

**Forest as Social Space: Representations in Early Indian Sanskrit Sources
(Circa First Millennium BCE)**

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DECLARATION

I, Umesh Kumar Khute, declare that thesis entitled, “Forest as Social Space: Representations in Early Indian Sanskrit Sources (Circa First Millennium BCE),” submitted by me in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other University.


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CERTIFICATE

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


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Note on Transliteration

Sanskrit vowels:

अ	a
आ	ā
इ	i
ई	ī
उ	u
ऊ	ū
ए	e
ऐ	ai
ओ	o
औ	au

Sanskrit consonants:

क्	k	ट्	ṭ	प्	p	ष्	ṣ
ख्	kh	ठ्	ṭh	फ्	ph	स्	s
ग्	g	ड्	ḍ	ब्	b	ह्	h
घ्	gh	ढ्	ḍh	भ्	bh	क्ष	kṣ
ङ्	ṅ	ण्	ṇ	म्	m	त्र्	ṛ
च्	c	त्	t	य्	y	ज्ञ्	jñ
छ्	ch	थ्	th	र्	r	:(विसर्ग)	ḥ
ज्	j	द्	d	ल्	l		
झ्	jh	ध्	dh	व्	v		
ञ्	ñ	न्	n	श्	ś		

Chapter One

Introduction

The forest has always been seen as a space of uncertainty and awe; from the time of evolution of human beings on the earth to contemporary times, humans have tried to explore it for various means and with different intentions. Various anthropologists, sociologists, and historians have seen the idea of the forest from different points of view. For some, it is the place where human society evolved from a lower form to the upper form of civilization. While for others, it becomes a source of natural resources. Some have also tried to derive it as a place for understanding of non-material realities because of its distinct features away from common human-society.

This research is an attempt to analyze the various meanings and understanding of the forest through the early Indian sources, particularly how the initial society/state society has perceived the forest from their own perspectives. If we see some of the early Indian texts like *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and epics like *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, it is clear that the concept of the forest and its representations vary. The question that arises here is this and how the idea of the forest for and among early human societies has transformed with the changing historical context? What has been the relevance of the factor in human societies? Why a set of the Vedic texts were even called the *Aranyaka*? *Aranya* is another relevant word used in literature alongside the *vana*.

With the expansion of population and agriculture in the past, there has been a constant struggle between the idea of *vana* (forest) and *kṣetra* (settled area regulated by the state). The state-society always tried to interpret *vana* as an antithesis to *kṣetra*. The idea of periphery developed as a space of struggle between these dichotomous zones.

Through this research, we will also try to know what are the kinds of representations of forest and its various interpretations in early Indian Sanskrit textual traditions.

The forest is also seen as a primary settlement of human beings with a subsistent mode of society and economy. In this respect, with the emergence of the early state, society always attempted to penetrate and exploit the resources through various means.

This is a study about ancient forest-dwelling societies and their encounters with non-forest societies in order to understand the socio-economical complications through an analysis of various mythical stories and instances from *Vedas* to the epics, which were composed in different historical periods. The socio-historical process of expansion of political and social identities/hierarchies on the basis of settlements and life practices is also analyzed in this research.

Through this research, an attempt will be made to correlate the philosophical and material understanding of nature and culture dichotomy particularly to explore and analyze the social/material transformations in the early societies where *vana* and *kṣetra* are epitomes.

I.1 Sources and Discussion

A wide range of ancient classical texts like - the *Vedas* (C. 1500-500 BCE)¹, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads* (C. 1000-500 BCE)², are analyzed for this study. These texts help us to look at the initial understanding of human- forest relationships.

¹ Singh, Upinder, *A History of the Stone Age to the 12th Century*, Pearson Publishers, Delhi, 2009, p. 18.

² *Ibid.*, p. 208.

There are various points of view regarding the time period of the above texts. According to Arthur Berriedale Keith, *Ṛg-Veda Saṃhita* is the collection of 1,028 hymns and it is considered as the one of the most important source of Indian religion. The Vedas were preserved in the early stages through oral tradition and they were regarded as too sacred to be reduced to writing down. He further argues that moreover, an invaluable form of control exists in the texts of the other Vedas, the *Yajur Veda* in its different recensions, the *Sāma Veda* and *Atharva Veda*, all of which contain much of the matter of the *Ṛg Veda*.³ While Alfred Hillebrandt viewed *Ṛg Veda* as a practical collection of hymns, arranged according to their connection with the sacrificial rituals, all other Saṃhitas except *Atharva Veda* which occupies a peculiar position, are definitely in their none-Brāhmaṇa portions manuals of the chants and formulae used by the priests in the ritual while the *Ṛg Veda* is not a practical but a historical handbook.⁴ Hermann Oldenberg also believes that 1500 to 1000 BC was the period when the Vedas were composed where the Vedic Indians settled on the banks of the river Indus and in Punjab.⁵

According to R. S. Sharma, the earliest Vedic manuscripts are not older than the 10th century AD., and inscriptional evidence for writing in India between the 17th and 3rd century BC is wanting. But some Ṛg Vedic gods are mentioned in the *Mitannian* inscription of the 14th century BC., and the great reverential attitude to the *Ṛg Veda* leading to its correct recitation and consequent oral preservation suggests that it was

³ Keith, A. B., *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, Motilal Banarasidass Publication, Delhi, 1989, p. 01.

⁴ Ibid., p.01.

⁵ Oldenberg, Hermann, *The Religion of the Veda*, Motilal Banarasidass Publication, Delhi, 1988, p. 01

compiled, at least orally, around 1200 BC. The later Vedic texts were compiled in western U. P. in the land of Kuru and Pāṅchāl.⁶

Romila Thapar considers the Vedic corpus as the earliest body of texts from the Indian past. According to her, much of it was initially transmitted orally and later in written form. It can be viewed as the point of commencement of the *Itihāsa-Purāṇa* traditions, initiating forms that eventually become germinal to these traditions. Among them, mention is made of the *dāna-stuti* hymns, included in the earliest of the *Vedas*, the *Ṛg Veda*; and, subsequently of *gāthās* and *nārāsamsī*, all poems in praise of heroes and *ākhyāna* narratives that are associated with *Itihāsa*. The *Ṛg Veda* may have incorporated some themes from the oral tradition going back to earlier times, and reflecting some integration with other prior cultures. Until the Harrapan pictograms are deciphered we can, at best, assume only a marginal continuity of earlier traditions in the Vedic corpus.⁷ She argues that the *Ṛg Veda* is frequently dated to 1500 BC, although it might be even later, given that its cognates in Old Iranian and parallels from Syria date to about 14th Century BC. The substantial presence of Indo-Aryan speakers in North-Western India is from this period, although some minimal contact may have existed from the borderlands just prior to this.⁸

The chronology of the *Vedas* is difficult to shift because of some later interpolations in the *Ṛg Veda* which is known as the earliest one. In *Ṛg Veda* which is earlier than the other three *Vedas*, there are sections in the first and tenth *maṇḍalas* that are dated later than the intervening ones. The verses although composed in the latter part of the second millennium BC were compiled and edited in various recensions in early first

⁶ Sharma, R. S., *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasi Dass Publication, Delhi, 1959 p. 15.

⁷ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 87.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

millennium BC. The corpus was edited with reference to people of diverse origins. Since there were earlier settlements of non-Aryan speaking peoples, whose presence is recorded through non-Aryan linguistic elements in Vedic Sanskrit, and on the basis of earlier archaeological sites, the societies reflected in the Vedic corpus were not culturally homogeneous as it is often assumed.⁹

The books intended by reason of the dread holiness of their contents for study in the forest, and of these certain parts which bear more defiantly philosophical aspects were called as Upaniṣads. It is word apparently derived from the session of the pupils around the teacher in the process of instruction. Each Veda represents a school of thought which is later associated with its Brāhmaṇa and then these Brāhmaṇas were attached with their particular kind of Upaniṣads, like *Ṛg Veda* is associated with *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Satpatha Brāhmaṇa* which is attached with *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* and *Bṛhadāranyak Upaniṣad*. The *Sāmveda* has *Chānalogya Upaniṣad* which is a major portion of *Jaiminiya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*.

According to A. B. Keith, it can be assumed that the doctrines of these Upaniṣads were prior to the rise of Buddhism, which is derived logically from the system which they contain, and as the date of the death of Buddha may be placed about 480 BC for the Upaniṣads are attained. The priority of the Brāhmaṇas proper to the Upaniṣads is beyond doubt, and thus a lower limit of 600 BC for the latest Brāhmaṇas is obtained.¹⁰

Efforts to establish an earlier date for the *Samhitās* and the *Brāhmaṇas* have naturally been made and of these two may be mentioned. Jacobi has insisted that the post-Vedic period may be dated from 800 BC on the strength of the fact that the end of the

⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁰ Keith, A. B., *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads*, Motilal Banarasidass Publication, Delhi, 1989, pp. 19-20.

Vedic period is marked by the simultaneous appearance of the *Sāmkhya*, Yoga and Jaina philosophies, and the later can be carried back to 750 BC. The second line of argument is based on the war which forms the main topic of the *Mahābhārata*; by various modes of reckoning of dynasties recorded in the Purāṇās the date of 1000 or 1100 BC is attained for war, and, as the Pāndus are unknown to the Saṃhitās and the Brāhmaṇas, it is contended that they must fall before the war of Kurus and Pāndvas.¹¹

R. E. Hume in his earliest book *The Thirteen principal Upaniṣads* have assigned the time period of 6th century BC for the compilation of Upaniṣads. He writes that ‘almost contemporaneous with that remarkable period of active philosophic and religious thought the world over, about sixth century BC., when Pythagoras, Confucius, Buddha, and Zoroaster were thinking out new philosophies and inaugurating great religions, there was taking place in the land of India, a quiet movement which has exercised a continuous influence upon the entire philosophic thought of that country and which has also been making itself felt in the west.’¹²

S. Radhakrishnan says that the Upaniṣads form literature which has been growing from very early times. Their numbers may exceed two hundred, though the Indian tradition puts it at one hundred and eight. Muhammad Dara Shikoh collected and translated fifty Upaniṣads into Persian (1656-1657) and then into Latin by Anquetil Duperron (1801-1802) under the title *Oupnckhat*. The Principal Upaniṣads are said to be ten. Saṃkara commented on eleven, *Isa*, *Kena*, *Kathā*, *Prasna*, *Munḍaka*, *Māndukya*, *Taitīriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chāndogya*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, and *Śvetasvatara*. He also refers to the *Kausitaki*, *Jabālā*, *Mahanārayaṇa* and *Paingala* Upaniṣads in his commentary of *Brahma Sutra*. The other Upaniṣads which have come down are more

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 20-21.

¹² Hume, R. E., *The Thirteen Principal Upanisads*, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, p. 01.

religious than philosophical. They belong more to the Purāṇa and the Tantra than to the Vedas. They glorify Vedānta or Yoga or Saṁnyāsa or extol the worship of Śiva, Shakti or Viṣṇu.¹³

According to Signe Cohen, The Upaniṣads are among the most sacred fundamental scriptures in the Hindu religion. They were composed of 800 BC onwards and marking up part of the larger Vedic corpus, they offer the reader “knowledge lessons” on life, death, and immortality. While they are essential to understanding Hinduism and Asian religions more generally, their complexities make them almost impenetrable to anyone but serious scholars of Sanskrit and ancient Indian culture.¹⁴

After the Vedic and later Vedic texts, the Epics are the main sources with this research is dealing. Romila Thapar has said that these are not historic per se, but they incorporate fragments of narratives pertaining to what was believed to have happened.¹⁵ Various scholars have attempted to fix the dates of these epics whereas C. V. Vaidya in his book *Epic India: India as described in Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa*, have given the time period of 3000 to 300 BC for these both texts and assumes the date of *Mahābhārata* war in 3101 BC.¹⁶

Traditionally the *Rāmāyaṇa* is regarded as an ideal representative of Kāvya as opposed to the *Mahābhārata* which is an *Itihās*.¹⁷ The text of the *Mahābhārata* has been studied seriously by some western scholars in the early nineteenth century as by

¹³ Radhakrishnan, S., *The Principal Upanisads*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1953, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴ Cohen, Signe, *The Upanisads: A Complete Guide*, Routledge, London, 2018, p. 01.

¹⁵ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2016, p. 144.

¹⁶ Vaidya, C. V., *Epic India: India as Described in The Mahabharata and Ramayana*, Radhabhai Atmaram Sangoon, Bombay, 1907, p. 01.

¹⁷ Sharma, Ramashraya, *A Socio-Political Study of the Valmiki Ramayana*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Delhi, 1986. p. 02.

Moriz Winternitz and Hermann Oldenberge¹⁸, while the earliest serious research on socio-political conditions of *Rāmāyaṇa* was done by scholars like P. C. Dharma and S. N. Vyas.¹⁹

William Buck in his book *Mahābhārata* has given the time period of these texts between the second century BC and second century AD.²⁰ R. S. Sharma has argued regarding the dating of the *Mahābhārata* as it is difficult to use the material drawn from the *Mahābhārata* for one particular period, for its narrative portion looks back to as early as the 10th century BC and didactic and descriptive portions belong to as late as the 4th century AD. Originally the epic consisted of 8,800 ślokas, then had 24,000 ślokas, and finally inflated to 1, 00,000 ślokas, though the critical edition by V. S. Sukthankar consists of nearly 78,000 ślokas.²¹

James L. Fitzgerald has looked into the *Mahābhārata* through a critical perspective and have argued that “the Great Bhārata was subjected to deliberate extension or updating, at least once after the original creation of the text, for there are certain parts of it which, while not deviating significantly from the basic thrust of the text as read without them, do not seem to have the same general measure of inter-dependent continuity with other parts of the text”.²² Fitzgerald fixes the date for this updating of the text as argued by some royal houses for important symbolic or propagandistic purposes in between 100 BC to 350 AD.²³

¹⁸ Hildebeitel, Alf, *Rethinking the Mahabharata: A Readers guide to the Education of the Dharma King*, The University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 01.

¹⁹ Sharma, Ramashraya, *A Socio-Political Study of the Valmiki Ramayana*, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Delhi, 1986. p.03.

²⁰ Buck, William, *Mahabharata*, University of California Press, California, 1981, p. XIV.

²¹ Sharma, R. S. Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1959 p.18.

²² Fitzgerald, James L., *India's Fifth Veda: The Mahabharata's Presentation of Itself*, in *Essays on the Mahabharata* edited by Arvind Sharma, Motilal Banarasidass Publishers, Delhi, 2007, p. 154.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

Romila Thapar has discussed in detail the dating of epic *Mahābhārata*, and according to her, there is no agreement on the date of the central event, the war at Kurukṣetra. One view holds that it marks the end of the *Dvāparayuga* and the beginning of *Kaliyuga*. This has been calculated as the equivalent of 3102 BC. The theory of four yugas or time cycles described in the epic is however late and is dated to around the Christian era.²⁴ She further argues that “given the structure of the epic, the Bhārata ākhya/kathā was doubtless known by the mid-first millennium BC, and inclusion of the *Bhāgawata* cult would date to the rise of *Bhāgawatism* at the end of the first millennium BC”.²⁵

While Upinder Singh argues that the similarities in language and style suggest that the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* emerged from a common cultural milieu. The *Mahābhārata* refers to Vālmīkī and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and outlines the Rāma story in a section called the *Rāmopakhyana*. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, in turn, mentions the Kurus Hastinapur and Janamejaya, although it does not mention the *Mahābhārata* war. The two epics were clearly aware of each other, at least in their later stage of development. The composition of *Mahābhārata* can be placed in between 400 BC to 400 AD, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* in between 5th century BC to 3th century AD.²⁶

Regarding the dating of epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, Romila Thapar has used various textual sources from Jainism as well as from Buddhism; she argued that the different phrases of *Rāmāyaṇa* composed in Sanskrit are dated to be 400 BC to 400 AD. She further argued that the Vālmīkī *Rāmāyaṇa* has been evolved in five stages. The initial version of the story was the narrative in books 2-6. This was put together in the 5-4th century

²⁴ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 161.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

²⁶ Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the stone age to 12th century*, Pearson Longman Publishers, Delhi, 2008, p.

BC and revised with periodic interpolations from the third century BC to first century AD. The text was by then in written form, in the subsequent two centuries; books 1 and 7 were added. From the fourth to twelfth centuries AD small passages were interpolated.²⁷

In this research, we are also using Kautilya's *Arthasāstra* which is known as the book of statecraft in ancient India, particularly during the time of Chandragupta Maurya to understand the relevance of the forest in ancient Indian social structure. The existence of the *Arthasāstra* of Kautilya in the past has been proved by the texts written between the 4th and 14th century AD, though the actual *Arthasāstra* was discovered in 1905. The reference about *Arthasāstra* and its author are found in the *Kamandakiya Nitisāra*, *Kādambari of Bāṇbhata*, *Panchtantra*, *Somadeva's Nitivakyamrit*, *Kathasaritsāgar*, and *Nandisutra*.²⁸ The *Arthasāstra* was looked upon as the product of the Mauryan age almost by all the groups of historians. According to S. C. Sharma, the text has been stated variously either to be pre-Pāninian or post Dāndin or anywhere between these two extreme limits. Thus it has been variously placed between from 700 BC to 700 AD.

Dr. R. Shama Shastri who brought this great work into the light in 1905 argued regarding the dating of *Arthasāstra*, as he observes that “from Indian epigraphical researches it is known beyond doubt that Chandragupta was made a king in 321 BC and the Aśokavardhana ascended the throne in 296 BC. It follows; therefore the

²⁷ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, pp. 208-220.

²⁸ Mishra, S. C., *Evolution of Kautilya's Arthasastra: An Inscriptional Approach*, Anamika Publishers, Delhi, 1997, p. 17.

Kautilya lived and wrote his famous work the *Arthasāstra*, somewhere between from 321 to 300 BC.²⁹

Upinder Singh has critically observed the whole development of the text she put forth the major problem with the text as a source of history because of the differences of the opinion regarding date and authorship of the text. As per the traditional view, the text is a work of 4th century BC, written by Kautilya, also known as Chāṅkya or Viṣhṇugupta, who became Chandragupta Maurya's chief minister after helping him overthrow the Nandas.

However, over the years, this view has been questioned on several grounds. It has been pointed out that there is no reference to Kautilya in Patanjali's *Mahābhāṣya* which mentions the Mauryas and the assembly of Chandragupta and also Megasthenes, who we know was associated with Chandragupta's court, does not mention Kautilya in his *Indica*. The *Arthasāstra* does not contain any references to the Mauryas, their empire, Chandragupta, or Pātalipura. This could be because it is a theoretical, not a descriptive work.³⁰

R. P. Kangle has pointed out to support the traditional view, which places Kautilya and the *Arthasāstra* in the Mauryan period. On the ground of style, the book seems to be earlier than Vātsyayana's *Kāmasutra*. It is probably earlier than the *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti*, and probably also the *Manu Smṛiti*. The mention of the *Ājivikas* as an important sect fits in with the Mauryan period, as do the references to sangha polities and the discussion of the large scale establishment of agricultural settlements.³¹

²⁹ Unni, N. P., *Kautilya Arthasastra: A Study*, Bharati Vidya Bhawan, Delhi, 1983, p. 12.

³⁰ Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the stone age to 12th century*, Pearson Longman Publishers, Delhi, 2008, p. 322.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

I.2 Historiography

The forest has been an integral part of human society because human societies have actually developed themselves around them and form different kinds of settlements. From the time of the *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, and Epics, their socio-political understandings have come under various transformations, and these transformations have been studied by various scholars and historians to analyze and observe the patterns of change in the idea of a forest.

D. D. Kosambi has looked over the primary settlements in India in order to understand the means of production among the inhabitants and have described them as '*tribal Indian society*'³² because they did survive on the food gathering and they know their places in a jungle as well as they also know over a hundred other natural products beyond the staples which may be gathered without cultivation: fruit, nuts, roots tubers, honey, mushrooms leafy vegetables, etc.³³ He has also argued how this tribal Indian society has transformed with time as 'semi-tribal peasants farming the poorest land, though they were known as good archers, hunters, fishermen, and food gatherers'³⁴.

The forest has been a major source of natural resources on the basis of which 'primitive societies' as they were called evolved from subsistent production to surplus production in order to maintain their growing population and its demands. Societies developed from various stages of the mode of productions like tribal, pastoral and agriculture, and made their settlements as per their mode of productions in a long historical period. Those who adopted their particular mode of production and

³² Kosambi, D.D., *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1965, p. 33.

³³ Ibid, p. 34.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

settlement for a long time, have also developed their specific socio-cultural domain where they practice their life's virtues according to their geo-cultural demands.

The particular mode of production also derives its particular superstructure and because of that the societies who remained in a tribal mode of production still remained with primitive social and cultural structures dependent on the forest products completely. Instead, the pastoral communities adopted 'migration' with their cattle as their main feature and came out from the jungles for the pasture/grasslands and formed moving settlements at the periphery of the jungles. Finally, the agricultural societies came into existence with their permanent settlements as *kṣetra/grāma/nagara* and further developed superstructures like State to maintain the law and order in the society. Therefore, the dichotomy of *vana* and *kṣetra* allowed to earlier representing the nuances of different socio-ecosystems which evolved gradually.

Gunther Dietz Sontheimer in her classical article '*The Vana and Kṣetra*', has also explained the above dichotomy which is based on the idea of the kinds of settlements in relation to the forest and non-forest spaces. According to her, the terms *vana* and *araṇya* seem to be used or less as equivalents in late Vedic and the post-Vedic literature. *Kṣetra* means well-settled space with regular plow agriculture; *vana* means 'wild space', forest or jungle which harbors the 'hermitage', the tribal, the *saṃnyāsi* and the *aśrama*³⁵. She further argues that the dichotomy of *vana* and *kṣetra* is not mutually exclusive but it is rather complementary or a continuum similarly as the continuum from tribe to caste³⁶.

³⁵ Sontheimer, Gunther Dietz, '*The vana and the kshetra*' in Religion and Society in Eastern India (ed.) G.C. Tripathi and Hermann Kulke, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1994, p. 127.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 128.

Sontheimer in her same article argues that the *vana- kṣetra* dichotomy is a nature-culture dichotomy, a theoretical expansion of material creations in order to understand and analyze the concept.

She further explains that in the past *vana* was the realm of tribals and the roots of much of Hinduism in the worship of the spirits of mountains, trees, animals, the *yakṣas*, snakes and their homes, hermitage mounts, but also defied clan ancestors. The more the *kṣetra* spread into *vana*, the more the tribal cults were integrated by an exceedingly slow, but a steady process over centuries. As indicated, the assimilation of tribal cults in the *kṣetra* meant only a transformation, but not abolition. They were reinterpreted in terms of the cults and rituals of the *kṣetra*. The unbound elements of nature became regulated through myths and different rituals which were handled by ritual experts. Such rituals found detailed elaboration in the Vedic rituals. The *vana* had its ambivalence and ambiguous values as seen from the *kṣetra*: it may be considered deadly, chaotic, primordial, full of *bhutās*, *daityās*, and *rākṣasas*, but it also had its positive value. It was the source of creation and renewal of life. The burning place the *smasāna* is sometimes compared with the forest³⁷.

On the basis of the above explanation by Sontheimer, it seems very clear that the dichotomy between *vana* and *kṣetra* has a very assimilative kind of relationship instead of being antagonistic in features. She tried to understand the cohesive character of *vana* on the basis classical Sanskrit literature that the forest was also the place for the *aśrama* of the *ṛṣis* and Sanskrit *kāvya* literature abounds in descriptions of the *vana* and *upavana*. The forest is also the abode of the ascetic, the renouncer of *samsāra*, of worldly life in the *kṣetra*. The dangers and deprivations of *vanavāsa*, of

³⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

the life in the forest or on mountains and the direct access to the divine, attracted the ascetic to perform *tapas*. In the wilderness, the normal rules of *samsāra* were not applicable from the point of view of the settled people and it was thus the normal abode of the ascetics, the renouncer of *samsāra*.

According to Sontheimer the highest ascetic of the *Veda* which is known as the Vedic Rudra or Śiva with his polymorphic manifestation was originally beyond the Brahmanical fold and the *kṣetra*. Rudra was thus to say, between the *vana* and the *kṣetra* was in the contact with all communities from highest to the lowest. It was he who could hold the two different ecological, cultural, and religious areas together. On the other hand, one of his manifestations is the *kṣetrapāla* and he is the protector of Brāhmaṇas. He lives in the border between *vana* and *kṣetra*. It is common to identify, at least partially, the outlandish *rākṣasas*, *asurā*, or *daitya* who infest the *vana*, with the god who is victorious over him. These entities, thus, becomes a source of protection. Rudra/Śiva is himself of demoniac and outlandish origins as seen from the point of view of people in the brāhmanical *kṣetra*. The *rākṣasas* came from the realm of the *yakśas* or *bhūtās*. The latter in turn were often identified with outlandish people like tribes or pastoral groups.³⁸

Romila Thapar in her article '*Perceiving the Forest in Early India*' has also discussed the idea of *vana* and *kṣetra* and has extended the argument of Sontheimer. She argued that though the duality has existed for many centuries, the perceptions accompanying it were neither static nor uniform. The forest was seen in multiple ways, and historical change altered the focus. Where it was romanticized it became an imagined alternative, a fictive paradise, which expunged the inequities of civilized living. Alternatively, it was seen as the fearful habitat of demons.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

According to her, the dichotomy between the *vana* and the *grāma* evolved in early times when the village constituted the settlement. With the emergence of urban centers, particularly in the early centuries, there was also a growing dichotomy between the *grāma* and *nagara*-the village and the town respectively. At the same time, *vana* and *araṇya* had ecologically different from that of the settlement and would have included the desert and the semi-arid pastoral regions as well. Another dichotomy, discussed in the context of ecology and medical knowledge, was that it was a jungle and *anūpa* the forest and marshland³⁹.

Romila Thapar also looks at the various kinds of historical change that occurred in the popular and textual meaning of forest. She argues that the reason for a change in the connotation of the forest is the demand of civilization to impinge on the forest; the perceptions of the forest and its people have also changed. The forest, therefore, is not a neutral item, that is 'out there', the images that evoke are significant to the self-understanding of the settlement and these change with time and with intention. She further states that, when the monastic system came to be established, despite the necessity of dependence on alms which lined the monasteries to the *grāma*, the ideal image remained that of monks in forest monasteries⁴⁰.

Some scholars have made a further distinction between the two categories. *Grāma* and *araṇya*, as more widely inclusive terms, are seen as dichotomous; whereas *vana* and *kṣetra*, being more specific, are viewed as interactive or even as a continuum. The dichotomy is also suggested by the statement in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that the sacrificial animal at the *yajña* should be from *grāma*, for while a domesticated animal eliminates the undesirable, the sacrificing of a wild animal from the forest has a

³⁹ Thapar, Romila, 'Perceiving the forest in early India', in Environmental history of early India: A Reader (ed.) Nandini Sinha Kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 143.

negative effect⁴¹. On the basis of this, we can say that the two complementary ways of obtaining meat for eating were hunting and the sacrifice and through this *vana* and *kṣetra* are closely in interrelations.

The notion of dichotomy was also extended to the major opposition in societal terms, that of the *grhastha* (householder) and the *saṃnyāsin* (ascetic or renouncer). The householder has to observe the social obligations of the *grāma* and of the *dharma* and has a schedule of daily rites, but the renouncer living in the forest is free of these. And the logic of the duality was that he who had renounced the practice of social and sacred obligations would have the forest as his habitat since the forest does not require these. The eventual crystallization of these ideas was the theory of the four stages of life- the four *āśramas* where interestingly a major part of one's life was to be spending, one way or another, in the forest⁴².

As per Thapar's argument, the epic literature is among the early compositions which play on the dichotomy and the complementarity of the *vana* and *kṣetra*, but it also tends to change the orientation somewhat from that of Vedic corpus. Many forests are mentioned each by name, suggesting that the forest was not an undifferentiated expanse but had its own categories of identity. In early India, the forest was the context for at least three activities: the hunt, the hermitage, and the place of exile⁴³.

She takes the example of the Śākuntala as a narrative which opens with Duśhyanta

⁴¹ Pragâpati desired, 'Would that I might gain both the worlds, the world of the gods, and the world of men.' He saw those beasts, the tame and the wild ones; he seized them, and by means of them took possession of these two worlds: by means of the tame beasts he took possession of this (terrestrial) world, and by means of the wild beasts of yonder (world); for this world is the world of men, and yonder world is the world of the gods. Thus when he seizes tame beasts he thereby takes possession of this world, and when wild beasts, he thereby (takes possession) of yonder (world). Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 13.2.4.1, Translated by Julius Eggeling, *The Sataptha-Brahmana, according to Madhyandin School*, Part V, Kanda XIII, Fourth Brahmana, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1892, p. 305.

⁴² Thapar, Romila, 'Perceiving the forest in early India', in *Environmental history of early India: A Reader* (ed.) Nandini Sinha kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 144.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

hunting in the forest where the *vana* was the unknown territory, peopled by *gandharvās*, *yakṣās*, *rākṣasas*, and *nāgās*.

There are also some incidents in the epics with the vivid description of the destruction of a forest like the *Khāṇḍavavan* burnt by Agni and latter cleared forest became the settlement for Indrapraṣṭh and the chiefdom of the *Pāṇḍavas* established. It has been also argued that the burning of forests was an attempt to destroy the resource base of hunter-gatherers even if forested land was easily available or it might be an attempt to clear more land in the vicinity for overpopulated areas.

It has been accepted by the scholars that the war of *Mahābhārata* was actually for the access over land and there was also a battle between the *ganadharvas* and Kurus over the rights to the interior of the forest and *Kurus* were eventually defeated. Cattle raids and claims over forest lands were essential to chiefdoms. The *gandharvas* in this narrative have an ambiguous identity, for they are likely to have been forest dwellers rather than celestial beings⁴⁴.

The dichotomy between *vana* and *kṣetra* has also led to creating strong identities between the peoples those who inhabited outside of *vana* or within the *vana*. The people dwelling in the forest sufficing themselves by hunting- the *Vyādh*, *Niṣādh*, and similar other communities and entities are regarded with contempt, treated as uncouth and sinful, and subordinated to low caste status. It is the king who had to conquer it and refashion the chaos in to order.

The *rākṣasās* have generally been described as the reason for the chaos in the forest and shown as demons unreal. But given the perception of the forest in the epics, they are likely to be the forest-dwellers who obstructed hunting expeditions and hurrahed

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

those establishing settlements in the forest, for example, *ṛiṣis* establishing *āśramas*, etc.

In the narrative of *Śakuntalā*, the ferocity of hunt is contrasted with the gentle calmness of the heritage, each presenting a different view of nature. The hermitage is situated so deep in the forest that it is almost another world. This is liminal space, the threshold between the two contrasting ecologies of the *vana* and the *kṣetra*. But at the same time, ‘it may be seen as a precursor of what the later evolved into *agrahāras*: land grants to the Brāhmaṇas, either in the forest or wetlands, or grants of cultivated land an intrusion into the forest by the peoples of the *grāma*’⁴⁵.

The early *Upaniṣads* use the dichotomy to differentiate the path of the soul where rebirth is associated with the *grāma* but self-realization in the forest ensures a release from rebirth⁴⁶, whereas, exile was a device to use commonly by bards and poets to stretch the story in the epic traditions. The forest was where anything could happen

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁶ ‘Those who know this (even though they still be grihasthas, householders) and those who in the forest follow faith and austerities (the vānaprasthas, and of the parivrāgakas those who do not yet know the Highest Brahman) go to light (arkis), from light to the day, from day to the light half of the moon, from the light half of the moon to the six months when the sun goes to the north, from the six months when the sun goes to the north to the year, from the year to the sun, from the sun to the moon, from the moon to the lightning. There is a person not human’, Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part I, (Sacred Books of East)*, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Kanda V, Tenth Brahmana, 1879, p. 80.

‘Those who thus know this (even Grihasthas), and those who in the forest worship faith and the True (Brahman Hiranyagarbha), go to light (arkis), from light to the day, from day to the increasing half, from the increasing half to the six months when the sun goes to the north, from those six months to the world of the Devas (Devaloka), from the world of the Devas to the sun, from the sun to the place of lightning. When they have thus reached the place of lightning a spirit comes near them, and leads them to the worlds of the (conditioned) Brahman. In these worlds of Brahman they dwell exalted for ages. There is no returning for them.

‘But they who conquer the worlds (future states) by means of sacrifice, charity, and austerity, go to smoke, from smoke to night, from night to the decreasing half of the moon, from the decreasing half of the moon to the six months when the sun goes to the south, from these months to the world of the fathers, from the world of the fathers to the moon. Having reached the moon, they become food, and then the Devas feed on them there, as sacrificers feed on Soma, as it increases and decreases. But when this (the result of their good works on earth) ceases, they return again to that ether, from ether to the air, from the air to rain, from rain to the earth. And when they have reached the earth, they become food, they are offered again in the altar-fire, which is man, and thence are born in the fire of woman. Thus they rise up towards the worlds, and go the same round as before.’

‘Those, however, who know neither of these two paths, become worms, birds, and creeping things. Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part I, (Sacred Books of East Vol. 15)*, Brāhdānyak Upaniṣad, 6.2.15-16, Kanda VI, Second Brahmana, 1884, p. 209.

and in each retelling of the story, fresh incidents could be added. For the hierarchies and regulations of the *grāma* were not observed, thus, exile became an experience in forging and testing of human values⁴⁷.

Kauṭilya has seen the forest on economic perspectives for the state he advised to settle *Sūdra* peasants on wasteland or land which has been deserted for the purpose of extending agriculture and in order to bring large revenue from their natural products such as timber, elephants, veins of semi-precious stones and mines. Kauṭilya also suggested that these activities of state may have met with some opposition from the forest dwellers so that the king should not tax those areas which had been laid waste by the *aṭavika*/ forest dwellers.

Alok Parasher Sen in his article '*Of tribes' Hunters and Barbarians*' has dealt with the Mauryan state policies in relation to the forest dwellers on the basis of textual and inscriptional studies. He quotes Thapar as 'the Mauryan state was metropolitan in nature that initiated conquest and control of the other areas, the territorial expansion to mobilize the resources necessary to support metropolitan state', whereas Sen states that in this interpretation of the Magadha empire given an opportunity to look deeper into the complex relationship between the dominating and the dominated regions of the empire which were held together not merely by military strength.

He argues that, however powerful an ancient empire, it always had difficulties in containing diverse ethnically powerful populations. On the basis of these two arguments, it is important to observe and analyze that 'how the state perceived the dwellers and sought to subordinate and assimilate them'⁴⁸.

⁴⁷ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forest*, p. 149.

⁴⁸ Alok Parasher Sen, '*Of tribes, hunters and barbarians*', in *Environmental history of early India: A Reader* (ed.) Nandini Sinha kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 03.

According to Sen, it is from literary sources that we can try and understand the ways of the dominant community as to how they have constructed and defined themselves. There were various kinds of forests inhabited by various tribal and ethnic groups. Fragments of Megasthenes depicting conditions in the third century B.C. inform us that the Indians were surrounded by *barbarian* tribes who differed from the rest of the population. Aśokan edicts and *Arthasāstra* clearly shows that the traditional rules of excluding the tribes from the imperial territory. There also desired to differentiate different types of tribal groups through various generic names and by such general terms as *aranyacara*, *aṭavi*, and *aṭavika*.⁴⁹

Forests between villages of the same *Janapada* would supply fuel, timber, hay, game and edible produce, and provide land for grazing, Kauṭilya suggests that the frontiers of each Janapadas were to heavily guard against attack from savages or foreign enemies. The territory between frontier and fortress was to be guarded by *Vagurikās*, *Śabarās*, *Pulindās*, *Cāṇḍālas* and by *aranyacara* (forest dwellers).⁵⁰ Kauṭilya also differentiated the kinds of forests in order to categorize them on the basis of resource production for the state; *dravyavana* (material forests) for metals like iron, copper and lead, *haṣṭivana* (elephant forest), etc. In the same line of thought, Sen also points out that even though there was state practice to clear the forest for land but in the case of elephant forest, they were not to be cleared strictly because elephants were indispensable to the army, not only in battle but for heavy transport and building bridges.⁵¹

Sen also analyses the Aśokan Rock Edict XII in order to understand the relationship between the Magadha state and forest tribes.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 06.

⁵⁰ Kosambi, *Culture and Civilization*, pp. 145-47.

⁵¹ Alok Parasher Sen, *Of tribes, hunters and barbarians*, p. 07.

“Even when he is wronged, the beloved of the Gods believes one must *exercise patience as far it is possible to exercise*. As far as the forests (tribes) which are in his empire are concerned, the beloved of the Gods conciliates them too and preaches them. They are even told that they repent and do not kill anymore.”

Sen argues on the basis of Aśokan Rock Edict XII, XIII that Asoka made a clear distinction between the people inhabiting the borders of the empire and the tribes in the interiors of the empire. The list of these people like the *Yonās*, *Kāmbojas*, *Nabhkās*, *Bhojas*, *Pitirikās*, and *Āndhrās* was engraved on Rock Edict XIII, Sen further argues that Aśoka was thus categorical in warning the forest tribes that even after the Kalingā war, the king was still powerful and that they had to fall in with his policies. He certainly did not want to subdue these forest tribes through force and bloodshed.

On the other hand in the second separate edict, he made an appeal to all unconquered peoples on his borders not to fear him and to follow the *Dhammā* initiated by him. The *Dhammā Mahāmaṭṭrās* were advised to inspire confidence among those who lived in the borders and induce them to practice the moral principles laid down in his policy of *Dhammā*. No derogatory terms like *Mlechha* were used in Aśokan inscriptions to describe the forest tribes, the aim being to win them over through the spread of his idea on *Dhammā*.⁵²

Nandini Sinha Kapur in her book *‘Reconstructing Identities: Tribes, Agro-Pastoral and Environment in Western India’*⁵³, has discussed the transformation of the forest tribes into the agro-pastoral communities. She argues in the introduction part that, the trade routes which cut across hill and forests brought the tribes close to the

⁵² Ibid., p. 10.

⁵³ Kapur, Nandini Sinha, *Reconstructing Identities, Tribes, Agro-Pastoralists and Environment in Western India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2008.

‘civilizational’ forces. Certain professional and artisanal services of the tribal groups such as *Niṣādas* and *Pukkusas* generated tribal societal economic interdependence. Such interdependence brought tribes and their geographical locations within the brāhmanical knowledge as reflected in *Smṛiti* texts and works of grammar. Process of ‘subordination’ and absorption of tribes like *Niṣādas*, *Cāṇḍalas*, and *Pukkusa* led to the emergence of a fifth varṇa by post-Vedic time. These tribes were accorded a mixed-origin *varṇa-saṃkara jāti* by ancient lawgivers like Manu and Yājñavalkya.

Vijay Nath’s *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*⁵⁴ is a landmark work on the history, acculturation, and assimilation of the tribal population into the Brāhmanical society in early India. She discusses the emergence of the tribal elite consequent of cultural-contact with expanding states and migrant Brāhmaṇas into forests and hills: a macro-process in the history of the subcontinent. Nath opines that any change in the mode of production had to be accompanied by a partial restructuring of the tribal social base and traditions which were rooted in the cultic beliefs and practices. If acculturation means a process of accommodation in cultural contact, this cultural phenomenon was visible in the Vedic/post-Vedic periods, when acculturation turned central to most religio-social formations of the time. Nath believes that economic expediency spread Sanskritic culture into the peripheral zones and acted as a catalyst to the forces of acculturations. Economic forces were compounded by political forces of the processes of the state formation operating during the Vedic/post-Vedic periods.

⁵⁴ Nath, Vijay, *Puranas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, Delhi, 1980.

Makhan Lal in his article *'Iron Tools, Forest Clearance, and Urbanization in the Gangetic plains'*⁵⁵, he is dealing with a very serious question that how the process of urbanization taken place irrespective of deep and dense monsoonal forest in the Gangetic region. He mentions that in the context of urbanization in Gangetic plains during the period of first millennium BCE, it has been repeatedly argued by some archaeologists and historians that the urbanization was possible only because of widespread use of advanced iron tools which helped the people in clearing the dense forest of the Gangetic plains, and widespread use of iron tool was possible only when the mines could be explored in the middle of first millennium BCE. However, some scholars have argued that it was not the technology alone but the establishment of strong social and political institutions.

He argue that after observing and analyzing the settlement patterns and systems in Gangā plains during first millennium BCE, the first-hand knowledge of the setting of archaeological sites, excavated archaeological materials, and intensive exploration in the Gangā plains lead to the conclusion that the so-called extensive use of iron tools and large scale clearing for human settlements is nothing but a myth. The problem of clearing of forests for human settlements and agricultural land and a few references found in literature, that is *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, have been blown out of proportions. A careful analysis of archaeological data, locations and density of settlements, and an approximate estimate of population on the basis of size of settlements, and an idea of land requirement for agriculture purpose to support population are bound to give us a

⁵⁵ Lal, Makhan, *'Iron Tools, Forest Clearance, and Urbanization in the Gangetic Plains'*, in *India's Environment History: From Ancient time to Colonial period, A Reader*, (ed.) Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishna, Permanent black, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 65-79.

fairly good idea about the problem of large scale use of iron tools, deforestation, and urbanization⁵⁶.

Lal concludes his article with some important arguments on the basis of archaeological findings and data analysis like, there was never any need for large scale forest clearings in any period. Whatever little forest clearing was needed could be done with the technology available to PGW people. He further counters the established notion of forest clearance theory “that the urbanizations of Gangā plains was not due to iron technology and the overexploitation or extensive tilling of agricultural land for the surplus, but mainly due to the culmination of several social, political, and economic factors that were operating over many preceding centuries to channelize the energy, resources and generate a need and circulation of the surplus”⁵⁷.

Thomas R. Trautmann in ‘*Elephants and the Mauryas*’⁵⁸ have explored the relationship between Mauryan state and the importance of forest elephant (*Haṣṭivana*). Here Trautmann have taken the accounts of Strabo, the historian and geographer who lived in first-century BCE believed had visited Pāṭaliputra (Palimbothra) on an embassy to Bindusāra, Megasthenes to Chandragupta and also from *Arthashāstra* to collect information regarding the mutual relationship between Mauryan state and elephants.

Trautmann mentions that according to *Arthashāstra*, the state makes possessions of an element forest on the attributes of the typical kingdom, recommending that its superintendent keep a census of its wild population, and imposing the death penalty

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁵⁷ Lal, Makhana, ‘*Iron Tools, Forest Clearance, and Urbanization in the Gangetic Plains*’, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Trautmann, Thomas R. ‘*Elephants and Mauryas*’, in *India’s Environment History: From Ancient time to Colonial period, A Reader*, (ed.) Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishna, Permanent black, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 152-181.

on anyone who kills an elephant⁵⁹. He further describes the details of elephant forests in the Mauryan period that there were eight kinds of elephant forests these are:

1. *The Prācyā vana* or eastern forest bounded by Brahmaputra River and confluence at Prayāg to the east by the Himālaya and Gangā to the north and south.
2. *The Kalingā vana*, between Vinḍhya Mountain, Citrakūta Mountain, bordered by the eastern sea.
3. *The Cedikasura vana*, between Mekal, Tripuri, Darśan country and the unmattagangā.
4. *The Darsan vana*, between the country of Darsanas and the Mahāgiri, the Vinḍhya Mountain and the Vetrāvati River.
5. *The Angarya vana*, between Vaidesa and the Narmadā River, Brahmavardhana and the Pariyatras.
6. *The Aparantaka vana*, between Sahya Mountain and Bhragukaccha.
7. *The Saurāstraka vana*, between the country of Avantis and the Narmadā, Dwārka and Arbuda Mountain.
8. *The Pancanda vana*, between the Kurukṣetra country and the Kalikā forest, the Śindhu and the Himavat.

These elephant forests were preserved directly under the state power and maintained in order to have a good count of elephants so that they could be used for various purposes like from war to royal ceremonies etc. from this point of view we can see the direct relationship between kingship and preservation of forest, particularly for elephants as Trautmann has discussed.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

The above correlation between state and Kingship has been also taken up further by Nancy E. Falk in her article '*Wilderness and Kingship in South Asia*'.⁶⁰ According to her, it is customary to think of forested wilderness of old India as something kept separate from civilized life, ordinary people avoided the wild spaces because of the cannibalistic *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas*. In general, only ascetics took on the wilderness directly, and when they did so they broke with the common structures of the community. She argues that there are traces of another kind of practice in South Asia in which the separation was not so distinct. In particular, it seems to have been a complex relationship between wilderness and kingship, an institution squarely at the center of settled activity. It appears that a king had to have some kind of a transaction with the wilderness and the beings that inhabited to acquire or hold his kingship.

She sees the king's conquest of the wilderness as a royal ordeal. While reading the ancient myths and motifs from India and Sri Lanka she found that there are two basic variations on the motif. Firstly, the kingdom is to be carved out of the wild space themselves, and the pacification of the wild being is demanded by the situation. And secondly, the kingdom to be won is already in existence, and the encounter with the wilderness is just a preface to its assumption⁶¹. The first myth is from the account of *Mahāvamśa* of the settlement of Ceylon where prince Vijaya, who was himself the grandson of a *Simha*. As yet there was no human settlements island. Instead, like many other uninhabited areas, it was overrun by ferocious *yakṣas* and *yakṣinīs*. But Vijaya manages to get the *yakṣinī* and made her his wife, but now fears the other *rākṣasas*, hence decides to make sure that he will acquire the kingship. She takes him to *yakṣa* city where a wedding is being celebrated and instructs him in the means of

⁶⁰ Falk, Nancy E., *Wilderness and Kingship in Ancient South Asia*, in *Environmental History of Early India* (ed.) Nandini Sinha Kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 16-22.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

killing all the *yakṣas* present. He succeeds, even though the latter was invisible; puts on the garments of *yakṣa* king; and then goes off with his follower to find a city. The second myth is from *Mahābhārata*, where Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers acquire weapons in the wilderness that were crucial in the Great War⁶².

When we analyze these two myths as discussed by Nancy, it appears that the distinctiveness between forest and kingship seems to subsume each other in order to produce the reason for the germination of state or to produce a strong effect on the existing state.

B. D. Chattopadhyaya in the introduction of *'Rural society in early medieval India'*⁶³, describes the kinds of settlements to understand the basic idea of features, on the basis of which, one can differentiate the settlements and their inhabitants. According to him, from the time of the Buddha, the sphere where accepted societal norms could be prevalent was a *Janapada*, and the three distinct types of settlements which constituted the *Janapada* were *grāma*, *nigama*, and *nagara*. *Aranya* the forest was in sharp contrast to *Janapada*. *Aranya* was not a non-living space; it was also not simply a recluse for the hermits, although the stereotype of the hermit-forest equation continues in early medieval literature. He also argues that the proximities between forests and communities significantly change as simple communities moved towards greater complexities, best exemplified by the emergence of the state in other words 'forest' is a necessary space to the state but not as necessary as 'State' is to forest-dwellers.⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid., p. 18.

⁶³ Chattopadhyaya, Brajadulal, *'Aspects of Rural Settlements and Rural Society in Early Medieval India'*, Centre for studies in social sciences, K. P. Bagchi & Company, New Delhi, 1990.

⁶⁴ Kapur, Nandini Sinha, *'Reconstructing Identities: Tribal, Agro-Pastoralists and Environment in Western India'*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2008, p. 23.

If we carefully analyze Chattopadhyaya's above lines we find that there was a continuous process of state to encroach towards the forest, particularly for 'lands' because the new lands were in demand for the agriculture as well as population adjustment into virgin lands through land grants to *ṛiṣis* and *brāhmaṇas*.

Shubhra Sharma in her book '*Life in the Upaniṣads*'⁶⁵, has written about the forests at the time of *Upaniṣads* and argued that the 'forest or *araṇyas* were becoming increasingly popular at the backdrop for new philosophical thinking as is evident from the genre of literature called *araṇyaka*.'⁶⁶ According to her, the wandering ascetics frequenting these forests had grown by scores in the *Upaniṣadic* period but no names are mentioned. The only exception is the *Naimisha* forest where a sacrifice is reputed to have been performed.⁶⁷

नैमिशियानामुदगता बभूव⁶⁸ ।

The *Chāndogya* text tells us, the people who live in the forests practice faith and austerity goes to the path of the gods. Whereas the person who lives in the village performs sacrifices and works for the public utility and practice charity goes to the path of the manes.⁶⁹

ये चेमेऽरण्ये श्रद्धा तप इत्युपासते ।

या इते ग्रामे इष्टापूर्ते दत्तमित्युपासते⁷⁰ ॥

⁶⁵ Sharma, Shubhra, '*Life in the Upaniṣads*', Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, 1985

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁷ Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 1.2.13,

⁶⁸ (*Baka Dalbhya, knew it, he became the Udgatr priest of the people of Naimisa. He sang out for them their desire*). Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 1.2.13, Translated by S. Radhakrishnan in *The Principal Upaniṣads*, George Allen and Unwind Ltd. London, 1953, p. 341

⁶⁹ Sharma, Shubhra, '*Life in the Upaniṣads*', p. 89. (Chāndogya Upaniṣad V.10.1-3)

⁷⁰ 'So those who know thus, and those who in the forest meditate on faith as austerity (or with faith and austerity) go to light and from light to bright half of the month (of the waxing moon), from the bright half of the month to those six months during which sun moves northward.'

These two statements from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* clearly indicate that there was a sharp distinction between village life and forest life instead both were gaining almost equal virtue through the performance of duty as prescribed according to the settlements and the texts are full of such references.

The *Bṛahdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* mentions about the different classes of ascetics as *Paulkasa*, *Śramaṇa*, and *Tapasa*.⁷¹ It means within the ascetics there were differences which show that either they were different sects following different modes of penances, or it might be on the basis of their settlement relations particularly for alms and other important things.

Mangaldeo Shastri extends the above argument and believes in the co-existence of *ṛiṣī* traditions of the *Āryas* and the *Muni* traditions of Non *Āryas*, which blended together to give the *Aranyakas* and *Upaniṣads*.

V. S. Agarawal in his book '*India as known to Pānini*'⁷², have critically looked about the terms those who have been used in the context of forest and he found that the two common Sanskrit words for the forest are '*Vana*' and '*Aranya*', there are *Upaniṣads* like *Nāradparivyaṇakopniṣad* (3.90), *Jabālopniṣad* (2.1), *Jabālādaranyakopniṣad* (5.4), in these *Upaniṣads* the term '*Vana*' have been frequently used, while *Chāndogyopniṣad* (2.9.3) and *Bṛihadāraṇyak Upaniṣad* uses the term '*Āranya*'. According to Agarawal, there are other *Upaniṣads* those whose are talking about different kinds of Vanas like in *Kṛishnopniṣad* and *Rādhopanisad* there is a discussion

But those who in the village (a life of) sacrifices, (and perform) works of public utility and almsgiving they pass into the smoke, from smoke to night from night to the latter (dark) half of the month, from latter dark half of the month to the six months in which the sun moves southwards, but they do not reach the year.' *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, V.10.1-3, Translated by S. Radhakrishnan in *The Principal Upanisads*, George Allen and Unwind Ltd. London, 1953, p. 431

⁷¹ Sharma, Shubhra, '*Life in the Upanisads*', p. 91.

⁷² Agarawal, V. S., '*India as known to Panini*', Benaras, IIInd edition, 1963.

about ‘*Vṛindāvana*’ where the term “*Vṛindā*’ is denoted as Tulsi (the sacred plant) and *Vṛindāvan* has been regarded as the habitat of tulsi.

Agarawal has also analyzed that the word ‘*Vanaśpati*’ which is very common in *Upaniṣads* like *Śvetastaropaniṣad* (2.1), *Bṛihadāranyak upaniṣad* (3.2.13), *Gāyatri Rahaśya Upaniṣad*, all they have mentioned the term *Vanaśpati* in various contexts. Here it seems that the uses of different terms to represent the forest have evolved during the *Upaniṣad* period with the changes in the settlements of inhabitants

While we talk about the forest in the time of Vedas we get much information from the book ‘*The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upaniṣads*’⁷³ by A. B. Keith. According to him, Vedic people have shown their concern for the forest and forest dwellers through praising and caring for the earth. The goddess *Prīthvi* plays a singularly respected part in the *Ṛg Veda* except in so far as she is invoked along with *Dyaus*⁷⁴. They have discussed about the forest dwellers as ‘*Gandharvas*’, and these *Gandharvas* have been shown in relation with the water or water sources; either water of the sky are the basis on which his activities have been transformed to the waters of the earth/*Prīthvī*, or his association with the *Apśarās* has led to his connection with the waters⁷⁵.

Most of the references about the forest in Vedas have come in the contexts of the healing power of some plants and also spirits of the forests, trees, and plants. According to Keith the references to the worship of trees and plants are very scanty in Vedic rituals and mythology. A long hymn in the last book of *Ṛg Veda* is devoted to the definition of the plants with special reference to their healing properties; the same

⁷³ Keith, A. B., ‘*The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upaniṣads*’ Part I, Motilal Banarsidas publishers, Delhi, 1989

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 174.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 181.

thing also appears in *Atharva Veda*. In *Ṛg Veda*, Soma is the king of the plants and they are called mothers and goddesses the *Atharva Veda* poetically describes a plant as a goddess born of the goddess earth. The cult of trees and above all of the forest trees, *Vanaśpati* is recognized by *Ṛg Veda*. (VII. 34, 23; X. 64.8)⁷⁶

In the later *Samhitās* as we have seen trees are the favorite homes of the *Apśaras* and *Gandharvas*. The *Taittirīya Samhitās* assigns to them as their homes the trees, *Aśavtha*, *Nyagrodha*, *Udimbara* and *Plaksa*. When the wedding possessions pass by large trees these deities are to be sought to afford then favour. More directly in some ceremonies, in some accounts, the tree is solemnly honoured on the fifth day after marriage with the gift of flowers and offered food and clothing. The part of the marriage ritual is one of the commonest features of Indian marriage, particularly among the tribes⁷⁷. The *Ṛg Veda* preserves one hymn in its last book which is describing the forest goddess, '*Aranyāni*', in a poetical and graphic manner⁷⁸.

