CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

A. Ancient Sanskrit Literature:

In our survey of the literary sources for the knowledge of ancient Indian geography, we have included all works of Indian literature Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina, but as the period of our special study begins from A.D. 650, our treatment of the literary writings which are earlier than this date shall be sketching and brief.

Starting with the most ancient period, we find that the Sāmkhitas of the Rgveda supplies us the names of almost all the major rivers of the North-Western parts of India. In the Rgveda, the Indus enjoys a pre-eminent position. Its tributaries both from the West and the East have been enumerated. The rivers joining it from the West are:

1. Kubāla or Kabul
2. Kamūna or Kurra
3. Gomati or Gomul
4. Sveti is Swat
5. Tretā or Ṭarā
6. Suvartu
7. Mehtu and some minor ones.

On the East we have:

1. Susama or Sohan
2. Vitastā or Jhelum
3. Asikni or Chenab
4. Iravati, Parusni or Ṛavi
5. Vipāśañā
6. Śatudri
7. Arjikīyā and
8. Haradvṛdhā

Eastwards, the Gāṅga and the Yamunā, as well as Sarasvatī and Dṛṣadvatī, form separate groups. We also come across the names of Vedic tribes in the time of the Ṛgveda, and it is worthwhile to take note of them as later Indian names of the countries are mostly based on the names of the people. We come across the following tribal groups:

1. Turvāṇas
2. Matsyas
3. Bṛgyus
4. Druhyus
5. Pakśhas
6. Bholānasas
7. Alinas;
8. Śüras
9. Tṛtrus
10. Bharatas
11. Purus.

At one place the Čedis have also been mentioned. The Atharva-Veda shows knowledge of Magadha and Āṅga, and the Yajurveda knows the Kuru-Pañcālas. By the time of the Satapatha-Bṛahmana and the Arhadārayaka Upaniṣad Videh or
Videgh is mentioned. The Aitareya Brāhmaṇa knows the Vidarbhas and Aryan people as also the Andhras, Pundras, Sabaras, Pulindas and Mitibas who are all non-Aryan. The Dharmasūtras have a more detailed knowledge of the countries and divide them into Aryan and non-Aryan. Boudhāyana defines Aryāvarta as lying to the East of Vīnāśana where the river Sarasvati disappears into the sands of Bikaner, to the West of Kālakavāna (Prayāga), to the South of the Himalayas and to the North of Pāripātra.

From this brief survey of Vedic literature we pass on to the classical Sanskrit works.

**Geographical Literature in Sanskrit**

From a perusal of the two Sanskrit Epics - The Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, as well as the Purāṇas and their Mahātmyas, it is evident that the ancient Indians had a detailed knowledge of Geography not only of their own country but also of the adjacent regions. The fullness of these accounts in some cases, as for instance in the Mahābhārata, makes it evident that there must have existed geographical treatises in fairly early times. However much of this literature has been lost due to neglect and the damage caused by nature as well as the vandalism of man. Still a few works of this type have survived, though they belong to a rather late date.

Thanks to the investigations of early European
Indologists, some information has become available about the geographical literature in Sanskrit. Lt. Col. F. Wilford published a lengthy article on this subject in the Asiatic Researches as early as 1822. He has mentioned the following works, the manuscripts of some of which he actually acquired. Amongst these was a Koetwasamasa which he calls "Entirely geographical and a most valuable work". Two more works mentioned by him are - The Mahayaptidesavayavastha and The Bhojayaptidesavayavastha. These were written by or for the two famous kings of the Parmara Dynasty of Malava, who ruled from A.D. 974 to A.D. 995 and A.D. 1011 to A.D. 1055 respectively. These works are obviously based on the information collected from the Epics and Puranas and their own contribution is not much. Wilford was not able to get a manuscript of either of these two. Another treatise on geography was written by the order of the founder of the Vijayanagar Dynasty, King Bukka in circa A.D. 1285. According to Wilford it finds mention in a commentary on the geography of the Mahesharata. Wilford thinks it is the BhuvanaSagara. Another work a manuscript of which Wilford was able to acquire, is said to have been written by a Pandit from Bengal, during the reign of Hussain Shah, who came to the throne in A.D. 1489. This was written by order of an East Indian Prince (Paurastya) - may be of Assam. Another work was VikramSagara which is often quoted
by the author of the Ksetrasamāsa. Wilford could get hold of only seventeen leaves of the work. Another work named Bhuvanakāga is only a section of the late Bhavisyapurāṇa. The Ksetrasamāsa, though a late work, written circa A.D. 1648, is, according to Wilford, valuable and interesting performance. It deals only with the Gangatic provinces. According to its author himself, it is based on the Vikramaparvata. Another late work is Kṛitadharavali by Rāmasvari, of which Wilford could get only eighty leaves. Lastly Wilford mentions a Gaṇavatana which contains a list of countries, "with several most valuable hints".

