According to the earliest geographical conception of the Puranas, the earth was taken to consist of four continental regions, viz. Jambudvipa, Ketumala, Bhadravasara and Uttarakuru. Jambudvipa stood for India proper, Ketumala represented the Oxus region, as the river Svaraksha (Vaksa) flowed through it. Bhadravasara signified the Jajares region, as the river Situ watered it, and Uttarakuru denoted the country beyond it. In Buddhist texts these continental regions are differently named as Jambudvipa, to the south of mount Sumura (Sineru), Apragadana (Apragodayana) to the west, Puravadvisha to the east, and Uttarakuru to its north. Both these traditions agree on the fact that Uttarakuru was the name of the region to the north of India.

The name Uttarakuru or northern Kuru is used in contradistinction to Dakinukuru or southern Kuru. In the Mahabharata the Uttarakuru are juxtaposed with the Daksina-kurus. The distance between their countries can be measured by the marches of Arjuna described in the Samboparam. After crossing the White Mountain (Svethavasata), he marched through Kimpurvasara and reached the Manasvarara Lake, in the country of the Hatakas, dominated by the Gandharvas. From there he entered into the region called Harivarasa, beyond which lay the land of the Uttarakuru. Elsewhere in the epic, the region to the north of India, corresponding to Svaraparvata and Kimpurvarasa, is called Haimavata, and the site of the Manasaravara Lake is indicated by the mountain Hemakuta, beyond which is said to lie Harivarasa. The Kailasa Range, running parallel to the Ladakh Range, 50 miles behind it, is, thus, the dividing line between Haimavata and Harivarasa. According to Bana, Arjuna reached the Hemakuta mountain, whose caves were echoing with the twangs of the bows of the irritated Gandharvas, after traversing the territory of China. Here the use of the word China seems to be intended to denote the Mongoloid peoples of the Himalayan regions, also called Kuria, a word derived from Kirati or Kurati, the name of a group of people in eastern Nepal. Beyond Harivarasa, including the territories of Tibet, lay the idyllic and utopian land of the Kurus, called Uttarakuru. This was the land of mystery.
and solitude, where nothing familiar could be seen, and it was useless to wage war. According to a tradition, the head of the demon Mahisā, severed by Skanda, formed a huge mountain, that blocked the entry into the Uttarakuru country. Yet Arjuna is said to have reached its frontier and conquered the northern Kurus living there. The result of this campaign was that the people of the mountainous regions presented themselves with the offerings of garlands of jade, characteristic of Uttarakuru, and the powerful herbs of the Trans-Kailasa territory at the Raṣṭamya sacrifice of Yudhishṭhira.

It is clear from the above account of the location of Uttarakuru that it lay to the north of the Himalayas, possibly, beyond Tibet, in the vicinity of the mountain Meru, which seems to represent the Pāmil, as shown by Sylvain Levi. According to the Great Epic, this land was marked by idyllic pleasure, bucolic beauty and sylvan silence. The trees produced choice fruits and flowers; the earth yielded gold and rubies; the seasons were agreeable; the people were healthy and cheerful and had a life-span of 11,000 years; they passed their time in song, dance and merry-making and among them sexual relations were promiscuous and unrestrained. It was a veritable land of gods (devālaka). There the righteous people were born to enjoy the fruits of their meritorious deeds. In particular, the warriors, losing their life on the battle field, were transferred to that region. Even those, who made gifts of horses to Brahmans, were entitled to be born in that country. These data show that Uttarakuru cannot be the bleak mountainous country of the Himalayas, but the region to the north of it, watered by the Tāsim and its tributaries, where the states-states of Bharatka, Kuru, Karashahr and Turfan, on the northern route, and Khotan, Niya, Endere, Ckalmdana, Kroraina, Charāk and Mīra, on the southern route, flourished in ancient times. Chinese travellers and pilgrims have testified to the prosperity and richness of these regions and the religiosity and righteousness of their people and Indan writers have described their luxury, affluence, wealth and bliss by the terms Manikan-cana varsa, Buddhavavarsa, Gondharavavala and Apragodana.

The names Kuru and Uttarakuru came into vogue in the Brahmana period. It is significant that the word “Kuru” is conspicuous by absence in the earliest strata of the Rgveda. Only once in the tenth mandala there is a reference to Kuruvaravana Tejaslapūta, but he is called the king of the Purus. Even in the territory of the Dravadvati, Sarasvati and Apaya, later known
as Kurukṣetra on account of the association of the Kurus, the Bhaṇḍāṣṭa kings are said to have kindled the sacred fire. In the April hymns Sarasvatī is mentioned with Bharati, the glory of the Bharatas. In the Pāramanyu Sūktas the Bharatas appear in place of the Kurus-Pancalas. But in the Brahmāna texts the Kurus become very prominent and are usually associated with the Pancalas. They are also said to be in occupation of the territory, through which the rivers Dravīḍa, Sarasvatī and Aparā flowed, and which, consequently, came to be known as Kurukṣetra. It was the home of later Vedic culture; its speech was best and purest and its mode of sacrifice was ideal and perfect.