Keith further argued that the forests were being treated as scared place and because of that, the *Upaniṣadic* traditions were directly associated with forests. The lessons of the teachers to his pupils were not public in the ordinary space of the world. They have been the witness that certain texts of special importance were to be taught to the pupil in the 'forest', not in the normal space. These forests as well as the *Upaniṣads* were later being known as '*Aranyakas*' and *Aranyakas* were specially intended for study by the *Vānprathis*.⁷⁹ In order to understand the relationship between *Aranyakas* and *Brāhmaṇas*, Keith states that as the distinction between *Aranyakas* and *Brāhmaṇas*

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 184.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 185.

⁷⁹ Keith, A. B., '*The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanisads*' Part II, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, Delhi, 1989, p. 489.

is not as absolute, though the *Aranyakas* tend to certain more advanced doctrines than Brāhmaṇas.

Vijay Kumar Gupta has also discussed in detail about the forest and its aspects in his book '*Forest and Environment in Ancient India*.'⁸⁰ She is trying to look over the hymns, in which there is an adverse relationship between Agni and *Prīthvī*, according to him Agni (the god of fire) next to Indra is most prominent in the Vedic gods being celebrated in more than 200 hymns always invades the forest and shave the heir of earth.⁸¹

The relationships between Agni and *Prīthvī* have been interpreted by Vijay Kumar as the constant process of deforestation in Vedic age. The legend as described in the *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* clearly indicates that as a result of the pressure of the expanding population the process of deforestation started as a major factor. The myth of the fire god Agni moving from the bank of the *Śaraśvati* up to the *Sadānira* (Gaṇḍak) river burning the forest on his way significantly tells us the story of the clearing of Jungle to accommodate the growing population.⁸²

He also finds the epithet of *Vanaśpati* as the lord of the forest. Among the large trees mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda*, the most important is the '*Aśvattha*' (horse stand) or sacred fig tree, its fruit is described as sweet and wood was used for Soma's vessels. The later Vedas tells us that the gods are seated in the third heaven under the *Aśvattha*.⁸³ This description shows the importance of fig tree in the Vedas and still, it is known as scared in present. Apart from the plants for medicine and trees for its sacred value animals were another asset from the forest mentioned in the Vedas. As to the *Atharva*

⁸⁰ Gupta, Vijay Kumar, '*Forest and Environment in Ancient India*', B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2010

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 09.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Veda and *Yajur Veda*, the elephant is quite familiar for it is not frequently mentioned but the adjective '*haṣṭin*' became used to designate animals.⁸⁴

The *Pṛīthvī Sūkta* in *Ṛg Veda* is most important for the understanding of human-ecological relationships. In this *Sūkta*, the poet sees the earth in close relation with forest 'it is all nourishing the earth upon which the forest sprang trees ever stand firm (V-27). The poet sees the earth as the home of a pluralistic society. In brief, the *Pṛīthvī Sūkta* is the epitome of the later Vedic attitude towards forest and environment.⁸⁵ With the adoption and understanding of the forest in the Vedas now Brāhmaṇas have been also mentioning various new places and tribes as *Paricakra* mentioned in *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* (13-5-4/7) Various tribes mentioned in *Ṛik-Saṃhitā* underwent considerable changes in Brāhmanical age and the five principal tribes of the *Saṃhitā* period are; the *Anus*, *Druhyus*, *Purus*, *Turvsus* and *Yadus*.⁸⁶

Ancient tribes were living in different forests and according to Vijay Kumar's argument on the basis of textual analysis of Vedas that, there were different kinds of forest in different regions of ancient India. He has mentioned about some of the forests like; *Anjanāvana* (natural forest) existed in *Madhyadeś*, *Kurujaṅgal* (wild forest) spread over realm and extended as *Kāmyak* forest, *Parileyyakavana* (elephant forest) at some distance from *Kausāmbi* and on the way of *Śarsvati*, *Lumbinivana* (natural forest) situated on the bank of *Rohini* river, *Vindhyāṭavi* (Vindhya forest) surrounding the Vindhya range through which lay the way from *Pāṭaliputra* to *Tāmralipti*, it was a forest without any human habitation.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 53-54.

D. D. Kosambi in his classical article ‘The Autochthones elements in *Mahābhārata*’⁸⁸, have critically analyzed the mentioned communities in *Mahābhārata* particularly residing in the forests. He has tried to read between the lines and interpreted the mythological characters and events in order to understand the *itihās- purāṇa* tradition. Kosambi is first trying to decipher the *Nāgās* which have been mentioned throughout the classical writings particularly in *Mahābhārata* as inhibitors of the forest. According to Kosambi, Janamejaya III performed a *yajna* fire sacrifice to encompass the destruction of the *Nāgās*, long after the fighting was over. These *Nāgās* were demonic beings who appear simultaneously in the guise of poisons cobras and also in human forms. One of the *Takśak* had caused the death of King Parikshit II, Janmejaya’s father.

The *Nāgās* (taken as the primitive tribe and people) established themselves at Takshila and assailed Hastināpur which indicates that the Punjab Kingdom that played so prominent had fallen, but Janamejaya defeated them and peace was made. Nevertheless the principal *Nāgā* Takśak induces special friend had gone to *Kurukṣetra* and so escape the conflagration, he was later barely rescued by Aśtik from Janmejaya’s fire in which innumerable lesser *Nāgās* were killed.

Kosambi further extends the relation of *Nāgās* with Kṛṣṇa; Kṛṣṇa’s relation to the *Nāgās* is particularly interesting. The child Kṛṣṇa tramped down but spared the *Nāgā Kāliya*, who prevented occupation to Yamuna bank and ceases to the river pool. He further describes the Balrāmas association with the *Nāgās* and argues that, if, after all this Kṛṣṇa’s elder brother Balrāma is made the primeval earth bearing *Nāgā* incarnate,

⁸⁸ Kosambi, D. D., ‘*The Autochthones elements in Mahabharata*’, in *Combined Methods in Indology and other writings* (ed.) B. D. Chattopadhyaya, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

there must have been some later synthetic accord between the groups of *Nāgā* myths and the completely hostile Kṛṣṇa saga.

This would be incomprehensible without a corresponding rapprochement between the distinct but configures human groups that held two distinct sects of cults in respect. Balrāms attribute to plough on the implement of no use to human *Nāgās* if they remained food gatherers. The previous enmity between Kṛṣṇa and Indra is shown by Govardhana episode. The multiple struggles for cultivable territory show a curious alliance.

Jungle life of the modern *Nāgā* tribes would suggest that the *Nāgās* were food gathering aborigines ready to change over. The name must indicate in a group many thinly scattered, linguistically and perhaps ethnically diverse primitive tribes' men who had a snake totem or snake worship practices.

By associating the above three myths of the *Nāgās* in epic traditions Kosambi argues that 'the religious manifestations of the same process is the iconographic adoption of the *Nāgā* as bed and canopy for sleeping Viṣṇu, garland for Śiva as well as an independent cult object'⁸⁹ evolved from forest-dwelling tribal groups.

Kosambi also seeing the evolution of Droṇachārya in *Mahābhārata* very critically and connecting him to the community of forest living *Niṣādas*, according to him Droṇa a Bhārdwaja was not women born (*ayonisambhava*). His birth from a wooden vessel (drown) which conceived from the seed of a *ṛiṣi* stimulated by sight of *Apśarā*. Droṇas remarkable proficiency with the bow is more characteristic of the autochthones *Niṣāda* than a proper Brāhmin. The head jewel that son Aśwathāmā

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 360-61.

bore like any *Nāgā* is ground for deeper suspicion that the Droṇa was *aryanised* in the epic.⁹⁰

Kosambi in his writings has also explored the context of the clearance of forests in the first millennium BC with various aspects. According to him, the best land there could not have been cleared without an ample supply of cheap metal namely iron. The heavy rainfall and excellent soil guaranteed a dense forest covers in pre-history. Primeval forest (*Mahāvana*) covered the greater part of the region in the 6th century BC “the Buddha could spread his doctrine only along a few trade routes.”⁹¹

The Indus basin has no source of iron, while food gathering was rather easy to the eastern river valley. This easy of food gathering not only means less urgent need of plough culture but also undertaking the *Vānprastha* retreat and the rise of median sects in sixth century Magadha.

Vivekananda Jha in his article ‘*From Tribe to Untouchables: A Case of Niṣādas*’⁹² in the book ‘*Indian Society: A historical probings in memory of D. D. Kosambi*’; have also examined the *Niṣādas* in ancient India as in the above discussion Kosambi has done. According to Jha, the indigenous people met by the Āryans the first is the *Niṣādas* mentioned as early as the *Rudrādhyāy* of *Yajur Saṃhitā*. Whereas most other autochthonous groups are noticed quite surprisingly in the later Vedic texts and generally appears as victims at the symbolic human sacrifice in the *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* and *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa*, the *Niṣādas* are referred to a number of times with a full-fledge tribal personality within the Āryan social framework. This has induced several scholars to presume that the *Niṣādas* signify at this stage aborigine in general

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 365.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 354.

⁹² Jha, Vivekananda., ‘*From tribes to Untouchables*’, in *Indian Society: Historical probing in memory of D. D. Kosambi* (ed.) R. S. Sharma, ICHR, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi, 1974.

rather than one particular tribe with a separate entity. They base their hypothesis on the *Nirukta* reference to the Aupamanyava's explanation of *Pañch Janya* in the *Ṛg Vedic* passage as four *Varṇas* and the *Niṣādas*.⁹³

The process of acculturation of forest-dwelling *Niṣādas* seems to have started in the later Vedic period, although the *Aitarey Brāhmaṇa* speaks of them as marauders operating in the forest. As per the *Mahābhārata*, it also contains numerous references to the *Niṣādas* coming in to clash with both the *Kurus* and *Pāṇḍvas*. *Ādi Parva* also mentions the *Adhipati* of the *Niṣādas*, *Eklavya* the son of *Niṣādhrāj*. On the basis of these references about *Niṣādas*, hypothetically we can say that they were the earliest forest dwellers with ample affinities towards state organization and that's why they have been recognized by other contemporary states.

Alfred Hillebrandt in his book '*Vedic Mythology*'⁹⁴, has studied the Vedic Mythology and came out with important speculations about *Asuras* and *Devās*. He extends the argument of *Asuras* as beings of the forest with a lower level of material productions. According to him, *Asuras* have their stronghold and hunts in mountains and caves. In the bowels of the earth do they dwell in the region of *Pātāla* where they have several large cities; *Hiranyapura*, *Prājyotish*, and *Nirmochana*.⁹⁵ They are described as very powerful in the battle they uproot the trees and hurl the tops of mountains against their enemies.⁹⁶

Hillebrandt has interpreted some the mythical stories according to their descriptions in the Vedas that they give very different meanings because the way other scholars have shown the forest dwellers as a primitive stage of social formation with a subsistence

⁹³ Ibid., p. 67.

⁹⁴ Hillebrandt, Alfred, '*Vedic Mythology Vol. 1*', Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1980, first published in German in 1891.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 03.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 05.

level of economy with submissive features against other developed states. Instead of that, there are two examples from the Vedic myths which show a very different picture of forest inhibitors. Alfred has discussed the two mountains from Veda: Mountain *Meru* and Mountain *Mandārā*.

According to text ‘there is mountain name *Meru* of blazing appearance and looking like huge heap effulgence, the rays of the Sun falling on its peak of golden luster. Abundant with gold and of variegated tints, that mountain is the hunt of gods and the *Gandhravas*. It is immeasurable and unapproachable by men’s of manifold sins. Dreadful beasts of prey inhabit its breast, and it is illuminated with divine herbs of healing virtue standing high for infinite ages upon it once all the mighty celestial sat them down and held a conclave. They came in a quest of Amrit/ambrosia they who have practiced penance and observed the rules according to the ordinance seeing the celestial assembly in anxious consecrations.’⁹⁷

The next is Mountain *Mandārā*; it has been described as ‘there is mountain name *Mandārā* adorn with peaks like those of the clouds. It is the best of the mountain and is carved all over with intertwining herbs and these beasts of prey roam about. The gods, the *apśarās* and the *kinnaras* visit the place upward it raises eleven thousand *yojanas* and descendent downward as much.’⁹⁸

These two mountains have been described in detail and shown as an oasis within the forest where divinities were residing; these kinds of descriptions about forests open our pre-established theories/hypotheses regarding the understanding of forests and their people.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

S. N. Vyas in his book '*India in the Rāmāyana age*'⁹⁹, discussed in detail about the peoples of forests of the *Rāmāyana* age. He has critically analyzed the so-called Aryan culture and the forest culture through describing various kinds of living beings in the *vana* particularly *jana*, *niṣādas*, *vānarās*, *rākshāsas*, *gandharvas*. According to him the *Aranyakāṇḍa* (forest sojourn), *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍ* (alliance with *vānaras*) are typical forest events dominated the nature of forest directly.

Vyas describes that there are numerous incidents which shows a continuous process from the mainstream story for the access into the forest like; at the age of *Danḍak* forest, Rāma came upon on extensive *āśrama* inhabited by anchorites devoted to a life of spiritual discipline. After accepting their spontaneous hospitality and benedictions Rāma penetrated into the wild forest where he was confronted by a hidden monster Viradhs. Rāma and Lakṣman killed him and repaired the *āśrama* sage Sarbhanga who was waiting for his arrival before departure to the next world.¹⁰⁰ On another incident Ram was on the way to hermitage of another saint Sutikśna, Rāma was met by a body of hermitages of various orders living in the area who sought his protection against the *rākṣasās*, who use to molest them and desecrates their hermitages. Rāma assured them for protection and promised to rid the wood of all evil beings.

Sītā however, saw no reason why Rāma an ascetic given to non-violence should use his arms against the *rākṣasās* especially when they had given him no offense. Rāma explained that “it is his bounden duty to protect the sages against the orgies of the *rākṣasās*, all the more as he had given his words of honours.

⁹⁹ Vyas, S. N., '*India in the Ramayana age*', Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi, 1967.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

These incidents of *Rāmāyaṇa* have explained the way of encounters that have happened in the forest between nature and culture as what Romila Thapar has described in her writings earlier.

Vyās have also listed the peoples those who have been shown as forest dwellers in the *Rāmāyaṇa* with their special features, these are *Rākṣasās*, *Vānarās*, *Niṣādas*, *Gradharvas*, *Śabarās*, *Yakśas*, *Devās*, *Gandharvās*, *Kinnarās*, *Siddhās*, and *Apśaras*.¹⁰¹

Rākṣasās were against the expedition of Rāma as recorded in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Rākṣasas* are depicted as infesting the hermitages or settlements of Āryans as obstructing their sacred rites as enemies of Brāhmaṇas as horrible in aspects and as changing their form while.

Next to the *Rākṣasas*, the *Vānarās* play an important part in the epic these were other tribes of Deccan. They allied themselves with Āryans and embodied their form of worship. Vāli and Sugrīv were their chiefs to all intents and purposes. They were the woodland inhabitants of Vindhya Range wearing the tail as their tribe totem or identity and not actual *Vānarās* and monkeys as they are generally described.¹⁰²

Instead of *Vānarās*, *Niṣādas* were more close to the Aryan culture they lived on the borders of the Kośala and Gangā, Srīgaverapura on the banks of this rives was presumably their capital city and Guha their chief. The *Niṣādas* were good archers and they even prepared themselves to oppose Bhārata on his march to Chitakūta. Their culture was probably Neolithic seems to have been semi Aryanized by their close proximity to the Kingdom of Kosala.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 24.

Some of the nomadic tribes of ancient India were called after the names of birds (*Grdhrās*) on account of their migratory habits. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* age the *Grdhrās* frequented in the Western Ghats and the western seaboard of the peninsula. They were ruled by brothers Sampāti and Jatāyu and became politically extinct with their death.

Śabaras were also forest dwellers. Rāma and Lakṣman during their wandering in search of Sītā are said to have arrived on the banks of Pampā Lake. Their main occupation was hunting; they are still represented as tribes in central India. The story of Śabari is typically a non-Aryan tribe fully influenced by Aryan culture. She is styled as *Samyāsini* who led the pious and virtuous life of *Samnyāsini* and considered herself blessed by her contact with Rāma.

The *Yakṣas* insignificantly form the point of view of numbers and influences were noted for their extraordinary beauty and physical strength. They and *Rākṣasas* were probably kindred races and the epic furnishes several instances of a marriage alliance between them. Kubera the king of *Yakṣa* is said to have been a stepbrother of Rāvaṇā.

Another tribe perhaps contemporize with *Yakṣa* was the *Nāgās* with the serpent as their totem. The *Nāgā* rose to prominence in the South, some part of Lanka and Malabar were their territories occupied by them, *Vāsuki*, *Takṣak*, *Sankha*, and *Jali* were famous *Nāgā* chiefs.¹⁰⁴

Rāmāyaṇa distinguishes between *Asuras* and *Rākṣasas*, though both these have been described as identical. The *Asuras* were hostile to Āryan sages and were meat-eaters and persecutors of the Brāhmaṇas. The sages of the *Daṇḍak* forest requested Rāma to extirpate the *Asuras*.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

Apart from the above tribes, there were other tribes as mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as *Gandharvās*, *Kinners*, and *Apśarās* they have been mentioned by the poet several times on various occasions. Since they were docile in order to accept the so-called Aryan culture that's why they have been mentioned only as spectators rather than main characters in the epic.

I.3 Chapterisation

The Thesis has been divided into seven chapters including the introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter deals with the understanding of 'space' and its various socio-historical connotations. It is an attempt to theorize the idea of space with social, economic and religious perspectives particularly in the context of the forest as a social space in ancient India. In this chapter an attempt has been made to look at the process and consequences of historical change in the Idea of the forest as a space from Vedas to Epics. On the basis of observation and critical analysis of the texts like *Vedas*, *Upaniṣads*, *Aranyakas*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and *Arthashāstra* the idea of 'forest as a space' for forest dwellers and non-forest settlers would also be the aim of this chapter.

The second chapter is a critical survey on classical texts to find out the kinds of forest resources available in the first millennium BC. In this chapter the idea of forest resources would be explained in detail. The study of the Forest food culture and the aesthetics of forests through various myths and events from *Vedas* and *Epics* would also be the centripetal idea in this chapter.

The interrelation and cross product of the ideas between the Forest and state has been the subject of great interest to scholars, and the third chapter of the thesis tries to explore this issue with to see and analyze the nature of ‘forest and state’ as an entity under the influence of each other in first millennium BC, particularly from the narratives of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* where state has been seen as in expansion towards the forest to derive new ideas of identity and knowledge.

The fourth chapter speaks about the forest and the people. An attempt would be made here to identify the various kinds of communities, those which were presented as the primitive inhabitants in the texts. The creation of various identities on the basis of their dwelling practices and economic exercises are the main areas to be discussed in this chapter. Mythical identities and their place in the epics in order to explain the variation in social formation will also be expressed in this chapter.

The exile and renunciation have often been related to the forest, both in the ritual and philosophical texts and certainly in poems, dramas, and the epics of India. The stories and episodes of renunciations are also the central topics of many of the Sanskrit texts which speak of the forest in both intimidating and triumphalistic terms. Chapter five, therefore, deals with the idea of exile and renunciation and understanding of *Āśrama* system as the fourth stage of life as prescribed in the classical texts. How the idea of exile prevailed in the epics in order to explore and exercise the forest space and material/products; and how the renouncer has extended the idea of morality and virtues in the forest as a place for the production of knowledge is the main intention of this chapter.

An attempt has been made here to look at the ancient texts and to understand the relations between the forest and humans; as well as to see how the changes occurred

in this relation in the course of time. An attempt is also made to analyze whether the meaning of the forest has changed in the historical understandings and if there is any link between these changes and relations with material reasons.

Chapter Two

Forest as Space

II.1 Theorising Space

The forest as space has captured the imagination of the human mind for as long as human history can be remembered. From being a plethora of resources to sheltering various forms of human and animal lives, the forest appears before us a place of mystery, myths as well as realities. The forest both hounds, intimidates us, and it also beckons us, it draws us towards in with fear and respect. No ancient Indian text can shape itself in the absence of the forest. The forests have been also residing place of various tribes and still in different parts of India various tribal groups call the forest as their home. When we try to understand and explore the idea of the forest the first connotation which comes in our mind is that the “forest is a space” or in simple words, it is a kind of place where trees, plants, rivers, animals, fertile land are in abundance and accumulates as one entity.

In order to understand the idea of the forest one need first to understand the idea of space about which it evokes. The idea of space is a very complex concept in itself, and various scholars particularly sociologists and historians have tried to unfold this mysterious idea.

The single word ‘space’ initially sounds like a three-dimensional space where matter and time play a major role in the construction of a material world. There could be various kinds of spaces; it means multiple space formations with a particular kind of

relation in-between time and matter, for example, social space, cultural space, technical space, democratic space, etc. each of these terms have a particular meaning to describe the particular kind of event and matter.

The concept of space has been discussed from early Greek times when the Greeks dwelled elaborately on the nature and types of knowledge. That theory of knowledge is regarded to be particularly illuminating even today.¹⁰⁵

The Greeks used a single word 'episteme' for knowledge as well as 'science', and they recognized 'scientific knowledge' as real knowledge.¹⁰⁶ The concept of space in ancient and Greek classical thought was not a social space as we have conceived it today. The concept of space was ultimately mathematical and had strict geometrical meanings like an empty area.¹⁰⁷ However, in Indian conceptions of space, it acquired even greater significance beyond a geographical and inhabitable space. Space becomes also a place for rituals and spiritual activities. Such a notion is not unknown to western traditions.

On the basis of these critically scientific understandings of space, it is very essential to understand the classical difference between the terms like space and place. When we try to describe the term space it gives no clear meaning that what it refers to and for what it belongs to and that is why it is just an abstract idea which can only be explained through mathematical narratives. Instead, when we try to describe the term place, it has some kind of belongingness to something, it is a well-defined area where a particular kind of event or material production is taking place.

¹⁰⁵ Gauba, O. P., *Western Political thought*, Macmillan Publishers, New Delhi 2011, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson Smith, Oxford Blackwell, 1991, p. 01.

Again, for the classical understanding of the idea of space, we find that the philosophy of space was accompanied by certain qualitative, adjectives and descriptive terms as Euclidean isotropic or infinite which had strict mathematical connotations: space was mathematical homogenous and infinite. For the Euclidean geometrical understanding of space, space is space of ordinary experience having physical properties in all directions. Euclidean space is defined by its isotropy and a property which guarantees its social and political utility.¹⁰⁸ If we will try to understand and unfold the meaning of Euclidean space then it becomes clear that he is trying to give a humanistic meaning to space where the human activities, emotions, and social productions are being placed and working simultaneously for self-reproduction.

An Indian parallel to such a notion is possible as well, we shall explore this later. For Euclidean, space pre-exists and all human emotions and expectations are made tangible through it, yet space is empty and that is why space is always unaffected by whatever may fill it.¹⁰⁹

Plato and Aristotle have also made an attempt for a similar analysis of the concept of space. They both had a difference over their point of view for the understanding of space. As we have discussed that it space was believed as an abstract with directions, left and right, high and low and these directions have symbolic force and therefore for Plato space is a thing and related to cosmos, his work *Critias* offers descriptions of cosmic space and a space of a city as the reflection of the cosmos.¹¹⁰ Aristotle held the view that both space and time are categories that facilitate the having and classing of the evidence of the senses.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 296.

¹¹⁰ Lefebvre, Henri, *The Production of Space*, p. 02.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 01.

The basic difference in the views of Plato and Aristotle is the perceiving of the space. For Plato, space is an independent entity that is like the universe and as per his explanation, the small space is the reflection of the universal space where city or human arrangements on that space is the reflection of cosmos. While Aristotle is seeing space in terms of inter-relations with time because time and space both are abstracts and both give meaning to each other. Space-time relation is one of the classic relations in western philosophy from where scientific knowledge of the universe begins.

There is also another view on space apart from the Greek philosophers, like for Alexander Koyre space is a mental category, differentiated set of inner-worldly places. Alexander in his work from the closed world to the infinite universe observed that the seventeenth-century mental revolution in Europe brought two fundamental changes- the destruction of cosmos and geometry of space; the breakdown of infinite hierarchically ordered cosmos and the emergence of the infinite universe.¹¹²

The Enlightenment philosopher Rene Descartes advanced the Euclidean conception of space with new meaning that the space as absolute and a form emerges as a substance bringing an end to the Aristotelian tradition which understood space purely as a mental category.¹¹³

Henri Lefebvre in his classical book the production of space has critically analyses all the major scholars those who have worked on the idea of social space particularly from Greek traditions as we have discussed above and have come out with his own understanding of social space and some basic questions which need to be answered.

According to Lefebvre social space is a social product that is affected by human

¹¹² Koyre, Alexander, *From the closed world to the infinite universe*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 1957, p. VIII.

¹¹³ Lefebvre, Henari, *The Production of Space*, p. 218.

activities but at the same time-space also affects human activities and emotions as well. The social understanding about the space has prevailed in Lefebvre's approach towards space.

Karl Marx has also tried to explain the idea of social space on the basis of economical understanding of space, for him space is binary whereas both a means space and force of production under capitalism, in which this dual characteristic of space as both a product and a means of production.¹¹⁴

Marx has just changed the perception through which earlier scholars were looking at space. He has included the economical point of view into the explanation of space particularly with the arrival of capitalism how its meaning and nature have changed is an important aspect in the process of theorizing the social space.

Dialectical materialism represents the philosophical basis of Marx. It may be recalled that G.W.L. Hegel, a famous German philosopher, believed that the idea or consciousness was the universe; it was the force behind all historical development. Marx rejected this view and postulated that matter was the essence of the universe, which embodied the force behind all manifestations and social change. For Marx, each stage of social development represented the corresponding stage of development of the material conditions of society¹¹⁵. From this point of view, Marx believes that social space is the product of economic and material exchanges between societies.

Marx has insisted on the importance of separation on town and country as the greatest division of material and mental labour because on the basis of this separation he demonstrates the results of labour on a particular kind of space. It means for a town the kind of labour either mental or material is different from the kind of labour either

¹¹⁴ Zieleniec, Andrzej, *Space and Social theory*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2007, p. XIV.

¹¹⁵ Gauba, O. P., *Western Political thought*, Macmillan Publishers, New Delhi 2011, p. 267.

mental or martial from the country. As the process of material production holds the key to man's social life, changes in this process are responsible for all historical development.

As Marx, himself observed: "In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of productions which correspond to a definite stage of their material productive force. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure, the real basis on which rises a legal and political superstructure."¹¹⁶

Marx has connected the idea of the political economy with the idea of space in his above explanation while Lefebvre has interlinked space with time.

For Lefebvre this is an important point; space and time are inextricably linked in processes subsumed under the modes of production. Lefebvre's theory understands the production of space as emphasizing the need to consider space as both a product (a thing) a determinant (a process) of social relations and actions.¹¹⁷

Space is also the product of ideological, economic, and political forces that seeks to delimit, regulate and control the activities that occur within and through it. For Lefebvre space is the center of continuing social and historical processes, involving conflict and struggle over meanings and values.¹¹⁸ Lefebvre has given a new meaning to the production space through including socio-economic and political spheres to the definition of social space.

Scholar David Harvey has given a new dimension to the theoretical study of social space and has extended the ideas of Marx and Lefebvre. Harvey has tried to establish

¹¹⁶ Marx, Karl, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 1859.

¹¹⁷ Zieleniec, Andrzej, *Space and Social theory*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2007, p. 60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

historic-geographical materialism, which he sought to develop Marx's paradigm of capitalist accumulation to include the production of space in the production and reproduction of social life.¹¹⁹

Harvey's study and critical analysis of social space have actually opened a wide range of questions; like he has replaced the question of what is social space? By the question of how it is different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualization of space. Harvey's approach is fundamentally a Marxist analysis of the role of space in the process of accumulation and circulation of capital, of the products, of the built environment and class struggle.¹²⁰

The basic idea of social space is that it is the product of social factors and behaviors accumulated around socio-economic and political inter-relations and that is why as well as the society have developed the meaning and understanding of social space have also developed and become more complex in comparison to its earlier definitions as geometry and geography of area to the modern concepts of social production of space.

II.2 Idea of Forest Space in Indian Understanding

In the first section of this chapter, we tried to look at the theory of social space, how the idea developed from various philosophical understandings and gradually modified with the need of time. Since in this chapter we are trying to understand the idea of social space particularly in relation to the Indian forests so that we can know which kind of understanding was there in ancient India in regards to the forests. In this

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 99.

section, we will try to unfold the ideas from ancient Indian traditions about the idea of space particularly in relation to forests.

The Indian texts have always talked about the dichotomy with respect to space; as Gunther- Dietz Sontheimer had drawn attention in his writings, namely the relationship of the forest to the settlements, the *vana* to the *kṣetra/grāma*. This dichotomy between *vana* and *kṣetra/grāma* evolved in early times when the village constituted the settlements. According to Romila Thapar, with the emergence of urban centers and particularly in early centuries there was also a growing dichotomy between *gram* and *nagar*, the village and town respectively. At the same time, *vana* and *araṇya* had ecology different from that of the settlement and would have included the desert and semi-arid pastoral regions as well. Another dichotomy discussed in the context of ecology and medical knowledge was the *Jungle* and *anūp* the forest and the marshland.¹²¹

Here it is important to understand the essentiality of the forest as space because other spaces were being identified and explain in relation to forests. For example, space which is not forest must come under *kṣetra* or *grāma* where things are just opposite to the forest. *Gram* is considered to be a place of civilians or *nāgarik* where things are in order and under control, while the forest is to be considered as a place of uncertainty and disorder, where animals have occupied the forest spaces. When the demands of civilization begin to impinge on the forest, the perception of the forest and its people changed over time.

According to Romila Thapar “, the wilderness seems to have germinated in the agro-pastoral society referred to in the Vedic corpus but come to fruition in the discussions

¹²¹ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forest in early India, in Environmental History of Early India*, (Ed.). Nandini Sinha Kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 142.

which took place in urban centers, which could only be established through clearing the forests.”¹²²

Charles Malamoud has argued for a dividing line between the *grāma* and the *araṇya* and linked it to Vedic Ideology. As per his argument, these were not merely spatial differences. Stability in the *grāma* grew out of cohesion of the group rather than the limitation of space and was maintained by dharma. The *araṇya* are any wilderness, it is interstitial empty and constitutes ‘the other’. Whatever is not included in the settlement belongs to the forest. The forest is thus not only the space between settlements but is characterized by being strange, remote wild and different.¹²³

The dichotomy is also suggested by the statement in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that the sacrificial animal at the *Yajña* should be from the *grāma*, for while a domesticated animal eliminates the undesirable, the sacrificing of a wild animal from the forest has a negative effect.¹²⁴ From this explanation, it is very clear that the rituals are actually supporting this kind of dichotomy and obligatory methods are actually enhancing the distinction more sharply.

Epic literature is among the early composition which plays on the dichotomy and the complementarities of the *vana* and *kṣetra*, but it also tends to change the orientation somewhat from that of the Vedic corpus. Many forests are mentioned, each by name

¹²² Ibid., p. 143.

¹²³ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forest in early India*, p. 144.

¹²⁴ ‘Pragâpati desired, ‘Would that I might gain both the worlds, the world of the gods, and the world of men.’ He saw these beasts, the tame and the wild ones; he seized them, and by means of them took possession of these two worlds: by means of the tame beasts he took possession of this (terrestrial) world, and by means of the wild beasts of yonder (world); for this world is the world of men, and yonder world is the world of the gods. Thus when he seizes tame beasts he thereby takes possession of this world, and when wild beasts, he thereby (takes possession) of yonder (world).’ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 13.2.4.1, Translated by Julius Eggeling, *The Sataptha-Brahmana, According to Madhyandin School*, Part V, Kanda XIII, Fourth Brahmana, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1892, p. 305.

suggesting that the forest was not an undifferentiated expanse but had its own categories of identity.¹²⁵

In early India, the forest was the context for at least three activities: the hunt, the hermitage and the place of exile. The descriptions of the hunts of the rajas in the *Mahābhārata* have a ferocity which can only be described as there being a surrogate raid on nature. The narrative of *Śakuntala*, for example, opens with Duśyant hunting into the forest.¹²⁶ Here it is important to analyze the narratives which have been used in Epics to introduce the forests and forest people & places that are very distinctive. Always a kind of need is there in the narratives to visit forest; either as a fourth and last stage of life which is called *vānprasth*, or as a kind of punishment for *vanvās* it means to lives within the forest for a certain amount of period. Forest has been an essential part of main societies in the Epics and has been celebrated through various subtexts within the main texts.

In Epics the *vana* /forest has been described as the unknown territory, peopled by *rākṣasa*. The *vana* has been explained vividly during the destruction of *Khāṇḍavana* burnt by Agni “the fire raged for days and ate everything that came in its way. The *Pāṇḍvas* were presented with stunningly splendid weapons and the massacre began. Not only did animals and birds lose their lives but the *gandharvas*, *yakśas*, *rākṣasa*, and *nāgās*, all were sought to be killed.”¹²⁷ On the basis of this wide description about the *Khāṇḍav* burnt from *Mahābhārata* we can analyze the forest was seen as also a place of living for various societies as mentioned above the *gandharvas*, *yakśas* and *nāgās*, are the people who were actually residing inside the forest space.

¹²⁵ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forest in early India*, p. 145.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.145.

¹²⁷ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forest in early India*, p. 145.

Apart from them, the hunt introduces us to the forest dwellers. These tended to be either creature of imaginations such as the *rākṣasa* or it might be they were the forest dwellers who obstructed hunting expeditions and harassed those establishing settlements in the forest, for example, *ṛṣis* establishing *āśramas*. Here it is very important to questions their very identity if the *rākṣasa* were forest dwellers or they were the societies contrasted with the monarchy, such as the more sophisticated *rākṣasa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Moreover, is the hunt also an aspect of the subordination of nature to culture? If the forest is seen as a place that is without order or discipline, then it is required to the *raja* to control it and the hunt becomes the beginning of such control, even if it is initially chaotic.¹²⁸ This subordination was also achieved, perhaps less traumatically, through the setting up of *āśramas* in the forest and gradually converts the forest space as a social space for the civilians and *nāgarikas*.

The settlements of hermitages inside the forests are a clear sign of encroachment into the deep forest. But at the same time, the choice of the forest and the symbolic act of going to the forest for the purpose of asceticism and renunciation has multiple meanings. As per the early Upaniṣads used the dichotomy to differentiate the path of the soul where rebirth is associated with the *grāma* but the self-realization in the forest ensures release from rebirth.¹²⁹ In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and *Bṛihdāranyak*

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

¹²⁹ ‘Those who know this (even though they still be grihasthas, householders) and those who in the forest follow faith and austerities (the vānaprasthas, and of the parivrāgakas those who do not yet know the Highest Brahman) go to light (arkis), from light to the day, from day to the light half of the moon, from the light half of the moon to the six months when the sun goes to the north, from the six months when the sun goes to the north to the year, from the year to the sun, from the sun to the moon, from the moon to the lightning. There is a person not human’, Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part 1, (Sacred Books of East)*, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, (5.10.1-2) Kanda V, Tenth Brahmana, 1879, p. 80.

‘Those who thus know this (even Grihasthas), and those who in the forest worship faith and the True (Brahman Hiranyagarbha), go to light (arkis), from light to the day, from day to the increasing half, from the increasing half to the six months when the sun goes to the north, from those six months to the world of the Devas (Devaloka), from the world of the Devas to the sun, from the sun to the place of lightning. When they have thus reached the place of lightning a spirit comes near them, and leads them

Upaniṣad the importance of forest has been detailed and it has given more priority for the realization of self and meditation.

Nature has been intimately connected with life in Indian tradition; Mountains particularly the Himalayas are said to be the abode of gods, rivers are considered and worshipped as a goddess, especially the holiest river Gangā; and forest have been the abode of great sages. Forests were the centers of great intellectual activity as per the Vedic literature. Most of the gurukuls were located in the forests. Under socially sanctioned patterns of individual life-span management (*āśram* system) every individual after the age of 50 was expected to go to the forests in search of the truth. There, in fact, arose a whole tradition of intellectual activity called *tapovana* forests in which certain texts were prepared and studied only in forests came to be known as *aranyakas* (belonging to forests).¹³⁰

If we try to interpret the socio-historical forest and non- forest place and its interdependency on the basis of production relations then we would find that the continued encroachment of state-society towards forest has actually increased the struggle between the forest people and none forest people. There was an attempt to socialize the forest space as per the requirement of state-society, and it is clearly visible from the Vedic to later Vedic texts that how the process of hunting, hermits,

to the worlds of the (conditioned) Brahman. In these worlds of Brahman they dwell exalted for ages. There is no returning for them.

'But they who conquer the worlds (future states) by means of sacrifice, charity, and austerity, go to smoke, from smoke to night, from night to the decreasing half of the moon, from the decreasing half of the moon to the six months when the sun goes to the south, from these months to the world of the fathers, from the world of the fathers to the moon. Having reached the moon, they become food, and then the Devas feed on them there, as sacrificers feed on Soma, as it increases and decreases. But when this (the result of their good works on earth) ceases, they return again to that ether, from ether to the air, from the air to rain, from rain to the earth. And when they have reached the earth, they become food, they are offered again in the altar-fire, which is man, and thence are born in the fire of woman. Thus they rise up towards the worlds, and go the same round as before.

Those, however, who know neither of these two paths, become worms, birds, and creeping things. Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part I, (Sacred Books of East Vol. 15)*, Bṛahḍāranyak Upaniṣad, 6.2.15-16, Kanda VI, Second Brahmana, 1884, p. 209.

¹³⁰ Rawat, Anil, *Life, forests and Plant sciences in ancient India*, in *Environmental history of Early India*, (ed.) Nandini Sinha Kapur, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, pp. 245-246.

and renunciation have actually changed the understanding of forest and its space and bring it unfolded for the state society for exploitation of natural resources and expedition of new lands.

The idea of new land is very important in Indian history because with the continues enhancement in the population of state-society there was the need for new land and new social spaces and virgin soils and that could only be possible after the encroachment and clearance of forests. The problem of clearing of forests for human settlements and agricultural land and a few references found in the literature that is *Śatpatha Brāhmaṇa* have been blown out of proportions. A careful analysis of archaeological data, location and density of settlements, an approximate estimate of the population on the basis of the size of settlements, and an idea of a land requirement for agricultural purposes to support the population are the main reasons for the massive deforestation and urbanization.¹³¹

There is continue transition in the idea of forest form Vedic to Upaniṣadic periods and the way a process of colonization of forest space has started has actually reached its zenith during the time of *Arthaśāstra*. The essence of the text lies in the fact that it makes a clear departure from the Vedic texts and Purāṇas where the forest is depicted as an abode of demons and a palace of exile for unfortunate kings and evildoers. It is Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* which for the first time stresses the economic importance of forests in the formulations of principles and policies of the state.¹³²

According to the *Arthaśāstra* in ancient India, the forest was considered as one of the four land categories: arable land (*kṣetra*), homestead land (*vāstu*), pasture (*gocharan*),

¹³¹ Lal, Makhan, *Iron tools, Forest clearance and Urbanisation*, in India's Environmental History, (ed.) Mahesh Rangrajan, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 66.

¹³² Ray, Rita Ghose, The Attitude of Kautilya to Aranya, *Journal of Environmental History*, Vol. 02, No. 02, South Asia, June , 1996, pp. 221-229.

and forest (*aranya*). In the Vedic texts and epics forests mainly features as a habitat for hermits, demons and *rākṣasa*, and a place of exile for criminals and unfortunate kings. It is the *Arthaśātra* of Kauṭilya which first gives full recognition to the significance of forest in the economy of the state.

As per Kauṭilyas, categorization of forest are mainly of four kinds; the forest of wild animals (*paśuvana*), forest of domesticated animals (*mṛigavana*), economic forests (*dravyavana*), and elephant forest (*haśtivana*), economic forests (*dravyavana*) and elephant forests (*haśtivana*).

Kauṭilya next refers to the use of forests essentially as a boundary demarcation or a landmark. While describing the forest dwellers as trappers, *Śabaras*, *Pulindās*, and *Cāṇḍālas*, *Kauṭilya* points out that they reside in the intervening region between the frontier (of the kingdom) and the durga (fortified urban center, capital). This evidence is indicative of the fact that forests acted as a buffer zone between the forest and the durga. As the forest is considered one of the seven sources of revenue in the Kauṭilya's *Arthaśātra* these forest dwellers, it seems, paid revenue to the state. This fact is corroborated by the *Indica* of *Megasthenes*, who refers to hunters and husbandmen as the third group among the seven divisions of the Indian population. According to one summary of *Megasthenes*, they keep the country free from obnoxious birds and beasts. Those who are employed by the king are exempted from paying any taxes, but the rest have to pay a tribute in cattle.¹³³

From the above-mentioned references, it is very clear that there has been a continuous effort to bring the forest land into the use of main society, either it was through the hunt, hermitage, renunciation or maintaining of various state forests as referred in *Arthaśātra*.

¹³³ Ray, Rita Ghose, *The Attitude of Kautilya to Aranya*, p. 222.

The use of forest land has come under various kinds of transformations due to the change in the mode of production in human society. As from *Vedic* to later *Vedic* and from later *Vedic* to epics there is a sharp distinction in the social mode of production. It was a series of transformation from nomadic society to pastoral and then pastoral to a settled agricultural society. It was necessary to make the forests a social space through various human activities for the maintenance of new socio-political needs.

II.3 Forest as Space in the Vedas

The Vedas are often regarded as abstract and mysterious sacred books. The Vedas are an oral tradition and that applies especially to two of the four: The Veda of verses (*R̥g Veda*) and the Veda of Chants (*Sāma Veda*). Another anachronistic idea is that the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*, of non-human origin.¹³⁴ Various scholars have studied the Vedas on various perspectives some have looked at them to study the early migration of Indo-European peoples and on the basis of the various linguistic theories that have been developed. Some have been exploring the Vedas to understand the early Indian society attributed to caste and class and some have tried to understand the early development of Purāṇic gods from the Vedas.

According to Hermann Kulke, the Vedas are the most important source of information about the Vedic Aryans and at the same time their greatest cultural achievements. This treasure of sacred literature encompasses four categories of texts: holy words (*mantras*), commentaries on the sacrificial rituals (*brāhmaṇa*), esoteric philosophical treatises (*Upaniṣads*) and the instructions for rituals (*sūtra*). These categories also reflect the stages of development of this sacred literature in the various phases of

¹³⁴ Staal, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. XV.

cultural evolutions of settlements of Indo-Aryans from their first migration into the plains of Northwest to the reclamation of land in the Ganges valley and the establishment of their first little kingdoms in the sixth century BC.¹³⁵

The *Ṛg Veda* is composed by the families of priests who offered prayers to the gods either on their own behalf or on behalf of the tribal chiefs who rewarded their priests handsomely.¹³⁶ The hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* may be divided into three classes, those in which are especially lauded the older divinities, those in which appear as most prominent the sacrificial gods, and those in which a long weakened polytheism is giving place to the light of a clearer pantheism.¹³⁷

It is very clear from the above discussions and analysis by scholars of Veda that their society was actually at the edge of transformation from wondering tribal society to the settled agriculture society. The most significant thing about the Vedic culture is the absence of Iron, although the term *ayas* is used in *Ṛg Veda* which is supposed to be copper. In that sense, it was not easy to clear the forest until the discovery of tough metal, Iron, though forest burning has been mentioned frequently in the various hymns of the Veda.

In Indian Philosophical discussions, the entire Vedic knowledge is considered as the *Mīmāṃsā* School, which later divided into two parts, first is the *Purva Mīmāṃsā* and second is the *Uttar Mīmāṃsā*. *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* believes in the ritualistic and sacrificial aspects of Veda as the pure form of knowledge while *Uttar Mīmāṃsā* School is the follower of the Vedāntic thoughts and perceptions where knowledge is to be gain from the spiritual understandings of truth, wisdom, and reality of the internal as well

¹³⁵ Kulke Hermann and Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, Routledge, London, 1986, p. 33.

¹³⁶ Sharma, R. S., *Material Culture and Social Formation In Ancient India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, p. 22.

¹³⁷ Hopkins, E. W., *The Religions of India*, Ginn & Company, Boston, 1885, p. 37.

as the external world. *Purva Mimāṃsā* advocated and propagated the knowledge of the Veda, through their etymological and hermeneutic interpretation, to reach the essence of a Vedic utterance.

Since the early Vedic people were nomadic and they do not have settled life they were wandering into the forests and that is why the Vedic hymns are full of vivid descriptions of the forest as place. They developed their own understanding regarding the idea of forest and its various aspects. Their early gods are just various forms of nature like Agni who is produced out of the forest; they worshiped Rūdra which is the ferocious form of nature; they worshiped Soma which is a plant drink. Each and everything was related to the forest and from here we can argue that the Vedic people have a very strong idea about the forest as space and they have described them at various places in various hymns.

In this section, we will try to understand the Vedic approach towards the forest as space where things are happening, space which is continuously being produced and re-interpreted for the new meanings of things and ideas.

The term Van/वन which means forest has appeared frequently in the Vedas and as we know in the *R̥g Veda*, it appeared for 1805 times, in *Sāma Veda* it is mentioned for 83 times, in *Yajur Veda* it is again 83 times, while in *Atharva Veda* it is there for 21 times.¹³⁸ The frequency of the term Van in the Vedas is a clear indication that Vedic people were very much concern about their space and that is Van.

There are various hymns in the Vedas which indicate to us about the importance of the forest and their various aspects which were being worshipped by Vedic people.

¹³⁸ This data have been collected from a Linguistic Software which is developed jointly by Indian Institute of Technology Delhi & JNU Computational linguistics Research and Development Cell.

For example, the first hymn in the *R̥g Veda* where the term Van is mentioned is from *R̥g Veda* 1.3.2.

अश्विना पुरुदंससा नरा शवीरया धिया । धिष्ण्या वनतं गिरः¹³⁹ ॥

(*R̥g Veda* 1.3.2)

In this hymn, God is Aśvini Kumar and Purandar/Indra and Ṛṣi is Viśvamitra. According to the translation by H. H. Wilson, this is a prayer where a devotee is making a request to the god Aśvins and saying, abounding in mighty acts, guides endowed with fortitude, listen with un-averted minds to our praises. Here the term Van appears as a place of activity where Aśvins are performing their power to control nature through showing their might at the hills and forests. In this hymn, devotees are requesting the gods for their well beings and these gods are powerful enough to control the mountains and forest which is the living place of early Vedic people. Forest has been depicted here as an abode of Vedic people and its importance has gradually increased in the text as well as the sacrificial ritual increases.

The Vedic people were curious to understand nature and its aspects, they always tried to understand things that were happening around them, and that is why they started worship of all the forms of nature. They started worshipping wind as Varuṇa, fire as Agni, Plants as Soma or forest as *Vanaśpati*. Since the forest was the most important place for them because it is the place where they got shelter, food, and medicines and that is why they personified the place as a living god *Vanaśpati*.

¹³⁹ ‘Aśvins, abounding in mighty acts, guides of devotion, endowed with fortitude, listen with unaverted minds to our praises.’ As translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhita Vol 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 07.

There are various hymns dedicated to the forest god Vanaśpati. In the *R̥g Veda*, there is a hymn 1.13.11 *R̥g Veda* where there is a clear indication of personification of the forest as forest god Vanaśpati.

अव सृजा वनस्पते देव देवेभ्यो हविः । प्रदातुरस्तु चेतनम्¹⁴⁰ ॥

(*R̥g Veda* 1.13.11)

As per the translation of H.H. Wilson this hymn is about the divine god *Vanaśpatidev*. Here the devotees are praising the god *Vanaśpatidev* so that they could receive true knowledge in their lives. When we analyze this hymn in order to understand the idea of the forest as space then it becomes very complicated to unfold the meanings and metaphors from the mantra.

The Vedic mantras are mostly prayers and for a historian, it is difficult to follow a proper and specific meaning of a specific term, and that is why the ancient Indian Philosophers were known to apply their Mimāṃsāic approach towards the validity of knowledge because words cannot be the sole carriers of knowledge however as Prof. Matilal has argued the knowledge is dependent on the words and it is called Śabda Shakti. While Mimāṃsā school focuses on the twin ideas of ‘perception’ and ‘object’ for the understanding of real knowledge. The idea of ‘perception’ is the most difficult to understand in the whole historical development of various Indian schools of thoughts particularly among the *Nigam Mūlak* schools or the schools those have faith in the divinity of the Vedas.

In addition to the ‘perception,’ there are five other valid sources of knowledge admitted by the *Mimāṃsā*, namely, inference (*anumāna*), comparison (*upamāna*), verbal

¹⁴⁰ ‘Present, divine Vanaspati, our oblation to the gods and may true knowledge be the reward of the giver. Vanaspati, lord of the woods, usually a large tree, here said to be an Agni, as if the fuel and the burning of it were identified.’ Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 31.

authority or testimony (*śabda*), postulation (*arthapatti*) and nonperception (*anūpalabdhi*)¹⁴¹. These are important means/tools to understand the meaning of Vedic hymns/mantras because as we have already mentioned that the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*, composed without human interventions, and they require special understanding from the Mimāṃsā School of thoughts.

Now when we look at the above mantra where the Idea of *Vanaśpatidevi* has emerged very clearly from the forest space, we can argue that the idea of the forest as space had well developed in the Vedas. According to Frits Stall the first poem of the *Ṛg Veda*, RV 1.1 invokes Agni vaiṣvanara, Agni who is common to all men; Agni is fire and receiver of oblations and a link to all the gods.¹⁴² Agni was also called Aṅgirās¹⁴³ and the Agni concealed in the trees in the forest, therefore the fire is called Aṅgirās.¹⁴⁴

In the Vedic world, fire is the most important element; they use it for protection from wild animals, for the production of light and to cook food. Since the origin of Agni has been mentioned as to be in the forest, therefore the Vedic people treated the forest as *Vanaśpatidev*. It means that the space of the forest has been properly imagined as a spiritual space where Agni appears for the well being of humans as well as for the fulfillment of rituals. In that sense, we can connect the Idea of forest space with the idea of god, Agni. Forest as space has been seen by the Vedic people as a place full of natural resources, place of the production of fire, food, and medicine. Another mantra from *Ṛg Veda* 1.28.8 explains the importance of the forest as a place of the preparation of Soma for Indra.

¹⁴¹ Chatterjee, Satishchandra, Dhirendramohan Datta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, Rupa Publication, New Delhi, 2007, p. 293.

¹⁴² Stall, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, p. 92.

¹⁴³ Stall, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, p. 93.

¹⁴⁴ J. N. Shende, 'Angiras in the Vedic literature', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 31, No 1/4., 1950, p. 110.

ता नो अद्य वनस्पती ऋष्वावृष्वेभिः सोतृभिः । इन्द्राय मधुमत्सुतम्¹⁴⁵ ॥

(Rg Veda 1.28.8)

H. H. Wilson has translated this mantra as, ‘Do you two forest lords of pleasing form prepare with agreeable libations our sweet Soma Juice for Indra’. According to this mantra, there is mention of two gods, one is Indra and the second is *Vanaśpatidev* in one place. As we all know that Indra has been considered as the most powerful god in the Vedas and he is known for his interest in Soma.

Soma is strongly connected with the worship of Indra and Agni. Soma is considered as the intoxicating and personified drink by the Vedic people. It is said in the *Rg Veda* that Soma grows upon the mountains of *Mujāvat*, which it’s or his father is Parjanya, the Rain God and the waters are his sisters. Indra intoxicated by Soma does his great deeds, and indeed all the gods depend on Soma for immortality.¹⁴⁶

The importance of Soma has been explained at various places in the Vedas but here the point is its association with the *Vanaśpati* and Indra. Although its association with Indra has been explained above, the question arises why in the above mantra it has been associated with *Vana* god or *Vanaśpatidev*? Here it is quite interesting to search for the reasons and for the connection between them because Soma has already been personified with moon god and *Vanaśpatideva* as the god of the forest but still, Soma is dependent on the forest god because ultimately it falls under the category of plant and *Vanaśpatidev* is the god of all the plants in the forest or in the mountains.

There is another mantra in *Rg Veda* 1.39.5 which indirectly indicates us about the idea of the forest as habitat or space of living.

¹⁴⁵ ‘Do you two forest lords, of pleasing form; prepare with agreeable libations our sweet Soma juice for Indra.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016 p. 68.

¹⁴⁶ Hopkins, E. W., *The Religions of India*, Ginn & Company, Boston, 1885, pp. 112-113.

