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The Concept of Bhāratavarṣa and Its Historiographical Implications

THE CHOICE OF THE concept of Bhāratavarṣa as the theme of this essay has derived from a number of reasons. We have been brought up from our early childhood on the idea that the country we live in is Bhāratavarṣa which is India and which is also a map with specific boundaries, separated from other countries with similar maps indicating them. The partition of the India of 1947 changed the map, but the notion of Bhāratavarṣa and the name remained, conveying, as it did to our predecessors, the image of a country which has forever been there and will so remain despite the change in the map. And yet, the question of the history of India or Bhāratavarṣa as it evolved over time, and linked to what is perceived as India today, remains to be critically examined in terms of historical change. In other words, the link between a notion or a concept of space, the actual geographical space supposed to be denoted by it, and the space as the locus of our history is an issue which needs to be reopened, because what we accept today as granted is based on a number of assumptions. These assumptions, without adequate deference to the many meanings embedded in our sources, have substantially affected our generalizations about Indian history, particularly of its early phase.

One major assumption, for example, has been that of the identity of the concept of India with the concept of Bhāratavarṣa. It is not

possible, in this essay, to historically explain in what ways the convergence of the meanings of the notions took place, but it seems obvious that by the nineteenth century, whether in history-writing or in general thinking, their identity had been established. Those who write on India, or on the idea of it, take it for granted that what they mean is represented by the term Bhāratavarṣa as well, and that they both carry with them the sense of our past or our history. Even in the early phase of colonial history-writing, it was easy to conceive of a History of India, and a corresponding indigenous enterprise in that direction would have produced, for example in a language like Bengali, a title like *Bhāratavarṣer Itihās.*[1] An academic example of the identification of Bhāratavarṣa with India is a positive statement by a reputed researcher of Purāṇic cosmography, who wrote:[2]

> The southernmost *varṣa*, Bhārata, lying between the Himavat and the sea, is, *of course*, India. (emphasis added)

The understanding and unhesitating acceptance of the identity of India and Bhāratavarṣa was further formalised in the solemn declaration of our constitution: 'India that is Bharat shall be a union of States.'[3] This declaration puts a historic seal on the identity of our country and nationality, but not necessarily on our history. The terms, it needs to be remembered, had different origins, one perceiving the country from what may be called a geographically outer perspective and conveying different meanings in different contexts, and the other term, Bhāratavarṣa, consistently, but not eternally, used in early texts of different varieties, located within a completely different cosmographic structure. The term Bhāratavarṣa has therefore altogether different nuances, and the texts present variations on how its different segments are conceived. Pursuing the early history of this term, independently of its possible correspondences, and clarifying the different contexts in which they occur, may yield rewarding results. Connected with this issue is also the nature of historiography. We have been used for long to take it for granted, despite some recent efforts to explore the history of the idea of India, that the country we inhabit has had the same

connotation all along, and that the way we think of our country now is what was always perceived in the past. At the same time, it is common knowledge that geographical spaces and notions such as that of Bhāratavarṣa are defined and redefined, and that, in order to understand the history of a space and its peoples, it is necessary to be aware of such processes of definition and redefinition. Secondly, identification of a particular collective sensitivity, which is usually termed nationalism, with a space is not a given quality of that space or of the collective human entity inhabiting that space. It is a sensitivity which is historically acquired and which may undergo mutations. A country or ideas about that country may exist independently of that collective sensitivity unless this historically acquired awareness is shown to be evident through different forms of articulation.

Today, when we have come to accept that a geographically bounded (in whatever way) and a constitutionally defined country is what we belong to, the need to look into the meanings of that country in the past seems to me, for various reasons, to be urgent. Historiographically, we are at a particular juncture in our efforts to understand that meaning, particularly because there are sharply different approaches to the concept of India or 'Bhāratavarṣa'. Without getting into any great details one can perhaps locate three major positions in recent writings on the theme. One position, which seems to have taken off from the colonial construct of India as a territorial, governable unit, separable for administrative purposes from other spaces, insists on the idea of India or Bhāratavarṣa as an expression of national unity present in the distant past. Monographs such as *The Fundamental Unity of India*,[4] published in the early second decade of the previous century, forcefully projected this idea of unity; in this idea, 'unity' is a fundamental quality of the country, evidence of which could be located in concepts of Indian geography, networks of pilgrimage centres, expressions of urge for political unity through conquests or colonisation and so on. The notion of the existence of our unified country has permeated writings on the history of India as one unquestionable given unit, despite

the vitality of its regions, and the projection of the Indian nation in the past in relation to the geography of Bhāratavarṣa is a refrain which continues to this day. Bhāratavarṣa or India, as locus of an ancient nation, implied in *The Fundamental Unity of India*, is present in a recent work on *The Concept of India*[5] as well, which suggests:

> Obviously the inhabitants of the subcontinent [the country lying be-tween the Himalayas in the north and the ocean in the south] were considered by the Purāṇic authors as forming a nation, at least geographically and culturally. There were feelings among at least a section of the public that the whole of the subcontinent (or by and large a major part of it) was inhabited by a people or group of peoples sharing a link culture or some common features of an 'umbrella' culture in so deep a manner that they could be called by a common name—Bhāratī. So geographically and culturally, if not politically and ethnically, the Bhāratī were a nation.

An exactly opposite position seems to be taken in an essay, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', published in one of the volumes of the *Subaltern Studies* series. The essay opens, with a good deal of emphasis, with the following statement:[6]

> India, the objective reality of today's history, whose objectivity is tangible for people to preserve, to destroy, to uphold, to construct and dismember, the reality taken for granted in all attempts in favour and against, is not an object of discovery but of invention. *It was historically instituted by the nationalist imagination of the nineteenth century.* (Emphasis added)

Apart from the consideration that the exercise behind this statement is not grounded on the use of any substantive historical documentation, the approach in the essay itself involves certain im-plicit assumptions which are open to questioning: (i) the essential equation that it posits between nationalism as 'historical reality' and the idea of India, (ii) 'invention' out of nothingness without any pre-existing concepts or notions which may have been 'objective reality' of a different kind, not necessarily denoting 'nationality', and (iii) attribution of the 'invention' to the nationalist imagination,

ignoring the possibility of the emergence of the *modern* notion of India as a colonial space, and the relationship of that emergence with the construction of a particular state and its history. In denying the pre-national existence altogether of the institution without actually defining what an institution is, the essay seems to be denying the idea of India too, because it equates the 'objective reality of India' with the reality of Indian nationalism which is modern. This denial seems to be present in C.A. Bayly's *Empire and Information*[7] too, in which the concept of India is seen as an important 'aspect of emerging national consciousness', geography, as a social science, being at the same time, 'close to the heart of British colonial information collection'. Bayly underlines the distinction between European and what he calls 'Hindu conceptionalization of geography', and in the light of this contrast, characterises Bhāratavarṣa as corresponding to Hindu 'sacred' space. The mapping of India, in Mathew Edney's view, was for the first time 'a massive intellectual campaign to transform *a land of incomprehensible spectacle*[8] (emphasis added) into an empire of knowledge . . . the geographers created and defined the spatial image of the company's empire', and also its territorial integrity and its basic existence. Edney of course makes it clear that it was not a value-free space; the way the British 'represented India' made it their 'India'. This was 'British India' which comprised only what they perceived and governed.[9]

What, then, about pre-colonial times? There is apparently a position somewhere in between. Irfan Habib, for example, has been arguing strongly for the existence of the concept of India not only as a geographical unit but also as representation of a country in which certain special social and religious institutions are present as early as the fourth century BC, separating the country from others. The geographical and cultural separatedness of India was the basis, in Habib's argument, of Al Biruni's comprehension of India as a 'cultural unity', and, reinforced by long process of interaction and adjustment, 'some prerequirements of nationhood had . . . seemingly been achieved by the time the British conquests

began in 1757 . . . India was not only a geographical expression, it was also seen as a cultural entity and a political unit'.[10]

Without pausing to reflect on why such an overripe field had to wait, to follow Habib's own position, the colonial intervention for mature nationalism, what appears to be significant is this. In most although not all discussions on the idea of India, or on Bhārata-varṣa, the issue of the nation and of nationalism somehow creeps in. This intermeshing is perhaps understandable but not inevitable, and in choosing to write on the theme of Bhāratavarṣa, my idea has been to understand it as a historically evolved concept, to probe into the kind of senses in which the notion of Bhāratavarṣa was articulated by those who referred to it in different contexts, and on the basis of this probe delve into the possible implications of the concept for the historiography of early India.

