The unity of the Deccan table land is as much an obvious geographic fact, as the unity of the Gangetic Valley.

— K.M. Pamphikkar
Chapter Four
LAND IN RELATION TO PEOPLE

Land constitutes the permanent material basis of history. The Deccan formed the main land of the Yadava kingdom though its political expansion often crossed its boundaries. So the physiography of the Deccan as a factor in the history and culture of our period is an indispensable part of our study. The term Deccan is derived from the ancient word Dakshinapatha occurring in the Puranas and Mahabharata. Though it generally meant the country south of the Narmada, it was not always used in the same sense. Here the term is used in its modern implication which must be made clear.

Denotation of Deccan:

Deccan is the country roughly between the Narmada in the north and the Krishna in the south, and from the Western Ghats to a little more than the Vainaganga in the east. So essentially it is a geographic term. Culturally its main bulk is modern Maharashtra excluding the coastal strip. Geologically it is a large part of the trap. So roughly Deccan is the table-land between the Narmada and the Krishna. It is a unit supported by geological, linguistic and historical factors.

Geology as an Environmental Factor:

Geologically Deccan is a part of the great volcanic formation, called the Deccan trap, named after the terraced aspect of the weathered hills. Except in the north and the north-east, the limits of the trap correspond with those of the Deccan. The edge of the lava shows a striking accordance with the linguistic boundary
between Maharashtra and Telangana. The geology of the Deccan is a significant determining factor in the geography and culture. It is the peculiar geological formation that has produced the orographical frame-work of the Deccan which is further responsible for the system of land communication. The trap played its part in one more sphere. It encouraged the cave-cutting activity which was carried out so zealously till the 10th century. In our period it was replaced by another equally enthusiastic industry of erecting structural temples. Here also the constructional material was amygdaloidal trap which could be quarried on the spot but proved a limitation on the size and durability of the temples.

Geography

There are two principal orographical systems of the Deccan. The first is the Sahyadris running from North to South, forming the very backbone of the Deccan. The second is the Satpuras extending on the north, from west to east. The mountains and rivers which naturally divide the Deccan into certain units also have played an emotional role in the life of the people. They are not merely natural features but tangible personalities invested with a sort of sanctity and dwelling in the midst of the millions. The historian cannot afford to overlook this factor.

The broad natural divisions of the Deccan may be discussed here, with reference to their historical and cultural contexts. A contemporary Marathi passage throws a little light on some of them. Quotations from it are cited at relevant places.

The Ghats and the Mavals:

The Sahyadri extending from the Girna hills to the Goa border together with the transitional strip on the east, known as Mavals,
constitutes a unit by itself. The eastern flank of the Western Ghats is cut up into a number of small river basins having abundant rainfall. They are popularly known as Mavals and Neras.

The tract is studded with a number of mountain peaks. Three of them — Mahabalesvara, Bhimasankar and Tribakesvara, not only represent three of the sacred Jyotirlingas, but also give rise to the three principal rivers of the Deccan, the Krishna, Bhima and Godavari respectively. The pass-routes between Konkan and the table-land called Desa, but through this tract. There are sixty such passes, most of them commanded by the mediaeval forts. This region played its true rule in the Maratha period.

Khandesh Basin:

The major part of the Tapi valley is Khandesh. It is a topographical unit separated from Central India by the Satpuras and from the Maharashtra plateau by the Satmala hills. Dey's work discussed in the first chapter reveals how geographical factors have made Khandesh a political unit through history.

The land-forms of the Tapi valley largely determine the human geography of the region. The banks of the river suffer from heavy erosion but the central black-soil belt attracted population and developed trade-route centres. Routes from Gujarat in the West, Ujjain in the north, Ellichpur in the east and Nasik in the south passed through Khandesh.