प्र वेपयन्ति पर्वतान्वि विञ्चन्ति वनस्पतीन् । प्रो आरत मरुतो दुर्मदा इव देवासः सर्वया
विशा¹⁴⁷ ॥

(Rg Veda 1.39.5)

It is saying that the Marut is so powerful that they make the mountains tremble; they drive apart the forest trees and devotees are requesting to Marut to go somewhere elsewhere with his progenies.¹⁴⁸ This mantra is very important in order to understand the idea of the forest as a space for Vedic people. First, we need to look upon the meaning of Marut and its understanding that who were Maruts.

According to Uma Chakravarty,¹⁴⁹ the *Rg Veda* dedicates thirty-five hymns to Maruts. The two major aspects of *Rg Vedic* Maruts character are, firstly they are storm gods and then they are Indra's associates and friends. It means they are the ferocious forms of nature and they were always a threat to the Vedic people and settlements. The Maruts have been divided into various forms on the basis of their characters. They have been classified as bright Marut, Rain Marut, Fearful Marut, and Maruts as birds.¹⁵⁰

Maruts were been disastrous to the forest trees, plants, and settlements of the Vedic people that is why they are requesting Marut to move somewhere else so that the loss could be reduced and minimize.

This hymn shows us a struggle of the Vedic people to protect their place and the environment from the Maruts and its various forms. Here we can strongly argue that

¹⁴⁷ 'They make the mountains tremble; they drive apart the forest- trees. Go, divine Marut, whither you will, with all your progeny, like those intoxicated'. Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 103.

¹⁴⁸ See Wilson, H. H. and Bhasya of Shankaracharya, *RgVeda Saṃhitā Vol 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Chakravarty, Uma, *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Vol 72-73, No ¼*, Amritmahotasav Vol. 1991-92, pp. 611-636.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 615-618.

the fear of destruction by Maruts is actually working upon the Vedic people and that is why they are worshipping the rough form of nature as Marut. In this hymn, the forest has been presented as living and occupational space where things are in order as per their human requirements but the disorder is prevailed by Maruts by uprooting the trees and destruction of natural habitats.

In the Vedas, the forests were not only a minimal space instead they gradually enhancing their form as social and economical space by space production. According to D. D. Kosambi in the Vedas the principal Vedic god is Agni, the God of fire; more hymns are dedicated to him than to any other. Next in importance comes Indra who resemblance a human war leader.¹⁵¹ This transition from “a natural form of god Agni to the human form of god Indra” is actually the reproduction of space and identities with time.

According to R. N. Dandekar, the ancient Vedic Āryans lived with an overwhelming feeling of awe with the cosmic order; it was but natural that their religion and mythology should have been dominated by the concepts of *Agni*, *Ṛta* and *Varuṇa*. As against this in the new phase of their cultural life, the Vedic Āryans were mainly required to encounter various forms of opposition and obstructions, both natural and human. They, therefore, sought a new kind of religion and god was needed. Then Indra came to born in the *Ṛg Vedic* Pantheon and gradually he becomes the foremost among the Vedic gods.¹⁵²

We can look into this transition through the aspects of space, particularly forest space. The relevance gods like Agni, Ṛta, and Varuṇa a are very much into the life of Vedic

¹⁵¹ D. D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, p. 76.

¹⁵² N. R., Dandekar, ‘Reflections on Vedic Mythology’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 70, No ¼, 1989, p. 5.

people when their society being developed in the primitive stage, where the forest is the only space of all the kinds of natures action and as well all the kinds of human reactions.

There is another hymn in the *Rg Veda* which is also important to see the balance between the Agni and *Vanaśpati*.

वनस्पतिरवसृजन्नूप स्थादग्निर्हविः सूदयाति प्रधीभिः ।

त्रिधा समक्तं नयतु प्रजानन्देवेभ्यो दैव्यः शमितोप हव्यम्¹⁵³ ॥

(Rg Veda 2.3.10)

If we closely observe the translation of this hymn which is ‘May the Agni who is Vanaśpati, approving (of our rites) approach, and by his especial act fully dress the victim, may the divine immolator convey the burnt offering to the gods, Knowing it to have been thrice consecrated¹⁵⁴, Here in this hymn it is said that Agni is Vanśapati it means Agni lives within Vanaśpati or forest because the emergence of Agni through dry plants and trees were very common in nature. In the sacrificial rituals, Agni has been also considered as the carrier of gods who take the offerings from the devotees and give it to gods.

After the critical analysis of this hymn, we can see a balance between the ‘*Idea of Vanaśpati*’ and ‘*Agni*’. We can describe them in phases where the first phase was about the pastoral and un-settled economy depended on the forest products and habitats, while the second phase is about settled agriculture and development of Vedic

¹⁵³ May Agni who is Vanaspati, approving of our rite, approach, and by his essential acts fully dress the victim: may the divine immolator convey the burnt-offering to the gods, knowing it to have been thrice consecrated. Translated by, H. H. Wilson and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Samhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 11.

¹⁵⁴ Wilson, H. H., and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Samhita Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016.

social life. In the first phase, the relation between Vanaśpati and Agni was totally antagonistic in nature while in the second phase due to the increase in the sacrificial rituals and settled human life there is a kind of balance between them.

The idea of space and space production has been continuously changing in the Vedas; forest has always been the centripetal place for human actions and deeds, as there was change in the mode of production as we have discussed pastoral to agriculture there was a visible change in the idea of social space particularly related to the forest and its importance.

There are various hymns regarding *Vana* and *Vanśpati* in the Vedas but they have been used in numerous senses and meanings. What we are looking for is the production of social space in the Vedic age in context with forests. On the basis of some of the examples from *R̥g Veda*, we can argue that the idea of the forest as space had well developed during Vedic period and gradually after the agricultural mode of production a sharp change has been noticed that there is an idea of social spaces out of it various social institutions emerge. For example, the social institutions *Sabhā*, *Samiti*, *Gopati* arise to exploit the social space and for its further continuation.

II.4 Forest as Space in Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads are the most important literary products in the history of Indian culture and religion, both because they played a critical role in the development of religious ideas in India and because they are valuable as a source for our understanding of the religious, social and intellectual history of ancient India.¹⁵⁵ Before moving ahead to

¹⁵⁵ Olivelle, Patrick, *The Early Upaniṣads*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 03.

understand the Upaniṣads and their forest connections first we need to have an idea about various kinds of later Vedic texts.

The later Vedic literature comprises of four classes of writings; *Samhitās*, *Brāhmaṇas*, *Aranyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*. The *Samhitā* part is the collection of hymns devoted to the gods individually or collectively composed by the different families of priests. The *Brāhmaṇa* text gives details for the sacrificial ceremonies, explaining the significance of each gesture. The *Aranyaka* or forest treatises are symbolic ponderings of forest dwellers. The *Upaniṣads* coming at the end of Vedic canon, record the philosophical speculations regarding the beginning and end of the world, the transmigration of the soul and the ultimate unity of the individual with the world soul.¹⁵⁶

The term *Upaniṣad* is very important in its meaning and understanding, especially in the context of the ritual and sacred spaces. According to S. Radhakrishnan, the word *Upaniṣad* is derived from (*upa*) near, (*ni*) down, (*sad*) to sit, i.e. sitting down near. Groups of pupils sit near the teacher to learn from him the secret doctrine in the quietude of forest hermitages. The other meaning for *Upaniṣad* which was propounded by Ādi Śankar is quite different from the above. Śankara derives the word *Upaniṣad* as a substantive from the root (*sad*), ‘to loosen’, to reach, or to destroy, with *upa* and *ni* as a prefix. If this derivation is accepted, *Upaniṣad* means “*Brahma Knowledge*” by which ignorance is loosened or destroyed. The treatises which deal with “*Brahma Knowledge*” are the *Upaniṣads*.¹⁵⁷

From these two derivations, it is obvious that the idea of *Upaniṣad* was related to the teaching of secret knowledge by the teachers to students. But question is that for such kinds of teaching and philosophical speculations one needs to be distant from the

¹⁵⁶ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 01.

¹⁵⁷ Radhakrishnan, S., *The Principal Upanishads*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd Publications, London, 1953, p. 20.

regular life makings and society and for that what should be an apt place for such teachings, and then the idea of the forest comes with strong connections with the whole idea of Upaniṣad.

In this section, we will try to understand why forest as a place was important for Upaniṣadic teachers and students. What is the material as well as philosophical reasons them to choose the forest as a teaching place and how there is continues the evolution of a new social space within the forest? For the better illustrations regarding the connections between Forest space and Upaniṣads we will go through major Upaniṣads and will see how forests in various contexts have appeared.

Bṛihadāranyak Upaniṣad is one of the principal and oldest among all Upaniṣads. Scholars believe that it was composed during 700 BCE, It is dealing with the most serious and secret subject which is Ātman or Soul. The literal meaning of *Bṛihadāranyak Upaniṣad* is “*Great Wilderness or Forest*”. It is the compilation of six chapters and supposes to be created by sage Yājñavalkya but scholars argue that like the Vedas they don't have sole authorship for such texts. As per the literal meaning of *Bṛhadāranyak* it is very clear that it was composed somewhere in the deep forest which was not common access for all.

There are hymns in this Upanishad which directly or indirectly indicates their strong relationship with the forest. For example, in the *Bṛhadāranyak Upaniṣad* the total count of word Van is 67 which is a good number to establish an interrelation between the Upaniṣad and forest.

ॐ उषा वा अश्वस्य मेध्यस्य शिरः ॥ सूर्यश्चक्षुर्वातः प्राणो व्यात्तमग्निर्वेश्वानरः संवत्सर
 आत्माश्वस्य मेध्यस्य ॥ द्यौः पृष्ठमन्तरिक्षमुदरं पृथिवी पाजस्यं दिशः पार्श्वे अवान्तरदिशः
 पशव ऋतवोऽङ्गानि मासाश्चार्धमासाश्च पर्वाण्यहोरात्राणि प्रतिष्ठा नक्षत्राण्यस्थीनि नभो
 मांसानि ॥ ऊवध्यँ सिकताः सिन्धवो गुदा यकृच्च क्लोमानश्च पर्वता
 ओषधयश्च वनस्पतयश्च लोमान्युद्यन पूर्वार्धो निम्लोचञ्जघनार्धो यद्विजृम्भते
 तद्विद्योतते यद्विधूनुते तत्स्तनयति यन्मेहति तद्वर्षति वागेवास्य वाक् ॥¹⁵⁸

In the first hymn of *Bṛhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad* there is the presence of term *Vana* or forest and as per the translation of Max Muller, there are happenings of multiple natural events like rising of Sun, the sacrifice of a fit horse, and rain sounds, and all this was happening at one place and that is a forest.

अथ वँ शः पौतिमाष्यात्पौतिमाष्यो गौपवनाद्गौपवनः पौतिमाष्यात्पौतिमाष्यो

गौपवनाद्गौपवनः कौशिकात्कौशिकः कौण्डिन्यात्कौण्डिन्यः शाण्डिल्यात्शाण्डिल्यः

कौशिकाच्च गौतमाच्च गौतमः¹⁵⁹

(BU 4.6.1)

In another hymn from the same text and according to the translation of Patrick Olivelle, here is an interesting point about the names of sages as given in the hymn 4.6.1. There is a name which is *Gaupavana*. He was the first sage in the line of

¹⁵⁸ ‘Verily the dawn is the head of the horse which is fit for sacrifice, the sun its eye, the wind its breath, the mouth the Vaisvânara fire, the year the body of the sacrificial horse. Heaven is the back, the sky the belly, the earth the chest, the quarters the two sides, the intermediate quarters the ribs, the members the seasons, the joints the months and half-months, the feet days and nights, the bones the stars, the flesh the clouds. The half-digested food is the sand, the rivers the bowels, the liver and the lungs the mountains, the hairs the herbs and trees. As the sun rises, it is the forepart, as it sets, the hind-part of the horse. When the horse shakes itself, then it lightens; when it kicks, it thunders; when it makes water, it rains; voice is its voice.’ Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part 1, (Sacred Books of East Vol. 15), Bṛhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad*, 1.1.1, Kanda I, First Brahmana, 1884, p. 74.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Now follows the stem, (We) from Pautimâshya, Pautimâshya from Gaupavana, Gaupavana from Pautimâshya,’ Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part 1, (Sacred Books of East Vol. 15), Bṛhadāraṇyak Upaniṣad*, 4.6.1, Kanda I, First Brahmana, 1884, p. 186.

tradition of Pautimasya.¹⁶⁰ When we analyze that how a sage has been named as *Gaupavana* in Upaniṣad, while when we break the name and see the Sanskrit Sandhi (law of addition) it seems that there is śvar śandhi between Gaupa+vana. Here Vana is working as a suffix to the name of sage.

On the basis of the translation and speculations of Patrick Olivelle and the laws of Sanskrit grammar, we can argue that since the sage was associated with a long time to forest or *Vana* that is why the suffix sound of *Vana* is there in his name. Forest was the most important place for the sages during the age of Upaniṣads because for great tapas and renunciation as well as for philosophical speculations they needed a place of silence and less crowded from human interventions and that is why they have chosen forest.

अथ य इच्छेत्पुत्रो मे कपिलः पिङ्गलो जायेत द्वौ वेदावनुब्रवीत सर्वमायुरियादिति दध्योदनं
पाचयित्वा सर्पिष्मन्तमशनीयातामीश्वरौ जनयितवै¹⁶¹ ॥ (BU 6.3.15)

A hymn 6.3.15 from *Bṛhadāranyak Upaniṣad* indicates with very much clear view that how the forest space was occupied by followers of Vedic tradition that they even called a particular forest as *Vedavana*, which means (*Veda+Vana*); a vana which is dedicated to the knowledge of Veda and filled with the Vedic sages.

After *Bṛhadāranyak Upaniṣad* the next important Upaniṣad is *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*. It is called the Upaniṣad of ‘Singers of Sām Veda’. According to Patrick Olivelle, a section of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* which is *Chāndogya Brāhmaṇa* belongs to the

¹⁶⁰ Olivelle, Patrick, *The Early Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 148.

¹⁶¹ BU 6.3.15

Tāṇḍya School of Sām Veda.¹⁶² Like the *Bṛhadāraṇyak*, the *Chāndogya* is the work of editor or a series of editors who created an anthology of passages and stories.

In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* there is a very special term *Naimisā* has been used for the representation of sacred forests. According to Patrick Olivelle, it is the name of a special sacred forest, it may have been located somewhere along the river Śaraśwati.¹⁶³ *Naimisā* forest is interesting because it is the only forest that has been mentioned as the forest of sacrifices. The Purāṇic tradition also shows *Naimisā* as the venue where thousands of Vedic seers congregated.¹⁶⁴ The context of *Naimisā* is very important as well as interesting because in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* it has been shown as a different kind of forest space. It was known for the sacrificial rituals and as it has been discussed that it continued till the time of Purāṇas to as a sacrificial forest. When we analyze the basic idea behind the sacrificial forest *Naimisā*, we come to know that since forest has become a dwelling place spiritual and philosophical confluence for Upaniṣadic sages and there was a silent ideological struggle between the followers for Vedic ritualistic and sacrificial form of religion as well as non-ritualistic and non-sacrificial philosophical interpretation of religion, they both had presence in the forest.

From the discussion of *Naimisā* forest it seems that within the forest there were classifications of forests according to the followers of particular sects and philosophies. Here we can also argue that there might be some struggle for the forest spaces among the sections of Vedic sages so that they could get their hermits near a water body and fruit trees with less carnivorous animals around them.

¹⁶² Olivelle, Patrick, *The Early Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 166.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

¹⁶⁴ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 41.

There are also various stories in the Upaniṣads from where we can look in the way of forest representation and its assimilation into human lives. There is a story in the *Kenopaniṣad*¹⁶⁵ where it has been mentioned that how beautiful forest was at that time, even Indra was interesting to call his assembly at *Nandanvan* of *Amarāvati*.¹⁶⁶ Here we can see how the idea of the forest as a place of ascetics and sages is been gradually changing. Now the idea of aesthetics is coming to overtake the claim for forest spaces. In this story there are two important place names, one is *Amarāvati* which is clearly a later interpolation in the story but the place *Nandanvan* is an imaginary forest space in various classical Sanskrit works of literature.

On the basis of the story and the terms used to represent the forest, we can see a sharp shift in the understanding of forest space. Earlier it was shown as a silent place suitable for penance and spiritual discourses, now the forest has become a place of beauty and joy where Indra, Apśarās, and Gandharvas are encroaching forest space. We can also argue that in the later Vedic period there was settled agriculture and land was required for more production since Iron was not discovered yet it was difficult to clear the lands and therefore forest not remained only for the sages but other human groups were also claiming the space within the forest.

Forest was full of natural resources like firewoods, fruits, water, meat, and land. As well as the economic prosperity was beginning the idea of space was also changing. Here we can argue that as well as there was a shift from the sacrificial to philosophical approach towards religion, also there was continues human penetration into deep forests particularly for the claim over natural resources not only for the spiritual and philosophical gain.

¹⁶⁵ Kenopanishad, Part III, *Yakshopakhyān*, with *Shankar Bhashya*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur, 1992, p. 87.

¹⁶⁶ Shastri, Rampratap Tripathi, *Stories from Upanishads*, Lok Bharati Publication, Allahabad, 2011, p. 02.

The idea of forest and its aesthetical importance have already developed in the Vedas and it is important to discuss here a Vedic story from *R̥g Veda*, which is popularly known as the story of Pururva and Urvaṣi.¹⁶⁷ In this story the beauty of forest has been explained in detail and forest was represented as an abode of beautiful Gandharvas.

Stories are important links between myth and realities, the stories from Vedas and Upaniṣads are continuously flowing from ages. There is another story from *Aitirīya Upaniṣad* which opens a new kind of understanding for us in the context of the forest as space. It is a story of Sunahsepa¹⁶⁸ which forms the third chapter of book four. According to this story, the childless king Harish Chandra vowed, if he should have a son, to sacrifice him to Varuṇa. But when his son Rohit was born, he kept putting off the fulfillment of his promise. At length when the boy was grown up, his father pressed by Varuṇa, prepared to perform the sacrifice. Rohit, however, escaped to the forest where he wandered for six years, while his father was afflicted with dropsy by Varuṇa. At last, he fell in with a starving Brahman, who consented to sell him for a hundred cows his son Sunahsepa as a substitute. Varuṇa agreed, saying 'A Brāhmaṇa is worth more than a Kṣtriya', finally with the help of gods Sunahsepa released and everything falls correct.

While we analyze this story through the lens of socio-historical understandings, it gives us various clues about the kind of social development that was happening during the time of Upaniṣads. In this story, there are a few points that need proper attention to analyze the various aspects of post-Vedic society. Here it is been mentioned that Rohit escapes for the forest and stayed there for six years, it indicates

¹⁶⁷ *R̥g Veda* 10.95.1-18

¹⁶⁸ Gupta, Vijaya Kumar. *Forest and Environment in Ancient India*, B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2010, p. 43.

that how there were two kinds of parallel society was running together. One is the mainstream society where King Harish Chandra belongs, a society where law and order, as well as social promises, are prime attentions, second is the forest society where Rohit lived for six years.

Now the question arises that if there was no forest society and the availability of basic socio-economic order in the forest how he could live there for such a long time. Now the answer is that during the age of later Vedic period or Upaniṣadic period a kind of forest society had appeared which was giving space to the cultural raw materials as well as social by-products of mainstream society.

According to R. S. Sharma, the later Vedic phase which was the time of 'Yjuz and Atharvan, the Brāhmaṇās, the Upaniṣads', is marked by the predominance of sacrificial rituals, conducted by priests and mainly meant for tribal chiefs and princes.¹⁶⁹ It is very obvious that the period of Upaniṣad was a transition phase in between the tribal cum pastoral society to the evolution of state-society. From the above-mentioned passages and stories of various Upaniṣads we can argue that there was a gradual shift in some basic ideas related to the forest, particularly forest as social space.

The idea of the forest as social space was continuously changing; earlier in the Vedic age forest was considered as a ferocious and dangerous place, it was called as the origin place of Agni, it was being worshiped as *Vanaśpatideva*. As the coming of Upaniṣadic age, human intervention was increases and hermits were being established by sages for deeper philosophical studies of earthly as well as unearthly subjects. Earlier myths were dominated by supernatural forces, like the sun, the moon, thunder, etc. But after the change in the mode of material production from pastoral to

¹⁶⁹ Sharma, R. S., *Material Culture and Social formation in Ancient India*, New Delhi, p. 64.

agriculture there was also change in the popular myths and one of the biggest examples is the mythical story of Pururava and Urvaśi, they appear in the last section of the *Ṛg Veda* but certainly, it was the beginning of Upanishads.

Now the forests were not ferocious or dangerous places instead as argued by Romila Thapar they become the subjects for poets and writers because in the art of prose, passage or story the idea of uncertainty is to be considered as a prime requirement, it creates gravity and attention to the listeners. Since the forest was full of uncertain things they become the main plot for the great Sanskrit writers. The composers of Vedas to Upanishads and from Vālmīki to Veda Vyās and from Kālidās to Dāṇḍin all have chosen forest as their favorite destinations to tell a story.

A sense of aesthetics and beauty was created in the Sanskrit literature, and defiantly it was started during the time of Upanishads. We can also see Upanishads as products of the forest by the great sages but at the same time still, they remained as a space of raw and disorder which was suitable for the lawbreakers of mainstream society as we saw in above Upanishadic story.

II.5 Forest in Epic traditions

(Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata)

*Rāmāyaṇa*¹⁷⁰ & *Mahābhārata*¹⁷¹ are the two great epics of Indian culture; they are full of narratives and meta-narratives. The Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* is arguably the most

¹⁷⁰ Here I am using English translation of Valmiki Ramayana by, William Buck's *Ramayana: King Rama's Way*, Published by American Library, New York, 1978.

The second translation I am using here is by Sheldon I Pollock, *Ramayana Book two Ayodhya by Valmiki*, Published by Princeton University Press, New York 2005.

The third translation I am using is by John Brockington and Mary Brockington, *Rama the Steadfast an Early form of Ramayana*, Published by Penguin Books, London, 2006.

¹⁷¹ For Mahabharata, here I am using its English translation by Kirari Mohan Ganguli, *The Mahabharata of Krishna- Dwaipayana Vyasa*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi, 2001.

important and most widely influential text ever written. For the impact of this poem and countless other works, it has inspired the religions, the arts and the social and political thought of much of Asia.¹⁷² Still, it is the inspiration for morality and religion as well as for new literary creations.

The *Mahābhārata* is a tradition of religious epic that has lived in numerous different cultural niches; some oral, some written, some Sanskrit, some vernacular in South Asia. The *Mahābhārata* has played a fundamental role as a sacred “scripture” in defining the Hindu world.¹⁷³ It is also considered to be one of the great socio-political drama as well as a family struggle for dominance over land and kingdom. *Mahābhārata* is also important on the religious point of view because within the *Mahābhārata* there is a subtext which is called as *Gītā*, which is a kind of religious and spiritual interpretation of various Indian philosophies explaining three roads for an escape from this material world; these are *Gyān mārga*, *Karma mārga*, and *Bhakti mārga*.

Here, in this section now we are trying to look into these two epics to know about the kinds of presentation of the forest as space in various instances. Within *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, both the author has used extensively the forest as a major plot in their stories. In these two epics forests is playing a major role during the period of Vanvās or forest living. One by one we will analyze each epic through some particular prose and passages that how the idea of the forest as space has prevailed in these two epics.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* forest has appeared again and again that that is why some scholars also called it the book of the forest. For example in the *Bālkāṇḍa*, Rāma and

¹⁷² Goldman, Robert, P. and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, *Ramayana*, p. 280.

¹⁷³ Fitzgerald, James, L., *Mahabharata*, p. 52.

Lakṣmaṇa went to the forest with teacher Viśvamiṭra and they killed demon Tāḍakā, then they went for Vanvās for 12 years along with Rāma's wife Sītā, and in the last Sītā went to the forest to give birth two sons in the hermit of sage Vālmīki.

In all these instances the only one thing which is common in the forest. The story has been plotted beautifully around the forest some time they have projected forest as a place of love beauty knowledge and care, while some times it has appeared as the dangerous place of demons and disorder.

स वनं घोरसंकाश दृष्ट्वा नर वरात्मजः।

अविप्रहतमैक्ष्वाकः प्रपच्छ मुनिपुन्गावम¹⁷⁴ ॥

(Bālakāṇḍa, Chapter 24, Verse 12)

This śloka is very important in the *Rāmāyaṇa* particularly in the context of forest and wilderness. According to the translation of this śloka, there is a situation when the first time Rāma saw such a dense forest where there was no sign of any human being at all. This was the first encounter of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa with a forest. Here the representation of forest for the readers is not much explanatory, instead, the author has used the one-word expression which is घोरसंकाश which means horrible or dangerous.

अहो वन्मिदमं दुर्गं झील्लिका गण संयुतम

भैरवै क्षपदे कीर्णं श कुन्ते दारुणारावे¹⁷⁵ ॥ (Bālakāṇḍa, Chapter 24, Verse 13)

¹⁷⁴ 'He who was a descendent of Ikshvaku and son of the best of kings, (Dasaratha) having seen that un-trodden and dreadful forest asked the foremost of the ascetics.' Translated by Prof. P. Geervani, Prof. K. Kamala and Shri V. V. Subba Rao, under the guidance of Prof. H.K. Sathapathy VC, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peetham, Tirupati in a project developed by Indian Institute of Kanpur (IIT) which is available at [www. Valmiki.iitk.ac.in](http://www.Valmiki.iitk.ac.in)

¹⁷⁵ 'What a wonder this inaccessible forest echoes with the (shrill) chirpings of crickets it is filled with ferocious beasts and birds producing fearful sounds.'

नाना प्रकारे शकुनेवश्यद्विरभेरवस्वने¹⁷⁶ (Bālakāṇḍa, Chapter 24, Verse 14)

In the śloka 13 and 14, Rāma is explaining the character of the forest, as this forest is not easy to walk, there is continuous sound of crickets with dangerous and violent animals. Birds are also making dangerous sounds around us. This explanation or vivid description of the forest by Rāma needs a complex analysis to understand the idea of the forest as space in the age of *Rāmāyaṇa*. When we critically analyze the way how the author has an approach towards the forest and what are the things upon which he has a focus at first sight then we found that there were actually unexplored virgin forest lands and the fear was particularly from the uncertainty that anything could happen there.

Though there was a period of transition in the age of Upaniṣads there was not a complete transition in the terms of forest, still, they were adventures place for human beings and the forest was only a forest space at all, have not converted into forest places.

There is a difference between '*forest as space*' and '*forest as a place*.' As well as the story moves ahead of the idea of '*forest as space*' was overtaken by the idea of '*forest as a place*'. When we say forest as space, it has a different meaning and connotation because space is the geometrical representation of three-dimensional external worlds; it might be anything with a height, width, and length, associated with forest. In other words, we can say that forest as space gives a sense of less human interaction.

Forest as a place emerges in the latter part of the text where each and every space was been mapped by Vānaras and also the author of the text introduces forest space with

¹⁷⁶ 'It resounds with the frightful shrieks of various kinds of birds. Lions, tigers, boars and elephants prowl about.'

names and nature, and it indicates its previous connection or interaction with human societies. Like in the next śloka as which are from the description of *Pañchvati*, the author has a quite different approach towards the opening of sentences for this place.

ततः पंचवटी गत्वा नाना व्याल मृगा युताम्

उवाच लक्ष्मण रामो भ्रातरं दीप्त तेजसम्¹⁷⁷ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 15, Verse 1)

आगतः स्म यथोदृष्टि मुनिरब्रवीत्¹⁷⁸

अयं पंचवटीदेश सौम्य पुष्पितकानन ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 15, Verse 2)

सर्वतः आश्चर्यता दृष्टी कानने निपुणो हवसी

आश्रम कतास्मिन् नो देशे भवति सम्मत¹⁷⁹ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 15, Verse 3)

Now there are three continuous ślokas from *Aranyakāṇḍa*, in the first śloka Lakṣman is describing the forest very minutely and pointing out that; this forest is full of various kinds of snakes, wild animals and full of beautiful deer's. However, the notable point is that either it is a dangerous forest but it is a famous forest that is known by sage Viśvāmitra. This forest was known not because of its deep and dangerous tracks and animals instead of its beauty and natural prosperity suitable for hermitages and sages.

¹⁷⁷ 'On reaching Panchavati, which was full of various vicious animals, Rama said to Lakshmana, his brother who was glowing like fire.'

¹⁷⁸ 'O handsome one, following the directions of the great sage, we have arrived at Panchavati, a place full of blossoming trees.'

¹⁷⁹ 'O Lakshmana cast your eyes all around the forest for a suitable place (for building a hermitage). Indeed, you are good at judging things.'

The second śloka is the answer of the first one; here it is being said that this forest has been visited earlier by sage Agastya and as his guidance, this is the place of *Pañchvati* which is famous for its various kinds of flowers and fragrances. This śloka is also arguing that this is not an unknown forest instead it is a place called *Pañchvati*.

In the third śloka, Rāma is asking to Lakṣmaṇa to search for a good place here, which is suitable for making a Āśrama or hermitage for them. *Aranyakāṇḍ* is an important book within the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is quite obvious from its name that it is the story of forest or the journey of Rāma, Lakṣman, and Sītā into the forest. From the above three ślokas, we come to know that how the gradual human intervention into the forest is increasing, either the place called Pañchvati was a no man's land but even though it was known to sage Agastya and sage Viśvāmitra. In this description we can see a kind of transition from the idea of space to the idea of place, the intervention of 'nouns' and its enhancements in the grammar of any language is the sign of discovery of new things, new places or new ideas.

If we closely analyze the ślokas of *Aranyakāṇḍ* when Sītā was abducted by Rāvaṇa, it shows us another level of human understanding for the forest. Forest has been personified as the 'power of nature' was been in the Vedas.

यत्रा न मृगयमाणस्तु नाससाद वने प्रियाम

शोक रक्तेक्षण श्रीमान नुन्मंत इव लक्ष्यते¹⁸⁰ ॥ (*Aranyakāṇḍ*, Chapter 60, Verse 10)

वृक्षाद वृक्षं प्रधावन स गिरिक्षापी नदी नदाम

बभ्रंम विलपन् राम शोकपंकार्ण वप्लुतः¹⁸¹ ॥ (*Aranyakāṇḍ*, Chapter 60, Verse 11)

¹⁸⁰ 'He ransacked the forest, yet did not find his beloved. He appeared like a mad man, his eyes turned red with tears of sorrow.'

¹⁸¹ 'Running from tree to tree, hill to hill, and river to river and weeping, Rama was immersed in a sea of sorrow.'

These two ślokas takes the representation of forest at another level, first, the forest was a space waiting for human intervention, and then it became a place of sages and then after human forest relations becomes the ultimate aesthetics in the literature. In these two ślokas sage Vālmīki has melted the human emotions with the simplicity of forest trees.

According to the translation of these ślokas, Rāma searched for Sītā everywhere into the forest but he didn't find her and then his eyes become red. He was running from here to there, he was in utter pain after missing Sītā and certainly, he started to ask for Sītā to every possible object and material. He was asking to the trees, mountains, and rivers, he was asking particularly to Kadamba tree, Arjuna tree, Aśoka, and Tāl tree because Sītā was so close to these trees for woods, leaves, and flowers.

When we critically analyze these two ślokas we would found that with the increase of economic activities and the human will to exploit the forest lands had lead various kinds of changes in the understanding of forest and forest resources as well. Human beings were fascinated with the beauty of the forest because it was undiscovered and unaffected by the mainstream societies, and that is why now a strong connection was being established in between humans and forests and it has become very clear with the conversation of Rāma with trees, mountains, and rivers in this section.

Now we will discuss the idea of the forest as space on the basis of passages from *Mahābhārata*. However, these two texts are representing a state society through the lineages and war for property and state but also they are indirectly talking about forest and forest societies which are below the sociological ladders in comparison to other state societies. The *Mahābhārata* went through the stage of classical heroic epic and was partially transformed into a religious didactic people. There is no other epic in the

world that combines, in the same way, the features of all three main historical stages of development; archaic, classical and late.¹⁸²

In this section, we will focus on the idea of forest and its representation in *Mahābhārata* through some of the important passages and would also try to see the transitions in the idea of the forest through the socio-political changes in the basic structure of society.

ततः संप्रस्थिते तत्र धर्मराजे तदा नृपे

जनाः समस्तास्तं द्रष्टुं समाररूहुरातुरा

ततः प्रासाद वार्याणि विमान शिखराणई च

गोपुराणी च सर्वाणि वृक्षांनन्यान्श्च सर्वशः

अधिरुहा जनः श्रीमानुदासीनों व्यलोकयत¹⁸³ ॥

(Mahābhārata, Anudyatparv, 69, Verse 32)

This is an important śloka in *Mahābhārata* in relation to the forest and state “dichotomy” because here is a description of forest going seen of the Pāṇḍavas. They were moving to the forest as a part of their Vanvās into the forest and people were looking into them from various places like; palaces, home terraces, and also from the top of the trees. These kinds of descriptions of cities clearly make a distance between the imagination of forests and cities. Here we can argue that sage Vyās is trying to set the stage for a new world where the city structure will not be present and the

¹⁸² Fitzgerald, James, L., *Mahabharata*, p. 53.

¹⁸³ At the departure of those foremost of men from Hastinapur, lightning flashed in the cloudless sky earth began to tremble. Jackals, vultures and ravens began to shrink from the temples of the gods, from the tops of scared trees and from walls and housetops. As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Elysium Press, Calcutta, 1895, pp. 105-106.

dichotomy between city and forest would become more clear if one has the memorial imprints of city structures.

Since *Mahābhārata* is covering all the three stages of historical developments as we have argued above, now from a historical point of view as well as there was an extension in the blood relations as shown in *Mahābhārata* kinship and struggle for private property rises. The idea of forest and state or city dichotomy can be understood clearly on the basis of private property¹⁸⁴. City/states place which is full of private properties but the forests are not like that, there is no claim over the things/material in the forest, while in the city-states the center of all struggles are property, as the whole story of *Mahābhārata* has shown. So through the above ślokas, we can understand that how the Idea of forest space was evolving in comparison with the ideas of settled societies.

न ही रथ्यास्ततः शक्या गन्तु बहुजनाकुला

अरुहाते स्म तान्यत्र दिनः पश्यन्ति पाण्डवम्

पदाति वर्जित छत्रं चेलभूषणवर्जितम्

वल्कलाजिन्संवितम पार्थे दृष्टा जनास्तदा

उचुर्वाहुविधा वाचो भ्रिसोपहतचेतसः¹⁸⁵ ॥ (*Mahābhārata*, Anudyatparv, 69, Verse 33)

The forest and *city-state* dichotomy have also been shown by the clothes and things which Pāṇḍavas were carrying to the forest. According to śloka 33, Yudhiṣṭhira was

¹⁸⁴ The Idea of Private property is taken from Friedrich Engels, *the Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

¹⁸⁵ 'It was difficult to walk on the streets because of the crowds, people were looking Yathisthira with compassion, he was walking without any royal clothes or jewellery, now he was covered with deer skin.'

walking on the road with no silky clothes and pieces of jewelry on his body, he wore deerskin as forest dwellers and people were looking on him with full of grief.

द्वादसेमानी वर्षानी वस्तव्यम निर्जने वने

समीक्षादध्व महारण्ये देस बहुमृगाद्विजनम¹⁸⁶ ॥

(Mahābhārata, Arjunarbhiganam Parv, Chaturvisho, Verse 2)

बहु पुष्पं फलं रम्यं शिवं पुन्यजना वृतम्

यत्रेमा शरदः सर्वाः सुखं प्रतिवसेमहि¹⁸⁷ ॥

(Mahābhārata, Arjunarbhiganam Parv, Chaturvisho, Verse 3)

इदं द्वैतवनं नाम सरः पुन्यजलोचितम्

बहु पुष्प फलं रम्यं नानाद्विजनिषेवितम्¹⁸⁸ ॥

(Mahābhārata, Arjunarbhiganam Parv, Chaturvisho, Verse 10)

Above three ślokas 2, 3 and 10, all of them are explaining the forest in a very different way, as per their translations in these ślokas after reaching the forest Yudhiṣṭhira is asking to his younger brothers that, they should search for a good place within the forest where various animals and birds are staying as well because they will have to be there for next twelve years.

¹⁸⁶ ‘We shall have to live in this lonely forest for twelve years; do you find out in this huge forest a spot, charming , auspicious and abounding in many deer, birds, flowers and fruits, and filled with pious men, where we may live happily for all these years.’ As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Aranyakparva, Elysium Press, Calcutta, 1895, p. 36.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸⁸ Here is the lake called *Dwaitvana*, resorted to by the pious, abounding in many flowers and fruits, charming and inhabited by birds of diverse species. As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Aranyakparva, p. 36.

In the third śloka, Yudhiṣṭhira is again saying that, search for a place which is full of colorful flowers and a pleasant place to stay for a long time, which should be the abode of pious souls. In the tenth śloka, there is a description of *Dvaitvan*, the meaning of *Dvaita* is a beautiful lake that is full of forest flowers and this forest is a resting place of various brāhmaṇas well.

When we analyze these beautiful ślokas from Vanaparva which are especially dedicated to the beauty of Dvaitvana, we found that how the idea of the forest has been shifted from the space to beautiful space and natural order which is called aesthetics came out from raw and disorder as the earlier forest was mentioned in *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as *Mahābhārata*.

Earlier during the Vedic and Upaniṣadic periods hermitages of sages were made in the fringes of forests, they have not intervened in the deep forests for various reasons. But as it comes out of these ślokas for the first time the sages are staying inside the deep forest as mentioned near the Dvaitvana. Gradually the idea of ‘aesthetics’ and ‘beauty’ was being dominated over the idea of the forest as a normal or neutral space.

On the basis of these pieces of evidence from *Mahābhārata* and particularly from Vānaparva we can strongly argue that there was a continuous change in the idea of the forest as space. From *Rāmāyaṇa* to *Mahābhārata* forest was under strong socio-political impact from state society. Regular interventions of sages and hunters into the forest had intensified the exploitation of forest space. And as these texts are suggesting that there was a transformation into the idea of forest space and it has changed as forest as ‘place’.

We have already argued that during the epic ages the idea of uncertainty and ferocious dangerous aspects of the forest have been overtaken by the idea of beauty and

aesthetics. It was happened due to the change in the mode of production and requirements of virgin lands for agriculture propose. Kinship relations and enhancement in the family blood relations were also the reason behind the sociological development of *socio-political* institutions which were the main reasons behind the human intervention into the deep forest.

II.6 Conclusion

The idea of the forest as space developed through various *socio-historical* stages. Development of human society and the understanding of surroundings in relation to the material production raise the level of our pursuing, particularly the external world. The idea of forest in Indian understanding was always under the process of change. The Vedas to the Upaniṣad it was a place of learning and worship while in the age of epics its wild nature and inhabitants increased.

Chapter Three

Forest as Resource

III.1 Introduction

Forest is a place that has been known for its uncertainty, ferocity and deep dark unrevealed undiscovered truths and realities. It always creates a quest within the human mind to explore the hidden meanings and materials as well as it has been a wonderful subject for the poets and writers from the beginning of the first millennium BC for their literary creativity and still it imposes the natural feature of attraction for the same.

Apart from the literary production and provocative features for the human mind, the forest has been important for humankind from the beginning of the evolution of man on the earth. The early humanity was totally dependent on the forest and forest products. With the development of civilization, the process of food-gathering has transformed into agriculture. Men came out from the forest and settled themselves in the form of communities, but still, the idea of the forest was prevailing in their life for survival.

With the emergence of space dichotomy as village and forest, the proximity of human inclination was diverted more towards village rather than forest and subsistence economy. This was totally based on forests converted to surplus production and market economy with time. But even after this larger historical shift in early societies the value of forest and forest products remained/maintained and

demands from the forest were always high for societies as well as for early states. There are a good number of evidence from early literary sources which tell us about the various kinds of demands and supply from the forest, and that is why forest has been considered as the land of resources.

If we closely observe the Vedas, Upaniṣads, and Epics then we would find that there is a linear development in the understanding of the forest, particularly from materialistic requirements to the philosophical interpretations. In ancient India, forests were regarded as abodes of spiritual solace and the concept of preserving forests and wildlife developed around the ashrams of sages. These ashrams propagated a forest culture and human understanding of the fundamental ecological unity of forest ecosystems and their economic importance, which led to trees and animals being treated with veneration¹⁸⁹.

Ancient texts like the *Rāmāyaṇa* give clues to sensibilities towards forests. When Rāma the prince of Ayodhyā, is about to set out on his long exile in the forests, south of the Gangetic plains, his mother Kaushalyā expresses fears about his safety: ‘May the huge elephants not harm you, my dear son’, she says, nor the lions, tigers, bears, boars or ferocious horned buffalo. Rāma himself, in a bid to dissuade his wife Sītā from following him to the woods, paints a similar portrait of the forest as a place of hidden menace. In fact, the word *vana* or forest was only given to lands where pleasure gave way to hardships. But it is also a place that is beautiful. The twin themes of the forest as a place of danger to be confronted and of beauty to be enjoyed run like a thread through the epic¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁹ Rawat, A. S., *A History of Forestry in India*, Delhi, 1991, p. 130.

¹⁹⁰ Goldman, R. P. (ed.), *The Ramayana of Valmiki: An Epic of Ancient India, Vol. II., Ayodhyakānda*, Princeton, 1986, pp. 131-136.

Forest can be seen as dangerous as well as beneficial and these two aspects of the same place have prevailed not only in the epics but also in the Vedas as well as Upaniṣads. This socio-ecological perspective of forest on the transition from pre-agrarian society to agrarian society is an important aspect for observation and analysis. The ancient texts have shown the forest in various forms, sometimes it is dangerous or sometimes it is beautiful abode but most of the time it has been mainly shown as a place which is full of natural resources. The term natural resource can be defined in various ways like some basic forest products to the production of space either for literature or expansion of settlement and agriculture.

The exploitation of the forest resource was the prime necessity for the evolving early states and this has also taken the intense form of struggle and power politics as it has been mentioned in the epics. But the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* have found and discovered the forest more in the sense of ‘production of space’ for knowledge and practice of austerity. In most literary presentations, the forest (*araṇya*) was conceived as an area for wild beasts, dangerous robbers, and fierce demons (*rākṣasa*) defiling the sacred sacrifices of sages and forest hermits who had their forest hermitages (*āśrama*) there. The forest was thus perceived as a space in contrast to the settled environment of the village. Sanskrit sources described a settlement area with multiple villages as a territory (*rāṣṭra*) or a *Janapada*, referring to the feet (*pada*) of the people (*Jana*)¹⁹¹. From this description, it is obvious that at the time of *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* the exploration of the forest was for the philosophical and symbolic means of different aspects of life and its meanings, but during the epic period, the idea of settlement and material demands from forest enhances because of the emergence of chiefdoms and budding states.

¹⁹¹ Chakravarti, Ranabir, *Natural Resources and Human Settlements: Perceiving the Environment in India*, in *Environmental History of Early India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 57.

III.2 Forest as Resource in the Vedas

The Vedas are known as the book of knowledge and regarded as the earliest texts. The Vedas has been studied by various scholars from various points of views because it is believed that it is the text which is full of initial human inquiry about nature and its phenomenon and also they have tried to interpret and imagine the external human environment and constructed their foundation of faith and believes. According to Romila Thapar, the *R̥g Veda* refers to various tribes settled in the region around the Indus, the river of Punjab. The major concentration of settlements from archaeological data points to the lower doāb of Punjab. *R̥g Vedic* society was essentially a pastoral society. This did not preclude agriculture although agrarian activities are more frequently described in the later section of the text. The pastoralists may have well-controlled agricultural niches without being economically dependent on them, particularly if the cultivated area was worked by the people other than those who belong to the pastoral clan.¹⁹²

Since the Vedic society was a pastoral society, it was dependent much on the forest products for their various needs and that is why they have devoted many hymns to the mother forest as goddess *Vanaśpati*, while the later Vedic texts show that the Vedic people were more dependent on agriculture although cattle rearing remained a significant activity.¹⁹³ The forest and pasture land are also very important for cattle rearing. Even with the growing importance of agriculture, the demands for forest products never declined in the long history of Vedic tradition.

The pastoralism of *R̥g Vedic* society made livestock breeding and more especially, cattle herding a major activity. Pastoralism is dependent on assured grazing grounds

¹⁹² Thapar, Romila, 'From lineage to State,' Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, p. 23.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 23.

to accumulate and increase the herd, this being the primary source of wealth.¹⁹⁴ With the extension of agriculture and the number of herds, there was an intense need for new and virgin lands, and therefore the Vedic people always have seen the ‘forest’ with a keen curiosity for exploration and economic accumulation.

The proximity of the forest is always present in the consciousness of the settlers as is evident from the images of *grāma* and *araṇya*, where the forest is the place of exile, of demons and *rākṣasa*, but also where the hermitages of *ṛiṣis* were situated. The latter was in a sense vanguard of the new society and the hermitages could act as the nuclei of new settlements.

The nomenclature of mother earth as *Prithvī* in the Vedas is also interesting because it tells us the devotion, dedication and emotional connection of the Vedic people towards mother earth. As per the story from *Aitriya brāhmaṇa*, the story of *Prathu Vainya*, the first righteous ruler according to the tradition, is pertinent to that *Niṣāda*, the original chief created by the *ṛiṣis*, whose name becomes synonymous with hunting and gathering tribes, is expelled to the forest to become a hunter and gatherer. *Prithi Vainya*, who is created subsequently, introduces cattle rearing and the plow, an action for which the grateful earth goddess *Prithvī* bestows her name on him.¹⁹⁵

On the basis of this story, Romila Thapar argues that the entire process would not have been difficult for those acquainted with the superior technology of iron weapons, with the horse and chariot, and no longer pastoralists but also familiar with the advantages of agriculture. That land was now recognized as an item of wealth but there is no reference to the sale of land in the Vedic texts, and this shows that the requirement of new lands for agriculture and human settlements was being taken from

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

the forests. In this way, we can argue that the ‘new lands’ were the products of the formation of new social spaces and material culture which were seeing towards the forest as ‘resource’ for the new lands.

If we carefully analyze the Vedic verses then we can find valuable information regarding the interrelationships between humans and forests, particularly the way they perceive and gain from the forest is very important.

य एकश्चर्षा नीना वसुनामिर्ज्यती इन्द्रः पञ्च क्षितिनाम ¹⁹⁶ ।

(R̥g Veda 1. 7. 9)

In the *R̥g Veda*, there is a mantra¹⁹⁷ (1. 7. 9) which is telling us about the five kinds of social communities but names are not mentioned, it has been seen as the fifth one is the *Niṣādas* who were living and dwelling in the forest and have confronted several times with the other four for the access over forest resources.

The Vedic writers have used several beautiful metaphors in the texts to enhance the aesthetics of their poems, and on the basis of the kinds of metaphor they have used we can also analyze and extract the important and valuable materials of that time. In many cases, it seems that the forest products were one of them as in the mantra¹⁹⁸ (1. 8. 8) of *R̥g Veda* explains that ‘O lord Indra your sweet voice gives us pleasure same as the giver of the cow and the ripped fruits of the tree given to the guest.’ In this verse, the poet is mentioning about the sweetness and comparing with the taste of the ripen fruits from the tree and getting of a cow to the Indra, who is the prime god of the Vedic tradition.

¹⁹⁶ Indra, ‘who alone rules over me, over riches and over the five classes of the dwellers on earth.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p.17.

¹⁹⁷ R̥g Veda (1. 7. 9)

¹⁹⁸ R̥g Veda (1. 8. 8)

रवा हास्य सुनृत विरप्शी गोमती पक्वा शाखा न दाशुषे¹⁹⁹ ।

(Rg Veda 1. 8. 8)

The tree with the ripen fruits and the cow, these both are somehow connected with the forest and pasture land and there are various instances through the Vedas wherein many hymns these two metaphors of ‘ripen fruit tree’ and ‘cow’ have been used in plenty. This hermeneutic analysis of verses gives us a sense of trees and cows, particularly in regarding of forests, the trees which are loaded with ripen fruits can be seen as the major forest resource for the food gathering and pastoral societies. We can also see this interpretation with respect to the pre-agricultural society where not only fruits but most of the needs were being supplied from the forest.

The forest entity was such an important part of the Vedic society that they have worshipped the forests in the name of *Vanaśpatideva* as in the mantra²⁰⁰ below.

अव सृजा वनस्पते देवे देवेभ्यो हविः

प्र दातुरस्तु चेतनम²⁰¹ ।

(Rg Veda 1. 13. 11)

In this verse of the *Rig-Veda*, the term ‘*Vanaśpatideva*’ has been appeared as the lord of the forest or lord of the plants and trees, to him poet is praying for the continuous production of life-giving fruits and grains. As we know that the Vedic people were nature worshipers and they have created their own articulations of various aspects of

¹⁹⁹ ‘Verily the words of Indra to his worshipper are true, manifold, cow-conferring, and to be held in honour, they are like a branch loaded with ripe fruits.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Samhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 19.

²⁰⁰ Rg Veda (1. 13. 11)

²⁰¹ ‘Present divine Vanaspati, our oblation to the gods, and may true knowledge be the reward of the giver. Vanaspati, lord of the woods; usually a large tree, here said to be an Agni, as if the fuel and the burning of it were identified.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Samhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 31.

the nature as Indra the lord of the rain and prosperity, Agni the lord of fire, Varuṇa the lord of the wind, etc. but the genesis of the idea of *Vanaśpatideva* shows their dependency and care about the forests so that a kind of natural respect could be produced among the humans as there was for sun, moon, and water was there. The respect and care not always come because of receiving of goodness but it also comes because of fear and destructions, the other part of the same forest can also be seen as ferocious and uncertain full of dangerous animals and creatures with deep and dark undisclosed reality have always been subsumed with the space called the forest. In this way, we can also see the genesis of *Vanaśpatideva* in the fear of men from the forest.

In the *Ṛg-Veda* there are two mantras from the different Sūktas which tells us about the destruction of the forest for different reasons. In the first mantra²⁰² the poet is again using the metaphor about the destruction of the forest trees by Indra and in the second mantra²⁰³ seems a natural disaster by lord Marut.

अहं वृत्रं वृत्रतरन व्यंसमिन्द्रो व्ज्रेनाह महता व्येन ।

स्कंधासीव कुलिशेना विवृकणहिः शयत उपप्रिक्यथिव्यः²⁰⁴ ॥

(Ṛg Veda 1. 32. 5)

परा ह यत्ष्ठिरम हथ नये वर्तयथा गुरु वि याथन वनिनः पृथिव्या व्याशः पर्वतानाम²⁰⁵ ।

(Ṛg Veda 1. 39. 3)

²⁰² Ṛg Veda (1. 32. 5)

²⁰³ Ṛg Veda (1. 39. 3)

²⁰⁴ ‘With his vast destroying thunderbolt, Indra struck the darkling mutilated Vrtra: as the trunks of trees are felled by the axe, so lies Ahi prostrate on earth.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 80.

²⁰⁵ ‘Directing Maruts, when you demolish what is stable, when you scatter what is ponderous, then you make your way through the forest (trees) of the earth and the defiles of the mountains.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 103.

According to the first verse, there is fighting between lord Indra and demon Vṛitrāsura, in which lord Indra has uprooted his hands from his body as he has cut the branches of the tree with an axe and fell it down to the ground. This verse is very important because a Sanskrit term ‘*Kulsina*’ has been used as a weapon to cut down the trees and this shows very clearly about the slow but steady annexation of the forests by humans in order to bring wood and other important forest products. *Kulsina* is an axe which seems close to the iron weapon as in the Vedas it has been mentioned two kinds of *ayas*; red and black, which has been interpreted by scholars as copper and iron. R.S. Sharma and B.P. Sahu have also argued that it was Iron because that the clearance of forest and extension of agriculture became possible and the Vedic people were aware of the use of iron as it is also clear from the above mantra.

The second verse is also about the destruction of the forest but in a different way, there is a pain in the writing of the poet because of the natural destruction of the forest through the storm. The poet is saying O’ lord Marut you are taking out the roots of the trees away from the mountains and falling down the trees enormously. This also shows the importance of trees and forest because of their valuable contribution to human life in various forms as foods, woods, timber, and the most important one is medicine.

Forests have always been the major source of medicinal plants and herbs, and because of that, the religious sentiments apart from economic perspectives have been associated with the forest or forest grooves. In the *R̥g Veda*, there is also a verse completely dedicated to the medicinal plants²⁰⁶.

²⁰⁶ *R̥g Veda* (1. 43. 2)

यथा नो अदितिः करत्पक्षे न्निभ्यो ।

यथा गवे यथा तोकाय रुद्रियम²⁰⁷ ॥

(Ṛg Veda 1. 43. 2)

This mantra is a prayer to goddess Aditi to increase the production and affinity of aūśadhi/medicinal plants so that, poet's pets, relatives and sons could not be affected by the decease. This mantra gives us immense speculations regarding the idea of plants as medicines. It shows that there is a need to protect and preserve the medicinal plants for the well being of humans and animals and that is why they are offering their prayer to goddess Aditi, but the interesting thing is that this prayer has not been offered to the lord of plants or forest, which is *Vanaśpatideva*, but to goddess Aditi who is considered as wife of the Sun in Vedic tradition. This may be because lord Sun is the deity of all germinating power and energy on the earth, in the same way, goddess Aditi would take care of the medicinal herbs from all-natural calamity.

A forest fire has been considered as the biggest calamity by the Vedic peoples because the production of the fire has always shown within the forest, which causes major destruction of all forest resources.