 Besides the Kurus, there are references to the Uttarakurus in Brahmana literature. In the Aitarīya Brahmana (VIII, 14), it is stated that the people, living beyond the snowy regions, like the Uttarakurus, anoint their kings for Vāyuṣa, who, as result, are called Vīruṭ. At another place, in the same text (VIII, 23), Vasītha Satyasūrya is stated to have anointed Janantapi Āyurādhi, according to the ritual of Aindra Mahabhīraka, who, in consequence, went over the whole earth and conquered it unto the oceans. Thereupon, Vasītha Satyasūrya demanded his fees. Āyurādhi replied that when he would conquer the Uttarakurus, he would confer the whole empire on him and himself become the commander of his army. Satyasūrya reiterated that the country of the Uttarakurus was the land of gods, whom no body could conquer, and, since he had deceived him, he would snatch everything from him. As a result, Āyurādhi lost his prowess and Sunāmitra of Sāvīya, killed him.

 It is clear from the above data that the Kurus came into the limelight in the later Vedic period. They migrated from their homeland to the north of the Himalayas, and entered into India, driving away the Bharatas and occupying their habitat between the Dravīḍa and the Sarasvatī. Gradually, the Kurus and the Bharatas mixed with them and became one people, as is clear from the expression Kuru Nami Bharatī occurring in the Mahābhārata (XII, 341, 44). In the beginning their relations with the Pancalas were good, but, in course of time, differences appeared among them and culminated in the famous Mahābhārata war. Though settled in the fertile and prosperous country of the Sarasvatī and the Yamuna, they preserved the memory of the idyllic home in the northern region and treated it as the abode of gods. Another section of the Kurus reached Iran and Western Asia and penetrated into Anahita. Traces of the
wanderung of the Kurus in these regions are found in a series of place-names and personal names current there. A town in Sogdiana still bears the name Kerkah; two kings of the Parsawas Aman branch of the Achaemenian family of Iran were named Kur; a river in Transcaucasia, to the north-west ofPanis, is called Kur (Cyprus of Hellenic geographers); the region round the confluence between the river Herma and its right bank tributary, the Phrygian, just to the north of the city of "Magnesia under-Sipylos," is known as Korupedion, meaning the Kur Plain or Kerukea, which, like its Indian namesake, was the scene of memorable wars, like those between Seleucus Nicator and Lysimachus in 281 B.C. and the Romans and Antiochus III in 190 B.C., which decided the fate of empires in that region. Thus, it appears that a wing of the Kurus left their homeland for the west, swept through the corridor between the southern foot of the Elburz Range and the northern edge of the Central Desert of Iran and reached the pasture-lands in the basin of Lake Urmiyah and, beyond that, in the steppe country in the lower basin of the river Aras and Kur, adjoining the west coast of the Caspian Sea. From there they travelled on still farther westward over the watershed between the basins of the Aras and the Qyzyl Irmaq (Halys) and debouched into the Anatolian Peninsula to settle in the region called the Kur Plain after their name. Another detachment of the Kurus found its way to Luristan and joined the Elamites Achaemenids; whilst a third one swung to the southeast and through Bactriana and the Hindu-Kush moved into the Panjab and occupied the Sarawasi-Yamuna region. It is significant that one section of the Kurus, called Pratipeyas, are known as Balikas, since one of the sons of Patipa was called Balika. According to the Kambavana, Pururavas Aila, the progenitor of the Ailas, with whom the Kurus were associated, migrated to the middle country from Balii or Bactriana. Thus, we observe that, starting from their northern homeland (Uttarakuru), the Kurus moved to the west, and, breaking into several branches, migrated into Anzolia, Luristan and the Panjab. As I have shown elsewhere, the painted grey ware, which succeeded the ochre-coloured ware, at more than fifty sites in U.P. and the Panjab, and may be dated 1200-1100 B.C., was associated with the Kuru. We may, thus, date the wanderung of the Kurus about the middle of the second millennium B.C. or a bit later.
The Mahabharata connects India with the land of Utaurar-kuri through Himalayan regions rather than the north-western passes. As above shown, Arjuna is said to have gone there via Kimpurvasvara, Gandharvavaioka, Haimavatya, Hemakuta and Harivarsa, corresponding to different Himalayan regions. From early times the people of the Indian plains have been in contact with the Kaitragh region through many routes. Some of them were:

1. From Almora via Askot, Kheda, Gaya byang, Lipu Lekh Pass (16,750 ft.) & Taklakot to Xizang (Tarchen) 250 miles.
2. From Almora via Askot, Kheda, Darma Pass (18,519), and Gyanima Mandi 227 miles.
3. From Almora via Bagdibrar, Milam, Unta-Dhara Pass (17,900), Jyanti Pass (18,562), Kangri-Bingni Pass (18,300) and Gyanima Mandi 210 miles.
4. From Joshimath via Guela-Niti Pass (16,000), Nabara Mandi, Sibchilin Mandi and Gyanima Mandi 200 miles.
5. From Jashmatha via Dewan Niti Pass (16,200), Tungnath (16,350), Sibchilin Mandi and Gyanima Mandi 160 miles.
6. From Joshimath via Hosi-Niti Pass (16,390), Sibchilin Mandi and Gyanima Mandi 138 miles.
7. From Bhatinchala via Maha Pass (15,400), Thuling Maath, Dapa, Nabara, Sibchilin and Gyanima Mandi 233 miles.
9. From Simla via Rampur, Sibphki Pass, Shiring La, Thulign, Dapa, Sibchilin and Gyanima Mandi 243 miles.
10. From Simla via Rampur, Sibphki Pass, Shiring La, Thuling, Dapa, Sibchilin, and Gyanima Mandi 273 miles.
11. From Srinagar (Kashmir) via Zoji La (11,578), Namkum (13,290), Fotu La (13,416), Lech (Ladhakh), Taglang La (17,900), Dumtse, Gangotri, Garch, Changur La (16,200) and Tshapuri (16,605) miles.
12. From Kathmandu (Nepal) via Sikkim to Bhutan, Khodarnath and Taklakot 525 miles.
13. From Kulu in Kangra District through Rampur Badshah state to Thuring.

In the east there were routes connecting Assam with Tibet and China. One route passed through Yung-ti-sang and Wantag and corresponds to the Burma Road. Another route led from Szechuan to Lhassa and Acuti. Often pilgrims used to bypass Tibet in the north by following the Tangan Phe route. The twenty Chinese monks, who, according to T'ang, arrived in Lhasa during the reign of Srigumtza, who constructed for them a temple called Chimento Temple (Chirmatza). 40 Yogas to the east of the famous Mukchhul Mandi Temple at Nashida came by one of these routes. Chinese bacteria, trees, silks reached India along these routes, whence they
were carried to Bactriana before the journey of Chang-K’ien in the second century B.C. Later, the Chinese adventurer Wanghsuan-Tsche advanced along one of these routes to capture Kamaü after the demise of Hara and the usurpation of Arjuna or Aswini in the seventh century. According to the Mahabharata (VI, 177, 11-13) the Pandava brothers advanced north of Baddri and, scaling the Himalayas, probably via Mana Pass, Tshiling Math, Dapa, Nabur, Sibeilma and Gyanima Mandal, and passing through the lands of the Chinas, Tusaras, Darzadas, Kulindas etc reached the kingdom of the Kirata king Subahu. It is noteworthy that in subsequent Indian traditions, embodied in the Great Epics, the routes leading to Uttarakrura are said to pass through the Himalayas rather than the passes of the Hindu Kush and the Pansirs. It appears that either there was an infiltration of people from Uttarakrura to Kurukshetra along the Himalayan routes, besides the immigration of these peoples from Bactrian quarters along the northwestern passes, or, after the settlement of the Kuras in India, the tradition of their coming from the north-west was forgotten and a connection between their Indian abode and their archevat beyond the Himalayas was established through Himalayan routes, that were regularly in use.

NOTES

1. Mahabharata VI, 7, 11
3. Anchalaresita, I, 102, 10.
4. Ibid., II, 25, 5.
5. Ibid VI, 7, 6.

32


8. Mahabharata II, 25, 12.


10. Ibid III, 231, 14612.

11. Ibid V, 22, 8

12. Ibid II 48, 6.

13. Ibid VI, 6, 23.


15. Mahabharata XI, 25, 17

16. Ibid XIII, 57, 2958
18. Rgveda III, 23.
20. Jaiminiya Upanisad Brahmana III, 7, 6; VIII, 7, Kauśitaki Upanisad IV, 1; Gopāla Brahmana I, 2, 9; Kathā Śvetā, X, 6.
21. Pāncavimśa Brahmana XXV, 10; Satapatha Brahmana IV, 1, 5, 13; Aitareya Brahmana VII, 90; Jaiminiya Brahmana III, 126.
27. Buddha Prakāsha, Political and Social Movements in Ancient Panjab p. 23.

* Reproduced from 'Bulletin' 1965 : 1