CHAPTER 1
REGIONAL REALITY AND STATE FORMATION

Regions, Strongholds, Logistics & Communications with reference to Maratha Expansion in the North

History of the Maratha State Formation under Shinde and Holkar in the North is an account of on going campaigns, conquests and consolidations during the 18th century (1720-1800). Campaigns, conquests and consolidations are different stages depicting Maratha power & influence, domination and control in the region and areas within that Marathas were targeting. Maratha Campaigns starting from early 18th century to the late 1790s covered Central India (consisting of Khandesh, Malwa, Bundelkhand), Doab, Rajasthan, Delhi, Panjab and went up to Afghanistan borders. Maratha conquests were made in Central India, Rajasthan and parts of Doab and in parts of Bundelkhand, this could widely be termed as Maratha areas of Dominance and Dominions that never remained constant during the period of this study. Maratha territorial gains as a power was limited to all of Khandesh, most of Malwa plateau and parts of Bundelkhand, this could be termed as fixed areas, of actual Maratha control or Maratha Dominions. Only in 1780s and 1790s under Mahadji Shinde and his European mercenaries some consolidation of Maratha power took place in areas beyond Chambal-Yamuna line of control. It is important to map Regions and Areas within the broadly defined territories of Maratha conquest and consolidation to understand the role of Shinde and Holkar in the expansion of Maratha Power in the North and their family holdings.

In the century old history of Marathas in the North, from the very beginning Central India was the safe base from the very initial stages of campaigns under Peshwa Bajirao and played host to Shinde and Holkar families as they migrated from their homelands in Maharashtra. Central India had its own geographical diversities as areas within had their own identity due to varied topography and settlement of people of different community over the centuries.

Malwa plateau and adjoining areas were termed as “Central India” by John Malcolm, when he penned down his survey of its past and contemporary history as a result of the administrative assignment, which he received as an official of the East
India Company, after it was taken over by the British in 1818. Since then references pertaining to the events of pre-colonial and colonial period in Malwa, Khandesh and Bundelkhand regions have often been put under the term Central India(for convenience sake) as for long it remained an administrative division of the British. This region was placed north-west of adjoining Central India Agency of the colonial period. It won't be wrong to say that Central India was almost coextensive with areas under the control of the Marathas in the 18th century period, outside Maharashtra region. Maratha sardars Sindhia and Holkar established their bases here after its conquest in late 1730s, at Ujjain and Indore respectively. While Holkars estates were mostly located in Western Malwa and Sindhia’s in the north and eastern parts. Peshwa directly controlled most of Khandesh, south-east Malwa and parts of Bundelkhand. From here Marathas operated in Rajasthan and North India across the Chambal-Yamuna river bank.

Much time was consumed in getting acquainted with location of obscure places and much varied geographical features i.e., general landscape in different parts of the region, plains, mountain ranges, hills, ravines, course of the river, spread of the forest cover, fordable point along the river course, pass in the hill ranges, agricultural products, items of trade and commerce, areas and towns where they were produced, etc. It was also necessary to get familiar with man made features like forts, pilgrimage centers, trade, military and pilgrimage routes, suba and sarkar outlines, their bases as well as territorial holdings of different local chiefs, geographical distribution of different tribes and communities, approximate areas represented by specific area names of very common usage by local population, especially in the past like Khandesh, Bundelkhand, Khichiwada, Hadauti, Ummatwada, Ahirwada, etc., which were quite often coextensive with pargana, sarkar or suba boundary. We come across these details repeatedly while going through primary or secondary source material on the region. Secondly Peshwa was neither particular about Mughal suba, sarkar and pargana divisions while distributing saranjams to his sardars and own officials, nor organized administration on this line, but they have remained in spite of this helpful as point of reference for the study of Maratha state formation. Holdings of a Maratha

---

sardar were scattered in different parganas, sarkars, and subas of the region.¹ The natural boundaries of Central India roughly are Chambal- Yamuna riverbank in the North, Tapti river valley in the South, Aravalli hills in the West, Gwailgarh and Mahadeo hills of the Satpura range in the East. The three different regions Malwa, Khandesh and Bundelkhand have had distinct regional identity since Sultanate days but their much known boundary lines were drawn in the Mughal period. On the modern map of India, Central India exists in the western half of Madhya Pradesh, bordering district of southeast Rajasthan and bordering districts of Gujarat and North-Eastern Maharashtra, roughly.

Malwa suba and Malwa plateau were nearly coextensive in the Mughal period. A comparison of Malwa plateau and suba boundary stretched further in the West to include Mandsaur, Banswara, Jhabua and Amjhera areas and in the south Nimar and Handia areas.² Northern edge of Vindhya range is the southermost boundary of the Malwa plateau while Narmada river was made the boundary of Malwa suba in the period of Shahjahan when Nandurbar, Bijagarh and portion of Handia sarkar lying south of Narmada river were separated later on from Malwa suba and added to Khandesh suba.³ Northern boundaries of both the Malwa plateau and suba were marked by the Chambal River for some distance in the north-west separating it from Rajputana principality of Bundi or Hadauti, a part of which got separated and became the future state of Kotah, the town Kotah itself located on the eastern bank of Chambal.⁴ In the northeast corner Kolaras and Chanderi towns were located very near to the suba boundary, scarcely separated from the plateau boundary.⁵