वनेषु जयुर्मतेशु मित्रो वृणीते श्रीषटी राजेवाजुर्यम ।

क्षेमो न साधू क्रतुन भद्रो भुवात्स्वाधिहोता हव्यवाट²⁰⁸ ॥

(Ṛg Veda 1. 67. 1)

²⁰⁷ 'By which earth may be induced to grant the gifts of Rudra to our cattle, our people, our cows and our progeny. Aditi is here said to mean the earth; who it is wished, may so act (karat), that Rudra may be obtained. The meaning of Rudriya is Rudra Sambandhi Bhesajam.' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 111.

²⁰⁸ 'Born in the woods, the friend of man, Agni protects his worshipper, as a Raja favours a noble man; kind as defender, prosper as a performer of good works, may he the invoker of the gods, the bearer of oblations, be propitious.' As Translated by H. H. Wilson and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 169.

This mantra is dedicated to Lord Agni because of his mass consuming power; he generates in the forest and consumes everything that is over on the earth. The mantra²⁰⁹ is talking about the balance in the nature of Agni because it was important for human beings as it is destructive to all. Here Agni can also be seen as the product of forest because it initiates between the frictions of dry woods and helps in the cooking but at the same time, it becomes the reason for the mass destruction.

Lord Indra has also been associated several times with forest as other gods like Agni, Aditi, Vanaśpatideva, has associated with forests. He is known as the lord of the gods who fight from gods and maintains the order of nature. There is a mantra²¹⁰ in the *R̥g Veda* which says that Indra has fought for the possession of cows, waters, medicines, and forests.

तदस्येदं पश्यता भूरी पुष्टं श्रदिद्रस्य धत्तेन वीर्याय ।

सगा अविन्दत्सो अविन्ददस्वांस ओषधिह सो स वनानि²¹¹ ॥

(*R̥g Veda* 1. 103. 5)

This mantra is very important in terms of extension of ‘social space’ and proximity of human society towards forests. Here it seems a socio-political claim over the forest by Indra which can be interpreted as an extension of social space at the Vedic period. According to Durkheim ‘the social life must be explained, not by the conception of those who participated in it, but by deep causes which are outside of

²⁰⁹ *R̥g Veda* (1. 67. 1)

²¹⁰ *R̥g Veda* (1. 103. 5)

²¹¹ ‘Behold this, the vast and extensive might of Indra, have confidence in his prowess, he has recovered the cattle, he has recovered the horses, the plants, the waters and the woods.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 249.

consciousness.²¹² The assimilation of forests as important space by Indra shows the slow but constant historical movement of human society towards forests for the extension of social space which later emerges as āśramas or hermitages within the forests. If we critically analyze all verses then we would find that there is a kind of synchronization among all and they are showing a historical movement of a society which is learning new things and accepting with new perceptions.

Forest resources should not only be seen in the sense of ex-situ material transfer from the forest but also in-situ broader theoretical explanations. The idea of social space in respect to the forests is a very complex theoretical ground on the basis of which we can articulate and speculate about the socio-historical development and migration of Vedic society towards forests, as in the case of Indra, he is trying to occupy the forests in order to create the new social space within the forest for the pastoral society.

There is always struggle for the ‘*living space*’ in the history as Indra the Vedic god slain the demon Vṛitrāsura, who is considered as rākṣasas can also be seen as struggle for space and resources because as in the beginning of this chapter we have also discussed about the Niṣādas who were known as the forest dwellers might also have some confrontations with the Vedic settlers because space is a system of relations between social space and geographical space.²¹³

This confrontation appears clearer in the next mantra²¹⁴ where Aśvini Kumārs were protecting the grazing cows from the forest dwellers. Since Vedic society was a pastoral society and herds were considered as wealth that is why the protection was necessary for the cows, but again the question arises from whom?

²¹² Bourdieu, Pierre, ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1, spring 1989, p. 14.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

²¹⁴ Ṛg Veda, (1. 180. 3)

युवं पय इस्त्रीययामधंते पक्वमामायायाव पूज्य गोः ।

अन्वद्वानिनो बामृतप्सू हरो न शुचियर्जाते हविशमान²¹⁵ ॥

(R̥g Veda 1. 180. 3)

The answer to the above question is embedded in the mantra itself, that due to continue horizontal expansion of population and enhancement in the demands from the village for the forest products has increased the confrontation between the forest dwellers and pastoral communities. Aśvini Kumars have been shown as the protector of cows as Indra to humans.

The most important of the terrestrial deities is Agni (the god of fire), next to Indra he is the most prominent of the Vedic gods, being celebrated in more than two hundred hymns. He invades the forest and shears the hairs of the earth as given in the following mantra²¹⁶.

त्वमग्ने द्युभिस्त्वमाशुशुक्षनित्स्वय्दध्यास्त्वमश्मन्स्परी ।

तवं वनेभ्यस्तवमोशधीभ्यस्तवम न्निण नृपते जायसे शुचिः²¹⁷ ॥ (R̥g Veda 2. 1. 1)

He bellows like a bull when he invades the forest trees; the birds are terrified at the noise when his grass-devouring sparks arise. In a number of hymns of *R̥g Veda*, Agni is described in close relations with the forest, underlining the process of

²¹⁵ ‘You have restored milk to the cow: you have (brought) down the prior mature (secretion) into the unripe (or barren udder) of the cow: the devout offerer of the oblation worships you, whose forms are truth as a thief of a thicket.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016.p. 466.

²¹⁶ R̥g Veda, (2. 1. 1)

²¹⁷ ‘Sovereign of men, Agni, you are born for the days (of sacrifice), pure and all-irradiating, from the waters, from the stones, from the trees, and from plants.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016.p. 01.

deforestation.²¹⁸ In the above mantra, Agni has been shown as the god of human beings who is purest of the pure and purifies everything on the earth.

The poets love to dwell on the various birds, forms, and abode of Agni. They often refer to the daily generation of Agni by friction from the two fire sticks. These are his parents, producing him as a new-born infant who is hard to catch. From the dry wood the god is born living; the child, as soon as born, devours his parents.²¹⁹

From the forest products, the Soma plant is the most important and mentioned frequently in the Vedas. Since the Soma sacrifice, besides the cult of fire, forms a main feature in the ritual of the *R̥g Veda*, the god Soma is naturally one of its chief deities. The whole of the ninth book is devoted to his praise. Thus, judged by the standard of the frequency of mention, Soma comes third in order of importance among the Vedic gods. The constant presence of the Soma plant and its juice before their eyes set limits to the imagination of the poets who describe its personification. Hence little is said of Soma's human form or action. Being the most important of herbs, Soma is spoken of as lord of plants or their king, receiving also the epithet *Vanaśapati*, lord of the forest.

The later Vedic texts mention offerings made to plants and the adoration paid to large trees passed in marriage processions. All the hymns of the *R̥g Veda* X. 146²²⁰, celebrates the forest as a whole, personified as *Aranyāṇi*.

²¹⁸ Gupta, Vijay Kumar, 'Forest and Environment in Ancient India', B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, p. 09.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

²²⁰ अरण्यान्यरण्यान्यसौ या परेव नश्यसि | कथाग्रामं न पर्छसि न तवा भीरिव विन्दती.अ.अ.अन ||

Aranyani, Aranyani, who are as it were, perishing there, why do you not inquire of the village, does not fear assail you.

वर्षारवाय वदते यदुपावति चिच्चिकः | आघाटिभिरिवधावयन्नरण्यानिर्महीयते ||

When the ciccika replies to the crving vrasarva, Aranyani is exalted, resonant as with cymbals.

उत गाव इवादन्त्युत वेशमेव दर्शते | उतो अरण्यानिःसायं शकटीरिव सर्जति ||

Like the Soma plant, there are also some specific trees and plants who have been mentioned in *Yajur Veda* with praise and details. There is a mantra²²¹ which is about a Udumbar tree that is very big and long literally touching the sky and standing on the earth. And to maintain you standing lord Marut and Vāyu helps you.

उद्विय स्तभानाअंतरिक्षम प्रिण द्विह्रस्व प्रिथ्विया दयुतानस्तव मरुतो मिनोतु

मित्रावरुणो ध्रुवे धर्मणा ।

ब्रह्मंवानी त्व क्षत्रवनी रायस्योषवनी पयुहामी ब्रह्मा द्विधा ह क्षत्र द्विध्य ह प्रजा²²² ॥

(Yajur Veda 5. 27)

ध्रुवासी ध्रुवोधन यजमानो भीन्नायतने

प्रजया पशुभिभृत्त्यत घितेन द्वाप्रिथ्वी

पूर्वेधा मित्न्द्रस्य ददिरासी विश्रुजंस्य छाया²²³ ॥

(Yajur Veda 5. 28)

It is as if cows were grazing, and it looks like dwelling and Aranyani at eventide, as it were dismissed the wagons.

गामडगैष आ हवयति दार्वडगैषो अपावधीत | वसन्नरण्यान्यां सायमक्रुक्षदिति मन्यते ॥

This man calls his cow, another cuts down the timber, tarrying in the forest at eventide, one thinks there is a cry.

न वा अरण्यानिर्हन्त्यन्यश्चेन नाभिगच्छति | सवादोःफलस्य जग्ध्वाय यथाकामं नि पद्यते ॥

But Aranyani injures no one unless some other assails him: feeding upon the sweet fruits, he penetrates at will.

आञ्जनगन्धिं सुरभिं बहवन्नामक्रुषीवलाम | पराहम्ग्गाणां मातरमरण्यानिमशंसिषम ॥

I praise the musk-scented, fragrant, fertile, uncultivated Aranyani, the mother of wild animals.

Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *RG Veda Samhita Vol 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.541.

²²¹ Yajur Veda, (5. 27)

²²² 'Prop heaven, fill full the air, on earth stand firmly, Dyutana offspring of the Maruts, plant you Mitra and Varun with firm upholding. I close you in, you winner of the Brahmans, winner of nobles and abundant riches. Strengthen the Brahmans, strengthen you the nobles, strengthen our vital power, and strengthen our offspring.' Translated by, RTH. Griffith, *Yajurveda Samhitā*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2013. p. 60.

²²³ 'Firm set are you, firm be this sacrifice within this home with offspring and with cattle. O heaven and earth be you fitted full fatness. Indra's mats are you, shelter of all the people.' Translated by, RTH. Griffith, *Yajurveda Samhitā*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2013. p. 60.

In another mantra, it seems that the Udumbar tree is a kind of fortune tree who full fills the wishes and that is why the poet is asking for goodness, stability, home, and son. Poet is also offering purified butter to the Udumbar tree so that god Indra can also associate himself also. These trees can also be seen as the major and important forest products however they stayed in the forest but sometimes as a religious ritual its branches, shoots or even leaves use for religious purposes.

अत्यन्या अगा नान्या उपगाम्वाकं त्वा परेभ्योविंद परोवारेभ्यः तं त्वा जुशामाहे देव वनस्पते ।
देव याज्याये देवस्त्वादेवायजयायैजुसंता विष्णवे व्या ओषधे त्रायस्व स्वधिते मेंन ही सी ह²²⁴ ॥

(Yajur Veda 5. 42)

In the sequence of important trees from the forest the next is the Yup tree as mentioned in the above mantra. It is important in the Yup formation. Yup is a kind of medicinal tree because the poet is asking for the Yup trees not any other, and also asking the protector of the forest to specially protect the Yup tree so that gods can get its benefits. It is being requested by the poet that in any condition this tree should not be cut and down.

As we have already discussed the impotence of medicinal plants and it is being considered as the prime forest recourse. In the same line of development, *Yajur Veda* has a very important mantra which tells about the medicinal features of the plants.

²²⁴ 'I have passed others, not approached to others. On the near side of those that were most distant and farther than the nearer I found you. So, for the worship of the gods, with gladness we welcome you god, Sovran of the forest. Let the gods welcome for the gods service. For Vishnu you, plant guard, Axe, do not harm it.' Translated by, RTH. Griffith, *Yajurveda Samhitā*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2013. p. 64.

मधुमान्नो वनस्पतिमधुमारस्तु सूर्यः मध्विगार्वो भवंतुनह²²⁵ ।

(Rg Veda 1.90.8)

According to this mantra, each and every plant and trees have some kind of medicinal features but actually, we don't know all. In the later Vedas, this knowledge about the medicinal characters of plants structured special fields which are known as *Āyur Veda*. In the same mantra, the poet is praying to Lord Sun for the life energy to every plant and cows so that human beings can have a long life free from decease.

In the *Atharva Veda*, *dirghayasūkta IX* is very important because there is three continues mantras telling about severe diseases with the name of medicinal plants.

दशवृक्ष मुय्वेम राक्षसो ग्राध्वा अधि येन जग्राह पर्वसु ।

अधो एनम वनस्पते जीवनं लोकमुन्ने²²⁶ ॥

(Atharva Veda 9. 1)

This is the mantra about *das vrikś* which is being considered as the medicine to remove the *rākṣasi* of *gathia* disease/joint pain and making a prayer to lord *Vanośadhi* to make a fast recovery of the diseased body so that he could again achieve his social status in the society.

The another mantra which is a prayer to lord *Vanaśpati*/ god of the forest and plants in which poet is making a humble request for the diseased person and saying that, O lord *Vanaśpati* please pertain your grace to the diseased one and on all living human beings so that they could join again their family, and can enjoy their rest of the life with sons.

²²⁵ 'May Vanaśpati be possessed of sweetness towards us; may the sun be imbued with sweetness; may the cattle sweet to us'. Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 215.

²²⁶ Griffith, R.T.H., *Hymns of the Atharva Veda*, 185, p. 359.

आगादुद्गाद्य जीवनाम व्रात मप्यागात

अभूद् पुत्राना पिता नृपं च भगवतं²²⁷ ॥

(Atharva Veda 9. 2)

अधितिरध्यगद्यामधि जिवपुरा अगन

शत हास्य भिषजा सहश्रमुत विरुथः²²⁸ ॥

(Atharva Veda 9. 3)

These mantras are full of hope from the recovery of critical diseases by the lord of the forest, Vanaśpatideva. On the examination of the contents of the *Atharva Veda* more in detail, we find that the hostile charms its contents are directed largely against various diseases and demons, which are supposed to cause them, there are spells to cure fever, leprosy, jaundice, dropsy scrofula, cough, fractures and wounds, the bite of snakes or injurious insects. These charms are accompanied by the employment of appropriate herbs. Hence the *Atharva Veda* is the oldest literary monument of Indian medicine, describing the plants' herbs and trees with medicinal value.²²⁹

As if we see the Vedas in the contexts of forests as resources then it appears that forest was full of the natural resources either in terms of new lands, food products, medicinal products or woods for the material applications. We can also not deny the confrontation and tensions among the *rākṣasa* of the forests and the Vedic peoples because of the extension of Vedic socio-political space into the forest. But at the same time, the gradual transition to agriculture made an impact, perhaps indirectly, on other aspects of Vedic life. Among there was the pattern of change in the different sections

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 362.

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 368.

²²⁹ Gupta, Vijay Kumar, 'Forest and Environment in Ancient India', B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, p. 25.

of the society. The Vedic *Jana* (tribe) incorporated a number of *Viṣ* clans.²³⁰ We can also derive a strong argument on the basis of the verses written on the forests that, since Vedic society was a pastoral society and economic activities were at the primary level of surplus production that is why it was difficult to change the realms of human activities other than subsistent food gathering rather than exploring and encountering the deep and dark forest mysteries actually which presided by the age of Upaniṣads which is all about the production and exploration of knowledge within the lap of forest and proliferation of ṛiṣi's *āś'ramas* in the forest.

III.3 Forest as Resource in Upaniṣads

The period (circa 800-500 BC), in which the poetry of the Vedic Saṃhitās arose, was followed by one which produced a totally different literary type the theological treatises called Brāhmaṇas. According to the view of Oldenberg, superior mystic, the sanctity of their contents, were intended to be communicated to the pupil by his teacher in the solitude of the forest instead of in the village. The Upaniṣads mark the last stage of the development in the Brāhmaṇa literature, as they generally come at the end of the Brāhmaṇas, they are also called Vedānta (the end of the Vedas).

The Upaniṣadic tradition is always considered as very rich because of its exponential philosophical discussions and debates over the values of life. Modern scholars have also noticed the change in the orientation from the ritual texts to the Upaniṣadas. Romila Thapar describes the emergence of Upaniṣadic materials as a paradigm shift in the consortium of knowledge in ancient India observing that 'the nature of the shift was from the acceptance of the Vedas as revealed and as controlled by rituals to the

²³⁰ Thapar, Romila, '*Lineage to state*,' Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, p. 29.

possibility that knowledge could be derived from intuition, observation, and analysis.²³¹

According to Brian Black, there is a number of specific changes that are directly reflected in the early Upaniṣads:

1. A Shift in geographical orientations
2. Changing attitude towards sacrifice
3. Changing the definition of Brahmins

These three issues explained by the texts reflect social changes that were taking place during the time of composition and compilation of the Upaniṣads. Brian K. Smith in his article 'looking the forest in respect to the relationship between humans and animals,' trying to see this changing attitude of humans towards the forest with different aspects at the time of Upaniṣads. As we know from the beginning of early human history, hunting is the prime feature of the primitive societies for food, and for that forest is to be considered as the place of hunting but at the time of Upaniṣadas the *araṇya* and *grāma* dichotomy came into larger social domain and on the basis of which some common rules were prescribed for the animal sacrifices., because earlier the sacrificial animal was the major forest product that used to be coming from the forest for a long time.

Now animals were classified on the basis of space they belong; either domestic or village and third the ritually based criteria were deployed for categorizing animals into those which were suitable for the sacrifice and those which were not.²³²

²³¹ Black, Brian, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India Priests, Kings, and Women in the Early Upaniṣads*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2007.

²³² Smith, Brian K., 'Classifying Animals and Humans in Ancient India', *Man, New Series*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep.1991), p. 528.

In certain texts, those dealing with the mammoth animal sacrifice within the *Aśvamedh* or horse sacrifice the number of particular kinds of both village and jungle animals are greatly expanded. In some texts dealing with the rituals, the two types of victims are said to be inclusive of all food as well as all animals. Because they also represent the cosmic totality: the village equated with this world and the jungle with the other world.²³³

Some scholars have made a further distinction between the two categories. *Grāma* and *araṇya* as more widely inclusive terms are seen as dichotomous; whereas *vana* and *kṣetra*, being more specific, as viewed as interactive or even as a continuum. The dichotomy is also suggested by the statement in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* that the sacrificial animal at the yajña should be from the *grāma*, for while a domesticated animal eliminates the undesirable, the sacrificing of a wild animal from the forest has a negative effect.²³⁴ The performance of a yajña is linked inherently to the *grāma*. Village animals can, however, graze in the forest, and pasturelands are frequently seen as a category between the two. The two complementary ways of obtaining meat for eating were hunting and sacrifice. The meat from the hunting was obtained in a non-ritual context, and since it came from *vana*, no controls were required. The meat from the ritual of sacrifice was generally that of a prized animal and was there for infrequently available.²³⁵

Brain K. Smith is also trying to see this animal sacrifice on the basis of the definition of 'paṣu' and argues that the Jungle animals are thus precluded from the sacrifice and as the Upaniṣadic texts indicate are there for not paṣus in the more limited sense of the world. The forest animals are separable from paṣus also by the virtue of different

²³³ Ibid., p. 535.

²³⁴ Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (13. 2. 4. 1)

²³⁵ Thapar, Romila, 'Perceiving the Forest,' in Environmental History of India (ed.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011, p. 144.

ways men dispose of each, Paṣus are the animals that's get sacrificed whatever their origins, mṛigas are the animals that get hunted.²³⁶ But in later periods of Upaniṣads the idea of sacrifice comes under severe debate and minimized because as Romila Thapar argues that 'the Vedic sacrifice becomes too much of an economic strain and as a consequence went in to decline, she further states that the new technology and urbanization was based on iron, the widespread domestication of horse, the extension of plow agriculture and a far more sophisticated market economy than that of earlier period.²³⁷

Since there was extending economic activities and trade routes were crossing the forests also a process of deforestation can be also seen at that time. The legend as described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* clearly indicates that as a result of the pressure of the expanding Vedic population in India, the process of deforestation started as a major factor in the age of the brāhmaṇa. The myth of the fire god Agni moving from the bank of the Saraśvati up to the Sadānīra (Gaṇḍak) river, burning the forest on is way symbolically telling the story of the clearing of Jungles to accommodate the growing population. The legend is integrally reproduced here in order to offer an exact idea about the process of deforestation in the period of brāhmaṇas.²³⁸

From Vedas to Upaniṣads the forest has been regarded as a space of various natural resources as we discussed in this section the Upaniṣadic period is to be considered as the time of Aranyakas or forest where all kinds of knowledge production were being taken place. And also various literary stories evolved around the forest as the main

²³⁶ Smith, Brian K., 'Classifying Animals and Humans in Ancient India', *Man, New Series*, Vol. 26, No. 3. (Sep., 1991), p. 535.

²³⁷ Thapar, Romila, Ethics, Religion, and Social Protest in the First Millennium B.C., in Northern India, *Daedalus*, Vol. 104, No. 2, Wisdom, Revelation, and Doubt: Perspectives on the First Millennium B.C. (Spring 1975), p. 120.

²³⁸ Gupta, Vijay Kumar, '*Forest and Environment in Ancient India*', B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, p. 48.

theme where exile became a necessary event for the protagonists of the stories, through these stories which were mostly written by the ṛiṣis; as claimed were written in the forest as well as about the forest. The epics are best examples to study about the forest resources in ancient India because in each of the epics there is a proper section devoted completely to the forests in order to describe and explain the true nature of the forest, as in *Rāmāyaṇa* there is *Aranyakāṇḍ*, in *Mahābhārata* there is *Vanaparv*. These both are important to understand the various aspects of the forest as social, political, or economic.

III.4 Forest as Resource in the Rāmāyaṇa

Aranyakāṇḍ, the book of forest within the *Rāmāyaṇa* is a literary codification of socio-historical accommodation of material realism of forest with urban moral values in order to create a social sharing space within the conflicts and contradictions. *Aranyakāṇḍ* is a section of *Rāmāyaṇa* where Rām, Lakṣman, and Sītā is getting into the forest as per their exile and exploring the forest from *Chitrakūt* to *Pañchvati*. In the description of the *Aranyakāṇḍ* poet is minutely explaining about the whole forest particularly from the kinds of grass to the kinds of animals have been mentioned in detail, if we would critically examine each of the verses, the possibility to perceive the forest increases.

कुशचीरपरिक्षिप्तं ब्राह्म्या लक्ष्म्या समावृतम्

यदा प्रदीप्त दुर्दर्श गगने सूर्यमंडलम्²³⁹ ॥

(Aranyakāṇḍ 1. 2)

²³⁹ ‘They (the hermitages) were strewn all over with kusa grass and robes by bark with auspicious sacrificial materials around and hence dazzling like the orb of the sun in the sky difficult to gaze.’

The śloka (1. 2) from *Aranyakāṇḍ* is telling us about hermitages, where how the ‘Kush’ grass have been stored in much quantity because it is very useful in the yajña. The ashram residents have spread the woods here and there to make them dry so that they could use it as firewood. In this verse, we come to know about the abundance of Kush grass which is an important forest grass used during the performance of yajña and firewoods. Here we can also analyze the horizontal spread of forest because the settlements of the ṛiṣis were depicted at the fringes of forests and they use to go deeper in the forest for important forest products and resources as in the following verse.

समि म्दिस्तोय कलशैः फलमूलैश्च शोभितम्

आरंयेश्च महावृक्षैः पुण्यैः स्वादुफलेर्युतम्²⁴⁰ ॥

(*Aranyakāṇḍ* 1. 5)

In this śloka, other important forest fruits which are very tasty with some sweet roots have been mentioned in the ashram particularly with an earthen pot that is full of water. The earthen pot is very important in various senses because it also symbolizes the penetration of urban culture with the coming of people who came to visit āśrama as kings and others.

फल मुलाशनैर्दयान्तैश्चचिरकृष्णाजिनाम्बरे

सूर्यवैश्वानाराभयश्च पुराणमूर्निभीर्वृतम्²⁴¹ | (*Aranyakāṇḍa* 1. 7)

²⁴⁰ ‘The hermitages looked glorified with dances by celestial damsels. They were adorned with vast fire sanctuaries, ladles for sacrificial ceremonies, deerskins and kusa grass faggots for pots of water, roots and fruits. They looked delightful with huge sacred trees of the forest laden with sweet fruits.’ As translated by Prof. P. Geervani, Prof. K. Kamala and Shri V. V. Subba Rao, under the guidance of Prof. H.K. Sathapathy VC, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peetham, Tirupati in a project developed by Indian Institute of Kanpur (IIT) which is available at www.Valmiki.iitk.ac.in

²⁴¹ ‘The hermitages where various sacrificial offerings were made reverberated with Vedic chantings. Flowers were scattered all over. There was a lotus pond with lotuses. There were aged, self restrained sages glowing like the Sun or the fire, living on fruits and roots, clothed in bark and dark deerskin.’

The above śloka gives us to detail the basic feature about the ṛiṣis those who are residing in the forest, and according to verse they use to eat roots and shoots of the plants and trees and wear the dead skin of deer. This indicates that the forests were providing good amounts of fruits for their survival, but the main point of the verse is the dead skin of deer because it arises some questions that do they hunt the deer's for the skin if analyze carefully the whole Vedic tradition we would find that there was a strong demand for the deer's skin from the ṛiṣis because it has been an integral part of the rituals during the *yajña*. On the basis of these kinds of verses from the Vedas and Epics, we can say that forest was supplying continuously this dead deerskin for a long time and full-filling its demand from within the forest as well as outside the forest.

वैखानसा वालखिल्याः सम्प्राक्षाला मरीचिपा

अस्मकुट्टाश्च बहवः पत्राहाराश्च धार्मिकाः ॥

दांतो लुखलिनश्चैव तथैवोमाज्जाकाः परे

गास्त्रशयया अश्याश्च तथैवा भाव काशका ॥

मुनयः सलिलाहारा वायु भक्षास्तथापरे

आकाशानिल याश्च तथा स्थपिण्डलशायिनः

वृतोपवासिनो दंतास्तथार्द्रपटवाससः

सजपाश्च तपोनित्यास्तथा पञ्च तापोवितो²⁴² ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa 6. 2-5)

²⁴² 'Vaikhanasas, Valakhilyas, sages who continuously wash their bodies, Marichakas Asmakuttas sages who live on leaves only, those who have teeth like mortar, Unmajjakas, those who use limbs as their bed, those who practise penance without using a bed, those who do penance in the open, unmindful of rain or Sun or wind, those who live on water only, those who penance under the open sky, those who carry on penance on high places like the mountaintop, those who recline on bare ground only, those who observe fast as a part of religious tradition, those self restrained men, those who mutter sacred mantras, those who constantly perform penance and those who stand under the blazing Sun in

Since the forest was the toughest place to survive, and to perform austerity it is the only place outside the urban society. Due to the unavailability of foods in different seasons, the ṛiṣis have adopted various kinds of food culture as mentioned in the above verses, this also indicates the kinds of people living in the forest might have different socio-historical developments and because of that they have different kinds of food practices and identities.

For *Vaikhanas* ṛiṣis it is to be believed that they have originated from the nails of Brahma; the *Valkhilya* ṛiṣis is considered that they are from the pores of the skin of Brahma; *Sampratāl* ṛiṣis finds their birth from the water which has touched the feet of Brahma; these identities also look like the idea of Purus from the tenth section of *R̥g Veda* where on the basis of origin of human beings from Brhamā have shown and formulated the ground for caste system.

The above three continuous verses from the *Aranyakāṇḍa* gives a briefing about the variant food practices among the sages. *M̥srichish* were the sages those who were dependent on the rays of the moon for their survival, *Ḁsmkūt* were the sages those who use to eat grains by grinding them on stone. *Patrāhar* were the sages who were living by eating leaves only. *Dantolukhali* were the sages who eat only uncooked grains.

Grains can be seen here as an important marker of expansion of agriculture into the forest because there are several verses which show on some significant ritual or occasion in which grains have been served to the guest, as in the following śloka:-

summer placing fire on four sides while performing penance all these types of sages met Rama in the hermitage of Sarabhanga.’

ततः शुभं तापस भोज्यमन्नम

स्वयं सुतीक्ष्ण पुरुषर्षभाभ्याम्

ताभ्यां सुसत्कृत्य दद्रो महात्मा

संध्यानिवृतो रजनीमवेक्ष्य²⁴³ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍ 7. 24)

According to this śloka when Rāma visited the hermitage of sage Sutikṣṇa, they were offered fruits, roots, and grains, but it is not clear that which kind of grain is this either it is rice or any other pulses. We can argue here that instead of the ṛṣis those who were surviving on the non-traditional foods as we have mentioned in an earlier verse, there is also a group of ṛṣis which might have practicing agriculture for subsistence or there is also possible that they receive them from the nearest human settlements as alms.

Apart from agriculture, there were large and rich vegetation has been shown in verses where the poet has tried to identify each and every important plant and tree which was related to humans.

यथो दृष्टेन मार्गेण वनमालोकयम्

निवारान्पन्नसान्स्तालास्तिसान्द्रादुलाध्वाम

चिरीबिल्वान्मधूकांच बिल्वानपी च तिन्दुकान

पुशिपतांदुविताग्राभिर्लताभिर्नुवेस्टीतान

ददर्श रामः शतशस्त्रव कान्तार पादपान

हस्ती हस्तैर्विर्मृदितानन्तान्वारना नरे रूप शोभिताम् ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa 7. 75-77)

²⁴³ 'Seeing that the evening had passed and night had set in, the great sage Sutikshna with due hospitality, served those best of men, food fit for ascetics. Thus ends the seventh sarga of Aranyakanda of the holy Ramayana the first epic composed by sage Valmiki.'

While Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā were going towards *Pañchavati* they were seeing a beautiful forest full of greenery and vegetation and in this place, the poet is mentioning about variety of trees like *Nivar*, *Katahal* (Jack Fruit), *Shāl*, *Vanjuel*, *Tinish*, *Dhaak*, *Mahuā* and old creeper plants encircled the trees. This is a good description of the forest trees and plants but the important factor which should be noted here that the maximum plants and trees as mentioned here are the vegetables directly or indirectly related to the non-forest society. This indicates the expansion of non-forest identities into forest land.

J. L. Brockington in his book '*Righteous Rāma*' mentioning a very important point in the context of the forest as a recourse, commercial exploitation of the forests is hardly alluded to at all at any stage. Two incidental references to charcoal (*angārā*) from the second stage attest a more systematic use for fuel than the piles of firewood near āśramas. The common comparison of a warrior's fall to that of a tree can usually refer as naturally to a tree uprooted by a gale as to deliberate felling; occasionally the latter is suggested, however (e.g. *nīkr̥tta iva pād̥pah*). The details of the destruction of the *Madhuvana* show that this area was the private preserve of the Vānara chief but it does not anything resembling as a commercial orchard. Indeed, it is by no means clear which trees, if any, were actually cultivated.

Abundant references to Sandalwood (*Chandana* and *raktchandana*) shows that this was a valued commodity as was the aguru (aloe wood) with which it is not infrequently linked, while there is also one late reference to Camphor (*Karpura*, 6.116.51). However, there is no direct evidence for whether such trees were actually cultivated or their products gathered from the wild specimens.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Brockington, J. L., '*Righteous Rama*', Oxford University Press, New York, 1984, p. 100.

The *Rāmāyana* is a text which is full of references and events from the forests. From *Aranyakāṇḍ* to *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍ* Rāma spent ten years of his exile in visiting several *āśramas* of the Daṇḍak area and exploring the various aspects of the forest as well as the forest peoples like; *Rākṣasas*, *Vānaras*, *Niṣādas*, *Asuras*, *Devas*, *Gandharvas*, and *Apśaras*.²⁴⁵ With the increase of economic activities interaction between the peoples of different communities enhances as well as the evolutions of states cause for the movement of resources and from then instead of plants and skins of dead animals, iron from the forest areas where their deposition has come under the power of states particularly for the constructions of weapons and tools, and this becomes more visible in the *Mahābhārta* age.

III.5 Forest as Resource in the Mahābhārata

The *Mahābhārata* which is also known as fifth Veda is the largest literary text written ever in the world. It is the story about the war between *Kauravas* and *Pāṇḍavas* for the kingdom and power. The text has several sections and subsections, narratives and meta-narratives with wonderful socio-political and philosophical debate and discussions and numerous instances of moral dilemmas under the paradigm of the Idea of Dharma. Historians like D. D. Kosambi, R. S. Sharma and Romila Thapar have studied the text with critical perspectives and tries to extract the historical part from it from the material interpretation of the text.

Here we can also see a section of the text to critically analyze the representation of the forest in Vanaparva when Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī stayed in the forest as a part of their exile. According to J. A. B. Van Buitenen the book has traditionally two names, the

²⁴⁵ Vyas, S. N., '*India in the Ramayana Age*', Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi, 1967, p. 17.

Vanaparva the book of the forest, the *Aranyakparva* the book of the forest teachings. In the first group, that of the "forest" included the Pāṇḍavas' encounter with the demon Kirmira and his slaying, the arrival of Kṛṣṇa; Arjuna's journey to the world of Indra; Bhima's search for the saugandhika flowers and his encounter with his half brother Hanumāna; the cattle expedition of the Kauravas. The second group comprises the story of Nala; the accounts of pilgrimages to the sacred places, and the many episodes that are inspired by the actual one; the battle with the Nivatakavacas, the Session with Mārkaṇḍeya and the story of Rāma related by Mārkaṇḍeya.²⁴⁶

From all these sub-stories from the *Vanaparva*,²⁴⁷ there are some important sections that give us a glimpse of the forest and forest society in more detail. There are some verses in each sub-section which gives us the symbolic meanings to read the historical part from the *Mahābhārata*.

त्वं ममापन्न कामस्य सर्व तिथ्यं चिकीर्षतः

अन्नमपते दातुमभितः श्रद्धयारसी²⁴⁸ ॥

(Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 67)

The above śloka in which Yudhiṣṭhir is asking for the food to the lord Sun in the forest is a striking subject in order to understand the nature of forest and Pāṇḍavas. Because in the case of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā in *Rāmāyaṇa* they had never asked for any kind of assistance regarding foods and other things, but at the beginning of

²⁴⁶ Van Buitenen, J. A. B., *The Mahabharata: The Book of the Assembly Hall and the Book of the Forest*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975, p. 175.

²⁴⁷ Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa (Translated in to English from Original Sanskrit Text)*, Vol. III, Vānaparva, Munshiram Manoharlal, Publisher Pvt. Ltd. 2001, first published in 1896.

²⁴⁸ 'O lord of all food, you should grant me abundance of food to entertain all my guests with reverence.' As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Vanparva, p. 08.

Vanaparva Pāṇḍavas has requested to lord Sun to full fill their food demands. This shows that either in the forest there was a scarcity of fruits and other kinds of food because of continues exploitation of forest by the states or people as by the expansion of agricultural fields into the forest. In *Rāmāyaṇa* the condition was different as it seems in *Mahābhārata*, and on the basis of this comparison, we can argue that a strong change has occurred in the nature of forests and forests products.

तत तेऽभिलिप्तम किञ्चित तत त्वं सर्वमावाप्स्यासी

अहमन्नं प्रदस्यामी सप्त पञ्च च ते सयाः²⁴⁹ ॥

(*Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 3/68*)

If we try to interpret the next śloka which is in the same context where lord Sun is giving a metal pot to king Yudhiṣṭhira with the words that this will provide you foods for twelve years from now and Pāṇḍvas will never face problems regarding food anywhere in the forest. This śloka also might have other philosophical meanings like Sun is the ultimate source of every kind of energy and that is why the Pāṇḍavas do not have to depend on the forest for food.

In the *Vanaparva* there is a more socio-political line of verse in the *Araṇyaparva* where the river inside the forest is dividing the region as a geographical border like it has been a worldwide socio-political phenomenon where rivers and mountains are being considered as borders for geopolitical regions.

²⁴⁹ ‘O king, accept this copper vessel that I present you. O man of excellent vows, so long the Panchala Princes will hold this vessel without partaking of its contents, -fruits, roots, meats and vegetables cooked in your kitchen, the four kinds of food, shall from this day be inexhaustible. *Vanaparva/Araṇyaparv*, p. 08.

सरस्वती दृष्टव्यो यमुनां च निषेत्यते ।

ययुर्वनेनैव वनं सततं पश्चिम दिशं²⁵⁰ ॥

(Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 5/2)

ततः सरस्वतिकुले समेषु मरुध्वंसु ।

काम्यकं नाम दृशुर्वन मुनिजनप्रियं²⁵¹ ॥ (Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 5/3)

The meaning of the above verse is very simple but it is very important in order to understand the socio-political use of forest spaces; like rivers, Saraśvatī and Yamunā have been shown in this verse as a divider of the region. And this region seems more social rather than political in its nature. The next verse to the above one is explaining that the Pāṇḍavas have traveled a lot from the river Saraśvatī to the region of desert and then they reached the *Kāmyakavana* which is known to be a favorite place among munīs.

प्रीत्या च तेऽहं दास्यामि यद्स्त्र मुनीवारितम् ।

त्वं ही सक्तो मदीयं तद्स्त्रम धारापितुं क्षणात्²⁵² ॥ (Vanaparva-Kairataparva-Verse 71)

The forest has been shown differently in various texts; because of variations of socio-political changes cause the change in the geographical patterns as it is visible in the case between *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. But even after these various

²⁵⁰ ‘Performing the ablutions in the Sarasvati, the Drisdawati and the Yamuna, they went from one forest to another travelling in a westerly direction.’ As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Vanparva, Aranyaparva, p. 10.

²⁵¹ ‘Then at last they saw before them the forest of Kamyaka on the bank of Saraswati, and on a level and wild plain which was ever charming to the ascetics.’ As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Vanparva, Aranyaparva, p. 10.

²⁵² ‘Shiva said, being pleased with you, I shall give you an irrestible weapon; you shall soon acquire great weapons.’ As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Aranyaparva/Kairatparva, p. 62.

transformations or what we call the material changes that occurred with respect to time the philosophical and mythical aspects of forests remain the same.

In both the epics forest has been depicted as a sacred place to get boon mostly in the form of weapons as in the case of *Kirāta* episode²⁵³ where Arjuna receives blessing from lord Śiva; mentioned in the above verse from *Kirātaparva*. It is a subject for us to critically analyze the reason behind attaining weapons and powers by the protagonists of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* particularly in the forest and from here we can argue that forests can be projected as a resource in the form of space to perform austerity and to achieve boons.

रुरून कृष्ण मृगाक्षेव मेध्यं कश्चन्यान वनेशचरात ।

बाणेरुमध्य विविधैर्ब्राह्मणेभ्यो न्येवेद्यत²⁵⁴ ॥

(Vanaparva-Indraloknirgaman-Verse 7)

प्रची राजा दक्षिणा भीमसेनो

यमौ प्रति चिमथ वाप्युदिचिम ।

धनुर्धाण सहितो मृगाना

क्षयं चक्रुर्नितय मेयो पग्म्य²⁵⁵ ॥

(Vanaparva-Indraloknirgaman-Verse 11)

²⁵³ Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa (Translated in to English from Original Sanskrit Text)*, Vol. III, Vānaparva, Munshiram Manoharlal, Publisher Pvt. Ltd. 2001, first published in 1896.

²⁵⁴ 'He dedicated the black and other kinds of deer and clean animals of the forest to those Brahmins, after having killed them with his arrows.' As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Vanparva, Indralokgamanparva, p. 75.

²⁵⁵ 'The king going towards the east and Bhima towards the south, and the twins towards the west or north, put an end to the race of the deer in the forest (by daily killing them with their bows) for the sake of meat.' As translated by M. N. Dutt, *The Mahabharata*, Vanparva, Indralokgamanparva, p. 75.

The poet has described the *Kāmyakavan* in detail while Pāṇḍavas were walking through the forest. In the present verse the various kinds of animals particularly ‘deer’ has been mentioned. Apart from deer, there are other dangerous animals that are also there. The Pāṇḍavas use to kill these deadly animals for their skins and offered to the brāhmaṇas and ṛiṣis. As we have discussed earlier that the ‘skin’ of dead animals have been remained very special and it is a paradox that the ṛiṣis who was believed to be the renouncer and preachers of peace and knowledge were actually producing a demand which was indirectly related to the killing of animals.

The above verse also reveals a very interesting thing that they use to go for a hunt in the forest at different directions and they killed the people those who were mentioned in the verse as ‘*dhanushdhāri*’, now the question arises that who were these ‘*dhanusdhāris*’ in the forest? If we critically analyze the place and situations then it seems that they might be the inhabitants of the forest or *Niṣādas*. If we connect this confrontation to the sociological theories of great and little traditions or the expansion of state-society to the tribal societies then we would find that as Romila Thapar has argued that the *āśramas* and hermitages are the agents of states in order to make way to the threshold of forests. In the same way, we can argue that the system of exile is devised in such a way that the information about all forest resources could be collected and later can be used for the benefit of the state.

In the words of Van Buitenen, the forest is the wilderness that has not been under cultivation, it may be described as not yet the village. But simultaneously it is also no more the village, it is the place for those who for various reasons have said farewell to

the village either from necessity as in the case of our heroes or from the personnel choice.²⁵⁶

The episode of *Yakṣa Praśan*²⁵⁷, emerges out of the *Vanaparva* as the oasis of moral, social, and religious values of settled state-society govern by the idea of Dharma in the forest of tribal and primitive societies. It is also believed that the book of the forest is the celebration of the highest values in the moral code of the ancient Indians, truthfulness, and faithfulness under all circumstances.²⁵⁸

मा तात सहसं कश्चिर्मम पुर्वपरिग्रहः

प्रश्नानुफत्वा तू कौन्तेय ततः पिव हरस्व च²⁵⁹ ॥

(Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 34)

इमे ते भ्रातरो राजन वर्यामाना मयासक्रित

बलात् तोयं जिहिर्पतस्ततो वय मृदिता मया

न पेय मुदकमं राजनं प्राणनिह परिप्सता

पार्थ मा साहस कश्चिर्मम पूर्वपरिग्रहः

प्रश्नानुक्तावा तू कौन्तेय ततः पिव हरस्व च²⁶⁰ ॥

(Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 40-42)

²⁵⁶ Van Buitenen, J. A. B., *The Mahabharata: The Book of the Assembly Hall and the Book of the Forest*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975, p. 175.

²⁵⁷ Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa (Translated in to English from Original Sanskrit Text)*, Vol. III, Vanaparva, Munshiram Manoharlal, Publisher Pvt. Ltd. 2001, first published in 1896.

²⁵⁸ Van Buitenen, J. A. B., *The Mahabharata: The Book of the Assembly Hall and the Book of the Forest*, p. 177.

²⁵⁹ 'If however you drink before answering my questions, you will die as you will drink.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Vana Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 444.

²⁶⁰ 'Thus addressed by the Yaksha of unrivalled energy, soon as Bhima without answering his questions, drank of it he fell down dead. Then the best of men, the royal son of Kunti of mighty arms, whose heart was burning in grief after much deliberation, rose up. And entered the mighty forest where no sound of human voice could be heard. It was inhabited by rurus, boars and birds.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Vana Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, pp. 444-445.

If we carefully read the above śloka which is from *Yakṣa-praśan*, we would find a different meaning. Instead of a philosophical and moral explanation, we should also see the events on the subjective point of view where facts and reasons are to be considered as more close to the socio-historical realities. In the above verse, Yakṣa is saying to Yudhiṣṭhir that the lake belongs to him and no one can challenge his authority over the water of the lake and even Yudhiṣṭhir accepts his authority. This might have evidence of the idea of ‘private property’ within the forest resources because of the expansion of economy and agriculture towards forests. It has also been argued by S. N. Vyas²⁶¹ in the case of *Rāmāyaṇa* that the Yakṣa are the inhibitors of forests grooves with higher standards of lifestyle in comparison to others.

तत सतां शिवां श्रुत्वा वाचं स परुषकश्राम
यक्षस्य ब्रवतो राजन्नुपक्रम्य तथा स्थितः ॥
विरुपाक्षम महाकायं यक्षम ताल सभुचक्ष्यम
ज्वलनार्कप्रतिकाषम धित्यम पर्वतो पयम ॥
वृक्षमसृत्य त्स्थितम ददर्श भरत्पर्भ
मेघगाम्भिर्नादेन तर्ज्यन्तः महास्वप्नम²⁶² ॥
(Vanaparva-Araṇyaparva-Verse 37-39)

It perceives like the Yakṣa which has been described in the way into the above verse symbolizes them as they do not belong to forest origin but they have come from outside of forest domain. According to above verse 37-39, Yakṣa was sitting over a

²⁶¹ Vyas, S. N., *India in the Ramayana Age*, Atma Ram and Sons, New Delhi, 1967.

²⁶² ‘Thereupon, hearing those inauspicious words couched in harsh letters which the Yaksha was speaking, he (Yudhisthira) O king approaching him stood there, And the best of the Bharatas saw the huge bodied Yaksha endued with unnatural eyes, tall as palm tree, blazing like the sun or the fire, irresistible, huge as a rock, staying on a tree.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Vana Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 446.

tree with a heavy and tall body appearance, but at the same time, he was also looking not any below than the grace of Lord Agni and lord Sūrya.

The next important sub-section of the book *Vānparva* is *Ghoshyātra*²⁶³, this is about the encounter of Kauravas to Gandharvas in Dwaitavana.

गण रप्सरसां चैव त्रिदशानाम तथात्मजैः

विहारशीलः क्रिद्रथे तेन ततः संवृतं सरः²⁶⁴ ॥

(Vanaparva-Ghoshyatraparva-Verse 22)

दुर्योधनं चित्रसेनो विरथं पतितं भुवि

अभिद्रित्य महाबाहु जीवंग्राहमथाग्रहीत²⁶⁵ ॥ (Vanaparva-Ghoshyatraparva-Verse 06)

The story of *Ghoshyātra* is very important in order to understand the politics within the forest for the occupation of space between Kauravas and Gandharvas. As per the translations of the above verses, the Gandharvas was having leisure in the forest at a pond. The same pond was claimed by Duryodhana, and then there was a fight between them. The Gandharvas captured the Kuru prince Duryodhana, and Pāṇḍavas helped them to release Duryodhana.

We can interpret the event of the encounter between Duryodhana and Gandharvas as the struggle for the forest resource which is actually a pond and moreover for the

²⁶³ Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa (Translated in to English from Original Sanskrit Text)*, Vol. III, Vānparva, Munshiram Manoharlal, Publisher Pvt. Ltd. 2001, first published in 1896.

²⁶⁴ 'O ruler of men, this plan which has no difficulty to be carried out was. What I also saw for the purpose of going to (Dwaitavana). The King will certainly grant us permission, or even he may send us there of his own accord. Our herds of cattle are now all waiting to see the forest of Dwaitavana. We may certainly go there under the pretext of seeing our cattle.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Vana Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 351.

²⁶⁵ 'With their arrows, they cut off into pieces its yoke, shafts, fenders, flag-staff, three fold bamboo poles and the chief tureet. They also cut off his charioteers and horses. When Duryodhana thus deprived of his car fell on ground, the mighty armed Chitrasen rushed upon him and seized him with such force that it seemed as if hi life itself was taken.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Vana Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 355.

claim for the forest, because at that time it seems that forest was also to be considered as a place for leisure by the non forest peoples as in this case. A forest is also to be considered the place for *Vānaras*, *Rākṣas*, *Niṣādas*, *Gandharvas*, *Asuras*, and *Nāgas*; all they use to find in the forests according to the descriptions from epics. They all have made the forest a social space for different communities, but in the stories like the verses have shown also depict conflicts and confrontations regarding the encroachment on forests by peoples from outside.

On the basis of the mentioned verses in this section of *Vanaparva*, we can say that the idea of forest in terms of resources has changed. Now the struggle for space is also appearing within the forest as well the fight for land is a central theme of *Mahābhārata*, which actually shows a synchronic historical transformation due to the change in the mode of production from subsistence farming to surplus production which leads to change in the definition of ‘forest’.

III.6 Conclusion

The prevailing idea ‘forest as a resource’, in the society, has long historical transformations. From the time of Vedas to Upaniṣadas and then Upaniṣads to Epic traditions there is a strong sense of variation in the meaning of forest. In the Vedas, the forest has been worshiped as *Vanaśpatideva* and *Aranyāni* so that the Vedic people can achieve a good quantity and quality of life-saving medicines in the forms of plants and herbs but also various forest products as fruits, shoots, and firewood. The Vedic people have worshiped forest not only because of getting benefits from it but also due to fear and danger which comes from the ‘forest origin’ of *Dāvāgni*/forest fire.

Upaniṣads and Aranyakās are showing a very different perspective about the idea of a forest, now the forest has become the space for knowledge production and practice of austerity. It can be argued on the basis of cited verses that it was the time of shift in a social structure where whole human life was divided into four *āśramas*, and the fourth one is to be known as Vānprasth. It means now the forests have become an integral part of human life because it is believed that forest is another world where human emotions, necessities, and patience to be tested and guided by a guru in the right way. In another word, we can say that in the time of Upaniṣadas the forest has become a new space for the settlements of ṛiṣis, munīs and students so that they can find the answers of some eternal philosophical questions at a peaceful place.

Epic traditions have dealt with forests very differently, now they have learned to use maximum forest resources, but the highest demand from the forest was ‘new lands’ for agriculture and pastureland for cattle herd. As Upaniṣads formulated the idea of ‘Vānprasth’, the epics have devised the idea of ‘exile’ to explore the hidden secrets of forests and its resources so that the state-society can avail the valuable natural resources for its development and exploitation.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to see the idea of ‘forest as a resource’, through the various examples and the numerous aspects of transformations in the understanding of forests. On the basis these transformations in the ‘*idea of forests*’ we can argue that, ‘because of the change in the mode of production from hunting and gathering society to agricultural society, and from subsistent farming to the surplus production, has increased the demands for the ‘*new lands*’ from forests. And within the forest, a struggle for space as a resource, has also created the tussle within as well as at the peripheries of the forests.

Chapter Four

Forest and States

IV.1 Introduction

The state is the socio-political entity gradually developing and modifying in its form and nature from the last 3000 years to till now. Various scholars and political thinkers have contributed to defining the idea of the state as well as formulated new political theories to make it is functioning better. The state has remained the main subject for study and analysis from the times of great western political thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. However, in Ancient India greats, sages and philosophers like Bhīṣma, Nārada, Bṛiḥaspati, and Kauṭilya have looked into the genesis and problem of the state.

According to the western political thinkers Plato and Aristotle, the fusion of ethics and politics were responsible for the common belief in ancient Greeks that “the state comes into existence for the sake of life and continues for the sake of good life”²⁶⁶ which is also called as social contract theory. While the Indian scholars and philosophers have interpreted the origin of ancient Indian states through evolutionary theory.

Historians like A. S. Altkar, B. C. Law and H. C. Raychaudhuri supported the theory of the evolutionary origin of the state. Altkar argues that with the Indo-Aryan communities, the state also evolved in India in prehistoric times out of the institution of joint family. R. S. Sharma in his book ‘*Aspects of Political ideas and institutions in*

²⁶⁶ Gauba, O. P., *Western Political Thought*, Macmillan Publishers India Ltd, New Delhi, 2011, p. 36.

Ancient India’ have analyzed the role of family, Varna, and property in the evolution of the state, from the examples of *Ayodhyā kāṇḍ* of *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Śānti Parva* and *Dīgha Nikāya*.²⁶⁷ However, at the same time, Indian historians like K. P. Jaysawal and D. R. Bhandarkar have also looked the traces of contract theory for the origin of states in the Vedas.

Romila Thapar has also critically looked into the origin of the ancient Indian state and she had applied a theory called ‘*conquest theory*’ to understand the emergence of states in early India. She has argued that “the transition from an absence of state to state systems in the mid-first millennium BC has generally been treated as a sudden change. Ṛg Vedic society has been described as a tribal society and that the later Vedic period as one of the state-based kingdoms, transition has occurred during the period from the late second to the early first millennium BC this has sometimes been assumed on the basis of the conquest theory”²⁶⁸. As per this theory ‘after the supposed conquest of the area by the Aryans when they gained control over the indigenous society, the state almost automatically come into existence’²⁶⁹.

With all these above theories and speculations regarding the origin of early Indian states, here we will try to see the various connections and complexities in relation to the forest. Forest as space and various forest-dwelling groups have been mentioned in most of the early Sanskrit sources and therefore it is important to see their relationships with the evolution of early states. D. N. Jha has looked into the Vedic

²⁶⁷ Sharma, Ram Sharan, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banaridas Publishers, Delhi, 1959.

²⁶⁸ Thapar, Romila, *From lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p. 04.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 04.

society through ‘*the battle of ten kings*’ *dasrājan*, it is the most important tribal war within the Ṛg Veda.²⁷⁰

In the above arguments of Romila Thapar and D. N. Jha, both are saying the same thing but in a different way; the first argument is about the ‘theory of conquest’ the supremacy by the Aryans over the area, while D. N. Jha is also saying about war and conquest for the supremacy among the Aryan tribes. Now the question arises, was what the reason for this war and why they were fighting? In order to find the answer to this question first, we need to understand the relationship between forest and state.

