forest and forest dwellers. The *Arthaśāstra* draws a fine line between the forests on the basis of their uses. Forests were classified in two categories: *Dravyavana* and *Hastivana*. In the *Arthaśāstra*, various terms were employed to denote forest people such as *aranyacara*, *ātavi* and *ātavikā*. There were differences among them. *Aranyacara* represented forest dwellers, while *ātavikās* were well organised and autonomous, and were fond of looting and killing. They operated from the frontiers and forests under some kind of forest chieftains.

Aloka Parasher-sen²⁰ in her book *Mlecchas in Early India* provides many details about tribes and indigenous peoples subsumed under the concept of *mlecchas*. She shows that the notion of the *mlecchas* depended on the principle of exclusion. The exclusion was made on three grounds: speech, area of habitation and cultural behaviour. But the three grounds were not rigid either in theory or in practice. This was because of the tension between two factors –the geographical expansion of brāhmaṇical culture and ideology on the one hand and the attempt to conserve and continue the established *śāstric* norms and values on the others.

Parasher-sen deals with tribal groups, such as the Niṣādas, the Kirātas, the Śābaras, and the Pulindas. During the Vedic period the Niṣādas had a certain status. But in the *dharmaśāstra* tradition, the Niṣādas as well as the Kirātas occupied a lower status. In the course of time, ‘the Niṣādas were provided to the position of untouchables under the theoretical framework of *anuloma jāti*, while the Kirātas were absorbed in the brāhmaṇical society and became *vrātya* or degraded kṣatriyas’. This shows the multiple level of interaction with the brāhmaṇical establishment. The Kirātas figure as hunters, basically forest dwellers, who lived in mountainous regions, like the Himalayas and the Vindhya. She says, “it is possible that the term Kirāta was used in a wider context by the ancient Indian writers to

²⁰ Aloka-Parasher-Sen, *Mlecchas in Early India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, 2001.

describe primitive hunters, irrespective of their geographical or linguistic location²¹”, because we have references to the Kirātas related with both the Himalayan region and the Vindhyan region.

Śabaras and Pulindas are markedly different from those forest dwellers that lived in primitive condition. “The brāhmaṇical writers were aware of these ‘tribal’ groups and their ways. They were never listed by the *Dharmaśāstra* writers as *jātis* or castes. The fact that many of these groups continued to remain isolated in the forest and mountain regions of the subcontinent for long time was perhaps the main reason for their exclusion from the *varṇa-jāti* system²²”. That is why they were able to maintain their specific cultural identities. The Andhras and the Pundras were earlier mentioned as tribes. Later they were partly brāhmaṇized. They are known from epigraphic sources as people who rose to prominence politically. The descriptions of these tribal peoples and their acculturation at different levels show that they were not considered as a single category.

Vivekanand Jha²³ in his article ‘From Tribe to Untouchable: The case of Niṣādas’ has argued that the Niṣādas were the first indigenous people met by the Aryans and that during the Vedic period they mentioned their tribal personality within the social framework. During the performance of *viśvajit* sacrifice, the Niṣādas played a significant part. This sacrifice required ‘sojourn with the Niṣādas for three nights and partaking of their foods. A Niṣāda village is mentioned in this connection’. They were evidently not treated as untouchables.

The process of their acculturation started in the later Vedic period, but not in a manner favourable to them. The partaking of food from a Niṣāda was forbidden. The reason behind this seems to be that they continued with their traditional occupation of fishing and hunting.

²¹ Aloka Parasher-Sen, ‘‘Foreigner’ and the ‘Tribe’ as barbarian (mleccha) in Early India’, in Aloka Parasher-Sen ed. *Subordinate and marginal groups in Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 298.

²² Ibid, p. 299.

²³ Vivekanand Jha, ‘From Tribe to Untouchable: The case of Niṣādas’, in R.S. Sharma, ed., *Indian Society: Historical Probings*, in memory of D. D. Kosambi, New Delhi: People's Pub. House, 1974.

They were forced to live near but outside the villages and towns. This situation imposed a much lower status than the general śūdra population. However there are descriptions of “Ekalavya, the son of the niṣādarāja, who was himself succeeded by his son. That shows the hereditary nature of the office and the choice of chief from within the tribe itself.” But the location of the tribal kingdom outside the *jāti* system did not prevent the degradation of the Niṣādas in the Hindu social scheme because of the brāhmanical prejudice against their occupation and food.

Romila Thapar²⁴ has also dealt with the image of the barbarians, known as *mlecchas* in Sanskrit literature. The term *mleccha* used to indicate foreigners and indigenous peoples. She believes that the distinction between the Aryans and the indigenous population was a linguistic and a cultural one. However over the years the emphasis on speech differentiation was gradually increased.

She observes, “The relationship between the *mleccha* and the Aryans was conditioned by all the different facets which went into the making of a caste society”²⁵. The facets are: a network of exogamous and endogamous kinship relation (*jāti*), a hierarchical ordering of occupations and a division of labour, a ritual status, and association with geographical locations. But the society rarely functioned according to these rules.

There occurred a change in the concept, when the *mlecchas* both the indigenous and the foreign peoples acquired political power. *Vrātyakṣatriya* (degenerate kṣatriya) became the new concept and “it was maintained that in origin they were of the kṣatriya *varṇa* and that their degeneration was due to the non-performance of sacred rites, or because of the wrath of the brāhmaṇas when they ceased to perform the sacred rites”²⁶. Among the indigenous

²⁴ Romila Thapar, ‘The image of the Barbarian in Early India’, in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.

²⁵ Ibid, p, 239.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 246.

peoples Drāviḍa, Ābhīra, Śabara, Kirāta, Mālava, Śibi, Trigarta and Yaudheya were mentioned as *vrātyakṣatriyas*. The majority of such tribes tended to be the inhabitants of the Himalayan and the Vindhyan region, traditionally called the *mleccha-deśa*.

Among the indigenous peoples, the Niṣādas appeared in the Vedic literature, which were not assimilated in the four fold varṇas system, and had a low ritual status. They are generally located in the region of the Narmada river or among the Vindhyan and the Satpura mountains. In the Vindhyan region, three *mlecchas* were located: the Kirāta, the Pulinda and the Śabara. With reference to the Mahābhārata, Thapar says that they were living in the east, but in later texts we find them residing in the Vindhyan region. Their migration may have been due to the expansion of the agrarian settlements in the Ganga valley. Due to the same reason, the Pulindas also migrated from the Mathura region to the Vindhyas. She says that the names Pulinda and Śabara in particular became generic names for barbarian tribes.

From the ninth century onwards references to indigenous peoples as *mlecchas* began to decrease. This period witnessed emergence of new political powers in the form of feudatories. Sometimes these developments took place in the non-Aryan regions, and the brāhmaṇas constructed genealogies for the new ruling houses exerted them to higher status. In the process many tribal cults were absorbed and the identity of barbarians changed.

Sources and Methodological Issues

In the large corpus of Sanskrit literature, the *Purāṇas* stand out as a special category of sacred texts, based on narration and story-telling. There are eighteen major *Purāṇas*: *Vāyu*, *Brahmāṇḍa*, *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya*, *Mārkaṇḍeya*, *Bhāgavata*, *Kūrma*, *Vāmana*, *Varāha*, *Skanda*, *Liṅga*, *Agni*, *Garuḍa*, *Brahma*, *Padma*, *Brahmavaivarta*, *Nārada* and *Bhaviṣya*. These are classified by scholars on different basis. There is the three-fold classification on the basis of *Sāttvika*, *Tāmasa* and *Rājasa* characters. Scholars also divide the *Purāṇas* into five categories

as they are dedicated to five gods; Brahmā, Sūrya, Agni, Śiva and Viṣṇu. Among them I shall focus on *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya*, *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa*. These are some of the earlier *Purāṇas* and have preserved much of their older materials.

The reason for selecting the *Purāṇas* as source material for my study is the fact that these have not been adequately explored in writing the social history of early India, particularly the forests and forest dwellers, despite the fact that these contain interesting information about them. Most of the *Purāṇas* in the important section on cosmology, deal with various facets of the forests. Also, in their narrative components, they provide both direct and indirect information on the forest landscape and its various inhabitants. Explored carefully, keeping in mind the narrative style of these texts and contrasting the Purāṇic information with the parallel sources, they can give fascinating insight into perception of forest and forest dwellers in early India. But due to the limitation of time, I have had to depend on the *Purāṇas* alone.

The use of Purāṇic literature as historical sources has its own problems, both because of the complexity of its narrative structure as well as the problem of historicizing the information revealed through it. There are several issues involved with the critical understanding of Purāṇic narratives such as their origin, their sectarian character and the *pancalakṣana* aspects. Due to these problematic nature of the *Purāṇas*; these texts as historical sources have been neglected for a long time. This attitude begin to change after the publication of R. C. Hazra's work *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*.²⁷ Hazra extensively discussed the dating issues and successfully gave a time-frame for individual *Purāṇas* and also located different themes within time-span.²⁸ Along with him,

²⁷ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 6.

²⁸ R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.

other scholars also tried to date the *Purāṇas*, but generally it is believed that “it is not possible to set a specific date for any *Purāṇa* as a whole.”²⁹ However the comfortable level and authenticity increased after Hazra’s work and scholars began to use these texts to formulate historical contexts and generally agree the chronology suggested by R. C. Hazra.³⁰ Based on the extensive study he has given particular date for specific themes within the *Purāṇas*. Focus of our study i.e. four early *Purāṇas* has been dated by Hazra as follows: the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* between 100 and 350 A.D., the *Matsya Purāṇa* between 400 and 1250 A.D., the *Vāyu Purāṇa* between 200 and 1400 A.D. and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* between 200 and 500 A.D. the long time-frame of the *Purāṇas* suggest that it was open to later incorporation, and thus contains information ranging from early to early medieval India.

Another challenge for the scholars in using the *purāṇas* as a source is to historicize the information contained in its complex narrative style. The *Purāṇas* were developed over a long period and were compilation of material gathered from the other existing texts, and it ‘invoked the authority of the Vedas to legitimating itself’³¹. Scholars also believe that the *Purāṇas* not only borrowed from earlier texts but also underwent a continuous process of re-editing over the time span. Hazra³² argues that the process of re-editing was done in three different ways: by adding fresh chapters, by substituting the latter by the former and by writing new works bearing old titles. In this process some of the *Purāṇas* retained their old materials, some lost. But the fresh additions to the *Purāṇas* were not always fresh composition. He shows that chapters and verses were often transferred from one to other *Purāṇa* or from the *Smṛti* and other works. Although, materials were borrowed from different sources belonging to different ages, the *Purāṇas* exist as a single unit.

²⁹ Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1986, p. 103.

³⁰ R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975.

³¹ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 59.

³² R. C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, pp. 6-7.

However, the above peculiar nature of the *Purāṇas* has its own historical importance. It gives the insight of evolving into the changing brāhmaṇical attitudes towards others. There were important changes occurring in the society that were continuously influencing the composition of the *Purāṇas*. The emergence of Buddhism, Jainism and other non-brāhmaṇical sects, and their continue attack on brāhmaṇical structure created a need for introspection in brāhmaṇical thinking. Brahmanism responded in terms of the Purāṇic mythologies which was 'substitutes for the benefit of those who were intellectually incapable of understanding of Veda and socially excluded from Vedic recitation.'³³ However, the *Purāṇas* underlined 'the authority of the brāhmaṇas, because it has been made by brāhmaṇas and composed in a language to which the indigenous population had no accesses'³⁴, and in this manner these texts represent one sided story. But along with all the above problematic nature of the *Purāṇas*, these are very useful to reconstruct the images of the forest and forest dwellers, because of its encyclopaedic nature.

Chapterisation

The encroachment of forests through expansions, settlements etc, is a historically continuous process. Expansion happened through violence and various other ways, such as cultural incorporation. However, violence was easily applied, because forests were seen as dark wild places and the habitat of ruthless, hostile forest dwellers. The story of Videgha Māthava carrying Agni in his hand across the Sdānīra/Gandak and the burning of the forest Khāṇḍava indicate the nature of the violence. It is also reflected in the warning given by Aśoka to the forest dwellers in Rock Edict XIII and the Allahabad Inscription of Samudragupta. Scholars such Romila Thapar, B. D. Chattopadhyaya, Aloka Parasher-Sen etc. believe state's attitude towards forests took a decisive turn with the beginning of the

³³ Ludo Rocher, *The Purāṇas*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1986, p. 16.

³⁴ Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 25.

institution of land grant in Gupta and post- Gupta times. It marked the territorialisation of the forest spaces using *Agrahara* system as a socio- economic process of integration and assimilation of the hitherto simple forest society to a more complex state society.

In this dissertation my attempt will be to reconstruct the image of the forest and forest dwellers in the early *Purāṇas*. The *Purāṇas* associate different attributes to the forest. It is generally seen as a wild space as well as an abode of sages and renouncers. It has also been habitation of the hosts of lower and marginal groups of the society such as Sabaras, Pulindas, Kiratas etc. In the narrative literature, forest also worked as a seat of action of the celestial and semi-devine beings as well as demonic creatures such as Yakṣa, Gandharva, Rakṣas, Nagas etc.

I shall take up all these themes separately in different chapters, which will be divided into three. The first chapter deals with various perception of forest emerging from Early *Purāṇas*. The section of *Purāṇa* dealing with cosmology contains physical description of the forests. Forest was not only physical terrain; it also constitutes the social space created by the various social groups. Sometimes specific space was created within the forest which was different from the general character of forest, especially by the sages. It is believe that sages created a peaceful space within the wild forest through the power of penance. Perception of forest was not always static and it evolved through the time as reflected from *Purāṇas*. Besides the popular perception of forests as the place of hunt, hermitages and exile, in the *Purāṇas* we find that it also functioned as hiding place for defeated kings. These instances are very useful to understand the nature and perception of forest. Here forest played a different kind of space for survival and resurrection.

Forest was always seen as repository of resource of various kinds. Above mentioned examples show the resourceful nature of forests which helps a fallen nobility to strengthen

and regain its old glory and might. Besides, forest had always been the supplier of the essential consumption items such as meats of various animals (deer's meat was an important item for ritual purposes also), herbs and medicinal plants, precious gem as well as strategically important supply of elephants.

In the second chapter my focus of attention will be forest dwellers: the Niṣādas, the Śabaras, the Pulindas, and the Kirātas, who were historically marginalised. They live in forest and depend on forest for their livelihood. Puranic literature closely associates them with mountain regions, mostly Himalayan and Vindhyan ranges. Purāṇic writers demarcated them as barbarians, as earlier texts did.

The image of the forest life that reflects from the *Purāṇas* opens up a possibility to look at socio- economic and political life of the forest dwellers which were not always at the receiving end of the socio- political norms of the settled society but at times, there was active denial of these norms by emphasising the norms and customs of the forests. Here I shall study their status and position in the *Purāṇas* and try to look out for differences, if any.

The third chapter deals with the super human beings that according to the Purāṇic mythologies inhabitate the forests. These include Rākṣāsas, Dānavas, Serpents, Yakṣas, etc. The chapter shall strive to analyse the forms of interactions between different categories of the forest dwellers with these super human beings. By focusing on the dialogue between them, the circumstances and content of the dialogue, and the culmination and result of the dialogue, I shall try show how these mythical characters get associated with the forest in the Purāṇic narrative and what relevance do they have to overall picture of the forest in the Purāṇic worldview.

Chapter 2

Representations of the Forest as Landscape and Resource

Forests have always been peripheral to the consciousness of the settled societies. However, this relationship was never a monolithic and static process one as the societies right from the period of the early farming communities till the present have engaged with forests on the multiple levels: political, socio-economic and religio-cultural. Though, the terms of engagement kept changing over the period. In early India, forest was a subject of fascination on account of the anxieties borne out of the things unconceivable, which in turn, gave birth to its various images reflected by the contemporary textual sources such as the *Purāṇas*. Scholars also argue that the forest was seen as another land, culture, and space, set apart not only by its beasts and birds but also by its people. The forest was all that the city and the villages were not. It was also seen as a place of danger as well as beauty.¹

Here, an attempt has been made to analyse the brāhmanical constructions of the forest as reflected in the *Purāṇas*. It encompasses various images of forests which at times were contradictory at times. In the *Purāṇas*, the forests were generally seen a wild space marked by the presence of the supernatural social categories such as the Rākṣasas, Dānavas, Nāgas etc. They have also been portrayed as spiritual abode of sages, renouncers, etc., which adds another interesting dimension to the image of the forest. Although, “the distancing takes the form of romanticising the forest at a time when some forests are being cleared and the forest people living there being forced to change their lifestyle”². Forest has been an ideal background for unfolding of various Purāṇic myths as it provides an interesting sub-text

¹Mahesh Rangarajan, ‘The Forest and the Field in Ancient India’, in Mahesh Rangarajan, ed., *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*, New Delhi: Pearson, 2007, p. 42.

²Romila Thapar, ‘Forests and Settlements’, in Mahesh Rangarajan, ed., *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*, New Delhi: Pearson, 2007, p. 33.

adding different dimension to the stories and enriching their contents. Sometimes the stories evolve in the forests, e.g. the story of Yayāti, Devayāni and Sarmisthā, and at others they have an important association with the forest. In these mythological stories, the image of the forest is not always a stereotypical one; brāhmaṇical writers also draw fairly natural pictures of forests.

An important trend that can be identified is that there is a continuous change in the perception of forests in Early India. A change can be observed from the Mauryan period to the Gupta period. Forest was no more a simple land. It became a territory. The kings wanted to capture forest and rule it. Though forest was a place for hunt, hermitage and exile, it was also a place of hiding. The hiding place is not only for thief and robbers, but also defeated kings for their entered into forest. The Purāṇic texts present such instances.

Forest: Physical Description

The most important section of the *Purāṇa* that has particular focus on the nature and character of the forest is the section on cosmology. It contains physical description of the forests in terms of *Catur-dvīpa* and *Sapt-dvīpa* theory of the world. S. M. Ali who has worked on this theme has tried to locate these different dvīpas in the different regions of the world which gives us an interesting insight to the importance and perception of the forests in the *Purāṇas*. S. M. Ali also argues that the Purāṇic description of rivers and mountains in a dvīpa can be applied to any region and is therefore misleading³. However, our objective here is not to prove the authenticity of the cosmological sections of the *Purāṇas*, but try to understand the internal structure of this Purāṇic construct.

³S. M. Ali, *The Geography of the Purāṇas*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966, p. 39.

The *Purāṇas* talk about the four kinds of forests that surround the supernatural mount Meru according to the concept of *Catur-dvīpa* theory, and these are divine playground of the Devas, Dānavas, Gandhrva, Yakṣas, Nāgas etc. These are: Caitravārtha, and Savitṛ/Gandhamādāna, Vaibhrāja and Nandana forest; and these mountains are named as Mandara, Gandhamādāna, Vipula and Suparsva. However, there are differences within the *Purāṇas* regarding the direction of these forests. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*⁴ situated Caitravārtha, Savitṛ/Gandhamādāna, Vaibhrāja and Nandana on the eastern, southern, western and northern side of the mountain Meru respectively. But the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵ located Nandana and Savitṛ forest on the southern and northern direction respectively. The *Purāṇas* also associate four lakes to these forests and mountains namely Aruṇoda, Mānasa, Sitoda and Mahābhadrā⁶.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁷ at another place mentions that the river Gaṅgā, which splited into the four parts irrigated the four forests which were situated on the four cardinal's direction of the mountain Meru. The four forests were Caitrarātha, Gandhamādāna, Nandana and Vaibhrāja. It also claims that the earth has four great continents, four forests of sports, four great trees as the four land-marks, and the four excellent lakes⁸.

The *Purāṇas* closely related mountains and forests to each other, and this complexity creates problem of distinguishing the nature of different forests. There are four mountains in the *Purāṇas* and each has been described in some detail. On the eastern mountain Mandara, there is a great tree Keturāṭ with hanging branches. There is also another tree Kandara*⁹ with extensive fragrant, full-blown flowers which bloom in all seasons. On the southern mountain, *Purāṇas* place Jambū tree (rose apple) blooms and bears fruits having very sweet and soft,

⁴*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 11.2, p. 137.

⁵*Vāyu Purāṇa*, 1.36.11, p. 250.

⁶*Ibid.*, 1.36.16, pp. 250-251.

⁷*Ibid.*, 1.42, pp. 274-280.

⁸*Ibid.*, 1.42.80, p. 280.

⁹**Viṣṇu Purāṇa* mention Kadambe, Pipal and Vata tree at the place of Kandara, Aśvattha, and fig tree respectively.

nectar like taste and huge in size. This tree is the landmark of the southern continent Bhadrāśva. On the western mountain Vipula, a great Aśvattha* tree grows with hanging garlands. Its trunk and branches are very lofty. It gives big auspicious fruits in all seasons. This tree is the landmark of the western continent Ketumāla. On the northern mountain Supārśva, a fig tree* grows up with extensive branches. It shines with fruits, which taste like honey. This tree is the landmark of the northern Kuru¹⁰.

The *Purāṇas* also give general feature of these four regions. The forests are full of Sārikās (Turdus Salica), peacocks, Cakorās, parrots, bees, leopards; and Jivamjīvaka (Cakara) birds, Hemakas, cuckoos and goats. There are charming sounds of the golden swans, sparrows and other pleasing chirping sounds. The forest regions appear to be singing with the sweet humming sounds of the excessively lazy and intoxicated bees. The trees, shaken by the gentle winds, equipped with bunch and clusters of flowers and copper-coloured tender sprouts. There shining pebbles and diverse minerals get mixed with the barks of trees and rinds of fruits scattered splendidly. These forests are inhabited by Devas, Dānavas, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Nāgas, Siddhas and Apsaras. Various holy centres and great sanctifying gardens are mentioned as the residences of great Nāgas. Sweet and pure water of four lakes are auspicious and very pleasing; and drunk by Siddhas, Devas and Asuras. The lakes were shining with lotuses and lilies with huge leaves¹¹.

Along with the *Catur-dvīpa* theory, the *Purāṇas* also deal with the cosmology under the concept of *Sapt-dvīpa*. According to *Sapt-dvīpa* theory, Purāṇic writer divide the earth in the seven dvīpa; and in each dvīpa, they situate seven major mountains and seven rivers along with the various small mountain and rivers. But they did not relate seven forests with seven dvīpa, as they do in the *Catur-dvīpa* theory. However, under *Sapta-dvīpa* theory, Purāṇic

¹⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.35, pp. 247-249.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I.36. pp. 1-15.

writer relate each dvīpas with a particular tree which represents vital marker of that dvīpa. So we find, different dvīpas like Jambū-dvīpa, Plakṣa dvīpa, Salmala dvīpa, Kusa dvīpa, Saka-dvīpa, Pushkara-dvīpa etc. related to Jambū tree, Plakṣa tree, Samali (silk-cotton) tree, clump of kusa-grass, Saka tree, Nyagrodha tree respectively. Only the Krauñca-dvīpa was not related with any tree or anything else and Kusa-dvīpa was related not with any tree type but with Kusa-grass. The important point here is to note that the dvīpas were named after tree's name, and in each dvīpa there was one landmark tree.

While describing the geographical aspects, the *Purāṇās* also mention of the various valleys between the mountains situated in cardinal directions of the mountain Meru. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*¹² notes that between the boundary mountains on the four sides of mountain Meru, there are various valleys. These valleys are the favourite resorts of the Siddhas and Cāraṇas. Upon them, there are also pleasant forests and cities. But the *Vāyu Purāṇa* in chapter-37 and chapter-38 provides more details as compared to other three early *Purāṇas* viz., *Viṣṇu*, *Matsya* and *Brahmāṇḍa*, and the details are given below follow as:

“The valleys between the Śītānta and Kumūṣṭja ranges were noisy with birds and resorted to by innumerable creatures. There was an excellent lake Śrīsaras. On the eastern side of the lake, there was a charming Bilva forest which was full of flowers and fruits. The fruits were as sweet as nectar, huge as war-drums, and different in colours like golden, green, pale and white. The Bilva forest was known as Śrīvana. It was resorted to by Kinnaras, Yakṣas and Mahānāgas (big serpents). Siddhas subsist on Bilva fruits. Even various groups of living beings (or goblin-Bhūtas) always resided in it. The goddess Lakṣmī also dwelled there continuously.

In the midst of the mountain Vikaṅka and Maṇiśaila, there was an extensive Campaka forest which appeared to be yellow with trees with huge trunks and branches blooming with flowers. They were always in bloom and sweet smelling. It was resonant with the humming of inebriated bees. This forest was resorted to by

¹²*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, II.2, p.140.

