CHAPTER: I

MAHARASHTRA : THE LAND*

Geographical Nature

Linguistic regions constitute an important element in the making of Society. A region is considered as a middle range socio-cultural unit between the village, at its microlevel, and the nation at its macrolevel. A region is not just a geographical concept, but it implies a fusion and integration of physical, social, and cultural elements. However, the geographical aspects form the foundation of a region. The edifice of social life at the regional level is built on this foundation and the culture is its apex. Indian society is made up of such linguistic regions. In view of this it is imperative to have an adequate knowledge of the linguistic regions in order to gain a proper understanding of the Indian Society. Our approach to the society of Maharashtra is based on this perspective.

Though there are total 28 states in India linguistically they can be divided into 24 regions. Among the 24 linguistic regions of Indian Society, Maharashtra occupies an important place, from the geographical, social and cultural points of view. Maharashtra is the only region in the South of the Vindhyas with Marathi, its language belonging to the Indo-Aryan family of languages. The State is located between 16° 40' and 22° 10' degrees Northern latitude and 72° 06' and 80° 09' degrees East longitude. Its 825 kms. Western boundary borders the Arabian sea; 750 kms. long Eastern boundary touches Madhya Pradesh. The Southern boundary of 1,875 kms. touches Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka and 1,725 kms. long Northern boundary touches the States of Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Geographically, Maharashtra occupies almost the central position in between South and North India, and this is reflected in the making of its society and culture.

India, according to Geologists, comprises five geological regions:— (1) The Himalayan region, (2) the Gangetic plains and the surrounding territory, (3) The Punjab, Aravali Mountain, Vindhya and Rajmahal hills belt, (4) Deccan Trap, including Maharashtra, and (5) the primitive rocky region extending from Karnataka, Andhra to Rameshwar in the South.\footnote{Maharashtra occupies the major portion of the Deccan Trap region. Nature has given Maharashtra a unique geological identity in the form of Deccan Trap. A series of}

* This Chapter has been contributed by Dr. T. N. Walunjkar.
earthquakes began taking place in the region about seventy lakh years ago, causing fissures in the plain out of which hot basalt lava oozed out and spread over an area of five lakh square kilometres. It took several centuries for the lava to cool down. Each subsequent earthquake would repeat this spreading of basalt lava over the earlier layer, cooling, forming into a rocky layer over the earlier layer. In the course of thousands of years the land of Maharashtra was formed, creating mountains of different heights and shapes, and giving birth to several rivers. These mountains and rivers created further natural sub-divisions of Maharashtra, Viz. Konkan and Desh.

The rivers, mountain ranges, hills and the sea have given Maharashtra its distinct identity and also have created within itself natural and cultural sub-regions. The Western boundary of it is marked by the Arabian sea coast, stretching between the Damanganga river to the North and the Terekhol creek to the South. Its Northern boundary includes Satpuda mountain ranges generally. The river Narmada originating from the Amarkantak hills and flowing towards the Arabian sea has separated Maharashtra from North India and has provided its North-Western boundary. The Southern boundary of Maharashtra, which in the real sense, is its South-Eastern boundary, it is not so much characterised by natural barriers like rivers or mountains as by its linguistic and cultural identity. It has conical border and connects Gadchiroli in the East with Goa in the South-West. The well-known Bastar forest to the East touches the boundary of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The Eastern boundary of Maharashtra is the shortest one.