THE RAMAYĀNA:

Apart from stray references to mountains, rivers, countries and cities throughout the body of the work, we have a really valuable and interesting information in the Kśirakhandā, in the account of the various expeditionary parties despatched by Sugrīva in search of Sītā to the various quarters of India and neighbouring regions. One party headed by Vīśāma explored the East. In this direction are mentioned the rivers Sona and Gaṅga. The countries like Vīdeha, Vālava, Kāti, Kosala, Magadha, Pundra and Vaṅga, within India and the South Asian countries called Suvarṇadvīpa, Yavadvīpa where there is a mountain named Śīrā. Besides these some mythological seas, mountains and islands like Sudarśana are also mentioned.
In the list of the Southern places to be searched by
the party headed by Hanumāṇ, are enumerated the Vindhyā
mountain, the rivers Narmadā, Godāvari, Kṛṣṇa, Varadā
and the countries of Mekalā, Utkala, Desārṇas, Avanti,
Vidarbhā, Rājakā, Mahikās, Vāhangas, Kalingas and Kauśikas,
Andhras, Pundras, Colas, Pāṇḍyas, Keralas. The mountain
Ayasmukha—modern Kudremukh where vast deposits of iron
ore have now been located. The river Kāveri is mentioned
as also the Tārāparṇī. Next a mountain named Mahendra is
mentioned which has plunged into the ocean. Beyond the
Ocean is the island which is the abode of Rāvana.

To search the Western direction Susena was put in charge.
In the West are mentioned the countries of Saurāstra,
Bāhlikās, Gandrācitras. These regions are said to be
generally deserts with high mountains, which probably is
applicable to Bāhlikā only. The Western ocean i.e. modern
Arabian Sea is mentioned. The confluence of the Indus and
the Sea is also noted. The mountain Pāriyātra is described.
The description of the West includes some mythological
elements, such as the mountain Varāha having peaks of gold,
as also the mountain Meru with all the wonders associated
with it.

Lastly comes the North, where a party headed by Satakala
is despatched. The direction is said to be adorned by the
Himālaya mountain. The Mlecchas, Pulindas, The Śūrasenas,
Praṭhallas, Bharatas, Kuruś, Madrakas, Kṣabojas, Yavanas,
Sakas, Daradas are enumerated amongst the people of the North. After crossing the Himalayas, they would reach a mountain named Sudarśana, after which is another peak called Devasakha, which abounds in birds. After crossing a great wilderness, Kaśī will be approached. There is a city of Kubera. In its vicinity is mentioned the mountain named Kraunče, beyond which is Advika, where there are horse-faced women. Then comes the river Saśada, beyond which is the country named Uttarakuru, which is a land of plenty, abounding in all good things. It is the land of all joys. Beyond that is the Northern Sea, in the midst of which is the mountain Samgiri beyond which progress is impossible and the Yanares are advised to return from this point. This account gives us more or less an accurate idea of the rivers, mountains and countries in various quarters of the Indian sub-continent and also the land beyond the Indian frontiers. Of course there is an element of vagueness sometimes and some of the accounts appear to be mythological. Still we get substantial geographical information. Sometimes, the countries are put in the wrong quarter obviously because of the mishandling of the text in the course of its transmission.

Some more geographical information about the North can be obtained from the account of the journey of Rāma from Ayodhya to Mithila, as also that to fetch Bharata, and their journey back to Ayodhya to which we can add by
following Rama's itinerary during his exile.

