

THE NARRATIVE OF PṚTHU VAINYA AND ITS ECONOMIC ASPECTS

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INTRODUCTION

The narrative of the celebrated king Pṛthu Vainya is characterized by a hoary antiquity which traces its roots in the Ṛg Veda, the most ancient of the Indian texts. The date of the Ṛg Veda as well as that of the entire corpus of literature which goes by the terms 'Vedic' or 'Vaidika' is a matter subjected to divergent debates and numerous controversies. Some of the serious scholars pursuing research in this field have dated the Ṛg Veda to around 3000-2500 BCE. Pṛthu Vainya, was known so as he was created from the body of Vena, a mystic in the Ṛg Veda and a tyrannical king in the Purāṇas. As per the narratives in Vedic Texts and the Purāṇas, Pṛthu was one of the primeval monarchs to rule the earth and set the whole creation in order by introducing agriculture, animal husbandry and trade as well as urbanization and foundation of rural settlements. All this, specially the production of food, was achieved by him by milking the earth which had assumed the form of a cow. The myth also speaks of Pṛthu as the inventor of cow-herding and trade. In other words the character of Pṛthu is closely associated with the concept of 'Vārttā'. This word is derived from the term 'Vṛtti' which implies livelihood and the branch of knowledge needed to earn one's living. The myth of Vena and Pṛthu appears in the highest number of Purāṇas and its origins are in the Vedas, specially Ṛg and Atharva Vedas (Nath 254). This is precisely the matter, i.e. the economic aspects of the narrative of Pṛthu Vainya specially in terms of the concept of Vārttā which will be investigated in the present research paper.

The whole concept Vārttā is deeply embedded in the puruṣārtha of Artha. Vārttā has been accorded the status of vidyā or a systematic knowledge system along with Ānviṣikī, Trayī and Daṇḍanīti. These four have been called vidyās by Kauṭilya in his Arthaśāstra (AŚ 1.2.1). Further, in the opinion of Kauṭilya these four vidyās help a man to understand Dharma and Artha (AŚ 1.2.8). According to Kauṭilya, all these constitute the Veda. The term vārttā according to Kauṭilya implies the occupations agriculture, animal husbandry and trade:

Kṛṣipāśupālye Vāñijyā Ca Vārttā (AŚ 1.4.1)

Since this vidyā helps an individual to avail of grain, animals (mainly cattle), money, forest produce and labour force this vidyā is very beneficial. The Kāmandakīya Nīṣāra is considered by some scholars as a summary of the Arthaśāstra. The date of this work is believed to be before the 7th century CE (Sastri v). Vārttā has been mentioned in the second sarga of the text as a branch of learning along with Ānviṣikī, Trayī and Daṇḍanīti. The text states that the king, after controlling his senses should concentrate on ensuring the development of these vidyās, seeking help from those well versed in them (Kām Nīt 2. 1). Next the text makes it clear that only these four are the eternal branches of learning (Kām Nīt 2.2) and equates Vārttā with the branch of knowledge that concerns itself with the gain and loss of wealth (Kām Nīt 2.7). Like the Arthaśāstra, this text too includes animal husbandry, agriculture and trade in the definition of Vārttā (Kām Nīt 2.14) and considers these three to be the means of livelihood for the Vaiśyas (Kām Nīt 2.20). The subject of Vārttā in the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa has been dealt in Lord Rāmā's advice to Bharata in the hundredth sarga of the Ayodhyākāṇḍa. Lord Rāma expects Bharata, as the administrator of the state to be aware of the three vidyās namely the three Vedas, Vārttā and Daṇḍanīti (Rām 2.100.68). He asks Bharata whether the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas are absorbed in their respective duties (Rām 2.100.40). Lord Rāma is shown to fully understand the importance of Vaiśyas in the running of the state and the economy and wants to ensure that Bharata loves the Vaiśyas whose source of Vārttā is agriculture and animal husbandry. He specially inquires about the welfare of the Vaiśyas whose Vārttā is sourced from trade, agriculture and cattle breeding (Rām 2.100.47). From the instances noted above it is clear that the ruler had to make sure that all his subjects had a source of living and specially those who are engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry and trade are not neglected as these vocations form the basis of the economy.

The Rājadharmānuśāsana Parvan which is a part of the Śānti Parvan of the Mahābhārata presents the counsel of Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhira on Rājadharmā or duties of a king. Among many other things, Bhīṣma speaks about the necessity of adequate artha or dhana which a king ought to possess. According to Bhīṣma's advice, the source of Dharma and Kāma is Artha and without Artha attainment of heaven and leading life on earth are both not possible (Mbh XII.8.17).

The Manu Smṛti discusses the duties of a king at length in its seventh adhyāya and states that a king must be trained in the four vidyās- Ānviṣikī, Trayī, Daṇḍanīti and Vārttā which have no temporal limits from those who

are knowledgeable in them. He should learn the Vārttā from the people. (Man Smṛ 7.43). The Yājñavalkya Smṛti refers to Vārttā in the opening śloka of the Rājadharmaprakaraṇam i.e. the section elucidating the duties of a king. Among other virtues, the king should be well versed in the four vidyās i.e. Ānvikṣikī, Daṇḍnī, Vārttā and Trayī (Yāj Smṛ 13.311).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prof. Vijay Nath (2009) in brief discusses the varied contexts in which the myth of Pṛthu appears in the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The myth through a number of texts serves a different purpose with reference to the central ideology and concept that shape a particular text. Nath emphasizes on the non-Vedic origins of Vena, and based on this conjecture she observes that Vena was an “aboriginal” chief who lived in the region of Aṅga (a part of the modern state of Bihar) and his character served as a symbol of resilience to the introduction of agriculture in this region by the “mainstream” society in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. Nath examines the myth of Pṛthu Vainya more from a social perspective and the origins of communities like Niśādas from the body of Vena. This myth carries a reference to the presence of local chiefs who were outside the Vedic culture and Vena could be one such chief (Nath 257). These chiefs perhaps posed a hindrance to the agricultural expansion of the people following the Vedic way of life. According to Nath, Vena represents the archetypal tribal chief who appropriated others’ wives and property (Nath 258). This is contended by Dr. Madhavi Narsalay. The whole myth of Pṛthu Vainya as incorporated across a sizeable number of texts is analyzed by Nath by centering her argument on the concept of acculturation or in other words a so called mainstream population engulfing the very existence of a so called peripheral community. In the narratives of a few texts like the Harivaṁśa and Brahma Purāṇa, Vena is projected as a king who imposes restrictions on Vedic practices and consequently comes in conflict with the sages who in turn take punitive action against him by killing him. Nath’s examination of this myth is more from a social and political perspective though she does touch upon the economic dimension as her article draws to a close.

