Of States and Monsters:

Negotiating the *Self* and the *Other* in Early Indian States

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ABSTRACT

It is a well-known principle in philosophy that to define the *self*, cultures have traditionally relied on defining their *other*. However, defining the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in a complex ethno-linguistic milieu such as South Asia has traditionally not been very easy. Earlier research by Romila Thapar (1971) and Aloka Parasher-Sen (1978) have demonstrated how a variety of ancient texts have used the category of *mleccha* in Sanskrit or *malikkha* in Pali to refer to the ‘other’ as recognized vis-a-vis the ‘Hindu’ self. However, not only do Thapar and Parasher-Sen both highlight the inconsistencies in the use of the term, they also fail at locating a precise theory of ‘othering’ employed in ancient India. This paper, uses a variety of Sanskrit sources in formulating a ‘theory of othering’ that can be effectively demonstrated to have been operative as evident from the *Mahabharata* and in Mauryan India. Finally, it also offers insights into the nature of inclusion operative in this paradigm of othering and explains this using the case study of Bhima’s marriage to Hidimba in the *Mahabharata*.

Introduction

A survey of the historiography of the ‘State’ in South Asia demonstrates two marked asymmetries both temporally and in spatial terms. Temporally, the largest volume of academic literature is centered on the two transitional points—the establishment and extension of the Mughal administrative system (ca. 16th century) and the consolidation of colonial rule in the 19th century. Spatially, the focal points therefore tend to align with the temporal concerns and look at northern and coastal India respectively; leaving a vast swathe of South Asian territory in the dark. Yet it is necessary to understand mechanisms and strategies of state-formation in the Indian heartland as changes and transformations in these processes over the centuries such as in the early nineteenth century, have left considerable traces in the trajectory of Indian history and in the conception of the Indian state—as I have discussed previously elsewhere.¹

1 Sagnik Bhattacharya, “Monsters in the Dark: The Discovery of *Thuggee* and Demographic Knowledge in Colonial India,” *Palgrave Communications* 6 no. 78 (2020): 1-9.

Hermann Kulke's masterful work on this topic over the years have illustrated a number of distinct stages and processes that went into the process of state-building which although extensive, are still limited by period as is the work of Burkhard Schnepel which although paradigm-shifting in terms of its breaks with colonial modes of anthropology is still restricted to certain periods in the history of Odisha.² This paper intends to provide a *longue durée* perspective of the process of state-formation in eastern India from the point of view of the repertoire used by the states in their attempts to integrate pre-existing communities and settlements. The 'state' therefore, is redefined here in terms of Fredrick Cooper and Jane Burbank's notion of an institutionalized body exerting its authority over a vast territory with differentiated degrees of integration with the 'core' that extends its authority through an imperial repertoire and system of symbols and values.³ The state, therefore, by virtue of these ecumenical repertoire(s), symbols and myths, establishes 'narrative sovereignty' over a territory instead of an actual monopoly on violence (which discounts any possibility of employing Weber's definition of the 'state') which can be traced in the documents they produced about themselves and their subjects. This reasoning is key to the methodology of this paper that employs a study of the *shastra* and Puranic literature to explore the representation of the 'other' in early Hindu cosmology and their employment in ancient India⁴ for the purposes of state building and including 'tribal' polities within the state's repertoire.

Identifying how the early Indian state looked and defined itself can only be successful if a concrete evaluation can be completed regarding the definition of the 'other' in the such collectives. Although Romila Thapar and Aloka Parasher-Sen have worked extensively on the delineation of the other in early Hindu cosmology (i.e., the early State's repertoire), the identification of the category of *mleccha* that Parasher-Sen and Thapar both seem to agree on as the term for the paradigmatic 'other,' is essentially problematic because of two main reasons.⁵ Firstly, although Thapar outlines a vast array of sources from ancient India declaring the *mleccha* as the ontological 'other,' her work does not clarify the precise grounds of this othering process. In other words, Thapar's paper is not clear about the precise nature of the this 'other' and

2 For an overview of this literature, See: Hermaan Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000-1700* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) ; Hermann Kulke, "Early State Formation and Royal Legitimation in Tribal Areas of Eastern India" in Rupert R. Moser and Mohan K. Gautam (ed.), *Aspects of Tribal Life in South Asia I: Strategy and Survival* (Berne: Institute of Ethnology, University of Berne, 1978), 29-37 ; Burkhard Schnepel, "Contact Zone: Ethnohistorical Notes on the Relationship Between Kinds and Tribes in Middle India," *Asian Ethnology* 73, no. 1-2 (2014): 233-257.

3 Frederick Cooper and Jane Burbank, "Imperial Trajectories", *Empires and World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1-22.

4 Note: The periodization of 'ancient' and 'medieval' is in accordance with the standard practice in Indian history. The end of the Gupta Empire (ca. 550 CE) is generally taken to be the point of origin for the Medieval period and the end of the ancient.

5 See: Romila Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian in Early India" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 13 no. 4 (1971): 408-436 ; Aloka Parasher-Sen, "A Study of Attitudes Towards Mlechhas and Other Outsiders in Northern India (– AD. 600), PhD Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, submitted January 1978 (ProQuest ID: 10731192).

the roots of its delineation.⁶ This problem becomes acute because; secondly, Thapar also notes significant discrepancies in the usage of the term *mleccha* among Buddhist, central and southern Indian sources.⁷ In this context, is it at all possible then, to demarcate a concrete theory of othering in ancient India?

Moreover, as both Thapar and Parasher-Sen note, since the definition of *mleccha* is seen to be flexible across time, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the *mleccha*, over several centuries evolved into a marginal category within the Hindu ecumene from its previous position of its ontological other. This is in line with Burkhard Schnepel's identification of a "Hindu—tribal continuum"⁸ in Odisha which is his region of study. All this suggests that there has been significant mobility between the elements categorized as 'others' or *mleccha*(s) and tribal groups and the 'state' employing Hindu liturgical repertoire.

The central concerns for this paper, therefore, are to explore the possibility of a unified theory of othering in ancient India; and secondly, to search for evidence of mobility between these categories and the perception of 'other' in terms of the Hindu state. I will be attempting this through the use of a series of shastra and puranic texts such as the *Rig Veda*, the *Manusmriti*, the *Arthashastra*, the *Purana*(s) and the *Mahabharata*. Within these texts, this paper will attempt to investigate the definition of the *other* as well as the attitude and the position of the 'state' vis-a-vis those entities. Finally, the curious episode of marriage of a *rākshasa* within the *Mahabharata* and the subsequent portrayal and integration of Ghatatkaḥ within the ecumene of the state in discussion of the processes of integration and of interaction with non-state elements.