The region thus played a vital role in all the northern invasions of the Yadavas. Thus Burhanpur came into prominence as a trade-route centre, though it is not known during our period. Patana was an important centre of the Yadava times, under the
feudatory dynasty of Nikumbhas (1000-1200 A.D.). Bhamer, a stone-
built town at the foot of a fortified hill must have been an
important a trade route centre.

_Vidarbha:_ (तायागसोऽब्रिहि आवचे लरड़्धे नौहः। ठेंढे एक मंड़बः।)

To the east of Khandesh and south of Satpuras lies the
Vidarbha. It is drained by the Purna, Vardha, Painaganga and
Vainaganga. It is mainly the prosperous black-cotton soil region.
Varhada or Berar is a part of Vidarbha and a geographic term
applied to Vardha, Nagpur, Chanda and Bhandara districts.

Vidarbha was very active during our period. The _Govinda-
prabhu-Caritra_ throws considerable light on the prosperity of the
13th century Vidarbha. A number of centres like Ellichpur, Riddhi-
pur, Katol, Ramtek and Bhandara etc. were well-known. Ellichpur or
Alajapur was an important military out-post of the Yadavas. It was
via Ellichpur that Ala-ud-din dashed upon Devagiri. One ruler
Ramadarana of Alajapur is known. Ramtek was a centre of pilgrimage
and the prosperous town of Riddhipur (Ritpur) was sacred to the
Mahanubhavas.

_The Upper Krishna Basin:_ (फलेखण्ऊः पतोलीचे रक्षितेचे मराठी भाषा
जेलुंकां ताई दोर्ने एक मंड़बः।)

The Upper Krishna basin with its north and south orientation
forms a distinct geographical region between the main Sahyadris
and the Mahadeva hills. It mainly includes the Satara-Sangali-
Kolhapur area.

The routes from the Bhima and the Krishna valleys to the south
and east pass through this region. It rose to real prominence in
the Maratha period. Yet, Kolhapur area situated in an arc of the
Sahyadri hills protected by the Panhala fort played a vital role
under the Silaharas and the Yadavas. As an abode of the Ambabai of Kolhapur, the Upper Krishna basin is sacred to millions and Namdeva has given it its spiritual tradition based on devotional mysticism.

The Bhima Basin: (तयासां उत्तरे व्यावेराणाचा सेवन असेहून तेसा एक स्वंगृहबः.)

The Bhima basin between the Balaghat and the Mahadeva hills comprises mainly of the dry Poona-Sholapur area. Though a tributary of the Krishna, the Bhima drains a major area of the plateau and has fostered a physiographical unity on it. The river has played a vital role in the life of the people. The Bhima basin is the sacred land of the lord of Pandharpur and also an abode of the Bhavani of Tuljapur. Poona developed as a cultural capital of this tract and Tukaram filled it with a spiritual air in the Maratha period.

The Upper Godavari Basin: (उपर गंगातीर नेघू ह्या स्वंगृहबः.)

But the main focus of the Yadava period and the very core of their kingdom was the Upper Godavari basin. It runs along Nasik Paithan and extends up to Nanded in the east. The Akola-Balaghat and the Chandor-Ajanta ranges with their steep and terraced heights enclose the region to form a basin and become a barrier for the movements of people.

Its route to Khandesh through the Chandor pass was commanded by the Chandor fort. The Seunadesa extending from Nasik to Devagiri was a part of the Upper Godavari basin and was the main seat of the Yadava empire. Not only political citadels like Chandor, Sinner and Devagiri but also cultural centres like Nasik, Nevasa
and Paithan fell within the basin. It is the birth place of Jnanesvari the greatest contribution of the Yadava age and even Cakradhara largely confined himself to this vital tract.

The glory of the Godavari is sung in the contemporary literature. It is Ganga of the south and the abode of Mahishasuramardini. For the conveated dip in the Goda, thousands trekked their way to Tryambak, Nasik or Paithan and built up an emotional bond with their fellow pilgrims, while the rulers fought their battles. What is the Ganga in the history of North India is the Godavari in the annals of the Yadava empire. It recalls both the splendour and the devastation of the Yadava age. It is no exaggeration to say that the Yadava empire was in one sense, an expansion of the Upper Godavari basin.