Dr. Madhavi Narsalay (2009) examines the role of Vena who belonged to the clan of the Bhārgavas as a seer of certain Sūktas in the Ṛg and Atharva Vedas. She also analyzes Vena as a Vedic deity of the middle region. She has also dealt with the identity of the Vedic mystic Vena as synonymous with the tyrannical ruler of the Epics and Purāṇas. She unambiguously states that the two are in fact the same and the mystic Vena is identified as the father of Pṛthu in the Ṛg Veda (Narsalay 20). Dr. Narsalay concludes that the hymns of Vena which had a distinct trait of mysticism may not have gone too well with the adherents of the Vedic religion. The projection of Vena as an anti Vedic and despotic king could be attributed to this factor (Narsalay 22)

Acclaimed Sanskrit scholar Prof. Dr. Sindhu Dange (2016) has also alluded to the narrative of Pṛthu with respect to his birth from the right hand of Vena as well as the birth of Niśāda also from the body of Vena. Her references to the myth of Pṛthu and Vena lay emphasis on the origin of certain Non Vedic tribes like the Niśādas (Dange 71).

The present study has focused almost in entirety on the economic dimensions of the myth of Pṛthu Vainya as its other facets have been already dealt with by the aforementioned scholars.

METHODOLOGY

Inputs from research methods like the historical method as well as literary review have been incorporated in the present study. The study has also used methodological pointers from the branch of the discipline of Archaeology known as Processual Archaeology which attempts to understand ancient societies from the perspective of cultural processes which shaped them. Descriptive and analytical research methods have also been resorted to as per the requirements of the study.

DISCUSSION

The earliest references to Vena i.e. Pṛthu’s father and Pṛthu himself are found in the Ṛg Veda. In the Ṛg Veda, Vena comes forth as a mystic seer rather than the tyrannical ruler projected by later texts. We are told that Prithi Vainya invoked the Aśvins in the sacrificial chambers (R.V. 8.9.10). Prithi has been mentioned as invoking Indra in this Sūkta. In another Sūkta he has been mentioned as Venya and Indra is said to have been praised by Venya (R.V. 10.148). The next reference to Vena and Pṛthu is found in the Atharva Veda. The origins of the narrative of Pṛthu as the milker can be traced back to the Atharva Veda. However here, Pṛthu milks the goddess Virāj and not the earth and in fact the earth has been called the milking pail. The Atharva Veda says: She mounted up, she came to men. They called her, Come unto- us, come hither thou Free-giver!

Earth was her milking-pail, the calf beside her Manu Vaivasvata, Vivasvān’ s offspring.

Prithi the son of Vena was her milker: he milked forth husbandry and grain for sowing.

These men depend for life on corn and tillage. He who knows this becomes a meet supporter, successful in the culture of his corn-land. (A.V. 8.10.24)

The next noteworthy reference to Pṛthu is contained in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa which is affiliated to the Śukla Yajur Veda. Here Pṛthu is associated with a Soma Yajña and food. The relevant passage from this text reads like: “He then offers the Pārtha oblations. Now Pithin Vainya was consecrated first of men. He desired that he might appropriate to himself all food. They offered up for him those (oblations), and he appropriated to himself all the food here on earth. They would even call forest beasts to him, saying, ‘Come hither thou (beast) so and so, the king wants to cook thee! Thus he appropriated all food here on earth; and verily he appropriates to himself all food for whom that knows this those (oblations) are offered.” (Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa V.3.5.4).

Though there is no reference in this text to Pṛthu milking the earth in the form of a cow, he is invariably associated with food and more specifically food in the form of animal meat and not grains. Another significant reference to Pṛthu is obtained from the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa affiliated to the Sāma Veda. In this text, there is a mention of the Pārtha Sāman i.e. the chant of Prithi or Pṛthu. The text states that it was through this Sāman, Prithi the son of Vena got control over both kinds of animals i.e domestic and wild.

“He who in lauding has applied the Pārtha (sāman) gets the supremacy over both kinds of animals” (Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa XIII.5.19). Here again Pṛthu is comes in close connection with animals.

From the Vedic texts, we now turn our attention to the Epic Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. The Mahābhārata version of the myth of Pṛthu proceeds along the following narrative. After the Bharata War, Kṛṣṇa consoles Yudhiṣṭhira by narrating to him the upākhyānas or stories of different kings in adhyāya twenty-nine of the Śānti Parvan of the Māhābhārata. These upākhyānas have been narrated in the form of a dialogue between Nārada and Śṛṅjaya. As per the narrative in the Epic, The Mahārṣis consecrated Vena's son Pṛthu as a king in the forest (Mbh 12.29.129). Pṛthu was named so because he would establish (prathayīsyati) Dharma in all the lokas and as he would save people from kṣata or sorrow he was called a Kṣatriya (Mbh 12.29.130). Pṛthu Vainya (son of Vena) looked after his subjects (rañjana) so he was called Rājā (Mbh 12.29.131). During the reign of Pṛthu the earth produced grains without being ploughed, every tree was filled with honey, the cows produced plenty of milk (Mbh 12.29.132). There is also a reference to people living in fields as per their choice (kṣetreṣu) (Mbh 12.29.133).

Thus this myth of Pṛthu as given in the Mahābhārata, is devoid of his act of milking the earth-cow. However the Harivaṃśa, the Khila Parvan of the Mahābhārata which describes the life and feats of Kṛṣṇa has assigned a detailed treatment to Pṛthu and his milking the earth. As per this text Vena was born in the lineage of Aṅga who was born in the lineage of Atri. Vena did not perform his duties appropriately and behaved arbitrarily with his people (HV 1.5.3). We are told that under Vena, his subjects abandoned the study of the Vedas and making the call of Vaṣaṭ (HV 1.5.5). Vena, because of his arrogance was killed by the sages and Pṛthu emerged from his right hand (HV 1.5.21). Brahmā, the gods and the Aṅgirasas, all movable and immovable beings crowned Pṛthu as the king of the people (HV 1.5.26-27). Due to the affection (rañj) of the people towards Pṛthu, he was given the title of Rājā (HV 1.5. 29). The subjects appealed to Pṛthu to provide them with livelihood (HV 1.5.41). Pṛthu is said to have picked up his Ajāgava bow and arrows to kill the earth and feed his people (HV 1.5.42). The earth feared Pṛthu and assuming the form of a cow began to flee but Pṛthu caught up with her (HV 1.5.43). The earth requested Pṛthu to spare her and reminded him that she is the support of the whole world and in her absence his subjects would be destroyed (HV 1.5.48-49) and that she will be covered with food (HV 1.5.51). Pṛthu instructed the earth in the form of a cow to become his milk making daughter so that he could milk grains from her. (HV 1.6.6). She also requested Pṛthu to arrange for a calf for her for whom she could lactate. She also pleaded with the king to level her up so that her milk could flow without any obstacles and nourish the world (HV 1.6. 7-8).