**THE MAHABHARTA:**

The Mahabharata contains a fuller and more accurate account of the geography of ancient India. The treatment is more detailed in the Bhishmaparva, although, interesting information is available in Tādī, Sabhē, Aranyaka, Āvamadha and Udyogaparvas. In the sixth Sarga of the Bhishmaparva we get an account of the divisions of the whole earth into Dvīpas and Vṛṣas. Of these the Uttarakuru, Bhadravana and Mahāyavat are described in the seventh chapter, and the Ramanava, Hiṃsasena and Ardāvata in the eighth. In the ninth Sarga of the same, Indian sub-continent called Bharatavasā is described in detail - its mountains, rivers and the various States (Janapadas) are enumerated comprehensively. In the Sabhāparva the various States of India and its neighbourhood are mentioned in connection with Digvijaya (conquest of the four quarters) by the Pāndava brothers. In the Aranyaka Parva are mentioned the various sacred places of India, a pilgrimage to which constitutes an act of religious merit. In the Udyogaparva are mentioned the States, the rulers of which took part in the great war. In the Āvamadha Parvan, the chapters 73 to 84 which describe the wanderings of the sacrificial horse set loose for Yudhishthira's horse-sacrifice, contain geographical information about India from Manipura in the East to Gandhara in the North-West. Similarly some of the countries,
rivers, and mountains are described in the Adiparva, in the account of Arjuna's exile for twelve years.

**THE PURANAS:**

Our next important source is the section called Bhuvanakosa in the Puranas, where we find lists of
mountains in the various directions. This account is most interesting as given in the Markandeya and Visnu Puranas.

The Markandeya Purana divides India into the following seven regions:

1. The Middle Country (Madhyadesa)
2. North
3. East
4. The Deccan
5. West
6. The Vindhya Region

The mountains, rivers and the states of each region have been described in detail. The Visnu Purana enumerates the seven continents - Jambu, Plaka, Saimala, Kuśa, Kramoṣa, Saka and Puskara. Next we are supplied the boundaries of India i.e., Bharata Varṣa. It is the land situated to the North of the Sea and to the South of the HImālayas. This definition is more comprehensive than that of the Manusmriti which restricts śrīvārta only to the North of the Vindhya. The Vīṣṇupurāṇa on the other hand includes both Northern India and the Deccan, by including the entire
land between the Himalayas and the Sea i.e. the Indian Ocean. The Visnu Purana also describes the various racial elements. It says, "The Kiratas are in the East, the Yavanas in the West, the four castes - Brahmans, Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras are in the middle. Then it goes on to describe the various river-systems with reference to the mountain from which they rise. The States of India are enumerated next with which the account of Bharata comes to a close. Then follows a detailed description of the remaining six continents. The Bhagavatapurana deals with geography in a general way. It describes the various continents and their sub-divisions with details about India (Bharatavarsha).

Before taking leave of the Puranas as a source of geographical knowledge, it seems necessary to say a word about what appears to be mythological about them. The account of the earth as consisting of seven concentric islands separated by seven oceans appear more like a myth than scientific geographical information. However, it has been very pertinently observed by S.N. Majumdar Sharma, that, 'though this conception is childish, we ought not to compare it with that of the twentieth century and stigmatise it as ridiculous. The true conception of the earth is a thing of modern times. Ancient nations had strange notions. The conception of the different parts of the earth as so many islands was maintained also by the Greeks. Now when the
Epics and Purānic writers (who had not the slightest personal knowledge of foreign land) attempted the difficult task of arranging the traditional accounts of the different parts of the then known world handed down from those who actually visited them, they harmonised the different accounts by reducing them to this system. But though their system is wrong and though there is plenty of the fabulous in Hindu Geography, their accounts of the different parts of the world were based on facts.¹⁴ A proof of S.N. Majumdar's assertion is provided by the fact that the account of the river Nile and its source reconstructed on the basis of the Purānic information and a map prepared on the basis of the same information, enabled Lt. J.H. Spence to find the source of that river.¹⁵