What this paper hopes to produce is a deliberation on the theories of othering that can be found in the classical texts of Hinduism and hypothesize about the relationship between the 'Hindu' state and the tribal settlements in the early history of India. Primarily I aim to understand the relationship in terms of co-dependence of these two elements in the creation of Schnepel's Hindu—tribal continuum.

1. The Hindu State as an Atypical Self

In her seminal thesis, introduced above, Alok Parasher-Sen, discusses the distinctiveness of the Hindu 'other' identified in the *mleccha*, and the delineations of the 'other' in Greece and China.⁹ This distinctive character and problems of definition of the *mleccha* in India can in large part be attributed to the peculiar position of the Hindu(s) or Aryans in the Indian subcontinent. While the Han Chinese or the Greeks comprised the ethnic majority in their respective regions, the Hindu(s) that produced the puranic and shastra literature did not enjoy similar status. The Hindu Aryans remained a minority surrounded by largely animistic non-Hindu 'tribal' populations in the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, any analogy with other

6 Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian", 408-412.

7 Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian", 415-416.

8 Schnepel, "Contact Zone", 234.

9 Parasher-Sen, "A Study of Attitudes", 1.

modes of othering and population classification are not necessarily valid in the case of India and Hindu theories of othering therefore, must be regarded as (at least partly) unique and borne out of the special circumstances of the early Hindu State.

These modes of classifications originated in the central Gangetic plains and hence the extreme reaches of both western and eastern India (modern-day Bengal, Assam and Odisha) demonstrates the greatest degree of deviance from these ‘ideal types’ that were anchored in a different spatial frame. In our present methodology, it therefore stands to reason to assume that the processes of state-formation also gradually moved eastward as the early Hindu ecumenical system engulfed more and more of Eastern India under its repertoire. The case for the inclusion of eastern India is made stronger by the linguistic evidence available from the *Satapatha Brahmana* discussed below.

The Mleccha—Some Paradigms

In Romila Thapar’s paper where she identifies the *mleccha* as they key term by which ancient Hindu(s) referred to ‘foreigners’ she offers a number different theories of origination and identification of this category. Firstly, linguistically the term *mleccha* was used to denote people who spoke indistinctly and according to Thapar, was used to demarcate non-Aryan populations. This argument stems from the fact that verb *mlech* refers to the act of speaking indistinctly and that Pānini gives a variant of the word *mliṣṭa* meaning “one who speaks indistinctly.”¹⁰

The *Shatapatha Brahmana* which is an extensive commentary on the *Shukla-Yajur Veda* written around 300 BCE, perhaps provides the most conclusive proof of the distinction between Aryan and non-Aryan populations. It contains illustrations of phrases used by the barbarians or *asura*(s):

te’asurā ātavacaso he’lavo he’lava iti vadantah pārābhūba.

Referring to a certain proclivity for ‘r’ sounds to transform into ‘l’ sounds; from which, Thapar, quoting J. Bloch, concludes that the *asurā*(s) mentioned in the above verse speak an Eastern Indian Prakrit language. The same verse is found in Patanjali’s treatise on grammar—*Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya*¹¹ which identifies these barbarians sometimes as demons while in other cases as a maritime people with whom the Rig Vedic people had contacts with. Anantaprasad Banerji-Śāstrī hypothesized if they might be the people of the Indus Valley Civilization although such speculations may be confidently discounted.¹² Archaeological remains in

10 Panini, *Ashtādhyāyī* VII:02:08.

11 Patanjali, *Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya* 1:01:01.

12 Thapar, “The Image of the Barbarian”, 411.

the Chhota Nagpur region are identified by the local tribes as belonging to the asurā(s)¹³ and so it stands to reason to identify the peoples mentioned by Patanjali with the same lot.¹⁴

Besides language, another prominent marker for the mleccha appears to have been territory. References to *mleccha-desha* are rampant in the *Manusmriti*¹⁵ as lands that are cordoned off and forbidden for the Aryans who belong to *āryāvarta* (lit. realm of the Aryans). These mleccha lands are polluting and expiatory rites (*prāyascitta*) must be performed before reentering *āryāvarta* after traveling to *mleccha-desha*. The latter is defined as territory where the *śhrāddha* ceremony (offering to ancestors) cannot be performed and are associated with corruption and danger.

Problems essentially start to brew once it is understood that the terms ‘Aryan’ or ‘mleccha’ were not as concrete as they appear to be. More importantly, in drawing any conclusion on the basis of the linguistic postulates outlined above regarding the interaction between Aryan and mleccha populations in eastern India as seems to be implied in the description of such peoples in Sanskrit grammar treatises, Thapar’s careful assertion must be remembered, that “it is doubtful that the term *ārya* was ever used in the ethnic sense;”¹⁶ which means that the demarcations between Aryan and non-Aryan populations was far less concrete than the earlier hypotheses suggest.

Similarly, with regard to the notion of territory, it is highly probable that such regions came to be known as mleccha-desha due to their longstanding association with non-Aryan populations and not essentially due to any quality (or lack thereof) of the areas themselves. The question therefore, is still open—how and when the mode of separation between the mleccha and the arya was engendered. If the ‘Aryan’ was indeed a cultural honorific as Thapar seems to confidently assert, what essential cultural qualities did the mleccha need to acquire before being admitted into the ranks of the Hindu, and how did the Hindu ‘states’ deal with the mleccha who failed to conform to such strict demands of cultural behaviour?

Towards a Possible Theory

In answering the last two questions, some of the qualities can perhaps be gauged by studying the issue chronologically. The “other” in the earliest of records appear in Hindu cosmology as a complete antithesis to Aryan culture and a constant sense of threat and anxiety is perceptible in such records. As Parasher-Sen rightly points out, such a categorization is atypical among ancient civilizations with reference to the portrayal of the ‘Amazons’ or the Scythian(s) in Greece and the northern tribes in China.¹⁷ One needs

13 Anantaprasad Banerji Sastri, *Journal of the Bihar Oriental Research Society*, XII, pt. ii, 246 ff.

14 Ibid.

15 Manu 2:23 ; Manu 10:45.

16 Thapar, “The Image of the Barbarian”, 411.

17 Parasher-Sen, “A Study of Attitudes”, 1.

to look no further than the Rig Veda to discover the degree of hostility that the Aryans espoused for the indigenous population inhabiting the Indian heartland as they moved in from the northwest. Although no specific (historically situated) act of aggression or violence is mentioned in the texts, the sense of unease can be read from the repeated appeals to deities for the destruction of the *dāsa* or the *dasyu* (the Vedic terms used to refer to what would become ‘the mleccha’).

It is of course reasonable to speculate that the unique position of the early Hindu(s) as a small minority in an otherwise culturally and politically alien milieu gave rise to such a sense of unease by virtue of their mere presence. Among the numerous appeals to *Indra* and *Agni* for the destruction of *dasyu* settlements, one in particular might offer some clues in understanding the precise nature of this distinction and offer some suggestions in uncovering a theory of othering consistently employed in a series of texts.