In the Harivaṃśa, Vaiśampāyana tells Janmejaya that Pṛthu lifted rocks with the tip of his arrow and placed them on mountains. In the previous creation, when the surface of the earth was not leveled, there was no distinction between towns and villages. There was a total absence of grains, cowherding, ploughing and trade routes. All these things began to develop during the reign of Pṛthu Vainya (HV 1.6.9-11). The text also states that before the rule of Pṛthu Vainya, the subjects collected fruits and roots, but it was a tough act (HV 1.6.13). Pṛthu made Svāyambhuva Manu as the calf and milked different types of grains from the earth. Vaiśampāyana tells Janmejaya that the people have survived till the present times on these very grains (HV 1.6.14-15) After Pṛthu had milked the earth and divided her, the earth began to live with towns and villages and by giving grains as a form of tribute to the king (HV 1.6.41). As per her request Pṛthu also levelled her and the text tells us that once Pṛthu accomplished this task, towns and villages emerged and so did grains, cowherding, ploughing and trade routes. Therefore Pṛthu has been called the primordial giver of livelihood: ‘Sanātanaḥ Vṛttidaḥ’ (HV 1.6.43). The text suggests that apart from Brāhmaṇas and Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas too should revere Pṛthu as he provided them with livelihood (HV 1.6.47).

After the discussion of the Pṛthu narrative in the Harivaṃśa, let us now focus on the narrative of Pṛthu incorporated into the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa is one of the major Purāṇas and is counted among the list of eighteen major Purāṇas. It dates approximately to the 5th -6th centuries of the Common Era. Pṛthu, in this text is regarded as an aṃśa of Viṣṇu (V.P.1.13.45). It is said that during the reign of Pṛthu, the earth produced food grains without ploughing and sowing. Grains would be produced just by thought and the cows were like Kāmadhenu yielded plenty of milk (V.P. 1.13.50). As a consequence of anarchy during the time of Vena the earth hid all the herbs and grains within her and the people were starving and they appealed to Pṛthu to save

them (V.P. 1.13.66). Pṛthu, paying heed to the appeals of the people set out to attack the earth and make her produce food with his Ajāgava bow and arrows (V.P. 1.13.69). The earth assumed the form a cow but Pṛthu followed her in all the worlds including Brahma Loka (V.P. 1.13.70-71) The earth requested Pṛthu to milk her and the herbs and grains will be extracted from her in the form of milk. She further tells the king to bring her a calf and out of motherly love for this calf the earth could produce milk. In addition the king was also requested by the earth to level her so that the milk could spread everywhere and grains and herbs could grow (V.P. 1.13.78-81). The sage Parāśara tells Maitreya that Pṛthu, with the tip of his bow leveled the entire earth and before this there was no distinction between villages and cities. Before Pṛthu there was no proper sequence in food grains, cowherding, agriculture and trade (V.P. 1.13.82-84). Before the leveling of the earth, the people fed on fruits and roots and that too became difficult when the earth hid all the herbs and grains in her (V.P.1.13.86). Pṛthu made Svāyambhuva the calf and milked the earth in the form of the cow and extracted various kinds of grains and herbs from her and fed his people. The residents of the earth are surviving on these very grains (V.P. 1.13.87-88). After Pṛthu, the earth was milked by various kinds of beings.

After reviewing the myth of Pṛthu Vainya as given in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the version of the myth as found in Bhāgavata Purāṇa will now be given consideration. Of the various versions of the Pṛthu myth included in the Epics and Purāṇas, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa version is the most detailed. The Purāṇa states that Pṛthu single handedly in his own body, in the course of time, will maintain all living beings. He will take the forms of the Lokapālas and perform various departmental matters. Moreover, in the proper course of time, Pṛthu will also maintain the earth by bringing proper rainfall (B.P. 4.16.5). The text further adds that Pṛthu will extract taxes from the people and return their money in times of need (B.P. 4.16.6). When there is no rainfall and the subjects will have to face a famine, Pṛthu who is an incarnation of Viṣṇu will be able to provide rains exactly the same way as Indra does. Thus he will be able to protect his subjects from drought with no difficulty (B.P. 4.16.8). Pṛthu is considered to be equal to Prajāpati and we are told that he will milk the earth, which is like a cow. He will also break the mountains with his bow and level the earth with the tip of his bow just like Indra breaks mountains with his thunderbolt. (B.P. 4.16.22). Sage Maitreya tells Vidura that when Pṛthu was consecrated as king by the great sages and Brāhmaṇas with them declaring that he will be the protector of the subjects, there was a shortage of food grains. The subjects became emaciated because of starvation. The subjects approached Pṛthu and told them about the real situation. (B.P.4.1.9)

The subjects appealed to Pṛthu to provide them with all kinds of occupations and livelihood. He is called Vṛttikāra. He is called the master of people's livelihood. The subjects entreated Pṛthu to feed them by proper distribution of food grains. (B.P.4.17.10-11). The king contemplated on the appeal of his people and to redress their grievances he took his bow and arrow and aimed them towards the earth (B.P. 4.17.13).The earth pleaded to Pṛthu to spare her but Pṛthu tells the earth that she accepted her share from the yajñas but in return she did not produce adequate food grains (B.P. 4.17.22).

Pṛthu tells the earth that though she is feeding on green grass she is not filling her milk bag with milk to nourish living beings (B.P. 4.17.23). The earth does not supply herbs and grains which were originally created by Brahmā which are now hidden within the earth (B.P. 4.17.24). The earth says that seeds, roots, herbs and grains were created by Brahmā in the past and are now used by people who are devoid of good conduct (B.P. 4.18.6). The earth puts forth her predicament that she is not being taken care of as the kings are not taking any action against the thieves who use the grains for sense gratification. Hence the earth has hidden all the seeds which are meant for the Vedic yajñas (B.P. 4.18.7). The earth tells Pṛthu to extract the grains and herbs in the prescribed way from her (B.P. 4.18.8). The earth suggests to Pṛthu to bring her calf whom she could lactate to with love and through this milk the grains will be supplied to the people. Pṛthu is also told by the earth to arrange for a pot and a milkman for this purpose (B.P. 4.18.9-10). The earth further tells Pṛthu to level her as it will help her even after the rains have stopped. The advent of rain is attributed to Indra. The rainfall will remain on the surface of the earth and keep her moistened, thus enabling her to produce all kinds of grains. (B.P. 4.18.11) The Purāṇa also makes a point regarding the creation of water bodies and making the earth fit for agriculture. Pṛthu made Svāyambhuva Manu the calf and milked all kinds of herbs and grains from the earth. (B.P. 4.18.12) The earth supplied food to classes of beings. The earth was fully under the control of Pṛthu and all the residents of the earth could receive their food by creating different kinds of calves and storing their particular milk in numerous pots. (B.P. 4.18.26)

Pṛthu made the earth flat by demolishing hills with his bow (B.P. 4.18.29). Pṛthu was like a father to all his subjects. He arranged for their subsistence and gave them employment to earn their livelihood (B.P. 4.18.30). Pṛthu is also said to have founded different kinds of villages, towns, forts, cowherd settlements, cow pens, camps, mines, agricultural settlements and mountain villages (B.P. 4.18.31). In the Ancient Indian tradition, agriculture, trade routes and mines have been regarded as some of the most lucrative resources of revenue available to a king.

