INTRODUCTION

THE SEPARATE CULTURE OF GREATER MAGADHA

Not long after the year 150 BCE, the grammarian Patañjali gave the following description of the “land of the Āryas” (āryāvarta):¹

Which is the land of the Aryas? It is the region to the east of where the Sarasvatī disappears (ādārśa), west of the Kālaka forest, south of the Himalayas, and north of the Pāriyātra mountains.

Not all the terms of this description are clear,² but whatever the precise meaning of “Kālaka forest”, this passage states clearly that the land of the Āryas had an eastern limit. Three to four centuries later, the situation has changed. The Mānava Dharma Śāstra (2.22) characterizes Āryāvarta as extending from the eastern to the western sea:³

The land between the same mountain ranges [i.e., Himalaya and Vindhyā] extending from the eastern to the western sea is what the wise call “Āryāvarta”—the land of the Āryas.

The immediately preceding verse (Manu 2.21) shows that the Mānava Dharma Śāstra was familiar with the description of Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya, or with one similar to it, but that it reserves the designation “Middle Region” (madhyadēśa) for what Patañjali calls Āryāvarta:⁴

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¹ Mahā-bh I p. 475 l. 3 (on P. 2.4.10); III p. 174 l. 7-8 (on P. 6.3.109): kah punar āryāvartaḥ / prāg ādārśat pratyak kālakacananād daksinena himavantam uttariṇa pāryātraṃ /.
² The translation follows Olivelle, 2000: 199. For the date of Patañjali, see Cardona, 1976: 263 ff.
³ See the discussion in Olivelle, 2000: 571 n. 2.9; further Appendix VII, below.
⁴ Manu 2.22: ā samudrāt tu vai pūrvaē ā samudrāt tu paścimāt / tayor evaṁtaraṁ gīyor āryāvartaṁ vidur budhāḥ //. Tr. Olivelle, modified. See Olivelle, 2005: 18 ff., for a discussion of “Manu”’s date. The Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta still uses, in the fourth century, the expression Āryāvarta to refer to a region whose precise extent cannot be determined, but which included “the greater part, if not the whole, of U. P., a portion of Central India, and at least the south-western part of Bengal.” (Majumdar & Altekar, 1967: 140 ff.)
The land between the Himalaya and Vindhya ranges, to the east of Vinaśana and west of Prayāga, is known as the “Middle Region”. It seems likely that Patañjali’s Kālaka forest was near Manu’s Prayāga, situated at the confluence of the two rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā—in English: Ganges and Jumna—near the present Allahabad.\(^5\)

These passages suggest that an important change took place between the second century BCE and the second or third century CE. While the Brahmins of the second century BCE looked upon the eastern Ganges valley as more or less foreign territory, the Brahmins of the second or third centuries CE looked upon it as *their* land.

The passage from Patañjali’s Mahābhāṣya occurs in virtually identical form in some other texts, viz., the Baudhāyana Dharma Śūtra (1.2.9) and the Vasiṣṭha Dharma Śūtra (1.8-12). Both these texts add that, according to some, Āryāvarta is the land between the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, which supports the idea that the Kālaka forest was indeed situated at or near the confluence of these two rivers. Olivelle (2000: 10) argues that these two Dharma Śūtras are later than Patañjali. If this is correct, it supports the view that the region east of the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā was still more or less foreign territory for many Brahmins even after Patañjali.

The change that is recorded here concerns the eastward spread of Brahmanism. This spread cannot be dissociated from individual Brahmins moving eastward. However, the arrival of individual Brahmins does not, of itself, gain a territory for Brahmanism. For this to happen, Brahmins have to be recognized as Brahmins, i.e., as people who are members of the highest group of society by birthright. This recognition has to come from other members of society, to begin with local rulers. All this takes time, and a prolonged presence of Brahmins.

According to the passages cited above, the region east of the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā was not considered Brahmanical territory at the time of Patañjali. This does not exclude that there were Brahmins living there. Rather, it suggests that the Brahmins living in it did not receive the esteem which they deemed themselves entitled to. In Patañjali’s Āryāvarta, on the other hand, we may assume that they did receive this esteem, at least to some extent.

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\(^5\) Rāma and Lakṣmana, in order to reach the confluence of the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, have to pass through a very large forest (*sumahad vanam*; Rām 2.48.2).