Routes of Communication:

The routes of the movements of traders and armies are the life-lines of any land. 'The Deccan has been the great middle rampart of India' and as such it holds a network of vital routes. The specially prepared map, attached here shows the system of land communication during our period. Important routes from Gujarat, Ujjain, Tripuri (Jabalpur) in the north and towards Dharwar-Shimogha and Warangal, Vijayavada in the south passed through the Deccan. So the Yadavas like any earlier Deccan power played a part in the northern as well as southern politics and kept up a constant contact with the other parts of the sub-continent.

Here a comment may be made on the probable routes of the northern invasion of the Yadavas as they are a recurrent phenomenon of our period. The northern invasions on Malwa and Lata (South
Gujarat) are very common. The expedition usually attacks first Malva and then comes down upon Lata and returns by completely a circle so to say. Here geographical factors seem to dictate the course, apart from the circumstances at the time of expedition. With a strong enemy at Dhar holding the strategic Malva plateau a direct invasion of Lata from Devagiri would be dangerous. So the Yadavas must have found it necessary to first give a blow to the Malva power by crossing the Narmada at Khalghat or even at still eastern points, and then with no danger at the back, invade Broach probably via Pavagadh and Dabhoi. The Narmada could safely be crossed in the Rajpipala area for the return journey.

But a direct invasion of Lata could also be undertaken. We know one instance. In the Hammira-mada-mardanam (Act,II,p.15). Simghana is once known to have come upto the Tapi where a spy from Gujarat advices him to wait in the forest on the banks of the river, from which one route went to Malva and another to Gujarat. This place is quite likely to be the forested Songadh area from which one can go straight to Broach and also to Malva through Rajpipla.

The invasion of Tripuri could be undertaken through Vidarbha or from Malwa if it formed a part of a single northern expedition. These points would be better appreciated in their relevant contexts of the political history.

Contemporary Knowledge of Geography:

It would be interesting to investigate the knowledge of the contemporaries of Geography. Their knowledge lies only in the acquaintance with the physical features of the land. It is
reflected in the choice of the strategic spots for the construction of forts, description of the village boundaries and the acquaintance with the trade routes. The Mahanubhavas have shown exactness in locating and describing the places visited by Cakradhara and the Sthanapothi can be in one sense, regarded as a contribution to the 13th century regional geography.

The contemporary people also have shown an aesthetic sense in appreciating the beauty of nature and some realism in describing certain places like Mutuge (App.Insc.no.12), Kiriyindi country (App.Insc.no.28), Uddare (App.Insc.no.74), Munivalli (App.Insc.no.232) and so on.

In their wider space-concept neighbouring regions like Gujarat, Malwa, Karnataka, & Telangana often do occur. But when the still wider Indian contexts is referred to, their source of knowledge are the Puranas. The fantastic geography of the Jambudvipa girdled by the ocean and with the Meru mountain in the centre and Bharatkhanda lying to its south still lingers in their mind (App.Insc.nos.12,28). The lack of continental outlook of our ancestors is reflected in this, and in spite of excellent progress made in certain other fields the science of geography as such was never developed.
References


2. This passage is actually from Acara-paddhati, a Mahanubhava work belonging to the 17th century according to S.G. Tulpule (An Old Marathi-Reader p.4). But K.P. Kulkarni has treated it as a 13th century piece. (Marathi Bhasa-Udgam Va Vikas, p. 203-204). Even if it is later, it nicely throws light on the dialectal divisions and geographical units of Maharashtra.


4. Kapre, H.R., Archaeology of the Place-names in the Deccan, p.54.

5. Lila Caritra, Ekanka, Lilas 53 to 57.