¹ Shinde and Holkar family’s holdings were scattered extensively in Malwa as well as Khandesh, Ibid.,pp.123,149(mentioned in the foot-note). Also see the description of Pawar family’s holdings surrounded by those of Shinde and Holkar in Dewas, in A. C. Mayer, Caste and Kinship in Central India, A village and Its Region, London, 1960, pp.13-14.
² This statement is drawn from a comparison of “Malwa Suba” and “Malwa Plateau” boundary drawn by Raghubir Singh in his work Malwa in Transition OR A Century of Anarchy, The First Phase,1698-1765, Bombay,1936, map of Malwa facing P.1 and Stewart N Gordon, ‘The Slow Conquest: Administrative Integration of Malwa into the Maratha Empire,1720-1760,’ MAS, Vol.11,1977, p.9
⁴ Sinh, Raghubir, Malwa in Transition, map of Malwa facing p.1
⁵ Ibid., map of Malwa facing p.1
The land enclosed within these boundaries and physical features was not all along black fertile soil but as well as sloppy or undulating “alluvial tract scattered all over” interrupted by scrub land, small conical and table crowned hills, low ridges open forest, ravines and occasionally very small rain fed lakes. Western frontier as well as eastern boundary of Malwa suba had hilly tracts formed by Aravalli and Vindhya ranges respectively. The major rivers were Chambal originating in the Vindhya Range flowing northward through western part of the plateau before joining Yamuna in Agra subah. It separated Hindustan region of those days from Malwa region. Sipra, Kali Sindh, Parvati and Sindh also originating in the Vindhya Range and flowing northward joined Chambal at its different stages in the same order. Betwa and Ken following the same course further east joined Yamuna passing through Bundelkhand. Narmada River as stated before running east to west south of Vindhya Range was a much known demarcation for the Marathas entering the Malwa suba when their raids in the region started in late 17th & 18th century.

In the early 18th Century when Malwa suba was a part of the Mughal empire, it was divided into ten sarkars - Ujjain, Mandu, Mandsaur, Handia, Sarangpur, Kotri, Pirawa, Gagron, Alamgirpur (also known as Bhilsa and Raisen), Chanderi, Garha. Sarkar headquarters were same as the sarkar name above described. Each sarkar was divided into several mahals or parganas. Every pargana had around hundred villages and sometimes even up to two hundred villages under their jurisdiction.

Khandesh suba prior to Shahjahan’s period was very small, having no sarkar division. Nandurbar, Bijagarh and southeastern part of Malwa suba, lying south of Narmada were added to Khandesh suba by Shahjahan in his eighth regnal year. In 1638, Khandesh suba was further enlarged by the addition of Baglana as a sarkar lying west of Nandurbar, after its annexation. In total Khandesh suba in the last days of Aurangzeb had sarkars of Asir, Nandurbar, Baglana, Bijagarh, Handia only.

1 John Malcolm, Memoir of Central India, Vol. I, p.3
2 S N Gordon rightly describes ten sarkars into which the Malwa plateau was divided in the Mughal period but doesn’t delineate Nandurbar, Southern Handia and Bijagarh as separated in the period of Shahjahan in his section on Mughal Malwa, iii, ‘The Slow Conquest’ , p.3; Raghubir Sinh describes 12 sarkars in 1695 and 11 in 1697, when he says Bijagarh was “transferred to the suba of Burhanpur” i.e., Khandesh suba, in a much later published article in Hindi, titled “ISA ki Attharahvi Sati ke Prarambhik Yugin Malwa ka Atithasik Bhugol”, Ahilya Asmarika, Indore, 1980, p.7 he has quoted 11 sarkars from a Rajasthani document where Nandurbar is not mentioned and sarkar Sahabad is added, whose location he admits is not known
3 Alavi, Rafi Ahmad, ‘Mughal Geographical accounts of Khandesh’, p.127
4 Ibid.
mahals south of Narmada) and Galna.\(^1\) Burhanpur town lying in Asir suba was the suba headquarter, often Khandesh suba was mentioned as Burhanpur suba also, during the Mughal period. Before the enlargement of Khandesh suba in the period of Shahjahan, it was the area lying between Satpura and Sahyadri ranges and consisted of only one sarkar i.e., Asir. This area is watered by the Tapti River, flowing east to west, and originating in the area between Mahadeo and Gawilgarh hills.\(^2\) The northern boundary of it only changed later to Narmada River from Satpura range, It had the same soil type as Malwa plateau i.e., black fertile soil. But it had a much more even landscape except the area covered by Satpura range dividing the cultivable land north and south of it. Watered by Narmada and Tapti rivers its fertile undulating plain on the eastern as well as western frontier, slowly became hilly touching Mahadeo and Gawilgarh Hills and Nasik area respectively.

Bundelkhand lying on the north-eastern border of Malwa is dotted with hills formed by the offshoots of Vindhya Range running northward.\(^3\) Pogson drew its boundary as such, “Bundelkhand is bounded by the river Yamuna on the north, on the north-west by the Ganges, on the south by the Sagar district and Garh Mandla; Rewah and Baghelkhand on the south-east and by the Mirzapur hills on the north-east.”\(^4\) Bundelkhand is watered by the Yamuna, Ganges, Ken and Betwa, besides numerous small rivers.

Its soil was also “black fertile soil and forest cover in the area consisted of dwarf trees and bushes.”\(^5\) The main rivers flowing through the region are Ken and Betwa. Ganga and Yamuna also watered its soil in the north. Here also alluvial tracts are spread in between the hilly areas which were “well irrigated through tanks”\(^6\) and “small streams”.\(^7\) Bundelkhand was a part of Allahabad suba in the Mughal period. Due to its proximity to Malwa, references to Malwa, “at times also included Bundelkhand”.\(^8\)

---

1. Ibid., p.129
5. Ibid, p.129
Part of Bundelkhand came under Peshwas control quite early as local chief Chhatrasal "in order to secure the independence of his posterity, divided his territories into three parts; one of which, he bequeathed to the Peshwa Bajirao, on the express condition, that his heirs and successors should be kept by him and succeeding Peshwas in possession of the remaining portion of his dominions."¹

The part of Bundelkhand Chhatrasal bequeathed to Peshwa consisted of Kalpee, Huttah, Sagar, Jhansee, Sironj, Koonah, Gurd Kotah and Hurdee Nagar earning 30,76,953 rupees as revenue. Kalpee was a large town, on the right bank of the Yamuna River, celebrated for being the mart of cotton and Khurwa, the well known coarse red cloth used for camp equipage.²