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Kinnaras, Dānavas, Devas, Gandharvas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Apsaras and big serpents. There was also the hermitage of Kaśyapa prajāpati, with the enchanting sounds of Vedic recitations coming from it.

The region between the mountain Mahānīla and Kumūñja, on the bank of the river Sukhā, was resorted to by Siddhas. There was a charming Palm forest. The Kumūda and Afjana trees were deep rooted and very strong. They grew in cluster without any space. They were firm, great and circular in shape. The fruits of these trees were sweet. This forest was mentioned by the Puranic authors as the abode of the auspicious elephant Airāvata.

There was a big stretch of Dūrvā grass in the region between the mountain Veṇumān and Sumedha. This region was also devoid of trees, hedges, creepers, winding plants and all kind of animals. Similarly, north of the mountains Niṣadha and Deva, there was a big rocky piece of land which was devoid of trees and creepers, although, this region was moistened with deep water.

Then there was a forest of Udumbara between the mountain Śīsira and Pataṅga. Its ground was gloriously smooth and polished. It shined with huge trees with ripe fruits as big as great pitchers. They were coral-coloured, charming and full of honey. Siddhas, Kinnaras, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, serpents and Vidyādhara subsisted themselves on them. The rivers and lakes contained clear, sweet and pure tasty water. In that forest, there was the hermitage of the holy Kardama prajāpati, where Devas also lived.

Between the mountain Tāmravarṇa and Pataṅga, there was a highly sacred lake, which was beautified with white and red lotuses. The water of the lake shone with sweet smelling, blooming red and blue lilies. The lake was resorted to by Devas, Dānavas and great serpents. Close to it was also a country which was embellished with red minerals and a beautiful city where Vidyādhara with their lord Puloman lived.

In the valley between the mountain Viśākha and Pataṅga, there was a lake Tāmravarṇa. On the eastern side of this lake, there was a flourishing and prosperous mango grove. The fruits were golden in colour and very tasty. Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Yakṣas, Nāgas and Vidhyādhara enjoyed sweet mango juice and delighted.

The region between the mountain Sumūla and Vasudhāra was called Bilvasthali. That was a pure level land, sweet smelling and flourishing. It is lovely due to the presence of birds. The trees bear fruits which were hanging very low. The soil on the ground was wet and damp with the shattering and shattered sweet Bilva fruits.

Yakṣas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Siddhas and Nāgas were mostly eating only the Bilva fruits and lived in that natural region.

In between the lordly mountain Vasudhāra and Ratnadhāra was a beautiful fragrant forest of Kimśuka (Butea frondosa). With the rich growth of flowers, it seemed to be blazing all around. By its divine fragrance the whole region is sweetened up to a hundred yojanas in the forest all round. That forest of Kimśuka trees was resorted to by Siddhas, Cāraṇas and Apsaras. It was bedecked with various water-sheds. There was also a great abode of lord Āditya; and the region between the mountain Pañcakūta and Kailāsa was impassable.

On the central part of the western direction, the valley between Suvakṣa and Śikhiśaila mountains was rocky and stony. It was always hot and inaccessible to creatures. People were afraid of touching that surface. The abode of the Fire-god was situated in that region. Between the mountains there was also an auspicious pond of Devas; and a tract of land known as Mātuliṅsa. That region was wholly splendid with ripe fruits of golden lustre and juice sweet as honey. It also housed the hermitage of Bṛhaspati.

The valley between the mountains Kumuda and Afjana was called Kesara. There was a forest of Bakula trees. The forest shone with spotted and brindled flowers in all seasons. The forest was resonant with the humming sounds of inebriated bees. There was also a great temple of Viṣṇu.

The region between the mountains Kṛṣṇa and Pāṇḍura was a single tract of smooth rocky land. That region was devoid of trees and creepers. However in the middle there was a charming grove of land-lotuses, which was frequently visited by Yakṣas, Gandharvas and resorted by Siddhas and Cāraṇas. Along with white lotuses, there were fragrant hundred-petalled lilies and full blown flowers with blue petals. In the midst of that grove, there was a Nyagrodha tree, and Viṣṇu was worshipped here by Yakṣas, Gandharvas and Vidyādharas.

Between the mountains Śāṅkukūṭa and Vṛṣabha, there was a beautiful region of Parūṣaka. The region was moistened with the fruits of Parūṣas fallen from their stalks. They were as big as Bilvas, and auspicious, sweet and fragrant. Kinnaras, serpents and saints lived there. The Cāraṇas were highly honoured at this place.

A beautiful region, decorated with various forests and endowed with various flowers and fruits, was situated between the Kapiñjala and Nāga mountains. It is resorted to by Kinnaras and Uragas (serpents). There were charming groves of grapes, Nāga-leaves, Kharjūras, blue Aśoka grove, tasty pomegranates, Akṣotaka

(walnuts), Atasī (linseed), Tilaka, Gingelly seeds and plantain groves. There was also a small plot of tasty Badarī fruits. They were auspicious regions brightened by rivers of tasty and cool water.”¹³

The above descriptions of different valleys between the mountains seem very general, and which can be situated in any geographical region. However, some of the valleys had some peculiar qualities, like any specific valley being abode of a particular sage. Besides, the Purāṇic writers very cleverly situated different valley to different regions on the basis of their flora and fauna and not two of them were even coincidentally placed in the same settings. Looking at the description, one notice that in some valleys forest was absent and only flowers and fruits found, while some of the valleys are portrayed as terrible. It can be argued here that, despite maintaining the general nature of a region, the Purāṇic authors project different images of the different forest and natural entities of that region.

The Purāṇic writers also relate forests with the Devas and other supernatural social categories, such as Dānavas, Rākṣasas etc. Scholars believe that the forests were the places where gods most often descended to communicate with human beings,¹⁴ but besides this, the *Purāṇas* also mentioned forests along with mountains as the abode of Devas and other supernatural social categories. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* in the chapter-39 talks about forests, which are inhabited by Devas and supernatural groups. For example it is stated that:

“... the forest of sport of Mahendra was on the great mountain Śītānta. The forest was endowed with all desirable qualities. The mountain contained many belly like caves, which were the abode of the Devas. It was very extensive with hundreds of variegated minerals and jewel mines. It was the abode of animals of good qualities. Its ridges and slopes were laden with flowers where the bees hum and buzz. There were also the fountains and springs of pure and tasty water. The inner crevasses of the mountain were frequented by Kinnaras. There were many caves and cavities frequented by Yakṣas and Gandharvas. Some of them were comfortably

¹³ *Vāyu Purāṇa*. I.37 and 38, pp. 252-261.

¹⁴ Philip Lutgendorf, ‘City, Forest, and Cosmos: Ecological Perspectives from the Sanskrit Epics’ in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker eds., *Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p.280.

resorted to and some were dense and impassable. The mountain was embellished with trees bearing various fruits and flowers.

The great Pārijāta forest of the king of Devas, Indra, was also there. The winds blowing from that forest wafted the fragrance of Pārijāta flowers full hundreds yojanas. The tanks were full of blue lotuses resembling lapis lazuli with golden and diamond like filament, possessed of fragrance and resonant with the buzzing of bees. Thousands of fishes shined within the waters with the un-winking eyes and decorated with gold gems. With tortoises richly embellished with gold and occupying many positions, the water gets splashed all round and shone well. The birds had gem set beaks decorated with flowers of good colours; they were always elated while they fly all around chirping sweet attractive sounds.

The Purāṇic image of the Pārijāta forest is of a resort of perpetual pleasure filled with the sounds of the elated bees and the chirping of birds. The forest was also full of monkeys of variegated colour and gem-like hairs along with the various types, colours and shapes of animals. The tender creepers and the Pārijāta trees, when gently shaken by the mild wind, make a shower of flowers, when gem set couches and seats were laid all around the playing grounds, the forest looked very splendid. There, the sun was neither hot nor cold. The climate was always calm and controlled. The wind were blowing in the spring is rendered fragrant by various flowers and produces excessive elation. In that splendid forest of Indra, Devas, Dānavas, Pannagas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Guhyakas, Gandharvas, Vidyādharas, Siddhas and Kinnaras were joyous and engaged in the various kinds of enjoyments with Apsaras.

On the eastern side of the royal mountain was the mountain of Kumūñja with many streams and caves. There were eight big cities of noble-soul Dānavas. The abode of Rākṣasas crowded with men and women was situated on the mountain Vajraka with many peaks and caves. These terrible Rākṣasas known as Nīlakas could assume any forms. They were lived there forever.

On the great mountain Mahānīla, there were fifteen cities of the horse-faced Kinnaras. Devasena, strong as Indra, is a powerful ruler. In those cities fifteen different Kinnaras king ruled, who were haughty by nature. The great mountain was also decorated with the enclosed settlements which have golden flanks mostly and which possess people of different races. Hundreds of great Urugas (serpents) live there under the control of Garuḍas. They were terrible, fiery and inaccessible, and of venomous sight.

In the great mountain Śunāga, there were thousands of abodes of Daityas. They consisted of mansions and palaces with huge rampants and archways. On the mountain Veṇumanta, there were cities of Vidyādhara. The rulers of these cities were Ulūka, Romaśa and Mahānetra. They were as valorous as Indra.

On the great peak Vaikaṅka, with caves and rivulets, lived Sugrīva, the fierce and powerful, the enemy of serpents and the son of Garuḍa. The peak was of variegated colours due to jewels and minerals. The whole of that mountain was teeming with birds, which destroyed serpents.

Śiva lived on the mountain Karañja, and the eight illustrious abodes of the eight Vasus were situated on the mountain Vasudhāra. The seven holy hermitages of the seven sages and abodes of the Siddhas were on the mountain Ratnadhātu. Lord Brahmā lived on the mountain Hemaśṛiṅga. On the mountain Gajaśaila, lord Rudras resided along with the groups of Bhūtas. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* also mentions that the constructed abode of Ādityas, Vasus and Rudras were on the mountain Sumegha. The mansions of the Aśvin gods too were there. This mountain was beautified with many caves, bunds and hedges.

On the mountain Hemakakṣa was the prosperous Gandharva city Aśityā. The abodes of the Rākṣasas were on Anala, Dānavas lived on Pañcakūṭa. On the Śataśṛiṅga mountain were the hundred cities of Yakṣas. The excellent city of Takṣaka, the son of Kadru, was on the Tāmṛābha mountain. The great mansion of Guha, fond of residing in a cave, was on the mountain Viśākha. The city of Sunābha, son of Garuḍa, was on the mountain Śvetodara. On the Piśācaka mountain, there was a great mansion of Kubera. There Yakṣas and Gandharvas frequently visited. The abodes of Kinnaras were on Kumuda, the Nāgas on Añjana, Gandharvas on Kṛṣṇa, and Vidyādhara on Pāṇḍura mountain. On the mountain Saharsa-śikhara, there were thousands cities of Daityas of fierce activities, wearing gold necklaces. The residences of Pannagas (serpents) were on the Mukuṭa mountain, and sages always lived happily on Puṣpaka mount. On the mountain Supakṣa, there were four mansions of Vaivasvata (Yama), Soma, Vāyu and the king of serpents.”¹⁵

The forest was not only the place of abode of gods and other supernatural social categories. It was inhabited by forest dwellers, such as Niṣāda, Sabara etc. In the mythological birth story of Niṣāda and Prithu, Niṣāda and his descendant were compelled to go to the vindhyān region, a thickly forested area throughout the history and even today. This

¹⁵ *Vāyu Purāṇa*. I.39., pp. 261-265.

shows the process by which forest dwellers were deprived of their traditional resources. On the other hand cattle rearing and agriculture introduced by Prithu shows the processes of the opening up of the peripheral zones inhabited by the pre-literate tribes to mainstream cultural society. Thapar also argues that this myth emphasises the differences between the forest dwellers and the cultivators¹⁶. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*¹⁷ also situates Śabarās in the Himalayan region. It seems that the hunters and gatherers live near the hilly and forested area, and these were seen identical to each other.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*¹⁸ also mentions various hilly people along with the other groups living in the Bhāratvarṣa. It mentions the following kingdoms in the Vindhya mountains: Malavas, Karusas, Mekalas, Utkalas, Uttamarnas, Dasarnas, Bhojas, Kiskindhakas, Tosalas, Kosalas, Traipuras, Vaidikas, Tumuras, Tumburas, Satsuras, Nisadhas, Anupas, Tundikeras, Vitihotras, Avantis. It also mentions about other mountainous territories: Nigarharas, Hamsamargas, Ksupanas, Tanganas, Khasas, Kusapravaranas, Hunas, Darvas, Hudakas, Trigartas, Malavas, Kiratas, and Tamasas.

On the basis of above information we can argue that the description of forests in the *Purāṇas* is not unitary and it keeps changing in different contexts and period. May be this is due to the nature of Purāṇic texts that are not concerned with the forests in a direct manner. In their accounts Purāṇic writers situate forests in different directions. Sometimes they related forests with the mountains and there is also tendency to relate forest with a particular kind of plant. Forests are named basis of a particular tree. We find connotation like 'the forest of palm trees', 'the forest of Candana trees', 'Tāla forest', 'Śāla forest', 'Udumbara forest' and many more. This possibly shows the importance of a particular tree in a specific forest. However, it is difficult to assume that in the early India, there were many forests with such

¹⁶Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the forest: Early India', *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17, 1, (2001), p. 15.

¹⁷*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.22.22, pp. 590-591.

¹⁸*Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.45.132-137, pp. 299-300.

characters as Purāṇic writers present. There is a possibility that there were some forests where particular tree was in majority.

There are various instances in the *Purāṇas* describing the wild nature of forests. There was a mountain named Audbhida, in the forest which was situated on the bank of the river Krtamala. Along with the various trees, the mountain was also frequently resorted to by tigers, lions, bears, rhinoceroses, musk-deer, very big elephants, the eight-footed Sarabha and others. There is this description that once near the Puskara, a stag came there running accompanied by a hind. He was being chased by a hunter. After some time, hunter also came there holding up the bow and having an arrow in his hand. But he saw Paraśurāma and recognized him, and became afraid of him. So he did not kill them. Later, the hunter was devoured by a lion¹⁹. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*²⁰ also mentions the killing of Prasena who went to the forest for hunt, by a lion. The lion was later killed by Jāmbavat, the king of the bears. These stories indicate the wild nature of the forest.

Varied Description of the Forest Landscape

Purāṇic writers perceived forest space in a very personalized manner. Individual characters like Paraśurāma, who was the Purāṇic hero, through his journey towards Himvana (Himālayas) for performing penance crossed different countries, mountains, rivers and forests. In this context, the picture of forest that Purāṇic writers present is different from the above descriptions of forest. The details about the forest, given in the story of Paraśurāma seems more real as compared to other descriptions. The perception of forest seen through Paraśurāma's eyes in the *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa* is as follows:²¹

¹⁹ *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.34.11-22, pp. 665-666; 2.3.35.31. p. 672.

²⁰ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.12, p. 340.

²¹ *Brahmaṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.22.10-46a, pp. 589-593.

“In some places the forests were blazing due to the fire originated from the friction of dry trees clashing together on account of violent gusts of wind. The flame was further enhanced due to the blowing winds.

In some places, the sun-stone came into contact with the rays of the sun and began to emit fires. Due to these fires the snow and bitumen got melted and the water thus formed quelled the forest fires.

In some places, the forests got illuminated through beams of light reflected from crystalline collyrium, silver and heaps of gold through the rays of the sun. Their mutual rays of light came into contact with one another and a brilliant gleam spread everywhere.

In some places, the forests were brightened by groups of Siddhas who had been wet due to snowfall and so were basking in the early morning sunlight over the rocks, at the feet of the mountain.

In some places, the borderland was brightened up by Yaksas who were seated on golden rocks over which fell the rays of sun and so the Yaksas appeared to enter fire.

In some places, the caves were filled with the piteous cries of herds of deer that had been agitated when hyenas jumped up after coming out of the caves.

In some places, the huge shining rocks and sloping sides of the tree had been scraped suddenly when the leaders of the herds of boars and tigers fought each other.

In some places, the slopes of rocky ridges had been scared and dug up by the hops of the Gavayas (A species of wild ox) as they were chased by the elephants attracted by the resemblance of their own young ones. (The idea seems to be this- the Gavayas were mistaken to be the young cubs of elephants by their mother elephants. Hence, they pursued the Gavayas).

In some places, the forests abounded in smashed pieces of rocky boulders, because the highly excited elephants in their rut had been fighting one another for the sake of a female elephant.

In some places, the rocky slabs had been split by the claws of lions treading upon them, as they pursued the elephants, when their anger had been roused on hearing the roaring trumpeting sound of those elephants.

In some places, the forests were filled with the loud lamenting cries of elephants whose temples had been pierced by the claws of the lions suddenly pouncing upon them.

In some places, there were deep caves, the rocks of which appeared to be split by the terrible cries of the lions whose manes had been violently pulled by the eight-footed (fabulous animal) Sarabha.

In some places, the rocks and pebbles had been broken up as the excited and infuriated hosts of Sabaras (hill-men) and the leaders of the herds of bears had been engaged in mutual struggle.

In some places, the female elephants and tuskers were found sporting about in the bower-like bushes on the mountain, in some places the excited elephants in rut were seen pursuing the she-elephants throughout the forests.

The mountain Himalaya had hundreds of caves filled with gusts of wind formed by the breaths of sleeping lions. In the forests of that mountain deer wandered about despite their great fear being suspicious of dangers.

Herds of Camari deer moved about here and there very slowly while sporting, because they were afraid of their tail getting split as a result of being entangled in the thorny bushes.

The entire face of all the quarters was filled with the utterances and the sounds of beating time by the Kinnaris residing in the caves of the mountains.

The ground had been marked by the red-lac-dyed wet feet of the sylvan deities moving about here and there.

All round activities of dance had been initiated by the groups of peacocks and pea-hens, whose notes were musically sweet and whose plumes had been raised up and spread.

It appeared that the mountain was being fanned gently by the breezes in the forest, which were extremely pleasing to the bodies and which shed showers of flowers blooming in water as well as on the ground. The region bordering upon the mountain had been abounding in the Mango trees and they were filled with the tumultuous cooing of male cuckoos that had become excessively elated by tasting the juice of the season spring.

The mountain had been resonant with the musical notes of bees that had been maddened by imbibing nectar from different kinds of flowers. The forests therein had become deafened, due to the chirping sounds of many birds.

The surface of the ground had become filled and thickly bedecked with a number of fresh flowers wet with honey. They had been blown therein by the breezes of the forest and scattered about.

The region all round had been deafened by the loud sound of springs and water-fall that cascaded down from great heights upon narrow defiles abounding in rugged rocky pebbles.

The forest on the mountain abounded in all the following trees viz. Pāṭala, Kadamba, Nimba, Hintāla, Sarja, Bandhūka, Tiduka, Kapittha, Panasa, Aśoka, the mango tree, Inḡuda, Asana, Nāga, Campaka, Punnāga, Kovidāra, Priyaṅgu, Priyāla, Nīpa, Bakula, Akṣa, Tamalaka, the grape wine, Madhūka, Āmalaka, Jambū, Kaṅkola, Rose tree, Bilva, Arjuna, Mango tree, Bījapūra, Picula, Ambaṣṭha, Kanaka, Vaikaṅkata, Śamī, Dhava, Putrajīva, Abhaya, Ariṣṭa, Loha, Udumbara, Pippala, and other trees. It was beautified on all sides by other trees of various kinds. Their innumerable branches spread all round. They grew so close together that they appeared to be overlapping one another.

The leaves too clustered together without leaving any gap in between. The surface of the ground on all sides was inaccessible (due to the impenetrable thick leaves) to the rays of the sun.

Hundreds of rows of jungles were occupied and as if trembling with monkeys who grew fat and strong by eating different kinds of ripe fruits.

Here and there hundreds of rivulets could be seen gushing out of the rocky crevices. They were extremely charming as they produced roaring sound in view of their falling over rugged rocky basin.

It was beautified all round by excellent large lakes adorned with lilies and lotuses and resonant (with the cries of) different aquatic birds.

After reaching the lordly mountain, the mountain with its peaks capped with snow, the excellent (descendant) of Bhṛgu climbed on to it immediately with great joy.

After entering the dense forest full of trees growing in the open space, Rāma of noble mind, walked about slowly to a tree grown in the open spaces, O king.

As he moved about in the different quarters, he was glanced at on all sides with suspicion and awe by the female deer, with lovely eyes. Being glanced at thus, he became delighted.

The above description appears very close to the reality and conforms to the conventional idea of forest. There were animals chasing each other, fighting and killing. Even, indication of the fight between the hill tribe Śabara and boars, also gives hint of their area of habitation and the way of living. What is most striking in the above description is beauty with which it has painted the charms of forest, which indeed is very attractive. The narrative also indicates the forest catch fire naturally through friction, a common phenomenon in our contemporary world as well.

There is another personalised narrative of a forest in the *Matsya Purāṇa*²² It notes that in the country of Madra, there was a king Śākala Aśvapati, who had a daughter Sāvitrī. Sāvitrī was married to Sātyavāna, who was son of the king Dyumati Sen. Sāvitrī's father-in-law was deprived of his kingdom and resided with his son and his son's wife in the forest. On the day, when Sātyavāna was supposed to die due to his fate, he went to fetch flowers and fruits from the forest. Sāvitrī also went with him. In the forest, she began to describe the beauty of forest. Her description of the nature and flora-fauna of forest is as follow:

“Dear! Look at the forest smiling with verdure and nice trees. The whole atmosphere is so pleasing to the eyes and the nose. It indeed fills the mind with amorous feeling. Look at the Aśoka trees laden with flowers. O, one with beautiful eyes! The spring is really smiling on us. Look at the Kiṅśuka blossoms to the south of this beautiful forest. The Kiṅśuka flowers look like a blaze of fire and are fragrant. Dear! In this forest flows the wind laden with the sweet aroma of flowers which is so soothing to me. To the west are visible the Karṇikāra

²²*Matsya Purāṇa*, II.208.5-21, pp. 210-211.

flowers of the golden hue. Most of the thoroughfares of this forest are choked with luxuriant blossoms. Indeed the whole place abounds with flowers and looks charming.

Listen to the buzzing of the passionate black bees. In the midst of such surroundings the god of love with his arrows on the bow is about to make me his target. The place is resounding with the chorus of the cuckoos that taste the jungle fruits. Their notes are indeed beautiful like the speech of the good. These peacocks fired with love are following their females that are soaked in the aroma of flowers. Indeed the whole wood looks charming like you.

These young cuckoos are enjoying themselves on the branches of the sweet smelling mangos. Their bodies are besmeared with the dust and aroma of the sweet smelling flowers and in pursuit of their females and going from one branch to another. See! Though there are many flowers in this forest, the male cuckoo has taken the flower stalk of Śahakāra flowers and is enjoying it like his wife.

See, this crow sitting on the branch of that tree. She is shielding her young ones with her wings and the male crow is feeding her after her delivery by his beak.

This Cātaka bird with his wife has come down to the ground but being enamoured does not pick up his food.

Look at this crane that is enjoying himself in the company of his female and surcharged with passion is constantly making love to her and exciting passions in others.

This parrot sitting on the branch of that tree in company of his female is blinding down the twig so that it seems that the twig is loaded with fruit.

This lion is also having his rest after a full meal and the lioness is lying in his embrace.

Look at this wolf with his female in this cavern. See how their eyes are gleaming.

This rhinoceros is licking his female constantly and being licked in return by the female and is feeling pleasure thereby.

How is the she-monkey making asleep by placing his head on her lap and what pleasure is she giving to the male when she picks up insects from his body?

How is this cat scratching her female who is lying on the ground with her belly visible without causing her pain?

See that pair of hares are lying clasping each other in close embrace hiding their bodies and feet. But they can be marked out by their ears that are seen.

This enamoured elephant after plunging itself into the water in the tank is playing with his female with a lotus stem.

See this show is following her boar with her pigs on the track and is feeding on mice raised up by the nose of the boar.

This thick-skinned buffalo besmeared with mud is frisking after his female.

Dear! Look at this winking deer. It looks amazed at our sight.

Mark this female deer; it is scratching her husband by her horns. It is sometimes going behind; again it is scratching his face. Turn your eyes towards that Camarī cow. The passionate ox is after her. He is haughtily staring at me. Look at that ox! How is he basking under the sun with his wife and ruminating? How is he also driving away the crow sitting on its hump? Also look at the goat jumping on that huge tree with his female. Resting themselves on their legs they are both eating the pulms.

See this crane walking about with his female on the banks of that pool, and mark his colour resplendent like the moon emerging out of the clouds.

This Cakravāk is wandering with his female in the tank and his female appears as if Padmini²³.