Historian R. C. Majumdar has looked into the idea of sovereignty for the development of states in ancient India. Majumdar argues that it is said in the *Aittrīya Brāhmaṇa* (1.1.14) that “gods and demons fought with one another, but the gods were defeated, whereupon they said: it is because we have no king that the demons defeated us; so let us elect a king.”²⁷¹ The elected king was Indra and he had all the powers as well as sovereignty and hence the idea of kingship evolved.

The development of state-society can be studied in three continue phases/stages, first as the Vedic stage where the proto-states as small tribal communities were evolving, second is the Upaniṣadic age stage which can also be called as developing stage and third is the Epic age when there is mature forms of state-society have been marked in the stories of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. Here it is an interesting point is that we not see the development of state society in a continue monolithic manner because even in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* various tribal societies have been shown as still going through the proto stage and primitive way of living.

²⁷⁰ Jha, D. N., *Ancient India: In Historical Outline*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2009, p. 44.

²⁷¹ Majumdar, R. C., *Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, New Delhi, 1952, p. 74.

The whole relationship between forest and development of state-society can be better understood through the Marxist theory of *production relations*. In the first stage, there was tribal society surviving on the forest products directly, they had matrilineal society as stated by D. D. Kosambi and there was no settled agriculture and surplus production at all. Vedic tribal chiefs were the leader of the groups and they were fighting among them for supremacy over the land and resources.

Later Vedic age or Upaniṣadic age is marked by the change in the mode of production from pastoral economy to agricultural economy, surplus production leads to the evolution of private property and for the protection of property and society, kingship evolved. However, the importance of forest becomes more relevant because the state was under indeed pressure for new lands which was needed for the extension of agriculture so that the growing population could manage to survive. At the same, we come to know from the stories of Upanisads that the people's perception towards perceiving the forest has been also changed. Earlier in the Vedas forest was shown as a dangerous and mysterious place full of wild animals but gradually stories like *Pururva-Urvaśi*, *Nala-Damyanti*, and *Duśyant-Śakuntala* have presented the forest as a place of pleasure and peace where the Protagonists of the stories perceive a different experience from the state societies.

According to Romila Thapar, 'the historical context to these stories is a lineage-based society, with chiefdoms moving towards incipient kingdoms. Authority is concentrated in the ruling clans and its distribution is linked to the birth and closeness to the senior clans. Cattle keeping and cultivation of crops sustained society, the

former requiring control over large acres of pasture land, some in forest regions. Hunting was also a mechanism for asserting control over grazing grounds.²⁷²

Now epics are the major source to understand the relationship between newly evolving states and forests. Scholars have argued that in both of the epics either *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mahābhārata* forest is the inseparable part of the texts. When we closely observe these two texts, particularly the entry points of protagonists into the deep forests we would find that the situations are the same in both the places.

Kirmira in *Mahābhārata* and Viradha in *Rāmāyaṇa*, merely guard access to the forest or have little to do with the larger plot or divine plan. In contrast, exit encounters are momentous. Rāma must subdue Kabandha to learn about Sugrīva, and thus how to find Sītā. In Draūpadis case, while the Pāṇḍvas leave her behind her in Mārkaṇdeys hermitage, they meet Dharma disguised as murderous Yakśa, whose second of three boons in that the Pāṇḍvas and Draūpadī will be able to pass their thirteen years as unidentified in a place of their choosing²⁷³. In this analysis, we come to know that exist encounters have more to do with the divine plot, while the entry encounters are more to do with basic struggle with the forest dwellers.

With the coming of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* age, the idea of caste and *Varṇa* system imbibed strongly with the idea of kingship. “The authorities of kings derived partly from stories of righteous heroism in the great epics of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, which bestowed upon them the legitimacy of sacred right to rule”²⁷⁴.

Here we can also argue that the idea of heroism is a central theme in the epics and it has worked for those who were from the non Kṣatriya backgrounds as well.

²⁷² Thapar, Romila, *Sakuntala*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 13.

²⁷³ Bagchee, Jaydeep (ed.), *Reading the Fifth Veda studies on Mahabharata*, Essays by Alf Hiltebeitel, Brill, Boston, 2011, p. 121.

²⁷⁴ Avari, Burjor, *India the Ancient Past: A history of the Indian Sub-Continent from 7000 BC to 1200 AD*, Routledge Publishers, Oxon, 2007, p. 89.

One of the major consequences of penetration of state society in the forest society was the expansion for brāhmaṇical culture and tradition into deep forest regions. *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have also inculcated the idea of Dharma into the hinterlands. But here the important argument about the propagation of personnel and social morality is more important because as well as with the increase in surplus production and expansion of agriculture within the forest regions it was necessary to have statecraft as we see in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Kiṣkindhā was a forest kingdom under the leadership of Bali and then Sugrīva, they had a beautifully devised statecraft, though they do not have the evolved family and bloodline systems as the state society had, and their throne was not bound to kinship instead the quality of leadership and personnel strength were more important. There are various such small forest kingdoms in *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as in *Mahābhārata* and they are best examples to understand the dichotomy between state society and forest society.

IV.2 Forest and Idea of State in the Vedas

The evolution of the idea of the state has been traced back to Vedas, scholars have argued on the basis of various hymns of the Veda that there was the idea of proto-state among the tribes of the Vedas. Vedic tribes were the people living in the forest and surviving on the forest products and pastoral activities.

Now the question arises that who were these tribes and how they have transformed their chieftain based society into kingship state society. D. D. Kosambi²⁷⁵ has looked

²⁷⁵ Kosambi, D. D., 'The Vedic Five Tribes', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 87, No 1, 1967, p. 33.

into this matter, as per his inquiry, the *Rg Veda* refers several times ‘five groups of people’ with various five terms.

1. Janah (Five tribes)²⁷⁶
2. Jatah (Five Jatah)²⁷⁷
3. Manusaha (Five Humans)²⁷⁸
4. Kṛstayah (Five Nations)²⁷⁹
5. Carsanyah (Five Mobile Peoples)²⁸⁰

According to D. D. Kosambi, these were the people who were being represented in the Vedic literature. There is also debate among the scholars that either there were five tribes as described *Yadu, Turvāśa, Puru, Anu, and Druhyu* or as Sayāna in his

²⁷⁶ युवं प्रत्नस्य साधथो महो यद्वैवी स्वस्तिः परि णः स्यातम् । गोपाजिहवस्य तस्थुषो विरूपा विश्वे पश्यन्ति मायिनः कृतानि ॥ Rg Veda 3.37.9

Veda 3.37.9

मित्राय पञ्च येमिरे जना अभिस्टी शवसे स देवं विश्व श्रन्बिभर्तिव !! Rg Veda 3.59.8

अग्निरीशे बृहतो अध्वरस्याग्निर्विश्वस्य हविषः कृतस्य । क्रतुं ह्यस्य वसवो जुषन्ताथा देवा दधिरे हव्यवाहम् ॥ Rg 7.11.4

इहि तिस्रः परावत इहि पञ्च जनाँ अति । धेना इन्द्रावचाकशत् ॥ Rg Veda 8.32.22

य आर्जीकेषु कृत्वसु ये मध्ये पस्त्यानाम् । ये वा जनेषु पञ्चसु ॥ Rg Veda 9.65.23

प्र सुमेधा गातुविद्विश्वदेवः सोमः पुनानः सद एति नित्यम् । भुवद्विश्वेषु काव्येषु रन्तानु जनान्यतते पञ्च धीरः ॥ Rg Veda 9.92.3

विश्वस्य केतुर्भुवनस्य गर्भ आ रोदसी अपृणाज्जायमानः । वीळुं चिदद्रिमभिनत्परायञ्जना यदग्निमयजन्त पञ्च ॥ Rg Veda 10.45.6

तदद्य वाचः प्रथममसीय येनासुराँ अभि देवा असाम । ऊर्जाद उत यजियासः पञ्च जना मम होत्रं जुषध्वम् ॥ Rg Veda 10.53.4

²⁷⁷ त्रिषधस्था सप्तधातुः पञ्च जाता वर्धयन्ती । वाजेवाजे हव्या भूत् ॥ Rg Veda 6.61.12

²⁷⁸ यदन्तरिक्षे यद्वि यत्पञ्च मानुषाँ अनु । नृम्णं तद्धत्तमश्विना ॥ Rg Veda 8.9.2

²⁷⁹ विशां कविं विशपतिं मानुषीरिषः सं सीमकृण्वन्त्स्वधितिं न तेजसे । स उद्वतो निवतो याति वैविषत्स गर्भमेषु भुवनेषु दीधरत् Rg

Veda 3.2.10

ससर्परीरभरत्त्यमेभ्योऽधि श्रवः पाञ्चजन्यासु कृष्टिषु । सा पक्ष्या नव्यमायुर्दधाना यां मे पलस्तिजमदग्नयो ददुः ॥ Rg Veda

3.53.16

²⁸⁰ या पृतनासु दुष्टरा या वाजेषु श्रवाय्या । या पञ्च चर्षणीरभीन्द्राग्नी ता हवामहे ॥ Rg Veda 5.86.2

यः पञ्च चर्षणीरभि निषसाद दमेदमे । कविर्गृहपतिर्युवा ॥ Rg Veda 7.15.2

य ओजिष्ठस्तमा भर पवमान श्रवाय्यम् । यः पञ्च चर्षणीरभि रयिं येन वनामहे ॥ 9.101.9 Rg Veda

bhāsya mentioned that, *Ṛg Veda* takes the five to mean the four class caste with the autochthonous savages (*niṣād*) as the fifth.²⁸¹ However Sayāna has explained another five classifications of them as *Gandharva, Piṭarah, Devah, Rākṣasi, Mānava*,²⁸² Now we have a total of three kinds of classifications of Vedic people, first is on the basis of their tribe/community, second on the basis of Varna system and the last is about divine origin.

When we try to connect all of them in the context of forest and state, we found that in the first kind of classification all of them are tribes living on the forest produced and unsettled pastoral economy. The second classification is actually the second stage of social development where the division of labour has become the main identity as a caste system as well the *niṣāds* or forest-dwelling community have been segregated from the state society. The last classification was actually based on the nature of society and called as divine classification. In all these classifications of Vedic people, forest dwelling society has never been neglected and it seems on the basis of the above analysis that earlier all have belonged to forest society but with the socio-political transformations segregation started and division of labour leads to a more complex state society.

If we take the first postulation that all the Vedic tribes were forest-dwelling people and worshiped the various forces of nature which were not under their control had evolved themselves as chieftain society to protect their own people from other tribes and as well as natural disasters. Leadership in this situation requires the ability to protect not only the herd, since cattle were chief form of wealth, but also one's clan,

²⁸¹ Kosambi, D. D., The Vedic Five Tribes, *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 87, No 1, 1967, p. 33.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

and to defend the claim to ownership of cattle and control over the grazing ground or Vraja.²⁸³

The gradual transformation of chieftainship oriented society in the kingship society can be understood through a particular term which is called 'sovereignty' if we critically analyze the Ṛg Vedic literature we would find that how the numbers of the word which indicates 'sovereignty' have increased in the text.

नि षसाद धृतव्रतो वरुणः पस्त्यास्वा । साम्राज्याय सुक्रतुः²⁸⁴ ॥

(Ṛg Veda 1.25.10)

In this mantra Ṛg Veda 1.25.10, the term 'Sāmrājya' or 'Dominion' have been used. According to the translation by H. H. Wilson,²⁸⁵ devotees from the Vedas are saying that, O Varuṇa, the acceptor of holy rites, the doer of good deeds, has sat sown amongst the (divine) to exercise supreme dominion. This hymn is important to understand the use of term *Sāmrājya*, it is a specific term with a specific meaning. This hymn is praising for Varuṇa because Varuṇa has the supreme power to dominate over the people. On the basis of linguistic analysis of the term *Sāmrājya* and its socio-political connotation gives a strong sense of a kind of primitive authority to rule over the region and subsequently people are accepting his rule.

इत्था हि सोम इन्मदे ब्रह्मा चकार वर्धनम् ।

शविष्ठ वज्रिन्नोजसा पृथिव्या निः शशा अहिमर्चन्ननु स्वराज्यम्²⁸⁶ ॥ (Ṛg Veda, 1.80.1)

²⁸³ Thapar, Romila, *From lineage to State*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, p. 24.

²⁸⁴ 'He, Varuna, the acceptor of holy rites, the doer of good deeds, has sat down amongst the divine progeny, to exercise supreme dominion (over them).' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. I*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 61.

²⁸⁵ Wilson, H. H., and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. I*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. P. 61

²⁸⁶ 'Mighty wielder of the thunderbolt, when the priest had thus exalted you (by praise), and the exhilarating Soma juice (had been drunk), you did expel, by your vigour, Ahi from the earth,

The idea of self-governance and evolution of proto-state within the Vedic tribal community can be also looked through the Ṛg Vedic mantra 1.80.1 here the term *Swarājya* has been mentioned in a very beautiful manner. As per the translation, Vedic poets are alluring lord Indra and requesting him to expound his sovereign power after having Soma.²⁸⁷ Here an important term *Swarājya* has been used to explain in a very different way. Generally, *Swarājya* is being used to represent the people's power to govern the state by them, while in this mantra it has been used to show the power of mighty Indra.

According to Sheldon Pollock in his book '*The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*', he has argued that there is a close relationship between the language and words used in a society with the culture in practice; they are inseparable to each other²⁸⁸. If we apply the same theory on the above hymns then we can make strong speculation regarding the presence of a sense of governance among the Vedic tribes, because they are constantly used the terms which are related to the state, politics, and governance.

स त्वामद्वृषा मदः सोमः श्येनाभृतः सुतः ।

येन वृत्रं निरद्भ्यो जघन्थ वज्रिन्नोजसार्चन्ननु स्वराज्यम्²⁸⁹ ॥

(Ṛg Veda 1.80.2)

manifesting your own sovereignty.' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 190.

²⁸⁷ 'Mighty wielder of the thunderbolt, when the priest had thus exalted you (by prise) and the exhilarating Soma juice, you did expel, by your vigour, ahi from the earth manifesting your own sovereignty' Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.190.

²⁸⁸ Pollock, Sheldon, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2006, Discussion on Culture, Power and Pre Modernity, p. 02.

²⁸⁹ 'That exceedingly exhilarating Soma juice, which was brought by the hawk from heaven, when poured forth, has exhilarated you, so that in your vigour, thunderer you have stuck Vṛtra from the sky, manifesting your own sovereignty.' Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.190.

In the next to continue mantra, the Vedic poets are saying that the Indra have rejoiced after having Soma brought by a bird, defeated Vṛatrā and released water from the sky and humored his own Kingdom. It is very clear from this hymn that Indra was protecting the people from the curse of Vṛatrā and helping out them through the release of water from the sky. Here again, *Swarājya* term has been used in a direct way to describe the power of Indra as well as to make a claim over the people and land for which he is fighting with Vṛatrā.

According to Frits Staal, one thing which emerges very clearly out of these hymns is that; the most important Vedic gods, Agni, Indra, Soma, Usā, Rūdra, Bṛihaspati, Aśvins, and the Marut survives as a god with more personnel traits²⁹⁰. It means Ṛg Vedic gods are more humane in nature, they are not maintaining the cosmic order as the later gods do and that is why it seems very obvious to see the evolution of society and state within the Vedas instead they represent tribal traits and features.

प्रेहयभीहि धृष्णुहि न ते वज्रो नि यंसते ।

इन्द्र नृम्णं हि ते शवो हनो वृत्रं जया अपोऽर्चन्ननु स्वराज्यम्²⁹¹ ॥ (Ṛg Veda 1.80.3)

निरिन्द्र भूम्या अधि वृत्रं जघन्थ निर्दिवः ।

सृजा मरुत्वतीरव जीवधन्या इमा अपोऽर्चन्ननु स्वराज्यम् ॥²⁹² (Ṛg Veda 1.80.4)

²⁹⁰ Staal, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 91

²⁹¹ 'Haten, assail, subdue; your thunderbolt cannot fail; your Vigour, Indra destroys men, slay Vṛtra, win the waters, manifesting your own sovereignty' Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.191.

²⁹² 'You have stuck Vṛtra from off the earth and from heaven; now let loose the wind bound, life sustaining rain, manifesting your own sovereignty' Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.191.

Rainwater has been given immense importance in the hymns of *R̥g Veda*; Vṛitāsura is shown as a demon who blocked the water in the sky and it's come to Indra to release the rainwater out. Now here the question arises that why rainwater has been mentioned again and again and Indra fought for that. Above hymns is also repeating the same thing that Indra is killing Vṛatrā and releasing the water for his *Swarājya*.

It is very important here to analyze the demand for rainwater again and again in various hymns. In order to answer this question first, we need to understand the geography of Gaṅgā doāb region. This region comes under the hot and dry sub-tropical region where rainwater was the only source of water and since river canals were not made at that time hence river water was the actually uncontrolled and unmanageable source.

Society was also gradually shifting from the pastoral society to agricultural society and therefore water was needed to have irrigation and its simple result would be prosperity in the society. But there is a problem with such kinds of postulation in the Vedas because Frits Staal has also looked into such kind of hymns throughout the text and has concluded that, many of the riches of the *R̥g Veda* is now understood, but there remain unexplained words, names, and phrases.²⁹³ Actually, he is arguing a very unique idea about the words, names, and phrases of *R̥g Veda*; he is saying that it is not necessary that all the time there should have meanings and narratives instead they are there because they are having a particular sound and meter which holds the reader.

While Sheldon Pollock gives much importance to the words and languages to study cultural narratives and civilization. He has argued that Sanskrit was a very powerful language in the past and that is why poets and writers chose it for their literary creation though, it was never a people's language.

²⁹³ Staal, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 89.

After the Indra terms like *Swarājya* and *Rājya* have also been used with hymns of Agni. Agni is the second most important Vedic god. He lives within the trees and takes sacrifices to the gods; he has been represented as protector and messenger to the humans and gods.

अस्ताव्यग्निः शिमीवद्भिरकैः साम्राज्याय प्रतरं दधानः ।

अमी च ये मघवानो वयं च मिहं न सूरौ अति निष्टतन्युः²⁹⁴ ॥

(Rg Veda 1.141.13)

अत्रिमनु स्वराज्यमग्निमुक्थानि वावृधुः । विश्वा अधि श्रियो दधे²⁹⁵ ॥

(Rg Veda 2.8.5)

The representation of Agni in these two mantras is very different from others, in *Rg Veda* 1.141.13 and *Rg Veda* 2.8.5, hymns the term *Sāmrājya* as well as *Swarājya* both has been used. Here Agni is shown as most suitable for *Sāmrājya*, he has the capability like Sun so let's pray him as well as he is the slayer of enemies who adore the valour and might in himself. If we critically examine these hymns then we would find that here Agni is being treated like a powerful leader and who has all the necessary capabilities to rule and protect the people. In an Rg Vedic mantra 5.66.6 Mitra and Varuṇa have also been presented in the same way, they are being projected by the poets as owners of the kingdom.

²⁹⁴ 'Agni, processing eminent (fitness) for supreme sovereignty, has been glorified by us with holy rites, and with hymns: Let all who are present, as well we ourselves enriched (by his favour), shout aloud in the praise of Agni as loudly as the Sun and the rain Cloud.' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 369.

²⁹⁵ 'Our praises have increased the self irradiating devouring Agni: he is possessed of all glory' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 18.

आ यद्वामीयचक्षसा मित्र वयं च सूरयः । व्यचिष्टे बहुपाय्ये यतेमहि स्वराज्ये²⁹⁶ ॥

(Rg Veda 5.66.6)

It is very interesting to see connection between the Vedic Gods and Vedic tribes because on the basis of discussed hymns the gods were also associated with the words like Rajya, *Swarājya*, and *Sāmrājya* and we can't deny that these all words are associated with the statecraft system or sometimes synonyms for various kinds of rule over the people. If the Vedic people were forest-dwelling groups then there is no doubt that they have some basic idea about the proto-state and sovereignty over land, resources, and people.

Scholar Hartmut Scharfe²⁹⁷ has done a great linguistic approach while comparing the Sanskrit term Rājā/Rājan with other Indo-European languages, to understand the development of the idea of the state polity. He has argued that the Vedic term Rājana have similarity with the Latin, Greek and Irish languages at the root level. It means the expansion of ideas to rule with the term Rājan and its similar words spared together with the expansion of Aryan culture and people therefore they are the same at the root level.

He further argues that, the standard equation Vedic, Raj- 'king' and the old Iris "ri" going back to an Indo-European 'reg' king, Rājan, king much more common in Vedic and classical Sanskrit. Apart from the Indo-European connection of some of the essential Sanskrit terms, there are also non-Indo-Aryan names in the *Rg Veda*, such as *Churmuri*, *Dhuni*, *Pipru*, and *Shambara*. The text also refers to Aryan chieftains with

²⁹⁶ 'We the devout invoke you, Mitra and Varuṇa, who are far seeing: many we precede to your spacious and much frequented kingdom.' Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Rg Veda Samhitā Vol. 3*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 504.

²⁹⁷ Scharfe, Hartmut, 'The Vedic Word for King', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 105, No 03, Indological Studies, Dedicated to H.H. Ingalls, July-Sep 1985, pp. 543-548.

non-Indo-Aryan names, example *Balbuth* and *Bribu* all this is an indication of cultural interaction and cultural assimilation.²⁹⁸

On the basis of Ṛg Vedic mantras and various theories and arguments, it seems that there were various Vedic tribal groups and they had their developing ideas about the state which is called proto-states, historians have called them as chieftain societies. With the expansion of so-called Aryan culture, there was a process of interaction and assimilations at various levels and as well as there was the sophistication in the tribal warfare there was a need of strong state society for the protection of wealth and people.

IV.3 Forest and Sates in Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads is also called as *Vedānta* or End (ant) of the Veda.²⁹⁹ These are also considered as the earliest serious attempts at constructing the world of experience as a rational whole. Furthermore, they have continued to be the generally accepted authoritative statements with which every subsequent orthodox philosophic formulation has had to show itself in accord, or at least not in discord. Even the materialistic *Chārvākas*, who denied the Vedas, a future life, and almost every sacred doctrine of the orthodox brāhmaṇas avowed respect of these Upaniṣads.³⁰⁰

According to Deviprasad Chattopadhyay, the doctrine of Upaniṣads stands at the simple equation of Brahman with Ātman. Whatever it might have been the prehistory of the concept of Brahman in the Upaniṣads it comes generally to mean the ultimate reality of this world. The Ātman meant the self. Thus the doctrine amounted to the

²⁹⁸ Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, Pearson, New Delhi, 2008, p. 187.

²⁹⁹ Staal, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 159.

³⁰⁰ Hume, Earnest, Robert, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, London, 1921, p. 02 .

assertion that the self is the ultimate reality. This was briefly expressed by the great sayings of the Upaniṣads, like that thou Art (*tat tvam asi*) I am Brāhmaṇa.³⁰¹ Though this period is considered as the period of philosophical developments and arguments at the same time it was also a time of socio-political transitions at large.

On the basis of Upaniṣadic hymns and stories, we can have some idea about the kind of socio-political transitions that were happening in the post-Vedic era. As we have already discussed that the idea of kingship was in its initial phase in the Vedas. In the context of Vedas and development of the idea of state warfare is a striking aspect in the milieu of Vedic and later Vedic literature. The first Maṇḍala of *Ṛg Veda* Saṃhitā refers to a battle of twenty kings. It was the time of evolution of different kinds of political systems during the sixth century BCE. These systems were³⁰²:-

1. Monarchical States (Rājyas)
2. Oligarchic States (Gaṇa or Saṅgha)
3. Tribal states (Forest States)

Here we will look into the various aspects of forest states through the Upaniṣadic prism of hymns and mythical stories in which there are references about the development of early tribal states. Since it is believed that all the major Upanishads were written and compiled in the forest, therefore, it is possible that there would have some direct or indirect impacts of forest society into the text.

In the early Vedic age the states were more tribal than territorial, by the time of the Upanishads, the states although still named after the tribes, had become territorial units and boundaries. The Upanisads mentions the kingdoms by the name of the

³⁰¹ Chattopadhyaya, Debiprakash, *Indian Philosophy a Popular Introduction*, Peoples Publishing House, Delhi, 1964, p. 74.

³⁰² Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, Pearson, New Delhi, 2008, p. 187.

people like the Madras, the Videhas, the Kurus, the Pañchālas, and the Mahavarshas.³⁰³ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* first times gives detailed information about a settled state where Sadanira was demarcating the line between two states Kośala and Videha.

During the Vedic age, states were called as Janapadas, the *Chāndogyā Upaniṣad* mentions a kingdom as Aśvapati Kaikey as a janapad. *Bṛihadāranyak Upaniṣad* also mentions the term Janapadas, not Jana³⁰⁴. In a very sense the tribal people were known as Jana and event today they these forest tribes were called Janajāti, which means forest dwellers. The *Chāndogyā Upaniṣad* gives four terms for forms of state.

These are:-

1. Rājya
2. Vairājya
3. Swarājya
4. Sāmrajya

They all have specific meanings and definitions, *Rājya* is a term used for the synonym of the Kingdom. *Vairājya* has been used in various texts as later in *Arthaśāstra*. R. S. Sharma has also explained this term as ‘a place there was no kingly office and the people, therefore, had no sense of thine and mine.’³⁰⁵ He argues that the absence of the rulers coincided with the lack of primitive property, in the absence of these institutions the state also did not exist. According to him, the discovery of the art of cultivation enabled people to produce more than they could consume, then they started to store and they established their separate house which required the sanction

³⁰³ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publication, New Delhi, 1985, p. 61.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 62

³⁰⁵ Sharma, R. S, *Aspects of Political Institutions and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, Delhi, 1959, p. 51.

of law. Here we can assume that there is a close connection between the emergence of the institution of state and discovery of agriculture and therefore we can argue that as well as the expansion of agriculture was extended into deep forests, the new kingdoms emerge as the institutions within forests.

Swarājya and *Samrājya* terms are also present in the *R̥g Veda* but might be the context would be different in the Upaniṣads. Since *Bṛihadāranyaka* is the longest and most important among all the Upanishads, therefore, we will try to extract the ideas of *Sāmrajya* and *Swarājya* within them. There are 10 mantras in *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* where there is direct mention of the terms *Rajya* and *Swarjāya* in Various contexts.

तद्वापि ब्रह्मदत्तश्चैकितानेयो राजानं भक्षयन्नुवाचायं त्यस्य राजा मूर्धानं
विपातयताद्यदितोऽयास्य आङ्गिरसोऽन्येनोदगायदिति वाचा च ह्येव स प्राणेन
चोदगायदिति³⁰⁶ (BU 1. 3. 24)

In *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* hymn 1.3.24, there is a story about a King Brahmdatta, who is also considered as the grandson of King Chikitana. Regarding this subject, a story is also narrated in the ṣṛuti. As per the story the great-grandson of Chikitana, while drinking Soma in a sacrifice, said 'Let this Soma in the bowl that I am drinking strike off my head for being a liar, i.e. if I have told a lie. While critically analyzing this story it seems that it was the early phase of kingship when the king was supposed to claim his purity and morality, again and again, to maintain his legitimacy over kingdom because the state society was developing from tribal warfare to rational and philosophically democratic virtues.

³⁰⁶ 'As also Brahmadatta Chikitaneya, while partaking of King (Soma), said: Let this king cause this man's head to fall off, if Ayasya Angirasa sang the Udgitha with any other means than that, for,' said he, 'only with speech and with breath did he sing the Udgitha.' Speak further than this, for my release. BU 1.3.24 Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 70.

ब्रह्म वा इदमग्र आसीदेकमेव तदकं सन्न व्यभवत् । तच्छ्रेयोरुपमत्यसृजत क्षत्रं यान्येतानि
 देवन्ना क्षत्राणीन्द्रो वरुणः सोमो रुद्रः पर्यन्यो यमो मृत्युरीशान इति । तस्मात् क्षत्रात्परं नास्ति
 तस्माद्ब्राह्मणः क्षत्रियमधस्तादुपास्ते राजसूये क्षत्र एव तद्यशो दधाति सैषा क्षत्रस्य
 योनिर्यब्रह्म । तस्माद्यद्यपि राजा परमतां गच्छति ब्रह्मैवान्तत उपनिश्रयति स्वां योनिं य उ
 एनं हिनस्ति स्वां स योनिमृच्छति स पापीयान् भवति यथा श्रेयाँ सँ हिँ सित्वा³⁰⁷ ॥

(BU 1.4.11)

This is a very important hymn in *Bṛihadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.11, where a kind of new mutual relationship between the old brāhmaṇsa and newly elevated kings are being established. According to the translation, the poet is saying that in the beginning there was only Brāhmaṇas and the Brāhmaṇas created the *Kṣatriyas* and other castes as well, though the *Kṣatriyas* are supreme due to the sacrifices and fighting capacity but ultimately they come to us.

The serious examination of these hymns leads us to speculate on the assertion of a strong mutual relation between Brāhmaṇas and *Kṣatriyas*. Since the Upaniṣadic period is considered as the period transition and cultural assimilation and absorption, here it seems quite clear that, there was requirement of legitimacy for newly emerged kings to rule the people & land, and that could only be possible if they perform various *Yjñas* as *Aśvamedha* or *Rājsuya*, and their completion needs the acceptability of the Brahmanas. Hence here we can argue that the newly emerging states during

³⁰⁷ ‘Verily in the beginning this was Brahman, one only. That being one, was not strong enough. It created still further the most excellent Kshatra (power), viz. those Kshatras (powers) among the Devas,--Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parganya, Yama, Mrityu, Ísâna. Therefore there is nothing beyond the Kshatra, and therefore at the Râgasûya sacrifice the Brâhmana sits down below the Kshatriya. He confers that glory on the Kshatra alone. But Brahman is (nevertheless) the birth-place of the Kshatra. Therefore though a king is exalted, he sits down at the end (of the sacrifice) below the Brahman, as his birth-place. He who injures him, injures his own birth-place. He becomes worse, because he has injured one better than himself.’ BU 1.4.11 Translated by Max Muller, *The Upanisads Part II, The Sacred Books of East Vol. 15*, 1884, p. 89.

Upaniṣads either tribal or none tribal had to bring support and legitimacy from the brāhmaṇas.

The second most important thing is the performance of sacrificing either *Rājsūya* or *Aśvamedha* they are very important to understand the socio-political as well as economic aspects of the society. In most of the cases, it appears that the sacrifice performed by the king is actually maintaining order and balance between King and Brāhmaṇas within the state and challenge the opposite kingdoms and his sovereignty. We can also argue that the sacrifices are the evolved forms of primitive warfare because there is a close relationship between sacrifice and war. Earlier sacrifices were performed for the success in war and later sacrifices became the initiators of war, in both cases expansion of authority and claim over foreign land was a prime goal.

On the basis of the above hymns, we can also analyze the extension of the caste system during the Upanishad times inside the forests. As these newly evolving states had primitive and pastoral modes of the economy but have some beginning into the development of private land and property that leads them to state formations was requires an identity. The need for socio-political identities has also propagated the caste system within Upaniṣadic states.

स वा अयमात्मा सर्वेषां भूतानामधिपतिः सर्वेषां भूतानाँ राजा तद्यथा रथनाभौ च रथनेमौ
 चाराः सर्वे समर्पिता एवमेवास्मिन्नात्मनि सराणि भूतानि सर्वे देवाः सर्वे लोकाः सर्वे प्राणाः सर्व
 एत आत्मानः समर्पिताः ³⁰⁸ ॥ (BU 2.5.15)

The idea of self which is the most important theory of Upaniṣads has been equated with the King. They both have many similarities at sociological as well as

³⁰⁸ ‘The Self, already mentioned, is the ruler of all beings, and the kind of all beings. Just as all the spokes are fixed in the nave and fellow of a chariot wheel, so are all beings, all gods, all worlds, all organs and all these individuals, selves fixed in the self.’ BU 2.2.15 *Brhadaranyak Upaniṣad*, Translated by Swami Madhavanand, Advait Ashram, Almora, 1950

philosophical levels. Both ideas have gone through an evolutionary process. At the beginning of Vedas, peoples moved to search for the outer world and finally reached the understanding of nature where a particular kind of law-governed among all. Then they moved in the search of the internal world and reached to the notion of self. The philosophers of Upaniṣads concluded themselves at self because it has been explained as the center of all thoughts and actions.

While the idea of the king also evolved gradually from the various forms of governance and leadership as well as wars, king was needed to have land, people, resources and legitimacy and then his authority over society would be universally acceptable. Here we can argue that the poet has also tried to produce mutual respect among the followers of self/philosophers as well as state authorities/kings and rulers so that they could not interfere in each other's regions.

स यो मनुष्याणाँ राद्धः समृद्धो भवत्यन्येषामधिपतिः सर्वैर्मनुष्यकैर्भोगैः संपन्नतमः स
मनुष्याणां परम आनन्दोऽथ ये शतं मनुष्याणामानन्दाः स एकः पितृणां
जितलोकानामानन्दोऽथ ये शतं पितृणां जितलोकानामानन्दाः स एको गन्धर्वलोक
आनन्दोऽथ ये शतं गन्धर्वलोक आनन्दाः स एकः कर्मदेवानामानन्दो ये कर्मणा
देवत्वमभिसंपद्यन्तेऽथ ये शतं कर्मदेवानामानन्दाः स एक आजानदेवानामानन्दो यश्च
श्रोत्रियोऽवृजिनोऽकामहतोऽथ ये शतमाजानदेवानामानन्दाः स एकः प्रजापतिलोक आनन्दो
यश्च श्रोत्रियोऽवृजिनोऽकामहतोऽथ ये शतं प्रजापतिलोक आनन्दाः स एको ब्रह्मलोक आनन्दो
यश्च श्रोत्रियोऽवृजिनोऽकामहतोऽथैष एव परम आनन्द एष ब्रह्मलोकः समाडिति होवाच
याज्ञवल्क्यः सोऽहं भगवते सहस्रं ददाम्यत ऊर्ध्वं विमोक्षायैव ब्रहीत्यत्र ह याज्ञवल्क्यो
बिभ्यांचकार मेधावी राजा सर्वेभ्यो माऽन्तेभ्य उदरौत्सीदिति³⁰⁹ ॥ (BU 4.3.33)

³⁰⁹ 'If one is fortunate among men and wealthy, lord over others, best provided with all human enjoyments--that is the highest bliss of men. Now a hundredfold the bliss of men is one bliss of those who have won the fathers' world. Now a hundredfold the bliss of those who have won the fathers' world is one bliss in the Gandharva-world. A hundredfold the bliss in the Gandharva-world is one bliss of the gods who gain their divinity by meritorious works. A hundredfold the bliss of the gods by works

The story of Yajñavalkya in *Bṛihadāranyak Upaniṣad* is the most celebrated one throughout the text. On the basis of mentioned various instances in the Upaniṣads he appears as the greatest thinker and philosopher of his time. The śloka of BU 4.3.33 is one of the great philosophical descriptions about the inter-relations of various virtues discovered and developed by the whole Upaniṣadic traditions.

The context of the descriptive śloka is the story of King Videha/Janaka, he was a famous king known for his sharp mind and knowledge of Vedas.³¹⁰ He did a Yajna and called Brahmans and Philosophers from around the kingdom and was ready to offer a hundred cows bounds with ten golden coins in each and then Yajñavalkya appears as best among them who claimed to be the greatest and he won through his rich and deep philosophical interpretations on self/Brahman.

If we will go through the expression and interpretation of Yajñavalkyas above description then there are three things that appear as excellent findings to understand the contemporary socio-political situation during the age. First is the identity of king who was known as Janaka/Videha, he was himself a learned man and philosophers, as in western philosophy Plato have argued for the philosopher-king and here Janak has been represented as philosopher-king, even Yajñavalkya was not sure to satisfy the king with his answers in the last line of śloka. The second important extraction is the description of the king, a person who has the capability to win the world should be considered as the king; it was necessary to protect your own people from the warfare.

is one bliss of the gods by birth and of him who is learned in the Vedas, who is without crookedness, and who is free from desire. A hundredfold the bliss of the gods by birth is one bliss in the Prajāpati-world and of him who is learned in the Vedas, who is without crookedness, and who is free from desire. A hundredfold the bliss in the Prajāpati-world is one bliss in the Brahma-world and of him who is learned in the Vedas, who is without crookedness, and who is free from desire. This truly is the highest world. This is the Brahma-world, O king.'--Thus spoke Yajñavalkya. Janaka said ' I will give you, noble Sir, a thousand cows.' BU 4.3.33, Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 138.

³¹⁰ Shastri, Rampratap Tripathi, *Upanishado Ki Kahaniyan*, Lok Bharati Prakashan, Allahabad, 2011, p. 59.

This indicates that though states were settled and politically organized but territorial expansion was the prime need of the state, and for that, they have to move towards the forest.

The third important aspect of this famous story was the dialogue of Yajñavalkya with Gārgi. Gārgi was a women scholar who came to participate among other male scholars. Though the story Lopamudra is there as Vedic scholar in the Vedas, the way Gārgi participated in the debate with Yajñavalkya on the various aspects and critical theories of Ātman and Brahman. Here it seems that women were playing an important role in the possession of knowledge and Vedic recitations as well as their representations on the public place.

IV.4 Forest and states in Epics

(Rāmāyaṇa & Mahābhārata)

Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* are the two great epics of India. For a common man, they have been the remaining point of reference for a long time on matters of morality, justice, and virtue. The impact of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* on Indian culture is such a strong that even today we mark them on various disciplines like art, literature, music, and drama.

Scholars have argued that they not just a single story of Rāma or Pāṇḍvas instead there are multiple layers of stories within the texts, and these sub-stories are vowed in such a way that they help to maintain the continuity of the main story. These two texts are important to understand the socio-historical past of India that how Indian society has faces transitions and what kind of changes have taken place for the construction of the present.

IV.4.1 Rāmāyaṇa

A. B. Keith has studied in his paper '*Archaisms in the Rāmāyaṇa*'³¹¹, on the issue of differences between the Sanskrit that has been used in the Vedas and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, according to him, there is a sharp difference in the use of grammar between the two texts. He has given five classic examples to prove his argument. While R. S. Chakravarty is trying to look about the time period of text as well as the bridging the text between the myth and reality, he is arguing in his article '*Some Aspects of Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*'³¹² that large numbers of interpolations have done in this text, since it was being related with the religion it was not possible in the later period to subtract anything out of it.

After the enormous western interested in *Rāmāyaṇa* a kind of new interpretation started that what is the Mūla/original *Rāmāyaṇa*. Scholar S. N. Tadapatrikar in his paper '*Mūla Rāmāyaṇa*'³¹³ have argued that due to the esteemed new researches on the epic new facts come out like Jacobi proved that the first and last Kāṇḍas of the *Rāmāyaṇa* seem to be comparatively later additions.

Sheldon Pollock in his article '*A Political Imagination in India*', in various socio-political junctures in India *Rāmāyaṇa* an imaginary, come more centrally and dramatically to inhabit public political space, as opposed to simply a literary space.'³¹⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* is to be considered as the finest political imagination in India; hence it is quite clear that within the text there is a discussion on the various complex state

³¹¹ Keith, A. B, 'Archaisms in the Ramayana', *The Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Oct 1910, pp. 1321-1326.

³¹² Chakravarty, R. S., 'Some Aspects of the Ramayana of Valmiki', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 53 No ¼, 1972, p. 204-211.

³¹³ Tadpatrikar, S. N., 'Mula Ramayana', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 5 No 01, 1923-24, p. 66-68.

³¹⁴ Pollock, Sheldon, 'Ramayana and Political Imagination in India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 52, No 02, May 1993, pp. 261-297.

affairs in three different places. The main story starts with the first political state which is Ayodhayā, then its move to Kiśkindhā and finally reached to Laṅkā.

If we closely observe these three socio-political spaces we would find that either they all are states but there are sharp differences over their nature and political cultures. As it has been argued by scholars like Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman³¹⁵ that, the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* story revolves around the forest and it is the main plot. In the same line of thought here we will try to connect the idea of a state with forest in this section.

Within the *Rāmāyaṇa* there are various instances which show that there was a sharp distinction between mainstream city state-society like Ayodhyā and forest-dwelling state-society like Kiśkindhā. The society from which Rāvaṇa belongs has shown bipolarity in nature because at one place they have been presented as a city state-society like Lanka and at the same time other Rākṣasa are living in the forest as forest dwellers in the primitive mode of lives. In order to look at the changes that were happening at that time, we need to analyze the text through various means and speculations.

Romila Thapar and R. S. Sharma both have argued that since the age of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* was an age of socio-economic transitions and due to change in the mode of production from unsettled pastoral economy to the settled agricultural economy there was a continues effort from the state for the encroachment over new forest lands.

³¹⁵ Bose, Mandakrant (ed.), *Ramayana Revisited*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004.

सोऽयं ब्राह्मण भूयिसष्ठो वानप्रस्थगणो महान् ।

त्वन्नाथोऽनाथवद राम राक्षसैहन्यते भूसम³¹⁶ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 15)

एहि पश्य शरीराणि मुनीनाम् भावित आत्मनाम् ।

हताना राक्षसे घोरैराबहुना बहुधा वने³¹⁷ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 16)

पंपा नदी निवासानाम् अनुमन्दाकिनीम् अपि ।

चित्रकुटालयाना च क्रियते कदनं महत्³¹⁸ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 17)

There are śloks in *Aranyakāṇḍa* 6.15-17 which clearly indicated the kind of migration that was happening from the mainstream society to the forest. According to the mentioned ślok when Rama entered the forest he visited a place which was full of Vānprasth ṛṣis which were mostly Brahmins. They were asking for help from Rāma to eliminate demons that torture them and destroy their sacrificial rituals.

On the basis of this translation, it seems that state-society was devised in such a way to increase the flow of the human population within the forest through the idea of Vānprasth. The Vānprasth Ashram appears as a strong device that is helping indirectly or directly to access over forest land. Here it is important to focus on the idea of caste that how it was expanding from the state horizons to the forest lands.

According to H. D. Sankalia, there were various forest tribes that were indirectly presented in the texts; such as Rākṣas, Vānaras, and Birds. Sometimes there were

³¹⁶ ‘O Rama we are a group of great sages, mostly brahmins, leading a vanaprastha life. Yet with a protector like you, we are slaughtered in large numbers like orphans.’

³¹⁷ ‘Come and see the bodies of ascetics, who had perceived the Supreme Spirit, killed in large numbers in the forest by the fierce demons.’

³¹⁸ ‘A great slaughter is taking place amongst those residing on the bank of the Pampa Lake, near the river Mandakini, and on mount Chitrakuta.’

negotiations as in the case of Vānaras and Niṣādas, and sometimes there were wars as it has been shown into the text. Ultimately it was the city-based state society that is given preference over the tribal-state society.

अथ पंचवटी गछान्तारा रघुनन्दनः ।

आससाद महाकायं गृधं भीम पराक्रमम³¹⁹ ॥ (Aranyakānda, Chapter 14, Verse 1)

तं दृष्टा तौ महाभागो वनस्थं रामलक्ष्मणौ ।

मेनाते राक्षम पक्षी ब्रुवाण को भवानिति³²⁰ ॥ (Aranyakānda, Chapter 14, Verse 2)

ततो मधुरया वाचा सौम्यया प्रीणयन्निव ।

उवाच वत्स मा विद्धि वयस्यं पितुरात्मन³²¹ ॥ (Aranyakānda, Chapter 14, Verse 3)

रामस्य वचनं श्रुत्वा कुल्मात्मानमेव व ।

आच चक्षे द्विजस्त सर्वभूतमुद्भवम³²² ॥ (Aranyakānda, Chapter 14, Verse 5)

The story of Jatāyu in *Aranyakānda* 14.01-05 can be interpreted in a very different way from the text. As per the translation here, Rāma visited Pañchvati and met Jatāyu in there. Earlier Rāma thought him as a demon because of his huge structure. Then Jatāyu introduced himself as a friend of king Daśratha.

³¹⁹ ‘On the way to Panchavati, Rama, the delight of the Raghu race, met a vulture with a huge body and fearful strength.’

³²⁰ ‘Seeing the bird on the banyan tree, venerable Rama and Lakshmana mistook him for a demon and enquired who he was.’

³²¹ ‘With a sweet, pleasing, and gentle voice he said to both of them, O dear know me to be a friend of your father.’

³²² ‘On hearing Rāma's words, the bird started narrating the origin of all beings including his own family.’

Here Jatāyu has claimed about his Identity as a friend of Daśratha and that is quite interesting because it seems that Jatāyu belongs to tribal society and might be chief of his tribe and there could have been negotiations with king Daśratha in the past.

Our speculation about Jatāyu becomes stronger when his brother Sampāti enters in the text in the last of *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍ* (58.4-5). Here Sampāti appears as the elder brother of Jatāyu and they had marched to the Swarga/heaven to have a fight with Indra in the past, but while they were moving towards Indra, due to heat of the Sun feathers of Jatāyu started burning, hence Sampāti protected his younger brother and let his own feathers to burnout.

पूरा वृत्रवधे वृत्ते स चाहं च जाये शिनो

आदित्य मुप्यातो स्वो ज्वलंत रस्मिमालीनम

आवृत्याकाशमार्गेण जवेन स्वर्गतो ऋषम

मध्यं प्राप्ते तू सूर्ये तू जटायुवाशिदाती³²³ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Sarga 58, śloka 4-5)

As we know that for historians it is very difficult to read myths and stories and extract the real past from them. According to Romila Thapar for historians, literature is an important source because “historians comb literature for historical facts, references to events or descriptions of a particular time. The item of literature as a narrative relates to history, not for what it says which is anyway fictional, but for what it might indicate as being historically significant.”³²⁴

³²³ “In olden days, when Indra killed Vrutra we (Jatayu and I) seeking to challenge him reached the Sun blazing with a garland of beams.”

‘Flying in the sky at a violently high speed, we reached the meridian of the Sun when, unable to bear the heat, Jatayu became weak.’

³²⁴ Thapar, Romila, *Śakuntala: Texts, Readings and Histories*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, p. 02.

After the serious reading of the context of Jatāyu and Saṃpāti, it seems that they both belong to a strong and powerful tribal-state society and they had influence over the *Janasthān* which is close to *Pañchvati*. They had friendly relations with king Daśrath in the past but as Sampaati mentioned that they had a conflict with Indra and incident when he lost his feathers might be they also lost their socio-political space in the forest. While Saṃpāti retold the incident of Indra and Vṛitāsura fight which actually belongs to *R̥g Veda* is really quite interesting and it gives us a link to connect the past of these bird symbolized forest kingdom.

Within the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* the second-biggest fight was between Rāma and Khara Dūshan. The region of central Indian forest which has been mentioned as *Pañchvati* was their dominance place. After the insult of Surpaṇakha she went to her brothers Khara and Dūshan and asked them to take revenge from Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. The text has presented the fight between Rāma and Khara in such large and high magnitude then it seems that actually, Khara had a large army, while 14,000 soldiers might be an exaggeration as mentioned in *Aranyakāṇḍa* 22.8-9.

चतुर्दश सहस्रानी मम चित्तानुवर्तिनाम

रक्षसा भीमवेगं ना शम्येस निव्विर्तनाम

नीलजिमुतवर्नानण लोकहिंसाविहारिणाम

सर्वोद्योग मुदीणना राक्षससौम्य कराय³²⁵ ॥ (*Aranyakāṇḍa*, Chapter 22, Verse 8-9)

The way Khara has been introduced in the *Rāmāyaṇa* it seems that either he is a king of an independent state or he is a quite rich Rākṣasa within the central Indian forest

³²⁵ ‘There are fourteen thousand demons at my command ready to act according to my will. They are warriors of terrific speed and will not retreat from the fight.’
‘They are of the colour of the dark blue cloud, dreadful and merciless, strong and powerful fighters who roam about forturing people.’

region. In the śloka of *Aranyakānda* 22.13-15 he has been shown in a grandeur manner, he has a big chariot which has a thick layer of pure gold and a flag on the top of the chariot. Even his chariots horses were so decorated with golden works that they were shining like Sun.

Though the army of Khara was presented as rich as they belong to an economically developed society even there weapons were made by stones and woods as mentioned in the śloka *Aranyakānda*, 25. 32.

नि वृ तास्त पुनः सर्वे दूषणआश्रयनिर्भयः

राममेवाभ्यधावन्त सालतालशिलायुधा³²⁶ ॥ (*Aranyakānda*, Chapter 25, Verse 32)

Here it is a quite paradoxical explanation in the grand representation of rich Khara's army and the weapons and tools his foot soldiers were using to have a fight with Rāma. On the basis of close observation of these both illustrations, we can speculate that Khara actually represents economically developed Rākṣasa tradition within the forests of central India though still their skills to made metal tools were at low levels.

There are other two-three things that strongly indicate that Khara was might be a tribal forest king and had a primitive staged forest state. The first thing is the number of his foot soldiers which is quite big, second is a flag on the top of the chariot, it represents a sovereign state power or independent state identity. On the basis of all these examples, we can argue that there the fight between Khara and Rāma might be actually fighting with the sovereign tribal state which was represented by Khara and the forest intruders the ṛiṣis which were having a big number of influx from the state society to the forest.

³²⁶ 'Coming under the shelter of Duushana all of those demons are but emboldened and returned, and they once again rushed towards Rama with saala trees, palm trees and boulders as their weapons.'

As we discussed here the speculation we are formulating for the tribal state of Khara and Dūshan in *Rāmāyaṇa*, but in *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* the state polity of Bāli and Sugrīva is clearly mentioned in the text. There are various instances when Sugreev and Bali were called as the King of Kiṣkindha and their demarcation of the area was marked by the mountains and forests around them like *Ṛiśyamūk* and *Madhuvan/Matangvan*.

प्राप्तोऽहं प्रेषितस्तेन सुग्रीवेण महात्मना

राजा वनारामुख्याना हनुमान नाम वानरः³²⁷ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 3, Verse 21)

ईदृशा बुद्धि संपन्न जितक्रोधा जितेन्द्रिया

द्रष्टव्या वनेद्रण दितय दर्शनमागता ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 5, Verse 26)

दिवस श्रद्ध्य मर्यादायं द्रष्टा श्रोऽस्मी वानरं

बहुवर्ष सहस्त्रिणी स वे शैलो भविष्यति³²⁸ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 11, Verse 58)

There is literary evidence in the text which claims about the kingship of Sugrīva. The first one is from śloka of *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍ* 3.21; when Hanumān first time met Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa he introduces himself as the minister of Vānara King Sugrīva. As per the story of Kiṣkindhā, Bāli was the king of this tribal state but due to long absence of Bāli, Sugrīva becomes the king and then with the help of Rāma, Sugrīva killed his own brother Bāli. Later on, Sugrīva and his Vānara army helped Rāma and searched for Sītā.

On the basis of mentioned material and sociological explanations about things and relations among Vānaras, we can argue that Kiṣkindhā was a tribal state which was

³²⁷ 'Delegated by that great soul and the king of important monkeys Sugreeva, I have come here and by name I am Hanuma, another Vanara.'

³²⁸ 'I give one day's time for the monkeys (to leave). Whomsoever, I see tomorrow will get transformed into a mountain for many thousands of years'.

highly influenced by the city state-society because Bali and Sugrīva both were known to king Daśratha and his glory. There are few examples of less developed family system among the Vānara tribes as J. L. Brockington and Dev Raj Chanana³²⁹ have argued; abduction of Sugrīva's wife by his elder brother Bāli when Sugrīva was expelled from the state, and also during the long absence of Bāli, Bāli's wife was accepted to be with Sugrīva.

Their society is the best example of a tribal-state society with subsistence modes of production because they had the idea of state but there is very little sign of agriculture, instead, they have always mentioned at community fruit forest where they go and eat. Though, in the story, Bāli has been told as the son of Indra who had blessed with success in each and every fight that he will participate in. It seems that the kingdom of Kiṣkindhā was very famous because of a strong leader Bāli and because of that they had associations with king Daśaratha in the past but still, they were at the stage of forest-dwelling society.

IV.4.2 Mahābhārata

Mahābhārata is also called as the fifth Veda, it is one of the longest ever written text in human history. Like *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* is also a story where multiple sub-stories are making a complex net that sometimes it really becomes difficult to identify the beginning and end. Various scholars looked into this text to analyze its true sequence and overlapping of stories and V. S. Sukthankar did a historical work to compile all the various regional versions *Mahābhārata* into a singular book.

³²⁹ Chanana, Dev Raj, *The Spread of Agriculture in Northern India: As depicted in the Ramayana of Valmiki*, Sumna Prakashan, Delhi, 1969.

James L. Fitzgerald has argued that this is an extraordinary text because who has a very legitimate beginning because the writer of the book is Lord Gaṇeśa. The presence of Gaṇeśa in the starting of the story makes a very strong impact on readers. He further argues that the *Mahābhārata* has played a major role in educating Indian peoples, in structuring and informing their imagination and sensibilities in fundamental ways.³³⁰

According to Hermann Oldenberg, “the *Mahābhārata* began its existence as a simple epic narrative. It became in a course centuries, the most monstrous chaos.”³³¹ The idea of chaos was later reinterpreted by scholar Ramesh Chandra Dutta in a very different way and then the complete critical edition of *Mahābhārata* come out in 1966.³³² *Mahābhārata* is more about politics and diplomacy in a state society instead *Rāmāyaṇa* is about the idea of morality and ideal human being. As argued by the scholars that *Mahābhārata* is a compilation of various sub narratives and small stories; as like it is also telling us about various kinds of societies and in this section we will try to see ‘forest states’ through the prism of *Mahābhārata*.

Here we will also try to see and analyze the relationship between forest and states. *Mahābhārata* is a compendium of the number of tribal social groups; kingdoms and as much as geopolitical relationships between various states have been also explained in detail.