I. From *Jana* to *Janapada*

In pursuing the concept of Bhāratavarṣa in diverse sources one must remember that there was a textual phase in early India in which the term Bhāratavarṣa, even in a geographical sense, did not appear at all. In fact, early textual references were to *janas*, or peoples or communities, and to natural landmarks such as rivers by which locations of *janas* were defined. Thus, although the Bharatas are mentioned along with other *janas* in the *Ṛgveda*,[11] they do not, like the others, figure in the contexts of fixed territories. It is in the *Brāhmaṇa* category of Vedic texts that various spatial directions, in relation to what was considered a central zone, are for the first time mentioned. *Janapada* as an inhabited country or the space where a *jana* resided figures also for the first time in such *Brāhmaṇa* texts as *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and so on. The significance of *diś* or direction, which I shall point out later, is in relation to the *janapadas*, as *diś*, defined how the *janapadas* were to be located. Thus, this is how the *Aitareya Brāh-maṇa* specifies different regions and those who inhabited and ruled over those regions; this invocation occurs in the context of

the *Mahābhiṣeka* of Indra: '. . . in this eastern quarter (*Prācyānāṃ diśi*), whatever kings there are of the eastern peoples (*prācyānāṃ rājānaḥ*), they are anointed for overlordship; . . . Therefore, in this southern quarter, whatever kings there are of the Satvants (*dakṣi-ṇasyāṃ diśi*), they are anointed for paramount rule; . . . in the western quarter (*pratīcyām diśi*), whatever kings there are of the southern and western peoples, they are anointed for self-rule . . . in this northern quarter (*Udīcyām diśi*), the lands (*janapadāh*) of the Uttara-Kurus and the Uttara Madras, beyond the Himavat, their kings are anointed for sovereignty . . . in this firm middle established quarters (*dhrūvāyāṃ madhyamāyāṃ pratiṣṭhāyāṃ diśi*), whatever kings those are of the Kuru-Pāñcālas with the Vasas and the Uśinaras, they are anointed for kingship . . .'[12]

Clearly, in the enumeration of the directions of earthly kings, in the context of the great consecration of god Indra, the composer of the *Brāhmaṇa* shows greater familiarity with the *janapadas* of the firmly established middle region (*madhyamā diś*) than with those of other quarters. In the later Brahmanical discourse on the configuration of various *janapada* regions, it was this middle region which came to be regarded as the core or the centre from which other quarters or directions (*diś*) were taken to have radiated.

The idea of a country, or rather a segment of earthly space, which accommodated the *janapadas* placed in different directions was for the first time articulated in the reference to Jambudvīpa which occurs in early Buddhist texts.[13] One of four *mahādipas* (*mahādvīpas*), or four great islands, it extended around Mt. Sineru and was ruled by a *cakkavatti* or a sovereign ruler. In fact, according to the texts, it was only in Jambudvīpa that Buddhas and *cakkavattis* were born. When Metteya Buddha (Maitreya Buddha) appeared on earth, it was full of people and there were eighty-four thousand cities in it. According to Malalasekera, the author of the *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, when seen as different from Sihaladīpa or Tambapaṇṇidīpa, 'Jambudīpa indicates the continent of India'. However, if one goes by a reference in the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, there is a Jambudvīpa in each *cakravāla* or horizon, making it difficult

to take Jambudvīpa to correspond to the geography of any specific country like India.

The concept of Jambudvīpa, despite such ambivalence, persisted and became a part of the Brahmanical concept of the universe, being sometimes identical with Bhāratavarṣa, and sometimes Bhāratavarṣa being a part of it. That the term was used as a reference point for actual geographical space is seen in Mauryan emperor Aśoka's reference, made in the third century BCE, to Jambudvīpa as the space where 'the gods, who were formerly unmingled with men, have now become mingled with them'.[14] Aśoka's Jambudvīpa, over which he ruled, if taken to correspond to actual geographical space, extended from Afghanistan to the Deccan, including areas outside the Indian subcontinent and excluding south of the subcontinent. Jambudvīpa, part of an elaborate cosmography, in which the earth consisted of *dvīpas* or islands, was also a concept of a real country in the sense that familiar *janapada* names and places could be located within it. Bhāratavarṣa too was a crucial part of an elaborate cosmographic schema, but as will be clear as we present an outline of the schema, it could also be taken to correspond to a geographical space or a framework within which, over time, different constituent regions could be located. In the early stage of its use, it seems that the term Bhāratavarṣa did not carry the meaning which it came to be associated with later when it could correspond vaguely with the geographical limits of the Indian subcontinent. The historical stages of the expansion of that meaning are not, however, clear. Khāravela, the king of Kaliṅga or coastal Orissa in the first century BC, claimed,[15] in his epigraph, to have gone out to conquer *Bharadavasa* (Bhāratavarṣa) in his tenth regnal year, it being one of many such expeditions that he undertook. Clearly, Kaliṅga was not seen as a part of Bhāratavarṣa when he was ruling. In fact, Bhāratavarṣa figured as a key component in an elaborate cosmographical schema only when the *Purāṇas* were being compiled, and it is to this kind of textual evidence that we have to turn to understand the structure of the space and its associated characteristics that the term conveyed. The cosmographic schema, of which Bhāratavarṣa was a part, is available in more or less similar forms in a number of *Purāṇas*,[16]