This narrative of forest is further different from the Paraśurāma's description of Himvana's forest. The differences between above two narratives are due to the context and motives of description. In the Sāvitrī case, she wanted to divert her husband's attention from

²³Ibid., II.209.1-31, pp. 211-212.

the fact that he was going to die that particular day. Here, what she said about the forest's nature; can be more clearly understood if we keep in mind the relation between them, i.e. the relationship of husband and wife. That relationship shaped the nature of the narrative and added a romantic flavour to it.

The forest can be also seen as a romantic paradise, a hiding place for lovers. Like the forest of Umā, known as Śaravana, where Śiva and Pārvatī resided. Both, Śiva and Pārvatī decided that anyone entering into the limits of their pleasure-garden would instantly be transformed into a female figure²⁴. This demarcated some space of forest in a very personalise manner. Once, Devayānī and Yayāti went to the *Harit* forest. There she saw the three boys were playing. She asked about their father. The boys finger towards Yayāti as their father and Śarmiṣṭha as their mother²⁵. However the “*harit* forest” indicates a different kind of space. It may be a pleasure garden or play garden where children can play and guardian can go there to spend some time. It can also be a space to nurture love. The story of Devayānī and Yayāti is an important example of love story that developed within the forests. Most importantly, the example of Devayānī was quite different, as she was very provocative about her love, in both the cases: Kaca and Yayāti.

The perception of the forest was not always static and it evolves through the time as reflected from the *Purāṇas*. Besides, the popular perception of forests as the place of hunt, hermitages and exile²⁶, we find that in the *Purāṇas*, it also functioned as hiding place for defeated kings. In the lineage of Triśanku, prince Bāhu or Bāhuka was vanquished by the tribes of Haihayas and Tālajanghas, and his country overrun by them. In consequence, he fled into the forest with his wives, and lived near the hermitage of sage Aurva. Later he died and one of his wife, who was pregnant, gave birth to a son, named Sāgara, who went on to

²⁴Ibid., I.12.1-7, pp. 36-37.

²⁵Ibid., I.32.10-17, p. 95.

²⁶Romila Thapar, ‘Perceiving the forest: Early India’, *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17, 1, (2001), p. 4.

recover his patrimonial kingdom²⁷. However, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*²⁸ mentioned that the king after being defeated by enemies, decided to flee. He abandoned his city and kingdom along with the treasury, army and vehicles, and entered into the forest accompanied by his queen. Further it mentions that Sāgara took revenge for his father's death and killed Haihayas and Tālajanghas. His 'enemies were frightened...abandoned their homes...fled to the forest region where also they were stunned and stupefied by another enemy who got up from his sleep in the caves of the mountain'²⁹.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*³⁰ also mentions the killing of Kārttavīrya and his sons by Parśurāma. But Kārttavīrya's five sons were fled and went into the forest of Himālayas to protect their lives. Further, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*³¹ mentions that once Śūra (Kārttavīrya's son), who had escaped to the Himalayan forests, went for the hunt along with Śūrasena and others, and accompanied by the armies of four different units. After the hunt, they took bath in Narmadā River. On their way back, they saw the hermitage of Jamadagni. They decided to take revenge and killed Jamadagni. After killing him, they took away his head like the ruthless Niṣadas (hunters). These instances are very useful to understand the nature and perceptions of forest in the Puranic worldview. Here, forest is portrayed as a distinct space for survival and resurrection.

Forest was always seen as a repository of resources of various kinds. Above mentioned examples show the potency of forests which helps a fallen nobility to strengthen and regain its old glory and might. Sometimes they established their kingdom in the forests as reflected by the story of killing of Jamadagni by sons of Kārttavīrya. However, it seems that

²⁷ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.3, pp. 298-299.

²⁸ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, III.2.3.47.77-80, p. 736.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, III.2.3.48.24, p. 741.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II.2.3.41.13-14, p. 705.

³¹ *Ibid.*, III.2.3.45.1-9, pp. 724-725.

the act of taking refuge in the forest from the battle to save oneself was a normal activity within the Purāṇic structure.

This whole idea that defeated kings rushing to the forests to save themselves and only to return later to take revenge and achieve back his power and glory, gives very interesting insights into the monarchical political culture reflected by the *Purāṇas*. But this important insight raises many questions like, why forest was seen as safe haven for the defeated kings? Was it considered as neutral ground where hostilities ceased to exist or was it a part of any territory? What is so unique about the forest that allows/enables the defeated king to re-strengthen themselves and achieve back the older glory?

Though Purāṇic perception of the forest in this regard is complex, it seems that forest were more like neutral space than territory. Because every king was free to enter into the forest and hunt the wild animals. Even sages always welcomed all kings. Although, hunting can be seen as the act of asserting ownership over the forest, but kings never claimed authority over the forests directly.

Forests also provided space for sinful people to come out from the sins by doing penance and self-purification; and also by conducting self in a righteous way. For example, when Satyavrata abducted Vidarbha's wife, he was degraded and ordered to live among the Cāṇḍālas by his father. During this period there was no rain for twelve years. In that situation, in the absence of Viśvāmitra, his wife tried to sell one of her sons to sustain other. But that son was rescued by Satyavrata. Later he killed deer, boars, buffaloes and other forest animals and cooked that flesh near the hermitage of and fed Viśvāmitra's sons and wife. But when there was no meat available, he saw the cow of the Vaśiṣṭha, Kāmadughā and due to delusion, exhaustion and hunger, he killed the cow and ate the meat and fed the sons of Viśvāmitra also. After hearing this, Vaśiṣṭha abandoned him. But when Viśvāmitra returned and came to

know this whole incident, he was pleased and granted boon and crowned Satyavrata to the hereditary kingdom and presided over his sacrifice. Later sage also made him ascend to heaven along with his physical body³². The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also clearly states that during the famine Satyavarta continued hang the flesh of deer upon a fig-tree, so that he might not subject Viśvāmitra's family the indignity of receiving presents from an outcaste³³. The important point here is to note that during these terrible twelve years of famine Satyavarta, never tried to break the social order as the brāhmaṇical social order compelled him to stay away from the sage's family as he was fallen to the status of a Cāṇḍāla. So on the one hand, Satyavarta try to maintain the brāhmaṇical social order, but on the other, the sage Viśvāmitra sent him to heaven and acted against the existing brāhmaṇical ideology. Interestingly the forest provided the background for all this action. This highlights the complexity of the process of exclusion and inclusion in the forest. Further during the famine or other natural calamities settled societies also functioned in more flexible way and were ready to take support of the tribes and forest dwellers.

Forests as Resource

The forests had always been the supplier of the essential consumption items such as meats of various animals, herbs and medicinal plants, precious gems as well as strategically important supply of elephants. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*³⁴ distinguished animals into two classes, as domestic (village) and wild (forest). The domestic animal included cows, goats, hogs, sheep, horses, asses, mules; while the wild animals include all beasts of prey, many animals with cloven hoofs, the elephant, and the monkey. Devendrakumar Rajaram Patil³⁵ argues that the plant world was divided into three classes on the basis of the study of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*. The

³² *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.26.78-112, pp. 679-682.

³³ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.3, p. 297.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I.5, p. 37.

³⁵ Devendrakumar Rajaram Patil, *Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa*, Motilala Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, p. 107.

three classes are *grāmya*, *āranya* or *grāmy-āranya* and *yajñiya*. The *Vāyu Purāna* mentioned seventeen varieties of rural medicinal plants (*Grāmya oṣadhī*), viz., rice, barley, wheat, and the minute gingerly seeds, the Priyaṅgus, Udāras, Kārūṣas, Tinakas, black gram, green gram, Masūras, Niṣpāvas, horse gram, Āḍhakis and the other grams. However, the names of plants are not seventeen in numbers. Further, it also mentions fourteen kinds of plants, which were used in sacrifices. They were rice, barley, black gram, wheat, aṅṣ (panicum Miliaceum), gingelly seeds, Priyaṅgu, horse-gram, Śyāmākas (a variety of rice), Nivāras (another variety of rice), Jirtilas (wild sesamum), Gavedhukas, Kuruvindas (a kind of barley), Veṅuyavas (bamboo seeds), and Markaṭakas (a species of grain). These were the varieties of wild and cultivated plants. The *Vāyu* also mentioned that all these medicinal plants, trees, hedges, creepers and grasses grew in villages and forests without the fields being ploughed³⁶. Along with all these, the *Vāyu Purāna* also mentioned *Divyauṣadhis*³⁷ (divine medicinal herbs) and *Vanaṣadhis*³⁸ (forest herbs), although it did not mention the names of plants.

Patil also mentions various names of the plants mentioned in the *Vāyu purāna* and quite extensive. In the alphabetical manner, the names of the plants are: Āḍhakya, Aguru, Akṣoṭaka, Ambuda, Āmra, Aṅṣ, Aśoka, Aśvattha, Atasī, Badarī, Balvaja, Bhaṇḍī, Bilva, Campaka, Caṅaka, Candana, Dāḍima, Darbha, Devadāru, Drākṣa, Durvāra, Falgu, Godhūma, Gṛñjana, Ikṣu, Jambū, Japā, Kadalī, Kālāmra, Kalkaleya, Kalpavṛkṣa, Kapittha, Karambha, Kārūṣa, Kāśa, Kāśmarī, Hādira, Kharjūra, Kimśuka, Kūlatthaka, Kuraṇḍaka, Kuśa, Lakuca, Laśuna, Lava, Māṣa, Masūra, Mātuluṅga, Mudga, Nāga, Naktamāla, Nīlāsoka, Nīpa, Niṣpāva, Nyagrodha, Padma (Ambuja, Kamala, Kumuda, Utpala, etc.), Palāṇḍu, Palāśa, Panasa, Pārijāta, Parūṣaka, Pāṭalā, Paṭolā, Patola, Plakṣa, Priyaṅgu, Puṣkara, Śaka, Sāla, Sālmala, Sarala, Sarjaka, Savī(tī)naka, Śleśmāta, Śyāmāka, Udāra, Udumbara, Uśīra, Tāla,

³⁶ *Vāyu Purāna*, I.8.143-150, p. 71.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I.34.54, p. 241; 47.4-5, p. 304; 49.25, p. 316.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I.3.12-14, p. 28.

Tamāla, Tila, Tilaka, vamsīkarīra, Vaṭa, Veṇu, Vibhītaka, Vikāṅkata, Vrīhi and Yava.³⁹ This minute description brings home the point that Puranic writers were acutely observant about the vegetational peculiarities of the forests.

In the *Matsya Purāṇa*, there is a detailed list of trees, flowers, grasses, creepers and plants, which were situated at the mountain Himālayas. The list is as follows: ‘Śāla, Śleṣmātaka, Āmalaka, Harītaka, Bibhitaka, Bhūrja, Muñjaka, Bāṇa, Saptaccada, Mahānimba, Nimba, Nirguṇḍī, Hari, Devadāru, Kāleyaka, Kadmaka, Candana, Vilva, Kapittha, Raktacandana, Māta, Āmra, Āriṣṭa, Akṣota, Abdaka, Arjuna, Hastikarṇa, Sumanasa, Kovidāra, Prācināmlaka, Dhanaka, Samarātaka, Kharjura, Nārikela, Priyāla, Amrātaka, Inḡuda, Tautumāla, Dhava, Bhavya, Kāsmīraparṇi, Jātīphal, Pūgaphala, Katphala, Lavalīphala, Mandāra, Kimśuka, Kusumāṁśuka, Yavāsa, Śamiparṇāsa, Vetasa, Ambuvetasa, Nāraṅgi (of deep red colour), Hiṅgu, Priyaṅgu, Aśoka and (Red-flowered)-Aśoka, Akalla, Avicāraka, Muchukunda, Kunda, Ātarūṣa, Parūṣaka, Kirāta, Kiṅkirata, Ketaka, Svetaketaka, Sobhāñjana, Añjana, Sukaliṅga, Nikotaka, Asana, Sahakāra, Yuthikā (yellow and white), Jāti, Caṃpakajāti, Tumbara, Atumbara, Moca, Loca, Lakuca, Tila, Kuśeśaya, Cavyaka, Bakula, Pāribhadra, Haridraka, Dhāra-Kadamba, Kutaja, Kadamba, Ādityamustaka, Kumbha, Kuṃkuma, Katphala, Badara, Nīpa, Pālivata, Dāḍima, Caṃpaka, Bandhuka, Subandhuka, Kañjakajāti, Pātalā, Mallikā, Karavīra, Kurabaka, Jambu, Nṛipajambu, Bījapūra, Karpura, Aguru, Bimba, Pratibimba, Santānaka, Vitānaka, Guggula, Hintāla, Ikṣu (of white colour), Karavīra (without thorns), Cakṛamarda (relieving pain), Pīlu, Dhātaki, Ciribilva, Tintidīka, Lodha, Viḍaṅga, Kṣirīkā, Aśmantaka, Jambira, Śvetaka, Bhallātaka, Indrayava, Valguja, Nāgakesara, Karamarda, Kāsamarda, Ariṣṭaka, Variṣṭaka, Rudrākṣa, Putrajīvaka (having seven synonyms), Kaṃkolaka, Lavaṅga, Pārijātaka, Pippali, Nāgavalli, Marīca, Navamallikā,

³⁹Devendrakumar Rajaram Patil, *Cultural History from the Vāyu Purāṇa*, Motilala Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, pp. 108-113.

Mṛidvikā, Atimuktaka, Trapusa, Nartikapratāna (creepers), Kuṣmaṇḍa, Alābu, Cirbhīṭa, Patolīkāra, Karkotaki, Vārtaka, Bṛihati, Kaṇṭaka, Mūlaka, and various kinds of edible roots. Kallāras, Vidāri, Rurūṭa (having tasteful thorns), Bhāṇḍīra, Vidūsāra, Rājajambuka, Bāluḥ, Suvarcala, Sarṣapa, Kātkoli, Kṣīrakākolī, Chattra, Atichatra, Kāsamardī, Kṣīraśaka, Kālaśaka, Simbīdhanya and various other kinds of grain, and medicinal herbs which prolong life, procure fame, give strength, and remove the fear of old age, death and hunger; and give every kind of happiness. There are also Venulatā, Kīcaka, Venu, Kāśa, Śāra clusters, Kuśa, Ikṣu, Kārpāsa of various species, Kadali groves, as well as grassy plots (lawns) known as Marakata. In the flowers *Purāṇas* counted Irā, Kuṃkuma, Tagara, Ativiṣa, Māmsagranthi, Suragada, Suvarṇa, Bhūmipuṣpa, and Jambīra, Bhustrīṇa, Saśuka, Śrīngavera, Ajamoda, Kuveraka, Priyālaka, are mentioned as sweet smelling lotuses of various colours.

Some of the blooming lotuses looked like the rising sun, some like the moon and the sun. Some looked like bright gold, and some resembled the Sun-flower. The place was full of growing lotuses. There were Kumuda flowers, resembling the glow of fire. The species of the blue lotus, Kahlāras, the Guṇjātaka berry, Kaserū, Śrīngātaka, Mriṇāla (a species of lotus), Rājotpala (a kind of lotus), various kinds of fruits, flowers and roots thriving in water as well as on land, various species of rice fit for the use of the Ṛiṣīs, was available in that mountain.

The description further goes on to note that following birds and animals inhabited that landscape: the Peacock, the Wood-pecker, the Sparrow, the Cuckoo, the Goose, the Swan, the Lapwing, the Wagtail, the Osprey, the Kālakūta, the civet Cat, the Gokṣa-vaidaka, the Kumbha, the Parrot, the Crane, the Dhātuka, the Ruddy-goose, the Katuka, the Titibha, the Bhata, the Putra-priya, the Heron, the Gocarma, the Girivartaka, the Pigeon, the Kamala, the Sārikā, the Cikora, the Quail, the Duck, the Raktavartma, the Prabhadraka, the Cock, the blue

Jay, the Fowl, the Kumkumcuṛaka, the large Bee, the Porpoise, the Bhulinga, the Dindima, the Crow, the Gallinule, the Dātyūha, the sky Lark, the bees, the several other birds etc.

Along with the above animals, there were also the following wild beasts: the leopard, the lion, the tiger, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the wolf, the bear, the ape, the monkey, the rabbit, the agile cat, the buffalo, the antelope, the blue ox, the doe, the sāmbara, the wild boar.⁴⁰

The above long list of animals, trees, flowers, creepers etc. indicates that the Purāṇic writers were very much aware of the environmental surroundings. Behind this knowledge, there was some purpose which in this case was utilitarian. Even if not all animals, trees, flowers etc were useful for human beings, many of them noted above were important resources for human beings in different ways.

One very important use of these forest products was in the performance of various brahmanical rituals. For example, in the *Srāddha* rituals, the offering comprised both cultivated as well as wild objects. The *Purāṇas* state that at the time of making offerings, one should put his sacred thread on his right shoulder and offer, water, sesamum, kusa grass, flesh, Pathina (a kind of fish), cow's milk, sweet things, the flesh of rhinoceros, honey, syamaka, rice, barley, wild rice, kidney-bean, sugarcane, white flowers and clarified butter⁴¹. These ritualistic norms were definitely made for the *dvija* (the upper three *varṇas*) as it emphasises the importance of the sacred thread. This description interestingly mentions some wild products such as honey, flesh of rhinoceros, wild rice etc. as essential for the ritual. Since supply of these forest products depended on the interaction with the forest dwellers, it must be creating an occasion for the contact between the two different societies.

⁴⁰ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.118.3-61, pp. 316-318.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, I.14.32-35, p. 46.

The importance of the forest products, in the *Srāddha* rituals are also made clear by the sage Aurva. When the king Sagara asked to the sage Aurva, which types of offerings could satisfy the ancestors? The sage Aurva said, "...ancestors are satisfied for a month with offering of rice or the other grain, with clarified butter, with fish, or the flesh of the hare, of birds, of the hogs, the goats, the antelope, the deer, the gayal, or the sheep, or with the milk of the cows, and its products. They are forever satisfied with flesh (in general), and with that of the long-eared white goat in particular. The flesh of the rhinoceros, and honey are also special sources of satisfaction to those worshipped at ancestral ceremonies... ..grains that spring up spontaneously, rice growing wild, panic of both species (white or black) vegetables that grow in forest, are fit for ancestral obligation."⁴²

The above points are very clearly mentioned in the *Matsya Purāna*. It states that the *pitris* say that the offering of flesh keeps them satisfied for two months, the flesh of deer for three months, mutton for four months, the flesh of birds for five months, goat's flesh for six months, Parsat's flesh for seven months, Ena's flesh for eight months, ham and buffalo's flesh for ten months, hare and turtle's flesh for eleven months, cow's (flesh ?) and milk and rice cooked in cow's milk for a year, the flesh of Ruru for 15 months, lion's flesh for twelve years, Kalasaka (pot herb) and flesh of the rhinoceros for a great number of years, the cow's milk mixed with honey and rice cooked in cow's milk, clarified butter made of cow's milk offered even, in a small measure satisfies the *pitris*⁴³. Such rituals show the importance of the wild forest products for the settled society. The *Śrāddha* rituals were very important for the settled societies and the Purāṇic writers clearly emphasized it.

Forests also provide various important things which were required for Yajña and daily rituals for the sages and other members of the society. Flowers and other small materials were

⁴²*Viṣṇu Purāna*, III.16, pp. 265-266.

⁴³*Matsya Purāna*, I.17.31-36, p. 57.

required daily. Sāvitrī was married to Sātyavāna, who was a son of the king Dyumati Sen. Sāvitrī's father-in-law was deprived of his kingdom and resided with his son and his son's wife in the forest. Satyavāna every day went to fetch flowers and fruits from the forest. Sāvitrī also went with him⁴⁴. However, she went with him because of special reason, this narrative seems to suggest that it was part of normal activities of women in the forest. Most probably women also participated in such activities like fetching flowers and fruits for daily worship. Apart from providing physical space for the hermitage and supplying essential item for their survival, the *Purāṇas* indicate that the forest supplied some essentials to the settled society for everyday use. For example, a Brahmana Śivadatta had four sons. They learned all the Vedas along with their ancillary subjects and esoteric doctrines. It was their duty to go to the forest everyday and fetch fruits, water, sacrificial twigs, kusa grass and clay⁴⁵. As when Jamadagni invited the king Karttavirya, the king said, "...it is impossible for you to extend hospitality, because you sustain yourself in the forest only with the products of the forest."⁴⁶

Sometime there were requirement of deer's meat to perform *Yajña* and obsequies. Once Ikṣvāku desired to perform obsequies. He ordered prince Vikukṣi to bring some flesh suitable for the offering. Vikukṣi went to the forest and killed many deer, and other wild animals⁴⁷. Along with this, forests also provided essential materials for making hermitages. As mentioned in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* hut in the hermitage was made of tender leaves and sprouts. It also mentions that the sages wore deer-skin.⁴⁸

It can be argued here that for these very important rituals of the dominant section of the settled *varṇa* based society, the typically forest products were all most indispensable. Although the Yajñas were primarily related with the forest space and conducted by the great

⁴⁴Ibid., II.208.5-21, pp. 210-211.

⁴⁵*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.35.10-16a, pp. 670-671.

⁴⁶Ibid., 2.3.26.50-53a, p. 624.

⁴⁷*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.2, p. 287.

⁴⁸*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.35.49-50., p. 674.

sages, the daily worships to the *Srāddha* rituals as shown above also needed some wild forest products. It seems that the forest products were very much present in the daily life of the settled society at the time of the composition of the *Purānas*. Despite the establishment of the cities, towns and settlements, the need for the forest products existed as can be seen in the Purānic. Even if it decreased over the time, at the theoretical level it remained important.

Space for Hunting

Forests also provided the space for the hunt, which was a favourite past-time of the kings,⁴⁹ fulfilling other purposes as well. Once, king Karttavirya went on a hunting expedition in the forest of the Vindhya mountains. He was accompanied by his family priest and army of elephant, chariots, horses and foot-soldiers. His army was very huge, as can be inferred from the statement that due to the weight of his army, the surface of the earth converted into cave. There was rumbling sound of his chariots all around, and the sky covered with the dust of the ground trodden under the feet of his army. Firstly, they encircled the forest by his army, then king killed different kinds of beast, like lions, tigers, boars, herds of deer, eight-footed Sarabhas, porcupine, broods of rabbits, Camari deer, Ruru deer, foxes, Gavayas (a variety of wild oxen), wolves, Krsnasara deer, leopards, red rhinoceros etc.. Some of the deer were pursued by the hunting dogs. The hunting was extremely agitating and chaotic, and so full of bloodshed that it looked like the end of a Yuga. After killing, the king and his army were overwhelmed with great tiredness. They went to the Narmada river and took bath, and rested on the banks adorned with groves of trees. Once the sun came down, the king with his followers started to return to his capital.⁵⁰ This is a one day hunting expedition.

⁴⁹Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the forest: Early India', *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17,1(2001), p. 9.

⁵⁰*Brahmāṇḍa Purāna*, II.2.3.26.21-43a, pp. 622-623.

There is no mention of any camp-sites. The Purāṇas also mention about the hunting expedition of the sons of Kārtavīrya,⁵¹ and the king Yayāti.⁵²

Interestingly, the hunt by the kings was seen differently by the brāhmaṇical writers as compared to a hunter. A hunter, who lives by hunting are treated as uncouth, looked down upon and subordinated to the outcaste status. However, princes and kings frequently went for hunts, which were meant to be a sport but which can sometimes be described as a ferocious destruction of nature and animals. These activities do not affect the high status of royalty, even when they behave in a manner far more gruesome than the actions of professional hunters.⁵³ It seems that the kings worked within the ambit of brāhmaṇical ideology which stands on the structure of the varṇa system, on the other hand a hunter always remained outside this structure. Looked upon as outsiders, the activities of hunters were always seen as unlawful.

The hunting expedition was not simply an act of killing the wild animals. As the above narrative suggests the hunting was an intrusion into the forests by force. It disturbed the nature of the forests at various levels, more importantly, it disturbed the peaceful environment of the hermitages as king Kārtavīrya confessed. He accepts that there may be great trouble to the ascetics to perform religious observances due to the undisciplined behavior of his army.⁵⁴ Intrusion into the hermitage's environment happened at another level also. In the Purāṇic narratives we see some instances of violence and plunder, like the quarrel over the Jamadagni's cow Kāmadhenu, the routing the army of the king by the cow, and brutal attack to the sage Jamadagni. This whole incidence completely changed the peaceful

⁵¹Ibid., II.2.3.45.1-9, pp. 724-725.

⁵²*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.28.14-18, p. 86; I.30.1-8, p. 90.

⁵³Romila Thapar, 'Forests and Settlements', in Mahesh Rangarajan, ed., *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*, New Delhi: Pearson, 2007, p. 40.