It was extremely difficult to enter Maharashtra from the North crossing the mountains and big rivers. But several passes in this region provided a few entry points for people from the North to come into Maharashtra. In this regard special mention may be made of two passes, Burhanpur pass on the river Tapi and Bhedaghat pass on the river Narmada. However, the main route from the North to Maharashtra crosses the river Narmada at Handia. Several invasions on Maharashtra that took place in historic times, were led through these routes. The route which is described in the Mahabharata as a Dakshinapatha might be the same. By this route, one can enter Khandesh and come upto Ajintha and Paithan or Pratishthan as it was known during historic times. Communication during the ancient and medieval times used to take place through this route. This historic route is now converted into a railway route of the Central Railway connecting Delhi, Mathura, Gwallior, Khandwa, and Jalgaon to Mumbai.
Sub-Regions of Maharashtra: Just as the sea, rivers, mountain ranges and hills have given Maharashtra its regional identity, distinct from other linguistic regions of India, similarly, such geographical factors as variation in the type of soil, weather and rainfall have created its sub-regions having their distinct geographical social and cultural identities. The features of these sub-regions, in brief, are as follows:

The Sahyadri mountain, spread from North to South, has divided Maharashtra into Konkan and the Desh, its two main natural zones. The Sahyadri is said to be the backbone of Maharashtra. This mountain which is situated at a varying distance of forty-five to ninety kilometres from the sea, has created a strip of land known as Konkan. The south-west monsoon winds are arrested at this mountain due to its location which is parallel to the western coast of India. Nearly nine-tenth portion of the vast stretch of plateau land to the east of the Sahyadri is known as the Deccan plateau (Desh). The height of this plateau in its western portion is six hundred metres above the sea level, and in its eastern border area it is approximately three hundred metres above the sea level. The major rivers and their tributaries originating from the plateau and flowing Eastward have burrowed out Mawal, a land full of ravines. In the doab region due to less soil erosion and horizontal rock formation, this plateau has been formed. The Sahyadri and its ranges extending eastward at a right angle, provide protection to the Deccan plateau (Desh). The hills and rivers have divided the Desh into the following sub-regions. In this way, Maharashtra constitutes five natural sub-regions: Konkan, Tapi-Purna valley, Wardha-Wainganga valley, Godavari valley and Krishna valley. The salient geographical features of these sub-regions are described below.

Konkan: A strip of sloping land with a coastal line stretching from Daman in the north and Terekhol creek in the south, sandwiched between the Arabian sea and the Sahyadri mountain, measuring variously form 45 to 90 kms. in width and 720 kms. in length, is known from ancient times as Aparanta or Konkan. In the course of time, the land to the north of river Savitri, i.e. the northern part of Ratnagiri district and the southern portion of Surat district, began to be known as North Konkan and the portion between river Savitri and the southern part of Karwar district, as South Konkan. In this region, the average rainfall is 2600 mm. per year. The historic name Aparanta, which means 'the western end', is given to North Konkan. The Sopara inscription clearly shows that this territory was a part of Ashokan empire. The name Konkan began to appear in ancient texts since the fourth century B.C. Ptolemy, the Roman pilgrim-cum-historian (A.D.150), refers to Gujarat and North Konkan as Larika, and South Konkan as Aarika. However, there are several
opinions about how the word Konkan came into vogue. According to 
an opinion, the name Konkan was given after Kunkana, the legendary 
mother of Parashuram. In the past from 5th Century B.C. trade with 
Babylon, Rome and other places was carried out through the ports 
of Chaul, Mahad, Kalyan and Sopara. Various luxury goods, wine 
and glass were imported into India from the Roman empire through 
these ports.

**Tapi-Purna Valley:** This sub-region of Maharashtra is formed of 
the rivers Tapi and Purna. The land covered by the Tapi valley 
is known as Khandesh, while the portion covered by the Purna valley 
is known as Varhad. The region having black soil, is well-known for 
cultivating cotton. The route to the South from the North passes 
through Burhanpur. The Ancient Savalda and Bahal cultures 
flourished in this region. The beginning of the present way of life in 
Maharashtra is connected with these cultures. Traces of the Indus 
valley culture are also found in this region. Due to decline in trade, 
people from the Indus valley residing in Saurashtra might have 
been forced to migrate to Tapi valley. The black-cotton soil in this 
region might have been the major attraction for them.