A verse from the final book of the Rig Veda (which scholars believe, along with Book I, also constitutes the oldest sections of the Rig Veda) contains a hymn to Indra requesting him to direct his wrath at the *dasyu* population who ‘surround us’ and ‘do not perform the correct rituals’:

akarmā dasyurabhi no amanturanyavrato amānuṣaḥ |
*tvantasyāmitrahan vadhardāsasya dambhaya*¹⁸

Translators generally refer to the gist of this appeal to Indra to attack and squash the *dasyu* people that surround the composers; but what is of interest is the epithet used to refer to the *dasyu*(s) in the first line of the śloka i.e., *amānuṣaḥ*.

Amānuṣaḥ is the negative form of the word *mānuṣaḥ* which etymologically (*Manu* + *ṣa*) refers to an offspring of Manu—the ancient Hindu lawgiver. The *ṣa*-suffix (*ṣa-pratyaya*) denoting an offspring here of course is used in the metaphorical sense to refer to the followers of the codes of *Manu* later coded in the *Manusmṛiti*—perhaps the most famous of the *dharmaśāstra*(s). There are in fact several occasions on which the mleccha population has been identified as either *amānuṣaḥ* or *amānava*—the latter having a similar etymological derivation (a—*manu* + *a*) meaning those who lack the quality of *Mānava* or those of the offspring of Manu. Similarly, on several occasions, the Vedas refer to the ‘self’ as *mānava*¹⁹. Additionally, this is also consistent with the definition of ‘others’ than can be drawn on the basis of the *Manusmṛiti* which most definitively identifies and defines them as follows:

“...by failing to perform the rituals or to seek audiences with priests, the following castes of ruling the class have gradually sunk in the world to the rank of the servants [mleccha]—the sugarcane-

18 Rig Veda 10:22:08

19 Rig Veda, 5:29:10 ; 4:16:9 ; 2:20:8 ; 4:20:10.

boilers, the Colas, and Southerners, Kambojas, Greeks, Scythians, Quicksilvers, Persians, and Chinese, Mountaineers, Precipice-dwellers and Scabs.”²⁰

The populations mentioned in this list are mentioned specifically as *mleccha* and in large parts coincides with a similar list recounted in the *Śānti Parva* of the *Mahabharata* which explicitly mentions the same group as *amānava*²¹. It is thus reasonable to conclude therefore that the population referred to as *mleccha* in early Hindu textual sources effectively refers to the peoples who do not abide by the common cultural practices in their everyday lives. These practices include but are not restricted to the verbal and ritual practices of the Aryans.

This definition of the *mleccha* would not only explain the curious case of the inclusion of both tribal, nomadic and settled civilizational entities within the purview of the its meaning that made it broad enough to include the Chinese, Persians and the sugarcane-boilers within the same demographic category. Furthermore, this solves the anomaly of Tamil texts referring to northern Indians as ‘*mleccha*’²² in spite of northern India’s status as the homeland of the Aryan Hindus. Interestingly, defining the *mleccha* in terms of performative identities also solves a number of other problems—most importantly, the inclusion of Buddhists as evidenced in the *Kalki Purana* (the Buddhists feature extensively in the *Kalki Purana* as objects of Kalki’s wrath—evidence of their later inclusion into the the category of *mleccha*(s)).²³ Secondly, the identification of a performative dimension to identity points to the possibility of inclusion over time and mobility in the ranks of populations identifies as the *mleccha*(s) or the *dāsa*(s) or the *dasyu*(s).

2. From Theory to Practice

So far I have relied on Rig-Veda and the *Manusmriti* and certain other *dharmashastra*(s) in identifying a theory of othering employed in identifying the *mleccha*, however Romila Thapar carefully points out the unreliability of the *dharmashastra*(s) in her article on the barbarians.²⁴ According to her, legal commentaries and treatises such as the *Manusmriti* only discuss ideal cases or ideal types and not real historical cases and illustrations. Therefore, although a ‘theory of othering’ can be discerned from such documents, they would offer no comments on the actuality or the reality of the practice of othering in ancient India—for which direct sources are but scarce. In such a situation, I believe it is feasible to turn to the *smritishastra*(s) such as the *Mahabharata* which might be expected to yield more reliable information in terms of attitudes and practices than the *dharmashastra* literature. In the following pages, I will analyze

20 Manu 10:43-44.

21 Mahabharata, 12-65-13-14.

22 Thapar, “The Image of the Barbarian”, 410-411.

23 Since Kalki is typically invoked as ‘*mleccha nivaha nidhane kalayasi karavālam*,’ it is reasonable to assume his wrath against the Buddhists also refers to their inclusion into the status of *mleccha*.

24 Thapar, “The Image of Barbarian”, 413.

certain episodes from the Mahabharata and demonstrate the practice and theory of othering applicable in such cases.

The Mahabharata's treatment of the 'other' is actually distinctly different from that of the dharmashastra(s). The former recognizes their importance and in fact turns the 'others' from a complete ontological antithesis of the Aryan order to an entity on the margins of it. The *yavana*(s) are also recognized to some extent as distinct from the undifferentiated class of *mleccha*(s) or *dasyu*(s) as in the earlier texts.²⁵ Brockington argues that it is because at this stage, realistically, the position of a significant number of *yavana*(s) as rulers could no longer be ignored and the *smritishastra*(s) therefore, intelligently re-brand them as *patita-kshatriya* ('fallen kshatriya') to reassert the validity of their own Brahminical order.²⁶

The changed position of the *mleccha*(s) is also clear as are the changed repertoire associated with them. The *Yavana*(s) visit Yudhisthir's court (in spite of Manu asserting that their presence is polluting); they are even hailed as '*sarvajñā yavanā-rājāñ*' (the all-knowing *Yavana* kings)²⁷ while still described as '*ugrāś ca krūrakarmāṇas tukhārā yavanāḥ*' (fierce, banal and cruel *Yavana*)²⁸. Moreover, the *mleccha*(s) although still regarded as so, are curiously seen to be present at Yudhisthir's 'Rājasuya Yajña'²⁹ which perhaps speaks volumes about the precise nature of the relationship between the 'state' and the tribes inhabiting the margins (effectively, surrounding the 'states') which we shall discuss in the following section.