The other possessions of Chhatrasal were divided into separate states of Panna and Jaitpur to his two sons. Panna was assigned to Hirdeshah and Jaitpur to Jagat Raj. Panna was rich principality of Bundelkhand comprising of Kalinjur, Moho, Elich, Dhamoni etc and earned 38,46 123 rupees in revenue. Diamond mines of Panna were a big drawing force for local powers to Bundelkhand. According to an English Agent's report of 1762 Shuja-ud-Daula of Awadh had his eyes on these diamond mines and wanted to capture them from Chhatrasal's son Hindupat, the local Panna chief or was demanding "rupees 100 lakhs as revenue for these mines".³ Shuja had posted his troops at Jhanshi and was asking Hindupat to hand him over a fort near the diamond mines.⁴ English Agent quoting local estimates put the value of the diamond mines at rupees 150 lakhs and Shuja's strong position vis-à-vis Hindupat as latter had no forces to oppose.⁵

Kalpee was a large town, on the right bank of the Yamuna, celebrated for being the mart of cotton and Khurwa, the well known coarse red cloth used for camp equipage.⁶ Pogson in early Eighteenth Century wrote, "Bundelkhand is an extensive and fertile province, celebrated for its diamond mines, iron ore, the quantity of grain and excellent cotton it produces. The latter, however, is dwarf and stunted in its growth. The natives of this province never irrigate their fields, and the fertility of the

---

¹ Pogson W R, op.cit., p.105
² Ibid., p.133
³ Foreign Department Records, National Archive of India (henceforth NAI), New Delhi, SC 1762(9,24)
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Pogson, W R, op.cit., p.133
soil seems to render that labor unnecessary. The earth is black, loamy and rich and in the hot weather, full of broad cracks and fissures. The hills produce abundance of iron. Some are of the finest marble; and the forest ...is famed for its ebony. The timber is dwarf, but sufficiently large for every purpose for which it is required in that part of the country."¹ The whole territory is said to have yielded in the past rupees one crore and thirty-eight lakhs, but in early 19th century (1828) it yielded rupees 85 lakhs, of which Government realised about rupees 36 lakhs.² Revenue figures of the three different parts of Bundelkhand in 1728, when it was divided by Chhatrasal³ were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Revenue in Rupees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peshwa's Area</td>
<td>30,76,953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panna</td>
<td>38,46,123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaitpur</td>
<td>30,76,953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Malwa region was economically far superior to many other parts of Mughal India. Possessing vast extent of black fertile soil, on which a number of crops were grown. Industrially also Malwa occupied the first rank among the Mughal subas after Gujarat. In the Mughal period it was one of the most productive region and its revenue figures were among the highest from the Mughal subas. So much so that it could sustain successive regional powers because of its economy. Also its location was such that “All the military routes to the Deccan passed through it, so also the routes to inland Gujarat, and to the sea-ports on the Western coast. For striking at Rajputana, Gondwana or Berar, Malwa afforded an excellent military base”.⁴ Large number of people passed through this area annually as well as migrated from other parts especially Rajasthan and settled down lured by its fertile soil and very “good climate”.⁵ Frequent by people from all parts, Malwa has been termed as “Shatter or

¹ Ibid., p.129  
² Ibid., p.130  
³ Ibid., pp.105-107  
⁴ Sinh, Raghubir, Malwa in Transition, p.10  
⁵ Mayer, A C, Caste and Kinship in Central India, London,1960, p.13, where Mayer narrates his experience, “It is a common saying that Malwa has such a good climate and soil that people never leave it, but on the contrary outsiders from all quarters try to settle there.”
Route Region" without "persistent political tradition" and "strong regional or religious identity".¹

Agra- Burhanpur -Surat trade route passed through Malwa and Khandesh regions of Central India. It was a busy trade route established in the Mughal period.² It also served as a military and pilgrimage route.³ It was further reinforced according to Bayly by the "rise to power of Chitpavan Brahmins in the Maratha politics after 1750, for the orthodox Brahmins of Poona and Nagpur, Benares as the centers of the highly Brahminical cult of Shaivism was peculiarly illustrious. The Mughal campaigns in the Deccan passed through this route. Pilgrims also used this route as Gordon says," Accompanying the trade carvans, in the seventeenth century, were large numbers of pilgrims bound for Mecca. The hajj brought thousands of Muslims down the roads of Malwa, through Burhanpur and eventually to the port of Surat for a sea transport to Mocha (or Jiddah).⁴ Passing through eastern Malwa and Khandesh it connected several important towns of the region with Surat port and Agra city like Mandu, Ujjain, Shahajpur, Sarangpur, Handia, Raisen, Bhilsa, Duraha, Sironj, Narwar, Gwalior etc.⁵

From Burhanpur town towards north the route got bifurcated, one route passed through Mandu, Ujjain, Shahjapur and Sarangpur going through the central part of Malwa before it merged with the other branch from Burhanpur, covering eastern Malwa at Duraha.⁶ The straighter and also eastern branch from Burhanpur to Duraha touched Mandwa, Chainpur, Handia, Nemawar, Sandalpur, Ichhawar and Sehore before meeting at Duraha.⁷ From Duraha the route passed through Sironj, Narwar, Shivpuri and Gwalior before reaching Agra. Hoshangabad, Bhopal, Raisen, Bhilsa

³ Bayly, C A, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars,1770-1870*, Cambridge, 1983, pp.136-137, where Bayly says that, "the claim of the Maratha princes for a royal status on the lines of that of the great Rajput dynasties encouraged them also to seek merit by association with the holy places and to Benares, Allahabad, Jagannath and Gaya in greater numbers. After 1680 the Marathas appear to have replaced the Rajputs as major donors at all these centers"
⁵ Habib, Irfan, op.cit., sheets 8B,14B
⁶ Ibid., Sheet 9B, See also note on routes, p.38
⁷ Ibid.
and Chanderi not falling on the main route but located at a very short distance were also connected to it by roads starting from these towns.¹

This route “developed in the Mughal period”² as the most direct passage to the south. “Bridges were built on small rivers” and “sarais were built” at regular distances for passengers as well as for the Mughal rulers and other functionaries when they visited south.³ Otherwise also fortified towns or forts nearby at many places like “Mandu, Raisen, Kanauj and Thalner were fortresses guarding access from the south”.⁴ Burhanpur town was closely guarded by Asir fort and the fort garrison which “perhaps escorted important travelers as well”.⁵ The road made its way across the big and deep rivers like Narmada at fordable points and through passes in the Vindhya and Sahyadri hill ranges.