**Wardha-Vainganga Valley:** This is the third natural sub-region 
of Maharashtra. In many respects this region differs from the rest 
of Maharashtra. The excavation at Pavanar shows that human 
settlement began in this region some time between 1,000 to 800 B.C. 
This region lies to the east of the river Wardha and is known as 
Nagpur region, a part of Mahakoshal. Wardha to the west, Satpuda 
hills and jungle to the north and the east, and forest region of Andhra 
to the south constitute the natural boundaries of Nagpur region. 
The volcanic Deccan trap rock ends in this region. Besides granite, 
and gneiss rock formations are found here. The major portion of the 
valley, from Tumsar to Vainganga-Godavari confluence is very fertile. 
The region is characterized by artificial lakes, and green paddy fields. 
It is gifted with huge deposits of minerals and has a considerable 
tribals population. The average rainfall in this region, which is 1,016— 
1,270 mm. is considerably higher than that in the Deccan.

**Godavari Valley:** This is the fourth natural sub-region of 
Maharashtra. The river Godavari is known as the Ganga of 
Maharashtra. The urban civilization in Maharashtra took root in 
this region in ancient times. The river originates in Nasik district 
and after crossing Maharashtra border in Nanded district, flows 
through Andhra Pradesh. Paithan situated on the bank of the 
Godavari, is a place of pilgrimage. Geographically, this region is 
divided into two sub-regions, namely, the hilly portion and plains 
comprising Nasik district, and high and dry plateau to the east in
The ancient Ashmak and Mulak Desh fall in this region.

**The Krishna Valley:** This fertile belt created by river Krishna, which flows through Satara, Kolhapur and Sangli districts, is rich in variety of crops. In addition, this region also includes a portion of Pune district containing Nira and Bhima rivers, and also some part of Solapur district. A territory known as Kuntal in ancient times forms part of this region. Pandharpur, a place well-known since ancient times as a religious centre, is situated in this region.

**Human Habitation in Maharashtra**

Formerly, historians cherished a view that in ancient times the entire Maharashtra was covered with a vast forest and there was no human settlement in this region. But a route connecting North India with South India passed through this forest which was known as Dandakaranya. It was believed that after the Ramayana-Mahabharata period the forest was cleared and human settlements were made in this region. However, the archaeological survey in recent times, has disproved these old ideas.

Excavations and surveys carried out by archaeologists H. D. Sankalia, S. B. Deo, M. K. Dhavlikar and R. S. Pappu, at Nasik, Akola, Pune, Khandesh, Wardha and other places have confirmed the existence of Stone Age man in this region.² It is beyond doubt that the early man lived in all parts of the Deccan plateau and Konkan. Similarly in recent times, efforts have been made to establish the features of changing climatic patterns in early ancient times and to relate them with different stages in human civilization. On the basis of the new research, very ancient human settlements in Maharashtra can be divided into three stages, namely, the Stone Age, the Chalcolithic Age, and the Iron Age.

**The Stone Age in Maharashtra:** The Stone Age in Maharashtra shows following divisions and sub-divisions: (1) **Palaeolithic Period:** (a) Lower Palaeolithic Period from five Lakh B. P. to one Lakh B. P.; (b) Middle Palaeolithic Period from one lakh to thirty thousand B. P.; and (c) Upper Palaeolithic Period from thirty thousand to ten thousand B.P. (2) **Mesolithic Period** from ten thousand to four thousand B. C., and (3) **Chalcolithic Period** from four thousand to seven hundred B.C. Neolithic remains and tools are found in Maharashtra along with those belonging to the Chalcolithic Period.

The tools and fossils of animals found in the explorations conducted in the beds of Godavari, Pravara, Mula-Mutha, Krishna, Bhima, Tapi, Anjra, Ghod, Kukdi, Vainganga, Painganga, Purna and Wardha rivers and also in excavations conducted at Nandur Madhmeshwar situated on the banks of Godavari at Mungi near Paithan, at Gangapur near Nasik,