As per the narrative given in the Skanda Purāṇa (Sk P. V.2.49, Part XIII), we find in the Avanti Khaṇḍa, a list of numerous Śiva Liṅgas located within the city of Ujjayinī. One such Śiva Linga was known as Pṛthukeśvara. As per this version, in the lineage of Svāyambhuva Manu, a despot called Vena was born. Vena is said to be a non believer in the Vedas and had swerved from the path of Dharma or righteousness. He would apportion the finances of shrines and carry off others' wives. He was cursed by the Brāhmaṇas and he died consequently. The

Brāhmaṇas churned out of his body many not so civilized communities. Pṛthu was churned out of his right hand and he was righteousness personified. Pṛthu was saddened to see the plight of the subjects who were unable to perform the Vedic rites and also faced a paucity of wealth. Pṛthu decided to extract the essence of all the three worlds to make his subjects content. Nārada is said to have told Pṛthu that all the crops and vegetation have been hidden by the earth. Pṛthu was greatly infuriated by Nārada's words and he was determined to burn down the earth and shot a fire weapon towards her. The earth began to burn and in extreme desperation approached Pṛthu in the form of a cow. She entreated Pṛthu to bring a calf to her and milk her. Pṛthu complied and the Himālaya Mountain was made the calf and Pṛthu milked all kinds of vegetation and precious gems from the earth. The earth's milking led to the subjects being well fed and wealthy. They resumed the practice of Vedic rituals like Yajña and Dāna. Pṛthu however was repenting for having attacked the earth-cow who was a female and made up his mind to immolate himself as an expiation. However Nārada prevented Pṛthu from taking such an extreme step and advised him to pay his respects to a Śiva Linga in the Mahākālavana which wipes off all sins. Pṛthu did accordingly and was absolved of all his sins. This Śiva Linga came to be known as Pṛthukeśvara as it was worshipped by Pṛthu.

The Kūrma Purāṇa has little new to offer in its version of the Pṛthu Myth. The Purāṇa remarks that in the past Pṛthu milked the earth in the form of a cow for the welfare of his people along with Indra on the orders of Brahmā (Kūr P13.11). The Brahma Purāṇa (Chapter 2) version agrees largely with one found in the Harivaṃśa. So does the version of the Vāyu Purāṇa. In the Padma Purāṇa, (Sṛṣṭi Khaṇḍa Adhyāya 9) Pṛthu is considered to be a form of Viṣṇu. The whole world was filled with adharma or unrighteousness and the Pṛthu decided to punish the earth. However, the earth entreated him to spare her and on his orders agreed to produce objects which were meant for the welfare of the world. Making Svāyambhuva the calf, Pṛthu milked the cow and this milk transformed into food grains for people to subsist on. The version of this myth in the Matsya Purāṇa (Adhyāya 10) matches very closely with that of the Padma Purāṇa.

The Manu Smṛti refers to both Vena and Pṛthu stating that Vena like a few other rulers, namely Nahuṣa, Sudāsa, Sumukha and Nimi was destroyed on account of his avinaya i.e. whereas kings like Pṛthu and Manu acquired kingdoms on account of the quality of vinaya that they possessed (Manu Smṛ 7.41-42). Kullūkabhāṭṭa in his commentary named Manvarthamuktāvalī composed on the Manu Smṛti states that here the term 'vinaya' implies strict adherence to the Śāstras and avoiding those actions which have been prohibited by them. The term 'vinaya' is to be also understood as the mind and body discipline which every ruler must practice.

The highly acclaimed poet-playwright Kālidāsa (c. late 4th -early 5th century CE) has alluded to Pṛthu milking the earth-cow in the second śloka of the first sarga of his Kumārasambhava Mahākāvya. This reference comes in the context of Kālidāsa's very aesthetically imbued description of the Himālaya Mountain. The mountains made Himālaya the calf or vatsa and it was the mythical mountain Meru who took upon the role of the milker of the earth-cow and milked from her jewels and medicinal herbs as guided by Pṛthu (Kumārasambhava 1.2).

After the review of the various versions of the narrative of Pṛthu Vainya across texts, a brief discussion shall be undertaken pertaining to the history of agriculture, cattle herding, urbanization and trade in the Indian Sub-continent which to a certain may help understand the context of this narrative.

The practice of agriculture along with the domestication of certain species of animals was a major paradigmatic shift in the history of humanity. Both these phenomena formed integral elements of what eminent archaeologist V.G. Gordon Childe referred to as the Neolithic Revolution (Childe ch.V). The world witnessed the rise of primeval agricultural villages around 8000-6000 BCE. This period in archaeological parlance is termed as the 'Neolithic or New Stone Age'. Among the earliest sites to furnish evidence of agriculture and animal domestication is Mehrgarh in the Baluchistan Province of present day Pakistan. The excavations at Mehrgarh revealed the cultivation of crops like wheat and barley along with the domestication of animals like cattle, sheep and goats, thus making Mehrgarh one of the oldest agricultural zones in South Asia (Singh 210). The origins of agriculture and the animal domestication were the products of a long chain of experiments involving a number of generations. Human intervention and monitoring were the two key elements in the processes of plant and animal domestication. Agriculture paved the way for man to modify his subsistence strategies. The Hunting-Gathering mode of life gradually made way for a settled life. This transformation led to the emergence of more complex social, economic and political paradigms, best represented by the beginnings of incipient trade networks and state formation processes. Acclaimed archaeologist V.G. Gordon Childe coined the term 'Neolithic Revolution' to encapsulate the domestication of plants and animals in the Neolithic Age (Childe ch. V). However later scholars have expressed the opinion that rather being a 'revolution' this process was more of 'evolution' spread over several centuries or even millennia. Childe's theory which laid too much emphasis on environmental changes was challenged by Robert J. Braidwood (Braidwood, 1960) which in turn was refuted by Lewis R. Binford (Binford, 1968). Lewis R. Binford attributed the invention of agriculture to what he termed as 'external demographic stress' which implies the migration of a group of people from one region to another (Binford 331). Towards the end of the Pleistocene Age (around 12,000 years before present) the sea levels began to rise, compelling the people living on sea coasts to migrate to the hinterland. This automatically put pressure on food production in these regions which resulted in the innovation of techniques like agriculture to feed the increased population (Binford 331).