The route was busy through out the year except the rainy season when it wasn’t possible to cross the flooded rivers (Sind, Parvati, Narmada, Kali Sind and Sipra had to be crossed at some stage in the course of the journey) while travelling through the region. For marching army even the road was difficult during the rains. Lewis Ferdinand Smith remarked, “In Khandesh on the northern side of the river Narmada, during the rains, the soil becomes knee deep with mud, through which guns can hardly be dragged a mile a day, which renders the junction of distant detachments on an emergency, scarcely practicable.”⁶

In the monsoon period traveling resorted to the alternate route linking Agra to Surat through Ajmer and Ahmedabad which was otherwise not secure as there were cases of “forced payment by local Rajput chieftains from merchants and traders at

¹ There is a slight difference in the track of the Agra-Burhanpur road drawn in Irfan Habib and Raghurab Sinh, Sinh has shown two alternative road between Handia and Sironj in addition to the road in Irfan Habib’s map, one touching Bhopal. Both these roads are drawn east of the main road drawn in Irfan Habib’s map, An Atlas of the Mughal Empire, map of Malwa facing p.1.
² Khan, Zahoor Ali, ‘Road to the Deccan’, p.534
⁴ Gordon, S N, ‘The Slow Conquest’, p.3
⁵ Gordon, S N ‘Burhanpur: Entrepot and Hinterland’, p.427
⁶ Smith, L F, A Sketch of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Regular Corps Formed and Commanded by the Europeans, 1803-04, Typescript, Shri Natnagar Shodh Sansthan, Sitamau, p. 56
different places in Rajasthan". Also the Rajasthan route was hotter and passed through Chambal ravines known for bandits.

The Agra-Burhanpur-Surat route being the shortest and safest route for entering northern India as well as going to south and western India was militarily and politically important for rulers wishing to expand their frontier zones. In South near Adilabad close to Burhanpur separate roads coming from Aurangabad and Hyderabad merged, before touching Burhanpur. In the north through Agra it was linked to Delhi and other important places of northern India.

These were the most well known routes from the North to South India passing through Central India. But there were several other alternative routes already existing in the Mughal period. Additional roads were later opened by the Marathas as well. Like there was a route from Ajmer to Ujjain via Mandsaur, linking Rajasthan and Malwa similarly route linking Gujarat to the Malwa plateau passed through Dohad on the way to Ujjain. The Eastern route through Bundelkhand was longer, and the area less populated. Ujjain town was well connected to all parts of Malwa plateau and adjoining areas by separate roads. Raghubir Sinh has mapped the additional roads opened by the Marathas in the Malwa suba and adjoining areas during their campaigns in the first half of the 18th century. Indore which emerged as a major town during this period and served as Holkar's headquarter was connected to Ujjain in north and Khargon in south, the latter linking it to Surat road coming from Burhanpur in Sarkar Nandurbar. Similarly an east-west road opened by the Marathas joined Kotah to Shivpuri. Only natural obstructions on the way from north were the Vindhya Range followed by Narmada River and to some extent relatively lower ranges of Satpuda and Sahyadri hills, all of them having an east-west orientation. The Narmada is only in part navigable owing to the excessive steepness of the banks. The

---

1 Sinh, Raghubir, *Malwa in Transition*, p.5
2 Gordon, Stewart, 'Burhanpur: Entrepot and Hinterland', p.431
3 Habib, Irfan, op.cit., Sheet 14B
4 Khan, Zahoor Ali, 'Roads to the Deccan', p.354
5 Sinh, Raghubir, *Malwa in Transition*, map of Malwa facing p.1; See also Gordon, S N, The Slow Conquest, p.3
7 Gordon, Stewart, 'Burhanpur: Entrepot and Hinterland', p.431
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
Narmada is very often called the Reva, a name derived according to the Puranas from the leaping and hopping motion of her stream (from the root rev to leap) through its rocky bed. ¹ Narmada was “fordable by camel at Akbarpur”² On the Agra–Burhanpur route (through Ujjain) and further east near Mandhata for some part of the year only. Narmada represented a natural boundary between North and South, a term that we will be using to denote Maratha Expansion during the 18th century across the Narmada River and Maratha territory south of it.

Malwa plateau, Khandesh and Bundelkhand had the same soil type i.e., black loamy soil. This type of soil was perfect for cotton cultivation, which was grown widely in central India during this period. The other cash crop that grew well in Central India were opium, sugarcane, pan(betel leaf), indigo, grape, mango, melon, and sandalwood, but most of this were area specific as far as production for the distant market is concerned.³ Towards eastern side of the Malwa plateau the cultivable land seems to be much more widespread than western part, the northwestern tracts which were rocky contained Chambal ravines known as “badland”.⁴ Khandesh Suba was uniformly suited for cultivation. Forest products were also abundant in south-eastern Malwa, especially Bijagarh, Handia and Garha along with wild elephants.⁵ Besides crops and forest products, Bundelkhand was known for its diamond mines in and around Panna.⁶

There were many cotton textile-manufacturing centers in Central India manufacturing good quality cotton textile. They were located very near to cotton and indigo growing areas, required for producing cotton textile. Cotton was grown in sarkar Chanderi, Raisen and Handia in eastern Malwa in large quantity; in western Malwa also it was grown.⁷ Cotton was grown in “Adilabad area south of Burhanpur