³³⁰ Fitzgerald, James. L., ‘India’s Fifth Veda: The Mahabharata’s Presentation of itself’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 20 No 01, Part 01, Essays on the Mahabharata, Winter-Spring 1985, p. 126.

³³¹ Sukthankar, V. S., *On the Making of the Mahabharata*, The Asiatic Society of Bombay, Bombay, 1957, p. 01.

³³² Brockington, John, *The Sanskrit Epics*, Brill, Boston, 1998, p. 41.

The first story which appears to understand the forest and state relations is the story of Duśyant and Śakuntalā. This is one of the most celebrated stories inside the *Mahābhārata* as well as outside the *Mahābhārata* in the later period of time.

तद्याप्यातित्य नृप निरुत्त मश्रम संयुक्तं

मनः प्रहादजनन दृष्टीकान्तमतिव च

शीत मारुत संयुक्तं जगामान्यमहद वनं

पुष्पिते पदपे किरनमतीव शुखशाद्वालम³³³ ॥

(Ādīparva-Sambhavparva, Chapter 70, Verse 3-4)

Story of Duśyant and Śakuntalā have been interpreted by various scholars to take the various issues, but here we will try to analyze the representation of forest as well as the kind of connection which is being established through Duśyant and Śakuntalā in order to understand forest and states. As per the translation³³⁴ of *Ādīparva*, 70.3-4, there is a description that wondering King Duśyant reached a forest which is beautiful in all senses; but the thing which strikes Duśyant was hermitage of ṛṣi Kaṇv. Here he saw Śakuntala for the first time and fell in love with her.

The possible interpretation which comes in the words of Romila Thapar is ‘the āśram of Kaṇva is a tapovan, suggesting a sacred grove, sacred grooves may even have been specially planted since the trees are sometimes specific and sometimes in the

³³³ ‘The king with his soldiers, having killed thousands of animals, entered another forest to hunt in it. Fatigued with hunger and thirst, and accompanied by only one follower, he came to a large desert at the end of the forest. Having passed over this herbless desert, the king came to a forest full of holy hermitages. It was beautiful to the eyes and delightful to the heart. It was cool and it breathed delightful breeze. It was full of trees and covered with flowers. It extended far and wide in green soft grass. It echoed with the sweet songs of the birds. It resounded with the sweet notes of male *kokila* and the shrill cries of *cicalas*.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 101.

³³⁴ Here translation used of Ganguli, Kisari Mohan, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyas*, Munshilal Manoharlal Publishers, Delhi, third edition, & Buck, William, *Mahabharata*, Motilal Banarshidas Publishers Delhi, 1981.

form of deities.’ The normal activity of hunting associated with the forest has been devised in such a way to bring more access to the forest. Here the duality of settlement as the forest of Śakuntalā and the court of Duśyant suggesting again the bifurcation of nature and culture. It has been argued that patriarchy ideologies project nature as feminized and culture as masculine, where nature is passive and culture is authoritative.³³⁵

Characters of Duśyant and Śakuntalā are actually making a connecting link to have a bridge between forest and state as well as nature and culture.

सिद्धचारण संद्वैस्च गन्धर्व अप्सरागणे

सेवितं वन्मत्याथे मत्ता वानरं किन्नारम³³⁶ ॥

(Ādiparva-Sambhavparva, Chapter 70, Verse 15)

In another continue śloka, Duśyant saw various forest communities around the tapovan and they were enjoying the place. Mentioned communities are *Siddhās*, *Gandharva*, *Apśarās*, *Kinnars*, and *Vānaras*. It might be possible that the coming of Duśyant into forest abode is an attempt to bring them all under the umbrella of the state through having a marriage alliance with a forest girl Śakuntalā. As we know that it has been a continuous effort by the state societies to control the forest societies and bring them all under the one rule of law for the better resource management and also to keep the boundaries safe from external aggressions.

³³⁵ Thapar, Romila, *Perceiving the forests*, In Mahesh Rangrajan ed. *India's Environmental History*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, pp. 114-115.

³³⁶ ‘It was abode of the Sidhyas, the Charanas, the various sorts of Gandharvas, the Apsaras, the moneys and the Kinnaras, all drunk with joy.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 101.

The second story within the *Mahābhārata* which gives us a glimpse of the relationship between forest state societies and mainstream societies is the story between forest-dwelling women Hidimbā and Bhīma.

एव मुक्त हिडिम्बा तू हिदिम्बेन तदा वने

भतुर्वचना मासाय त्वर्मानेव राक्षसी

जगाम तत्र यत्र स्म पांडव भरतर्षभ

ददर्स तत्र सा गत्वा पांडवान प्रिथात्य सह

श्यानान भीमसेन च जग्रितम त्वपराजितम³³⁷ ॥

(Ādiparva, Chapter 51 , Verse15-16)

According to this story, Rākṣasa Hidimb sent his sister Hidimbā to kill the Pāṇḍavs and Kuntī while they were sleeping in the forest, but as she went to do this she had a glimpse of adorable Bhīma, he was only among them who was not sleeping at the moment and finally she fell in love with Bhīma. Hidimbā didn't kill them and informed about the plan of his Rākṣasa brother Hidimb.

Hidimb was later killed by Bhīma and the forest women Hidimbā approached to Bhīma with a marriage proposal, but he denied and argued that since my elder brother is unmarried and until the permission of mother Kuntī I can't do this. Now it is very interesting as per the historical point of view that what Hidimbā said about her.

³³⁷ 'The female Rashasha, went at the command of her brother, o best of the Bharata race, to the place where Pandavas were. Going there she saw the Pandavas with pritha asleep and the invincible Bhimsena sitting awake.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 218.

अहम् ही मनसा ध्याता सर्वान नेष्यामि व् सदा
 न यातुधान्य त्वांवे न चास्मि राजनिचारी
 कन्या रक्षस्सु सध्यास्मी राज्ञी सल्कत्ताकी
 पुत्रेण तव संयुक्त युवतीदेववर्णिनी
 सर्वान वोऽहमुपस्थास्ये पुरुस्क्रित्य वृकोदरम
 अप्रमत्ता प्र मत्तेशु शु सरु सुसक्रित त्वहम
 वृजिनत तार्यस्यामी दुर्गेशु विश्मेशु च
 प्रिस्थेण वो वहिस्यामी शिग्र गतिम्भिप्सता
 यूयं प्रशाद कुरुत भीमसेनो भजेत माम³³⁸ ॥

(Ādiparva, Chapter 54, Verse11-12)

According to the *Ādiparva* 54.11-12, she said that she is not a *Nisācharaṇī* or nocturnal though she belongs to the Rākṣasa community she is the princes of that region and ruling over the land. The extension of her family tree later becomes more clear when in Vanaparva Pāṇḍavas were attacked by the Rākṣasa Kirmira who claims to the brother of Hidim̄b.

On the basis of what she said in her own introduction to Kuntī and Pāṇḍavas gives us an indication that she was the prizes of a tribal/forest society and dominating over the region through his brothers and relatives. Her proposal for Bhīma could be seen as the attraction of little traditions towards higher ones due to clear and matures family

³³⁸ 'I shall drink a plentiful quantity of hot, fresh and frothy blood. Go and ascertain who these men are, laying asleep in this forest. The strong scent of men pleases my nostrils. Killing all these men bring them to me.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 218.

relations rather than tribal family relations which were at the very lower level as we had seen in the case of Bāli and Sugrīva in *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Here we can argue that it was not one way current of expansion of state-society and penetration it to forests instead on another way there was also quest within the forest societies as in the case of Hidim̄bā, to adopt a family as well as property system to run their societal and economic structure smoothly.

The interaction between Kirmira and Pāṇḍavas is also quite interesting because there is a direct relationship between Hidim̄b and Kirmira.

अहम् बकस्य वे भ्राता किर्मिर इति विश्रन्तु

वनेऽस्मिन् काम्यके शून्ये निवसामि गत्ज्वार³³⁹ ॥ (Vanaparva, Chapter 11, Verse 23)

युधि निर्जित्य पुरुशानाहार नित्यमाचरण

के युयुमभी संप्राप्ता भक्ष्य भूतममंतिकम

युधि निर्जित्य वः सर्वान भक्षयिष्ये गत्ज्वारह³⁴⁰ ॥ (Vanaparva, Chapter 11, Verse 24)

According to the *Vanaparva* as Pāṇḍavas entered into the forest after their exile there first interaction has happened with Rākṣasa Kirmira. As per the śloka of Vanaparva 11.23-24, he claims over the forest region and also wants to take revenge from Bhīma, because Bhīma had killed Hidim̄b in the past.

Vanaparva is the story of the exile of Pāṇḍavas, they had various experiences and interactions of forest peoples and various tribes but the interaction with Kirmira is

³³⁹ ‘Who and whose are you? Say what we shall do. That Rakshasha thus replied to Dharmaraj Yudhisthir.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, Van Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 16.

³⁴⁰ ‘I am the brother of Vaka(sur) and I am known by the name of Kirmira, I live in this uninhabited Kamyaka forest in comfort and ease.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, VanParva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 16.

very much different. Kirmira argues (Vanaparva 11.24) that he is the owner of the forest and anyone who come there or challenges his authority over the forest had to fight with him. Here it is quite clear that Kirmira appears as the observer at the forest fringes to block access of none forest dwellers into the forest. He also remembered his community brothers those who were killed by Bhīma as in the śloka *Vanaparva*. 11.23 he remembered his brother Bakāsūr who was the guard of *Kāmyaka Vana*.

Within the *Vanaparva* of *Mahābhārata*, there is another interesting story of sage August and his wife Lopamudrā³⁴¹. Through this story, a kind of mutual interdependency between life in the forest and material requirements from the state to run life smoothly has been depicted.

राजन निवेशे बुद्धिर्मे वर्तते पुत्रकर्नात

वरये त्वां महिपाल लोपामुद्रा प्रयच्छमे³⁴² ॥ (Vanaparva, Chapter 97, Verse 2)

गडाद्वारमथागम्या भगवा नृसिस्तमः

उग्रमातिस्तथ तपः सह पत्न्यानुकुलाया³⁴³ ॥ (Vanaparva, Chapter 97, Verse 11)

यथा पित्रगृहे विप्र प्रसादे शयनं मम

तथा विधे त्वं शयने मामूपेतुमिर्हाहसी³⁴⁴ ॥ (Vanaparva, Chapter 97, Verse 17)

³⁴¹ Leslie, Julia, (ed.), *Myth and Mythmaking: Continuous Evolution in Indian Tradition*, Curzon Press, Richmond, 1996, p. 34.

³⁴² 'O king, I have a mind to lead a domestic life for the sake of begetting off-spring, O ruler of earth, therefore bestow on me Lopamudra; I solicit her,' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, VanParva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 153.

³⁴³ 'That large eyed lady then dressing herself in bark, skin and rags, become equal to her husband in vows and acts,' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, VanParva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 153.

³⁴⁴ 'The husband certainly marries a wife for the purpose of offspring. But O rishi, you should show towards me that love which I bear for you.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. II, VanParva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 153.

As per the translation of the story, sage August once saw his *Piṭars* hanging upside down into a well and he asked, who are you then the replied to the sage we are your ancestors waiting for liberation until you have a son we will have to be like this. Then sage August decided to marry a girl named Lopamudrā and she was a daughter of king Videha. (*Vanaparva*, 27.2)

Parents of Lopamudrā were worried about the hardships of hermit and forest, they were hesitating to give her daughter to sage August. Certainly, Lopamudrā accepted sage August as her husband and moved for the forest. After the marriage, they both practiced tapas and penance for a long time in the forest. (*Vanaparva*, 27.11) One day after long tapas the sage wanted to have intimacy with Lopamudrā, and then she replied that first, you should bring all the material and luxury what I was having at my father's place then only I will fulfill your wish, (*Vanaparva*, 27.17) and then sage visited various kings and kingdom asking for the wealth and finally he fulfills all the demands of Lopamudrā and they had a son.

This story is a very useful source to understand the various relationships; between hermit and court, forest and gender, forest and state. Sage August's proposal for marriage to Lopamudrā can be seen as a change from the hermit society, the appearance of Piṭar and request for liberation through progenies is a clear sign that a householder is more meaningful than the renounces. The character of Lopamudrā appears as the voice of transformation, though she accepted the forest life her demands for luxury materials and wealth to have a meaningful life gives us a clear picture of a strong societal impact from state-society on forest society.

Hermits and asceticism can be seen as the markers of masculinity and dominance of males over nature and forest, while the idea of the household has been seen as the

place dominated by women for the rearing of child and development of family relations within society. Acceptance of forest life and decision to live the life as an ascetic from a state society woman has actually challenged the established tradition. Her demand for wealth and the visit of August to the various kings in the state-society for wealth can be read as later dependence of sages over state society.

Though the story of sage August and Lopamudrā have already appeared in the *R̥g Veda* they way it has been presented in *Mahābhārata* is a clear sign of transformation in the society at various paradigms like state, gender, family and wealth.

IV.5 Forest and states in Arthaśāstra

The *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya is an ancient Indian work on state polity and public administration, according to scholars like R. Shamsastry³⁴⁵ and R. P. Kangle³⁴⁶ it belongs to 3rd century BCE to 2nd century CE. The *Arthaśāstra* expresses the social and political thought of Kauṭilya, and tries to put Kauṭilyas political theory into the cultural and historical context of his times. Kauṭilya was the key advisor of Chandragupta Maurya (317-293 BCE), he composed this literature to tell the wise king how to defeat one's enemies and rule on behalf of the general good.³⁴⁷

Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* which is basically a book on political-economy has also mentioned in detail about the relationship between state and forests. Chapter second is devoted to the kinds of land and how to make it occupation, where he has described the importance of forestation as well as its defense and economic importance.

³⁴⁵ R. Shamsastri, *Kautiliya Arthashastra* (English Translation), Delhi, 2005.

³⁴⁶ Kangle, R. P., *The Kautiliya Arthshastra in three Parts*, (Translation), Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, Delhi, 1965.

³⁴⁷ Bosesche, Roger, *The first great Political Realist Kautilya and his Arthshastra*, Lexinton Books, Oxford, 2002, p. 08.

अक्रिश्ययां भूमो पशुभ्यो विवितानी प्रयाच्छेत ।

प्रदिष्टाभय स्थावराज्मानी च ब्रह्मनेभ्यो ब्रह्मसोम अरण्यानी, तपोवनानी च तपस्विभ्यो
गोरुत पराणी प्रयाच्छेत ।

तवं मात्रमेकद्वारण खातगुप्तं स्वादुफलगुल्म गुह्यमकंटकिद्रूममुत्तनतोयाशय
दांतमृगाचतुस्पाद भाग्नान्नाख

दंस्त्रव्याल मार्ग्यु कहास्तिहस्तिनी कलभम मृगवनं विहारार्थं राज्ञः कारयेत्³⁴⁸ ।

(Arthaśāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 1)

As per the translation of the text by R. Shama Shastri and Vachaspti Gairola, chapter two (*Bhumichhidra Vidhān*) is dedicated to the interrelationship between the state and forests. In the first śloka, it is guided that uncultivable land must be converted as pastureland and grazing grounds, and forest which is full of deer and trees should be given to the renouces and brāhmaṇas for the study of Vedas. Then some forest land should be kept under the direct control of the king so that he could visit and enjoy, and it should be filled with none canine animals.

The first śloka is very important for having an overall understanding of the forest and state relationship as well as, how should be the treatment of forest by the state. In the opening remarks, Kauṭilya is focusing on the conversion of uncultivable land into pasture land so that it could be used by the animals and also no land should be remained unused, and this is mostly located within the state, not on the boundaries or fringes of the states. Now he is talking about the forest which is available around the state full of wild animals and vegetation, according to him this kind of forest should be given to the ascetics for their spiritual purpose. His actual aim while giving the

³⁴⁸ Gairola, Vachaspati, *Kautiliya-Arthshastra*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhawan, Varansi, Reprint Edition 2009, pp. 82-84.

forest to ascetics could be analysed as the Yogis or the *Vānprathis* should stay near about the state so that the first line of defense for the state could be formed on the forest boundaries of the state.

कुप्य प्रदिष्टाना च द्रव्याणामेकेकशो वा वनं निवेशयेत्; द्रव्यवनकर्मान्तानटविश्वा
द्रववनापाश्रयः³⁴⁹ | (Arthaśāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 3)

Interestingly the third śloka is talking about settlements of artificial forests to fulfill various needs of the state. These forests have been called *Dravyavana* it means material forests. There is a special mention of kinds of the tree which should be grown in them are, Sandalwood, Palāsh, Ashok, etc. Maintenance and security of these forests were given to the forest dwellers or tribes those who were residing over there.

Here it seems that Kautilya was actually arguing for a permanent “forest resource zone” for the continuous supply of important woods and forest products to the state. It is also obvious here that the forest tribes and forest dwellers were incorporated under the wide umbrella of excellent statecraft so that they could also be engaged in the direct chain of economic production. This could also be seen as a way to pacify forest dwellers' socio-economic turbulence against the state structure by engaging them in a constructive way.

प्रत्यन्ते हिस्त्ववनमतव्याररक्ष्यं निवेशयेत् ।

नाग वना अध्यक्शः पर्वतं नादेय सारसामनानुपम च नागवनः विदितपर्यान्तप्रवेशनिशकासन
नगवनपाले पालयेत् ।

हस्तीघतिनः हन्युः दंत्युगम स्वम मृतास्याहरतः सपदाचतुष्पनो लाभः ।

नागवानपाला.....³⁵⁰ || (Arthaśāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 4)

³⁴⁹ Gairola, Vachaspati, *Kautiliya-Arthshastra*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhawan, Varanasi, Reprint Edition 2009, p. 82.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 83.

In the fourth consecutive śloka, Kauṭilya has advised the state to construct an “elephant forest” or *haśtivana*. The location for *haśtivana* is instructed to be having on the boundaries of the state. It was necessary for the heads of these *haśtivan* to know all the geographical entities around the forest; either it is mountains, lakes, rivers or rocks they must be in the minds of heads. The provision of capital punishment was also there for those who kill elephants of the *haśtivana*, and if any elephant dies naturally its ivory should be submitted to the king.

Kauṭilya's ideas of *haśtivana* can be analysed on the strategic point of view, the Mauryan state was known for its huge number of elephants within the state structure. According to Thomas R. Trautmann during the Mauryan period elephants were divided into four categories as per their works were given to them; elephants under training (*damya*), the war elephant (*Samnahya*), the riding elephant (*aūpavahya*), and the rough elephant (*Vyāl/dangerous*).³⁵¹ Since elephants were being used in the wars and they have been mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda* to *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* as an important war animal it was necessary to keep them ready for the emergency demand of the states and that is why special attention has been given to *haśtivana* or elephant forests.

On the basis of Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* particularly from chapter two, we can argue that state was in indeed pressure to exploit the forest resources for the maintenance of state structure and therefor Kauṭilya seems to use each and everything which is accessible to the state. A kind of cooperation and mutual relation has been established between the forest tribes and the state that the responsibility of *Dravyavana* was given to them only as mentioned in the third śloka.

³⁵¹ Trautmann, Thomas R., *Elephants and Kings: An Environmental History*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015, p. 67.

Dravyavana and *Haṣṭivana* are the two most important aspects of Kauṭilya's forest policy. Forest of materials or *Dravyavana* was not only known for the forest products like timber and fruits instead there were also mines of iron (*Kālāyasa*) and copper (*tāmra*) ores within the deep forest which were important to states armory and security. Every aspect of the forest was devised in such a way that directly or indirectly it was associated with the economic well being of the state as well as security of the state from enemies. During the time of Kauṭilya forest policy and administrations were become a very important part of state crafts because the change in the mode of production and emergence of various states during the time of *Mahājanapadās* has made a strong impact over the state forest relations.

IV.6 Conclusion

There is a strong relation between forest and state societies. The Vedic societies were evolving within the forests by worshiping nature and forest, while during the time of Upaniṣads there was a continuous effort from the state societies to penetrate into the forest societies. There was always a struggle between those who were settled and evolved in the forests and those who were coming from the state societies for material as well as philosophical means.

The Epic traditions open the doors of forest in the form of exile and hunts, state-forest relations reaches on the zenith during the age of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.

Chapter Five

Forest and People

V.1 Introduction

There is little evidence of human forest relationships during prehistory and Indus valley, but it has been proved by archaeologists and geographers that human inhabitants of the subcontinent were likely to have been heavily dependent on forest resources. The Vedic literature poetically depicts the natural environment, linking the sacred Himālayas, the abode of the gods, identifying the forest as the home of great sages in the text.³⁵² From the Vedic period to the documentations of epics all the literature is full of evidence regarding forest human interactions and interdependence.

The Idea of the forest is nothing in itself utile there is the presence of human or people who gives them meaning and identity. Form the time of early Vedic to the epic periods a drastic change has occurred in the presentation and human forest relations. In the ancient texts, forests have been reinterpreted by the presence of various forest-dwelling tribes as well as some small socio-economic groups dependent on the forest products. From literary sources we can try and understand, the way the dominant community, primarily the traditional cultivators and ethnic groups pursuing pastoralism and hunting as a mode of livelihood in the forest.³⁵³

³⁵² Poffenberger, Mark, (ed.), *Communities and Forest Management in South Asia*, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, IUCN, Santa Barbara, 2000, p. 13.

³⁵³ Sen, Aloka, Parashar, *Of Tribes, Hunters, and Barbarians, forest dwellers in Mauryan Period*, in *India's Environmental History*, (ed.) by Mahesh Rangarajan, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 129.

The earliest Vedic settlements were nothing but the forest, in the *Ṛg Veda* the term *Āryavartahas* has been used to demarcates the lands dominated by Āryan Culture, which lay to the east of the region where the river Saraśvatī disappeared to the west of the black forest (*Kālāvana*), to the north of the Pdrydra mountains, and to the south of the Himālaya.³⁵⁴ Here the idea of black forest (*Kālāvana*) is important to discuss in the context of forest peoples and their settlements. From the *Ṛg Veda*, it emerges a fairly clear picture of the situation at that time a series of related tribes settled in the Punjab and adjacent regions³⁵⁵ and occupied the north Indian dark forest which was unexplored and unused in all the ways. The earliest forest dwellers of the Vedas were organized in small bands, sometimes constitutive of a few families and were unfamiliar with the matter of status distinction or social organization beyond the family and kinship; they used the forest and scrublands as their resource.³⁵⁶

In the *Ṛg Veda*, a group of the tribe has been mentioned as “Jana” which is a very important term because this term is still being used for the forest-dwelling tribes in India. The idea of Jana and Jāti has gradually developed in the Indian historical tradition with various complex socio-economic definitions which later created social hierarchy and marked as the identity.

According to D. D. Kosambi,³⁵⁷ five tribal groups have been mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda* and Jana is one among them. Though all these tribes were associated with the forest in different ways but important is that how Jana tribes remained associated only with the forest dwelling society throughout the whole Indian historical tradition.

While Romila Thapar has looked over the genesis of Jāti in order to understand the

³⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 130.

³⁵⁵ Basham, A. L., *A Cultural History of India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1975, p. 20.

³⁵⁶ Thapar, Romila, *Early India: From Origin to AD 1300*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 55.

³⁵⁷ Kosambi, D. D., ‘The Vedic Five Tribes’, *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 87, No. 01, Jan-March, 1967, pp. 33-39.

caste system in the Veda and she have suggested that, it is possible that formation of Jāti may even have been an earlier process, the genesis of Jāti may have been clan, prior to its becoming a caste.³⁵⁸

On the basis of above, these two opinions on the ideas of Jana and Jāti we can postulate one possible argument and we can say that before the genesis of Jāti all there was Jana and engaged in forest-related activities and later on the division of labour they fragmented in the Jātis or castes for more economic activities. If we critically analyze the syntax of the term Jana, it appears almost in all the major and powerful terms, like Rā+Jana which is king, Jana+pada which is land, Jana+Jati which is caste, Jana+ka who is the king continuously mentioned in *R̥g Veda*, Upaniṣad and then *Rāmāyaṇa*, and then Jana+mejaya who was the first king mentioned in the beginning of *Mahābhārata*.

In all these terms prefix Jana, whose meaning is very close to ‘people’ appears very frequently and it seems that the immigration of Vedic culture into the north has either propagated the idea of Jana or it has adopted it because of its socio-economic intensity towards acceptance of forest-based society or people in early days.

In this chapter, we are aimed to look into the various kinds of people or tribal groups who were directly or indirectly associated with the forest. We will also see the various aspects of forests as it has been presented in the various texts ranging from Vedas to epics.

Apart from the five tribes of the Vedas as mentioned by D. D. Kosambi, there were other groups also in the Veda divided by the scholars on their Āryan and none-Āryan culture identities. In the *R̥g Veda*, there are people such as Dāsas, Dasyus, Asuras,

³⁵⁸ Thapar, Romila, *Early India: From Origin to AD 1300*, Penguin Books, 2003, p. 63.

Rākṣasas, Panīs who have been shown as enemies of the Āryans.³⁵⁹ Most of these none Āryan identities have a strong connection with the forest. For example, Asuras and Rākṣasas have always been represented throughout the Vedic and epic tradition that they have an abode in the deep forest.

According to A. B. Keith, most of the Vedic gods and goddess are exhibited in an anthropomorphic form particularly the various forms and phenomena of nature³⁶⁰ as well as they all belong to some aspects of forests. In the Vedic age, various kinds of forest people have been represented indirectly through the mythological stories of the anthropomorphic or animistic depiction of gods, the goddess as well as Asura and Rākṣasas.

D. P. Saxena in his book *Regional Geography of Vedic India*³⁶¹ has also described the various kinds of Vedic Āryan and none Āryan tribes dwelling into the forest. None Āryan Dasyus were regarded in the *Ṛg Veda* as *akarman* (riteless), *adevyu* (indifferent to the gods), *abrāhman* (without devotion), *ayajna* (non-sacrificing), *avrata* (lawless). According to D. P. Saxen, the Āryan tribes are Anus, *Druhyus*, *Yadus*, *Turvasas*, *Purus*, *Bhārats*, *Trtsus*, *Krivis*, *Pañchala*, *Kikatas*, *Cedis*, *Matsyas*, *Ajas*, *Yaksus*, *Prathus*, *Visanins*, *Alinas*, and *Pakthas*.

In the Upaniṣads there is a slight change in the depiction of forest peoples, tribal communities of small groups of the Vedas has been transformed in the settled societies in Upaniṣads. Glimpses into Upaniṣadic society reveal the existence of Varṇa division, Ashram theory and the prevailing idea of Saṃskāras.³⁶² With the coming of the āśram system certainly, the human activity increases within the forest

³⁵⁹ The term Aryans has been used at this place in the context of culture and ethnic groups.

³⁶⁰ Kieth, A. B., *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda, Part 01*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989, p. 58.

³⁶¹ Saxena, D. P., *Regional Geography of Vedic India*, Grantham, Kanpur, 1976, p. 42.

³⁶² Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 80.

for the attainment of knowledge as well as numbers of Vānprathīs occupied the forest land and formed forest communities here.

During the Vedic period, forest mythologies were full of gods and goddesses as protagonists but during the age of Upaniṣads humans become the protagonists in all mythological stories plying within the forests. The Upaniṣads are at one level philosophical speculation on abstract themes, but at another, they are embedded in the society to which they relate.³⁶³

There is also the argument by the scholars that after the emergence of Varṇa a system in the Vedas its extension happened during the time of Upaniṣdas. Maximum myths and dialogues in the Upaniṣads represent kings in the forest with high wisdom and knowledge. In the words of Patrick Olivelle, though the prominent and famous teachers of Upaniṣads were the Brāhmins though at the same time several prominent teachers of Upaniṣadic doctrines are presented as kings, or at least belonging to Kṣatriya class. Many scholars have claimed that the creative and new elements of Upaniṣadic doctrines were the creation of Kṣatriyas.³⁶⁴

The Upaniṣadic tradition has given the name called as Aranyakās, the name must clearly, as held by Oldenberg, have been derived from the fact that the discussions contained in these works were studied in the forest. The Aranyakās were specially intended for study by the *Vānprathas*.³⁶⁵ Aranyākṣ was the place for genesis and study of Upaniṣads and as we discussed the gradual dominance of Kṣatriya in the Upaniṣdas

³⁶³ Thapar, Romila, 'Sacrifice, Surplus and Soul', *History of Religions*, Vol. 33, No. 04, May 1994, p. 306.

³⁶⁴ Olivelle, Patrick, *The Early Upanishads: Annotated text and translations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 11.

³⁶⁵ Keith, A. B., *The Religion and the Philosophy of Vedas and Upanishads*, Part 02, Motilal Banasidass Publishers, Delhi, 1989, pp. 399-400.

we can argue that the movement of the people from state societies has gradually increased in the forest and that could have been for various material reasons.

The extension of state societies into the forest is more visible in the epics; it becomes a normal routine to visit forest by the kings. The Idea of “*tapovana*” which was earlier only made for the sages in the forest has extended by the idea of *Vanvās* which was made for the royal kings to have a compulsory visit and stay in forest and wilderness. The variety of people within the forest has gradually increased in the period of epics while it was stagnant for the sages in the *Araṇyakās*. The idea of exile in epics explores and undiscovered hundreds of tribes and peoples living within the forest in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*. Even the epic mythology tells us that forest became the abode of celestial Gandharvās and Apśaras and they had continues visits to some particulars places in forests. These Cultural differences within the forest people in the epics indicate us their levels of socio-political and material developments and the differences has given more options for creations of myths and believes.

V.2 Forest People in the Vedas

The Vedic people have been discussed in the text in various forms and natures; sometimes they have been shown directly as people of the forest and sometimes symbols and motifs have been used. A. B. Keith³⁶⁶ has divided the people of Vedas in basic two categories; first as gods and then as demons. According to him the evolution of nature gods and abstract deities is the process of amalgamation between early Vedic amorphism and animism. The gods and goddesses who have been

³⁶⁶ Keith, A. B., *The Religion and the Philosophy of Vedas and Upanishads*, Part 01, Motilal Banasidass Publishers, Delhi, 1989, p. 58.

described in the Vedas like Agni, Adītī, and Indra are influenced much by either human characters or animal features.

D. D. Kosambi in his classic article *The Vedic Five Tribes*³⁶⁷ has described the five kinds of Vedic tribes, these are, *Janah*, *Jatah*, *Manusah*, *Kṣatriyah*, and *Carsanyah*. They have been described as Jana and Jatah both in a single category while Manusah as a human being then Kṣatriya as five nations and Carsanyah as mobile people. Now the question arises that, which were the forest dwellers among them. In order to find the possible answer, we need to explore each of the terms with its proper textual and contextual interrogation in the Vedas.

The first term is *Janah*, in the *Ṛg Veda*; there are numerous hymns where this term has been mentioned very frequently. While a serious analysis of *Ṛg Veda* hymns gives as an idea that the Janah were the common people of Vedic society and most of the time they have been shown as praying to the gods and goddess.

यं रक्षन्ति प्रचेतसो वरुणो मित्रो अर्यमा । नू चित्स दभ्यते जनः ॥³⁶⁸

(*Ṛg Veda* 1.41.1)

The mantra of *Ṛg Veda* 1.41.1 is very important to understand that actually who these Janah were, and how they were associated with forest life. Prayers are the most important thought as well as emotion in the minds of human beings. These can be defined as subconscious socio-personnel demands for material as well as spiritual requirements. Reading of social as well as personnel demands in the hymns can tell us

³⁶⁷ Kosambi, D. D., 'The Vedic Five Tribes', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, Vol. 87, No 01, Jan-March 1967, pp. 33-39.

³⁶⁸ 'The man whom the wise Varuna, Mitra and Aryman protect quickly subdues his foes.' Translated by H. H. Wilson Translated and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 107.

the socio-economic background of human beings and through which we can interpret their affinity towards the forest.

The above hymn of *R̥g Veda* 1.41.1 is a prayer to *Varuṇa*, *Mitra*, and *Āryamān* to gain power so that the devotee destroys his enemies. Here *Varuṇa*, *Mitra* and *Āryamān* are gods which are actually the personified forms of nature and its destructive power. In this hymn, it seems that the devotee belongs to the forest society where natural calamities are very common as well as the darkness is the biggest enemy of humans in the night which is only conquered by the presence of *Mitra* who is synonymous to the Sun god.

सजोषस्त्वा दिवो नरो यज्ञस्य केतुमिन्धते । यद्धस्य मानुषो जनः सुम्नायुर्जुहवे अध्वरे ॥³⁶⁹

(*R̥g Veda* 6.2.3)

Another important hymn in the *R̥g Veda* is 6.2.3 where the descendants of *Manu* have been mentioned as the offerers of prayers and sacrifices to various gods for happiness and well being. Here *Manu* has been mentioned as the father of all human beings in the Vedas and the difference between forest dwellers and none forest dweller society has been assimilated into on human humane society.

The second term which has been discussed by *Kosambi* is *Jatah* which is associated with the first one as tribes within the Vedic corpus. *Manush* is the third term which is synonymous to humane while *Kṣatriya* and *Carsanyah* seem more social terms rather than forest-dwelling Identities. However it is difficult to differentiate between the *Āryan* and none *Āryan* people in the *R̥g Vedas*, but these five tribes of strikes our thought towards more socially segregated societies.

³⁶⁹ ‘The offerers of praise, sympathizing in satisfaction, kindle you the banner of the sacrifice, when man, the descendant of *Manu* desiring happiness; invokes you to the rite.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and *Bhāṣya* of *Shankaracharya*, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 3*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 04.

The reference of five tribes as *pañchmanush*,³⁷⁰ *pañchkrstyah*,³⁷¹ and *pañcakarasyah*³⁷² gives us enough idea about the various communities within the text those who were surviving in the socio-political geography of Ṛg Vedic region.

According to D. D. Kosambi, these two terms like *Krastyah* and *Karsyah* have derived from the root *krs* the meaning of which in later times is ‘plowing the land.’ Some scholars argue that the five tribes were known as *pañchjanyah* actually belong to the Āryan classes.

The major five tribes within the Vedas are mentioned as *Yadu*, *Turvasa*, *Anu*, *Druhyu*, and *Puruas*. According to the description of Sayana the *Ṛg Veda* takes the five to mean the four class-castes (*varṇa*) and the fifth is the *Niṣādas*. Here *Niṣādas* has been mentioned as the forest-dwelling people in the Veda, however, the term is very rare in itself within the Veda but the presence of four Varṇa systems gives a kind of support for its indirect presence.

According to Upinder Singh in the *Ṛg Veda*, about thirty tribes and clans have been mentioned within them the five people or *Pañcha-Janah* have a special mention. The

³⁷⁰ Whatever wealth may be in the firmament, in heaven, or among the five classes of men, bestow, Asvins upon us.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 392. *Rg Veda* 8.9.2

³⁷¹ ‘Human beings, wishing for wealth, give brightness, by their praises, to the lord of men, the wise (Agni) as they add lustre, (by polishing). To an axe: spreading everywhere, he goes alike through high and low places, and has taken an embryo (condition) in this region.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson., and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 113. *Rg Veda* 3.2.10

‘May she, gliding everywhere, quickly bring us food (suited) to the five races of men: may she, the daughter of the sun whom the grey-haired Jamadagnis gave to me, be the bestowed of new life. Five races of men- Pancajanya krstisu: here, therefore the five distinctions are restricted to human beings, confirming the scholiasts notion that the four castes and barbarians are included.

Daughter of the Sun- Paksya, the daughter of Paksa: paksanirvahkasya, the distributor of the parts of the year that is suryasya of the sun.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 217. *Rg Veda* 3.53.16

³⁷² ‘We invoke the two, Indra and Agni, who are irresistible in conflicts, who are renowned in battles, who protect the five classes of men’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 3*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p.530. *Rg Veda* 5.86.2

‘Who, juvenile, wise, the lord of the dwelling, abides with five classes of men in every dwelling.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *Ṛg Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 188. *Rg Veda* 7.15.2

Purus and Bhārtas are presented as the two dominant tribes in the Vedas. Despite these major clans and tribes, *Ṛg Veda* has also mentioned three hundred nine Indo-European words which indicates their interactions with other forest-dwelling groups as *Chumuri, Dhuni, Pipru, and Shambara*.³⁷³

Here it is important to notice some of these none-Āryan names which have been mentioned by Upinder Singh which indicates the strong presence of other forest-dwelling groups in the Vedas. Śambhara which later also appears as Śabaras in the later Vedic period and the then in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Śabari appear as a woman of the forest is quite interesting to see the presence of a particular forest-dwelling society from Vedic to the Epic periods.

Sometimes it also appears that since these Śabaras had a strong affinity towards the forest, they had rejected all the philosophies which were coming from the mainstream Āryan society in the form of a socio-political capsule of Vedic tradition. Therefore they have also been mentioned as the Chārvākas or the followers of materialism because they discarded the authority of Vedas.

Within the domain of *Ṛg Veda*, the war among ten kings can also be seen as the marker of earlier forest-dwelling society dependent on substantial social production as well as pastoral livelihood. According to R. S. Sharma 'war in the predominantly tribal society of *Ṛg Veda* was a logical and natural economic function. He observes the process of man hunting was the logical extension of animal hunting.'³⁷⁴ Since war is a very common feature of a tribal society and it was associated with its socio-economic activities, therefore, the war of ten kings in the *Ṛg Veda* could also be seen

³⁷³ Singh Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: from Stone Age to 12 century*, Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2008, p. 188.

³⁷⁴ Sharma, R. S., *Material Culture and Social formation in Ancient India*, Macmillan, Delhi, 200, p. 38.

as a war among the tribes and these tribes were the people with community feelings for the extension of their land and territory.

According to Upinder Singh, the battle of ten kings (*dashrājan*) recounted in the book seven in the *R̥g Veda* may be based on an actual historical incident. In this battle, the Bharat chief Sudas grandson of Divodasa fought against the confederacy of ten tribes.³⁷⁵ These tribes can also be considered as the various forest-dwelling groups on the basis of their socio-economic structure as well as the interpretation of ten kings war in the *R̥g Veda*.

The Vedic people have also been classified on the basis of external features as well; D. P. Saxena in this book *Regional Geography of Vedic India*³⁷⁶ argues that the Āryans distinguished themselves from others based on the colour of skin and nasal index. None-Āryan Dasyus were regarded in *R̥g Veda* as Akarman³⁷⁷ (riteless), Adevyu³⁷⁸ (indifferent to the gods), Abrahman³⁷⁹ (without devotion), Ayajvan³⁸⁰

³⁷⁵ Singh Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: from Stone Age to 12 century*, Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2008, p. 188.

³⁷⁶ Saxena, D. P., *Regional Geography of Vedic India*,

³⁷⁷ अकर्मा दस्युरभि नो अमन्तुरन्यव्रतो अमानुषः । त्वं तस्यामित्रहन्वधर्दासस्य दम्भय ॥ *R̥g Veda*, 10.22.8

‘The Dasyu practising no religious rites, not knowing as thoroughly, following other observances, obeying no human laws, battle, destroyer of enemies, the weapon of hate slave.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 244.

³⁷⁸ यो राजा चर्षणीनां याता रथेभिरधिगुः । विश्वासां तरुता पृतनानां ज्येष्ठो यो वृत्रहा गृणे ॥ *R̥g Veda* 8.70.11

‘I praise that Indra who is the lord of men, who proceeds irresistible in his chariots, the breaker-through all armies, the pre-eminent one, the slayer of Vrta.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 577.

³⁷⁹ अच्छा कविं नृमणो गा अभिष्टौ स्वर्षाता मघवन्नाधमानम् ।

उतिभिस्तमिषणो द्युम्नहूतौ नि मायावानब्रह्मा दस्युरर्त ॥ *R̥g Veda* 4.16.9

‘Maghvan, who are honoured by men, you have repaired to the presence of the sage for the sake of bestowing (upon him) wealth, and when soliciting (you) in his need (for aid): defending him with your protection, the guileful, impious Dasyu has been destroyed in the contest for the soil.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 2*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 283.

³⁸⁰ अन्यव्रतममानुषमयज्वानमदेवयुम् । अव स्वः सखा दुधुवीत पर्वतः सुघ्नाय दस्युं पर्वतः ॥ *R̥g Veda* 8.70.11

‘May your friend, Parvata, hurl down from heaven him who follows other rites, the enemy of men, him who offers not sacrifice and who worships not the gods; may Parvata hurl the Dasyu down to the stern smiter (death).’ Translated by, H. H. Wilson, and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 579.

(non-sacrificing), Avrata³⁸¹ (lawless). In the *R̥g- Veda* these cultural differences also caused the frequent conflict amongst the Āryan and none- Āryan people.

The people within the Vedas have diverse backgrounds and identities, the Veda has been constructed by some people and they have a strong historical background on the basis of interpretations of the Vedic hymns. Vedas can also be considered as the history of Devas, Paṇis, Rākṣas and other tribal groups as *Mats̥yas*, *Yak̥sas*, and *Śarpas*.

Hence each of these terms is important to understand the basic idea about forest-dwelling people as well as none forest-dwelling people. The word Deva undoubtedly denotes a being connected with heaven, it stands out against the demons weather Dāsas, Dasyūs or Rākṣasas, while the Brāhmaṇas show the term Asura degraded from its old higher sense and opposed to Deva.³⁸²

The Rākṣasas were presented as antihuman characters; they were more affiliated with the rough life and lower level of development in various aspects of life. They were dominated over the area of forest land which was basically virgin lands in the Vedas. Here it is important to discuss the term Asur in the context of Rākṣasas. It seems that the Asuras are separate ethnic groups who were following different cultures and beliefs other than that of Vedic religion.

Frits stall in his book “*Discovering the Vedas*” has completely discarded the interpretation of five tribes as four *Varṇa* and *Niṣādas*. According to him, the

³⁸¹ वि जानीह्यार्यान्ये च दस्यवो बर्हिष्मते रन्धया शासद्व्रतान् । शाकी भव यजमानस्य चोदिता विश्वेत्ता ते सधमादेषु चाकन ॥ *R̥g Veda* 1.51.8, ‘Discriminate between the Aryas and they who are Dasyus: restraining those who performs no religious rites, compel them to submit to the performer of sacrifices: be you, who are powerful, the encourager of the sacrificer : I am desirous of celebrating all your deeds in ceremonies that give you satisfaction.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson and Bhāsyā of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Samhitā Vol. 1*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016. p. 130.

³⁸² Keith, A. B., *The Religion and the Philosophy of Vedas and Upanishads*, Part 01, Motilal Banasidas Publishers, Delhi, 1989, p. 75.

indigenous population contributed substantially to the Vedas follows from the fact that the names of indigenous families, clans and tribes, become the names of Vedic Schools Śākhā.³⁸³ He argues that there is no evidence of the caste system in the Vedas. It begins to be visible in the late Vedic and posts Vedic Dharma Sutras. And become fully developed as a theory in the law book of Manu.

Here we can take the argument of Stall that the Vedic society was not divided on caste line, therefore, the interpretation of five tribes a caste representation seems very loose, at the same time the absence of the term Niṣādas also strengthens the opinion of Stall.

Ṛg Vedic mythology is another strong source of information about the people of the land during the Vedas. As we all know that myths work and give meanings when they are presented in a collective way. The myths of Deva and Asura were have been discussed to differentiate between the kinds of people on the basis of their behaviour and nature, now we will try to formulate the meanings and their identities through the reading of gods in the *Ṛg Veda*.

Many of the deities in the *Ṛg Veda* are transparently natural though they have acquired a certain amount of personality while others developed during the Indo-Iranian period. The Indo-Iranian gods are Varuṇa, Mitra, Arymān, and Bhāg, while the later development of semi-divine beings as Ṛta, Soma, Gandharvas, and Ṛīṣīs could be taken as the addition of local beliefs and people in the text.³⁸⁴

Ṛg Vedic mythology woven in such a way, that it had adjusted all the new and old gods to tell larger mythology. The new story and identities were given space to unfold a stronger impact over the followers of Vedic religion. They included the heavenly

³⁸³ Stall, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, Delhi, 2008, p. 54.

³⁸⁴ Flood, Gavin, (ed.), *A Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003, p. 71.

sphere with deities and ancestors such as Gandharvas, Ṛīsīs, and Pitṛs. They included Nāgās, Rākṣas, Kimdin³⁸⁵, etc. Here we can argue that there is the possibility of the representation of local people in mythical forms particularly those who were surviving on forest and nature like Nāgās, Rākṣas, and Kimdin. They all might belong to a lower level of social development in comparison to those who belonged to Vedic culture.

Romila Thapar has looked very different from the presence of Vedic clans in the region of Gaṅgā-Yamuna Rivers. According to her, the *Ṛg Veda* describes cattle herding agro-pastoralists, whose geographical horizon was narrowed down to the land between Indus and the two grassy banks of river Saraśvatī.³⁸⁶

The clan society of *Ṛg Veda* is different from the urban cultures that came before and after. The unit of society the vis (clan) was located in small localized settlements. A group of clans formed the Jana, sometimes translated as “tribe” although it might be better understood as “a constituent of segmentary society”. The mainstay of clan wealth was cattle alongside horse livestock.³⁸⁷ It seems very clear that the Vedic tribes were residing near river forests to easily avail the nearby grazing grounds for their cattle and horses.

Ṛg Vedic society had a dual social division system, that of ārya and dāsa. This has much debated, particularly in the context of the theory of a Āryan race. The term ārya is more frequently associated with status and used for the respect of a person and implacably connected with the wealth of a person³⁸⁸ while dāsa were lower to the

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 72.

³⁸⁶ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 101.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

socio-economic strata in the Vedic society. This dual division of Ṛg Vedic society and their occupancies around the rivers and grasslands makes space for the creation of a very complex society.

On the basis of geographical depictions as Romila Thapar has done in the above discussion we can argue that either they were tribes of Āryan or the Dāsas they all have belonged to a forest-based socio-economic ecosystem where everything was associated with forest space and resources. Even the kinds of material which were being exchanged during *dāna* and *dakṣhiṇa* within the Vedas are all some kinds of forest products.

On the above long discussion in this section, we can argue that the people of the Vedas are directly associated with the forests. All the mythological gods and personalities are actually a kind of metamorphosis where they have become a reflection of the rough as well as compassionate forms of nature and forest. Various modes of exchanges either war or sacrifices have also indicated the kinds of participation of people as well the things and materials from the forests that have become inseparable in the rituals clarifies the importance of forest and its identities of inhabitants.

V.5 Forest & People from Upaniṣads

Upaniṣads are also known as *Aranyakās* or the book of the forest. It is considered as the collection of stories full of debate and discussion on the important issues of law, morality, and justice. The period of Upaniṣad in Indian history is regarded as the period of transition old Vedic orthodoxy to new rationale approaches towards the understanding of religion and philosophy.

The Upaniṣadic society was different from Vedic society, certain kinds of socio-political and religious changes occurred during this period which given strong philosophical and rational ground to the later Brahmanical religion. We come to know about the Upaniṣadic society from the kinds of debates and issues that have been raised in the Upaniṣadic stories or through the kinds of people who have been mentioned directly or indirectly in the texts.

A. B. Keith has argued that the term *Aranyaka* in itself explains the whole idea of forest-based society and its various aspects. He quotes Oldenberg and says that “the name Aranyaka must clearly have been derived from the fact that the discussion contained in these works were studied in the forest; the alternative view that the *Aranyakas* were specially intended for the study by the Vānaprathas, men who, after serving their apprenticeship as Brahman students and having performed as householders their duties, retire to the forest to study.”³⁸⁹

According to Frits Stall, the Upaniṣads refers mostly to the kings and many brāhmaṇas as the creative and active participants in the debates. Brāhmaṇas may be members of a class or simply learned men. Women participants are mentioned by name but there is no mention of naked ascetics and monks.³⁹⁰

Patrick Olivelle has observed very critically about the language of people whom Upaniṣads belong. He opines that the modern linguistic studies have demonstrated that the language of these people, “the language in which ancient Vedic literature including the Upaniṣads was written and which later come to be known as Sanskrit, belongs to a family of language known as Indo-European, that includes Greek and Latin as well as ancient and modern language of Iran. This distribution of language

³⁸⁹ Keith, A. B., *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanisads Part II*, Motilal Banarsidas Publishers Delhi, 1998, p. 489.

³⁹⁰ Stall, Frits, *Discovering the Vedas*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 163.

suggests that a related group of nomadic pastoral people migrated across Europe and towards East, settling first in Iran and then northern India.”³⁹¹ While according to S. Radhakrishnan, as almost all the early literature of India was anonymous, we do not know the names of authors and people of the Upaniṣads. Some of the chief doctrines of Upaniṣads are associated with the names of renowned sages as Āruni, Yājñavalkya, Balaki, Śvetaketu, Sandilya, and Jābālī. They were the early exponents of the spiritual philosophies in the Upaniṣads.³⁹²

Though it is very difficult to argue about the peoples of the Upaniṣads because most of the time Upaniṣadic stories and philosophers either deals with the abstract ideas or use symbolism to produce and speculate about their spiritual as well as material findings. In this way, it is quite difficult to investigate the people who belong to the Upaniṣadic age.

Signe Cohen³⁹³ has suggested some ideas to deal with the above problem. According to him, there are five methods through which we can know about the Upaniṣdic people and society.

1. The relationship of the text to other known texts of ancient India
2. References in the text to things that can be dated through archaeological methods, such as the use of iron or rice cultivation or to historical figures and events
3. Linguistic evidence
4. Metrical evidence
5. The development of religious and philosophical ideas in the text

³⁹¹ Olivelle, Patrick, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated texts and translation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1998, p. 04.

³⁹² Radhakrishnan, S., *The Early Upaniṣads*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1953, p. 22.

³⁹³ Cohen, Signe, (ed.) *The Upaniṣads: A complete Guide*, Rautledge, New York, 2018, p. 11.

One by one analysis of each of the above ideas could lead us towards the formulation of a possible threshold for the study of Upaniṣadic people and society particularly in the context of people and forests.

According to the first method, it is quite obvious that the Upaniṣads have roots in the Vedas and extensions into the epics and it is well connected to the number of ancient texts. Sometimes the same names of kings and priests and Rākṣasas have been mentioned in the Vedas, Upaniṣads and epics, as well as the mythical creatures like Apśarsas and Gandharvs, have a continuous appearance from Vedas to the stories of Upaniṣads and Epics. On the basis of continues propagation of the same names and features in the texts, we can argue that these so-called mythical characters have a development in a long historical period and therefore they must be considered as the peoples of Upaniṣadic era.

Archaeological, linguistic and metrical methods have been discussed by various scholars in order to explain and investigate the Upaniṣadic society as Romila Thapar, Patrick Olivelle, Frits Stall and others have done. Here we will focus on the kinds of the religious and philosophical development of Upaniṣadic text through the analysis of important stories, characters and sages to know about the people and social environment.

Stories and instances from Upaniṣads reveal that there was the existence of Varna division, *āśrama* theory, and the *Samskāra* system. These are the three important key points to know about the peoples those who were interacting and staying in the forest. These three points can also be explained on the basis of socio-religious change that was happening during this time. In the Upaniṣads themselves, we can see religious and social ideas changing.

Old ideas about a vaguely imagined heaven are replaced with new notions of reincarnation and liberation; the idea of individual karma replaces earlier speculations about the benefits to be gained from performing intricate sacrifice correctly. The worship of gods and goddesses of nature is gradually supplanted by meditations and abstract cosmic force Brāhmaṇ. In this intellectually fertile climate, ideas traveled freely between Upaniṣads and the texts of emerging new religions of Buddhism and Jainism.³⁹⁴ The earlier system of automatic recycling was now replaced by one conditioned moral value of the actions undertaken during one's lifetime.³⁹⁵

Varṇa a division is an important factor of the Upaniṣadic society; it has divided people for the execution of various kinds of labours. The *Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* mentions the four Varṇa as *Brahma, Kshatra, Vis, and Sudra*.³⁹⁶

The *Chāndogyā* recognizes the Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, and Vaisya as good birth but places forth Cāndāla with dogs and hogs as an evil birth.³⁹⁷ The *Kaushitaki* mentions

³⁹⁴ Cohen, Signe, (ed.) *The Upanisads: A complete Guide*, Rautledge, New York, 2018, p. 34.

³⁹⁵ Flood, Gavin, *A Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, p. 84.

³⁹⁶ ब्रह्मा चा इदमग्न भासिदेकमेव , तदेकं सन्न व्यभवत्

तछेयोरुष्मत्स्यासृजत क्षत्रं, यान्येतानी देवत्रा क्षत्राशि

इन्द्रो वरुणः सोमो रुद्रः पर्जन्यो यमो मृत्युरिशान इति

तस्मात्क्षत्रात्पर नास्ति; तस्माद्ब्रह्मणः क्षत्रियाम्धस्ता

दुपस्ते राजसूये, क्षत्र एव तद्यशो दधाति ; सैषा क्षत्रस्य

योनिर्ब्रह्म I तस्माद्यापी राजा परमर्ता गच्छति ब्राह्मो

वान्तत उष्निश्रायती स्वं योनिम ; य उ एनं हिनास्ति स्वं

स योनी मृच्चछति, स पापियान भवति, यथा श्रेयांस हिंसित्वा BU 1.4.11

‘Verily, in the beginning this world was Brahma, one only. Being one, he was not developed. He created still further a superior form, the Kshatrahood, even those who are Kshatras (rulers) among the gods: Indra, Varuna, Soma, Rudra, Parjanya, Yams, Mrityu, Isana. Therefore there is nothing higher than Kshatra. Therefore at the Rajasuya ceremony the Brahman sits below the Kshatriya. Upon Kshatrahood alone does he confer this honour. This same thing, namely Brahmanhood (brahma), is the source of Kshatrahood. Therefore, even if the king attains supremacy, he rests finally upon Brahmanhood as his own source. So whoever injures him (i.e. a Brahman) attacks his own source. He fares worse in proportion as he injures one who is better.’ BU 1.4.11 Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 84.