⁵⁴*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.26.50-53a, p. 624.

aura of the hermitage.⁵⁵ Later Kārttavīrya's sons went for the hunt and killed the sage Jamadāgani.⁵⁶ We argue that the nature of the hunt and the use of violence disturbed the phenomenon of the forests, and it compelled kings to visit sage's hermitages and show their gratitude to them. It was possibly a compensatory act by the kings.

Hermitages and other Habitations

Forest was not only physical terrain; it also constitutes the social space created by the various social groups. Sometimes specific space was created within the forest which was different from the general character of forest e.g. the hermitages of the sages. It is believed that sages created a peaceful space within the wild forest through their power of penance. The hermitages of Aurva, Agastya, Jamadagni were such spaces, where the nature of relationships characteristic to the forest seems to have changed. The *Puranas* suggest that in these places animals abandon their natural hostility. On the occasion of visit to sage Aurva's hermitage, king Sagara said, "...the potentiality of your penance is great. It is not common to anyone else...in your penance grove, ever since its infancy the fawn, slowly but unhesitatingly approached the seat of the lion and drink water...in order to sustain itself, a tigress killed a hind which had recently given birth to its fawn, in another forest. But the same tigress nurtures the young ones of that hind in your penance grove. It is because of your penance that in the outer jungle, a lion was chasing a fleeing elephant. But as soon as they entered this penance grove, they had stopped running. They stand in the same place, afraid of you. The mongoose, rats, cats, peacocks, rabbits, serpents, wolves, boars, tigers, the fabulous eight-footed Śarabhas, bears, monkeys, jackals, Gavayas (mountain-ox), the cows, the deer and the buffaloes abandon their natural enmity and become friendly."⁵⁷

⁵⁵Ibid., II.2.3.29th and 30th chapters.

⁵⁶Ibid., II.2.3.45.1-9, pp. 724-725.

⁵⁷Ibid., II.2.3.51.6-12, pp. 756-757.

The hermitage of Agastya, which was established on the bank of the river Sarasvati, was resorted to by deer and lions coming together with calm minds, along with many sages. Various trees abounded there, namely: Kutaja (*wrightia anti dysenterica*), Arjuna (*terminalia Arjuna*), Nimba (*Margosa*), Paribhadra (pine tree), Dhava (*grisea Tomentosa*), Inguda (*Terminalia atapha*), Khadira (*Acacia Catbhu*), Asana (*Terminalia Tomentosa*), Kharjura (Date palms) and Badari (Jijube). The hut was made of leaves and sprouts. Sage Agastya was portrayed as wearing a deer skin⁵⁸. The hermitage of Jamadagni was echoed of sound of the *Vedic mantra* and calm animals. At this place, the animals though mutually harmful by nature, like lions, deer, cows, elephants, cats and mice, roamed about in joy simultaneously, leaving off their fear.⁵⁹ It seems that the peaceful nature of the hermitages was the general features, which was also romanticized by the Purāṇic writers.

There are also other images of the hermitages in the *Puranas*. For example, the hermitage of Atri was described as an area almost impassable to a human being. But the king Pururavā, by virtue of his devotion and by the grace of God, reached the sacred hermitage. There was a beautiful lake and on all the four sides of the lake, there were charming rock beds full of trees and silver and coral colour... In the centre of the lake, the sage Atri has built a palace, which can be reached by a golden bridge, studded with precious stones.⁶⁰ Although, hermitages were seen as accessible to everyone, here hermitage was described as more specialised space, where anyone could not reach and very interestingly, it is also presented as having royal set up with palaces etc.

At the one level, the hermitages humanized the space of forests. Sages choose to reside there, and they cultivated an attitude of nonviolence that transformed stretches of the forest into an earthly paradise. Even their behaviour, life-style and values were set in contrast

⁵⁸Ibid., II.2.3.35.44-50, pp. 673-674.

⁵⁹Ibid., III.2.3.44.4-5, p. 721.

⁶⁰*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.118.74-76, p. 319; 119.6-25, p. 320.

to that of the kings.⁶¹ They can be seen as making a bridge between the two different cultures. However, they also became a victim of royal violence along with the other living beings of the forests. The destruction of the hermitage of Jamadagani by king Kārtavīrya is an important example of the royal violence, which indicated the differences between the two different characters, living in two contrasting spaces.

It is also important to note that the forests were not only the place for sages to perform penances. The royal kings also moved to the forests after giving throne to eligible candidate to perform penance and to get *Mokṣa*. For example, Yayāti exchanged own old age with his son Puru. After enjoying himself thousand years, Yayāti gave back youth to Puru and turned old. He also made Puru the king of own empire, and after that he quitted the metropolis and went to the forest in the company of many Brāhmaṇas and ascetics. There are other instances where king went into the forests along with wives⁶². Yayāti passed a great number of days in the forest, living on fruits and herbs. By subduing his mind and conquering anger, he regularly performed *agnihotra* and offered libations to the Deities and the manes of ancestors according to the rules prescribed for *agnihotra*. He entertained his guests by offering them the jungle fruits and ate what he could get by picking up gleanings of harvest (Śiloñchavritti).⁶³ Yayāti was not a single royal king, but there were many kings who went to the forests and lived simple life that completely depended upon the forests.

There are very stories in the *Puranas* that reflect on the situation of women in the forest spaces. We have very few but important examples of women related with hermitages. The wife of the king Bāhu, along with her husband lived at the hermitage of the sage Aurva

⁶¹Philip Lutgendorf, 'City, Forest, and Cosmos: Ecological Perspectives from the Sanskrit Epics' in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds.) "*Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*", Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, p. 279.

⁶²*Matsya Purāna*, I.34 chapter, pp. 98-100.

⁶³*Ibid.*, I.35.11-17, pp. 100-101.

and gave birth of his son Sagara, who later regained his own kingdom⁶⁴. In the story of Sāvitrī, who was married to Sātyavāna, Sāvitrī's father-in-law was deprived of his kingdom and resided with his son and his son's wife in the forest. Satyavāna every day went to fetch flowers and fruits from the forest.⁶⁵ Here, she lived in the forest with her family. This narrative also gives us an example of the activities of women in the forest. Most probably women participated in such activities like fetching flowers and fruits for daily worship and sometime to sustain her or others members of the hermitages.

We have instances where the nature of the forest dramatically changed because of the activities of the sages. The story of the sage Saubhari is a good example. He wanted to experience the life of a householder. So he demanded one of king Mandhātri's daughters. The king hesitated due to his emaciated condition. He said that in our family there is tradition of choosing husband and if his daughter chooses him as her husband then he could marry her to him. With the permission of the king, Saubhari entered into the interior of the palace. After seeing him, king's all fifty daughters showed their desire for him. In such situation, king married all to Saubhari. Sage along with all his wives went to his habitation, where he employed the chief architect Viśvakarman to construct separate palaces for each of his wives. He also ordered him to provide each building with elegant couches and seats and furniture and to attach to them gardens and swan, with reservoirs of water, where the wild-duck and the swan should sport amidst beds of lotus flowers.⁶⁶ Even the king Nimi founded a city well known as Jayanta near the hermitage of Gautama.⁶⁷ The instances of making palaces inside the forest hint at a gradual process of encroachment upon the forests, and bring them into the influence of the complex institution of the states. On the one hand sages are the mediators

⁶⁴ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.3, pp. 295-300; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.26.128-132, pp. 683-684; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, III.2.3.47.79-87, p. 736.

⁶⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, II.208.5-21, pp. 210-211.

⁶⁶ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.2, pp. 291-292.

⁶⁷ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.27.1-3, p. 691.

between these two different societies, with king's frequent or occasional visits creating conditions for the introduction of monarchical state society in these regions. Though, one may question questions the level of influence of settled society on forest regions.

The story of the horse sacrifice made by king Janaka mentions that many sages were present on the occasion. He was curious to know who the most excellent brāhmaṇa amongst them was. So, he brought a thousand cows, plenty of gold, villages, jewels and maid-servants and announced that the wealth was for the most excellent brāhmaṇa. Yajñavalkya won the debate and took away the wealth to home along with his disciples⁶⁸. Although, the figure is very huge and seems imaginary but indicates an interesting dimension of the relationship between the forests and settled society. Through the gift, the king could induce changes in the structure of the hermitage and as a result also into the forest.

Scholars argue that the hermitages itself were an intrusion into the forest's space, but the construction of the other structures like palaces, buildings etc in the forest did not only show intrusion but ownership as well. Without ownership at the forest's space, it is not possible to make palaces, city and grant villages along with other things to the sages.

Burning of the Forest and the Question of Authority over the Forest

The burning of forests is not unknown in literary tradition in ancient India. It was seen as the necessary pre-condition of the expansion and extension power to hitherto new areas⁶⁹. The burning of the forest of Apava is given in the *Purāṇas*.⁷⁰ Once upon a time, the Sun god was thirsty. He begged alms from Kartavirya in the guise of a Brāhmaṇa. He demanded all immobile beings as food. With the grace of the sun-god, he burnt all immobile beings, hermitages, villages, cowherds, colonies, cities, penance groves, forests and parks etc. and

⁶⁸ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, I.1.2.34.36-68, pp. 335-338.

⁶⁹ Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the forest: Early India', *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17, 1, (2001), p. 4.

⁷⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.32.39-47, pp. 730-731; *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.44.3-14, pp. 115-116.

circumambulated the Sun-god. The earth burnt down by the splendor of the sun, became tree-less and grass-less. He also burnt the empty hermitage of Varuna's son named Vasistha (Apava). Knowing this, out of anger sage Vasistha cursed Kartavirya as such, "O haihaya, since you have not spared this forest of mine another man will set aside even this difficult task achieved by you. He will be Kunti's son Arjuna (Parasurāma). He will not be a king. O Arjuna, the extremely powerful Rāma... will cut off and shatter your thousand arms. The powerful Brāhmaṇa and Sage of great strength will kill you."⁷¹

The burning of forests is not unknown in literary tradition in ancient India. The burning of the forests were viewed at one hand an attempt to destroy the natural resources, which are vital for lives of hunter-gatherers, and on the other hand it symbolized the authority over lands. This became very important in such situation when the availability of forest-lands were very high, and also easily available. But within literary tradition, we see a departure in narratives regarding it. In case of *Videgha Mathava* narrative, the purpose was mainly to legitimize his settlement. The *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa* describes the narrative :

(14) "Mathava, the Videgha, was at that time on the (river) Sarasvati. He (the sacred fire, Agni) thence went burning along this earth towards the east; and Gautama Rahugana (the priest) and Videgha Mathava (the king) followed after him as he was burning along. He burnt over (dried up) all these rivers. Now that (river) which is called Sadanira ('always with water') flows from the northern (Himalaya) mountain: that one he did not burn over. That one the Brahmins did not cross in former times, thinking, 'it has not been burn over by Agni Vaisvanara'. (15) Nowadays, however, there are many Brahmins to the east of it. At that time it (the land east of the Sadanira) was very uncultivated, very marshy, because it had not been tested by Agni Vaisvanara. (16) Nowadays, however, it is very cultivated, for the

⁷¹Ibid., II.32.44-47, p. 731; *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.44.3-14, pp. 115-116.

Brahmins have caused (Agni) to taste it through sacrifice. Even in late summer that (river), as it were, rages along: so cold is it, not having been burnt over by Agni Vaisvanara. (17) Mathava the Videgha, then said (to Agni), 'where am I to abide?' 'to the east of this (river) be thy abode', said he. Even now this (river) forms the boundary of the Kosalas and Videhas; for these are the Mathavas (or descendant of Mathava)."⁷²

The *Mahabharata* also describes land-burning as the burning of the Khandava forest.⁷³ On the request of fire-god Agni, who was unable to consume Khandava forest, Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna set out to burn down the forest to restore Agni's vitality. The forest was under Indra's protection. That forest was abode of the great cobra Taksaka and others. They also shot down all living creatures that tried to escape. Only six escaped, Asvasena, Maya (an Asura, brother to Namuci killed by Indra, a clever architect who later built the assembly-hall where the Pandavas gambled away their kingdom) and four sarnga birds. Everything has been consumed by the fire-god. The Naga Taksaka was saved due to having been away at that time.

All three narratives describe the burning of forest in the grand Aryan manner. Besides the similarity between the narratives of The *Mahabharata* and The *Vayu Purana*, like due to grace of the god they burned the forest for him, god asked alms in the guise of Brahmana etc. These narratives "bring the contrasting paradigmatic life-style and values of the king and sage into their starkest juxtaposition."⁷⁴ But there are also some significant differences. In Mahabharata description, the fire-god tried to consume every living creature. While in *Vayu*,

⁷² *Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 1.4.1.14-17., cited in D. D. Kosambi, *An introduction to the study of Indian history*, Mumbai: Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1956, p. 123.

⁷³ *The Mahābhārata*, translated and edited by J.L. Fitzgerald, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, pp. 412-422.

⁷⁴ Philip Lutgendorf, 'City, Forest, and Cosmos: Ecological Perspectives from the Sanskrit Epics' in Christopher Key Chapple and Mary Evelyn Tucker (eds.) "*Hinduism and Ecology: The Intersection of Earth, Sky and Water*", OXP, New Delhi, 2000, p. 278.

the sun-god demanded all immobile beings as food. Besides it, in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* narrative there is a sense of territory and ownership/affection regarding forests.

Scholars⁷⁵ argue that the burning of the forest was an attempt to destroy the resource base of hunter-gatherers even if there was easy forest land available. Here, scholars emphasize the necessity of the violence. However Thapar⁷⁶ argues differently and says that the burning of the Khāṇḍava *vana* was the example of the claim on the land as territory. She further believed that the narrative of *Videgha Māthava* and the burning of the Khāṇḍava *vana* were different in mood. Although the narrative of the burning of the forest by the Haihaya king Kartavirya Arjuna was closely in the style and also indicated the process of claim on the land. But this narrative also gave other dimension of the claim. In that narrative, sage Aurva claimed the authority over the forest, which was different and shows the tension between the royal power and the power of intelligence. The authority over the forest was considered on both the ways, but we could not say to what extent the authority of the sages actually existed.

However, the authority over the forests was complicated, which is reflected from a very interesting story in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*. The story gives interesting insight into the authority over the forests. Śiva in the form of hunter confronts Paraśurāma and asks him the purpose and authority under which he decided to stay in the segment of forest falling under the domain of the hunter. He says, “I am a hunter named Tosapravarsa. I am staying here in the great forest. I am the lord of this region along with the living beings, trees and creepers therein... ..I do not tolerate the approach and stay of anyone in this forest. With my strength, I do not permit even Indra (to come here). There is no doubt about it. All the people know this since this region is dependent upon me. So, no one comes here without my permission. Thus my history has been entirely recounted to you. You too tell me everything about you

⁷⁵M. Gadgil and R. Guha, *This Fissured Land*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 78ff.

⁷⁶Romila Thapar, ‘Perceiving the forest: Early India’, in *Studies in History*, New Series, vol. 17, 1, (2001), p. 4.

factually. Who are you? What have you come here for? Why have you established yourself here? Are you ready to go elsewhere? What is it that you are desirous of doing?”⁷⁷

This dialogue between the hunter representing the inhabitant of the forest and the Paraśurāma portrayed as external aggressor give some very interesting insight into the complex interplay of the notion of authority and power in the forest space. The tone and content of the hunter speech invariably suggest that he consider himself to be the lord of the forest including non-human creatures (say, living beings, trees and creepers). He asserts his power over the forest by declaring that he does not tolerate the trespassing or the stay of anyone who does not belong to this region without his permission. Suspicious of Paraśurāma presence, he ponders upon the purpose of his visit to the forest and asks him various questions regarding his identity and authority.

Here the notion of authority over the forest that gets reflected is multifold. Along with the royal kings, sages and forest dwellers also asserted their authority. The royal king did not claim their authority in the absolute sense, his authority over the forests gets manifested in his power to hunt inside the forest and the burning of the forest. Although, this authority to hunt was never questioned, the sage Vaśiṣṭha questioned and also cursed Kārttavīrya for the burning of his forest. It seems that the nature of authority over the forest was not a well developed idea in the *Puranas*, as we earlier see in these various instances.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have been discussed the different notions of the forests, that emerge from the early *Purāṇās*. Purāṇic writers created a very fascinating cosmological section, giving very useful insights into the Purāṇic perception of forest. These texts mention forest

⁷⁷ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, III.2.3.49.43-49, pp. 743-744.

as a store-house of resources that plays a very crucial role in regaining of lost kingdoms of such kings who took shelter into forest after having been defeated by enemies. Along with these, this chapter also discusses various ways of using forest's space by the members of settled society.

We get the impression that forest space was used for various purposes, such as hermitage by the sages, as a place to perform various brāhmaṇical rituals and penances, and as a place for hunt and hide by the kings and nobility. However, the overarching idea that emerges from this discussion suggests that though forest was associated with various actions and persons, the idea of power and authority over this space in the *Purāṇas* seems highly fragmented.

Chapter 3

Representations of the Forest-dwellers: The Human Social Groups

Social stratification is to be found in almost all human communities, past and present¹, but some of the communities remained outside of it. In early India there were forest dwelling communities who were not part of the existing 'brāhmaṇical social order'. They were not internal 'others' like Caṇḍālas; and therefore did not come under the notion of *Varṇa* system till they began to be incorporated into the expanding frontiers of the state.² Along with all narrative or normative texts, the *Purāṇas* also mention many forest dwellers, for instance the Niṣādas, the Śābaras, the Pulindas and the Kirātas. They lived in forest and depended on forest produce for their livelihood. Like the literary texts, the *Purāṇic* literature also closely associate them with the mountain regions, mostly the Himalayan and the Vindhyan ranges, because such regions were a natural habitat for the tribal peoples throughout Indian history. The *Purāṇas* describe them as barbarians, conforming to other textual descriptions. However, the status of forest dwellers changed with the changing socio-economic condition. In this chapter, we will study their status as reflected in the *Purāṇas*.

Every culture is conditioned by its environment. The forest communities are no exception. They lived in relative isolation from civilized people and subsisted on hunting-gathering.³ The Himalayan region and the Vindhyan complex of central India are two significant habitational areas of these people, as these formed "throughout Indian history an

¹ Aloka Parasher-Sen, 'Introduction', in Aloka Parasher-Sen, ed., *Subordinate and Marginal Groups in Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 6.

² Dev Nathan, 'Introduction', in Dev Nathan, ed., *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1997, p. 13.

³ V. N. Mishra and Malti Nagar, 'From Tribe to Caste: An ethno-archaeological perspective', in Dev Nathan, ed., *From Tribe to Caste*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, 1997, p. 143.

ideal setting for the tribal peoples”⁴. The mountainous habitation area of the forest dwellers is one important factor for their exclusion from the civilized society.⁵

The attachment of forest dwellers with mountainous regions is also emphasised by the Purāṇic writers. The Niṣādas were constantly represented as the forest dwellers of the Vindhyan regions. Purāṇic writers also followed the same trend and situated them in the same region. Further, the Kirātas were situated on the east of the Bhāratavarṣa. However, Purāṇas contain less information about the Śabaras and the Pulindas as compare to the Niṣādas and the Kirātas. Only the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* gives passing reference to the Śabaras. It mentions that Paraśurāma crossing through the Himalayan region saw a Śabara man fighting with the boar.⁶ This suggests that the Śabaras were inhabitants of the Himalayan region. The important point that emerges here is that at the time of the composition of the *Purāṇas*, these forest dwellers were seen as the inhabitants mountainous regions. However, Puranas sometimes also situate these forest dwelling communities outside the characteristic mountainous regions possibly indicating a gradual shift in the brahmanical attitude toward them. We will discuss this point later.

Representations of the Niṣādas

The Purāṇic writers give the famous story of the king Veṇa and his two sons: Niṣāda and Pṛthu⁷. According to the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Niṣāda was born due to the churning of the thigh of the king Vena⁸. The *Matsya Purāṇa* on the other hand notes that Niṣāda was born after the

⁴ Romila Thapar, ‘The image of the barbarian in Early India’ in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Past*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 243.

⁵ Aloka-Parasher-sen, *Mlecchas in Early India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, 2001

⁶ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.22.22, p. 590.

⁷ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.13, pp. 83-84; *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.10, pp. 29-32; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.1.108-128, pp. 466-468; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, I.1.2.36.124-150, pp. 371-373.

⁸ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.13, p. 83.

churning of Vena's dead body.⁹ However, the *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇā* other account and mentions Vena's hand as the birth place of Niṣāda.¹⁰ The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that he was the outcome of the evil quality of his mother, who was the daughter of Mr̥tyu/Yama, and he was *Mleccha*, a barbarian.¹¹ Despite giving different place of origin, the *Purāṇas* seem to be in agreement on his description. They write that he was short and dark in appearance, and looked confused. On the other hand his brother Pr̥thu was shown as very calm and composed and determined to lead settled agriculturalist life. Thus, according to his qualities Niṣādas was compelled to lead a forest and subsequently he established the communities of the Niṣādas, the hunter community.

The *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* adds that Niṣāda created various other forest groups such as, the Dhīvaras (fishermen), the Tamburas, the Tuburas, the Khaśas and others from the sins of Vena. All these groups inhabitate around the Vindhyan region.¹² Parasher-Sen argues that this myth may have been used by the Purāṇic authorities to explain the existing situation and justify their own attitudes towards these people.¹³ This narrative also hints at the possible process of migration of the forest dwelling groups deep into the forest and difficult mountainous terrain in the wake of the onslaught of the dominant powers.

The later groups do not find mention in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*. This may indicate that the writers of the *Purāṇas* were getting more and more familiar with the tribal groups and their activities. Since they knew the Niṣādas, they associated any other forest groups with similar activities with it. This also served their purpose of integrating all the diverse groups by providing a common origin. Thus, the dark, short, ugly Niṣāda became the prototype of all forest dwelling people. At the same time it also sought to legitimize the expulsion or

⁹*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.10.6-7, p. 29.

¹⁰*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.1.121-123, p. 467; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, I.1.2.36.141, p. 373.

¹¹*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.10.8-10, p. 29.

¹²*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.1.121-124, p. 467; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, I.1.2.36.144-145, p. 373.

¹³Aloka-Parasher-Sen, *Mlecchas in Early India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, 2001, p. 201.

displacement of such groups when land was cleared and settled by the agriculturists,¹⁴ equipped with the brāhmaṇical ideology, into deep forest regions.

The stories about the origin of the Niṣāda establish some basic features of aboriginal people, such as the importance of matrilineal elements. The mother's characters were mentioned as the determining factors of the physical appearance and activity, something closely associated with the tribal groups. Niṣādas were basically hunter and hilly people. However, as mentioned when Niṣāda was born from the body of Vena, he was confused and did not understand what to do, because whatever they (sages) were doing was out of his concern. This is the indication of differences between two different cultures. Romila Thapar argues that this myth emphasizes the differences between the forest dwellers and the cultivators.¹⁵

There is a very interesting story in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* which gives interesting insight into a hunter's life and his notion about the forest and the people of other social groups. Once Śiva assumed the guise of a youthful hunter and his physical appearance was as follow: 'the luster of broken (heap of) collyrium, wide red eyes in their extremities, very tall, hard as adamant, raised chin, mighty and lifted arms and shoulders, tawny moustache and hair, the stinking odor of suet and raw fish. He held bow and arrows, and appeared like the destroyer of all living beings. His whole body had been scarred with wounds due to the contact with the thorny creepers and shrubs. He was found to chew frequently a piece of flesh dripping with blood. His neck was slightly bent with the weight of two pieces of flesh suspended from it.'¹⁶

¹⁴Romila Thapar, 'Society and Historical Consciousness' in Romila Thapar, '*Cultural Past*', New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 127.

¹⁵Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the Forest: Early India', in *Studies in History*, Vol., 16, 2001, p. 15.

¹⁶*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.23.9-12, p. 597.

The physical appearance of hunter is very important to understand the nature of his life inside the forest, which clearly gives impression that he belongs to a forest tribe. He not only has to fight with wild animals for livelihood. The nature of the forest makes him physically very hard, as he works so hard to sustain himself in the forest, building expertise in various actions. The understanding of the forests and their nature is very important for a hunter, because he depends on the forest for everything. However, in the forest he has to constantly struggle with the creepers and shrubs that make wounds on his body. Above features also associate a particular kind of food habit of hunter which primarily consists of meat as he is depicted frequently chewing raw flesh.

The life inside the forest as indicated in the context of hunter was totally different from the life of sages and renouncer, as they did not need to hunt and fight with the nature for survival. Their activities inside the forest had power to create contrasting spaces within forests. The early *Purāṇas* believe that this is happen due to their penance and rituals. On the other hand, hunter continuously has to fight nature and indulge in violence; even for daily necessities. The *Purāṇas* give this impression that brāhmaṇical ideology has power to transform the unknown spaces along with natural behaviors of animals. However, the *Purāṇas* do not mention any instance where sages try to change the natural code of conducts of forest dwellers.