---

¹ Indore State Gazetteer, Bhopal, 1996, See Introductory Chapter.
² Habib, Irfan, op.cit., Sheet 9B
³ Ibid., this statement is purely on the basis of visual analysis of the map & may be only partly correct
⁴ Spate, O H K and Learmonth, A T A, India and Pakistan, p.622 where they give approximate area of the Chambal ravine as 1,400,000 acres
⁵ Sinh, Raghubir, Malwa in Transition, p.8
⁶ Pogson, W R, op.cit., pp.128, 169-171, where he says, “Boondelkhund is an extensive and fertile province, celebrated for its diamond mines, iron ore, the quantity of grain and excellent cotton it produces”
town, as well as in “Bundelkhand at many places”. Main cotton textile manufacturing centers were Sironj, Chanderi, Raisen, Bhilsa, Handia, Sarangpur, Hasilpur and Dhar mostly located in eastern part of the Malwa plateau. In Khandesh main cotton textile producing centers were Burhanpur, Dharangaon, Nandurbar, Dhaita.

In Central India among areas growing cash crops, food grains and other natural resources, and manufacturing centers the maximum concentration of all these were along the Agra - Burhanpur - Surat route. Ruler controlling this part of Central India could have easy access to Northern India and also could collect big sum in form of tax on cultivable land, and tariff from traders and merchants doing business in towns and passing with their goods through the trade route. Looking at the heavy concentration of trade and commerce center and fertile areas producing food and cash crops in the region, the possibility of overall income from this region was to be very large compared to other areas in Central India.

The keen contest for the control of Central India after the decline of Mughal Empire was due to such factors as its economic prosperity which could provide stability to a regional power. Added to its prosperity was its strategic location. Positioned half way through the Delhi-Agra region and the Deccan and Western centers of political and commercial importance and connected by a thriving trade and military route, it provided easy access to both North and South parts of India. It was also having a very good climate with adequate rainfall.

Maratha expansion in the North in early 18th century were clearly to revive the battle starved economy of Maharashtra which was not so fertile and economically self supporting. Peshwa’s policy of northern expansion and acquisition of earlier discussed tracts along the trade route passing through Central India were due to prosperity of the region. Added to it were access to political centers & pilgrimage centers of North India and Rajasthan.

---

1 Habib, Irfan, *op.cit.*, Sheet 14B. See also Pogson, W R, *op.cit.*, p.128
2 Habib, Irfan, *op.cit.*, Sheet 9B. See Also Hasan, S Bashir, ‘Textile Production in Mughal Malwa’, pp.35-36
3 Habib, Irfan, *op.cit.*, Sheet 14 B
Maratha’s Line of Control and Regions Beyond

So what was the Maratha line of control all these years? Starting from Rampura in the south west on Malwa borders, this erstwhile Mewar territory given to Madho Singh of Jaipur was under Holkar’s control but faced frequent rebellions from the Chandrawat Rajputs.1 Kota was under their control and both Shinde and Holkar collected tribute from Kota ruler, Zalim Singh was an ally of the Marathas, Mukundra pass an important entry point to interiors of Rajasthan and nearby Gagron fort was thus within their control.2 Moving further north and east the line of control was near Ranthambore which Marathas were trying to wrest from the Jaipur state by making repeated claims. It was an important stronghold and had a strategic location for controlling nearby areas (Ajmer, Sambhar, Jaipur, Tonk, Bharatpur) further up in Rajasthan, but Marathas were facing lot of resistance from the local zamindars and Jaipur state forces.3 Moving further north Karauli was a friendly territory and corridor for Maratha movement into Jaipur territory from Gwalior side beyond the Chambal River, further up and east in Bharatpur Jats were strong opponents till 1760s but they were weaker after the death of Jawaharmal Jat in 1768. Much later in the 1780s Jats mellowed and turned friendly to Shinde as circumstances after the Lalsot debacle forced Marathas to ally with the Jats. However, Jats were always hostile to Holkars. Kumbher and Dig further up in the North were important mud forts of the Jats in Bharatpur territory. Shinde’s camp at Mathura in 1780s and 1790s was east of these Jat strongholds. Agra Fort next to Mathura town in the south-east was the turning point as the line of control turned south from Mathura towards Agra. On the downward slope from Agra started the Gwalior region where Gohad Jats had resisted Marathas throughout, from their mud fort at Gohad, only in 1784 they were defeated and Chhatar Singh was controlled. Gwalior south-east of Gohad was mostly under Maratha control except during the Anglo-Maratha war when it was taken over by English with the help of Gohad Jats for a brief period. South-east of Gwalior were the areas of Bundelkhand which was under Peshwas control since the time Chhatrasal

1 Holkarshahica Itihasachi Sadhane, V. V. Thakur (ed.), Vol.1, Indore, 1944, No.157/21-4-1761; No.158/13-7-1761; No.162/13-9-1761; No.12/12-8-1767; No. 38/22-2-1771; No.141/17-9-1782
2 See Gupta, Beni, Maratha Penetration into Rajasthan through the Mukundara Pass, Delhi, 1979; also Shastri, R P, Jhala Zalim Singh(1730-1830), Jaipur, 1971
3 Gwalior Kharita No. 165, Magh Sudi1, 1815/1758 & Gwalior Kharita No. 166, Posh Badi10, 1815/1758; Also see Kharita : Gwalior-Jaipur, Rajasthan State Archive, Bikaner, 1977, Serial No.16 & 20
Bundela gave him for protecting his kingdom but actually was never under total control, local chiefs turned refractory after a while and were always on their own, especially after the Battle of Panipat. Only Jhanshi was under Maratha control. Areas west of river Betwa accepted Maratha supremacy, since Peshwa’s campaign in the early days but local chiefs had never been die hard Maratha supporters. Khichiwada in the south west of Jhanshi too was rebellious state and defied Holkar’s control and agreements for tribute collection as late as 1785. This covers the whole line of control from West to East. Only territories south of this line remained under Maratha control except for the period just after the defeat in the Battle of Panipat when there was a general rebellion by Jats, Gujars and Ahirs all over north Malwa and Bundelkhand region.