despite some variations in them, and for the first time, similar to the *dig-vijaya* narratives, as in the *Mahābhārata*,[17] one comes across in them what emerged as a fully developed idea of Bhāratavarṣa and its different spatial segments. The Purāṇic texts are voluminous, and it would also be pointless to attempt fresh comparison of material contained in them by taking the *Purāṇas* individually. I would therefore limit myself to referring to the already much-used text of the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*.[18] For purposes of comparison to ascertain both the consistency and elaboration of the concept in relation to actual geographical space, I shall turn to two other texts: the *Raghuvaṃśam* of Kālidāsa, particularly the part on the *dig-vijaya* of Raghu,[19] and the tenth-century text *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* by Rājaśekhara.[20] The texts may be taken to represent a sufficiently wide span of time to illustrate not only how the Purāṇic schema and its details had become more or less stereotyped, but also how the meaning of the same details may have undergone some change.

II. Bhāratavarṣa in the *Purāṇas*

A few preliminary points regarding the nature of Purāṇic evidence may be made before we turn to the material in the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*. The Purāṇic details, despite their characterization as 'geographical details',[21] do not pertain to the geography of India. One section of the relevant part of the *Purāṇa* is devoted to what is called *Bhāratavarṣa-varṇanam*, but that too within a broad design of the world as a part of the cosmos, interspersed with the story of creation, detailed genealogies to show the *essential connection between genealogy and space*, enumeration of broad divisions of the world and the location of Bhāratavarṣa in it, as also enumeration of all the divisions within Bhāratavarṣa and so on. Bhāratavarṣa, before it can be considered as a geographical category, therefore needs to be taken within the entire context of its particular location, without which exploring the material only for premeditated selection of geographical names will obfuscate various possible meanings of the term. The details in different *Purāṇas* vary, and there are internal contradictions within individual *Purāṇas*. Not all Purāṇic schemas are mutually reconcilable either. Nevertheless, it

is the *Purāṇas*, apart from the epic *Mahābhārata*,[22] which present us, for the first time, with what was perceived as the structure of Bhāratavarṣa; it is thus definitely worthwhile persuing the Purāṇic evidence for one looking at the concept of Bhāratavarṣa and its significance for Indian history.

In the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, Bhāratavarṣa figures in the *prathama-adhyāya* (first chapter) of Book 2, titled *Jagat-sṛṣṭi-sambaddha-Bhārata-vaṃśa-kathanam* (narration of Bharata genealogy connected with the creation of the universe). *Bharata-vaṃśa* here is interchangeable with *Svayambhū-vaṃśa* because the lineage starts with Svayambhū Manu. In this genealogy, seven sons of Manu were put in charge of seven *dvīpas* or islands (Jambu, Plakṣa, Śālmalī, Krauñca, Kuśa, Śāka, Puṣkara) which together constituted the earth (*Vasundharā*). *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa's Bharata-vaṃśa-kathanam* is followed by *Jambudvīpa-varṇanam* (description of Jambudvīpa), then *Bhārata-varṣa-varṇanam* (description of Bhāratavarṣa), in turn followed by *ṣaḍ-dvīpa-varṇanam* (description of six *dvīpas*).

Jambudvīpa, of which the ruler was Priyavrata's son Agnidhra, was, in turn, divided into nine parts. Of those, Himavarṣa, later mentioned as Bhārata-varṣa came to be ruled by Nābhi. Bharata, son of Ṛṣabha, belonged to this lineage, and 'the country was termed Bhārata from the time it was relinquished to Bharata by his father . . .' The genealogy continued after Bharata, and Bhāratavarṣa came to be divided into nine portions (*bhedāḥ*). 'This was the creation of Svayambhūva Manu, by which the earth was peopled, when he presided over the first Manvantara.'[23]

Cosmographic details continue in the second and third *adhyayās* of Book 2 of the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, with the third *adhyāya* beginning with the following verse:

> *Uttaraṃ yat samudrasya Himādreścaiva dakṣiṇaṃ*
> *varṣam tad Bhārataṃ nāma Bhāratī yatra santatiḥ*

A literal translation of the verse would be:

> That [*varṣa*] which lies to the north of the ocean and to the south of the snowy mountain, is called Bhārata, where the progeny is called Bhāratī.