As far as the domestication of animals is concerned cattle, sheep and goats displayed a quicker pace of domestication, practiced when compared to other animals like the horse. The process of animal domestication is evident from the faunal remains found in archaeological excavations and explorations. Similarly plant remains in the form of grains and husks or impressions of the same on pottery and lumps of clay aid the understanding of plant domestication and agriculture. Domestication of plants and animals did not completely halt the hunter-gather way of life though its scale may have reduced. Agrarian communities continued to collect naturally available plant products and hunt animals for food. The Neolithic levels unearthed at the site of Mehrgarh reveal a distinct transition from hunting to the domestication of animals (Singh 213). This is evident from the predominance of wild faunal levels in the older levels and their decreasing number with the progress of time. Apart from Mehrgarh, the regions now known as Afghanistan and Pakistan were dotted with many Neolithic sites which were marked with agrarian production, animal domestication and the manufacture and use of pottery. The northern Vindhyan ranges (corresponding to the southern parts of Uttar Pradesh) have put forward evidence for numerous Neolithic sites which were characterized by the cultivation of rice and domestication of cattle. The site of Lahuradeva in the state of Uttar Pradesh is well known as one of the earliest centres of rice domestication which was approximately coeval with the cultivation of rice and barley. The land of Kashmir too had its unique Neolithic Culture with sites like Burzahom and Gufkral emerging as the major sites. Other parts of India like Bihar, the North Eastern Region, Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka had their own Neolithic Cultural sites with their distinct repertoire of material culture.

From purely stone using cultures, communities which commenced the use of metals started emerging towards the end of the Neolithic Period. Agriculture and trade (internal and external) formed the economic foundations of the Harappan or the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization. The early ploughs were made of wood. At the Harappan civilization site of Kalibangan in Rajasthan, a ploughed field discovered by the excavators B.B. Lal and B.K. Thapar in the pre-Harappan levels and this is the earliest recorded find of a ploughed field in the world (Randhawa 156).

However, in certain parts of South Asia, there is no clear line of demarcation between the Neolithic and Bronze Age Cultures which also bear the nomenclature 'Chalcolithic Cultures'. The rural Chalcolithic Cultures which flourished after the decline of the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization in parts of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra were also engaged in the cultivation of crops and rearing of domestic animals.

Agriculture and pastoralism were both practiced by the Vedic people and through the course of centuries the prominence of agriculture ascended. The Vedic people were mainly pastoralists though they cultivated wheat and barley. There are references in Vedic literature to ploughs being pulled by two to eight bullocks (Randhawa 297). There are in all twenty-one references to ploughing and agriculture in the Ṛg Veda and most of these are found in the first and tenth Maṇḍalas which are considered to be later additions (Randhawa 297). In the Atharva Veda, which is posterior to Ṛg Veda, the earth has been called the bearer of plants of many uses and she is prayed to for stretching out her hand and being bountiful to the people (A.V. XII.i). With the dawn of the Iron Age, wooden ploughs were provided with iron ploughshares and this led to more effective cultivation as well as expansion of agriculture. There are plentiful references to agriculture in the contemporary Buddhist literature. Coming to the Mauryan Age, where the State took the initiative to bring more land under farming, there are references in the Arthaśāstra to crown lands (sīta lands- furrowed lands) and their ploughing and the sowing of seeds in them by slaves and prisoners (AŚ 2.24.2). The Mauryans were succeeded by ruling houses like the Śuṅgas, Kuṣāṇas and Śātavāhanas. The period following the Mauryas witnessed a tremendous expansion of agriculture and the resultant settlements. In other words, newer areas were brought under cultivation and the agrarian base of the economy was strengthened. Contemporary inscriptions indicate the donation of fields and villages to religious establishments as well as individuals by the ruling class.

These developments were also mirrored in texts as well and here a few references from certain Smṛti texts have been cited. While discussing the sources of Vārttā for the four Varṇas, the Viṣṇu Smṛti states that the sources of Vārttā for the Vaiśyas is agriculture, cattle herding, trade and kusīda (Viṣṇu Smṛti 2nd Adhyāya). The Viṣṇu Smṛti also provides details regarding the manufacture of a plough, harnessing oxen to a plough and taking measures for their protection, the greatness of rain that falls from the sky onto the surface of the earth, production of crops from the womb of the earth, the type of soil to be used for agriculture and the rite of Sītā Yajña. The Bṛhat Parāśara Smṛti glorifies agriculture as the best and Kṛṣi or agriculture is the greatest of all Dharmas and there is no vocation superior to it. Moreover the text reiterates that there is no higher bliss than agriculture when practiced in conformity to dharma (Bṛhat Parāśara Smṛti 5th Adhyāya). The Vṛddha Hārīta Smṛti gives the stature of a sāmānya dharma to agriculture which can be pursued by all the four social classes. (Vṛddha Hārīta Smṛti 4.172). Further all the four Varṇas are permitted to practice the two occupations of agriculture and cattle herding (Vṛddha Hārīta Smṛti 4.175). The composition of highly specialized texts focusing on the science and technique of agriculture like the Kṛṣi Pārāśaraḥ endorse wide practice and deep percolation of farming activities among the Indian populace by the Early Medieval Period (Nagarkar 19).

We have thus observed that agriculture and animal domestication were the two principal cultural markers of the Neolithic Age. This Age also witnessed the rise of exchange networks, albeit very rudimentary between sites across geographical zones in the Indian Subcontinent. The basis for trade was certainly the generation of surplus produce which could be exchanged with other kinds of goods. Thus, man gradually advanced from

agrarian production for mere subsistence to the growth of surplus. Some of the agrarian villages steadily transformed into urban centres by the time we arrive at the age of the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization (c. 3500 BCE-1900 BCE), known alternatively as the Indus Valley Civilization and the Harappan Civilization. The Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization not only established trade relations with other coterminous cultures in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf but also among the various sites belonging to it as well as other contemporary cultures in the Indian Subcontinent. Large cities, smaller towns and rural settlements contributed their own share with respect to the trade of the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization. Both- raw materials and finished goods formed a part of the exchange networks. After the decline of this Civilization, the rural cultures which flourished in the Indian Subcontinent did engage in trade. The Vedic literary corpus alludes to a class of merchants known as Paṇis. Around the 7th -6th centuries BCE, the Gaṅgā Valley witnessed the rise of cities which is denoted in archaeological terms as the Second Urbanization. Some of the villages of the Gaṅgā Valley which were dominated by a culture known as the Painted Grey Ware began to develop into urban centres. Apart from the rise of urban centres, a rich produce from which surplus could be drawn, revival of dynamic trade networks, emergence of coinage in the form of silver punch marked coins, greater craft specialization and production as well as the emergence of states known as the Mahājanapadas characterized the Second Urbanization. The cities of the Early Historical Period evolved as nuclei of a number of multifarious economic activities with a substantial proportion of businesses and craft production combined with craft specialization. A sizeable number of Ancient Indian texts have plentiful descriptions of cities and invariably the economic dimensions of these cities have generated much attention. Cities also functioned as emporia for the exchange of merchandise which becomes apparent from the wide spread sale and use of luxury products arriving from various locations to the markets of a given Early Historical Indian city. Apart from a wide range of service based vocations, the elaborate descriptions of cities in ancient texts also underline the increasing scale and complexity of the material culture of the said period (Nagarkar 51).