Literature of technical nature also provides a good deal of information. Such information is copious in works of grammar, as these deal with the language of the country. We get a lot of names of rivers, mountains, countries and cities both in the Astādhyāyī of Pāṇini and its auxiliary literature particularly the Mahābhārata of Patañjali and the commentary called Kārikā. The Kāmasūtra of Vātsyāyana, a work not later than the 2nd century A.D., mentions the different countries of India. Similarly the Arthasastra of Kaṇṭalīya supplies not only topographical information, but also mentions the special produce of different parts of India and thus throws light on the economic geography.
The *Kātyāyāṇastra* of Bharata, a work on dramaturgy throws light on the divisions of India. It is however very refreshing to find that Rājashekhar in his *Kāvyamālahāsa* has given a lot of geographical information. He mentions in detail the various countries which constituted the five main divisions— the Central or Madhyadeśa, the Uttarāpatha or the Northern region, the Prāṇya or Eastern region, the Daksīṇāpatha or the South and the Western region.

We get some very good information from the *Erhatsamhitā* of Varāhamihira. It is of special importance for us as this work belongs to the sixth century A.D. and comes very close to the period the geography of which is the subject of our study. In Chapter XIV of the *Erhatsamhitā*, Varāhamihira has described the five Divisions of India, namely Madhyadeśa, Antarvedī, Daksīṇāpatha, Uttarāpatha and Apānta or Western India. He makes mention of the mountains, rivers, forests, oceans, peoples, countries and localities.

In the Sanskrit *Mahākāvyas* or epic-poems also we sometimes get useful information. The *Raghuvaṃśa* of Kālidāsa is particularly rich in this respect. In account of Raghu's conquest of the quarters given in the 4th Canto of the poem Kālidāsa has mentioned the countries, the rivers and mountains of the East, South, West and North of the Indian sub-continent. He has very often enlightened us about the characteristic produce of the various countries and their
flora and fauna. His account of the extreme North-West, comprising parts of N.W. Pakistan and Afghanistan is important not only geographically but also historically.

The Deśakumārakaritā of Dandin also supplies useful information, which is very detailed so far as the Central Deccan, which was at one time ruled over by the Vakātukas, is concerned. He also gives detail about big cities like Pāṭliputra, Ujjainī and Kāncī.

The Candaśahoc which gives an account of the Digvijaya (conquest of the four quarters of India) mentions the various countries, rivers etc. in the different parts of India.

The information in the Kathāsaritarāgarāma lies scattered all over the work. It has to be collected with labour, but it can prove interesting.

Amongst the historical poems i.e. literary works, the Narasāharitā of Sāma supplies some information. Its account of the products of Assam is rather interesting.

The Navaśahasāmkaritā of Paddagupta which describes the achievements of the Paramāra king Sindhurāja, supplies some information about the neighbouring countries.

The Vikramaśākadesāvaritā of Bilhana throws light on the geography of Kashmir. All that information has been scientifically compiled by Sir Aurel Stein in the second volume of his excellent translation of Kalhana’s work. Stein has also given very valuable notes on the geographical names, throughout his translation.
The Kusumapala-Curita of Haranandaracarya contains information about Gujarat under the Calukyas and their neighbours.

The Prthivirajavijya, though a fragmentary work, supplies information regarding the dominions of the Chalukyaas of Ajmer and Delhi.

BUDDHIST LITERATURE

The Buddhist literature comprises two distinct groups: (i) the old canon together with the Sutakas which are all in Pali and (ii) the Buddhist texts in Sanskrit which are later. The two Sutakas contain interesting information regarding the travels of the Buddha in various parts of India. This information is more detailed with respect to Bihar and U.P. but it is sparse about other parts of India. From the various references in different texts, a picture of the country emerges which shows that Northern India was divided into sixteen important kingdoms — the Belhara Mahajamapades of these works. The Sutaka stories mention the names of important cities situated at great distances from each other such as Rajagaha, Valabhi, Varanasi, Irawasth, Kausambi, Mathura, Indraprastha, Taxasila, Puskalavati, Ujjayini, Suraprasa and Bharukacca.