In considering the possible meaning of the geographical and cultural space indicated in the verse quoted above, it is necessary to remember that it is located within a context which is not strictly, and correctly, geographical but cosmographical, although different natural landmarks, such as mountains and rivers, associated with different mountain ranges mark Bhāratavarṣa out from other *varṣas* and *dvīpas*, and imbue it with a geographical meaning. The mountain ranges, each a *Kula-parvata* (family mountain), are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Śuktimat, Ṛkṣa, Vindhya and Pāripātra, and rivers originating from them flow in different directions.

It is the directions again, in combination with *Madhyabhāga*, or *Madhyadeśa*, which constitute the structure of Bhāratavarṣa. Thus, although Bhāratavarṣa is mentioned as being divided into nine divisions, all of which are again specified by their individual names, it is *dik*, or direction, which indicates how different communities of different *janapadas* were located in Bhāratavarṣa. To cite a verse from the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*:

> On the east (*Pūrve*) of Bhārata dwell the Kirātas . . . on the west (*Paścime*) Yavanas; in the centre (*madhye bhāgaśaḥ*) reside Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras, occupied in their respective duties of sacrifice, arms, trade, and service.

Dik, or direction, is here used to suggest the centrality of the middle zone not simply in the geographical sense, but to suggest a contrast between what the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, as indeed other *Purāṇas* too, considered to be a model social order, distinct from the order prevalent in outlying areas in the east and on the west. The same centrality of the middle zone is carried over in the context in which *janapada* communities are sought to be geographically located. Thus, the Kurus and the Pāñcālas are assigned to the middle region (*Madhyadeśa*); the Kāmarūpas to the east (*pūrva-deśādika*); Saurāṣṭras and Ābhīras to Aparānta (west), and so on.

From the way Bhāratavarṣa is represented in four consecutive *adhyāyas* of part two of the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* (or as it has been represented, sometimes in greater detail, in other major *Purāṇas*) as a part

of a cosmographical package, several points regarding the nature of this representation seem to emerge. One, since Bhāratavarṣa is very clearly a component of a much larger design, methodologically it may be inappropriate to identify the component with a concrete territorial unit and take it to represent a geographical reality. At the same time, in the construction of the structure of Bhāratavarṣa, the pool of current geographical knowledge as well as the understanding of the cultural attributes of the structure were put into use by the compilers of the *Purāṇas*. Thus in designing Bhāratavarṣa, the basic cartographic principle of dividing up space, first into four cardinal directions with a central zone in the middle, and then making further divisions of seven or nine, could be followed for locating its inhabitants in their respective zones, radiating to the east, west, north and south. This geographical knowledge of the early texts does not always correspond to what is known from various other sources and from other contemporary information about locations of various ethnic communities. Thus, in the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* itself, the Puṇḍras, Kaliṅgas, and Magadhas are all clubbed together with the southerners or the Dākṣiṇātyās, and the list, purporting to be that for the western region (*aparāntāḥ*) includes, without any references to the northern direction, a number of communities such Śakalavāsin, Sālva, Madra, Hūṇa, Saindhava and so on, who would otherwise be located in the northern region.[24] Before thus taking the description of Bhāratavarṣa in the early texts to correspond to the geography of our Indian history, it is necessary to note that to the compilers of these texts, it was perhaps not the accuracy of detail, but the overall structure of Bhāratavarṣa and the way it fitted into a cosmographic design which were more relevant. Second, the description of Bhāratavarṣa in the *Purāṇas* is inextricably linked with details of genealogy which envelops different layers within the design of the universe, originating with the sons of Manu and with the original division of the patrimony among seven sons. In the description of Bhāratavarṣa in the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, the expression *Bhāratī Santatiḥ* has therefore to be taken not in the exaggerated sense of the 'children of Bhārata', but simply

as 'children born in the lineage of Bharata'. This sense is made clear in a parallel expression which occurs in the *Vāyu-Purāṇa*.[25]

> *Tair = idaṃ Bhārataṃ varṣaṃ nava-bhāgair-alaṃkṛtam*
> *Teṣāṃ vaṃśa-prasūtaiś = ca bhukteyaṃ Bhāratī purā*

> This Bhāratavarṣa, adorned with its nine parts, was enjoyed in the past by those born in their family and known as Bhāratī.