³⁹⁷ तद्य इह रमणीयचरणा अभ्याशो ह यत्ते रमणीयां

योनिमापद्येरन्ब्राह्मणयोनिं वा क्षत्रिययोनिं वा वैश्ययोनिं

only the first three. Not only humans have divided on the basis of Varṇa an order but also the gods, trees, and plants were divided on the Varṇa order.³⁹⁸ The idea of Varṇa system and the expedition to the new forest lands by Kṣatriya have a close relationship. It actually helped the theory of kingship and given more impetus to the royal sacrifices by the kings to win more and more new lands.

Sometimes it also seems in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣada* that the *Cāndāla* were staying into the forest due to their participation in death-related rituals. There is two communities the *Kṣatriyas* and *Cāndāls* both were strongly associated with the forest during Upaniṣadic ages because the kings have to extend his territory through hunting into the deep forest so that Āśrama could be established within the forests and Cāndāls were bound to stay out of the main society and exactly doing the same what kings hunting into the forest

After the ‘Varṇa order’ ‘*āśrama system*’ is the key to know about the people engaged with forests. As the four Varṇas divided the society into four different classes, so did the Āśramas divided the individual’s life span into four different categories. The four stages of Āśram systems are, *Brahmachārīn*, *Gṛihastha*, *Vānprastha*, and *Samnyāsa*.

These four stages were connected with the four classes of Vedic literature. The Brahmchārīn resided with the preceptor and studied the Samhita section. The Gṛihastha performed the Sacrifices according to the Brāhmaṇa texts. The Vānprasthis

वाथ य इह कपूयचरणा अभ्याशो ह यत्ते कपूयां
योनिमापद्येरञ्श्वयोनिं वा सूकरयोनिं वा
चण्डालयोनिं वा ॥

‘Accordingly, those who are of pleasant conduct here the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a Brahman, or the womb of a Kshatriya, or the womb of a Vaisya. But those who are of stinking conduct here prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb, either the womb of a dog, or the womb of a swine, or the womb of an outcast (Candala).’ Chāndogya Upaniṣad 5.10.7, Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 233.

³⁹⁸ Aitarey Brahmana VI.4.4.12-15 Translated by Martin Haug, *Aitarey Brahmana of the Rig Veda*, (Rites of the Vedic Religion) Allahabad, 1922, p. 276.

performed symbolic worship in the forest as explained by Aranyakās and Saṃyasīns having freed himself from all desires, possessions, and attachments.³⁹⁹

Within these four Āśrama categories, the last two are important to understand and analyze the new forest influx from mainstream society. Vānprastha and Saṃnyāsa are the two categories of the sages of life which had to be spent in the forest with minimum materialism and maximum spiritualism according to the Upaniṣads.

When a man had enjoyed the state of material bliss, performing his prescribed duties of sacrificing and public welfare, he was free to follow the course of Vānprastha, the forest-dwelling stage of life. The Smṛitīs give the precise age for going to the forest as when a man has seen his grandchildren and when his hair has become grey or the skin wrinkled. There are clear instructions about the idea of Vānprastha in *Jābalopniṣad*, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, and *Bṛhdāranyaka Upaniṣad*, even Yājñavalkya was anxious to go to the forest from the state of the householder.⁴⁰⁰

Here it is important to question the popularity of Vānprastha during the Vedic age. Some scholars believe that earlier this migration to the forest was made for none believers of the Vedas but later, Upaniṣad incorporated it with the submission of Ṛiṣi tradition of the Āryans with Muni tradition of none Āryans.⁴⁰¹ The idea of Vānprastha could also be seen through the lens of material explanation.

When we try to see the material changes that occurred during the adoption as well as popularity of Vānprastha in the Upaniṣads we find that due to the expansion of agriculture and evolution of kingship and states it was required to make a way towards the unused virgin lands of the forest as well as to assimilate with the forest

³⁹⁹ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 89.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰¹ Shastri, Mangaldeo, *Aupnishad Dhara*,

communities. This socio-political and economical coherence between forest societies and state-society was only possible through the gradual sinking of the old age population into the forest. As well as the Vānpratha age people were economically unproductive therefore it could be the best use of them to make them as intermediates and carriers of the brāhmanical culture within the forests.

After the Vānprastha the fourth and last stage of life was named as Saṁnyās. “The term Saṁnyās is mentioned first time in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*.”⁴⁰² It was considered as the desire less and none attachment state of mind when knowing the Brāhman became the end goal of life. This stage of life has to be spent away from the materialistic society in the search for true knowledge and Brāhman. Forest was the only place which was none material place in the true sense and that is why the Saṁnyāsīs had a strong connection with the forests. In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* a specific term has been used to denote Saṁnyāsīs, they have been called as *Pravrājya*.

On the basis of the above discussion on Varṇa order, Āśrama system and idea of Vānprastha as well as Saṁnyās it is quite obvious that there was a migration of large chunk of state population into the forest and there is no mention of agriculture by these Vānprathīs and Saṁnyāsīs within the forest. So from where there was a chain of supply of agricultural products for these migrated forest dwellers who are in old age and can't afford hard work at all within the forest. There is a possibility that they could have received alms from the forest-dwelling societies which were later called as Niṣādas.

The representation of women within the Upaniṣad is very different from Vedas. Here they have been placed as the intricate part of Upaniṣadic intellectual tradition. ‘During

⁴⁰² Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, p. 97.

the Vedas, the Vedic ritual was performed by male members, whereas women did play a small but significant part in the Vedic ritual.⁴⁰³ Presence of women in Indian philosophical tradition can also be traced here in a very interesting way because of this the time when the different philosophical schools were blooming and among them, *Sāṃkhya* was one who described the presence of women as inevitable as *Purus* and *Prakritī* where *Prakritī* stands for the feminine.

While during the period of Upaniṣad women like Gārgi, Vacakanvi and Maitreyī participated actively in religious and philosophical discussions with men. But interestingly women have not been mentioned as the parts of Āśrama system, Vānprathis or Saṃnyasins and therefore they are not much visible within the forest.

There are a number of specific changes that are directly reflected in the early Upaniṣads: a shift in the geographical orientation from urban to the forest, changing attitudes about the sacrifice, and changing definitions about the status of Brāhmins. These three issues explored by the texts and reflect social changes that were taking place during the time of the composition and compilation of the Upaniṣads.⁴⁰⁴

Here we can argue that the Upaniṣads have seen the forests as their second home because as the complexity in human society and states has increased the instances of people migration into the forest also increased. Though there is a complete absence of any kind of animosity between the forest inhabitants and the *Vānprathis* or *Samnyāsis* within the texts.

⁴⁰³ Cohen, Signe, (ed.) *The Upanisads: A complete Guide*, Rautledge, New York, 2018, p. 39.

⁴⁰⁴ Black, Brain, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India, Priests, Kings and Women in Early Upaniṣads*, State University of New York Press, 2007, p. 13.

V.4 Forest and people in the Epics

V.4.1 Rāmāyaṇa

Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* both of the epics are considered as the socio-cultural expressions of ancient Indian geography and people those who were residing there for a long time. They are the rich depository of ancient Indian myths, rituals, custom and believe. Forest and its people have remained an integral part of epic narratives and they have been presented in various ways.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* forest is presented as home of the hermitages of the ṛisīs and this serves to highlight two features. One is the dichotomy between the settlement and the wasteland. The gram was the known the orderly, the predictable, and the aranya was unknown, with no recognizable order; it was where the unexpected could happen.⁴⁰⁵

The *Rāmāyaṇa* recognizes Rākṣasas and Vānaras as the key forest-dwelling communities. Hens the contrast between the people of Kośala and Rākṣasas is very clear. The hermitage is a threshold condition between settlement and forest also the Rākṣasas attacks on the hermitages were a common phenomenon. Rākṣasas reaction risen against the Ṛisīs those are bringing new culture, changing the habitat of forest-dwellers through agriculture, exchange, and clearing of forests.⁴⁰⁶

Rāmāyaṇa is full of the descriptions of the forest living people particularly in the *Aranyakānda* and *Kiṣkindhākānda* there are several references about the societies directly associated with forests. For example, the first instance which appears in the *Rāmāyaṇa* about the people other than the mainstream is the appearance of *Niṣādarāj*.

⁴⁰⁵ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical tradition of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 241.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

उचितो यं जनः सर्वः केशाना त्वं सुखोचितः ।

गुप्त्यर्थं जागरिश्यमी ककुत्स्थात्य वयं निशां⁴⁰⁷ ॥ (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Chapter 51, Verse 3)

मेस्त्याविदितम किंचिद वने असस्मिश्च सदा ।

चतुरंगं हयातिबलम सुमहत संतरेमाही⁴⁰⁸ ॥ (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Chapter 51, Verse 7)

The presentation of the leader of the forest-dwelling community in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is very vivid and powerful. According to the above hymns, the conversation between Lakṣmaṇa and *Niṣādarāj* is quite interesting; forest leader is saying that our life within the forest is very toiling we need to have put extra effort for making of simple things done. But at the same time, he is boasting about his community power that they can even ready to have war with anyone, because of our tuff life we can win against any army.

There are two-three points which need to be noted regarding the *Niṣāda* community in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; first, they were living in the fringes of the forest not in the deep forests because the deeper region was dominated by the *Rākṣasas*. The second point is that they do have genealogy but the *Rākṣasas* not, and they had friendly relationships with neighbouring states due to smooth socio-economic exchange of materials and ideas.

Vānprastha is the next category of people those who have been mentioned in *Vālmīkī Rāmāyaṇa* as forest dwellers. As we had discussed in earlier sections in this chapter

⁴⁰⁷ ‘We are used to all kinds of suffering and you, to comfort. We will keep vigil during the night for the protection of Rama, descendant of the Kakutsthas.’ As translated by Prof. P. Geervani, Prof. K. Kamala and Shri V. V. Subba Rao, under the guidance of Prof. H.K. Sathapathy VC, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peetham, Tirupati in a project developed by Indian Institute of Kanpur (IIT) which is available at www.Valmiki.iitk.ac.in

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Wandering about in this forest all the time there is nothing unknown to me (here). We can withstand even a vast army of four divisions.’

the Vānprastha system was initiated during the Upaniṣadic ages and remained continued to the epics. It is considered as the third stage of life when a person in the last days moved to the forest for the purpose of learning and tapas.

सोऽयं ब्राह्मण भुयिष्ठो वानप्रस्थगणो महान् ।

त्वनाथो नाथवद राम राक्षसैहन्यते भृशं⁴⁰⁹ ॥ (Aranyakānda, Chapter 6, Verse 15)

According to the *Rāmāyaṇa* the number of *Vānprathis* has exponentially increased. These Vānprathis has been mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in a situation where they had a great threat from the Rākṣasas and requests were being made by them to the prince Rāma to kill the demon. It is being very clear from the above instance that a large number of Brāhmaṇas were there in the forest as to spend their Vānaprastha stage of life and it seems that there was a constant struggle between them and Rākṣasas. Various scholars have called them as the agents of higher traditions within the deep forests where they have migrated with ideas of caste, class and social hierarchy as well. Though they were too become the forest community because of their constant presence and occupancies within the forest.

After the Vānprathis, *Rāmāyaṇa* considered Rākṣasas as the most visible and vibrant forest communities with various identities and secret knowledge. As per the *Rāmāyaṇa* story, most of the Rākṣasās know each other and they had family linkages throughout the forest geography. Various kinds of forest-dwelling Rākṣasas have been mentioned in the text; like Tāḍakā, Surpaṇakhā, Khar, Mārīch, and Rāvaṇa.

The way Surpaṇakhā given her introduction to the Princes Rāma reveals us about her background and society.

⁴⁰⁹ ‘O Rama we are a group of great sages, mostly brahmins, leading a vanaprastha life. Yet with a protector like you, we are slaughtered in large numbers like orphans.’

साम्ब्रविद वचनं श्रुत्वा राक्षसी मद्नादिता ।

श्रुत्या राम तत्वार्थं वक्ष्यामि वचनं मम⁴¹⁰ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 17, Verse 19)

अहं सूर्पनखा नाम राक्षसी कामरूपिणी ।

अरण्यं विचरामीदमेका सर्व भयंकरा⁴¹¹ ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 17, Verse 20)

रावणो नाम मे भ्राता यदि ते श्रोतमागतः⁴¹² ।

वीरो विश्रवा पुत्रो यदि ते श्रोतमागतः ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 17, Verse 21)

प्रवृद्धनिद्रस्य सदा कुम्भकर्णो महाबलः⁴¹³ ।

विभीषणः तु धर्मात्मा न तु राक्षस चेष्टितः ॥ (Aranyakāṇḍa, Chapter 17, Verse 22)

In the above hymns where Surpanakhā describes her family background we come to know that, she has a strong family lineage which started from the sage Viśravā then goes to Rāvaṇa and Kumbhkarṇa. They have ruled the forest and famous among other states also. They have a kingdom which is ruled by Rāvaṇa as state-society but at the same time, other Rākṣasas were still dwelling in their natural habitats which were forests. This bipolarity within the Rākṣasas society is has been critically observed by scholars like H. D. Sankalia and Brockington. There is enough evidence within the text that they had a well-established state-society like Lamkā where agriculture and economic exchanges were evolved from substantial productions and have reached to

⁴¹⁰ 'What for you have come, either, you tell in actuality...' Thus Rama asked her. On hearing the words of Rama she that demoness wetted with love said these words.'

⁴¹¹ 'I will tell you truth, Rama, nothing but truth, I am a guise-changing demoness named Shurpanakha, and I will be freely moving in this forest in a solitary manner and unnerving all.'

⁴¹² My brother is valorous and mighty Ravana, the king of demons and the son of Vishravasa, if ever you have heard of him.

⁴¹³ 'And the mighty Kumbhakarna who will always be in profound sleep is my brother, and the virtue-souled Vibheeshana too is my brother, but he does not behave like a demon, and two more bothers of mine are Khara and Duushana who are renowned for their bravery in war.'

the surplus production as it seems through the description of Lanka by Hanumāna in Lankākāṇḍa.

Though the presentation of Tāḍakā in *Rāmāyaṇa* is very different from Surpaṇakhā they belong to the same community. Tāḍakā was depicted as the protector of the forest and she was shown as continually attacking over the hermitages of sages. While we compare between them we find that Tāḍakā was afraid of human intervention into the forest because it was her natural habitat and she was always in a struggle with Vānprathis, Munīs, and Ṛishis. Tāḍakās' genealogy is not mentioned and it might be because of her lower level of socio-economic tradition where family and kin relations could have been still in process. At the same time, Surpaṇakhā belongs to a higher category of Rāṣasas and associated with state society and she was not afraid of human presence in the forest, instead, she was willing to make a relationship with them. On the basis of this comparison between Tāḍakā and Surpaṇakhā we can argue that actually there was a hierarchy among these Rākṣasas communities though they both were residing in the forest.

Rāvaṇa himself has also described the forest people what he had seen during his visit to Mārīch. According to Rāvaṇa while he was going to meet Mārīch he saw a deep forest which was full of Maharisīs, Nāgās, Gandharvas, and Kinnars.⁴¹⁴

The sages were everywhere in the forest with their hermitages while during the time of Upaniṣads they were in between grām and araṇya. Nāgās and Gāndharvas were always been considered in Indian textual tradition as celestial beings but at the same time they have their continuous presence from Vedic to Epics and this gives a strong reason to have their actual presence as highly evolved and materialistic human

⁴¹⁴ अत्यंत नियाताहारै शोभितं परमर्षिभिः

नागे सुपर्ण गन्धर्वो किन्नारैस्च सहश्रश्च Aranyakāṇḍā, Chapter 25, Verse 14

society. Kinnars were called as *tritiya prakṛitī* which is called as the third gender. Kinnars are also mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as wondering and staying in the forest as Rāvaṇa have described. The possible reason behind their presence within the forest could be their un-acceptance and negligence by mainstream society.

Though these Rākṣasās like Mārīch, Khar and Duśan have been presented in the text as very learned and powerful with their magical and supernatural powers but except those who were belonged to Laṅkā most of the Rākṣasas had very primordial and substantial socio-economic backgrounds.

Vānaras is the next and very important forest dwellers in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The whole *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* is devoted to them. They had their highly evolved state and kinship structure. Through the various instances in *Rāmāyaṇa* it seems that Vānaras were highly influenced by the process of brahmanization. They had rituals like Rājyābhishek as well as the position of crown prince and appointment of state ministers indicates their affinity towards the higher tradition. H. D. Sankaiya in his book *Rāmāyaṇa: Myth and Reality*, has considered them as forest tribes with some evolved social features.

नान्निग्वेद्विनितस्य ना यजुर्वेद धारिण ।

ना सामवेद विदुशः शक्यमेवं विभाशितुम्⁴¹⁵ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 3, Verse 28)

नूनं व्याकरणं क्रित्स्त्रमनेन बहुधा श्रुतं ।

बहु व्याहर्तानेन न किञ्चिदपशब्दितम्⁴¹⁶ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 3, Verse 29)

⁴¹⁵ 'Unless well versed in *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Samaveda*, for sure, it is not possible for anyone to articulate so well.'

⁴¹⁶ 'Surely, he seems to have studied well the whole of grammar, for there is not a single mispronunciation in his entire speech.'

नूनं मुखे नेत्रयोश्चापी ललाटे च भ्रुवोस्तथा ।

अन्येश्वपी च सर्वेषु दोषः सम्बिदितः कचित⁴¹⁷ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 3, Verse 30)

अविस्तरम्संदिग्धमविलाम्बितमव्यथं ।

उरःस्थ कंठगमं वाक्यं वर्तते मध्यम स्वरम⁴¹⁸ ॥ (Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa, Chapter 3, Verse 31)

There are enough pieces of evidence in the text which show their extraordinary affinity towards the Vedic tradition. The first meeting of Hanumāna with prince Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa is quite interesting to explain about the evolved features of these forest tribes. According to the above-mentioned hymns of *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* which is about the first interaction of the Vānara community with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumāna has been presented as the well-learned person of Vedas. During his conversation, there was not a single grammatical or metrical error in the language of Hanumāna and therefore Lakṣmaṇa asked him that you (Hanumāna) must be the traditional scholar of Vedas and ancient texts otherwise this proficiency is not possible.

In the story of *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vānaras are the most important forest dwellers because they were intelligent and sharp as well as organized and disciplined. They search for Sītā, they fight with the army of Rāvaṇa and they show their devotion to the Rāma and his supremacy. Here we can argue that the Vānaras were very well organized and cultured forest dwellers they were close to the mainstream society through their various socio-political alliances.

⁴¹⁷ 'No fault can be found in his face, eyes, forehead, between the eyebrows or any other part of his body (during his expression).'

⁴¹⁸ 'His sentences are not too elaborate, not ambiguous, not dragging, not fast, raised in the chest or throat, in a medium tone.'

V.4.2 Mahābhārata

Like *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* has also descriptions about the forest-dwelling communities instead of *Mahābhārata* has accommodated them more rather than *Rāmāyaṇa*. The various tribal societies which are represented as animistic forms have given ample place in this great text. At the beginning of *Mahābhārata*, the Nāgās/Sarpas have given importance, their symbolic presence in the text and their active participation in the mainstream story leads to formulating a strong impact.

कदृश्च लब्ध्वा पुत्राना सहस्रं तुल्वार्क्षाम

धार्यो प्रयात्न्तो गर्भाविकृत्युक्त्व स महातपाः

ते भार्ये वसंतुस्ते कश्यपो वन्मविशत⁴¹⁹ ॥ (Ādiparva, Chapter 16, Verse 12)

According to *Mahābhārata* Sage Kaśyapas, wife Vanītā was blessed with one thousand snakes and his second wife was blessed with one Garuḍa and they both played a very important role in the beginning as well as they both were presented as forest dwellers and out of the mainstream society.

These Nāgās have also been mentioned by D. D. Kosambi, he has argued that they were the strongest tribes of ancient northern India and they have been accommodated within the great tradition under various names as Takśak, Kālia, and Śes Nāgās.

⁴¹⁹ 'Kadru also obtained one thousand sons, all of equal splendour. "Bear the embryos carefully", so saying the great ascetic Kashyapa went into the forest, leaving his two wives much gratified with his boons.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I. Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 38.

यो मे हिंसित वंस्तातम तक्षकः स दुरात्मवान्

प्रतिकुर्यो तथा तस्य तद् भवन्तो बरुवन्तु मे

अपि तत् कर्म विदितं भवतां येन पन्नगम

तक्षकः सम्प्रदिप्ते अग्नौ प्रक्षिपेय सम्बंधाव

यथा तेन पिता महा पूर्वे दग्धो विशाग्निना

तथाहम्पी तं पापं दग्धुमिच्छामी पन्नगम⁴²⁰ ॥ (Ādīparva, Chapter 5, Verse 3-5)

The story of King Janmejaya who had organized a grand sacrifice to kill all the snakes of this earth is another symbolic representation of war against these powerful snake communities from the mainstream state society. It seems that earlier they had occupied great power particularly before the political establishment of Kurus in Gangā plains. Later the defeat of Kālīā by Kṛṣṇa around Mathurā is actually a symbolic control over them by the Yadus.

After the Nāgās the Niṣādas have also appeared in the *Mahābhārata* but not as a very powerful tribal community but they were more affected by the so-called Āryan culture and Brahmanical customs and rituals.

Within this epic, the story of Eklavya has emerged as a powerful symbolic representation of Niṣādas as well as the influence of the caste system over the society.

⁴²⁰ ‘The lord of the earth the best of the Kurus, king Janmejaya the son of Parikshit, then called his priests and Oritwijas. And that accomplished speaker spoke on the accomplishment of his great task. He said I must avenge on the wretch of Takshaka. Tell me what I must do, do you know any act by which I can throw Takshaka with all his friends and relatives in the blazing fire. I want to burn that wretch of a snake as he burned my father with poison.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 71.

अथ कस्मान्मद्विशिष्टो लोकडी च वीर्यवान् ।

अन्योस्ती भवतः शिष्यो निशादाधिपते सुतः⁴²¹ ॥ (Ādiparva, Chapter 131, Verse 49)

एकलाव्यस्तु तं दृष्ट्वा द्रोमायंतमंतिकत ।

अभिगाम्योपसंग्रिहा जगाम शिरसा महीम⁴²² ॥ (Ādiparva, Chapter 131, Verse 52)

पुज्यत्वा ततो द्रोण विधिवत् स निशादजः ।

निवेद्य शिश्यमात्मान तस्थो प्रन्जलिर्प्रत⁴²³ ॥ (Ādiparva Chapter 131, Verse 53)

ततो द्रोण ब्रविद राजनैकल्व्यमिदम वचः

यदि शिश्योसी में वीर वेतनं दियताम मम ।

एकलाव्यस्तु अछुत्वा प्रियामानो ब्रविदिदम⁴²⁴ ॥ (Ādiparva, Chapter 131, Verse 54)

The above hymns from 49-54 describe the mutual treatments between the royal teacher Droṇa and a tribal boy Eklavya. There is no tussle about superiority or hierarchy but this story reveals various hidden meanings and symbols between the representatives of higher tradition and the representative of lower tradition.

⁴²¹ ‘Why then there pupil of yours in the world equal to me ‘the mighty son of Nishada King,’ Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, Vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 193 .

⁴²² ‘Seeing Drona coming towards him Eklavya also went a few steps forward and touched his feet and prostrated himself on the ground.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 193.

⁴²³ ‘The son of Nishada worshipped Drona in the due form and represented himself as his pupil he then stood before him with jointed hands.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 193.

⁴²⁴ ‘O king thereupon Drona spoke thus to Eklavya “O hero if you are really my pupil, give me my remuneration. As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 193.

Eklavya was not a common tribal child though he was the son of a tribal chief the intensity of this boy to learn archery was so high that it was necessary to limit him so that in future he could never be a threat to the state. Here it seems that in the past there could have been such examples when these tribes might have challenged the state or could not have to limit themselves just within the forests. In this place, various scholars have tried to look over the thumb taking instance by Droṇa through caste angle but it seems that actually, he was serving his state through controlling the power of Niṣāda within the forest.

Rākṣasās are also depicted in the epic as forest dwellers and protectors of forest lands. One of the most interesting descriptions about an Rākṣasi called Hidimbā. Her introduction to Pāṇḍavas mother Kuntī gives us information regarding her socio-political backgrounds.

यादे तत पश्यसि वन नीलमेघनिभ महत ।

निवासो रक्षस्स्यैस हिदिम्बस्य ममैव च⁴²⁵ ॥ (Ādīparva, Chapter 153, Verse 5)

As per the above hymn she tells that she belongs to this forest and she is residing there with his brother Hidimbā. The most interesting thing about Hidimbā is that she has not been presented or described in an ugly way as usually others have; instead, she is the one of the beautiful Rākṣasi depicted in both of the epics. While we consider about the gender relations in the context of Rākṣasa, both the texts have a balanced approach towards the presentation of Rākṣasis in comparison to Rākṣasas.

⁴²⁵ ‘The blue cloud like great forest that you see is the abode of my brother Hidimba.’ As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adī Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 221.

स द्रस्ता पाण्डवान दुरत क्रिश्नाजिसमावृतान ।

अत्रिनोत तद्वान्द्वर मैनाक इव पर्वतः⁴²⁶ ॥ (Vanparva, Chapter 21, Verse 15)

अहम् वक्स्य वे भ्राता किर्मीर इति विश्रुतः ।

वने अस्मिन् काम्यके श्यन्ये निवसामि गतज्वर⁴²⁷ ॥ (Vanparva, Chapter 21, Verse 24)

Kirmirā is another Rāksasas in the epic *Mahābhārata* who has been clearly mentioned as the keeper of the forest. In the above hymns, 15 and 23 Kirmirā has been described as very big and very powerful but the interesting fact about above hymns in relation to Kirmirā is that he is shown as the guard of the forest and protecting the boundaries from the entry of humans in the forest. Here on the basis of the above description, we can argue that in some cases like Kirmirā the forests were highly protected from outer intervention and its reason might be the natural resources and natural habitats of forest tribes.

Mahābhārata has described another power community named as Gandharvas, they are always shown wondering within the forest enjoying in the river water. They are called celestial beings from heaven while most of the time they are being mentioned as forest-dwelling but materially developed communities. The contradiction remains there about their real abode in both the epics though we can also treat them are people very close to the forest. One of the interesting incidents in the *Mahābhārata* is the

⁴²⁶ 'Seeing from a distance the Pandavas clad in black deer skin, he obstructed their path through the forest like the Mainak.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Van Parva & Virata Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 16.

⁴²⁷ 'I am the brother of Vaka and I am known by the name of Kirmira. I live in this uninhibited Kamyak forest in comfort and ease.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Van Parva & Vana Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, pp. 16-17.

interaction and war between Kauravas and Gandharvas and then the war between Pāṇḍavas and Gandharvas and finally defeat of the Gāndharvas.

गणैराप्सरा चैव त्रिदासनाम तथात्मजः ।

विहारशीलः क्रिदार्षे तेन तत संवृतं सर⁴²⁸ ॥ (Vanparva, Chapter 220, Verse 22)

दुर्योधनः चित्रसेनो वीरथम पतितं भुवि ।

अभिदृत्त्य महा बाहुजिघ्रहमथागर्हित⁴²⁹ ॥ (Vanparva, Chapter 242, Verse 6)

Ghoshyātrā is an interesting journey by Duryodhana with Karṇa and Śakunī towards the forest to count their state-owned cows and calf, as well as they were also determined to show their power and luxury to the Pāṇḍvas. Certainly, the whole journey of Duryodhana converted into a dangerous war with Gandharvas, those who were already there in the forest and they captured Duryodhana after defeating his whole army. Then Pāṇḍavas arrived there to help Kauravas and release Duryodhana from Ghandharva Chitrasena.

This incident of war between Duryodhana and Gandharvas during the *Ghoshyātrā* gives us glimpses of the power and strength of Gandharvas. They actually defeated the whole army of Duryodhana which was large in numbers of soldiers and warriors like Karṇa. When we try to interpret the whole incident in relation to the forest space

⁴²⁸ 'He (Gandharva/Chitrasen) had come surrounded by various apsaras and also by many sons of celestials. Having come to that lake to sport, he had closed the place to all corners.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Van Parva & Vana Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 353.

⁴²⁹ 'With their arrows, they cut off into pieces its yoke, shafts, fenders, the flag-staff, threefold bamboo poles and the chief turret. When Duryodhana thus deprived of his car fell on the ground, the mighty armed Chitrasen rushed upon him and seized him with such force that it seemed as if this life itself was taken.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Van Parva & Vana Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 355.

reason for the war between them, we possibly could reach the assumption that though Gandharvas were the forest loving and adventures humans they had actually defeated Kauravas and only controlled by the Arjuna.

It seems that there was a continuous struggle between the forest people and none forest people; we can also see the state as a strong contender who always tries to claim over the forest land and resources. There is no doubt that the Niṣḍās, Rākṣasas, and Gandharvas has a stronghold over the vast forest land but at the same time they all have different socio-economic and family structures but there are not many instances when they had struggle among them for land and resources within the forest and this fact is actually arising question over the real possessor of the forest land in true sense.

In both the epics there are several references about the people who have a direct and indirect relationship with the forest. The forest has always been a matter of curiosity as well as its abundance of natural resources attracted the attention of people and states. The Royal sacrifices like *Aśvamedha* and *Rājsuya* have always been an effective method to reduce the war loss through the negotiation and submissions but certainly, the forest people and kings had never fallen under such negotiations the share and surrender forest land and resources.

V.5 Forest and People in Arthashāstra

The *Arthashāstra* of Kauṭilya is an extremely sophisticated and detailed treatise on statecraft. The book refers to several previous works on the same subjects of economics and politics. The *Arthashāstra* of Kauṭilya is a text on political economy

dating to the Mauryan and post Mauryan period, advised rigorous state control over economic and political activities.⁴³⁰

To know about the relations between forest and people as well as about forest dwellers, *Arthashāstra* is a good source. Since Kauṭilya has discussed the multiple state issues in this text then he has also written about the forest dwellers and their relations with states particularly in the context of revenue and taxes.

According to Romila Thapar, there was a perceptible shift in attitudes towards forest dwellers from earlier to later times. Initially, the forest was the habitat of those regarded as outside the social pale. Subsequently, the establishing hermitages in the forests and the preferences of ascetics for forest retreats led to some romanticizing of the forest.⁴³¹

During the time of the emergence of strong powers around the fourth century BCE, there was again a shift in the attitude towards forest dwellers. The *Arthshāstra* of Kauṭilya advised the king not to trust forest-chiefs and verged on regarding them with hostility.⁴³²

In the *Arthashāstra*, Kauṭilya is talking about forest people in his two chapters; first in the chapter of *Bhūmichidra-Vidhān* which is land management and the second chapter where he has mentioned about forest land and people is chapter seventeen which is on *Kūpayādhyakṣa*. From these two chapters, we come to know about the forest people and the kind relations state was maintaining with them.

⁴³⁰ Singh, Upinder, *A history of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From Stone age to 12th century*, Pearson Publication, New Delhi, 2006.

⁴³¹ Thapar, Romila, *The Penguin History of Early India: From origins to 1300 AD*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2002, p. 56.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

For the word forest, Kauṭilya has given the definition that forest includes an enclosure for beasts, deer-parks, forest for produce and elephant forests.⁴³³ Forest was one of the sources of collection of revenues.

It appears from the mentioned description in the *Arthashāstra* that Kauṭilya has advised to the king to construct a kind of *Abhyāraṇa* or a Zoological garden. Special forests with considerable areas were created for the settlements of ascetics and respected brāhmaṇas devoted to the study of Vedas.⁴³⁴ These two types of forest are respectively called *tapovana* and *brahma-somaranya*.⁴³⁵ Special care was taken during the formation of animal parks which has a single entrance surrounded by a moat, having trees without thorns and some trees bearing sweet fruits.

Kauṭilya advises the king to establish several forests one each for the separate forest produced such as fruits and timber. Factories were constructed separately for turning therein raw materials into finished goods. Kauṭilya also advised the *Kūpayādhyaksa* to make arrangements, within the boundary of the forest for the settlements of forest dwellers who are working to collect forest produces.⁴³⁶

The in-charge of forest produce was called *Kūpyādhyaksa* who was assisted by his subordinate *dravyavanapāla*. The in-charge of forest produce was working under the control of *Samahartā* who was in charge of setting up factories in the forests for

⁴³³ *Pasu-mrga-dravya-hasti-vana-parigraho vanam*, 'Enclosures for beasts, deer parks, forest for produce and elephant forests- these constitutes forests. *Arthashāstra* 2.6.6, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, Second Reprint, p. 76.

⁴³⁴ 'On land unsuitable for agriculture, he should allot pasture for cattle, (*Arthashāstra*, Chapter 2, Verse 1)

⁴³⁵ 'And he should grant to ascetics wildernesses for Veda study and Soma sacrifice, with safety promises to everything immovable and movable in them, one goruta in extent at the most.' *Arthashāstra*, 2.2.2, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 59.

⁴³⁶ 'And he should establish forests, one each of the products indicated as forest produce, as well as factories for goods made from forest produce, and settle foresters, attached to the produce-forests. *Arthashāstra*, 2.2.5, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 59.

producing serviceable articles from forest trees.⁴³⁷ For the protection of forests and of the production of factories, large numbers of people including Vanapāls were employed and for that, a large number of money was spent.

A kind of fine or *arthadaṇḍa* which was called *deyam* was also imposed on them who use to cut the forest trees or taking trees without paying the dues.⁴³⁸ From these rules which were made regarding the forest management seems very effective and sensitive approach of Kauṭilya towards the importance of the forest and forest products

The *Arthashāstra* of Kauṭilya has mentioned various kinds of people who were engaged with forest management or those who were living within the forest and doing various purposes. During the time of *Arthashāstra*, the state was directly involved with plantation and management of forest and forest products and they were also conscious about the forest dwellers while handling the forest for propose of state.

अक्रिश्ययां भुमो पशुभ्यो विवितानी प्रयाच्छेत ।

प्रदिस्ताभय स्थावराज्जमानी च ब्रह्मनेभ्यो ब्रह्मसोमअरण्यानी, तपोवनानी च तपस्विभ्यो

गोरुत पराणी प्रयाच्छेत ।

तवंमात्रमेकद्वारण खातगुप्तं स्वादुफलगुल्म गुछमकंटकिद्रूममुत्तनतोयाशय

दांतमृगाचतुस्पाद भाग्नान्नाख

दंस्त्रव्याल मार्ग्यु कहास्तिहस्तिनी कलभम मृगवनं विहारार्थं राजः कारयेत्⁴³⁹ ।

(*Arthashāstra*, Chapter 2, Verse 1)

⁴³⁷ 'The director of the forest produce should cause forest produce to be brought in by guards in the produce forest.' *Arthashāstra*, 2.17.2, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 129.

⁴³⁸ 'And he should fix dues from those cutting produce forests, also penalty, except in cases of distress.' *Arthashāstra*, 2.17.3. R.P. Kangle, p. 129.

⁴³⁹ Gairola, Vachaspati, *Kautiliya Arthashastra*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhava Publication, Varanasi, 2015, p. 82.

Though Kauṭilya has not much discussed directly the forest but people indirectly he has mentioned a group of people who were occupying space within the forest. Some of them were implanted for the purpose of forest protection from the state as well as the forest dwellers tribes have also been mentioned.

In chapter two which is named *Bhūmichhadra-Vidhan* as in the above śloka, there are some clues regarding forest dwellers in situ as well as ex-situ inhibitors. He is saying that the forest should be reserved for the brāhmaṇas those who were involved in the reading and studying of Vedas and other religious texts in the Āśramas within the forest. Then the forest must be given to the ascetics those who were engaged in penance and tapas.

It seems that *Arthashāstra* is also following the Upaniṣadic approach towards the implantation of rīṣīs and ascetics into the forest for gradual and continuous encroachment of forest lands and forest produces. On the basis of the above discussion, we can also argue that somehow they have been successfully colonized the forest land and people for the use of state because the establishments of factories and forest guards within the forest are a strong sign of a kind of colonization from the state.

It is interesting to imply the theory of colonization in the forests of *Arthashāstra* because the way they were treating the people and resources was just a kind of exploitation within the forest. As we have said in the beginning that Kauṭilya has advised the king to newer belief upon forest dwellers has some hidden connotations.

According to him the *kṣetra* which falls under the area of *arājya* or where there is no rule of a king like a forest might actually expand the *arajyam* theory of *Matsya-Nyāya*. It is a kind of no rule where the powerful dominates and exploits the lesser

one and if these kinds of illegitimate ideas and the people who have never been governed will go out of control then they might be harmful to the states and that is why Kauṭilya have warned against the people of the forest. In the *Arthashāstra* an allusion to the forest chieftain's aspiration for seizing the throne from the king has been made; if the chieftain gathered power or strength to establish his own territory, the king is advised to win over forest lords with money or honour.

सर्वा तिथि मृगं प्रत्यन्ते चान्यमृगवन भूमिवर्शेन वा निवेशयेत्⁴⁴⁰ ।

(Arthashāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 2)

कुप्य प्रदिस्ताना च द्रव्याणामेकेकशो वा वनं निवेशयेत्; द्रव्यवनकर्मान्तानटविश्वा
द्रववनापाश्रयः ।

(Arthashāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 3)

प्रत्यन्ते हिस्तवनमतव्याररक्ष्यं निवेशयेत् ।

नाग वना अध्यक्षः पर्वतं नादेय सारसामनानुपम च नागवनः विदितपर्यान्तप्रवेशनिशकासन
नगवनपाले

पालयेत् । हस्तीघतिनः हन्युः । दंत्युगम स्वम मृतास्याहरतः सपदाचतुष्पनो लाभः ।

नागवानपाला⁴⁴¹

(Arthashāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 4)

The importance of the forests has been upheld by Kauṭilya when he states that the king should protect the produce-forests (*dravyavana*), he also suggested the king

⁴⁴⁰ 'And he should grant to ascetics wildernesses for Veda study and Soma sacrifice, with safety promises to everything immovable and movable in them, one goruta in extent at the most.' *Arthashāstra*, 2.2.2, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthashastra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 59.

⁴⁴¹ Gairola, Vachaspati, *Kautiliya Arthashastra*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhava Publication, Varanasi, 2015, p. 82.

establish elephant forests (*haṣṭivana*) on the border of the kingdom and their chosen foresters were to guard the elephants. The in-charge of the elephant forest was called *Nāgavanādhyaksha*. Those who were employed to train elephants were called *Haṣṭadhayksha*. The establishments of *haṣṭivana* were basically for the purpose of war, and to manage elephants with various officials was very costly as well.

There were other two kinds of forests that were beneficial to the state as well as to common men, these were *dravyavana* and *mṛgavana*. We can speculate that both kinds of forests belonged to the state. *Mṛgavana* is actually a deer park where deer lived in plenty (*mragh prabhuta*) and benefited the countrymen with an abundant of meat and skin (*prabhutamamsa carmopakarinah*).

Since the state-owned forests like *dravyavana*, *haṣṭivana*, and *mṛgavana* were directly beneficial to the state and people, therefore, it seems a kind of serious concern for them from the state. At the same time, it was difficult to engage state people to work into deep forest therefore there are also some signs of direct employment of forest dwellers from the state into the forest.

Kauṭilya has referred *Aṭāvi* and *Aṭāvika* in the sense of the forest tribes who used to settle in the forests beyond the boundaries of towns and villages. These tribes are said to be engaged in attacking people in the night and robbed their cash.⁴⁴² There are some instances in the text when the king recruited wild tribes (*aṭāvibala*) in the

⁴⁴² 'Of highway robbers and forest tribes, highway robbers, operating at night and lying in wait, attack men's bodies, are a constant danger, rob hundreds of thousands in cash and stir up principal men, while forest tribes operating in forest on the frontier far away are openly known and move before the eyes of all, and harm only a part of the country say the teacher. No says Kautilya, robbers rob only the negligent, are few in numbers, powerless and easy to know and capture, whereas forest tribes, living in their own territory, are many in numbers and brave, fight openly, seize and ruin countries, having the same characteristics as the king.' *Arthashastra* 8.4.41.43, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 400.

troops, but they were seen to be more anxious for plunder (*viloprtham*) than for fight for the king.⁴⁴³

When we critically analyze the kinds of forest dwellers discussed by Kauṭilya in *Arthashāstra*, we would find that there are tribes, brāhmaṇas and state-employed people are residing within the forest. Kauṭilya have actually prioritized the importance of each of them for the state on the basis of their socio-economical benefits and losses.

Aṭāvi or Aṭvikās were the traditional forest dwellers and were in the process of proto-polity formation and gradually organizing them. Brāhmaṇas were playing a key role for the larger socio-economic and religious expansion of the state towards *arājya kṣetra*. And finally, the artificial forest settlements by the state within the forests and employment of state people in the dense forest for the purpose of exploitation of forest resources in the forms of animals, timbers, medicines, and iron ores was actually a kind of colonization of ancient forests and certainly, it seems very successful in the *Arthashāstra*.

There is a sharp transition in the state's approach towards forest and forest people. From the Epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* to the establishment of fourth century BCE state of Chandragupta the forest dwellers were socio-economically marginalized, they were regarded as none useful elements for the state as we mentioned above. Various kinds of myths had been created to describe the forest tribes during the age of Upaniṣad and Epics but these myths and imaginations have been neglected by Kauṭilya in his *Arthshāstra* and the idea of artificial forests like *hstivana*, *mṛgvana*

⁴⁴³ 'After winning the forest chieftains with money and honour, his should cause his kingdom to be destroyed.' *Arthashāstra* 12.3.17, as translated by R. P. Kangle in *The Kautilya Arthasashtra Part II, (An English Translation)* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1972, second reprint, p. 466.

have actually helped the state people to understand the forest life but at the same time process of colonization of forest has actually accelerated the rate of exploitation of the forests during *Arthashāstra*.

V.6 Conclusion

Forest people have been mentioned from the accounts of Vedas to the Epics. The Vedas has mentioned sages and pastoral communities as forest dwellers. The Upaniṣadas gives us details about various kinds of ascetics like *ṛiṣis*, *tapasvi*, *saṃnyāsī*, and *munis*. The Epics tells us about the *Rākṣasas*, *Gandharvas*, *Vānaras* and *Niṣādas*. We can say that with the emergence of state-society and development of material productions due to agriculture and surplus, the influx of people within the forest has increased.

Also, we can say that tribal societies have evolved into civil societies through the process of acculturation and brahmanization.

Chapter Six

Exile and Renunciation

VI.1 Introduction

The idea of 'Exile and Renunciation' is always present in Indian minds through the wide impact of Indian classical works of literature in our society. These two themes are considered as an integral part of Indian popular imaginations. Various scholars have made serious attempts to understand these two powerful ideas of ancient India in order to explore and study their deeper meanings and impacts over society.

In this chapter, we will try to see the continuity of the idea of 'Exile and Renunciation' from Vedic corpus to the Epics, as well as we will also analyze the variations that happened in their core ideas due to later socio-political changes in the societies.

According to Romila Thapar in early India, the forest was the context for at least three activities; the hunt, the hermitage and the place of exile.⁴⁴⁴ She further argues that Exile is a frequent device in epics as it provides a condition outside the normal. This allows a play of fantasy on person and event, the breaking of convention and an occasion for the bard to extend the story by weaving in other narratives. Given that every forest was said to be infested with predators, demons, and supernatural beings,

⁴⁴⁴ Thapar Romila, *Perceiving the Forest, In India's Environmental History*, edited by Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Shivaraman, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 108.

and could be a place of extreme pain, exile in a forest allowed for the display of heroic qualities.⁴⁴⁵

Exile in the forest can also be seen as in relation to the kings and princes, that the forest is an area of ambivalence where the future of chiefdoms and kingdoms is being contested prior to the main contest on the battlefield.⁴⁴⁶

These ideas of Exile and Renunciations are an integral part of forest life from the Vedic period. Only their forms have been changing due to material development in human life and more complex social formations. Exile is such a powerful idea in the Indian Kāvya literature that from *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki to the *Mahābhārata* of Vyās all of them chosen the idea of exile in the forest for their protagonists to explore the unexplored, to discover the undiscovered and to see the unseen matters and situations. Though it is difficult to know how Sanskrit Kāvya begins⁴⁴⁷ there is a kind of linear development in the idea of ‘Exile and Renunciation’ even the later poets like Kālidās, Bhāravi, and Bāṇbhata all of them have worked on the same theme and woven beautiful literary works for later Sanskrit literature.

The beginning of these powerful ideas can be traced into the Vedas and Upaniṣads in the forms of asceticism, according to D. N. Jha ‘by the time of Upaniṣads asceticism had become fairly widespread. Ascetics lived either as solitary hermits or in small groups away from society. Living off its resources, they had not created a counter-culture in a real sense, as has been suggested by some scholars.’⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Thapar Romila, *The Past Before us: Historical Traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 225.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁴⁴⁷ Yagal Bronner and David Shulman (ed.), *Innovations and Turning Points in Towards a History of Kāvya Literature*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p. 33.

⁴⁴⁸ Jha, D. N., *Ancient India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1977, p. 60.

According to Patrick Olivelle, there is sufficient evidence for the existence of organized ascetical institutions in northern India probably during the sixth century BCE. At a very early age, moreover, at least some of these ascetical institutions produced literary works often ascribed to their founders.⁴⁴⁹

Upinder Singh writes that the age of urban affluence of communities marked by distinction of class and caste was also an age of renunciants who advocated giving up attachment to all material things and social relationships. The renunciants were referred by various terms including *paribhājak*, *samana*, and *bhikkhū*. These were people who had left their homes and lived as wanderers; depend on food and alms offered by sympathetic or generous householders.⁴⁵⁰

Renunciation and asceticism were not entirely new ideas. Although the householder was the central to Vedic tradition, Vedic texts contain words such as *vānprathi*, *tapasi*, *yogi*, *vairāgi*, *muni*, *vaikhanasa*, and *saṃnyāsi* all of which have elements of ascetic or renunciatory connotations.⁴⁵¹

When we see the idea of 'Exile', particularly its development we find that it has been used as powerful tools in all Sanskrit narratives in a form of a journey from inner to external world while the idea of 'Renunciation' can be seen just opposite to exile as a journey from external to inner world. Though these ideas have been used by scholars and literary critics to express a common idea of 'life away from home' but the basic philosophical ideas behind them are different.

There are various socio-political and economical aspect of renunciation according to which this varied idea gets transformed into various understandings. For example, the

⁴⁴⁹ Olivelle, Patrick, *Saṃnyāsa Upaniṣad*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁰ Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India: From the Stone age to the 12th Century*, Pearson Publication, Delhi, 2008, p. 300.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

idea of renunciation has been looked into dichotomy with householder; they both are antagonistic to each other. According to Patrick Olivelle⁴⁵², it was an effort to create another world where the societal norms, customs, and rituals will be debarred.

Detachment is the core idea behind Exile and Renunciation, detachment from worldly material life and pleasure has been celebrated through the Vedic, Upaniṣadic and Epic texts. If we closely observe the reason behind the popular acceptance of Exile and Renunciation then we would find that it was also an attempt to create a balance between the hedonistic material life and forest-based simple and none material life.

The next idea which is associated with 'Exile and Renunciation' is the idea of celibacy. It can also be seen as the dichotomy with the concept of the householder's life. Celibacy is the basic feature and character of a renouncer, its origin can be traced from the Vedas and Upaniṣads and then it reached to its zenith in the Epics when householders like Lakṣmaṇa and Bhīṣma practiced celibacy in the forest as well as in the state society.

Gunther Dietz Sontheimer takes the discussion on *vana* and *kṣetra* back to Vedas where the dichotomy of household and renouncer has been looked through the idea of Vedic Rudra. According to her the Vedic Rudra or Śiva with his polymorphic manifestation was originally beyond the brāhmanical fold and the *kṣetra*. Nor was he originally strictly speaking a god of the forest tribes. Rudra was thus so to say between the *vana* and *kṣetra*.⁴⁵³

Here it is important to look into the difference between *vana* and *kṣetra* because these are the place for renunciators. These could be opposing concepts contrasting the

⁴⁵² Olivelle, Patrick, *Samnyāsa Upaniṣad*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992.

⁴⁵³ Sontheimer, Gunther Dietz, *The Vana and the Kṣetra*, in G. C. Tripathi (ed.), *Religion and Society in Eastern India*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 1994, p. 149.

habitat of the ascetic and the renouncer on the one hand, and the established settlement reflecting attempts at a regularly ordered social system, on the other. Or, in some cases, they could be seen as a continuum. The *grāma* which would fall under the category of the settlement was not static and could include a mobile village or migrating cattle keepers, the emphasis in both being on large numbers of people and domestic animals.⁴⁵⁴

Exile has been much celebrated in both the epics; the exile of the heroes in both epics is to the forest. But here the forest takes on a different connotation and is not merely the jungle beyond the settlement. The forest as the location of the unknown and the place of exile, become an exploration. It was also necessary for the continuation of the narrative of the epic.⁴⁵⁵

Exile was a device used commonly by bards and poets to stretch the story. The forest was where anything could happen and in each retelling of the story or even in each day of recitation, fresh incidents could be added. The heroes in the exile entered the unknown, unpredictable space, where events had strange consequences, for the hierarchies and regulations of the gram were not observed. Exile thus becomes an experience in forging and testing human values.⁴⁵⁶

The early developments in the idea of Exile and Renunciation are in the Vedas but a clear understanding of these ideas has emerged during Upaniṣads. According to Shubhra Sharma⁴⁵⁷ though the roots of the development of Āśrama system or four stages of life have been in the Vedas its full practice and wide acceptance appeared during the Upaniṣads.

⁴⁵⁴ Thapar Romila, *Perceiving the Forest: Early India*, In Mahesh Rangrajan edited India's Environmental History, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 105.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 113.

⁴⁵⁷ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanishads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985.

According to Shubhra Sharma as the four varṇas divided the society into four different classes, so did the Āśramas divide the individual's life-span into four different categories, these are *Brahmchāri*, *Gṛihasth*, *Vānprathi*, and *Samnyānsi*.⁴⁵⁸ Third and fourth Āśram is actually about the extension of the idea of exile and renunciation.

There are also some prescribed duties for the followers of these stages for example, the Vānprathis performed symbolic worship to the forest as explained by the Aranyakas. The Samnyāsins should have freed from all desires, possessions, and attachments.⁴⁵⁹ The idea of Exile and Renunciation get placed vary clearly in the popular perception through the epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, actually, they have planted the Āśrama system in the society more deeply through these powerful narratives and bring the forest under the direct control of human intervention.

VI.2 Exile and Renunciation in the Vedas

The earliest historical information about the renouncer tradition comes from Vedic and Upaniṣadic writings, as well as from the Buddhist literary sources.⁴⁶⁰ There is a long-standing and ongoing scholarly debate regarding the origin of the renouncer tradition. To simplify a somewhat intricate issue some contended that the origin of Indian asceticism goes back to the indigenous non-Aryan population, others, on the contrary, see it as an organic and logical development of ideas found in the Vedic religious culture.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

⁴⁶⁰ Olivelle, Patrick, *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions*, Anthem Press, London, 2011, p. 12.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 13.

One of the essential features of the Veda is the claim of *apauruṣeyatva*, which means no human agency has been responsible for the creation of the Veda,⁴⁶² though the Vedas are rich with human emotions like fear, protection, and ritualistic performances. One of the most powerful human emotions which emerges in the verses of the Vedas is ‘will to attain protection’ by Indra and that has to be achieved through exile and renunciation.

The Vedas have given immense importance to the concept of ‘tapas’ which is a kind of heat accumulated by sacrifices and performance of austerity. The Sanskrit noun ‘tapas’ has numerous meanings in the Vedic literature, the connotation of heat is always central. Moreover, this heat is seen in *Ṛg Veda* where ‘tapas’ is regarded as the force behind the creation itself.⁴⁶³ In the Brāhmaṇas the creator god Prajāpati invariably generates life through the practice of tapas. Tapas in the Veda is however not only a creative force that generates life, but it is also destructive.⁴⁶⁴

Exile and renunciation are present in the Veda but they are there in very different forms and aspects as they are described in the Upaniṣads and Epics. The idea of renunciation has been presented through multiple terms and situations but the idea of exile is much dependent on the context because the Vedic ṛṣis were the essential parts of forests itself.

Vedic ṛṣis were dependent on Indra for their protection and prosperity, as D. D. Kosambi has argued that, the *Ṛg Veda* describes the chief Aryan war god Indra, who looted the stored treasures of the godless. Kosambi believed that the Aryans also destroyed the agriculture system of Harappans, the basis of their food production,

⁴⁶² Dandekar, R. N., ‘Vedic Literature’, *Annals of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 81, No. ¼ 2000, p. 02.