Further, the story mentions that Śiva in the form of hunter confronts Paraśurāma and asks him the purpose and authority under which he decided to stay in the segment of forest falling under the domain of the hunters. He says: “I am a hunter named Tosapravarsa. I am staying here in this great forest. I am the lord of this region along with the living beings, trees and creepers therein. I move about here with the flesh of different animals for my diet. I am impartial towards all in this region viewing everyone equally in my mind. I am equally kind

to all living beings. I have no one related to me such as parents and others. I do not pay any attention to any of the objects desired by me whether they be unworthy of being eaten or drunk or whether they be unworthy of approach. Nor do I devote any particular attention to rites worthy of being pursued or not. I do not tolerate the approach and stay of anyone in this forest. With my strength, I do not permit even Indra (to come here). There is no doubt about it. All the people know this since this region is dependent upon me. So, no one comes here without my permission. Thus my history has been entirely recounted to you. You too tell me everything about you factually. Who are you? What have you come here for? Why have you established yourself here? Are you ready to go elsewhere? What is it that you are desirous of doing?"¹⁷

This dialogue between the hunter representing the inhabitants of the forest and Paraśurāma portrayed as an external aggressor give some very interesting insight into the complex interplay of the notion of hierarchy, authority and power in the forest space. The tone and the content of the hunter's speech invariably suggest that he consider himself to be the lord of the forest including the non-human creatures (i.e, living beings, trees and creepers). He assert his power over forest by declaring that he does not tolerate the trespassing or the stay of anyone who does not belong to this region without his permission. Suspicious of Paraśurāma presence, he ponders upon the purpose of his visit to the forest and asks him various question regarding his identity and authority. It is significant to note here that in this narrative a hunter is mentioned by his name. One can further argue that possibly this Tosapravarsa was the leader of the group of hunters living in that region. This is also substantiated by the claims that hunter makes in his discussion with Paraśurāma.

¹⁷Ibid., II.2.3.23.15-23, p. 598.

Further, the story also suggests that as the supposed chief of the forest dweller, hunter had least regards for the social norms and power structure of the settled society. He clearly states that he does not care for the rites and rituals governing the modes of eating, drinking or idea of purity and pollution prevalent in the settled society. So, the image of the forest life that reflects from the above passage opens up a possibility to look at socio- economic and political life of the forest dwellers who were not always at the receiving end of the brāhmaṇical socio- cultural norms. In fact, there was active denial of these norms by emphasising the norms and customs of the forests.

The response of the Paraśurāma was also important as it gives the insight into the notions of society living outside the forest. Answering hunter's query, Paraśurāma retorted back and said "hence, it is proper for you to go away from this place to some other place. If not, it is detrimental to me, to my holy rites and to my observances. Or I deserve respect from you with devotion as I am a guest from another land. I am an ascetic and a sage and have come to your place of residence. If I live in your vicinity it will be conducive only to sin. Resorting to my vicinity will result only in your unhappiness. Hence, leave off loitering about in the precincts of my penance-grove. Be happy thereby on both the world."¹⁸

It seems that Paraśurāma was not very keen to introduce himself to a hunter. May be he thought that it is against his honor and prestige. So, he said in a commanding manner that he was determined to stay there, and being a guest, Paraśurāma deserves respect from hunter. However, at the same time he also warned hunter, if he tries to remove him then he should be ready for consequences; and he advises him that he should better leave for another place.

On hearing Paraśurāma, the hunter argues that if Paraśurāma does not like his presence, then he should leave the place instead of suggesting hunter to leave the place as it

¹⁸Ibid., II.2.3.23.34-37, pp. 599-600.

originally belongs to him. These words agitate Paraśurāma, he says, “The very tribe of hunters is ruthless. It strikes terror into all living beings. It is always engaged in wicked activities. Hence, it is despised and held in contempt by all living beings. You are born of that tribe. You are a sinner. You harm and harass all living beings. Why then, O evil-minded one, do you not deserve to be shunned by good people? Hence, comprehend this that you belong to a low caste and soon get away from here to another place. You are not to hesitate in this respect. You are considerate to your body. You want to protect it. Hence, you do not go anywhere near thorns and other things. You cannot bear the pain thereof. Understand that in the same way, life is dear to all living beings. Everyone who is hit or hurt feels the pain just like you. Be non-violent unto all living beings. This is the eternal virtue (*dharma*). It is because you act contradictory to this dictum that you are despised by good men. For sustaining your own life, you will not stop to kill all other living beings. How can you prevent yourself being considered censurable by good people? Hence, go soon, O basest one among all men, there will not be dereliction of duty on my part and the subsequent loss thereof, on account of you. If you do not go away from here yourself, I shall, by using force, generate in you the inclination to move away. O sinner, your stay here even for half a moment is not conducive to your welfare. How can a hater of virtue, a person who always acts contradictory to the dictates of *dharma* attain welfare?”¹⁹

Paraśurāma response to hunter is basically structured on the brāhmanical believes system. According to this, being a member of hunter tribe, he was seen as ruthless and sinner, who only deserve contemptuous behavior from the settled society because he always acts contradictory to the Dharma. And being a low caste it is his responsibility to go away from the member of civilized society. Paraśurāma also shows that in order to protect dharma, he would not even hesitate to use force if hunter does not go away from the place. It gives the

¹⁹Ibid., II.2.3.23.46-55, pp. 600-601.

insight into the expansion of the brāhmaṇical influence that happened through both the means: ideology as well as violence. Residing even in the hilly areas, the hunters were not entitled to the ownership of the space and were asked to make way for the settled agrarian life. This particular instance from the *Purāṇa* definitely indicates the tension between two different groups for the authority over forest spaces.

On the question of being ruthless, hunter responds by saying, "...If I were forsake my duty (dharma) and remain care-free without fear from any quarter, then you can yourself mentally scrutinize and despise me as you please. It is sustenance of my parents, sons and others that destruction of living beings is carried out by me as a part of my duty. Along with my family, I sustain myself day by day with meat because it is my duty. This is the vocation formerly laid down by the creator for me. If I kill (more animals and have with me more) meat than what is sufficient to nourish my parents and others, then I may incur sin... ..carefully examine with your own intellect, the difference between you and me. As for me, I am engaged in the sustenance of my parents and others whole-heartedly..."²⁰

The above dialogue gives an important feature of the existing society. It shows that hunters were ruthless not because of their ways of living, but due to the fear of settled societies, fear of being victimised by the will of settled society. Hunter also argues that the nature and way of living were given to them by the creator of the world. They were not, what they were, due to their own will. And after all, for him this is only the way to sustain his family, he has no other choice. By doing this, he says, he is following his Dharma.

As we have seen above, the Niṣādas were represented as ruthless hunter by the Purāṇic writers. There are other narratives that hint the ruthless nature of the Niṣādas. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* mentioned that once Śūra (Kārttavīrya's son), who had escaped to the

²⁰Ibid., II.2.3.23.71-77, p. 603.

Himalayan forests due to Paraśurāma's onslaught, went for hunting along accompanied by the armies of four different units. After the hunt, they took bath in Narmadā river. On their way back, they saw the hermitage of Jamadagni. They decided to take revenge of own father death and killed Jamadagni. After killing him, they took away his head like the ruthless Niṣādas (hunters).²¹ Here the idea of Niṣādas as the epitome of cruelty and violence has been invoked to describe the gruesome act committed by Śūra. This narrative also represents the tendency among the brāhmaṇical writers to victimise the enemies through comparing them with the most degraded beings. In such way the Niṣāda was used here as a symbol of most hated, ruthless being.

It is important to note that the images of the Niṣādas were given by the brāhmaṇical writers as ruthless, sinful etc. was primarily due to his hunting activities. But the hunting is not the sole activity of only the forest dwellers; the royal kings also took pleasure and pride by indulging in it. But the manner in which both were perceived by the theoretical writers is contrasting. Thapar argues that the activity of hunting reflected the interesting dichotomy between nature and culture. Those who live by hunting are treated as uncouth, looked down upon, and subordinated to the outcaste status. Yet princes and kings frequently go on hunts, which are meant to be a sport but which at the same time was ferocious destruction of nature and animals. These activities do not affect the high status of royalty, even when they behave in a manner far more gruesome than the actions of professional hunters.²²

But the Niṣādas have not always been regarded as ruthless hunter. Aloka Parasher-Sen argues that during the Vedic period they had a certain status. During the performance of *viśvajit* sacrifice, there is requirement of sojourn with the Niṣādas for three nights and partaking of their foods. The reference to the Niṣāda village is given in this connection. This

²¹Ibid., III.2.3.45.1-9, pp. 724-725.

²² Romila Thapar, 'Forests and Settlements', in Mahesh Rangarajan, ed., *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*, New Delhi: Pearson, 2007, p. 40.

ritualistic requirement clearly indicates that Niṣādas was not an untouchable but an acceptable member of the brāhmaṇical society. It is the *dharmaśāstra* tradition that has scribed a lower status to the Niṣādas.²³ Vivekanand Jha has studied the case of the Niṣādas in details. He argues that the status of being able to take part in the *viśvajit* sacrifice had lost in the later Vedic Period, due to the traditional occupational habit as fishing and hunting. He believes that the occupation of fishing and hunting was the cause of their continuous degradation, despite having a tribal kingdom.²⁴

The Purāṇic writers also represent the Niṣādas in the similar manner. There is not any departure in their status. They are still as a hunter in the Purāṇic texts, and there is also a hint about their ruthless behaviour. So they are still known through the umbrella term 'Niṣādas'. However, the hunters were not shown ignorant about the rules and representatives of the settled society, as in one case a hunter recognised Paraśurāma.

The Purāṇic writers seem to believe that the hunters were well aware of the some representative of the brahmanical ideologist or settled society. Once Paraśurāma, accompanied by Akrtavrana went to the middle Puskara for taking bath. A stag came there running accompanied by a hind. He was being chased by a hunter. After some time, hunter also came there holding up the bow and having an arrow in his hand. He recognized Rama and became afraid of him. He thought thus, "This Rama is a great warrior. He is capable of destroying wicked persons. How can I kill the stag and the hind hunted by me, when he was within sight?" This narrative indicates that some of the most important representatives of the brāhmaṇical ideology were well known, even to the forest dwellers.

²³ Aloka-Parasher-Sen, *Mlecchas in Early India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, 2001

²⁴ Vivekanand Jha, 'From Tribe to Untouchable: The case of Niṣādas', in *Indian Society: Historical Probing in memory of D. D. Kosambi*, New Delhi: People's Publication House, 1974.

Within the notion of rebirth, the Purāṇic writers also believed that if anyone was doing wrong; they would be born in the hunter family. For instance, once in the Kurukṣetra a virtuous Ṛiṣi Kauśika lived with his seven sons, whose behaviors were connoted by their respective names. They were: Svasripa, Krodhana, Hinsra, Piśuna, Kavi, Vāgduṣṭa, Piṭṛivartī. They were pupils of Garga. After their father's death, there occurred a terrible famine. During these famine days the seven sons of Kauśika used to look after the cow of Garga and were residing in a forest. One day they did not get anything to eat and decide to kill the cow and satisfied their hunger. But they did not kill the cow instead, sacrificed her to their *pitrs* to escape from the sin of killing of a cow. But due to this act, they were born in the family of a hunter with the recollection of their previous life. Since they had a recollection of their previous life, they in a fit of asceticism spurned at all mundane luxuries and put an end to their existence by fasting. Afterwards, they were reborn as deer and later again reborn as Charkravāka birds, and then finally they attained human forms.²⁵

Although, the hunter communities were not a part of settled society, they played different roles in making brāhmaṇical theoretical formulation works. The above narrative indicates that the importance of a hunter in the idea of rebirth. Here it is used to forbid the wrong doing by the members of settled society. Besides this, various norms prohibited sight of the forest dwellers in different rituals. The Purāṇic texts clearly state that a real guest is neither terrible nor of a mixed caste²⁶; and in that way they warned settled society to keep distance from the forest dwellers like Niṣādas, Kirātas, Śabarās etc and outcastes such as Caṇḍālas. It also warned that the land of Śabarās and Pulindās, along with others is unholy and one commits sins by going there.²⁷ It further says that anyone who has no faith in purificatory rites is born among *Mlecchas* and we know that this connotation includes forest

²⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.20.2-24, pp. 63-65.

²⁶ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.17.18, p. 620.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, II.16.69-71, p. 617.

dwellers as well. Through these norms civilized society consciously make effort to keep distance from the forest dwellers. But at the same time the Purāṇic texts also give loopholes for assimilation of these groups. For instance it states that with great faith one should perform a *Śrāddha* by means of fruits, roots and foodstuffs available in forests.²⁸ So there were various ways of exclusion and inclusion into the sphere of settled society; and forest dwellers are always at the borders of making their presence into the ideological framework of civilized society.

Changing Status of the Kirātas

Most of the *Purāṇas* situated Kirātas on the east of Bhāratavarṣa, while situating the Yavanas on the west, and brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas and śudras at the centre²⁹. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* also mentions that Apagas, Alimadras, Tomaras, Haṃsamārgas, kāśmīras and Taṅganas as the tribes of Kirātas.³⁰ These later groups appear late within the Purāṇic tradition as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* does not talk about these Kirāta tribes. This is similar to the case of the Niṣāda, cited earlier. Including others social groups in the fold of Kirātas shows that the Purāṇic writers trying to enlarge this social category by bringing different social groups into it, thus making it heterogeneous. Probably the growing knowledge of Kirātas compelled brāhmaṇical authorities to differentiate among them. It may be also possible that the brāhmaṇical ideologists were trying to put these new groups into very low in the social structure. The term Kāśmīras used to denote a social group opens up another possibility for interpreting these demarcations as this connotation has geographical element to it.

²⁸ Ibid., II.16.19, p. 612.

²⁹ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, II.3, p. 142; *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.45.82, p. 292.

³⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.45.120, p. 297.

Interestingly the *Vāyu Purāṇa* also mentions Kirātas as the inhabitants of the mountainous territories.³¹

The king Sagara in the process of conquering the whole world defeated Haihaya kings, Kāmbojas, Tāljangas, Śaka, Yavanas, Kirātas, Palhavas, Pāradas and others. But on the request of Vasiṣṭha, he compelled them “to eschew the holy rites laid down for their families as well as their mode of dress...in this manner he made others also born of royal families, very ugly. They were denied the right of performing the holy rites mentioned in the Vedas... ..abandoned by the brāhmanas... ..those enemies abandoned their characteristic features and mode of conduct... ..became outcastes...ruthless, shameless *Mleccha* barbarian tribes...their only resorts were mountains, forests, caves and such other places.”³² Here Kirātas are not seen as forest dwellers, but as the challenging force to the monarchical structure, who has some political power. However, one can see an interesting parallel of such a situation in the Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta. In both case forest political powers were defeated, but left alive by the victorious with social impositions of certain condition.

There is a very interesting narrative of a Kirāta in the *Brahmāṇḍa Purānā*, which gives valuable information regarding the functioning and relationship between different social groups. It further indicates that the term Kirāta was not more a monolithic term to denote forest dwellers and it represented various fragmented identities. The narrative is as follow: “There was a thief Vajra in the city of Kanci. In this flourishing city, thief accumulated a great deal of money over the period. He dug a pit in the jungle and greedily deposited wealth therein. A certain Kirāta (forester) saw him hiding the wealth. In middle of the night, when Viraja had gone far away, the Kirāta came there and removed one-tenth of

³¹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.45.135-137, p. 300.

³² *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, III.2.3.49.43-49, pp.743-744.

stolen wealth without being noticed by Viraja. He went along his way bearing the burden of firewood”.³³

Here thief is not a forest dweller, but he went to hide his wealth in the forest. The Kirātas who were generally considered as forest dweller, in this case does not appear as inhabiting the forest. He went to the forest to collect firewood, but did not live there. Here it is shown that his livelihood is not depended on killing of wild animals a characteristic activity associated with them.

The above narrative move further as: “After reaching home, the delighted Kirāta said all to his wife. His wife said to his husband that a brāhmaṇa passes everyday own house, said to me that you will be very fortunate. She also said that due to the curse of sage Vālmiki, Lakṣmi, the goddess of wealth does not stay for a long time amongst Bhillas, Kirātas and Caṇḍālas, as well as in the family of a Sailusa (Musician, actor, dancer). She suggested that one should utilize for sacred activities the wealth which comes to him by chance. Hence build and dig splendid tanks, wells, etc. with this amount. The Kirāta agreed and built a tank with perennial supply of water in the eastern region. But the entire wealth spent on the artisans and workmen and the work was still incomplete. He again thought that without knowing thief Viraja, he will follow him and little by little fetch much wealth. He did so, and completed the work and also constructed a very large and impressive temple of lord Sarngin (Viṣṇu) in the middle of the tank. He also built a big shrine of Śaṅkara in the middle of the bund.”³⁴

Interestingly, the character of the wife of the Kirāta presents a interesting case where a Kirāta woman is well aware of the brāhmaṇical norms; not only just aware but also a believer. She was aware of the concept of scared and sin, and counted the stealing as sin,

³³Ibid., IV.7.10-13, pp. 1039-1044.

³⁴Ibid., IV.7.16-29, pp. 1044-1045.

which could be repented by using that money in some sacred activities. The important point here is to note that they made shrine of Viṣṇu, the well known face of brāhmaṇic ideology. This in a way suggests the ideological integration of the Kirātas in the brāhmaṇical system and societies acceptance of the sacred work of the Kirātas. The above narrative suggests that the status of Kirāta at the ritual level improved, as he was allowed to build shrines. This is very interesting point because the brāhmaṇical societies kept distance from the forest dwellers on the basis of ritualistic impurity.

The narrative developed by the Purāṇic writers further goes on as: ‘...the forest had been infested with many wild beasts was denuded. Thereby he (Kirāt) prepared many excellent fields of very great value. The field was divided. Some were dedicated to the deities and others were donated to Brāhmaṇas. He invited many Brāhmaṇas. Their leader was Devavrata. He made them pleased by means of gold and cloths. He spoke thus to them, “Where am I a Kirāta named Viradatta selling firewood? Where is the construction of the great bund? Where is the building up of a great shrine? Where is the allotment of fields and abodes of Brāhmaṇas? It was only due to your kindness. O excellent Brāhmaṇa that everything has been achieved.”³⁵

Interpreting this, I would like make some very observations suggesting the change in the status and function of the Kirātas. Kirāta which are always shown as hunter residing in the forest, in this narrative, performs altogether different function. He clears the dense forest and lays the foundation of the agrarian state society, gives lands to the Brāhmaṇas something unlike a forest dweller. Here he is not just accepted into the brāhmaṇical social fold, but, even represented as the agent of its expansion into the forest lands. Another interesting point that emerges from this story is that Kirāta Viradatta before establishing the agrarian society,

³⁵Ibid., IV.7.30-33, p. 1045.

Kirātas was indulged in the profession of selling the firewood for the survival of its family. It gives the hint that Kirāta Viradatta lived near the city and provided firewood to the city dwellers and probably because of the fact that he was not engaged in hunting, he was acceptable to the brāhmaṇical society. As we know, forest dwelling Kirātas till the *dharmasāstra* tradition occupied a lower status, but over the time they were absorbed into the brāhmaṇical society and came to enjoy the status of *Vārtya* or degraded kṣatriyas.³⁶ This narrative reflects on this process of transition of Kirāta's status from the position of dreaded hunter to *Vrātya kṣatriyas*. Economic status is very important for the upward movement creating the background for assimilation into brāhmaṇical society, as this narrative indicates. Thus, along with the political power, economical power also helped marginalized people to seek upward movement in the hierarchical social order throughout the ages.

The story further goes on to show that '...the brāhmaṇas accepted his (Kirāta's) offer. Brāhmaṇas named Kirāta and his wife as Dvijavarma and Silavati respectively. For the sake of protecting brāhmaṇas, Kirāta decided to establish his residence in the near vicinity with his wife and kinsmen.'³⁷ He named this area as Devaratapura after the name of the priest. Interestingly, the need to change the name of Kirāta couple seems compulsory for their submersion or acceptance by brāhmaṇas. The changing of Kirāta couple's name is like the first step towards to the changing their identity by the Purāṇic writers. Whatever the cause, the Kirāta along with his wife and kinsmen started residing along with brāhmaṇas at the same settlement. Here we may argue that the status given by Devavrata, the leader of brāhmaṇas, to Kirāta was recognition of his upward social mobility.

The narrative further states that one day Dvijavarma died and the messenger of Yama, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra assembled there. They started to fight. Sage Nārada came there and

³⁶ Aloka-Parasher-Sen, *Mlecchas in Early India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, 2001

³⁷ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, IV.7.34-37, p. 1046.

said, “Do not fight among you. Listen to my words. It was by means of theft that this Kirāta constructed the bund sometime back. He shall be transformed to a gaseous state and move about alone till the death of the owner of wealth (i.e. Vijra). As for him (Vijra) since he has taken away wealth from many (he too shall move about in a gaseous state) until all of them die.” After hearing such words, all messengers went back. Dvijavarma assumed a gaseous state and moved about in space for a period of twelve years. Since, his wife has not committed any defect or sin, sage said to her, “With the meritorious acts committed by you, go to the region of Brahmā from this world.” But she did not wish to go to the abode of Brahma, because her husband was transformed into gaseous form. She spoke to the sage, “I shall never go to the abode of Brahma without my husband. I shall stay here till my husband regains his body. Thereafter, I shall pursue the same goal as my husband. Or, is there any act of atonement and expiation to be performed by me or by him?”³⁸

The fight among messenger of Yama, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra gives insight of the complex nature of the theoretical dispute over the actions of Kirāta. Firstly the Purāṇic writers seem to accept him within the different brāhmanical notions, such as notion of the Karma, life after death, rebirth etc. Yet despite some sacred work, he was finally seen as a sinner. Kirāta’s wife was rewarded for meritorious acts, but she refused and decided to stay with her husband. This represents the patriarchal value system that is the hallmark of the brāhmanical ideological structure.

The ends of this narrative, sage replies to the Kirāta’s wife and says, “Your body that is capable of experiencing joy and sorrow can perform rites too. Atonement can be had through my influence. I shall mention it to you. He advised that before taking any food one must have his holy dip in the great *tirtha* every day. After devotedly worshipping Siva along

³⁸Ibid., IV.7.38-46, p. 1046.

with *Ambika* he must meditate on *Mahesana* (god Śiva) in his heart and then repeat the Mantra called *Satarudra Manu*. (In the course of this period) he shall have only roots, fruits and bulbous roots for food. By repeating this Mantra one thousand and eight times even the slayer of a Brāhmaṇa becomes liberated from sins. There is no doubt at all that he will be liberated from all others sins as well.” Then, the ascetic sage imparted *Rudradhyaya* to her and vanished. For the sake of her husband, she performed rites of meditation and the repetition of the Mantra. Liberated from the sin of theft, he regained his physical body. Thereafter, the thief named Vajra died. Others too to whom the wealth stolen by him belonged passed away. Yama called them together and due to meritorious acts of Dvijavarman, send them to heaven along with their wives, sons and friends.³⁹

The suggestion made by the sage is very important to understand the changing phenomenon of the brāhmaṇical ideology, which always tried to preserve its dominance. Yet it also creates possibilities of acculturation, as *tirthas* are recognized as the means of acculturation.⁴⁰ The brāhmaṇical structure gives opportunity to the Kirātas to visit *tirtha* and recite *Mantra*. Interestingly, the Purāṇic text is also silent about any consequences for accepting gifts, lands, and residing with the Kirātas.

However, the narrative suggests that the hunting was not the only means of livelihood for Kirātas. But the norms created for them still exist, as wife of Kirāta warned her husband Dvijavarman that the wealth does not stay for a long time amongst Bhillas, Kirātas and Caṇḍālas etc. It is clearly a question of right over the resources. But it is more complicated situation, because in the same narrative the brāhmaṇical ideologist agreed on the point of acculturation at the ritual level. So the position of the Kirātas in this story becomes more complicated on account of their fractured status into the society.

³⁹*Ibid.*, IV.7.47-59, p. 1047.

⁴⁰Vijay Nath, *The Purāṇic World: Environment, Gender, Ritual and Myth*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2009, p. 191.