Third, that the meaning of Bhāratavarṣa went beyond a geographical sense is conveyed in the way it was distinguished from other *varṣas* of Jambudvīpa. Thus, while in other *varṣas* there was no calamity, no fear either of growing old or of death, no sense of *dharma* or *adharma*, or of the high and low, or of the division of *yugas*, Bhāratavarṣa alone journeyed through various *yugas*; it was the region where *Karma* was in operation and which was characterized by the existence of four *varṇas*. The other *varṣas* were *bhoga-bhūmi*, but by virtue of its being *karma-bhūmi*, Bhāratavarṣa was projected as the best among all other *varṣas*.

Since the Purāṇic projection of *varṣa* is inextricably linked with genealogy of rulers, another dimension of space, conceived as the domain of a sovereign, or of one aspiring to be a sovereign, may be examined by referring to the concept of *dig-vijaya* or the 'conquest of quarters'. We set out to explore now how this can lend further insight to our understanding of the meaning of Bhāratavarṣa, by referring to the details of Ikṣvāku ruler Raghu's *dig-jigīṣā* or 'the intent of conquering the quarters',[26] specifically portrayed in Kālidāsa's genealogical poem *Raghuvaṃśam*.

III. Conquest of the Quarters
(*Dig-jigīṣā*)

Raghu, in the way Kālidāsa described his mission of conquests, started with the east (*prācī*), it being in order to mention the direction first, and this brought him to the shore of the ocean, dark with groves of palm trees. In this region he encountered the Suhmas,[27] the Vaṅga princes with their fleet,[28] and, then, having crossed the

river Kapiśā,[29] he proceeded to Utkala.[30] Moving further, beyond the summit of the Mahendra mountain,[31] he subdued the Kaliṅgas.[32] Along the seashore then, the army marched in the direction taken by sage Agastya (i.e. south), taking them to the river Kāverī and to the valley of the Malaya mountain.[33] The other landmarks mentioned in the region are the confluence of the river Tāmraparṇi and the ocean,[34] and the Malaya and Dardura mountains, which were like 'the breasts of that region' (*diśastasyāḥ*). From there, marching further, Raghu crossed the Sahya mountain. The subjugation of Aparānta[35] and Kerala were followed by Raghu's thrust toward Trikūṭa[36] from where the move was in the direction of the Parāsikas by a land route (*sthala-vartmanā*) and, in the same context, mention is also made of the Yavanas.[37] Raghu's fierce encounter with the western peoples, adept as cavalry men (*pāścātaiḥ aśva-sādhanaiḥ*), resulted in the following:[38]

> He strewed the earth with their bearded heads severed (from their bodies) by his (*Bhalla*) arrows as with honeycombs covered with swarms of flies. The remnant, removing their helmets, threw themselves upon his protection.

Raghu's march to the north (*Udīcya*), the quarter presided over by Kubera, brought against him the Hūṇas[39] and the Kambojas.[40] Journeying in the north further brought him to the lofty Himalayan ranges and to the upper reaches of the river Gaṅgā, where he encountered the Kirātas and other mountain tribes (*pārvatīya gaṇa*). Beyond Mount Kailāsa and having crossed the river Lauhitya, Raghu reached the kingdoms of Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa, and with their subjugation was completed Raghu's conquest of the quarters, a prelude to the performance of *Viśvajit* ('conquest of the world') sacrifice. With the conquest of *diś* and the performance of the sacrifice, Raghu's accomplishment of the status of a sovereign ruler, which is the ultimate aspiration of all *vigīṣu* rulers, was completed.

The major relevance of the *Raghuvaṃśam* material that we have attempted to summarise is the convergence of the geography of

space defined by the four *diś* and the space over which an early Indian monarch aspired to have unrivalled dominance, the idea being conveyed also by another expression, *cakravarti-kṣetra*. However, from the purely 'geographical' point of view what strikes us as interesting are references to different communities, natural landmarks and to the fauna and flora, which are pointedly connected with each *diś*. For the sake of convenience, the material may be presented in a tabular form.[41]