Above all, the Mahabharata, is a literary composition and hence should also be treated as such—different from the purely legal codes of the *dharmashastra*(s). In that vein, I will analyze, in this section, the portrayal of the *rākshasa* Hidimba (हिडिम्बा) and his sister Hidimbā (हिडिम्बा) and her marriage to Bhīma (the second of the Pāndava brothers). In keeping with the literary tradition, I will be analyzing the portrayal of Hidimba and attempt to understand the categories implicit in such a portrayal so that a fuller understanding of the facets deemed important for the Aryan author can be explored. Such an analysis can be expected to guide our understanding towards studying the 'Aryan-gaze' so to say, that is, the elements of one's persona that were deemed most visible or most remarkable by the Aryans.

In the second instance, I will analyze the occasions and episodes in which Hidimbā and their son Ghatatkacha appear in the Mahabharata and try to investigate the cause and nature of dependence on the *mleccha* populations by the Aryan states.

25 John L. Brockington, *HdO: The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 207.

26 Brockington, *HdO: The Sanskrit Epics*, 208.

27 Mahabharata, 8-30-80a.

28 Mahabharata, 8-51-18a.

29 *saha sarvais tathā mlecchaiḥ sāgarānūpavāsibhiḥ*; Mahabharata 2-31-10a.

Monsters in the Forest

The Hindu state and Brahmin authors of the Hindu texts were always weary of the presence of ‘monsters’ or rākshasa(s) in the territories that surrounded them. This fear and anxiety can easily be explained by the existence of non-Aryan populations in the extensive forests that surrounded the agriculturist ‘states’³⁰ The conflict of interests between the agrarian state and the hunting-gathering tribes often brought them into conflict primarily because of the state’s need to constantly expand available agricultural land through forest-clearing. Their description as ‘monsters’ can be identified naturally by applying Mary Douglas or Victor Turner’s notions of ‘danger’ and liminality.³¹

Monsters, are those populations which cannot be fitted into a certain place within the ecumenical system and the repertoire used by the agents of their recording. They are unknown and as such unknowable (because they neither speak the language nor share the same rituals and value-framework as the Aryans) and are people who appear to be out-of-place (i.e., in the forests).³² The agents of recording, that is, in Foucault’s terms, the Power-holders or the ‘Knowing subject’ here are of course of the authors of the shastra(s) who ascribe monstrosity to the tribes but as the Mahabharata shows, consistently have to acknowledge their presence and maintain their status within the ecumenical framework, because as I have hypothesized elsewhere, the tribes formed an essential element in ruling and controlling the forests that also lay beyond the epistemological reach of the agrarian statesmen.³³

Hidimba appears in the *Ādi Parva* or Book I (Chapters 152-154) of the Mahabharata as a regular dweller of a Sāl tree in across the Ganges near Vārnavat (modern Barnava, Uttar Pradesh—possibly on the foothills of the Himalayas). His appearance is described as follows:

Not far from where the Pandavas slept, there was a Saal tree on which a strong and human-flesh eating rākshasa named Hidimba lived. He was extremely devious and dark as the monsoon clouds³⁴. His was tall and his eyes were brown. He had a terrifying face, long teeth, copper hair, broad shoulders and ears long like a donkey.³⁵

30 Note: The strong dependence on agriculture of the State as evidenced by Manu’s ascription of importance maybe taken as proof of the agriculturist nature of the same.

31 For a detailed theoretical overview of these ideas, See: Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1966); Victor Turner, “Betwixt and between: the liminal period in rites de passage” in *The forest of symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967) ; Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975* (Picador, New York, 2003).

32 Ibid.

33 Bhattacharya, “Monsters in the Dark”, 6.

34 *mahākāyo mahāvego dārayann iva medinīm triśikhām bhrkūṭim kṛtvā samdaśya daśanac chadam*; Mahabharata 1-154-31.

35 Mahabharata 1-152-4,5,6. [My translation].

Interestingly, it may be construed that he had some territorial claim to the place where the Pāndava(s) were sleeping as he commands his sister Hidimbā to kill and bring the sleeping Pāndava(s) to him because they are sleeping in “my area” (‘*asmad vishayasuptebhyo naitebhyo bhayamasti te*’)³⁶. This is in fact, surprising and highly improbable because ‘territory,’ or private property more generally, are intrinsically agrarian concepts that should not be familiar to a rākshasa whom we can confidently identify as a hunter-gatherer. This is in line with Brockington’s assertion that Aryan interests were in several cases projected and imposed on non-āryan populations in the Mahabharata (while their indigenous conceptions are hardly represented).³⁷ What may in effect be understood from this assertion (which we only hear in the words of Vaishampāyana—the narrator of the Mahabharata) is that the forest was ‘understood’ to be beyond or outside Aryan territory (i.e., this is Hidimba’s territory, therefore, not our territory.) The forest is mleccha-desha, but what lurks in mleccha-desha is indeed unknown and unknowable—it is the land of the monsters.³⁸

But what about the attributes? They in fact match very closely to the attributes that I have discussed before in the context of defining the mleccha, the ‘otherness’ here is manifest in the monstrosity of Hidimba as he is presented to the Aryan reader. The very fact that considerable focus and attention went into discussing his physical appearance bears proof of his ‘otherness.’ In addition to that, his placing among the forest and his attributes such as ‘human-mean-eater’ is but a reference to his hunting-gathering lifestyle—placing Hidimba confidently among the populations that were in conflict with the Aryan Pandava(s). The Mahabharata scholar, Nrisimhaprasad Bhaduri further asserts that the hard consonants in his name are evidence of his mleccha identity.³⁹

But as the progress of this particular episode in the Mahabharata demonstrates, although sometimes, the Aryans and mleccha populations clash (as evidenced by the killing of Hidimba and Vakāsur later in the *Adi Parva*), mobility and intermarriage or at least some form of legal alliance is not entirely unheard of either. Both Bhaduri and Sukhamay Bhattacharya⁴⁰ are careful in noting the specific instances in which the rākshasa population appears in the Mahabharata and the rather queer ‘honeymoon’ that Bhīma enjoys with Hidimbā—traveling all across ‘the world’ with her, employing her rākshasa-magic.

What is curious with regard to Hidimbā is that although she is a legally wedded wife of Bhīma, she never features again after her initial traveling-spree with Bhīma and the birth of their son—Ghatatkacha. She is officially entitled, according to the dharmashastra(s) to a married life, however, we find no such

36 Mahabharata 1-152-8.

37 Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 159-231.

38 Note: Similar notions and sensation of fear is noticeable regarding the forest throughout the Mahabharata and the Ramayana,

39 Nrisimhaprasad Bhaduri, “Hidimbā” in *Mahābhārater Ashtādashi* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2013), 371-405.

40 Sukhamay Bhattacharya, “Ghatatkacha” in *Mahābhārater Charitabali* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2016), 187-188.

references and she in reality disappears from the story. However the situations and cases where the readers encounter Ghatatkacha can perhaps speak much about the ‘utility’ of the rākshasa people within the cosmology of the Mahabharata ‘states.’