Territorially Maratha expansion and presence in the North can be understood as Core and Periphery divisions based on degree of control and power that they enjoyed. In the core areas Maratha government and administration worked. In the periphery Maratha military presence and regular campaign managed tribute collection. The line of control that we travelled from West to East demarcated Core and Periphery. Core and periphery relations between ruler and the local elite as suggested by R G Fox is helpful in discussing Maratha relations with various categories of local elites in Central and North India during the 18th Century.

In the periphery there was Maratha domination from the beginning, campaigns were launched to assert Maratha dominance but local elite was always in control of their domain, the local elite had tribute agreements which they fulfilled when Maratha army applied pressure otherwise payments were partial or just token amount was handed over to keep the words, Maratha claims of huge arrears of tribute and other kinds of dues were the order of the day through out the period. Marathas finding the areas in Rajasthan not so rich in resources concentrated on directly collecting revenue from select pockets only. Moreover for similar reasons they didn’t go forward beyond Udaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer, Jaipur, Alwar line of dominance, basically Marathas eyed revenue rich areas falling in south-east Rajasthan compared to semi arid and desert areas further North-west. Ranthambor, Ajmer, Tonk, Rampura, Malpura, Toda Bhim, Sambhar, Bundi and Kota were the places whose strategic position, fertile tracts as rich source of revenue and commercially productive

---

1 Fox, Richard G., *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule: State –Hinterland Relations in Pre-industrial India*, Berkeley, 1971
centres led to constant Maratha presence there. Shinde and Holkar regularly applied diplomatic and military pressure to acquire controlling position at these places but local resistance and opposition from Jaipur and Jodhpur rulers never allowed them to settle down. Only after 1790 Marathas were in commanding position in these areas of Rajasthan when both Jaipur and Jodhpur went down fighting at Patan and Merta.

Chambal - Yamuna southern bank from Rampura in the West on Rajasthan-Malwa border right up to Kalpi in the East also depict nearly the same line of control that Maratha enjoyed for most the period of their stay in the North. Just across the Chambal River in Rajasthan lay Rampura, further northeast was Kota, further up on the curve towards east was Karauli, followed by Dholpur. Further east and south of Chambal lay Gohad beyond which Chambal emptied itself in Yamuna. As said bank of Yamuna was Maratha line of control in the North and East of Central India up to Kalpi.

Maratha campaigns north of Yamuna into the Doab region met tough opposition from the very beginning. Before Panipat and even after Maratha dominance in the region bordered by Yamuna and Ganga river banks was temporary and short-lived. Maratha thanas were set up and Malhar Rao Holkar & Raghunathrao especially campaigned in this region before and after Panipat battle. After his death Peshwa’s generals Ramchandra Ganesh and Visaji Krishna and Mahadji too tried to take over areas in this region from Jats and Rohillas but till Anglo-Maratha war, here Maratha presence was through military campaigns, local elites ruled supreme after Marathas departed. Only Mahadji Shinde’s forces made entry here as they occupied Doab areas in the north-west roughly from Aigar to Firozabad. Beyond this Awadh Nawab and English ruled supreme starting from Kanauj to Kanpur further east to Lucknow right up to Allahabad. No doubt Antarved i.e., area from Etawah to Allahabad was under Maratha’s sphere of influence so were the Doab region from the Siwaliks in the North to the junction of Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad in 1760s after the Battle of Panipat1 and even before but not much was gained in terms of dominance and control or tribute from these areas across Chambal and Yamuna line of control. They were merely under Maratha sphere of influence for some time before

---

1 See Selection from the Peshwa Daftar (New Series), Vol.3, P M Joshi (ed.), Bombay 1962, Introduction, p.8 “Shuja-ud-Daula and the Rohillas entered into pact with Malhar Rao Holkar whereby they tacitly agreed to treat the Antarvedi as a sphere of Maratha influence. Malhar Rao sent Venkat Rao to the Antarvedi as his agent but the Rohillas going back to their understanding murdered the Agent in March 1766”
Rohillas, Afghans, Shuja-ud-Daula and English made them their own spheres of influence.

In between Rajasthan and Doab territory Maratha found Mathura as a safe base in the years after Panipat. After the Anglo-Maratha war Mahadji Shinde moved up from his earlier headquarters at Ujjain to a permanent camp at Mathura and placed his garrisons at Aligarh, Agra and Gawalior to handle his army’s manoeuvres against the local elites of Rajasthan, Delhi and Doab. Moreover, from Mathura camp he could serve the Emperor’s needs better and had better grip over politics at Delhi court too. Kota, Jaipur, Delhi, Bharatpur and Agra could be easily approached and monitored from Mathura.

For the Marathas, Mathura as a safer base seems to have emerged during the Panipat campaign. English agents report Naro Shankar Qiladar of Delhi taking shelter at Mathura after Maratha defeat at Panipat. So did Ramaji Bhawani, Maratha commander and Gangadhar Narayan, diwan of Malhar Rao Holkar after the Battle of Panipat. Control over Mathura also figured in Maratha game plan due to its religious importance.

Rajasthan formed the periphery in Maratha sphere of influence in the North-West. With numerous fortified locations of its Rajput rulers, their subordinate chieftains and rugged terrain and extreme climatic conditions it posed challenge to an invading party. All three bigger states of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur derived their strengths from their impregnable forts like Ranthambhore in Jaipur; Mehrangarh, Nagore, Merta in Jodhpur and Chittorgarh in Udaipur. Marathas thus faced tough resistance and repeated claims for tribute were even not honoured by the Rajput rulers. It was only pitched battle that brought the Rajput forces down, that too with the aid of Europeanised Maratha forces in 1790. The whole region was a complex of forts (garh) and fortalice (garhi) of the local elites that Marathas had to encounter during their campaigns. Aravali was a defining feature that demarcated agriculturally better off Eastern Rajasthan from desert like Western Rajasthan which was rain scarce and had low water table.