At another places, the Purāṇic texts also give contrasting images where they were accepted at various position into the brāhmanical structure, which makes status of Kirātas a complex issue. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* interestingly mentions the women of Kirātas along with the women of oil-mongers, fishermen, labourers and others.⁴¹ Here, mentioning of the Kirātas along with other social groups indicates the acceptance of their equal social status in the society. Interestingly on the other occasion, in the context of *Śraddha* ritual, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* mentions that in the city of Kāntipura (the ancient name of Kathmandu), there is a holy lotus pond, which is protected by groups of Kirātas.⁴² Here the Purāṇic writers associate Kirātas with holy pond.

This ambiguity on the part of Purāṇic authors is because of the fact that they did not have any clear formula for their acculturation. The concept of the *anuloma* and *pratiloma*, and *varṇasankara* only can fix their position with regard to the social hierarchy, but their various economical activities and ritual functions could not be controlled through these concepts. The one thing that the narrative clearly establishes is that there was definite change in the status of Kirātas at different levels. These complicated situations needs further minute study by looking at different sources.

The Forest Dwellers in The Kali Age

The Purāṇic texts describe vividly about the forest dwellers along with Śudras, foreigners and *Mlecchas* within the notion of the Kali age. It mentions that in the Kali age, whole society will be surrounded by hunter like people and heretics of evil habits and conduct of life.⁴³ The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that during the Kali age, the men become flesh eater due to hunger. They all began to eat flesh of deer, boar, bull, etc., without caring about

⁴¹*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, IV.8.9-10, p. 1051.

⁴²*Ibid.*, II.2.3.13.95-97, p. 532.

⁴³*Ibid.*, I.1.2.31.53, p. 306.

norms of food habit. Those living near the rivers and oceans sustained themselves by taking fish. After consuming all the flesh, fish, etc., they began to eat roots and fruits and covered themselves with barks of trees.⁴⁴ Vijay Nath argues that the above description is the characteristic of mountain and forest dwelling groups and this has been invoked to describe the horrors of the kali age when upper *varṇas* people will also behave like the outcaste and forest dwellers. The Purāṇic writers also state that at the end of the Kali age, a part of Viṣṇu born as Pramiti will maintain the righteousness and social order. Texts say that with the help of armed brāhmaṇas, he killed *Mlecchas*, unreligious and unrighteous persons, mixed castes, mountain dwellers (*Parvatiyas*), dwellers in Vindhya, the different tribes of Kirātas along with many other communities and groups.⁴⁵

Whatever the debate over the situating the Kali age into the historical period, but the notion of the Kali age definitely represent the sentiments of the brāhmaṇas whose authority was under threat. Thapar argue that the Kali age was symbolic of a time when the brāhmaṇical normative order was reversed in practice and *Mleccha* rulers were frequent.⁴⁶ This can also be seen as the attempt to preserve the identities of the mainstream civilized society, “by reinforcing some of the age-old values and beliefs, at the same time also adopting a singularly syncretistic stance and postulating certain innovative redressal measures to tide over the difficult situations”⁴⁷. The important point is that the civilized societies are not only threatened by the *Mlecchas*, but also by the mountain and forest dwellers. The

⁴⁴ *Matsya Purāna*, II.144.73-87, p. 45.

⁴⁵ *Vāyu Purāna*, I.58.75-83, p. 415; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāna*, I.1.2.31.74-84, p. 309.

⁴⁶ Romila Thapar, ‘The Tyranny of Labels’ in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Past*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 1004.

⁴⁷ Vijay Nath, *Purānas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publisher, New Delhi: 2001, p. 97.

necessities of the incorporation of Tantric elements into the brāhmaṇas beliefs represent the pressure created by these groups, which reflects in the Purāṇic tradition.⁴⁸

Conclusion

In this chapter, analyzing the various representations of the forest dwellers in the *Purāṇas*, we see some patterns. We find that the early *Purāṇas* show limited knowledge about the different groups living in the forest. They mostly talk of them in generic sense and situate them in the conventional directions. However, with the increased knowledge of these groups in the later period, the later *Purāṇas* give more detailed description of these groups. It seems that with the spread of the agrarian society into the hitherto forested regions, brāhmaṇas came into contact with forest dweller which accounts for their increased knowledge reflected in *Purāṇas* written after the *Viṣṇu Purāna*. As the Purāṇic stories suggest, this expansion was not peaceful and the forest dwellers protested this onslaught. The story of Nisāda's confrontation with the Parśurāma possibly carries the memories of this tussle.

In situation of confrontation, the response of the agrarian society was not always violent as they also used the brāhmaṇical ideology to assimilate and appropriate these dissenting groups. One of the Purāṇic stories discussed in this chapter shows this tendency that how a Kirāta was incorporated into the brāhmaṇical fold and he was rather turned into the very agent of the brāhmaṇical state system. However, this process of appropriation was not always simple, as fitting range of forest groups into the *Varṇa* system was a challenging task. Thus

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 21.

we find instances, where one can spot clear confusion on the part of the Purāṇic author to situate them in changing socio-economic milieu.

Chapter 4

Representations of the Forest-dwellers: The Supernatural Social Groups

Brāhmaṇical texts, normative or narrative, contain details about various supernatural social categories associated with the forests. These categories include Asuras, Dānavas, Rakṣasas, Nāgas, Vānaras, Garudas, Yakṣas etc. Scholars believe that early Indian brāhmaṇical literature has this tendency to mythicize pre-literate social groups by representing them as Asuras, Nagas, Rākṣasas, Vānaras and others. Romila Thapar argues that they were actually unknown forest dwellers¹. So we cannot categorize them only as supernatural, as there is an opinion among the anthropologist that they are real as the other social groups. Their representation was actually a result of ‘the process of demonization of enemy’² as most of these groups were considered hostile by the brāhmaṇical society. However, their descriptions indicate a close interaction between the settled society and these forest-dwelling groups. There are various myths in the *Purāṇas* that reflect on the various levels of interaction as well as acculturation of these groups.

Origins of Supernatural Social Categories

The origin of these supernatural social categories is given in the *Purāṇas* in details. The Purāṇic writers believed that they were the children of *Kaśyapa*, from the daughter of the *Dakṣa*. The *Purāṇas* refer thirteen daughters of Dakṣa, who were married to Kaśyapa, as the mothers of these supernatural social groups. They were Aditi, Diti, Danu, Arishṭā, Surasā, Surabhi, Vinatā, Tāmrā, Krodhavaśā, Idā, Khasā, Kadru and Muni³. The *Matsya Purāṇa* mentions Irā and Viśva, at the place of Idā and Khasā respectively. Aditi was the mother of

¹Romila Thapar, ‘Perceiving the Forest: Early India’, *Studies in History*, New Series, vol.17. 1 (2001), p. 6.

²Romila Thapar, ‘The Tyranny of Labels’ in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Past*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 1002.

³*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.15, p. 102, and *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6, p. 18.

gods, and the childrens of Diti and Danu were Daityas and Dānavas respectively. Although at one place the *Vāyu Purāṇa* states that the descendants of Diti and Danu are commonly known as Asuras.⁴ Thus it seems that there is some fluidity in using the terms to denote Asuras, Daityas, Dānavas and Rākṣasa. Rest of the daughters of the *Dakṣa* mothered serpents, monsters, gandharvas, feathered tribes etc.

The *Viṣṇu purāṇa*⁵ states that the sons of Diti were Daityas. Their names were Hiranyākṣa and Hiranyakṣipu. She had also a daughter Sinhikā, the wife of Vipracitti. Hiranyakṣipu had four sons, named Prahlāda, Anuhlāda, Saṃhlāda and Hlāda⁶. At another place the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*⁷ states that Prahlāda had the following sons: Ayushmāna, Shivi, Bāṣkala and Virocana. Virocana's son was Bali, who had hundreds sons, among them the oldest was Bāṇa. Another notable sons of Bali were Dhritaraṣṭra, Sūrya, Candra, Candramṣutāpana, Nikumbhanābha, Gurbakṣa, Kukṣibhīma and Vibhīṣaṇa.⁸ While the *Vāyu*⁹ states that Vairocana had five sons, named Gaveṣṭhi, Kālanemi, Jambha, Bāṣkala and Śambhu, and other place mentioned Bali as his son. Śumbha, Niśumbha and Viṣvaksena were the sons of Gaveṣṭhi. Jambha's sons were Śatadundubhi, Dakṣa and Khaṇḍa. Virodha, Manu, Vṛkṣāyu and Kuśalīmukha were the sons of Bāṣkala. Kālanemi's sons were Brahmajit, Kṣatrajit, Devāntaka and Narāntaka. Dhanuka, Asiloman, Nābala, Gomukha, Gavākṣa and Gōmān were the sons of Śambhu. While the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* mentions Aja and Goma as the sons of Śambhu.¹⁰ It also adds some other names in the list of Bali's son, like Kumbhanābha, Gardabhākṣa, Kuśi and others. Śakuni and Pūtanā were the two daughters of Bali. The sons and grandsons of Bali constituted a group of demons known as Baligaṇa.

⁴ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.7.14, p. 523.

⁵ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.15.

⁶ Ibid., mentions Hlāda, but *Vāyu* and *Brahmāṇḍa* mentions Hrada and Hrāda respectively.

⁷ Ibid., I.21, p. 120.

⁸ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.11, p. 19.

⁹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.6.76-85, pp. 517-518.

¹⁰ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.5.40-41, p.429.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa* states that Hlāda or Hrada had two sons, named Hrāda and Nisunda. Sunda and Upasunda were the sons of Nisunda. Brahmaghna, Mahāvīrya and Mūka became the successors of Hrada. Mārīca was son of Sunda, born of Tāḍakā. Anuhlāda's sons were Vāyu and Śinīvālī. The descendants of Anuhlāda constituted the group of demons known as Hālāhala.¹¹ But the *Brahmāṇḍa* says different story. It says that Hrāda's sons' name were Sunda and Nisunda. Mūka too was an heir and successor of Hrāda. It also states that Nivātakavacas were born in the family of Samhrāda¹². There were four leaders of Daityas viz. Jambha, Śatadundubhi, Dakṣa and Caṇḍa. These were the sons of Bāṣkala.¹³

Hiraṇyākṣa also had many sons. Among them, the prominent were Jharjhara, Śakuni, Bhūtasantāpana, Mahānābha and Tāraka. They were daityas of great prowess.¹⁴ While the *Matsya Purāṇa* also states that Hiraṇyākṣa had four sons but there is difference in their names here. It mentions Ulāka in the place of Jharjhara and did not mention Tāraka.¹⁵ But, the *Vāyu Purāṇa*¹⁶ says that Hiraṇyākṣa had five sons, named Utkura, Śakuni, Kālanābha, Mahānābha and Bhūtasantāpana. Their group was known as Bāḍeya, and they were killed in the battle of Tārakāmaya. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*¹⁷ also states that Hiraṇyākṣa had five sons, but mentioned different names. It mentions their names as Śambara, Śakuni, Kālanābha, Mahānābha and Surasantāpana. The sister of Hiraṇyakaśipu and Hiraṇyākṣa, Saihikā, the wife of Vipracitti, gave birth of thirteen demons known as Saihiṃkēya. They were Vyamṣa, Kalpa, Nala, Vātāpi, Ilvala, Namuci, Svasripa, Ajana, Naraka, Kālanābha, Sarmāṇa, Kālavīrya, Potaraṇa¹⁸.

¹¹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.6.71-75, p. 517.

¹² *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.28, p. 20.

¹³ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.5.34-39, p. 429.

¹⁴ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.21, p. 121.

¹⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.14, p. 19.

¹⁶ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.6.67-69, p. 516.

¹⁷ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.5.29-31, p. 428.

¹⁸ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.6.26-28, p. 20.

The children of Danu were Dānavas. They were hundreds in numbers. They were expert in Māyā (illusive power) and unfavorable to brāhmaṇas and Yajñas.¹⁹ Their names were “Dvimūrddhā, Śankara, Ayomukha, Śankuśiras, Kapila, Samvara, Ekacakra, Tāraka, Svarbhānu, Vrishaparvan, Puloman, and Vipracitti”²⁰. Besides these, the *Matsya Purāṇa* also adds others names. These are Vāmana, Mārīci, Meghavāna, Irā, Garbhaśirā, Vidrābaṇa, Ketu, Ketuvīrya, Śathrida, Indrajit, Śaptajīt, Śakuni, Kapiśa, Vihranābha, Mahābāhu, Vajrākṣa, Aśilomā, Vindu, Bāṇa. Among them Vipracitti was the promonant.²¹ The list of sons of Danum is enlarged in the *Vāyu purāṇa*.²² It adds the following names: Nirāmaya, Śaṅkukarṇa, Mahāviśva, Gaveṣṭhi, Dundubhi, Ajāmukha, Śila, Vāmanasa, Marīci, Rakṣaka, Mahāgārgya, Aṅgirāvṛta, Vikṣobhya, Suketu, Suvīrya, Suhrda, Indrajit, Viśvajit, Suravimardana, Subāhu, Vaiśvānara, Puloman, Pravīṇa, Mahāśiras, Svarbhānu, Muṇḍaka, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Sūrya, Candra, Indra, Tāpina, Sukṣma, Nicandra, Ūrnanābha, Mahāgiri, Aśiloman, Sukeśa, Sada, Balaka, Adaśā, Gaganamūrdhan, Kum̄bhanābha, Mahodara, Pramodāha, Kuṇṇpatha, Hayagrīva, Virūpākṣa, Supatha, Aja, Hiraṇmaya, Śatamāyu, Śarabha and Śalabha. The *Brahmāṇḍa purāṇa*²³ also adds some more in the list of the sons of Danu, like Śaṅkuratha, Vibhu, Vipāda, Maya, Asipā, Mahāmāyā, Aśiras, Bhṛṣī, Śatāhvaya, Dvividā, Bhadra, Devajit, Prāpaṇa, Puruṇḍa, Mūlakodara, Jambha, Adma, Aśvagriva, Vaimṛga, Hala, Ahala, Akṣa, Śatagrīva. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* states that Sūrya (the Sun) and Candramas (the Moon) were the lords of Asuras earlier, but now they are the lords of Suras, while the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* says that Śarabha and Śalabha were regarded as the sun and the moon of Asuras. Interestingly this gives a glimpse of the tendency among the brāhmaṇical writers to accommodate the non-brāhmaṇical deities within the brāhmaṇical belief system.

¹⁹Ibid., II.7.3, p. 522.

²⁰*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.21, p. 121.

²¹*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6, p. 19.

²²*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.7.4-13, p. 523.

²³*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.6.4-13, p. 435.

The daughter of the Svarbhānu named Prabhā and Śarmiṣṭhā was the daughter of Vriṣaparvan. Both were known as Upadānvī and Hayaśirā respectively. While the *Matsya Purāṇa*²⁴ also states that Pulomā gave birth to Śacī, Māyā to Updānavi, Mandodarī and Kuhū, Vriṣaparvān to Śarmiṣṭhā, Sundāri and Candrā. Vaiśvanāra had two daughters, Puloma and Kālīka, both were married to Kaśyapa and their descendants were known as Pulomas and Kālakanjas.²⁵ However, the *Matsya Purāṇa* said that they were married to the demon king Mārīca.²⁶

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* also gives the details about the other wives of Kaśyapa. Tāmrā, the wife of Kaśyapa, had six daughters, named Śukī, Śyenī, bhāśī, Sugrīvī, Śuci and Gridhrkā. Among them Śuki gave birth to parrots, owls and crows, Śyenī to hawks, Bhāśī to kites, Gṛdhrkā to vultures, Śuci to water-fowl, Sugrīvī to horses, camels and asses. Vinatā gave birth to sons, Garūda and Aruṇa. Garūda also known as Suparṇa. He was the king of the feathered tribes and the enemies of the serpent race. Surasā was the mother of many headed serpents. Kadru was also the mother of many headed serpents. The chief among them were Śeṣa, Vāsuki, Takṣaka, Śankha, Śweta, Mahāpadma, Kambala, Asvatara, Elāpatra, Nāga, Karkkōta, Dhanañjaya, and many others. Krodhavaśā was the mother of monsters and they were devourers of flesh. Surabhi was the mother of cows and buffaloes, Irā, of trees and creeping plants and shrubs and every kind of grass; khaśa, of the Rākṣasas and Yakṣas; Muni, of Apsarasas and Arisṭhā of the illustrious Gandharbas.²⁷ However, the *Matsya Purāṇa*²⁸ states that Arisṭhā gave birth to Kinnaras and Gandharvas.

²⁴ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 1.6.21-22, p. 19.

²⁵ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.21, p. 121.

²⁶ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 1.6.23, p. 19.

²⁷ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1.21, pp. 122-123.

²⁸ *Matsya Purāṇa*, 1.6.44-45, p. 21.

Regarding Tāmarā, the *Matsya Purāṇa* gives almost the same details. But the *Vāyu Purāṇa*²⁹ states something different. It states that Tāmarā had many well-known daughters. Among them important are Śyeni, Bhāsī, Krauñcī, Dhṛtarāṣṭrī and Śukī. Śyeni was the wife of Aruṇa and gave birth to two excellent birds of great strength and prowess, named Sampāti and Jaṭāyu. Sampāti had one son and one daughter. Jaṭāyu's sons were crows, vultures and Aśvakarṇiṅṣ (a variety of vultures). Bhāsī, Krauñcī, Śukī, Dhṛtarāṣṭrī and Bhadrā were the wives of Garutman (Garuḍa). Śukī gave birth to six sons, named Triśira, Bala, Pṛṣṭha, Triśaṅkhanetra, Susukha and Śurasa. The sons and grandsons of these ruthless descendants of Garuḍa, the noble-souled serpent-eaters, were fourteen thousand in numbers. It also gives the names of places where the descendants of Garuḍa live. These were the whole of Śālmali dvīpa, the mountain Devakūṭa, mountain Maṇimān, Sahasra-śikhara, Paṇamāla, Sukeśa, Śataśṛṅga, Kauraja, Pañcaśikhara and Hemakūṭa. While Bhāsas (the bird vulture), Ulūkas (owls), crows, cocks, peacocks, Kalavīṅkas (sparrows), doves and Lāvas and Tittiris were the sons of Bhāsī. Krauñcī gave birth to Vārdhīṅṣa birds (black birds with red legs, head and eyes). Śyeni gave birth to ospreys, Sārasas (a kind of crane) and cranes. Dhṛtarāṣṭrī gave birth to Haṁsas (swans), and Kalahaṁsas, Cakravākas and other types of (aquatic) birds too.

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*³⁰ adds some more details about Tāmarā. It also adds Gṛdhṛī as the well known daughter of her. From Aruṇa, she gave birth to two sons named Sampāti and Jaṭāyu. Sampāti had three sons named Vijayas, Dvirāsyas and Prasahas. Jaṭāyu's sons were the herons, Vultures, Karṇikas. The wives of Garuḍa were Bhāsī, Krauñcī, Śukī, Dhṛtarāṣṭrī and Śyeni. Śukī gave birth to six sons, viz. Sukha, Sunetra, Viśikha, Surūpa, Śurasa and Bala. Their sons and grandsons number fourteen thousand. They were great devourers of snakes. They lived at the whole Śālmali dvīpa, mountain Devakūṭa, Maṇimanta,

²⁹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.316-329, pp. 551-552.

³⁰ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.444-458, pp. 474-475.

Varṇamāla, Sukeśa, Kaurara and Hemakūṭa. The sons of Bhāsī were Bhāsas (vultures), owls, crows, cocks, peacocks, doves, partridges, different types of birds of prey such as Vādhriṅasa, Krauñca, Śyena, sparrows and cranes and also others birds that eat flesh. Dhṛtarāṣṭrī gave birth to swans of various types, the ruddy geese and all types of aquatic birds. It did not give the names of Śyeni's sons. We see that regarding Tāmarā progeny the *Vāyu Purāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* gives almost same description, although some names are changed.

Regarding Vīnitā, the *Matsya Purāṇa*³¹ gave almost the same details, but also adds something. It states that despite the two sons, Aruṇa and Garuḍa, Vīnitā(Vinatā) had also a daughter Saudāminī. However, N. N. Bhattacharyya writes that Vinatā was the granddaughter of Tāmarā, as referring to the same Purāṇa.³² Sampāti and Jatāyu were the sons of Aruṇa, and Vabhru and Śighragha were the sons of Sampāti. Jatāyu's sons were Karṇikāra, Śatagāmī, Sārasā, Rajjuvāla and Bheruṇḍa. The *Vāyu Purāṇa*³³ said that Vīnitā had thirty-six daughters. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*³⁴ says that only Aruṇa and Garuḍa were the sons of Vinatā.

Suraśa and Kadru was the mother of serpents. Again, Bhattacharyya³⁵ wrongly says that both, Surasā and Kadru, are the granddaughters of Tāmarā, referring the *Matsya Purāṇa*. But as we know that Vinatā, Surasā and Kadru were among the thirteen wives of Kaśyapa, a fact clearly mentioned in all the four Purāṇas. The *Matsya Purāṇa*³⁶ adds many other names in the list of Kadru's sons, given in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, like Airāvata, Kaṃbala, Mahānīla, Padma, Asvatara, Balāhaka, Dhritarāṣṭra, Śankhapāla, Mahāsankha, Puśpadanṣṭra, Śubhānauā, Śankuromā, Bahula, Vāmana, Pāṇina, Kapila, Durmukha and Patanjali. The

³¹ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.33-37, p. 20.

³² N.N.Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2002, p. 154.

³³ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.63, p. 530.

³⁴ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.26-29, p. 440.

³⁵ N.N.Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2002, p. 154.

³⁶ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.38-41, p. 20.

Vāyu³⁷ adds some more names in this list, like Karṇīra, Jambha, Afījana, Mahākarna, Kumāra, Puṣpadanta, Sumukha, Śīlīmukha, Dadhimukha, Kālīya, Śālīpiṇḍaka, Bindupāda, Puṇḍarīka, Āpūraṇa, Ambarīṣa, Dhṛtapāda, Kacchapa, Prahlāda, Padmacitra, Gandharva, Manasvika, Nahuṣa, Khararoman and Maṇi. The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*³⁸ also adds few names like Akarna, Hastikarna, Piñjara, Karvīra, Sūnāmukha, Alipiṇḍaka, Ambarīṣa, Akrūra, Kapitthaka, Prahrāda born of Brahman Gandharva, Maṇiṣṭhaka.

The *Matsya Purāṇa*³⁹ states that Krodhvaśā gave birth of Krodhavaśā demons, killed by Bhimasena. But the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁴⁰ gives confused description about Surasā and Krodhavaśā. It states that Surasā gave birth to a hundreds serpents with nectar in their heads. The king of Sarpas is Takṣaka and of the snakes is Vāsuki. This group belongs to the family of Krodhavaśā. But the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*⁴¹ and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*⁴² said that Takṣaka and Vāsuki were the sons of Kadru.

The *Matsya Purāṇa*⁴³ says that Surabhī gave birth to the attendants of Rudras, cows, buffaloes, while Munī gave birth to the class of Munis and Apsarās, but the *Vāyu Purāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* notes that the childrens of Muni were the holy Gandharvas and Apsaras and mentions names of sixteen Gandharvas. The names given in the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁴⁴ are: Citrasena, Ugrasena, Ūrṇāyu, Anagha, Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Puloman, Sūryavarcas, Yugapat, Tṛṇapat, Kālī, Diti, Citraratha, Bhramiśīras, Parjanya, Kali and Nārada. The *Brahmāṇḍa*⁴⁵ also mentioned sixteen names, but there is difference in names. Like, it mentions Bhīmasena, Suparṇā, Varuṇa, Goman, Patravān, Arkaparna, Prayuta, Bhīma. They were the divine

³⁷ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.66-71, p. 530.

³⁸ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.31-37, p. 440.

³⁹ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.43, p. 21.

⁴⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.315, p. 551.

⁴¹ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.21, p. 551.

⁴² *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.31-37, p. 440.

⁴³ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.44-45, p. 21.

⁴⁴ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.1-3, p. 525.

⁴⁵ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.1-9, p. 438.

Gandharvas. Beside them, it also mentions other four Gandharvas viz. Subāhu, Hāhā, Hūhū and Tumburu. At other place it further mentions nine more Gandharvas. Their names given as Hamsa, Jyotiṣṭama, Ācāra, Dāruṇa, Varūtha, Vareṇya, Vasuruci, Suruci and Viśvāvasu.⁴⁶

Regarding Apsaras, the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁴⁷ says that they were thirty-four, but mentioned only thirty-three names. The names were Antarā, Dāravatyā, Priyamukhyā, Surottamā, Miśrakeśī, Śacī, Parṇinī, Alambuṣā, Mārīcā, Mārīcī, Putrikā, Vidyud, Varṇā, Tilottamā, Adrikā, Lakṣaṇā, Devī, Rambhā, Manoramā, Suvarā, Subāhu, Pūrṇitā, Supratiṣṭhitā, Puṇḍarīkā, Sugandhā, Sudantā, Surasā, Hemasārā, Sutī, Suvṛttā, Kamalā, Subhujā, Hamsapādā. These were the worldly Apsaras. However, the *Brahmāṇḍa*⁴⁸ says that there were twenty-four Apsaras, named, Aruṇā, Anapāyā, Vimanuṣyā, Varāmbārā, Miśrakeśī, Asiparṇinī, Alumbuṣā, Mārīcī, Śucikā, Vidyutparṇā, Tilottamā, Adrikā, Lakṣmaṇā, Kṣemā, Rambhā, Manobhavā, Asitā, Subāhū, Supriyā, Subhujā, Puṇḍarīkā, Ajagandhā, Sudatī and Śurasā. Besides these, it further mentioned Laukikī (Earthy) Apsaras named Hamsā, Sarasvatī, Sūtā, Kamalā, Abhayā, Sumukhī and Hamsapadī.