Ghatatkacha seems to be indispensable and ‘useful’ whenever the Pandava brothers are in the forest. He accompanies them during their twelve years in the forest and appear to have been extremely helpful in that period particularly for the purposes of navigation and of sustenance in an alien environment.⁴¹ Here, none of the rules related to impurity or ritual pollution seemed to have applied to the Pandava(s) in spite of their cohabitation with a rākshasa which suggests one of two things: either, the ‘forest’ as territory did not have the same laws or requirements and standards that the aryan lands were subjected to⁴², or, that the Ghatatkacha was not subjected to the same standards and same ‘otherness’ as his uncle Hidimba or other rākshasa(s) such as Vakasura were.

The latter probability seems distant as Ghatatkacha is subject to the same “Aryan-gaze” in his description as Hidimba:

*prajajñe rākshasī putram bhīmasenanmahābalam |
birūpāksham mahābraktam shankukarṇam bibhīshaṇam ||
bhīmanādam sutamroṣṭham tīkhnadangstram mahābalam ||*⁴³

He is described specifically in terms of those things that make him fundamentally different from the Aryans—his long ears, his copper-skin, his large body, his ‘fierce’ [lit. terrifying] face and his sharp teeth. His name too, bears marks of such attributes as Ghatatkacha was named because his head was shaped like *ghata* or a water-pot and he lacked *kacha* or hair on that *ghata*⁴⁴. I believe, thus, there is evidence to suggest that Ghatatkacha’s inclusion into Pandava affairs and his repeated involvement with their adventures bears proof of the ‘utilitarian inclusion’ of mleccha populations into the Aryan state’s cosmology as can be seen in the episode of the *Kurukshetra* war where a large number of rākshasa(s) including Ghatatkacha himself appear to be present and fighting on the side of both the Pandava and the Kaurava factions.⁴⁵

Such inclusion is utilitarian as it is clear that both Mahabharata itself discriminates against them and maintains their otherness while also seems to flout several injunctions related to their polluting effects. The argument that gradual inclusion was based on ‘behaviour’ and ritual practices and not on any ethnic characteristic is further strengthened by the revelation of Ghatatkacha’s son’s name—‘Anjanparvā’ in the

41 *kr̥tyakāla upasthāsya iti cōktvā ghaṭotkacāḥ*

rākṣasaiḥ sahitaḥ sarvaiḥ pūrvam eva gataḥ prabho. Mahabharata 3-157-10.

42 Note: This might indicate a certain kind of agrarian genesis of the rules and traditions.

43 Mahabharata 1-155-31–39, 7-173.

44 Note: Although, I must admit, that several characters in the Mahabharata are named after their physical attributes.

45 Mahabharata 6-90-77.

*Drona-Parva*⁴⁶. While Hidimbā and Ghatatkacha are both at least partially non-Aryan names as can be identified by the use of hard-consonants, Anjanparvā is a purely Sanskrit name suggesting his inclusion into the Hindu state's sphere of influence through generational acculturation.

3. Utilitarian Inclusion: Colonizing the Forests

So far, I have argued that the categories of mleccha and Aryan are not concrete or fixed and are based on certain notions of behaviour and ritual practices that succeeded in establishing a self—other dichotomy in classical India. I have also tried to demonstrate that once we stray away from the legal treatises, actual practice shows significant mobility and a recognition of realistic conditions prevailing in actual historical situations. And finally, we have seen that rākshasa(s) when they appear in Aryan narratives, either appear in the context of conflict or appear as helpers and protectors of the Aryan protagonists who gradually assimilate the mleccha populations into their own cosmologies. But what does this tell us about the nature of the Aryan state and its relations to the mleccha?

As I have argued earlier, in the pre-Weberian state, the essential glue for maintaining the state itself, is an ecumenical repertoire—a cosmology that positions all the different people and people-grounds within an ordered structure in relation to the state and the gradual inclusion of the mleccha from the status of a complete 'outsider' and a perpetual threat (Rig Veda 10:22:08), to that of a strategic ally (eg. Ghatatkacha) can only refer to a gradual inclusion of the mleccha within the state's ecumenical system. That such an inclusion was undertaken and that mleccha populations were living 'inside' Aryan territory and not surrounding them, can be read directly from the Mahabharata from a conversation between Bhīṣma and Yudhisthira on Kshatriya-dharma:

*yavanāḥ kirātā gāndhārās cīnāḥ śabara barbarāḥ
śakās tuṣārāḥ kahvās ca pahlavās cāndhra madrakāḥ
ponḍrāḥ pulindā ramathāḥ kēcā mlecchās ca sarvaśaḥ
brahmakṣatraprasūtās ca vaiśyāḥ śūdrās ca mānavāḥ*⁴⁷

Here, Bhīṣma recounts the tale of Māndhātā asking Indra, how should the Yavana, Kirata, Gāndāra, Chinese, Sabara (Sora), Barbara, Scythian, Tushara, Kanka, Pahlava, Cāndra, Madraka, Poundra, Pulinda, Ramatha Kacha, Mleccha⁴⁸ etc. peoples be incorporated within the *dharma* of the four Varna(s)? Furthermore, there is also explicit mention that these groups are already living within *āryāvarta* and thus the need for a religious sanction for their existence and a place in their cosmology is most urgent.

To this inquiry, Indra replies:

46 Mahabharata 7-154-90.

47 Mahabharata 12-65–13-14.

48 Note: This list is surprisingly similar to the one found in Manu 10:44–45.

*mātāpitryor hi kartavyā śuśrūṣā sarvadasyubhiḥ
 ācārya guruśuśrūṣā tathaiivāśramavāsinām
 bhūmipālānām ca śuśrūṣā kartavyā sarvadasyubhiḥ
 veda dharmakriyās caiva teṣāṃ dharmo vidhīyate
 pītryajñās tathā kūpāḥ prapāś ca śayanāni ca
 dānāni ca yathākālam dvijeṣu dadyur eva te
 ahiṃsā satyam akrodho vṛtti dāyānupālanaṃ
 bharaṇaṃ putradārāṇāṃ śaucam adroha eva ca
 dakṣiṇā sarvayajñānām dātavyā bhūtim icchatā
 pākayajñā mahārḥś ca kartavyāḥ sarvadasyubhiḥ
 etāny evaṃ prakārāṇi vihitāni purānagha
 sarvalokasya karmāṇi kartavyānīha pārthiva⁴⁹*

In summary, he prescribes the care of parents, service to one's teacher (*guru*), honoring the sages (*ācārya*), maintenance of their land, performance of the Vedic rituals, donation, child-bearing etc. as the ideal behaviour expected of them. Here, too, not only is the delineation of the 'other' distinctly performative, but there is also legal scope of inclusion of 'others' into the demographic cosmology. Perhaps a better dichotomy in place of aryan and mleccha therefore, would be to use the terms 'mānava' and 'amānava' as is used in the Sanskrit texts in a majority of the cases suggesting that was the crucial dividing line between the 'self' and 'other' (performance of Manu's rituals) in ancient India. Not only is the term mleccha, as used paradigmatically in reference to the 'other' by Thapar and Parasher-Sen, restrictive to specific population groups, it also prescribes a certain degree of ethnic connotations to the difference while the mānava—amānava dichotomy highlights the performative aspect of the distinction.