The Pṛthu narrative as is seen in texts from the Harivaṁśa onwards, presupposes the process of urbanization. These narratives are well aware of cities and villages being two distinct categories of settlements though their interdependence cannot be negated. Both were considered essential units of an economy. It is conjectured by the present author that the Pṛthu narratives-the ones found in the Harivaṁśa and later texts may carry imprints of the culmination of the process of the Second Urbanization by the period stretching from the 2nd century BCE to the 2nd century CE which witnessed the rise of numerous trade centres all over the Indian Subcontinent. The pre-urban settlements were invariably rural in character depending chiefly on agriculture and animal husbandry with minimal trade though they did differ from each other in terms of size, material culture and resource exploitation. Many cities like Mathurā in fact started off as spartan rural settlements and if some credence is given to the narratives from the Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa and Harivaṁśa, the pre-cursor to the Kuṣāṇa Metropolis of Mathurā could have been a modest settlement in the midst of a forested area known to these texts as Madhuvana. The birth of Buddhism and the rejuvenation of Jainism in the sixth century BCE played crucial role in process of the Second Urbanization. Both these religious sects wholeheartedly supported the mercantile communities and encouraged trade and agriculture. The Buddha specially had many followers who were professionally merchants and caravan leaders. The successive ages which experienced the reign of dynasties like the Mauryas, Pāṇdyas, Colas, Śuṅgas, Śakas, Indo-Greeks, Kuṣāṇas, Satavahanas and Guptas saw a steady rise in the volume of Indian Trade-both internal and foreign. The rules of the Śakas, Kuṣāṇas and Sātavāhanas are acclaimed for the immensely profitable trade with the Roman Empire. The Indo-Roman Trade which reached its high point during the first two centuries of the Common Era, brought in unprecedented wealth into the Indian Subcontinent. Its ramifications could be felt not only on the polity and economy but also in the fields of religion and art.

It was through the Grand Route of Northern India that armies of the Achaemenian kings like Cyrus and Darius, Alexander, Scythians, Parthians, Tukharas, Huṅas and Turks entered the mainland of India through this Grand Route (Moti Chandra ch.1). The part of this route from Balkh to Takṣaśilā has been referred to as 'Haimāvata Patha' by Kauṭilya (Moti Chandra 5). The Indian Mainland had two principal trade routes- one was the trade route across North India which was known as the Uttarāpatha and the other being in the Deccan and South India, acclaimed as the Dakṣiṇāpatha (Moti Chandra ch.1). The Uttarāpatha connected the city of Rajagṛha (modern Rajgir in Bihar) to Takṣaśilā via Mathurā (Moti Chandra 16). The Dakṣiṇāpatha comprised many sub-trade routes and it was on these trade routes that most Buddhist monasteries were situated. Brisk trade and movement were carried out on both these routes. These routes were also frequently treaded upon by the Buddhist Monks. The northern and southern parts of India were well connected to each other through a dense network of trade routes. Ports on the western coast of India like Sopārā and Kalyāṇa near Mumbai were connected to the hinterland by a few trade routes, the most significant and busy being the Nāṇeghāt. The region of Mālavā (modern Indore-Ujjain Region) went across the Sahyādri Ranges through Nāṇeghāt to ultimately reach the bustling port of Sopārā which was the capital of the province known as Aparānta (North Konkan in Maharashtra) (Moti Chandra 24). The trade route passing through Nāṇeghāt was controlled by the Sātavāhanas almost from the start of their reign and the famed record of the Sātavāhana queen Nāganikā (wife of Sātakarṇi I) has been inscribed in the Pratimāghara (Image Gallery) at Nāṇeghāt.

Kauṭilya in his Arthaśāstra provides an injunction by which the state official known as Ākārādhyakṣa who himself is an expert in sciences related to metallurgy and gemology like Śulbaśāstra, Dhātuśāstra, Rasapāka and Maṇirāga or who could seek the help of those well versed in these disciplines should discover mines. This should be done with aid of labourers skilled in such kind of work and the proper equipment. Indications for old mines could include the presence of coal, ash etc. and new mines could be searched for with the help ores found from the earth or rocks which could be deep coloured, bulky and possessing a strong odour and smell (AŚ 2.12.1). After providing the details of the nature and methods to identify ores and extraction of metals from them, Kauṭilya prescribes the manufacture of articles from these metals in state-run factories (Karmāntāh) meant for this purpose as well as the trade in such articles at a single place only (AŚ 2.12.18-19). Going ahead, the Arthaśāstra not only instructs the Lohādhyakṣaḥ or the officer in charge of metals to set up factories for the production of objects from metals like copper, bronze, iron etc. but also assigns him with the responsibility to arrange for the sale of the finished metal objects (AŚ 2.12.23). The Superintendent of Mines (Khanyadhyakṣaḥ) had to set up factories where products would be fashioned out of materials like conches, diamonds, gems, pearls, coral etc. (AŚ 2.12.27). One fact which can be clearly gleaned in the context of the above details furnished by the Arthaśāstra is that mines were lucrative sources of income for the state and therefore their discovery and upkeep had to be undertaken by the state. Moreover the state had to employ officers and labour for this end. The state through the state employees had to take the initiative for the manufacture and sale of metal and other related goods which would in turn generate finances for the state and empower the treasury. This kind of state initiative implies that one of the principal functions of the state, as envisaged by Kauṭilya was the provision of Vārttā to the subjects and the mines, the manufacturing units and the sales mechanisms were steps in the same direction.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The narrative of Pṛthu Vainya which features across the Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic genres of Indian Literature is one of the most prominent cosmological episodes and is subject to a multi dimensional interpretation. As it will be gleaned from the forthcoming discussion, Pṛthu first appears within the fold of Indian Mythology in the Ṛg Veda. Ever since his mention in the Atharva Veda, which is certainly posterior to the Ṛg Veda, Pṛthu is intimately associated with food. He milks the goddess known as Virāj and extracts grains for sowing and husbandry. Thus the two most fundamental foundations of human economic enterprise have been alluded to. Here, it should be pointed out that though the grains are themselves food, they are supposed to be sown. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the mainstay of the Indian Economy ever since the inception of plant and animal domestication around the 8th -7th millennia BCE. Food in the form of grains, meat and milk formed a part of the essential dietary needs of ancient man. Food was considered as the origin of the material world. Whether it is the people of the Sindhu- Sarasvatī Civilization or the Vedic folk, ancient Indians subsisted mainly on agriculture and animal domestication and at a slightly later stage, trade too became a major economic activity thus completing the triad of the earliest vocations practiced by man since the Neolithic Age (New Stone Age). In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Pṛthu comes forth as the one who devoured all kinds of food. The Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa projects Pṛthu as being connected to all kinds of animals. In all ancient civilizations animals were ready sources of milk and meat. In spite of the practice of agriculture, meat formed an indivisible part of ancient diets. The reference to Pṛthu in the Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa vividly indicates that by around the middle of the 2nd millennium BCE the domestication of certain species of animals had become completely established and the people perceived separate categories of animals- the domestic ones which were maintained within the settlement and the wild ones that inhabited forested areas and were occasionally hunted. Bones of domestic animals slaughtered for food form a significant part of the archaeological assemblages recovered from excavations. The myth of Pṛthu, as comprehended from the above two Brāhmaṇa texts must be viewed in this context. The character of Pṛthu undergoes a noteworthy transformation through the course of centuries and it is in the Mahābhārata that he shines forth as an ideal king. His being a role-model monarch springs from the natural marvels attached to his reign- the earth producing grains without being ploughed and cows yielding milk in abundant quantities. Though agriculture had progressed considerably, it was still wrought with a high degree of uncertainty since it was chiefly dependent on rain though we do find references to irrigation in the Mahābhārata as well. Thus for these obvious reasons, grain being produced from the womb of the earth without resorting to agriculture was indeed a miracle and perhaps something that every agriculturalist could have aspired for. Cows producing large quantities of milk was, like agriculture, a phenomenon which the pastoralists hoped for. In the mythical universe of the Mahābhārata these two ideal situations were invariably linked to the just rule of Pṛthu. The Harivamśa, the sequel to the Mahābhārata presents the myth of Pṛthu in deep connection with Vārttā or the ancient science of earning a living. Most ancient texts converge on the point that agriculture, animal husbandry and trade are the most standard sources of Vārtā. In the Harivamśa, Pṛthu has been lauded as the Primeval Giver of Livelihood to his people. The king was wholly responsible to ensure that his people had a proper source of livelihood and that they were well fed. Pṛthu milked the earth to make provisions for food for his subjects. The origins of agriculture, ploughing, cattle herding and trade routes are attributed to Pṛthu. Thus apart from agriculture and cattle herding, the king had to encourage trade and