---
1 Foreign Department Records, NAI, SC 1761(7, 77, 8, 81)
2 Ibid.
“Economically the region was underdeveloped as compared to neighbouring Malwa, Gujarat, Delhi and Agra because of ecological limitations.” However, for trading in quality horses brought from Sindh side along with other draft animals like camel, Pushkar, Mundawa (Nagor), Balotra, Patan and Jaipur were important centres during the 18th century, buyers from the Malwa & Agra region flocked to these markets. Turkish Horses were ordered from Jaipur horse market for the Poona court to be used by the Peshwa. Also trade route connecting the upper Gangetic plain with the seaports of Gujarat passed through eastern Rajasthan.

Since most of agriculturally rich pockets in Rajasthan were concentrated in its south-eastern part, Marathas activities were also largely confined to this region in the next fifty years as they coveted fertile portions of land with good revenue potential, as also commercially dynamic centres. Ajmer, Kishangarh, Shahpura, Malpura, Rampura, Tonk, Toda, Sambhar, Kota and Bundi happened to be major areas of Maratha interest till the end of the 18th century; all these areas were also located where frontiers of the three major Rajput states of Mewar, Marwar and Jaipur converged. Most of the areas besides these falling in Mewar, Marwar and Jaipur were not so attractive to the Marathas in terms of revenue earnings as this particular concentration of land. Probably that is how one can explain Marathas long term involvement in Rajasthan despite stiff resistance all around.

Horse trading centers in Rajasthan were an important attraction for the Marathas. Kharitas of Holkar and Shinde refer to demands for horses and Maratha representatives’ crossing over to Rajasthan to purchase horses and camels from Rajgarh and Patan just before the Battle of Panipat. Mahadji Shinde wrote to Jaipur ruler Prithvi Singh in 1771 to facilitate his North Indian ally Himmat Bahadur and Anupgiri’s agent Gosain Jagrupgiri who had gone to buy horse and camel from the fair ground in Rajasthan. Mahadji in 1772 bought horses for his own requirements as

1 Singh, Dilbagh, *The State, Landlords and Peasants: Rajasthan in the 18th Century*, Delhi, 1990, p.2
3 *Gwalior Kharita* No. 28, Chaitra Sudi 6, 1848/1791
4 Singh, Dilbagh, *op.cit*, p.2
5 *Holkar Kharita*, No.80, Posh, 1818/1761
6 *Gwalior Kharita* No.19, Margashir Badi 4, 1828/1771
wrote to Prithvi Singh to let his man Maujdin buy good horses first from an undisclosed fair ground.\(^1\) Mahadji in 1791 wrote to Jaipur ruler Pratap Singh requesting four horses of Turkish variety for Peshwa at Puna which traders had brought from abroad.\(^2\) In 1791 towards the end of the year Mahadji again asked Pratap Singh to send 10 Turkish Horses of good health, sturdy, intelligent (swift, trained) type \(^3\) “Many of the local melas, in Rajasthan also called hats (weekly fairs), became important outlets for indigenous horse-breeds of Sind and Gujarat”\(^4\) which sold alongside the foreign breeds coming from major breeding areas of Central Asia.\(^5\) Maratha sardars needed horses for their cavalry at cheaper rate and these markets served their purpose as they sold horses from. horse trading centres in Rajasthan at Pushkar near Ajmer, Mundwa near Nagor and Balotra near Jodhpur were attended by representatives of Maratha sardars and their allies. At Pushkar fair during autumn around 5000 horses were put on sale.\(^6\) Mahadji took personal interest in promoting Pushkar fair which probably suffered due to Shinde’s campaigns in 1787 and 1790 and wrote to Pratap Singh \(^7\) “Shri Pushkar fair has been organized in Kartik month every year and this year too ask all traders to attend the fair and inform them about it”.\(^8\) Rajasthan had indigenous breeding centres too.\(^9\) “Ummedganj fair in the neighbouring Malwa 200 km to the south-east, serviced the Kota state with horses”\(^10\) and must have been attended by buyers from Maratha camps too.

In the early phase of Maratha campaigns when Maratha frontier in the North didn’t go much beyond Malwa plateau Kota served as a local Maratha base for making moves in Rajasthan and Jats territories of Bharatpur and Gohad as well as Rohilla territories across the Chambal river in the North. Kota was the earliest base of

\(^1\) Gwalior Kharita No.25, Magh Sudi 14, 1829/1772
\(^2\) Gwalior Kharita No.28, Chaitra Sudi 6, 1848/1791; also see Gwalior Kharita No.30, Baishakh Sudi 9 1848/1791; Gwalior Kharita No.50, Posh Sudi 8, 1848/1791 & Gwalior Kharita No.54, Mah Sudi 1, 1848/1791
\(^3\) Gwalior Kharita No.51, Posh Sudi 13, 1848/1791
\(^4\) Gommans, Jos J L, op.cit., pp.80-81
\(^5\) Ibid., p.79
\(^6\) Ibid., p.81
\(^7\) Gwalior Kharita No.43, Aasoj Sudi 5, 1848/1791
\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid., p.80
\(^10\) Ibid., p.81
the Marathas in the North.¹ The period from 1732 to 1761 was one of the Maratha expansion in Northern India and Rajputana. Kota was the gateway to Rajputana. Besides, Kota was a small state, unable to resist the aggressions and depredations of the Deccani raiders. Through the Mukundra Pass in the Mukundra Hills of the Aravali range located south of Kota the Maratha hordes used to pour into the states of Kota, Bundi and Jaipur.² Famous Gagron fort lay nearby the Mukundra Range and was a famous strong hold of the Mughals and its location was strategic for the Maratha campaigns in Rajasthan and Jat territory. Gagron lay south to another famous Mughal fort of Ranthambor which was under Mughal control till 1753. Control on Gagron facilitated movement on the route via Kota to Rajasthan and Delhi which was an all weather route, especially in the monsoon season when Burhanpur-Agra-Delhi route was not easy. Kota became one of the permanent Maratha out post as early as 1742, here Peshwa appointed Balaji Yashwant Gulgule as his representative and revenue collector. In the 1750s & 1760s as Maratha penetration in Rajasthan and neighbouring Delhi region was being actively pursued, Shinde and Holkar were also campaigning in Delhi, Panjab and further North-West near the Afghan borders. Kota became an important Maratha base for these operations in the North. Much more direct routes from Ujjain and Indore came into use as Maratha presence in the North necessitated communication and supplies to the various camps on regular basis. In the 1750s and 1760s Kota became main hub of the Marathas for the military activity in the North. Arms and ammunition depot and factory were set up here to maintain supplies to Maratha camps in nearby frontier posts.