The State and the Forests

At this stage it is feasible to investigate what relationship the mleccha bears with the Aryan 'state' which produces the mass of texts about them that we have been using throughout this paper. A primary source for an investigation into this may be the Kautilya's *Arthashastra*—a constitutional manual composed in the 4th century BCE by Chandragupta-Maurya's prime minister, Chanakya or Kautilya. In spite of being a legal treatise, the *Arthashastra*, shows unprecedented considerations for ground-reality as Parasher-Sen discusses.⁵⁰

She outlines the extent of *Aryavarta* in Vedic times⁵¹ and juxtaposes that against the same in Mauryan times to conclude on the thesis of gradual expansion and assimilation of outlying areas into the

49 Mahabharata 12-65-17–22.

50 Alok Parasher-Sen, "Of tribes, hunters and barbarians", 176.

51 Parasher-Sen, "Mlecchas in Early India", map IV, 299.

sphere designated as *Aryavarta*.⁵² Such expansion of an agrarian state and agrarian interests naturally brings the state into conflict with hunting-gathering populations namely the ‘mleccha’ and more specifically the *rākshasa*. In view of this, it is cogent to argue that the episode of conflict in the Mahabharata involving Hidimba and Bhīma’s fight can essentially be interpreted as the archetypical conflict between the agriculturist and the hunter-gatherer. Which would also identify *Aryavarta* with agricultural (or, pastoral) land and territories where agricultural interests could be forwarded.

This argument is strengthened by the mysterious and rather flexible definition forwarded by Manu and developed from the *Brahmana* of the Bhallavin school of the *Sāma Veda*:

That land on which the black-antelope naturally grazes is fit for performance of sacrifices; but the land of the mleccha or those who speak barbarously are different. Let the first three classes inevitable dwell in the above mentioned land; while the Sudra can dwell wherever he chooses.⁵³

According to Parasher-Sen, this definition firmly establishes the State as an agrarian affair and one that is invested in safeguarding agrarian interests.⁵⁴ Scholars agree that the land where the ‘black-antelope [does not] graze’ are those of the forests of eastern India (particularly, Bihar and Bengal), the Deccan and the hilly uplands, the desert and the extreme northwest (where the Kambojas live—a people already identified as the ‘other’ in both the Manusmriti and the Mahabharata). However, the Arthashastra reflects realpolitik-al considerations unlike any other and it is perhaps worthwhile to detail the exact expectation of Kautilya regarding the ‘ideal state.’ Kautilya’s ideal *janapada* is a,

Possessor of strong positions in the centre and at the frontiers, capable of sustaining itself and others in times of distress, easy to protect, *providing excellent means of livelihood*, malevolent towards enemies, with weak neighboring princes, devoid of mud, stones, salty ground, uneven land, thorns, bands wild animals, deer and forest tribes, charming, endowed with *agricultural land, mines, material forests and elephant forests, beneficial to cattle, beneficial to men, with protected pastures*, rich in animals, not depending on rain for water, provided with water-routes and land-routes, with valuable, manifold and plenty of commodities, capable of bearing fines and taxes, with farmers devoted to work, with a wise master, inhabited mostly by the lower varnas, with men loyal and honest, these are the excellences of a country.⁵⁵

The discourse on forests is of interest here, Kautilya recognizes forests of two kinds—*dravyavana* (material forests) and *hastivana* (elephant forests) suggesting a strongly resource-oriented attitude towards the wilderness. This is a major development if this attitude is juxtaposed against the one found in the Veda(s) where the forest is dangerous and a major source of anxiety. While the anxiety is definitely palpable even in

52 Parasher-Sen, “Of tribes, hunters and barbarians”, 176.

53 Manu 2:23-24.

54 Note: The Arthashastra in its description of the ideal state, makes this agenda explicit. The ideal state possesses agricultural land, expands it and safeguards it etc. See: Arthashastra 6:01:08.

55 Arthashastra 6:01:08 [My emphasis]

the Mauryan texts, in this period the danger seems significantly ‘manageable’ and Kautilya mandates several techniques for the management of this threat.

One such technique appears to be keep the tribes “involved otherwise” in Parasher-Sen’s words⁵⁶ so that they would have less opportunities to resort to pillaging and become a threat to the agrarian societies in the plains—and one prominent method of keeping them engaged appears to be to employ them, primarily as soldiers to fight against other forest-dwellers as *atavibala* (or forester troops).⁵⁷ Furthermore, in Book XI of the Arthashastra, Kautilya discusses methods which may be employed in order to weaken and subjugate a tribe involving “disintegrating them from within so as to convert the tribesmen into members of a class society based upon private property.”⁵⁸ Parasher-Sen notes that such strategies disrupted the internal dynamics of a tribe and incited rivalry within them, keeping them weak and dependent on the State’s mediation.

Upon finer scrutiny of Kautilya’s work, it is revealed that he formulated much of his policies regarding the ‘use’ and subjugation of foresters based on his personal knowledge and experience of the Madra and Kamboja people of North-West India.⁵⁹ It is difficult to ascertain how the strategies learned from one particular region of India, fared when applied more generally as a matter of state-policy in other parts of the subcontinent as there is very little knowledge or sources for any investigation into the implications of Mauryan state policy on the tribes, however from this outline exploration, I believe it would be cogent to conclude that there existed a significant dialectical relationship between the ‘tribe’ and the ‘state’ whereby they were both transformed by means of their contact with the Other—learning and perfecting themselves to better face or better assimilate into each other as and when strategic considerations allowed.

Moreover, what can also be cogently concluded from the discussion so far is that the ‘state’ at least till the Mauryan times and the tribes had a necessarily utilitarian relationship as the state needed to keep them occupied and pacified through differential treatment and secondly, required their cooperation and expertise in navigating the forests (Kautilya mentions the *mleccha-atavika* being excellent spies and navigators⁶⁰) and collecting and handing-over the *dravya* or resources that appear to be the State’s prime interest in the forests in the first place.

56 Parasher-Sen, “Of tribes, hunters and barbarians”, 183.

57 Arthashastra, 9:02:18-20.

58 Arthashastra 11:01:1-14. See: Parasher-Sen, “Of tribes, hunters and barbarians”, 184.

59 Ibid.

60 Arthashastra 12:04:23.

King of the Jungles?