Another place the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁴⁹ states that Variṣṭhā gave birth to eight Apsaras. Their names were Hamsa, Hahā, Huhū, Dhiṣaṇa, Vasiruci, Tumburu, Viśvāvasu. It did not mention eighth name. These Apsaras were divine and of auspicious characteristics. Ariṣṭā gave birth to eight daughters, but Puranas mention only seven names. Their names were Anavadyā, Anavaśā, Anvatā, Madanapriyā, Arūṣā, Subhagā and Bhāsī. Manovatī and Sukeśā were the daughters of Tumburu. Regarding Ariṣṭā, the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* mentions that Riṣṭā gave birth to three daughters, named Arūpā, Subhagā and Bhāsī.

⁴⁶Ibid., 2.3.7.11-12a, p. 439.

⁴⁷*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.4-8, p. 525.

⁴⁸*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.5-10, pp. 438-439.

⁴⁹*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.46-50, p. 528.

Both the *Vāyu Purāṇa* and the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* also mentioned ten divine Apsaras known as Pañcacūḍās. Their names were Menakā, Sahajanyā, Parṇinī, Pañjikasthalā, Ghṛtasthalā, Ghṛtācī, Viśvācī, Pūrvācī, Pramlocā and Anumlocantī. Urvaśī was the eleventh. Menakā was the daughter of Menā. All were expounders of Brahman (vedas) and great Yoginīs.⁵⁰ Both *Purāṇas* also mentioned the groups of fourteen holy Apsaras. But the *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵¹ mentions only first and last name as Āhūtas and Śobhayantīs. But the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*⁵² mentioned all fourteen names. Their were: Āhṛtis (Āhūtas), Śobhavatīs, Vegavatīs, Ūrjās, Yuvatīs, Sruks, Kurus, Barhīs, Amṛtās, Mudās, Mṛgus, Ruks, Bhīrus and Śobhayantīs.

The Āhṛtis (Āhūtas) were the mental daughters of Brahmā, the Śobhavatīs of Maruts*, Vegavatīs of Riṣṭā(Ariṣṭā), Ūrjās of Agni(fire-god)*, Yuvatīs* of rays of the sun, Sruks of Yajña(sacrifice), Kurus of the rays of the moon, Barhīs of Kuśavatī, Amṛtās of Amṛta, Mudās of Vāyu(wind), Mṛgus* of the earth, Ruks of the lightning, Bhīrus* of Mṛtyu and Śobhayantīs of Kāma. The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵³ also gives some other names like the divine lady Tilottamā, the celestial damsel Prabhāvatī and Vedavatī, and Hemā.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵⁴ also mentions the daughters of Gandharvas. Their names were: Suyaśā, Gāndharvī, Vidyāvātī, Cārumukhī and Sumukhī. The sons of Suyaśā were very powerful and valorous. Yakṣas were the sons of Pracetas. Kaṃbala, Hārikeśa, Kapila, Kañcana and Meghamālī constitute the group of Yakṣas. Suyaśā's four daughters, named Loheyī, Bharatā, Kṛṣāṅgī and Viśālā, were remembered as Apsaras. From them other four groups of Yakṣas were procreated by Viśāla. These four groups were known as Loheya, Bharateya, Kṛṣāṅgeya and Viśāleya. The Gandharvas known as Vāleyas were procreated by Vikrānta. They were the leaders of great Gandharvas. They were Citrāṅgada, Citravarmā,

⁵⁰Ibid., II.8.49-52, p. 528 and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.14-16, p. 439.

⁵¹Ibid., II.8.53, p. 529.

⁵²*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.18-24, pp. 439-440.

⁵³*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.58-60, pp. 529-530.

⁵⁴Ibid., II.8.9-29, pp. 526-527.

Citraketu and Somadatta. There were also three daughters, named Agnikā, Kāmbalā and Vasumatī. Three other important groups of the Gandharvas were offspring of Kumāra. They were: Āgneyas, Kāmbaleyas and sons of Vasumatī. They possessed learning and were procreated by Vikrānta. Hiraṇyāroman, Kapila, Suloman, Māgadha, Candraketu, Gānga and Goda were the noble-souled Gandharvas of distinctive prowess. These were the first among the groups who were ascetics, valorous and pure on account of deep learning. There were also two daughters, named Śivā and Sumanas. They were mothers of the groups Śaiveya and Saumanasas. These two groups along with the group procreated by Vikrānta were known as Vidyādharas. They were known as the practitioner of learning.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵⁵ also states that horse-faced Kinnaras were offspring of the same Vikrānta. They were called Aśvamukhas and Kinnaras. Samudra, Sena, Kālinda, Mahānetra, Mahābala, Suvarṇaghoṣa, Sugrīva, Mahāghoṣa and others were the noble-soul Kinnaras with the faces of horse. Human-faced kinnaras were also procreated by Vikrānta. Hariṣeṇa, Suṣeṇa, Vāriṣeṇa, Rudradatta, Indradatta, Candradruma, Mahādruma, Bindu and Bindusāra were the kinnaras of lunar race.

From Irā⁵⁶ originated reeds, trees, creepers, & etc. The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁵⁷ states that from Irā Kaśyapa got three daughters named Latā, Vallī and Vīrudhā. Latā gave birth to Vanaspatis i.e. the non-flowering plants growing on the banks of rivers etc. She herself gave birth to Vṛkṣas or trees with flowers and fruits. Vallī gave birth to hedges, grasses and bamboo etc. of same species. Vīrudhā gave birth to Virudhās i.e. creepers spreading all arounds. The *Brahmāṇḍa*⁵⁸ gives same details but puts Alātā in the place Vallī.

⁵⁵Ibid., II.8.31-36, p. 527.

⁵⁶*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.46, p. 21.

⁵⁷*Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.330-333, p. 552.

⁵⁸*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.457-462, p. 475.

From Viśvā, Kaśyapa begot numerous Yakṣas and demons⁵⁹. Regarding khaśā(Viśvā), the *Vāyu Purāṇa* gives very details descriptions. Khaśā gave birth to two sons, who were well-known as man-eaters: Yakṣa and Rākṣasa⁶⁰. The physical description of the elder son Yakṣa is as follows: “He had excessively red in colour and devoid of ears...four arms, four feet, two head and two fold gait. He had hair all over the body. He had a huge body with a raised-up nose and a big belly. The head was big, the ears large and the hair like Muñja grass in accordance with his desire. The lips were like those of a horse. The chin was huge; the tongue red and the eyes had matted hair. The mouth was huge and the nose long. He was a Guhyaka. The ears were variegated in colour. He was extremely delighted and had a great face.”⁶¹

The features of younger brother Rākṣasa was: “He had three heads, three feet and three hands. His eyes were black. The hair stood upright. The moustache was green in colour. His body was as firm as a rock. He had a huge body (short in stature). His arms were mighty and of great strength. His mouth was slit up to the ears. The eyebrows were suspended and the nose was stout. The lips were big. He had eight fangs and two tongues. He was pike-eared. His eyes were red and tawny-coloured. His complexion was tawny. He had matted hair. He had huge ears and broad chest. He was devoid of hips and the belly was slender...had claws and whose neck was red.”⁶²

The *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* provides some additional features of them. It says about elder son Yakṣa that “one of his ears was very red...he was faltering and unsteady while walking, swaying on either side (Dvidhāgamim)... his limbs were stout...nose was splendid...head was very clean...mouth was very small but the tongue was long. He had

⁵⁹ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.6.46, p. 21.

⁶⁰ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.97-98, p. 533 and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.60-61, p. 443. The name of the two sons of Khaśā was given by Kaśyapa according to their behaviors.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, II.8.73-76, p. 531.

⁶² *Ibid.*, II.8.77-80, p. 531.

many curved fang-like teeth...thick eye-brows and a large nose...his neck had a bluish tinge. His feet were long and his face was big...”⁶³ About the Rakṣasa it states, “...his voice was loud...lips was thick...face was irregular in shape...he had twin globular (masses of flesh). His shoulders were big and broad...his penis and scrotum remained hanging down...”⁶⁴

Immediately after the birth, both increased in size and became capable of sensual enjoyment. The elder was distressed with hunger, tried to eat his mother. The younger brother saved her. At this time their father sage kaśyapa came and asked to his wife Khaśā about their misbehavior. He also said that both have taken their maternal uncle’s character and activities. But the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* quotes Kaśyapa as saying, “a son or a daughter will be like the mother, at the time of their birth. A son will have the same (character and habit) as his mother.”⁶⁵ After knowing the truth, the sage gave them name according to their act. He gave the name Yakṣa to the son who tried to seize and eat his mother and Rākṣasa to the other who saved her. Seeing their hunger, the Prajāpati⁶⁶ assigned them blood and fat as their diet. Their father granted them this boon, “Only at night can your hands feel the touch of anything. You will move about and take your food during the night. In the daytime you will be inactive and will enjoy sleep. But they behaved opposite to their father’s direction. They were eating anything they pleased, and harassing living beings. They possessed the illusive (māyā) power. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* also states that for food they were seizing Devas, Asuras, Sages, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Piśācas, human beings, serpents, birds and animals.”⁶⁷

At another place *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁶⁸ mentions the seven groups of the Rākṣasas, divided into two groups as Divācaras (those who move during the day) and Niśācaras (those who

⁶³ *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.39-42, p. 441.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, II.2.3.7.43-47, pp. 441-442.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II.2.3.7.55, p. 442.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, mentioned Kaśyapa at the place of Prajāpati.

⁶⁷ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.8.106-107, p. 533 and *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, II.2.3.7.68-72, pp. 443-444.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II.52-56, p. 558.

wander during the night). Yajñamukhas, Brahmadhānas and Vārtas belong to Divācaras group and Paulastyas, Nairṛtas, Āgastyas and Kauśikas constitute the Niśācaras group. It also states that all the Yakṣas and all the Rākṣasas belonging to the family of Pulastya, the cruel Brahmarākṣāsas of the families of Agastya and Viśvāmitra, were engaged in the study of the Vedas and performed penance and holy rites.

The *Vāyu Purāṇa*⁶⁹ also gives the general features of all these Rākṣasas, as follow: they had rounded eyes. They were yellowish in colour. They had huge bodies and bellies. They had eight fangs; pike like ears and hairs standing upright. They had their mouths extending (as if) upto the ears. Some had hair like the Mañja grass. Some had smoke-coloured upright hair. Some had stout heads shedding white luster. Some were short-statured, some had long arms, and some had copper-coloured faces. Some had long (dangling down) tongues and lips, and eyebrows and stout noses. Some were blue-bodied with red necks and majestic eyes. They were excessively terrible-voiced and hideous. They went in groups. They were stout with prominent protruding noses. Their bodies were sturdy like rocks. They had terrible kinsmen and generally they were cruel, indulging in painful activities. They wore (ornaments like) ear-rings, bracelets and coronets. They wore garlands of variegated flowers. They applied fragrant scents and unguents. Some were flesh eaters and some ate cooked food. They are remembered as man-eaters. These attributes of Rākṣasas, common to many of them, have been enunciated by scholars. The full extent of their strength is not known because it is affected by Māyā. The above attributes have been given to the Rākṣasas, were very close to human physical appearance.

Despite mentioning that the sage Kaśyapa was the father of all beings, the *Purāṇas* also give Brahmā credit of their creation. It is mentioned that when Brahmā decided to create

⁶⁹Ibid., II.9.57-63, p. 558-559.

gods, demons, progenitors and men, he first created demons (Asuras) through the quality of darkness from his thigh. From mouth, he created the gods and through hunger created Rākṣasas and Yakṣas; and the serpents were created from the hairs of Brahmā. When he got incensed, created fierce being dominated by goblins, Bhūtas, malignant fiends and eaters of flesh, and Gandharvas were created after that. Then he went on to form Birds from his vital vigour, sheep from his breast, goats from his mouth, kine from his belly and sides, and horses, elephants, Sarabhas, Gayals, deer, camels, mules, antelopes, and other animals from his feet⁷⁰. There is a detailed description of this the *Vāyu Purāṇa* with some variations and also some extra features. For example, Asuras were born from Brahmā's lions and vital breath with the Tamas quality, the gods were born from his shining face with predominant Sattva quality; Pitṛs were born from his two sides with pure Sattva quality and the Human beings were born from his mind with the Rajas quality. The Asuras were unbearable during the night and the Devas were powerful during the day. Interestingly this description includes men in the category of the rural domestic animals⁷¹. G. V. Tagare commenting on this argued that "it seems to be the social memory of ancient human sacrifices that man is included in the list of 'domestic animals'."⁷² It is interesting that at one point the Purāṇas give authorship of creation to Brahmā; and at another place credit goes to human beings. This is may be the attempt to give human face to the process of creation of living being by the Purāṇic texts.

The genealogy of super-natural being that we find here is "neither comprehensive nor adequately classified."⁷³ However, one can see a clear attempt on the part of the Purāṇic writers to hierarchise these supernatural social categories. For instance, the *Vāyu Purāṇa* states that the Asuras were equal to the Devas and all Guhyakas were inferior to Gandharvas by three-fourth. Similarly, it counts Rākṣasas as equal to the Yakṣas and Piśācas as three

⁷⁰ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.5, pp. 35-37.

⁷¹ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, I.9.3-43, pp. 76-80.

⁷² *Ibid.*, I.9, p. 80.

⁷³ N. N. Bhattacharyya, *Indian Demonology: The Inverted Pantheon*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2000, p. 153.

times less than the Yakṣas. The process of hierarchisation is typical a brāhmaṇical phenomenon and the Purāṇic writers tried to bring even supernatural social categories into this fold.

The importance of listing the occurrences of all these different supernatural categories together, right from the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa*, is to show that their description continuously increased especially Daityas, Dānavas and Rākṣasas (see table 1). This is not just a numerical increase, but these texts bring more information regarding their features. Importantly, the above long descriptions clearly show that there is lack of information about the women-folk. So, the Purāṇic writers enlarging the knowledge about the supernatural groups are remarkably silent about woman folk, if we leave isolated example of Putanā for the moment. This conspicuous absence of the other gender from the narrative seeks explanation. Are they not worthy of making a presence imagination of supernatural social categories? Or they are not fit in the patriarchic structure of the brāhmaṇical system. The another question is about the necessity of these increasing information about Asuras, Rākṣasas, Piśācas etc. and this point is very important because after a certain time the details about them becomes less.

Table 1

† The *Vāyu* mentions Indra and Tāpina separately but The *Brahmāṇḍa* mentioned Indratāpana

*These names occur in the concerned *Purāṇas* in different manners such as:

Ajāmukha = Ayomukha, Asiloman= Asilomā, Candra=Candramas, Dvimūrdhā = Dvimūrdhan, Gaveṣṭhi = Gaveṣṭhi, Mahodara = Mahodaka, Maghavān = Meghavān, Pramodāha= Pramada, Puloman = Pulomā, Ūṇanābha = Cūrṇanābha, Sada = Satha,

Śankuśirodhara = Śankuśiras, Vāmanasa = Vāmana, Vikṣobhya=Vikṣobha,
Vṛṣaparvan=Vṛṣaparvān

	Viśṇu	Matsya	Vāyu	Brahmānda
Adaśa			•	
Adma				•
Ahala				•
Aja			•	
Ajāmukha*	•	•	•	•
Akṣa				•
Aṅgirāvṛta			•	
Asiloman*		•	•	•
Asipā				•
Aśiras				•
Aśvagrīva				•
Balaka			•	
Bāṇa		•		
Bhadra				•
Bhṛṣī				•
Candra*			•	•
Devajit				•
Dhṛtarāṣṭra			•	•
Dundubhi			•	•

	Viṣṇu	Matsya	Vāyu	Brahmāṇḍa
Dvimūrdhā	•	•	•	•
Dvivīda				•
Ekacakra	•	•	•	•
Gaganamūrdhan			•	
Garbhaśirā		•		
Gaveṣṭhi*			•	•
Hala				•
Hayagrīva			•	
Hiraṇmaya			•	•
Indra†			•	•
Indrajit		•	•	
Irā		•		
Jambha				•
Kapila	•			•
Kapiśa		•		
Ketu		•		
Ketuvirya		•		
Kumbhanābha			•	•
Kupatha			•	
Maghavān*		•		•
Mahābhāhu		•		•
Mahāgārya			•	
Mahāgiri			•	•

	Viṣṇu	Matsya	Vāyu	Brahmāṇḍa
Mahāmāyā				•
Mahāśiras			•	•
Mahāviśva			•	
Mahodara*			•	•
Marīci		•	•	•
Maya				•
Mūlakodara				•
Muṇḍaka			•	
Nicandra			•	•
Nirāmaya			•	
Pramodāha*			•	•
Prāpaṇa				•
Puloman*	•	•	•	•
Puravīṇa			•	
Puruṇḍa				•
Rakṣaka			•	
Sada*			•	•
Saptajīt		•		
Subāhu			•	
Suḥṛda			•	
Suketu			•	•
Sukeśa			•	•
Spatha			•	•

	Viṣṇu	Matsya	Vāyu	Brahmāṇḍa
Suravimardana			•	
Suvīrya			•	•
Sūrya			•	•
Sūkṣma			•	•
Svarbhānu	•	•	•	•
Śakuni		•		
Śalabha			•	•
Śambara	•	•	•	•
Śankara	•			
Śaṅku			•	
Śaṅkukarṇa			•	•
Śaṅkuratha				•
Śaṅkuśirodhara*	•	•		
Śaṅkuvarṇa			•	
Śarabha			•	•
Śatagrīva				•
Śatamāyu			•	
Śatāhvaya				•
Śathvida		•		
Śila			•	
Tāraka	•	•	•	•
Tāpina†			•	•
Ūṛṇanābha*			•	•

	Viṣṇu	Matsya	Vāyu	Brahmānda
Vajranābha		•		
Vajrākṣa		•		
Vaimṛga				•
Vaiśvānara			•	•
Vāmanasa*		•	•	•
Vibhu				•
Vidrābaṇa		•		
Vindu		•		
Vikṣobhya*			•	•
Vipāda				•
Viprachitti	•	•	•	•
Virūpākṣa			•	•
Viśvajit			•	
Vṛṣaparvan*	•	•	•	•
Total-102	12	29	62	65

All children were procreated by the same Kaśyapa, but despite being sons of same father they possessed different qualities and characters. Their different qualities and characters were due to the different nature of their mothers, as Kaśyapa said, "...a son adopts the traits of his maternal uncle and a daughter those of the paternal ancestors. A son adopts the same conduct of life as that of his mother... ..your (kaśyapa's wives) sons have taken after their (maternal) uncle in their character and activities".⁷⁴ This shows influence of the tribal belief system, which was matrilineal in its outlook. Vāyu Purāṇ mentions Rākṣasas and

⁷⁴Vāyu Purāṇa, II.8.87-94, p. 532.

Piśāca along with Suparṇa, Yakṣa, Gandharvas, Uraga (Reptiles), Piṭṛs and Aśvinīkumāras as the eight groups of demi-gods⁷⁵. Here, we can see that how all these different categories were brought together through these two origin myths and this way the authoritative brāhmanical ideologists integrated them successfully.⁷⁶

Relationship Among the Supernatural Groups

The forest functioned as a common ground for the various actions to unfold. This commonalty brought together different actors together and provided a fertile ground for puranic writers. We find interactions between Demons, sages and the members of settled society in the forest space, happening at various levels. The love story of Devayānī, Yayāti and Sarmiṣṭhā developed and took many turns in the forest. Because of the forest as a background for this story, it became possible to bring Sarmiṣṭhā (a daughter of demon's king), Devayānī (a daughter of sage) and Yayāti (a royal king), together. Due to the typical nature ascribed to the forest, there was no restriction between such kind of interaction, which was unimaginable in the settled society. Forest seems to have been the interacting point for different communities, but as the interactions developed the stories moved from jangalas to kṣetras, as in the above story, after marriage of Devayānī, Yayāti and Sarmiṣṭhā went to Yayāti's royal palace. According to one story, once Kṛṣṇa went to forest in search of Prasena and Syamtaka jewel and there he had fight with the king of boars Jāmbavanta. But eventually, Jāmbavanta pleased Kṛṣṇa and expressed his wish to be killed by him also, he requested Kṛṣṇa to accept his daughter Jāmbavanti as wife. Here, Jāmbavanta possibly represents such a tribe who was somehow related with boars; and this relationship at the cost of Jāmbavanta's life indicates submersion of a weaker group by the powerful.

⁷⁵Ibid., I.31.12, p. 219.

⁷⁶Romila Thapar, 'Society and Historical Consciousness' in Romila Thapar, *Cultural Past*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2000, p. 127.

The *Purānas* presents many such accounts of supernatural social groups and their submersion into the representative categories of the brāhmaṇical ideology. The narrative related to the serpent Kāliya was not different. The narrative states that Kāliya had his abode in the river Yamuṇā and the surrounding was feared due to his presence. As the story goes lord Kṛṣṇa perished him and ordered him to leave from that place along with family and followers to the sea. Very interestingly, Kṛṣṇa also assured that Garūḍa would not harm them when he sees the impression of his feet upon Kāliya's brow. This narrative gives an important insight into the process of submersion. Here serpent community was not only suppressed, but was also compelled to leave their original habitat and moved to other space, while staying there also not independently but under the authority and supervision of the suppressor.

Belief System Among the Supernatural Beings

It is generally believed that all societies require one or more ideology to function⁷⁷. In this section, attempt is to look for any possible ideological structure that regulated these forest dwelling supernatural social groups. The narrative of rākṣasa Hiraṇyakaśipu and his son Prahlāda⁷⁸ gives interesting information in this regard. It hints that their believe system was antithetical to the Brāhmaṇical believe system, if we see the ideology manifested through the king Hiraṇyakaśipu's point of view. It is clear that he was desperate to protect his own cultural identity against the brāhmaṇical onslaught represented by his son Prahlāda. When, first time Prahlāda praises Viṣṇu, he was sent back to the house of his guru, to learn his own values and come out his alleged ignorance. The most important thing is the exclamation by Hiraṇyakaśipu. He exclaimed, "...what evil spirit has entered into the breast of this silly boy, that thus, like one possessed, he utters such profanity?"

⁷⁷Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purānas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 8.

⁷⁸ *Viṣṇu Purāna*, I.17 and 18 chapters.

The narrative continues and Prahlāda goes on to declare, "...kill the wretch, he is not fit to live, who is a traitor to his friends, a burning brand to his own race." Further he also exclaimed, "...it is thus often our progeny are our destruction, as fire consumes the wood from which it springs... ..my vile and unprincipled son is now teaching others his impious doctrines... ..repeatedly prohibited by us, he still persists in the praise of our enemies." The above exclamations show the fear and sorrow, due to his own son Prahlāda's continuous attachment with other (brāhmaṇical) cultures, because Hiranyakaśipu saw brāhmaṇical ideology as harmful for his own culture. Here the brāhmaṇical culture is constituted as 'the other' for the Rākṣasas. Wendy Doniger O'flaherty argues that Hiranyakaśipu was furious, not because Prahlāda was virtuous but merely because he had no respect for his father, in other words, because he was violating his *svadharma*, a matter of partisan loyalties rather than ethics⁷⁹. However, deviation from the *Svadharma* was wrong and it could be dangerous for that particular person. But in the case of Prahlāda, the situation was totally different and his life was saved by Viṣṇu, the very upholder of the brāhmaṇical culture.

The affection for their own belief systems and ideology is also evident from another puranic story. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*⁸⁰ states that once upon the occurrence of a war between the demons and the gods, both parties inquired from Brahmā that which one would be victorious. Brahmā said that the side with which king Rāji shall align, would be victorious. Accordingly the daityas immediately met Rāji, to secure his alliance. The king Rāji agreed to lead them, but also made a condition that they would make them their Indra after defeating the gods. But the daityas did not accept this and said to Rāji, "we cannot profess one thing and mean another; our Indra is Prahlāda, and it is for him that we wage war." After their departure, the gods come to him for same purpose. Rāji again proposed the same condition to them and

⁷⁹Wendy Doniger O'flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988 (reprint), p. 134.