These references in the *Raghuvaṃśam*, though not purporting to give us the structure of Bhāratavarṣa, nevertheless use the same key concept of *diś* or quarter. Kālidāsa's idea was not to provide strict geographical accuracy, but to use the schema for delineating the space over which a sovereign-designate had to traverse. One can easily point out the arbitrariness of some locations: the southern region being suggested only after Kaliṅga; the mention of Kerala only after Sahya or the Western Ghats and not in association with Malaya; the separation of Kāmarūpa from Prāgjyotiṣa and their implied location in the context of Raghu's expansive expedition in *Udīcya*. It may be reiterated that Kālidāsa appears more concerned with making Raghu's itinerary conform to the key concept of four quarters than with geographical accuracy. In fact, by using the concept of *diś*, starting with the east, and, at the same time, ending this itinerary with Prāgjyotiṣa and Kāmarūpa (which too should properly be located in *prācya*), Kālidāsa appears to have curiously combined the concept of four directions with a circular journey encircling the space of a sovereign ruler. The *Raghuvaṃśam* may also be said to have adequately used the existing geographical knowledge of four cardinal directions, of major physical landmarks (the oceans, the mountains, the rivers) in relation to these directions and of the locations of different communities in relation to them and physical landmarks. The additional significance of the *Raghu-vaṃśam's* description is that it shows a degree of familiarity with distinctive types of flora, fauna and other products of different locations and with what are projected as special characteristics associated with different ethnic groups. Some of the significant features

Table: *Raghuvaṃśam*

Prācī = east		Direction of Agastya = south		Aparānta = west to Pārasika		Udīcya = north	
Physical landmarks	Communities and Janapadas and fauna and flora, etc.	Physical landmarks	Communities and Janapadas and fauna and flora, etc.	Physical landmarks	Communities and Janapadas and fauna and flora, etc.	Physical landmarks	Communities and Janapadas and fauna and flora, etc.
1. Purva-sāgara (eastern ocean), also Mahodadhi (great ocean) 2. Gaṅgā 3. Kapiśā 3. Kapiśā 4. Mahendra mountain	Suhma Vaṅga Utkala	1. Velātaṭa = eastern shore 2. Kāverī 3. Malaya mountain 4. Dardura mountain	Pāṇḍya *janapada*	1. Sahya (Western ghats) 2. Ocean (Arabian Sea) 3. Trikūṭa mountain (north Konkan)	Kerala Pārasika Yavana	River Sindhu Himālaya River Gaṅga Kailāsa River Lauhitya = Brahmaputra	Hūṇa Kamboja Kirāta Pārvatīya-gaṇa Utsavasaṃketa Kinnara, Prāgjyotiṣa Kāmarūpa Prāgjyotiṣa Kāmarūpa

Table (*Contd.*)

Table (*Contd.*)

Prācī = east	Direction of Agastya = south	Aparānta = west to Pārasika	Udīcya = north
Tāla (palm)	Gaja (elephant),	Rājatālī (Royal palm)	Kuṃkuma = saffron,
Vetasī (cane)	Hārita birds,	Kharjura (date palm)	Akṣoṭa = walnut,
Kalama (paddy)	Elāphala (cardamom),	Horses,	Horses,
Tāmbula (betel leaf)	Candana (sandal wood)	Deer skin, vine creepers	Minerals,
Coconut and its milk	Pearls from the ocean		Lion,
			Bhurja tree,
			Devadāru tree
			Bamboo
			Nameru tree
			Oṣadi (herbs)
			Sarala tree,
			mṛganābhi (musk),
			Black aloe tree
			With reference to Prāgjyotiṣa

of Kālidāsa's material will be highlighted again when we sum up our findings on the concept of Bhāratavarṣa. We may now turn to a later text, composed in the ninth–tenth century, which has a completely different kind if concern, but which nevertheless incorporates, and in a sense, reiterates, the earlier notion of Bhārata-varṣa in its relationship with *cakravarti-kṣetra*, i.e. 'the field of one who moves on uninterrupted'.

IV. An Exercise in Synthesis? Rājaśekhara's *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*

The idea of Bhāratavarṣa, as articulated in the *Purāṇas*, as consisting of various communities and *janapadas*, and continuing, without using the term Bhāratavarṣa in Kālidāsa's fascinating though brief account of the conquest of the four quarters, gradually became more or less stereotyped, but with modifications and elaborations in individual texts. The *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* ('Discourse on Poetry') of Rājaśekhara arrives at the theme of *deśa-vibhāga* (division of *deśa*, i.e. 'country') after a thorough discussion of what the terms *Jagat* (universe) and *Bhuvana* (world) mean, since: (i) the entire *Jagat* or *Bhuvana*, or only a part of it may mean *deśa*, and (ii) in dealing with *deśa* and *kāla* (time) the poet is required not to display poverty of understanding (*arthadaridratā*). It is in this context of the discourse of *deśa* that Rājaśekhara locates Bhāratavarṣa after asserting that given the possibility of the existence of many *Bhuvanas* (worlds), *bhūloka* means the earth (*Pṛthvī*) which consists of seven islands. Despite resorting to the practice of citing many opinions, Rājaśekhara essentially follows the Purāṇic structure of Bhāratavarṣa, particularly the one elaborated in the *Vayu-Purāṇa*, and although he too divided Bhāratavarṣa into nine parts, he sticks to the convention of arranging the various *janapadas* or localities associated with individual communities in terms of quarters. What strikes as significantly innovative in Rājaśekhara's design is that he suggests specific geographical points from which different quarters begin, his central or the core region being the well-defined

Āryāvarta, equivalent to *Madhyadeśa*, and geographically defined as the space between the eastern and western oceans and between the Himālayas and the Vindhyas.