⁴⁶³ Kaelber, Walter O, ‘Tapas and Purification in Early Hinduism’, *Numen*, Vol. 26, Fasc. 2 Dec. 1979, p. 01.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 01.

which explains why the cities disappeared soon after their arrival.⁴⁶⁵ Since the Vedic society was a pastoral society based on the forest and cattle's products, therefore, the idea of exile into the forest seems very loose in the age of the Vedas. The absence of cities due to the destruction of Aryan culture in northern India as well as the pastoral Vedic economy is actually not being able to create the dichotomy of the human settlements where the idea of exile could be introduced as it seems in the Upaniṣads and epics.

Exile is a term that depends on the bipolarity of human settlements where one place is suitable and favourable for the existence of life, other stand for the adverse human condition bounds for hardships in the forest areas.

The Vedas have many references regarding the gradual but linear development of the idea of renunciation. It can be also called Tapas and austerity as well as hard physical and mental practices for the testing of human emotions and efforts for the attainment of tapas/heat.

According to Walter O Kaelber⁴⁶⁶ in the Vedas, three Kinds of tapas have been mentioned. These are:-

A. *Tapas*, Destruction, Purification

1. Tapas, Destructive heat
2. Tapas, Destruction Purification
3. Tapas, Undesirable Pain

B. *Tapas*, Asceticism, Purification

C. *Tapas*, Penance and Purification

⁴⁶⁵ Chakrabarti, Kunal, 'The Lily and the Mud: D. D. Kosambi on Religion', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, No. 30 July 26- Aug 1, 2008, p. 61.

⁴⁶⁶ Kaelber, Walter O., 'Tapas and Purification in Early Hinduism', *Numen*, Vol. 26. Fasc. 2, Dec, 1979, pp. 192-214.

1. Tapas, Ritual, Asceticism or Penance
2. Tapas as Penance
3. Specific forms of penance

Among the connotation of the Sanskrit root ‘tap’ are to consume or destroy by heat and to injure. Connotations of injury and consuming destruction are in fact the most prevalent meaning of the root tap and tap derivatives in the *R̥g Veda*.

The first kind of tapas is to destroy the enemies as R̥g Vedic deities are invoked to generate destructive tapas against enemies, and for that Agni is called upon more than any other deity. Here Agni has been considered as the agent for destruction and purification.

The second kind of tapas particularly about which we are discussing in this chapter is asceticism. The word tapa is translated as asceticism, as self-imposed austerity. This is, in fact, the most prevalent meaning of tapas in the Br̥hman̥s. The meaning of tapas as ascetic effort may be clearly seen in its repeated correlation with the root śram, “to toil”, “to exert one’s self. Just as Prajāpati exerted himself to become pure and cleanse himself of purity.⁴⁶⁷

The inner heat is also referred to as tapas. Through the heat of exertion, asceticism, mortification, and pain one generates heat or tapas, which raises him above the impure human condition.⁴⁶⁸ The third kind of tapas is called penance since tapas had been regarded as a primary means of ritual purification that is why penance has to be considered as the foremost ritual for purification.⁴⁶⁹

The idea of tapas has been clearly elaborated through the various mantras of *R̥g Veda*.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 208.

यो नः सनुत्यो अभिदासदग्ने यो अन्तरो मित्रमहो वनुष्यात् ।

तमजरेभिर्वृषभिस्तव स्वैस्तपा तपिष्ठ तपसा तपस्वान्⁴⁷⁰ ॥ (R̥g Veda 6.5.4)

In the above mantra of *R̥g Veda* 6.5.4, it has been clearly indicated that tapas is an important feature of the renouncer. According to its translation by H. H. Wilson, the power of tapas has been described that how the holder of tapas can protect his friends and save them. If we critically analyze the verse and its focus over the power of tapas then it seems that a kind of magical, as well as social legitimacy, has been given to the renouncer so that he should use his earned heat of tapas in a positive, to protect others from the destructive nature as well as from the demons.

इन्द्रावरुणा यदृषिभ्यो मनीषां वाचो मतिं श्रुतमदत्तमग्रे ।

यानि स्थानान्यसृजन्त धीरा यज्ञं तन्वानास्तपसाभ्यपश्यम्⁴⁷¹ ॥

(R̥g Veda 8.59.6)

There is another mantra in the *R̥g Veda* 8.59.6, from where we can actually see the kind of progression in the number of renouncers as well as the spreading of their webs in the forest. The followers of tapas in the *R̥g Veda* gradually increased and there is also developed in the sacrifices related to the holy austerities.

If we the translation of the above verse as, ‘O Indra and Varuṇa’, I have seen what you formerly gave to the seers, power of song and fame and the places which the wise have prepared for themselves, as they spread the web of the sacrifice with holy

⁴⁷⁰ ‘Do you, protector of your friends, who are most resplendent, blazing with radiance, consumes with your own imperishable flames him who injures us abiding in secret, or when near to us design us harm.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, and Bhāṣya of Shankaracharya, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 3*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p.11. *R̥g Veda* (6.5.4)

⁴⁷¹ ‘O Indra and Varuna, I have seen what you formerly gave to the seer, wisdom, power of song, and fame, and the places which the wise have prepared for themselves, as they spread the web of the sacrifice with holy austerities.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 546. *R̥g Veda* 8.59.6

austerities.⁴⁷² It appears that there was a continuous process of expansion of sacrifices and austerity among the Vedic sages that they become the carriers of Vedic sacrificial practices and taken them to unexplored places particularly in the forests.

Here it is important to discuss the relationship between forest and renunciations, as we have already discussed at the beginning of this chapter that the Vedic society was pastoral society and for the Vedic sages forest were playing a great role to provide them space food and shelter. Therefore most of the sacrificial rituals and religious practices were directly or indirectly associated with forests and here we can argue that for the practice of renunciation forest was the place for penance and true hardships as required for the purification of body and soul.

मन्युरिन्द्रो मन्युरेवास देवो मन्युर्होता वरुणो जातवेदाः ।

मन्युं विश ईळते मानुषीर्याः पाहि नो मन्यो तपसा सजोषाः⁴⁷³ ॥

(Rg Veda 10. 83. 2)

Indra is one of the most important gods in the Vedic pantheon, according to the Rg Vedic mantra 10. 83. 2 Indra has also attain his all power because of his tapas, as per the translation of this mantra “Manyu is Indra; Manyu verily was a god; Manyu is the sacrificing priest Agni, the omniscient Varuṇa, the people who are of human descent praise Manyu, protect us Manyu, Manyu well pleased along with tapas.”⁴⁷⁴ Here Manyu is one, who has attained the power of tapas or austerity, Indra has been called as Manyu, sacrificing Agni, Varuṇa has been called as Manyu.

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 546.

⁴⁷³ ‘Manyu is Indra; Manyu verily was a god; Manyu is the sacrificing priest (Agni), the Omniscient Varuna; the people, who are of human descent, praise Manyu; protect us, Manyu, well pleased along with Tapas.’ Translated by H. H. Wilson, *Rg Veda Saṃhitā, Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 394. Rg Veda 10.83.2

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 394.

Manyu seems very close to another term Muni, Muni has also appeared in the R̥g Veda as a term for the renouncer.

वास्तोष्पते ध्रुवा स्थूणांसत्रं सोम्यानाम् ।

द्रप्सो भेत्ता पुरां शश्वतीनामिन्द्रो मुनीनां सखा⁴⁷⁵ ॥ (R̥g Veda 8.17.14)

There is a prayer regarding the friendship between Indra and Munis if we closely see the translation of the verse *R̥g Veda* 8.17.14 which says that, lord of dwellings, may the pillar be strong; may there be vigour of body for the offers of libation; may Indra the drinker of Soma, the destroyer of numerous sites of asura, ever be the friends of Munis.⁴⁷⁶

According to Shubhra Sharma in her book *Upaniṣdic life* she has argued that there are some scholars who believe that the Muni tradition is actually none Aryan tradition and it has roots in Indus valley civilization, but during the time of influx of Aryan culture, it was incorporated by the Vedic people. This theory could also be associated with the above verse where tapas have been shown as renouncer tradition different from the renouncer tradition of Munis. Since, Indra represents the Aryan culture that is why the above verse prospects about the possibility of friendship among the Munis and Indra.

On the basis of the above discussion we can argue that there are two kinds of renouncers in the Veda, the first ones are tapasi and the second ones are munis. This dichotomy of these two lines of austerities diminishes during the time of Upaniṣads when the ritualistic society transformed into a knowledge-based society.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Lord of dwellings, may the (roof) pillar be strong; may there be vigour of body for the offers of the libation; may Indra, the drinker of the Soma, the destroyer of the numerous cities (of the Asursas), ever be the friend of the Munis’. Translated by H. H. Wilson, *R̥g Veda Saṃhitā, Vol. 4*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 420. R̥g Veda 8.17.14

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

In the same verse Indra has been called “Lord of dwellings” it is actually mentioning the forest. Forest remains a dwelling place for the Indra as well as it the place for Munis also to perform their austerities and therefore the above verse is talking about friendship which seems nothing but negotiation.

We can also argue that since a large number of sages and seers were engaged in the practices of renunciation in the Vedas and there was Munis also from the early Vedic tradition, therefore there could be a struggle for space and to attain that space this negotiation can be pursued.

अन्तरिक्षेण पतति विश्वा रूपावचाकशत् ।

मुनिर्देवस्य देवस्य सौकृत्याय सखा हितः⁴⁷⁷ ॥ (Rg Veda 10.136.4)

The Muni tradition of the Veda appears very strong and powerful because another verse from *Rg Veda* 10.136.4 explains that, the Munis flies through the firmament, illuminating all objects the friend of each deity, appointed for pious work.⁴⁷⁸

The socio-political explanation of the above verse is very important because it tells us that actually, their freedom from the society made them so powerful that their institution later enlarges as the new settlements of aśrams in the Upaniṣadic age.

Regarding the social life of a renouncer, we can argue that the renouncers withdrawal from society, is not physical but ideological. He does not participate in the most central socio-religious institutions: family and sex, ritual fire and ritual activities, permanent and wealth activities.

⁴⁷⁷ Wilson, H. H., *Rg Veda Saṃhitā*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, 2016, p. 529.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 529.

Of these two ascetic institutions, the one that becomes central to the development of Indian religions and cultures was the renouncer tradition. The hermit culture becomes obsolete at least by the beginning of the Common Era and lived in the forms of two great epics: *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* center on around hermit life in the forest.⁴⁷⁹

The development of exile and renunciation in the Vedas were at the primitive stage and they have grown up during the time of Upaniṣads. As well as the idea of renounce and austerity increased in the Vedic age we can assume that the possibility regarding the demand for forest space. Actually, the expansion and acceptance of these ideas among the people have certainly increased the human intervention into the forest because of the sacrificial rituals and penance.

VI.3 Exile and Renunciation in Upaniṣads

The Upaniṣads are among the most important religious and philosophical texts. Significant Ideas that are still embraced by millions of Indians today, such as ātman, Brahman, karma, reincarnation and the idea that salvation can be defined as freedom from an endless cycle of death and rebirth are first formulated in these texts.⁴⁸⁰ Within these philosophical ideas of Upaniṣads there was also a chain of continuities coming from the Vedas, and ideas of exile and renunciations are one of them.

The development of the idea of exile happened during the age of Upaniṣdas in true sense. The emergence of socio-political institutions can also be seen as the reason behind the change in aspects of religious sacrifices. The Upaniṣadic society reveals

⁴⁷⁹ Olivelle, Patrick, *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions*, Anthem Pres, London, 2011, p. 12.

⁴⁸⁰ Cohen, Signe, (ed.), *The Upanisads: A complete guide*, Routledge Publishers, Oxon, 2018, p. 01.

the existence of Varṇa-division, *Āśrama* theory, and the *Samṅskāra* system.⁴⁸¹ Due to the strong implantation of the ideas of *Varṇa-Āśrama* in Upaniṣadic society, the importance of the forest as a place for outsiders and renouncer increased.

If we see the historical as well as the cultural background of the development of Upaniṣads then we would find that there was a change in the pattern of Agriculture and evolution of state-society as well. Significantly, the time period during which the oldest Upaniṣads are likely to have been composed is also an era of growing urbanization in northern India. From around 500 BCE onwards, cities like Vārāṇasī, Campā, Rājagṛha, and Ujjain began to flourish.⁴⁸² Agriculture was the main livelihood, and rice as the main crop. Plough was widely used. Agricultural pests were also known: the *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* states that the land of the Kuru was once devastated by locusts.⁴⁸³

Within the paradigm of Upaniṣads, āśram system is the main reason in the extension of renouncer tradition into the forests. As the *varṇas* divided the society into four different classes, so did the āśramas divide the individual's life span into four different categories, these are *Brhamachāri*, *Gṛhasth*, *Vānprsth*, and *Samnyās*.⁴⁸⁴

According to Patrick Olivelle,⁴⁸⁵ the āśrama system is primarily a theological construct. The system and its history, therefore, should be carefully distinguished from the socio-religious institutions comprehended by the system and from their respective histories.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸¹ Sharma, Shubhra, *Life in the Upanisads*, Abhinav Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 80.

⁴⁸² Cohen, Signe, (ed.), *The Upanisads: A Complete Guide*, p. 35.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁴⁸⁴ Sharma, Shubra, *Life in the Upanisads*, p. 88.

⁴⁸⁵ Olivelle, Patrick, *The Ashrama System: The history and hermeneutics of Religious Institutions*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 07.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 07.

The Upaniṣadic age is also seen as the period of transition into the very idea of sacrifice. In the Vedas, the homa sacrifices and rituals related to Soma were considered as a path towards reaching to supreme, but in the Upaniṣads knowledge and mediations replaced them⁴⁸⁷

We can also argue that the ranges of Upanisadic texts are actually propagating the idea of āśrama system with the transition in the form of sacrificial ritual by making it more ideological rather than ritualistic.

There is a strong connection between āśram and forests, the fourth stage of āśram system which is actually a systematic allocation of a particular age to practice samnyās and the forest as the place of renunciation for ascetics. Vānprathis and Samnyāsis of the Upaniṣads had to visit Araṇyakas to perform their penances away from the societies. The Vānprathis performed symbolic worship in the forests, as explained by the Araṇyakas. The Samnyāsis were free from all desires, possessions, and attachments and Upaniṣads were introduced for such peoples.⁴⁸⁸

One important thing about the stages of āśrams system is the order of the stages because the Upaniṣadic references do not make it clear whether the stage was followed one after another in succession or whether the stages of the vānprathis or samnyāsi could be reached directly after that of the brahmchārin.⁴⁸⁹

All the 'major Upaniṣads'⁴⁹⁰ also focused on the methods to attain yogic or mystic trance through the practice of yoga and asceticism. The tapas (asceticism), occupies an important place in the practice of yoga and constitutes an element of its

⁴⁸⁷ Goman, Thomas G. and Ronald S. Lura, A logical treatment of some Upanisadic Puzzles and Changing Conceptions of Sacrifices, *Numen* Vol. 19, Fasc. 1 (Apr., 1972), pp. 52-67.

⁴⁸⁸ Sharma, Shubra, *Life in the Upaniṣads*, p. 89.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁴⁹⁰ *Bṛhadārṇyaka, Chāndogya, Taittīrīya, Kausitki and Kena.*

discipline.⁴⁹¹ Here the importance of forest for the practice of tapas/asceticism could be seen from *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, which tell us that the person who lives in the forests, practices faith and austerity goes to the path of the gods whereas the person who, living in the village, performs sacrifice and works of public utility and practices charity goes to the path of the manes.⁴⁹²

Vānprastha or third stage of life has been regarded as the beginning of renunciation in the Upaniṣads. If we break the term Vānprastha in two parts then we will have Vana (forest) and prasthān (an act of visiting the forest), the term itself clearly indicates that Vānprastha means a correct age or time for a human being to leave the social and

⁴⁹¹ Tola, Fernando, and Carmen Dragonetti, 'Yogic Trance in the Oldest Upanisads', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 68, No. ¼, 1987, p. 377.

⁴⁹² *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, V.10.1-3

तद्य इत्थं विदुः। ये चेमेऽरण्ये श्रद्धा तप इत्युपासते

तेऽर्चिषमभिसंभवन्त्यर्चिषोऽहरहन

आपूर्यमाणपक्षमापूर्यमाणपक्षाद्यान्षडुदङ्ङेति

मासाऽस्तान् ॥ 5.10.1 ॥

'So those who know this, and those too who worship in a forest with the thought that "Faith is austerity," pass into the flame; from the flame, into the day ; from the day, into the half-month of the waxing moon ; from the half-month of the waxing moon, into the six months during which the sun moves northward.' *Chandogya Upanisad* 5.10.1, Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 232.

मासेभ्यः संवत्सरः संवत्सरादादित्यमादित्याच्चन्द्रमसं

चन्द्रमसो विद्युतं तत्पुरुषोऽमानवः स एनान्ब्रह्म

गमयत्येष देवयानः पन्था इति ॥ 5.10.2 ॥

'from those months, into the year; from the year, into the sun; from the sun, into the moon; from the moon, into the lightning. There is a Person (purusa) who is non-human (a-manava). He leads them on to Brahma. This is the way leading to the gods.' *Chandogya Upanisad* 5.10.2, Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 233.

अथ य इमे ग्राम इष्टापूर्ते दत्तमित्युपासते ते

धूममभिसंभवन्ति धूमाद्रात्रि

रात्रेरपरपक्षमपरपक्षाद्यान्षडुदक्षिणैति

मासाऽस्तान्नैते संवत्सरमभिप्राप्नुवन्ति ॥ 5.10.3 ॥

'But those who in the village reverence a belief in sacrifice, merit, and almsgiving they pass into the smoke; from the smoke, into the night; from the night, into the latter half of the month; from the latter half of the month, into the six months during which the sun moves southward--these do not reach the year; from those months, into the world of the fathers; from the world of the fathers, into space; from space, into the moon. That is King Soma. That is the food of the gods. The gods eat that.' *Chandogya Upanisad* 5.10.3, Translated by Robert Ernest Hume, *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, Oxford University Press, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 233.

material life and then should visit the forest. Visiting the forest for the rest of life and particularly under the idea of āśrama system is actually different from a normal visit. Scholars have read this human instinct to visit the forest through philosophical sense as well as through its material explanation that why a system was being set up to visit the forest after a certain stage of life.

There are certain questions regarding the idea of Vānaprastha particularly during Upaniṣadic age when already there were numerous hermits of sages within the forests then why there was indirect instruction to the society to visit and stay the rest of life in the forest. It was a pursuit for philosophical attainment to achieve salvation through penance and forest hardships then why the forest was chosen. What could have been the material reasons behind devising this phenomenon of Vānaprastha for aged people from society? We need to also look into this connection between the pursuit of knowledge and salvation and forest as a place for its execution.

In order to try answers for the above questions regarding the importance of forest and its close relation with the idea renunciation, we need to have look into some of earliest Upaniṣadic stories from *Bṛhadārṇyaka Upaniṣad*, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, and *Taittīrīya Upaniṣads*, were in the stories various metaphors have been used in the coded forms for the understanding of higher socio-religious ideas.

The *Jābālopaniṣad* tell us that the order of the Vānaprasthin could be taken up directly after the studenthood or after spending some years as a householder.⁴⁹³ It can be inferred from the passage in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that the usual practice was to spend forty-four years as a householder, before going to the forest. The first forty-four years are called the morning and the next forty-four years, the mid-days. Therefore, it

⁴⁹³ Sharma, Shubra, *Life in the Upanisads*, p. 95.

seems likely that it was not before the age of sixty-eight that a man thought of going to the aranya.⁴⁹⁴

If we see this whole process of forest going phenomenon under the idea of Vānprastha through the socio-political lens then it would appear as more political rather than philosophical. As we have already discussed at the beginning of this chapter that the age of Upaniṣad was the time of emergence of early political states particularly northern India, where there was instant need for new agricultural lands as well as new lands for settlements of increasing population, therefore, the system of four stages of life particularly as Vānprasth came out as the best solution.

Forest is an essential part of Vānprastha, as we have mentioned that the meaning of Vānprasth is, visiting and staying in the forest. Now we need to see the answer to the question that why forests have been chosen as the place of execution of penance and austerities. And the answer to this question lies in a continuous tradition which is coming from the Vedic age, and it about knowing oneself that, from where we have come from. The Upaniṣads deal with eternal problems of humankind, that is: where do we come from, why we are here, where go? In other words, with the nature of body and soul, their fate after death, and what is their position in the universe.⁴⁹⁵ In order to deals with philosophical questions of life, death, and karma there was a need to connect with nature as the Vedic society does and worshiped forms of nature and therefore forest has become the place of internal philosophical pursuits for all the sages and Vānprathis.

The idea of renunciation in the Upaniṣads can also be observed through the understanding of Saṃnyāsa. It is the most common term for the lifestyle of a world

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴⁹⁵ Flood, Gavin, (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2003, p. 83.

renouncer in the Sanskrit. It is also given as the title of the fourth āśrama. Saṃnyāsin is commonly used as a synonym of terms such as *parivrājaka*, *pravrajita*, *śramaṇa*, *bhiksū*, and *yati*.⁴⁹⁶

Though saṃnyāsa was a fourth and last part of the āśram system at the same time it was the most powerful tradition within the Upaniṣadic society. Its importance can be seen through the composition of *Samnyāsa Upaniṣad* separately to deal with the nuances of asceticism and renouncer traditions. According to Patrick Olivelle, there are collections of twenty texts written in Sanskrit and their common characteristic is the theme of Saṃnyāsa or renunciation, these are called *Samnyāsa Upaniṣads*.⁴⁹⁷

Patrick Olivelle further argues that, the purpose of their composition was the establishment of the Vedic scriptural validity of already established ascetic lifestyles and renouncer theology, and that they played a central role in the theological reflections and disputes concerning that key institution of Brāhmaical religion.⁴⁹⁸ The formulation behind expansion and promotion of Saṃnyāsa could be the re-implantation of Brāhmanical ideology into the deep forests, but Vānprastha was devised to create a society within the forest so that they could help the early states for socio-political entry into forests.

The *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* shows Yājñavalkya eager to renounce the state of a householder, and the word used in this context is derived from the root *Vraja*, and *pra* prefix added to it. The other derivatives, *Pravrājya* and *Pravarājak* denoted the

⁴⁹⁶ Olivelle, Patrick, 'Contributions to the Semantic History of Saṃnyās', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 101, No. 03 (Jul.-Sep., 1981), p. 265.

⁴⁹⁷ Olivelle, Patrick, *Samnyāsa Upaniṣad: Hindu Scriptures on Asceticism and Renunciation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁸ Vail, Ise F., 'Unlike a Fool, He is Not Defiled: Ascetic Purity and Ethics in the Saṃnyasa Upaniṣads', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (Fall, 2002), p. 374.

specific sense of Saṃnyāsa and Saṃnyāsin respectively.⁴⁹⁹ The terms like Śramaṇa and Tapasa is also there in Upaniṣads.

Presence of the terms like Śramaṇa and Tapas in *Bṛahdāranyak Upaniṣads* indicates the Vedic linkages of the Śramaṇic and Tapas traditions. Since the idea of renunciation was started by the coming together of Śramaṇic and Muni traditions of Aryan and none Aryan cultural backgrounds in the Vedic forests, that is why we can also argue that the process of re-installation of Saṃnyāsin culture in the forest could be because of coming off a strong state-based counter-culture.

As K. M. Pannikar has seen cultures as “sites of struggles”, there is also a kind of struggle between the forest and state societies on the issues of morality, justice, and knowledge that appear in the Upaniṣadic stories. Stories are the symbolic and metaphysical representations of societies from where they belong. Most of the Upaniṣads are full of these kinds of stories particularly *Bṛhadāranyaka* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣads* delivers multiple ideas and social aspects in their single and simple stories.

There are two interesting stories in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* as well as in *Bṛhadārnyaka Upaniṣads*. In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*⁵⁰⁰ there is a story of Satyakām who was also known as Satyakām Jābāla. This story is important to understand the relationship between the hermitages which were situated in the fringes of state-society and forests, and how the process of incorporation of new forest lands has happened through the events of hermitages.

⁴⁹⁹ Sharma, Shubra, *Life in the Upanisads*, p. 97.

⁵⁰⁰ Shastri, Rampratap, Tripathi, *Upanishado ki Kahaniya*, Lokbharati Publication, Allahabad, Second Publication 2011, pp. 19-28.

Satyakāma was ordered sage Gautama to takeaway five hundred cows of the hermit with him into the deep forests and advised to come back only after the achievement of double numbers of cows. This incident tells us how the forest was used for pastoral activities by the sages who staying in the hermits. And it was an indirect process to intrude into virgin forest lands. Here on the basis of this story, we can argue that hermits and the sages were actually pre-installed human societies in the fringes of the forest so that the Vānprathis and Saṃnyāsins could easily accommodate in the forests.

The second story is in the *Bṛahdāranyaka Upaniṣad*⁵⁰¹ which is about a discussion between Yāgyavalkya and Matriyī. In this story, Yāgyavalkya express his wish to go for Saṃnyāsa and left behind the āśrama with his two wives. While he tells his idea to leave for Saṃnyāsa, his wife Matriyī asked him about the importance of Saṃnyāsa as well as the true and ultimate way to perceive the Brahman. According to Yāgyavalkya a householder's life where earthly material matters could not lead to the path of attainment of Brahman there for Saṃnyāsa is the best way.

From these two stories of two important Upaniṣads we can speculate about the importance of Saṃnyāsa and hermitages particularly in the forest for material gain as Satyakāma went for and as well as Philosophical gain, for which Yāgyavalkya is talking with his wife. We can also argue that Upaniṣads have celebrated the third and fourth stages of the āśrama system particularly to make the way for new socio-political evolutions in the state society. The role of the forest during the age of Upaniṣads also increased due to the settlements of hermitages and the large influx of Vānprathis and Saṃnyāsins and therefore a kind of new society was evolved which had experience from out of the state-society as well as experience form forest society. We can also argue that since *Vānprastha* and *Samanyāsa* were devices to occupy the

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 71-79.

new forest lands there is no discussion about the forest tribes and forest inhibitors in the Upaniṣdas.

VI.4 Exile and Renunciation in the Epics

Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* are the two great epics of India; these are the texts which has celebrated the ideas of Exile and Renunciation more than any Sanskrit texts. The whole story of *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* revolves around the idea of exile in the forest. In both of the epics, the forest has been presented as the substitute or an alternative of state-society, where ungoverned, undiscovered and unrevealed materials and ideas have been shown through the journey of protagonists.

These two Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*, fall within the category of ‘*smṛiti*’ as well as ‘*itihāsa*’ (traditional history). Similarities in language and style suggest that they emerged from a common cultural milieu. The *Mahābhārata* refers to Vālmīkī and *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as the outline of *Rāmāyaṇa* story. While *Rāmāyaṇa* in turns mentions the Kurus, Hastināpura, and Janmejaya but doesn’t mention the war.⁵⁰²

The idea of Exile established in a true sense during the epic age. Earlier in the Vedas and Upaniṣads a particular age was decided for the state people to set the journey of forest under the system of four āśrmas of life. But in the epics, the whole idea of forest visit in the last stage of life was superimposed by the idea of exile, where age bar was countered by the situations in the form of punishments to spend life in the forest. In this section of the chapter, we will look into each epic regarding their way of presentation of exile and renunciation.

⁵⁰² Singh, Upinder, *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*, p. 210.

VI.4.A. Rāmāyaṇa

The story of *Rāmāyaṇa* has come down to us in three ancient versions, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Rāmopakhāyan* in the *Vanaparva* of *Mahābhārata*, and in *Shoḍas Rajikā Dṛoṇa Parva* of *Mahābhārata*.⁵⁰³ Here in this section, we are exploring the ideas of exile and renunciation by looking into the text of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is also called as the book of exile, *Rāmāyaṇa* ascribed to the Vālmīki contains the story of Rāma and his adventures when exiled to the forest.⁵⁰⁴ From the beginning of the text, the forest has remained an integral part of the story. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, young unmarried princes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa visit forest with sage Viśvāmitra to kill Tāḍakā, then they Visit forest for fourteen years as a period of exile. After the completion of exile and re-establishment of Rāma as king of Ayodhyā, Sītā went for the forest in the hermit of sage Valmīkī where she gives birth to her two sons. In this text, we can see a continuous appearance of the forest with multiple shades and aspects in relation to human emotions and that is why the text has also shown the kinds of relationships with forest-dwelling societies.

Looking into the attraction of this literature towards the wild forest and its strong association with forest society and cultures John L. Brockington has argued that, the original *Rāmāyaṇa* was a martial epic, and the idyllic rustic elements were introduced only later.⁵⁰⁵ He has also suggested that epic *Rāmāyaṇa* was a device for the propagation of *Vaiṣṇavism* into outer and exterior forest areas from the mainland and

⁵⁰³ Pargiter, F. E., 'The Geography of Rama's Exile', *The Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Apr 1894, p. 232.

⁵⁰⁴ Brokington, John, *The Sanskrit Epics*, In Gavin Flood edited, *The Blackwell companion to Hinduism*, Blackwell Publishing Limited, Oxford, 2003, p. 117.

⁵⁰⁵ Brokington, John, L., *Righteous Rama: The Evolution of an Epic*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984, p. 99.

this is the reason behind the special focus over the forest and virgin lands in the journey of Rāma's exile.

Within the text, there are various direct and indirect references from where we can see and analyze the ideas of exile and renunciations. Since a kind of new social formation was under process in the age of *Rāmāyaṇa* when forest people and culture was brought under the affluence of *Varṇāśram-dharma* and for that the established norms of exile and renunciation were used for acculturation and assimilation of little traditions with great traditions.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* is the best story to see the parallel progression of exile as well as renunciation at one place. When we look at the instance of first stepping in of Rāma into the forest with sage Vishvāmitra, it was to protect the sages and hermits from demon Tāḍakā. Here the sages who have been mentioned were renouncer and ascetics staying within the forest for the performances of rituals and penances. Though Rāma was not in the exile he was with sage Viśvāmitra to help them out from Rākṣasas.

सप्त सप्त च वर्षा दंडकारण्यमाश्रीतः ।

अभिषेकमिदं त्व्व्या जताचीरधरो⁵⁰⁶ ॥

(Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Chapter 18, Verse 37)

The exile of Rāma started with the serious demand of Kekai to send Rāma for forty years of Vanavāsa. Hereafter the royal order of Rāma's exile, Rāma's mother invokes about the troubles of the forest for a householder and this description can be taken as

⁵⁰⁶ 'You have to leave this coronation function and dwell in the forest of Dandaka for fourteen years, wearing braided hair and covered with a hide.' As translated by Prof. P. Geervani, Prof. K. Kamala and Shri V. V. Subba Rao, under the guidance of Prof. H.K. Sathapathy VC, Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peetham, Tirupati in a project developed by Indian Institute of Kanpur (IIT) which is available at www.Valmiki.iitk.ac.in

the challenges of exile particularly for those who are going into the forest before the prescribed ages of Vānprastha and Saṁnyāsa.

येभ्यः प्रणाम सः पुत्रः देवेषा यातनेशु च ।

ते च त्वंभिरक्षन्तु वने सह महर्षिभ्यः⁵⁰⁷ ॥ (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Chapter 25, Verse 4)

समित्कुश पवित्रानी वेदाश्च यतनानी च

स्थान्दिलानी च विप्राण शैल वृक्ष क्षुपा हृदः

पतंगा पंगः शिहास्त्वः रक्षन्तु नरोत्तम⁵⁰⁸ ॥ (Ayodhyākāṇḍa, Chapter 25, Verse 7)

On the basis of above verses of Kaushlyā for Rāma, it seems that visiting forest was not an easy task instead it was equivalent to the death threat, from where the possibility to come back was very less because of wild animals, Rākṣasas and forest hardships.

Here it is important for us to discuss and analyze the differences of exile from Upaniṣads and from the epics. In the Upaniṣads the exile was planned under the āśrma system that one should visit the forest in his Vānprastha/third or Saṁnyāsa/fourth stages of life when he has completed more than sixty years of his life. While in the epics the idea of Vānaprastha actually transformed, there is no age bar in the epics to visit the forest and it was now planned under the umbrella of socio-political punishment. Vānaprastha in the epics emerges as the part of socio-political punishments/banishment as happened with Rāma and Pāṇḍvas. Now during the age of

⁵⁰⁷ 'O my son may the gods in the temples and in other sacred places and the maharshis you bow to protect you in the forest.'

⁵⁰⁸ 'O best of men may sacrificial fuel, kusa grass and sacred rings made of kusha grass, sacrificial altars, temples, various levelled sacrificial grounds, mountains, trees, plants, lakes, birds, serpents and lions protect you.'

epics forest visits by the people of state-society was become more frequent and more common.

शरभंगे दिवं प्राप्ते मुनिसंडा समागताः ।

अभ्यागाच्छंत काकुत्स्थ रामं ज्वालिततेजसम⁵⁰⁹ ॥ (Aranykāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 1)

वैखानसा वालखिल्या सम्प्रकशाला मरीचिपाः ।

अस्मृक्त्ताकस्य बहवः पत्रहरास्य तापसः⁵¹⁰ ॥ (Aranykāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 2)

दंतोलुखिलंस्सचेव तथैवोन्मज्जाका परे ।

गात्रशच्या अश्यास्य तथैव न वन्कशिकशिका⁵¹¹ ॥ (Aranykāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 3)

मुनयः सलिलहारा वायुभक्षास्ताथापरे ।

अकशानिल्यास्यैव तथा स्थादिल्शार्यीन⁵¹² ॥ (Aranykāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 4)

तथोर्धरवासिनो दंतास्था द्रप्त्वासस ।

सज्पस्यव तापोनिष्ठ पस्यतापाओ विंता⁵¹³ ॥ (Aranykāṇḍa, Chapter 6, Verse 6)

The *Aranyakāṇḍa* is the third book of the epic, in this Kāṇḍa Rāma was wondering with his wife and brother Lakṣmaṇa amongst the hermitages of the sages of Daṇḍaka

⁵⁰⁹ ‘When Sarabhanga attained the heaven, all the sages collected together and came to Rama whose radiance was like fire.’

⁵¹⁰ ‘The sages called Vaikahanasa-s, [who are born out of the nails of Prajaapati, the first ruler of mankind,] also Vaalakhilyaa-s, (those born from His hair,) and those from the water of His feet-wash, and those that thrive on drinking rays of sun and moon alone, and those that pound with stones and others who thrive on leaves alone, are those sages.’

⁵¹¹ ‘Some of them use their own teeth to grid the grain they eat, and some who perform asceticism in neck-deep water, and some who sleep with their head resting on their shoulders or on chests without using any kind of bed, and some who do not use any kind of beds either, and some who meditate without any repose sitting in an enclosure without any leg-space.’

⁵¹² ‘And some sages whose food is water alone, or air alone to some like that some who meditate staying in sky and some who sleep on bare ground it-self.’

⁵¹³ ‘Thus some are dwellers on high-peaked places with their senses controlled, and some are wearers of wet cloths, always reciting name or hymn japa and like that some who meditate with five kinds of fire around them.’

forest. According to the text, this place was full of Vānprastha munis and ascetics. The above verses from *Aranyakānda* tell us about the kinds of Vānaprastha munis particularly there various kinds of penances and practices.

Above mentioned verses are very important to know about the kinds of Vānaprastha munis as well as their origins. There are twenty-one kinds of Vānaprastha munis and all of them have different penance practices and different origins or schools.

The first one belongs to the nails of Brahmā, second ones have origin from the body hairs of Brahmā, third kinds of sages were those who eat and newer leftover the food for others, the fourth kind of sages survives on the rays of sun and moon, the fifth section of sages were those who eat uncooked food grinded by stones only, sixth school of sages was those who survive only on green leaves, seventh kind of munis were those who use their teeth only, eighth were those who meditate in the water bodies till their neck, ninth were those who sleep without any soft materials like cloths and grass, etc.

These Vānprasthis sages had very tuff life in the forest but the idea exile was much powerful that there are very fewer references within the text which show returning or escaping of Vānprasthis from forest to state society.

In both the epics either in *Rāmāyaṇa* or in *Mahābhārata* the representation of women as following the āśrma system and visiting a forest or staying alone in the forest as the ascetic is rare. Though in the *Rāmāyaṇa* there is one instance in the *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* where Hanumāna and his team those who went to the south in the search of Sītā visited a women sage named as Tapasi Swamprabhā.

मयो नाम महातेजा मायावी वानषभ ।

तेनेदं निर्मितं सर्व मायया कंचन वनं⁵¹⁴ ॥

(Kiṣkindhakāṇḍa, Chapter 51, Verse 10)

इदम च ब्राह्मण दत्तं हेमायै वन्मुत्तमम ।

शास्वतः कम्भगश्च गृहम चेदम हिरान्यमयम⁵¹⁵ ॥ (Kiṣkindhakāṇḍa, Chapter 51, Verse 15)

In the Vedas tapas/tapasi terms have been used for the renouncer and ascetics. *Rāmāyaṇa* has mentioned a women renouncer and called her as tapasi. Here we need to place the presence of women as tapasi in the forest very seriously because in the Vedas and Upaniṣads women have been presented as subordinate of men as a wife but not have presented as independent and alone renouncer at any place. Therefore the case of Tapsi Swamprabhā is a very important sign to see the indulgence of women into renouncer tradition.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* text, Rāma is the protagonist who is the actual carrier of the idea of exile and its celebration, his meetings, and interactions with the ascetics of the forests as well as the fighting of them with Rākṣasa indicates a strong affiliation between the ideas of exile and renunciation. We can also argue that not only Rāma was in exile and helping in the diffusion of Aryan culture into unexplored areas but there were other various kinds of sages that were also engaged in the same process.

⁵¹⁴ ‘O bull among monkeys this golden forest was created by the magical power of a deceitful demon called Maya.’

⁵¹⁵ ‘Thus this wonderful forest and the golden house with all luxury were given away permanently to Hema by the creator Brahma.’

In terms of women's representation in the forest, actually, epic *Rāmāyaṇa* can be seen as breaking the old tradition to keep the women only in the premises of household, as in the age of Upaniṣads but *Rāmāyaṇa* can be seen as making a new tradition when Sītā was allowed to visit the forest with Rāma. We can argue that the entry of Sītā in the forest is actually a transformation in the society, where strict four stages of āśrama system were challenged by the steeping out of a woman.

We should also read the exile of Rāma as, the protection of renouncer tradition in the forest, where the sages were getting a strong challenge from the so-called counter-culture. It was a process to mark the expansion of state-society into tribal and forest societies.

VI.4.B. Mahābhārata

The core of the *Mahābhārata* is a family over control of territory and resources. The epic narrative is in part a continuation of actions pertaining to the societies as described in the Vedas. It is an, overall an attempt to the reconstruction of some of the believed history of the clans.⁵¹⁶ Since *Mahābhārata* is called as fifth Veda, therefore, it also tries to recreate and reconstruct some traditions like ṛiṣi, the Vedic Idea of ṛiṣi was essentially that of someone “who sees the secret matters of gods with an inner eye” and gives what he see.⁵¹⁷

Like *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata* is also a text which gives us important insights on the ideas of exile and renunciations. The story of *Mahābhārata* is influenced by the bipolarity of state-society as well as forest society.

⁵¹⁶ Thapar, Romila, *The Past Before Us: Historical traditions of Early North India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2013, p. 151.

⁵¹⁷ Fitzgerald, James, L., ‘India’s Fifth Veda: The Mahābhārata Presentation of Itself’, *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Part I, Essays on the Mahābhārata, (Winter Spring 1985), p. 130.

अधर्मो वे महानस्तु वने वा मरणं मम ।

शरीरस्य विनाशेन धर्म एव विशिष्यते⁵¹⁸ ॥ (Ādīparva, Chapter 215, Verse 17)

The protagonists of the *Mahābhārata* went to the forest for fourteen years as their period of exile. But their fourteen years of exile was not the first exile in the *Mahābhārata* instead it Arjuna's exile alone was the first. This is an interesting incident when he enters in the house when Yudhisṭhir was with Draūpadi and breaks the law in order to save a poor Brāhmaṇa, and therefore he had to leave for the forest. And here Arjuna describes the hardship of the forest that even he will have vanished in the forest he will save the life of poor brāhmaṇa. According to James L. Fitzgerald, the tapas (heat, fire, and pain) are the center of *Mahābhārata*.⁵¹⁹

The Veda has talked about the same tapas, as Fitzgerald has argued about *Mahābhārata*, therefore, *Mahābhārata* the clan oriented history has a core value for the teachings and believes of Vedas.

Like *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Pāṇḍavas had to visit forest as exile due to the conspiracy of Duryodhana. There are various incidents that also show the process of acculturation and assimilation of little tradition with great tradition via marriage alliances and negotiations of the land, territory, and power.

Metaphors are the power of epic literature and they have been used in the *Mahābhārata* to tell the hidden things and inclinations of the contemporary society. One verse from the *Sabhā- Parva* helps us to read the act of exile within *Mahābhārata*.

⁵¹⁸ 'Our own irreligiousness will also be talked all over the kingdom, and we shall certainly incur a great sin.' As Translated by M. N. Dutt, *Mahabharata, vol. I, Adi Parva & Sabha Parva*, Parimal Publications, Delhi, Reprint 1994, p. 288.

⁵¹⁹ Fitzgerald, James, L., *Mahābhārata*, p. 59.

वनं गते धर्मराजे दुःखशोक्पारायण ।

वभुवु कौरव वृद्धा भृशं शोकेन पीडितः⁵²⁰ ॥ (Sabhāparv Chapter 50 Verse 35.5)

In the above verse, it is being said that with the going of Yudhisthir/Dharmarāj to the forest, Dharma will go to the forest and because of that even Kauravas were in grief. Here we can extend the expression of this verse as the whole idea of exile into the forest could be seen as an act of *Aryanization* of the uncontrolled, ungoverned forest lands and people. The idea of Dharmarāj stands for the idea of justice and morality, and the places visited by Dharmarāja certainly fall into the side of Pāṇḍavas as well.

Bhīma' marriage with Hidimbā, Arjuna's marriage with Ulupi, Chitrāngadā and Rukmaṇi can also be seen as the result of exile in the *Mahābhārata*.

Mahābhārata is a text which is full of narratives and meta-narratives, where there is a linear story of Pandavas and Kauravas and also hundreds of sub-stories to help the main story for making of plots and sometimes to give-up a none ending conclusion for the sake of future. Within the *Mahābhārata* there is the celebration of exile through various small stories, these are:-

1. Rāmopākhayāyan
2. Nal-Damayanti Katha

The whole story of *Rāmāyaṇa* and Exile of Rāma has been re-told in the epic *Mahābhārata*. The presence of *Rāmāyaṇa* within the *Mahābhārata* should be investigated critically. Both of the epics have forest and state dichotomy and the visit

⁵²⁰ 'When dharmaraj Yudhisthir was going to the forest the old Kauravas were in deep pain because dharma was going to the forest,' As Translated by Pt. Ramnarayan Dutt Shastri, *Mahabharat Vol. 1*, Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, 1965, p. 938.

of the forest as part of the exile and then recapturing of their states after the long period of exile and renunciations.

Since both of the epics revolves around the state, forest and exile then what was the need to have the inclusion of *Rāmāyaṇa* within the text *Mahābhārata*. To answer this question we need to have explored the material similarities between text and then we would have to be either *Mahābhārata* was trying to get absorb *Rāmāyaṇa* within it or *Mahābhārata* was taking legitimacy for the acceptance of this political text as Bhakti text.

If we exclude the portion of *Bhāgawat Gītā* from the *Mahābhārata*, then the text would remain only a long and complex story of the state polity. As scholars like Romila Thapar, V. S. Aggrawal, R. S. Sharma and Upinder Singh have argued that the section of *Bhāgawat Gītā* is a later interpolation in the main text; therefore here we can argue that to maintain the essence of Bhakti in the main text, because Bhakti is the most receptive element in the society the earliest *Mahābhārata* had the portion of *Rāmopakhyān* but after the inclusion of *Bhāgawat Gītā* the importance of *Rāmopakhyān* reduced and ignored.

After the *Rāmopakhyāyan* in the *Mahābhārata*, the story of Nala and Damayanti was celebrated in order to pacify the hardships of Pāṇḍavas exile. The story of King Nala and Damayanti has also close relations with the terms like state, forest and exile and it has been presented to the Pāṇḍavas in way that it happened to every great king in the past therefore they should no demoralize themselves instead the way Nala has regained his kingdom and love, Pāṇḍavas should also make efforts.

Here the story of Nala and Damayanti has some more meaning than it appears. The first thing about this meta-story is the projection of the idea of exile as a very common

thing in the society that anyone could fall under the circumstances that they have to visit the forest in his/her life. The second most important thing is the idea of reward after the successful completion of exile, as King Nala achieved his lost kingdom and beloved wife Damyanti after the painful period of exile in the forest.

If the society had considered the idea of 'exile and renunciation' as an event of life and a social system only, then it would not have been a mass accepted idea as well, therefore we can argue that it is was an ideology devised to channelize the various things. The idea of exile and renunciation was actually helping to move the wealth in the society; it was reducing the dichotomy between *vana* and *kṣetra*, it was the working as a tool for the extension of agriculture, *Varṇāśrama-dharma*, and Bhakti.

Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* both epics are giving more impetus to the ideas of exile and renunciation than any other socio-political ideas. It was the one effective method of socio-political as well as religious transformations in the known and un-known societies. Forest was the target for all the new socio-political ideologies to capture the forest space, people and culture to secure their own prosperity and security.

VI.5 Exile and Renunciation in the Arthashāstra

Arthashāstra is a political text of Kauṭilya where he has described the various socio-political aspects of the ruling of a state. The concepts of exile and renunciations are not much there in the text, though at some places they have come through indirect discussions.

अक्रिश्ययां भुमो पशुभ्यो विवितानी प्रयाच्छेत ।

प्रदिस्ताभय स्थावराज्मानी च ब्रह्मनेभ्यो ब्रह्मसोमअरण्यानी, तापोवनानी च तपस्विभ्यो

गोरुत पराणी

प्रयाच्छेत ।

तवंमात्रमेकद्वारण खातगुप्तं स्वादुफलगुल्म गुछमकंटकिद्रूममुत्तनतोयाशय

दांतमृगाचतुस्पाद भाग्नान्नाख

दंस्त्रव्याल मार्ग्यु कहास्तिहस्तिनी कलभम मृगवनं विहारार्थं राज्ञः कारयेत्⁵²¹ ।

(Arthashāstra, Chapter 2, Verse 1)

In the second chapter of *Arthashāstra* there are some glimpses and discussion on *Brhmachārīs*, *Tapovanis* and *Riṣis* mentioned as residing within the forests for their ritualistic activities.

According to the Kauṭilya as per the above verses, the state should not interfere and occupy the forest land where these yogis are doing their sacred practices. They have been called as *Tapovana/Vedavana*.

If we critically observe the conditions of *riṣis* and *tapasvis* during the time of *Arthshāstra* we would find that they are settled over small areas of forest fringes because the most of the forest was state-controlled and various activities like training of elephants, ore extractions and state sanctuaries were constructed within the forests.⁵²²

⁵²¹ Gairola, Vachaspati, *Kautiliya Arthshastra*, Chaukhamba Vidyabhawan, Publication, Varanasi, First reprint 2009, p. 82.

⁵²² Ibid., p. 81.

Arthashāstra just informs us about the presence of some yogis and ṛiṣis within the forest but not tell us about them in more details. Since the text is a secular text where religion and its aspects have not been deal in detail, therefore, we can say that due to the inter struggle between the *Mahājanpadas* and kingdoms the state machinery was engaged in the administration and maintenance of sovereignty. Though the text has not mentioned the kinds of religious developments in northern India history tell us that it was the time or religious revolutions with the coming of new sects within the fold of brāhmanical religion as well as out of the fold like Jainism and Buddhism.

V.6 Conclusion

Exile and renunciations have roots in the Vedas and developed during the age of Upaniṣdas, their acceptance at masses arises in the epic age. Exile was a device for the extension of state-society into the forest areas with brāhmanical ideologies like ‘*Varṇāśram-dharma*’ and ‘*Bhakti*’. The Vedas have mentioned the presence of *tapasi*, *munis*, and *Samnyāshis* in the forest and focus has been given to the idea of the power of tapas which is called as tap/heat.

Vedic sages have been described as engaged in the attainment of that tapa/heat to protect themselves as well as others from Rākṣasas and natural calamities.

The Upaniṣads promoted the ideas of varṇa system as well as the four stages of life wherein the third stage which is called as Vānaprastha one has to go forest in exile for in search of Brahman and ultimate truth. The fourth stage of life Sṃanyāsa has been much celebrated in the Upaniṣdas where it was necessary for one to left the material life and attachment and move forward in the forests.

Rāmāyaṇa and *Mahābhārata* are the gems of Indian Sanskrit literature where the ideas of exile and renunciation have been shown and celebrated at superlative degree. In both of the texts, stories and sub-stories have been used to project the idea of *Vaiṣṇavism* as well as the forest has been represented through the eyes of state-society. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Sītā visited the forests of in the direction of north to south while the Pāṇḍvas explored the forests of northern India from west to east.

Exile and renunciations remain the integral parts of forest life where new experience, adventures in unexplored lands unfolds the understandings of human values and power of nature.

Conclusion

In this research, we have gone through the stages of development of early ideas regarding the forest as a social space, from the wide range of Sanskrit sources. We have looked into the texts from Vedas and *Upaniṣads* to Epics and *Arthashāstra* that how the idea of social space developed within the forests.

For the Vedic people, the forest was more than just space, their imaginations and practices were revolving around the fear and curiosity of this physical space. They had constructed their own social space within the forests for their rituals, sacrifices, and beliefs. They had personified the forest as *Vanśaptidev* in the Veda from where they receive all material as well as spiritual experiences. For the Vedic people forest was the means for all-natural resources particularly for the Soma drink.

During the study of the *Ṛg Veda*, we also come to know about the various kinds of forest resources like fruits, woods, Agni/fire and grasses for their livestock's, these were main forest products. According to the Vedas, the forests have been called the prime means for the Vedic sacrifices where they receive their homa and Soma. For them, Vedic sacrifice was the center of everything.

In this research, an attempt has also been made to know about the Vedic people, particularly about the Vedic Jana. There has been mention about the Vedic sages as well as the early Vedic tribes who were struggling for the political power as well as for the natural resources and forest lands. It seems that the expansion of the family system and evolving social contract led them to a new social formation where the forest was the prime concern.

We have also tried to see the Vedas for the early seeds of the ideas of exile and renunciation. And this research finds that these Ideas were there in the protoforms. Since the society was less developed in terms of material development, therefore it was natural to perceive the mind towards the ‘meanings’ and philosophical speculations about nature and its powers. Terms like tapas, risi, and muni are the strong evidence Vedic development of renunciation. In the Vedas forest was the space for fear and struggle as well as spirituality and peace.

In the *Upaniṣads* the Idea of the forest as social space evolved and the installations of human stations appeared as hermits and *āśrmas* in the forests. Ideas of *vana* and *Kṣetra* were also evolved with sharp differences.

We have found that the idea of the forest as a resource has completely changed during the time of *Upaniṣads*. The earlier forest as a resource was used in the material sense only but the opening of new knowledge centers within the forests by great sages actually transformed the whole idea of the resource. Now the forests were not only considered the place for receiving fruits, woods, grass, and water instead it has evolved as the centers of learning and development of new philosophical ideas and theories.

From the stories of some major *Upaniṣads* we come to know that there was a constant effort from the mainstream state societies to penetrate in the virgin forest lands so that they could meet the requirement of the new lands for agriculture and settlements.

The study of the *Upaniṣads* also revealed us about the forest peoples and their relationships with mainstream state society. Within the *Upaniṣads* there is very little mention about tribals or other forest habitats, the focus of the texts seems only on sages, hermits, and kings particularly in relation to forest and its various aspects. Ideas

of exile and renunciation reached its zenith during the period of *Upaniṣads*. We have also found that the emergence of new socio-religious norms like *varnāśramadharmā* and four stages of life as *āśrama* system actually helped the new evolving states for its indirect extensions into the forest.

Through the prism of epic studies in this research, we have been able to see the major socio-political transformation in early India. During the time of epic age, the forest appears in a completely new form. Now it is wilder and fearful due to the presence of various forest-dwelling groups particularly the *Rākṣasas*, *Niṣādas*, *Gandharvas* and *Vānaras*.

Finally, an attempt has been made in this research to see and analyze the kinds of transformation which have taken place in the perceiving of the forest from *Upaniṣads* to Epics. Here we have found that the idea of exile is the most important device within these socio-political cum religious texts. Exile in *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* should be understood as the opportunity for the state society to discover and explore the forest resources and societies to mark the ways for the entrance of state societies for the accomplishment of material and philosophical needs.

Arthashāstra has been looked in this research as a secular text to know about the importance of forest from the state's point of view. We have gone through this text to explore the material relationships of state and state-society with forest. It seems that the whole idea of the forest has transformed into the text where there is complete access to the forest by state. Introductions of the concepts like *haṣṭivana*, *dravyavana*, *abhyarāṇa* give us a complete idea of a new kind of forest where the outside society is controlling the forest resources and the forest dwellers had negotiations with the states for the issues regarding claim over the forest lands and control over the fringes.

Throughout this research, we have closely observed the various socio-political aspects of forests. Forest was always under a strong pressure to adopt and adjust the new socio-political change in society. We can argue that the development in the socio-political and religious complexities has actually triggered the societies to explore the forest for their own material and philosophical purposes.

Change in the mode of production from pastoral society to *agro-pastoral* society and the emergence of the early state societies are the actual reasons behind the change in the presentation and representations of the forest in early Indian Sanskrit sources.

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