Given the interest of the state in subduing and extracting resources from the forests, the latter in the Mauryan period already assumes the form familiar from the Mahabharata; where the forest is a potential source of large-scale revenues yet, difficult to govern and at loggerheads with the agrarian interests of the state. In such a situation, it would perhaps not be entirely improbably to hypothesize an entente between the state and the mleccha rulers and tribal leadership in the form of a delegated sovereignty over the forests—the latter essentially acting as collaborators and organizing labour in order to meet the procurement necessities of the state in exchange for amicable terms with the *Arya*. Do the Sanskrit texts bear any hints or suggestions for the existence of such an alliance? If so, how is such an alliance justified and placed within the Aryan ecumenical system?

The *Arthashastra* itself provides a number of crucial hints in support of such an alliance that has been briefly discussed already. The fact that it was necessary (in the first place) to interfere in the regular functioning of a tribe—keeping them weak and to regularly engage with them suggests that they offered some form of utility to the Aryan state the nature of which may be gauged from the two elaborations regarding *atavikā* armies (*AS* 9.2.18-20) and the ‘tribal spies’ (*AS* 7.14.27) that were employed by the State. Kautiliya suggests that tribal-armies are particularly useful and should primarily be engaged in cases of conflict with other tribal or forest entities and a similar arrangement is deemed ideal for the tribal-spies who are also mentioned as particularly useful for navigation.⁶¹ both these facts suggest a certain lack of familiarity with the forest and the need for forester assistance in dealing with it which at the same time is extremely lucrative due to its resource.

As for the second part of the question regarding their placement within the Aryan ecumenical system, I believe it might be worthwhile to search within the Mahabharata and return to our case-study of dealing with the *rākshasa*(s). I had pointed out in the previous section a critical anomaly in reporting Hidimba’s thoughts regarding the Pandavas sleeping in forest. He says to his sister:

*asmad vishayasuptebhyo naitebhyo bhayamasti te*⁶²

Translated as “for they sleep fearlessly in my territory [therefore kill and bring them to me]” where the term *vishaya* meaning material property is peculiar in a hunting-gathering context⁶³. However, in light of the State’s consistent involvement with the forest peoples, perhaps this assertion is not that strange after all. If

61 Arthashastra, 9.02.07-08.

62 Mahabharata, 1-152-8.

63 From Parasher-Sen’s mapping we can establish Hidimba as a hunter-gatherer alongside his proclivity for human-flesh (which is probably an exaggeration for his regular consumption of meat.) A. A. Fuhrer also agreed with this view. See: A. A. Fuhrer, *Aphorisms on the Sacred Laws of the Aryas* (Bombay: Bombay Sanskrit Series, 1883), 3 & fn. 13.

we remember Kautilya's strategies of disturbing the functioning of a tribe by inciting rivalry through the introduction of private property, we can comfortably place Hidimba among this class of "propertied" tribal collaborators who had some kind of a territorial claim to the woodlands in the Himalayan foothills (which is clearly *mleccha-desha*) where the Pandavas were sleeping. It would then seem that, what got Hidimba killed is the failure to identify the Pandavas as agents of the State and his direct offer of threat to the former. Ghatatkacha's role as the 'guide', helper and protector of the Pandavas in the forests and hills also makes sense in this context as he inherited his uncle's role of State-collaborator and I argue that in the *Vana-Parva* (Book III) of the Mahabharata we find Kautilya's statecraft of using tribes and *amānava* populations as collaborators for colonizing and controlling the forests in actual practice.

This would finally explain the last of the peculiarities mentioned in my discussion of the Mahabharata—the curious presence of the *mleccha*(s) in Yudhisthira's Rājasuya Yajña in the *Sabha Parva* (Book II) of the Mahabharata.

David Knipe has discussed the Rājasuya Yajña in detail and has established it, in addition to being a consecration ritual, as one that generated the [political] cosmos at the end of the ritual.⁶⁴ but it was also a declaration of sovereignty and a key element of the ecumenical repertoire by which the pre-modern state lived and ruled as Cooper and Burbank discussed in their seminal article. The most challenging part of the ritual as the epic claims was the acquiring of *kar* or 'tribute' from all kings and princes of neighboring and subordinated kingdoms that were gifted to the sovereign ritually consecrating him as the 'king.' The Mahabharata details the conflicts (such as that with the *Jarāsandha*—the King of Magadha) and adventures of acquisition of tributes from the princes of other kingdoms and also mentions regions outside *aryāvarta* such as Bengal where Bhīma seems to have been sent and Manīpur which was the domain of Arjun.

Vaishampayana's roll-call of the kings and chiefs at the Yajña states:

*saha sarvais tathā mlecchahiḥ sāgarānūpavāsibhiḥ
pārvatīyāś ca rājāno rājā caiva brhadbalaḥ
paundrako vāsudevaś ca va gaḥ kālī gakas tathā
ākarṣaḥ kuntalaś caiva vānavāsyāndhrakās tathā
draviḍāḥ siṃhalāś caiva rājā kāśmīrakas tathā
kuntibhojo mahātejāḥ suhmaś ca sumahābalaḥ
bāhlikāś cāpare śūrā rājānaḥ sarva eva te
virāṭaḥ saha putraiś ca mācellaś ca mahārathaḥ
rājāno rājaputrāś ca nānājanapadeśvarāḥ*

64 David M. Knipe, *Vedic Voices: Intimate Narratives of a Living Andhra Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

*śiśupālo mahāvīryaḥ saha putreṇa bhārata
āgacchat pāṇḍaveyasya yajñam saṃgrāmadurmadaḥ*⁶⁵

Suggesting the presence of mleccha(s) and barbarian chiefs *Vanga, Pundra, Kuntala, Draviḍa, Siṃhala* etc. lands which are by all definition mleccha-desha but economically crucial for the maintenance of government in forest or marshy lands. This is perhaps the best proof of the flouting of religious injunctions in view of realpolitik.

In his study of medieval Odisha, Burkhard Schnepel had discussed a state of caste-tribe continuum where caste-Hindu society had merged with tribal society (and vice-versa) using symbols of legitimization, rituals and even each other's deities in order to 'regard' the Other and essentially carry on a political and economic alliance for the mutual benefit of both.

The political cosmos that is generated at the end of the Rājasuya Yajña therefore, contains the tribal chiefs, tribal populations and mleccha-jatis in their requisite roles and those that transformed their behaviour and learned to perform their 'aryan' identity—becoming *mānava*, could (in theory at least) be inducted into Aryan society and the Aryan state as exemplified by the case of Ghatatkacha's son Anjanparvā.