commerce in his domain which would lead to the state finances getting stronger. We can clearly discern from the version of the Pṛthu myth in the Harivaṁśa that, Pṛthu facilitated the spread of agriculture and settlements by flattening the surface of the earth. The text mentions the emergence of cities and villages and ascribes it to Pṛthu. We may fathom that there was a clear distinction between urban and rural settlements though apparently both owed their origin to Pṛthu and though the text explicitly does not say so, these settlements were a product of heightened agricultural activities, so also trade. One pertinent statement which the text makes is that it refers to the gathering of naturally available plant products before the commencement of agriculture. This is a historical fact. Before the invention of farming, primitive man subsisted on hunting and gathering and once the resources of a given area would deplete, he would move to a new region. The stone tools manufactured by early man were fashioned in such a way as to facilitate hunting and gathering. The reference to the people eating naturally available fruits and roots comes forth as an allusion to the pre-agrarian way of life. Further, as it will be soon understood, the text refers to the earth paying tribute in the form of grains to Pṛthu. This is a reflection of the Ancient Indian fiscal conditions. As attested by many ancient texts, the subjects had to pay 1/6th of the total agricultural produce to the state. This tax would be thus in kind and other duties imposed by the state had to be paid mainly in cash. The earth thus paying the tribute is a metaphor employed for the actual submission of the agricultural tax by the people. The king collected the tax from his subjects in return of which he extended his protection to them.

The narrative of Pṛthu in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa is not much different from the one included in the Harivaṁśa. It is said that due to the despotic rule of Vena, the earth hid all the herbs and grains within her and it was through her milking that Pṛthu was able to extract food grains from her and satiate the hunger and other needs of his people. Pṛthu is said to have not only initiated a proper sequence in the sources of living but also leveled the earth for the spread of the milk. The spread of milk symbolizes the expansion of agricultural activities. Similarly Pṛthu is also credited for the establishment of towns and villages, clearly distinct from each other. Thus a hierarchy in the categories of settlements can be made out. We may also speculate that the earth concealing vegetation within herself may be an indication of some kind of famine or some kind of an adverse climatic condition. This however, needs a rejoinder from the analysis of the palaeo-environment.

In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Pṛthu has been elevated to the stature of a part and incarnation of Viṣṇu respectively. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa rendition of the Pṛthu myth seems to be broadly based on the versions one encounters in the Harivaṁśa and the Viṣṇu Purāṇa. Pṛthu is also endowed with super natural powers like bringing rain as a remedy to a famine. The famine situation is further reiterated in this Purāṇa by the statement that when Pṛthu was consecrated as a king there was a shortage of grains and vegetation which had been gutted by the earth. Apart from his subjects going hungry, the text emphasizes the requirement of grains for the performance of Vedic yajñas. The production of food is seen concomitant with the performance of yajñas. The narrative in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa endorses a draught condition and it is the prime responsibility of the king to ensure that the basic needs of his people like hunger and means of livelihood are settled. The importance of rain and water bodies in the growth of agriculture has also been reaffirmed. Here too we can discern the almost complete dependence of agriculture on rainfall. The Bhāgavata Purāṇa narrative bespeaks of a greater categorization of settlements apart from towns and villages. Fortified settlements have a hoary history dating back to at least the Sindhu-Sarasvatī Civilization and mines were, as reflected in ancient texts like the Arthaśāstra and Kāmandakīya Nīṭisāra, a major source of income for the state. Though mines are a natural resource, they have been given an origin attributed to Pṛthu. This could in a way point to the necessity of mines in a given province for exploitation of mineral resources. Further, the narrative of this myth in the Skanda Purāṇa, in no uncertain terms refers to the appropriation of the finances of religious institutions. It could be added here that since the Early Historical Period or a little earlier religious institutions or monasteries affiliated to Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism received substantial financial support from the laity – both royals as well as commoners. This practice became all the more prevalent from the Gupta Period onward and evidence garnered from literary and epigraphical sources reiterates it. Situations like the one described in the Skanda Purāṇa may have arisen frequently and were vehemently condemned as acts of Adharma. The versions of the Pṛthu myth in other Purāṇas are not much in contrast to the others analyzed above.

We will now briefly touch upon the implications of the Pṛthu narrative from the perspective of a myth. With the invention of agriculture, man was prompted to consider the earth as an endless repository of food (Armstrong 35). In the opinion of Karen Armstrong, "Agriculture resulted in a great spiritual development that helped people in generating a whole new understanding about themselves and the world around" (Armstrong 35). Initially, as Armstrong points out, when man gradually began to practice agriculture, he was overawed with it and visualized it as something supra-worldly (Armstrong 35).