In Rājaśekhara's attempt to specify the beginning of each quarter (*diś*) in relation to Āryāvarta, it becomes obvious that overlaps are inevitable, more so when Rājaśekhara suggests that divisions of *dik*, despite being unstable to some thinkers, could be made from *antarvedī* with Kānyakubja (Kanauj) being something like a meridian.[42] With both Āryāvarta and *Antarvedī* (region between the Yamunā and Gaṅgā) being considered the centre for defining the cardinal directions, it is understandable that all directions overlap noticeably with the centre. Thus, although *Āryāvarta* is defined as the region between the eastern and the western sea and between the Himālayas and the Vindhyas, the *Pūrvadeśa* (eastern region) starts, according to Rājaśekhara, from the east of Vārāṇasī, the western region (*paścād-deśa*) from Devasabhā, the southern region (*Dakṣiṇāpatha*) from Māhiṣmatī and northern region from Pṛthūdaka.[43] This anomaly notwithstanding, Rājaśekhara's attempt to describe the details of the structure of a quarter (*diś, dik*) in relation to an actual geographical point (such as Vārāṇasī, Māhiṣmatī, Pṛthūdaka, etc.) suggests a recognition and use of such points as important enough to define the beginning of each quarter and thus relate them to the constituent elements of the quarter.

In Rājaśekhara's detailed treatment of the structures of individual quarters, one can notice the presence of three main Purāṇic elements: the enumeration of the *janapadas*, the mountain ranges associated with the quarters, and the rivers flowing from them. This is a pattern which, with expected variations, is present in all *diś*. However, what Rājaśekhara does additionally is to add, in the fashion of Kālidāsa, the list of natural products which can be associated with a quarter. To give a single example, *Uttarāpatha* (the northern region), apart from the communities located in it, is also described in terms of the following products *(utpāditaḥ)*: trees such as Sarala and Devadāru, *drākṣā* (grapes), *kuṃkuma* (saffron), *camara* (chowrie), *mṛga-carma* (deer-skin), *saindhava-lavaṇa*

(rock-salt), *sauvīra* (?), *srotonjana* (?), *vaidurya* (beryl) and *turaṅga* (horse). The list does not necessarily have to be comprehensive, or even correct, but adequate enough to distinguish the quarter from others. Rājaśekhara, further, introduces the concept of *cakravarti-kṣetra*[44] ('the field or space of the sovereign') in the context of his reference to Jambudvīpa and Bhāratavarṣa and to the nine divisions of Bhāratavarṣa. The spread of the *cakravarti-kṣetra* from, as Rājaśekhara suggests, Kumārīpura to Bindusarovara over a stretch of thousand *yojanas* may not be measurable in geographical terms, but the significance of the concept within Bhāratavarṣa is in its linkage with that space. Rājaśekhara's notion of the division of quarters has many other dimensions, which need not be discussed in the present context. What Rājaśekhara has attempted in his recapitulation of and addition to the Purāṇic material is to firmly establish a design of Bhāratavarṣa within a framework which is essentially Purāṇic but which, in his presentation, is shorn of its genealogical connection. For future composers, this kind of design may have been found useful to fit their individual cases into.

V. The Meaning of Bhāratavarṣa

The details of Bhāratavarṣa and the elements associated with it, as they appear in three types of chronologically differentiable texts, may be taken to provide some insight into how Bhāratavarṣa was perceived by those who wrote about it as also how their perceptions evolved. It is obvious that Bhāratavarṣa was not perceived as a well-defined geographical entity by itself. From what appears to be the earliest reference available so far, Bhāratavarṣa was a part of what it became later, perhaps corresponding to the *janapada* of the Bharatas, as were Kuru, Kosala, Magadha, Vatsa and many others.

In fact, it was the term *janapada* and not Bhāratavarṣa which defined the habitats of different communities, and with an expansion in the meaning of Bhāratavarṣa, individual *janapadas* became different spatio-social components of it, with their locations in this expanded schema being specified in terms of their *diś* in relation to the middle region.