⁸⁰*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.9, p. 329.

they agreed. Then Rāji joined the gods and destroyed the armies of the daityas. Interestingly in both the above cases, what is the believe system of the daityas is not clearly stated. Despite the different characterization of the Prahādā in the above two stories, it is cleared that whatever the ideological framework among them, it was against the brāhmanical systems and brāhmanical gods. Also, so called “others” had a high regard for their *Svadharmā* and did not want any compromise. The above stories indicate some kind of conflict of interest between two different ideologies.

The functioning of ideology depends on lots of things and preceptor constituted a basic and fundamental pillar of any ideological framework. Bṛhaspati and Śukra were the preceptors of the gods and the demons respectively. In most of the cases, both were responsible for their success against each other in the battle. For example Bṛhaspati played a crucial role in retaining the Indra’s status when his throne and position was forcibly occupied by the sons of Rāji. He performed sacrifice and misled the sons of Rāji; and thus devoid of morality and religion, they were killed by Indra. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* clearly states that by the assistance of the priest of the gods, Indra resumed his place in heaven⁸¹. Once his son Kaca was sends to learn *Saṅjīvanī* knowledge from Śukra on the request of the gods⁸².

As the preceptor of Devas, Bṛhaspati defended the interests of the Devas, and for this he could do anything including deceitful activities. Once sage Kāvya/Śukra went to Mahādeva for acquiring mantras for the sake of Asuras’s victory against the gods; and suggested Asuras to perform penance. All gods were afraid. The king of Indra sends his daughter Jayantī to pleased Kāvya with her auspicious services. Jayantī followed her father’s order. After getting boon from Mahādeva, Kāvya spend ten years with Jayantī. Knowing that development, Bṛhaspati assumed the form of Kāvya, and went to the Asuras and started

⁸¹Ibid., IV.9, pp. 329-330.

⁸²*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.25.15-19, p. 80.

teaching them. After ten years Kāvya came back and saw that the Asuras were deceived by the preceptor of the Devas, Bṛhaspati. He warned the Asuras, but deluded Asuras insulted Kāvya and did not believe that he was the real one. In a rage kāvya cursed that they would be defeated by the Devas. Bṛhaspati's intension was fulfilled through that curse and he vanished from there⁸³. Here, not only Bṛhaspati deceived the Asuras, but he along with the Devas also used Jayantī for this purpose.

The role of Śukra was quite different as compare to Bṛhaspati, because he formed 'a transitional bridge between gods and demons'⁸⁴. The demons were always guarded and suggested by him. Earlier only Śukra knew the knowledge of *Sañjīvanī*, and with this knowledge he restored Asuras who were killed by the gods in the war. However, later the gods also acquired this knowledge through Kaca, who was send by the gods to Śukra on this hidden mission⁸⁵. Once when the daityas were getting killed by the Devas, Śukra himself went to acquire the spell of victory from Śiva and make them victorious against the Devas⁸⁶. Thus both preceptors were doing their duties very well and tried everything but in different ways. Bṛhaspati seems like a con man, who acts in decisive manner. While Śukra, was straight in his actions and never believed in cheating.

The way of both preceptors, Bṛhaspati and Śukra, was remarkably similar to their followers. The demons performed great penances; and the gods granted boons to the demons, but with such condition, which ultimately caused their fall. The classic example is the story of asura Gayāsura⁸⁷. He was most powerful asura; and great devotee of Viṣṇu. His height was 125 yojanas and width 60 yojanas. He performed a very terrible penance on the mountain

⁸³ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.35 & 36 chapter, pp. 768-782, and *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.47.79-205, pp. 128-136.

⁸⁴ Wendy Doniger O'flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1988 (reprint), p. 98.

⁸⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.25 chapter, pp. 80-83.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, I.47.71-75, p. 128., *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.35.106, p. 769.

⁸⁷ *Vāyu Purāṇa*, II.44.4-63, pp. 916-922.

Kolāhala. The gods became afraid and agitated due to his penance. They went to Brahmā to put him under control. Brahmā, along with the gods went to Śiva for help, but he suggested that we all should go to Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu along with the them went to Gayāsura and asked about his wish. Gayāsura wanted to become the purest among all the Devas, Sages, Brāhmnas, renouncers, Karmins (the performers of holy rites), Dharmins (pious ones), Jñānins (wise ones and knowers), Yajñas, mantras, yogins, holy mountains and rivers. The boon was granted by Viṣṇu. But due to this boon, the cosmic order was becoming disturbed; and worried Brahmā and other devas complained to Viṣṇu that all the people are going to heaven by merely looking at Gayāsura and all the three worlds have become void. On the suggestion of Viṣṇu, they went to Gayāsura and Brahmā asked his body for *Yajña* as in the whole world, there was not any place which was suitable for divine sacrifice. The asura Gayāsura became overwhelmed on that proposal and fell on the ground, keeping his head in the north and the feet in the south on the mountain Kolāhala. On that body Brahmā performed his sacrifice, but as a result, Gayāsura's body began to tremble. A stone-slab from the Yama's house was put on his head; and later all gods stood on his body, but that did not stop him from trembling. At last Viṣṇu came and put his weight on him; and made him steady. At this Gayāsura said, "Why have I been deceived? The pure body was given unto Brahmā by me for the purpose of Yajña. Would not have I been steady at the sheer instance of Viṣṇu? Why have I been harassed by Śuras and Hari by means of the club? May Devas be delighted for ever now that I have been tortured?" But all gods including Viṣṇu became pleased and said to him, "speak out (choose) a boon. We are all very delighted." Here the demon Gayāsura said that he was deceived, but the gods did not show any regret as they had cheated one of their great devotee and now wanted to compensate.

There were also other instances when the Devas showed their deceptive characters. The churning of the ocean and the fight for the acquisition over the *Amṛta* also shows their

deceptive nature. At the churning of the ocean, which was done with the sole intension to strengthen the Devas; they needed the help of Asuras. To secure the assistance of the Asuras, Viṣṇu suggested to all gods that they must be at peace with them and assured them that they will get equal portion of the benefit for assistance. He also suggested that the gods should also promise them that by drinking the *Amṛta* all will become mighty and immortal. Viṣṇu promised to the gods that he will ensure that the demons did not get any drop of the *Amṛta*. So all gods were pre-decided that they will deceive the Asuras, and they did so. Asuras after observing that they are not going to get the *Amṛta*, forcibly seized it. But Viṣṇu assumed a female form, fascinated and deluded them and recovered the *Amṛta* from demons⁸⁸.

Killing the enemy is not the only way to keep self safe, but making alliance or assimilating them is also an important strategy. The birth story of Marut and his getting status of god is one of the examples of assimilation of a powerful enemy for Indra's self protection. Diti, wife of Kasyapa, wanted such a progeny, who would be able to kill Indra and conquer all the gods. Kasyapa promised her for such son. After knowing that, Indra left his kingdom and came to Diti and began to serve her; and was hoping that she might give him an opportunity of causing an abortion. She did not know the intention of Indra. One day, due to irregularities she gave a chance to Indra to kill the child. Indra entered into womb of Diti and divided the child into seven parts. But each part developed into a child due to Diti's observance of the Dvadasi fast and the worship of Kama. He again divided them into forty-nine. As Devas could not destroy them, so he thought that it would be safer to make them Devas. All forty-nine children known as Maruts were included by Indra among Devas and entitled them share in the sacrificial offerings, like the other Devas⁸⁹. Importantly, Diti was

⁸⁸ *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, I.9, pp. 64-66.

⁸⁹ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.7.30-63, pp. 24-26.

also happy with that development. She did not make any objection as her son became one of the Devas and was no more able to kill Indra, the killer of her sons.

Interestingly, it appears that what began as the contrast between forest dwellers and the settled folk has turned into between god and demon; and the question is what symbolises this god-demon conflict. We know that in the texts there are these supernatural beings who constantly opposed the authority of the gods; and at the some point it is the question of authority over the resources. This is also evident that the Rākṣasas were never stopped to perform asceticism and penances; and the fight occurred over the outcome of their asceticism and penances.

Conflict of Interest between the Supernatural Groups

The *Purāṇas* talk about the great twelve wars between the demons and the gods, which can be very important to understand the nature of relationship between them. The *Matsya Purāṇa* says that there twelve great wars were fought between the gods and demons. Starting from the Varāha (Boar) incarnation and ending with Śaṅḍā and Marka times, there were incarnations on the occasion of each war. Although, we know that the avatars of Viṣṇu are ten which did not fit into such framework. However, the text *Matsya Purāṇa* states that the first war was to kill the Daityas king Hiranyakaśyapu by Nṛsiṃha, the second of Vāmana to make the Daityas king Bali a captive; third Varāha to kill Hiranyākṣa, the fourth incarnation was at the occasion of the churning of the ocean for nectar, the fifth incarnation was took place on the occasion of the Tārakāmaya war, the sixth was at the time of *Āḍivaka* war, the seventh was on the Traipura war, the eighth was on the Andhaka war, the ninth incarnation was to kill Vṛitrāsura, the tenth Dhātṛi war; the eleventh was Hālāhala war and the twelfth war was Kolāhala war. The relationship between the incarnation of Viṣṇu and the wars indicate that there were some kind of disturbances within the brāhmaṇical social order,

because most of the time demons tried to get equal or superior status as compare to the gods. At the Same time, the incarnations of the Viṣṇu or other deities were also representation of the rising power of the demons, the representative of the forest dwellers communities in a supernatural ways, as ‘they were the main opponents to the brāhmaṇical encroachment’⁹⁰.

The battles did not happen only between the demons and the gods. Sometime the demons also fought for the gods against the other gods. On the issue of the possession of Tāra, the wife of Bṛhaspati, there was a war between Moon and Śiva. In that war, various demons, Vetālas, Yakṣas, serpents and others supported and fought for Moon⁹¹. And at the other occasion human beings also took part and made a difference in the result of the war between the gods and the demons. A good example is the king Raji’s story which is earlier cited.

However, the wars have their own consequences. Victory and defeat brings various changes for both the parties. Besides political and economical changes, wars also affect social structure. At the social level, women-folk of defeated side are the prime victims. We know that the great Mauryan king Aśoka forcefully deported 150,000 people from Kalinga to clear wasteland and established new settlement, after the victory over kalinga.⁹² But the Purāṇic texts give other important consequence of war. The *Matsya Purāṇa* states that once upon a time thousands of demons (Dānavas, Asuras, Daityas and Rākṣasas) were killed in the war between the Devas and the demons. Indra told their numberless widows and those women who were forcibly seized and enjoined, to lead the life of prostitutes and remain devoted to the kings and Devas.⁹³ The texts here clearly indicate that the women-folk were treated as property which as a war booty belonged to the victorious. At another level, forcing these

⁹⁰Romila Thapar, *Perceiving the Forest: Early India, Studies in History*, vol., 16, 2001, p. 9.

⁹¹*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.23.39-40, p. 75.

⁹²Romila Thapar, *Early India*, Penguin Books: New Delhi, 2002, p. 186.

⁹³*Matsya Purāṇa*, I.70.26-28, p. 211.

Rākṣasas women into prostitution is clearly an attempt made by the brāhmanical ideology to subjugate the Rākṣasas as gender-violence has always been used as a subversive force by brāhmanical patriarchy.⁹⁴

A vivid example of this process can be seen in a passage of the *Matsya Purāṇa*. Here after the winning the war Indra instructed to the Rākṣas women, “You should look upon, with equal eye, the kings your masters and on Śudra. All of you will attain prosperity, according to your fate. You should satisfy those who would come to you with adequate sum of money to enjoy your company, even they be poor. But you should not give pleasure to proud men. You should give away cow, land, grain and gold, according to your means, in charity on the sacred day of worshipping the Devas or the ancestors. You should act as the brāhmaṇas will say.”⁹⁵ Indra also told them about a *vrata* called Anaṅgadāuvrata, by that they would cross the sea of the evils of life without suffering and injury like those learned in the Vedas. For this, firstly, the women folk should bathe with various Mantras and recite the different names of the gods and goddesses mentioned by Indra. And then the brāhmaṇa should be well fed and be devoutly looked upon as cupid, for the sake of sexual enjoyment. Each and every desire of that brāhmaṇa should be satisfied by the women devotee. She should, with all heart and soul and with a smile on her face, yield herself up to him. This rite should be observed on every Sunday. Despite giving various things by the devotee, if any brāhmaṇa come to them for the sake of sexual enjoyment on a Sunday, should be respected and honoured. In this way, the good brāhmaṇas should be kept satisfied for a period of thirteen months; but if they go abroad, their course of action will be different. If with the permission of that brāhmaṇa, another handsome person came to them, these women should with love and affection and to the best of their ability, perform all the fifty-eight kinds of observances of love, favourite of

⁹⁴ Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, New Delhi: Stree, 2003.

⁹⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa*, I.70.29-32, p. 211.

man and gods. This would then lead to pregnancy and which is not harmful to their soul's welfare. By performing this *varta* regularly the prostitution never becomes sinful.⁹⁶

Despite having the contrasting nature towards the brāhmaṇical structure, the demons also worshiped gods and were granted boons. As *Matsya Purāṇa* states that by worshiping the Parvati, Pururava became Rajarsi, Yayati begot progeny and Parasurāma obtain wealth. Similarly, many Devas, Daityas, Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriyas, Vaisyas and Śudras obtained supernatural faculties⁹⁷. It is important to note that the performing asceticism and penances by the demons do not mean a distancing from their own culture. They did asceticism and penances to strengthen themselves against the brāhmaṇical ideology; and this is quite different from performance of the sages and other human beings. For instances, after defeated by the gods, the demon Maya practised several austerities with two assistants, Vidyumālī and Tārakāsura to create an impregnable fort so that the gods could not harm them.⁹⁸ The exceptional case among the demons may be Prahlāda in some sense.

Battle between the Gods and the Rākṣasas: Religious Ramifications

Once there was a battle between the gods and demons, in which the gods were defeated by the demons under the leadership of Hrada, son of Hiranyakaśipu⁹⁹. The defeated gods went to the god Viṣṇu for protection. They said, "They have seized upon the three worlds, and appropriate the offering which are our portion, taking care not to transgress the precepts of the Veda. Although we, as well as they, are parts of thee, of whom all beings consist, yet we behold the world impressed by the ignorance of unity, with the belief of its separate existence. Engaged in the duties of their respective orders, and following the paths

⁹⁶Ibid., I.70.33-61, pp. 211-213.

⁹⁷Ibid., I.13.60-64, p. 43.

⁹⁸Ibid., II.129.3-25, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, III. 17 and 18 chapters.

prescribed by holy writ, practicing also religious penance, it is impossible, for us to destroy them”.¹⁰⁰ To help them, Viṣṇu emitted an illusory form from his body and gave to the gods.

The illusory form proceeded to the earth in the semblance of a naked mendicant, with head shaven, and carrying a bunch of a peacock’s feathers (named ‘*Arhatas*’), he approached the daityas, who were engaged in ascetic penances upon the bank of the Narmada river, “to obtain a reward hereafter”¹⁰¹. He convinced them if they follow his words, they will obtain “either heaven or exemption from future existence”¹⁰². But due to his teaching, the daityas were seduced from their proper path and declined from the path of the Vedas and deviated from their religious duties. Later they were killed by the Devas, and their desire to go heaven did not fulfil. The story sharpened the opposite nature of the brāhmaṇism and Jainism; and superiority of the brāhmaṇism over the Jainism as the description of the naked mendicant and used the word ‘*Arhatas*’ for them by the Purāṇic writers, conform that they are representing Jainas. Kunal Chakrabarti argues that the brāhmaṇical system does not permit it... ..permanent residence in heaven is a privilege exclusive to the gods; the demons are not entitled¹⁰³. The above narrative also shows that in the brāhmaṇical structure, everyone had his place, duties and obligations, and they were not allowed to break the system.

There are also other stories which relate Rākṣāsas with the Jainism. In the story of the king Raji and his sons¹⁰⁴, philosophy of the Buddhism was used to show the cause of their degradation and their lost of lives. The sons of Raji demanded their hereditary right over the thrown of Indra, but he refused. Then they forcibly dethroned Indra, took his position, and usurped all the kingdom and share of sacrifice from him. In this case, sage Bṛihaspati came to

¹⁰⁰Ibid., III.17, p. 269.

¹⁰¹Ibid., III.18, p. 270.

¹⁰²Ibid., III.18, p. 270.

¹⁰³Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 151-152.

¹⁰⁴*Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, IV.9, pp. 329-330.

help Indra. Bṛihaspati performed a sacrifice for the purpose of increasing the might of Indra and misled the sons of Rāji¹⁰⁵. Due to the Bṛhaspati's act, and "misled by their metal fascination, they became enemies of the brāhmaṇas, regardless of their duties, and contemptors' of the precepts of the Vedas; and devoid of morality and religion" and were slain by Indra.

Some stories in the *Purāṇas* treated Buddhism in the same degraded manner. It is said that the ninth incarnation of Viṣṇu in the form of Buddha was for the establishment of righteousness and the destruction of the Asuras through asceticism¹⁰⁶. The method to deteriorate both Buddhism and Jainism are same, and that has been done through Viṣṇu, who is the prime face of brāhmaṇical ideology. Viṣṇu created illusionary form of Jaina and himself incarnate as Buddha to destruct the ideological structure of Asuras. But the question exists that what was be the possible ideological structure of the Asuras as we have no evident answers. The same brāhmaṇical ways of sacrifice, penances Asuras also indulged into and since they were getting the share of the gods, there were continuous efforts by the gods and brāhmaṇas to keep them away.

The *Purāṇas* also talk about the process of making of heretics groups. It says that formerly in the battle the Asuras were defeated by the Devas. The Asuras were defeated and they created the heretics groups like Vṛddhaśrāvākīs, Nirgranthas (nude Jainas), Śākyas (Buddhists), Jīvaskas and Kārpaṭas¹⁰⁷. The necessity to add heretics groups with the Asuras can be understood, as situating them within the Varna system would have associated them with Śūdras, something possibly not liked by the brahmanas. After the Śūdras, the remaining outcaste groups which are untouchables can not be connected with the heretics, because they

¹⁰⁵ *Matsya Purāṇa* says that Bṛhaspati perform Graha Śānti rite and taught the sons of Rāji the Jinadharmā or Jain religion.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, I.47.247, p.138.

¹⁰⁷ *Brahmānda Purāṇa*, II.2.3.14.38b-42, p.541.

are demarcated untouchables with the brāhmaṇical groups, did not leave any other option for the brāhmaṇas. So they related the heretics groups with the unknown forest dwellers who had been victimised since the very long time.

The projections of the Buddhism and Jainism in degraded status show the consciousness of the Purāṇic writers about the changes occurring into the contemporary societies. The relationship between the demons and the heretics groups developed in the *Purāṇas* was a theoretical response to the threat coming from the Buddhism and Jainism and to establish the earlier glory of the Brāhmaṇical past.

Conclusion

Here, an attempt has been made to analyze the different supernatural social groups and the relationship among them. The relationship amongst the sages, human beings, Rākṣasas, gods and other groups can be seen at various levels. The important questions to ask are, why did the brāhmaṇical thinkers create such supernatural social categories, what was the need for the representation of these relationships, and for whom such narratives were created and preserved? Thapar argues that they are projections of forest people resisting encroachment and therefore fantasized as demons in order to legitimize their extermination.¹⁰⁸

This chapter discusses that the development of these narratives has a pattern and it tended to reflect the existing contradiction of that society. From the origin to the later phases, these supernatural social categories were continuously at odds with the established brāhmaṇical ideologies and this explains the demonization of these groups.

¹⁰⁸ Romila Thapar, 'Perceiving the Forest: Early India', *Studies in History*, New Series, vol.17.1 (2001), pp. 9-10.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study has attempted to explore the representations of the forest and forest-dwellers in early India focussing on the early *Purānas*. Although, forests are always visible throughout human history, their visibility was subject to change with changing material cultures. The forest-dwelling communities had also undergone the same process. The main impetus for these changes in early India can be seen in the form of expansion of agriculture, encroachment of forest for new settlements, and emergence of institutions of state. One of the most important aspects of these transformations took place in early India was the simultaneous process of subordination and acculturation of marginal groups by the dominant power. Their habitational spaces were continuously encroached upon, compelling them to move deeper inside the forested and hilly regions. The present study is basically aimed at understanding the reflection of these changes through the early Puranic myths and stories.

The first chapter discusses various forms of representation of the forest in the early *Purānas*. Purānic writers composed very detailed descriptions of the cosmology; and divided the earth into four as well as seven divisions/*dvīpas*. Along with the mountains and rivers, they situated a forest in every division. The Purānic texts describe four forests which are situated in the four cardinal's directions of the mountain Meru; simultaneously, these texts also talk about the four landmark trees along with four mountains on the same directions. Evidently, the Purānic writers were not very particular while talking about forests and mountains in general terms. There are frequent overlaps between them and at times they are represented as identical.

Purāṇic descriptions of forests vary from context to context. So, while in the context of Paraśurāma's excursions, the description appears to be very close to reality, generally it is stereo typical and ambiguous. The *Purāṇas* also provides narratives of the personalised spaces within the vast forests - hermitages and residences of the defeated kings. It was also seen as the place which provided a background for romantic relationships.

In the *Purāṇas* forests are shown as repositories of enormous wealth and resources, which are used by various groups in various ways. Forest-dwellers were totally dependent on the forest for their survival whereas civilised society needed various products for their daily consumption and ritual purposes. The first chapter of my work provides detailed descriptions of these resources and the context of their consumption. Interestingly, the *Purāṇas* continuously see the forest as the hiding place of the defeated kings, who later regain their kingdoms. These show the resourceful nature of the forests, which had enough for everyone to live in and survive.

The question of authority over the forests, as it emerges from the *Purāṇas* is a complex one. Sages, hunter-gatherers and kings, all asserted their over these authority. The *Purāṇas* suggest that all the three sections had different kinds of authority on different sections of the forest. However, this was not neatly defined as we see instances of conflict between the various claimants. The different voices we hear on the question of authority over forestland indicate that these were open spaces to be conquered and exploited.

I have discussed the narratives on the forest-dwellers in the second chapter. Some forest dwellers perpetually remained at the margin, such as the Niśādas. However, the Kirātas were incorporated into the brāhmaṇical order at various levels. In the *Purāṇas* one can see the gradual change in their status from hunter-gatherers to *vrātakṣatriyas*. This, I have argued, was a reflection of their changing economic functions. However, the *Purāṇas* increasingly

mention names of some new tribes. This possibly indicates the process of assimilation of newer forest-dwelling groups. It also suggests further expansion of the brāhmaṇical society into forest, because without adequate resources it would not have been possible for any group to establish themselves in such a region. However, the overall landscape of forests did not change much as forest-dwellers were mostly shown as living in the hilly and forested regions.

The process of assimilation of the forest-dwelling groups into the brāhmaṇical structure depended on various factors. The stories in the *Purāṇas* show that the responses of forest-dwellers towards settled society was manifold and that decided the level of their acculturation. Some of the forest-dwellers like the Kirātas, were largely influenced by this process of acculturation and at times they seemed to have acted as brāhmaṇical agents. Despite creating different tools for acculturation such as *tirtha*, *vrata* etc., it was still a complex process as hinted in the *Purāṇas*.

The third chapter is about the representation of the supernatural social categories like the Rākṣasas, the Asuras and the Nāgas. It has been argued that the knowledge about these groups gradually increased in the *Purāṇas*. These mythical social groups were possibly the demonised forest-dwellers, unknown to the state society. The necessity for this demonization was to legitimise the exploitation and assimilation of these people carried out by the settled societies. I have argued that these forest-dwellers had their own ideologies and belief systems. Although it is not very clear in the *Purāṇas*, but it is obvious that these mythical forest-dwellers always tried to protect their cultures and ways of life.

Further, the relationship of these mythical groups with Buddhism and Jainism has been highlighted by the *Puāṇas*. It reaffirms the contemporary perception of the brāhmaṇas about these heretic groups. On the one hand, Purāṇic narrations show the process of assimilation of the Buddha and Mahavira into the brāhmaṇical fold; on the other hand, they

were given a lower position than the brāhmaṇs. These narratives also hint the necessity of control and suppression of these mythical groups. This was necessary because they possessed the resources of the forest. So, the mythical communities are always shown as inferior to the brāhmaṇical society.

Overall, I have tried to discuss the representations of forests and forest-dwellers in the early *Purāṇas*, and discussed what a crucial role they played in shaping the brāhmaṇical state society.

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