A myth is defined as "essentially an imagined situation or we could say that it is an expression of an understanding that is imagined as true and which has got rooted in the tradition (Dange lix). Further, Prof. Sadashiv Dange defines a myth as, "A traditional tale involving non-artful expression of a wonderful experience, or of a problematic situation, faithfully accepted by a society or a tribe" (Dange 6). The wide provenance of the myth of Pṛthu across texts belonging to various genres like the Vedic Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Mahābhārata, Harivaṁśa, Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Purāṇas, the Manu Smṛti and the Kumārasambhava best illustrates this and testifies to not only its acceptance by but also popularity in a fairly large section of the ancient and early

medieval Indian society. Prof. Dange further elaborates that in a given social group a myth has a multi-functional role to play. It provides the basis of not only social institutions like marriage but also economic institutions (Dange 81). The myth of Pṛthu perfectly exemplifies this statement. Many myths may be quasi-historical – as is the case with the myth of Pṛthu and the historical core may lie inside, enveloped by layers and layers of constructed narratives which could well be the outcomes of imagination. As per Joseph Campbell classification, the myth of Pṛthu would fall into the categories cosmological and sociological myths. Sociological myths are such that they present an explanation and foundation for the social order in a given society. The economic aspects of a society could also well be considered as a dimension of the larger social structure (Dange lix). P. Thomas states that “myths are thought fossils which tell us in allegories and symbols the story of cultures and civilizations that preceded ours and the attempts of primitive man to solve various human problems.” (Thomas 3). Thomas considers Pṛthu as the inventor of agriculture among the Indo-Aryans (Thomas 118) though this view certainly demands reexamination specially in the context of the recent developments in the research domains of Vedic studies and archaeology. The myth of Pṛthu can with certainty be looked upon as an allegory and symbol developed by the ancient Indian society as an explanation for the practices of agriculture, animal husbandry and trade which were the very modes of sustenance for it. Production of grains and milk are construed as divine phenomena and symbols of abundance. Pṛthu is considered to be the first king and it was the duty of the king to arrange for the livelihood to his subjects. Agriculture, cattle herding and trade –all the three are interrelated and the myths portray Pṛthu's initiative and thus underline the role of the state in this matter. The leveling of the earth signifies making regions suitable for agriculture and bringing more regions under cultivation and settlement. This process specially intensified after the 6th century BCE as the Second Urbanization became apparent. The Arthaśāstra is evidential with regard to the state taking a special initiative in the spread of agriculture. The practice of agriculture, animal husbandry and trade assumed an integral part of Dharma (righteousness and performance of one's duties, not religion) and social order. The milking of the earth in the form of a cow represents a metaphor from the pastoral way of life and the Ṛg Veda has many references to the cow feeding her calf. It also reflects a mutually complementary relationship between agriculture and cattle breeding. Perceived as the great sustainer all creatures residing on its broad surface, the earth was a treasure trove of natural resources. From grains to minerals, everything originated from the earth. The earth which signifies agrarian activities and the cow which symbolizes animal husbandry have been both celebrated in the Indian Civilization as epitomes of fecundity and prosperity. The myth of Pṛthu Vainya in fact brings about a synthesis of these vocations in the motif of the earth cow and underlines their mutual dependence. The myth of Pṛthu is found in Purāṇas across sectarian affiliations, making it all the more relevant in our understanding of the perceptions of ancient Indians about the origins of agriculture, animal husbandry and trade which constituted the vital elements of a pre-industrial economy. Summing up the entire discussion, the narrative of Pṛthu with all its myriad versions highlights the primacy of Vārttā in a given civilization as it is Vārttā that serves as the foundation on which the entire economic superstructure of a society stands. The character of Pṛthu is symbolic of the crucial role which a king as the head of the state plays or is expected to play in initiating reforms and implementing measures which would enable his subjects to earn a living. Agriculture, animal husbandry and trade are indispensable facets of any economy and can never be replaced by even the greatest of industrial and technological strides taken by a nation. The whole metaphor of Pṛthu milking the earth-cow reiterates the great significance ancient Indians attached to animal husbandry in general and cattle herding in particular. One need not repeat here the sacredness which Hinduism accords to cows. Cattle were major players in the organization and functioning of the Vedic economy as well as other Early Historical Cultures. In the ancient as well as the medieval periods, cattle herding was practiced on a large scale with milk and milk products forming an integral part of diets across the Indian sub-continent. The whole narrative of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa spending his childhood in a community of cattle herders and cows in the Mathurā Region has reached such great popularity that this originally rustic tale has been elevated to the most sublime and transcendental realms of Bhakti. Thus the aspect of cattle herding as Vārttā is repeatedly mentioned and divinized in the Kṛṣṇāite legends. In a sloka from the Harivaṃśa, Viṣṇu is referred to by Janmejaya as the universal cowherd and he asks Vaiśampāyana as to why did he (the universal cowherd) go to the earth and become a cowherd (i.e. Kṛṣṇa) (HV 30.7). This reference encapsulates the fact that cattle herding was an indivisible part of the Ancient Indian Economy. One may ponder about the factors behind Vārttā being regarded as a Vidyā or knowledge system in the Indian tradition and the answer to this lies in the fact no economy and the larger society can sustain itself in the absence of Vārttā. The Pṛthu narratives make it amply clear that the king, as the pivot of the state was responsible for the economic wellbeing of the people as well and this could be achieved only when the king possessed at least a basic knowledge about the forms of Vārttā which could aid him in creating and sustaining avenues for his subjects to earn their livelihood. The references from the Rāmāyaṇa as well as the Smṛtis precisely endorse this and provision of Vārttā was recognized as a principal component of Rājadharmā. Vārttā is nothing but the modification of natural resources through human interaction leading to the fulfillment of the basic needs of man. The Indian economic ethos never perceived the natural environment as something which had had to be rabidly exploited. Veneration for the earth as the supporter of the whole creation and other natural resources like seas, rivers, forests and animals is inherent in our culture. The essence of the narrative of Pṛthu is enshrined in the tenet that the

practice of Vārttā was intimately intertwined with the world order and had to be practiced always in conformity to Dharma.

FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The impact of ancient climatic conditions, which could have influenced the development of the Pṛthu Myth, needs further probing. The possibility of a draught-like situation in the Historical Period or its memory from an earlier age can be certainly evaluated and this could provide a meaningful context to the complete understanding of the myth of Pṛthu. Based on this study as well as other cultural markers in the various narratives of this myth, an attempt could be made in ascertaining a tentative time period in which the myth gained currency. As far as Indian Archaeology is concerned Prof. M.K. Dhavalikar (Dhavalikar 2002) has analyzed in depth the interrelationship between the environment and culture and how changes in the environment impacted various dimensions of culture including urbanization, religion, mythology and iconography.

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