The later Buddhist literature also contains some geographical information but it is very meagre so far as real geography is concerned.
Much of the information in Sanskrit works is fictitious. As pointed out by B.C. Law, countries like Kāmadhīpa and Khandadvīpa, cities like Vāndhumati and Pāyavatī and mountains like Triśākura are all imaginary. Still a study of the works like the Divyavadana, the Mahāvastu, the Lalitavistāra, the Bodhisattvavadāna, Kalpalata, the Aśokavadāna and the Avadānasataka do contain some geographical information here and there. For instance the Mahāvastu tells us that the Buddha spread knowledge in the countries like Aṅga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Kuśā, Kosala, Cedi, Vatsa, Māgaha, Sūrasena, Kuru, Pándu, Śivi, Deśārṇa, Assaka and Avanti. This tallies, more or less, with the list of the sixteen Mahājanapades mentioned in the Pāli canon, only it leaves out Gandhāra and Kamboja and inserts Śibi and Deśārṇa. Other Buddhist Sanskrit texts also occasionally refer to the countries of the list given above.

These works also contain references to cities like Fātaliputra, Rājagṛha and its suburbs like Srishrakūṭa hill with its well-known forests like the Vanavana, the Prabhāsavana and Yaśāvana and localities like Kolitagrāma, Kalandakaniṇḍa, Vaśā, Mithilā, Kuśagrāma, Anosiya (in the Kingdom of the Mallas), Bārānasi, Śravasti, Kapilavastu, Mathura, Kānyakubja, Hastinapura, Ujjainī, Kapilavastu, Gaya, Nalanda, Sāmkṣayya (Sankira), Sthūla, Rājasā, and Jambini. There are references to the mountains Himavanta, Pariyātra and Kailāsa and to the rivers Gaṅga, Yamunā and Nirājanā (Phalgu).
Amongst the cities of Uttarakāpatha mention is made of Taxila, Pushkalavati, Sakala, and the beautiful city of Kaśāmbīra.

Roruka was an important city in Sauvīra in the West. Divyavādana mentions Brūkascha and Śrīrapāraka. Of the places in Dakṣināpatha, the mountains Kiskindhā, Malayācalā, Maināka and Gandhamadana are mentioned, as also the Dandakavāna. Of the Eastern countries Vaṅga is mentioned in the Lalitavistāra. Thus it can be said that the study of Buddhist Sanskrit works yields interesting information about historical geography of Ancient India. The Mahābhāṣya, a section of the Bower, M.Ś., supplies very useful information.

**Jaina Literature:**

The canonical literature of the Jains, called the Aṅgas and their commentaries, is another important source. The Prabhandaś, or historical essays written by the Jain authors of medieval times, yield valuable information. The literature dealing with pilgrimages is particularly interesting. Several Jain writers have written Sandesā-Kīvyas on the model of Kalidāsa's Meghadūta. These contain rich material. The colophones of manuscripts of Jain writings in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhramśa are sometimes useful. Works like Tiloyapanatti and Vijnaptitriveni also supply useful information.

**Chinese Pilgrims:**

The Chinese pilgrims who came to visit the places sacred to the Buddhists, have left interesting accounts of India. The
writings of Fa-hien, Hiuen Tsang, I-teang and Jung-yun are particularly useful. Amongst these the fullest account is that of Hiuen Tsang, in his Si-yu-ki. It is on this account that Sir Alexander Cunningham's Ancient Geography of India is primarily based. Hiuen Tsang visited almost all parts of India, and has described them in detail. Hiuen Tsang's account has a direct bearing on the present study, as it almost coincides with the date with which we start.

GREEK GEOGRAPHERS

Greek writers who came to India with Alexander in the fourth century before Christ and shortly after during the rule of Chandragupta Maurya wrote about India. These accounts have not been preserved in full, but fragments collected by later compilers like Strabo, Arrian and others contain useful information, though it does not pertain to our period. Still the writings like the Periplus and the geography of Ptolemy are helpful in locating ancient place-names and throw light on their antiquity.