Conclusion: Some Notes on the State

After a long discussion, Parasher-Sen conceded that it is perhaps very unwise to imagine the state in ancient India (in this case, the Mauryan state) in the form of the large-scale monolithic institution that it is frequently described as.⁶⁶ In spite of the high degree of standardization and the complex bureaucracy that the state employed, as palpable from the Arthashastra, it also lived on the shoulders of a complex set of strategic alliances with *amānava* populations who in spite of their low ritual status, nevertheless had their role within the state's ecumenical repertoire or the complex of symbols, signs and narratives employed by the state to make sense of its demography and perpetuate its own legitimacy. Although throughout this paper, I have largely relied on narratives, texts and treatises to reconstruct the nature of the primitive state, I will now briefly discuss how far the model of state formation forwarded here matches with actual ethno-historical records and the existing scholarship on state-formation in medieval eastern India.

Hermann Kulke's schematic outline of the process of state formation involved a core nuclear-region expanding into the surrounding territories with the help of a merchant proprietor class spreading their economic interests into the hinterland. Into this hinterland, then appears Hindu temples and the forwarding

⁶⁵ Mahabharata, 2-31-10-14

⁶⁶ Parasher-Sen, "Of tribes, hunters and barbarians", 189.

of a Brahmin class who would then incorporate the region into the Hindu ecumenical system employed by the state and the hinterland would be colonized by Brahmin(s) via land-grants made to them by the 'king.'⁶⁷ Interestingly, Kulke found several instances when the lands donated to the priests were lands that were not effectively owned by the king in the first place, thereby needing a collaborator in such territories who would rule in the king's place. The sending out of Brahmin(s) in order to include those lands into the ecumenical narrative and the sacred geography therefore, naturally marked the first step in integrating them within the king's cosmology.

Burkhard Schnepel details the process of inclusion of the tribal cosmos into that of the state and discusses the emergence of a 'contact-zone' and a caste-tribe continuum which may well be the product of years of narrative assimilation coalescing into an amorphous form where the *mānava* and the *amānava* become virtually indistinguishable—again guided by the State's own necessities of ruling the forestland.

In this paper, I began with a discussion on how the 'other' may be defined vis-a-vis elite Hindu (or Aryan) society and how may their interaction in spite of these differences be explained given the amorphous condition observed in certain ethnographic records such as that of Schnepel's work on southern Odisha. My preliminary conclusion guided me to adopt the *mānava*—*amānava* dichotomy as the fundamental line of separation between the aryan and the *mleccha*—a distinction which I have also demonstrated had repercussion on how territory is viewed and how the state is constructed. The key benefit of this theory of othering is the benefit of consistency that this form of distinction demonstrates over the more traditional language, territory or skin-colour based theories expounded by Romila Thapar and also appears to be chronologically coherent in usage as the terms are found in texts from vastly different period of time. Additionally, this mode of othering highlights the performative aspect of 'Arya' identity that is otherwise drowned in more ethnic or lineage-based notions of the same which are difficult to support owing to the vast corpus of literature in the epics as well as the *Purāna*(s) bearing witness to *ārya* kings of *mleccha* birth.

The fact that in the *Mahabharata*, we find numerous pleas of inquiry regarding how non-aryan populations may be 'placed' within aryan society is the first hint of a major shift in the connotations associated with the 'Others'—a shift that may be accounted for by the expansion of the Aryan state into the forests and a growing volume of knowledge about the forest itself which later permitted Kautilya do distinguish between material and elephant forests. Such knowledge of forests and the practices of their dwellers is generally absent in the oldest of texts such as the *Rig Veda* which seem to be dominated by the fear of the foresters and the *mleccha* majority surrounding the early agriculturalist and pastoral proto-states.

⁶⁷ Kulke, *The State in India*, 242-243.

Finally, I have discussed what may be known or surmised from this shift and the presence of mleccha populations in Hindu political rituals and sacrifices such as the Rājasuya Yajña which speaks volumes about the alliance between the arya and the mlecchas and the utilitarian inclusion of the same into the cosmologies of the states. This adds to the already existing volume of literature that calls for a re-evaluation of the Indian state and certain paradigms of Indian sociological thought such as the concepts of ‘state’ and ‘statelessness’, a problem most articulately elaborated by Schnepel in his article where he raises the issue of the conception of tribes as ‘stateless.’⁶⁸ This paper has outlined the transformation of the notion of the Other, the mleccha and the ‘tribe’ from being essentially the antithesis of the Hindu state to an essential ally in expanding the state and its interests (what Kautilya calls *vartta*). The central questions raised in the “Introduction” of this paper have therefore been answered in the following ways.

Firstly, the delineation of the ‘self’ in early Hindu cosmology is necessarily based on performance of certain rites which are conducive to an agrarian lifestyle and hence is exclusive of hunting-gathering or non-sedentary forest populations who are relegated to the position of the mleccha and identified in detail in several texts in list form which generally appear to be similar to one another. Secondly, the transformation of the notion of the mleccha from the ontological other of the self to a marginal or liminal position can be explained based on ideas of acculturation as well as ‘utilitarian inclusion’ practiced by the Aryan state necessary for its own survival and the realization of the State’s own set of interests which mandated agrarian expansion on the one hand and exploitation of forest resources of the other. And finally, that the discursive shift in the treatment of the *amānava* population can essentially be explained as the expansion of the repertoire needed to realize this utilitarian inclusion in terms of the state’s ideology performed through rituals such as sacrifices.

One of the major obvious drawbacks of this paper is its complete reliance on elite sources of information when speaking of tribal and marginalized populations—however, as I have explained in the introduction, this paper essentially deals with the Hindu state’s strategies of the dealing with the ‘others’ and although it would be fascinating to see these dynamics from the other side of the coin, constraints of space, alas, does not permit the same. What would perhaps be a very interesting addition to this paper is to investigate the effects of such inclusion on tribes themselves, however, as Parasher-Sen points out such explorations too are not within the range of possibility owing to the acute lack of tribal and forester’s source materials that have survived the test of time.

Finally, in broad terms, this paper has highlighted the ability of the early Indian states in identifying their own epistemological limitations and of triumphing over them through unique strategies and

68 Schnepel, “Contact Zone”, cite

considerations of the realpolitik even when they were opposed to religious injunctions. This acknowledgment of the state's own limitations is something that I have found lacking in say, the colonial and post-colonial avatar of the state which caused the emergence of information-panics such as those surrounding the thugs in the 1830s and a general anxiety towards tribal populations that is palpable in the promulgation of the Criminal Tribes Act (1871).⁶⁹ The Indian republic can perhaps learn volumes from the strategies adopted by its predecessors in the ancient past in order to address issues surrounding this insecurity that still continues to haunt its peace lest it also begins to perceive monsters (rākshasas) lurking in the fissures of its own gaps in knowledge of forest-society.

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