ARAB GEOGRAPHERS

The Arab geographers of the period from the ninth to the fourteenth century A.D. have written much about India and her commercial contacts with her neighbours both in the East and the West. They have dealt with principal trade routes, given the distances between various places and described their cultural conditions. During the tenth century, there developed a geographical school in Arabia. The great success
of Arab traders, depended on the scientific inquiries of these geographers and paved the way for the establishment of the Muslim political power in the Pacific islands and in India. Amongst the prominent writers we may count: Istakhri (A.D. 950), Ibn Hawkal (A.D. 975), Al-Berūnī (A.D. 973-1048), Idrīsī (A.D. 1154), Badishgī, Al-Berūnī (A.D. 1325), Ibn Batūtā (A.D. 1395). Dr. C. Fermand has studied the writings of these authors and given an account of their geographical texts relating to India and the far East.  

B. INSCRIPTIONS

A very rich and most reliable source of information for ancient Indian geography, is provided by the inscriptions in Sanskrit and Prakrit discovered in all parts of India. Starting from the 4th Century B.C. they cover the period up to modern times. The study of the Indian inscriptions began in the 18th century of the Christian Era and thanks to the initiative of European scholars like James Prinsep, Charles Wilkins, E.F. Home, George Buhler, Alexander Cunningham, James Burgess, John Faithful, Fleet, F. Kisch, H. Inker, E. Hultsch, E. Jenner, S. Levi, J. Ph. Vogel, W. Konow, E. Rapson, F.W. Thomas and the Indian scholars like Pandit Shagwan Lal Indrāji, Dr. Bhaū Dajī, Ram Mitra, Sir Ananda Coomaraswamy, Gopal Bhandarkar, D.R. Bhandarkar, V.V. Mirashi, and A.S. Altekar. This ancient store of writings has been critically edited, translated and annotated and it constitutes the most valuable source for ancient Indian history and geography. The information derived from the inscriptions
has special importance in as much as it is contemporary, dateable and definite. We are sure that the name of a village, city, country, river or mountain has to be looked for in such and such locality. The information derived from the records of the grants of land made by kings to Brahmans, Buddhist monks, or religious institutions like temples or monasteries is particularly rich in geographical information. This information is valuable for studying the evolution of the political geography of India. The inscriptions supply not only the names of countries, towns and villages but also of rivers, mountains which form the boundaries of kingdoms and their administrative divisions. These inscriptions were published to begin with in research journals, like the journals of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, The Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bombay Branch, The Indian Antiquary and the Epigraphia Indica, a most useful publication of the Archaeological Survey of India, which has also brought out another valuable series - the Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, in which series, six sumptuous volumes have already appeared from time to time. In the present study an attempt is being made to collect, classify and annotate the material available in the inscriptions in Sanskrit from Circa A.D. 650 to A.D. 1000.
REFERENCES

1. RV., X, 75.
2. See RV., VII, 18.
3. Wilford remarks, 'Real geographical treatises do exist, but they are very scarce and the owners unwilling, either to part with them or to allow any copy to be made', XIV, 373-470.
4. Sarga, 40 ff.
7. This has been very ably discussed by Fargiter in JRAS, 1908.
9. Chapters LIV-LIX.
10. II, 2.
11. II, 3, 1.
15. See Discovery of the Source of the Nile, I, V, IX.
16. We have a very lucid and authentic account of the geographical data in the Brhatashīhī, in Dr. Ajaya Mitra Shastri's excellent work, "India as seen in the Brhatashīhī of Varahamihira". Dr. J. P. Fleet had written an article on the subject in the IA, XXII, 169, but it is not so detailed as Dr. Ajaya Mitra's treatment.
17. Collins has written an interesting dissertation on the subject.
18. See, Mirashi, V.V., ABORI.
19. Mahāvastu, V, 1, 34.
20. See, for example, the Aṅguttara Nikāya, Volume I, 213, Vol. IV, 252, 256 & 260.
21. For detailed references, see Law, B.C., Geographical Essays, 12-52.
22. See, for example, Muni Jina Vijaya's 'Pustaka Prasasti Samgraha.
23. The available Greek accounts have been compiled by Principal Mc Grindle in six volumes, and they are a valuable mine of information for thereby period.
24. See also M.H.Nair's work, "The Arab Geographer's knowledge of Southern India"-1942.