Economic & strategic importance of certain pocket had their own attraction for the Marathas, so Shindes tried hard to gain control over the salt trade at Sambhar in Rajasthan in which both Jaipur and Jodhpur had fifty-fifty stake. So was the case of famed diamond mines of Panna³ in Bundelkhand where Shuja-ud-Daula, English East India Company and the Marathas tried to gain control from the local Bundela chief by wresting control over the nearby forts. Even iron ore mines in the Gwalior and Bundelkhand region⁴ gained importance for casting guns and canon balls and other

² Shastri, R P, op.cit., p. 27
³ Pogson, W R, op.cit., pp.157, 169-171
⁴ Ibid., p.157
military and civil needs right from the time of Malhar Rao Holkar who along with her
daughter-in-law Ahilyabai raised artillery for his army in the karkhanas near Gwalior
and later in the 1780s Mahadji Shinde also got guns and cannon balls made here.²

Understanding Regional Reality and State Formation

Shinde and Holkar families thrived on military campaigns, due to their
excellent cavalry, mastery in guerilla warfare and later on their European style
military set up as per the requirements of warfare in the North. Maratha state
formation in the North was a continuous function of highly mobile army engaged in
repeated march and siege of the strongholds of local elites in the forward areas. The
expansion of Maratha power by these sardars in military and economic terms could
be better understood by having a feel of the regional geography and topography of the
area where they were highly mobile throughout the period of their campaigns and the
way they negotiated physical hurdles.

Geographical aspects were very closely associated with Maratha expansion
that began with Peshwa assigning territories to his sardars Shinde and Holkar in the
North. Broadly speaking movement of the Maratha army and the geographical spread
of the Marathas under Shinde and Holkar was more vertical than lateral as they
marched to North, first from Poona into Malwa and Bundelkhand and afterwards
from Indore and Ujjain to areas further North. This becomes clear by comparing their
movement with Gaikwad and Bhonsale’s position in the West and East. In the much
later stages too, Kota, Mathura, Agra, Jhansi and Delhi came to have Maratha
establishments that were positioned straighter in the North from their headquarters in
Central India. Highly mobile army of Shinde and Holkar crossed over major rivers
Narmada, Chambal, Yamuna and several other rivers that stood between Poona court
of the Peshwas and their camps and outposts (thanas) in the North. They created a
South–North corridor which can be better understood by their use of the several
military and trade routes, of which the earlier Mughal highway from North to South
& West via Agra, Gwalior, Burhanpur was one. Moreover, later on Shinde and
Holkar’s camps-court in the North were never stationary and moved into Rajasthan in
the west as well as Doab in the east for their military forays from Kota and Mathura.

¹ Holkarshahica Itihasachi Sadhane, Vol.1, V V Thakur (ed.), Indore, 1944, No.216/10-2-1765
² Sindhia as Regent of Delhi, J N Sarkar (trans.&ed.), Bombay,1954, No.3/p. 25
Another important geographical aspect that concerns Shinde and Holkar relates to Peshwa's distribution of territories given in grant to them from time to time mostly falling in Central India. When Peshwa assigned conquered and yet to be conquered areas to Shinde and Holkar, he denied them the advantages of aggrandizing their holdings, their allotted territories lay dispersed far and wide. It poses a challenge in mapping and understanding the geographical spread of the estates of the two families as it lay interspersed, a predetermined strategy of the Peshwas to keep the sardars in control.¹

In and around Kota all three sardars Shinde, Holkar and Pawar had their holdings, and Kota vakil Gulgule managed their revenue accounts separately from three areas Khairabad Bakani, Bhilwadi and Kota.²

What led to Maratha expansion in the North? At the beginning of the 18th Century Maratha homeland was a war ravaged territory. Constant warfare against Aurangzeb for more than two decades had left Agriculture and related economic activity in a state of decline. The countryside in Maharashtra and neighbouring Khandesh had deserted villages and land uncultivated for years when Shahu & Peshwa came to power. Moreover, Maharashtra’s natural resources were limited and unevenly distributed. Even before the rise of Maratha power under Shivaji, Maharashtra in 17th Century was not a prosperous region compared to other neighbouring regions like Gujarat, Khandesh and Malwa. The Konkan coast had fertile tracts that ran from North to South but were nowhere more than 50 km wide all along the Malabar Coast. To the east of Konkan ran mountainous tract of Western Ghats in parallel from North to South, flatter at the top housing famous hill forts but not very much suited for agriculture work? Beyond the Western Ghats there is a gentle descend towards east into hilly tract. They are further replaced by undulating tracts much lower in altitude and flatter plains. But the region east of Western Ghats was devoid of normal monsoon rains as it fell in the rain shadow area. Agriculture activity in this part of Maharashtra too was limited due to scarcity of rain. Godavari, Bhima and Krishna originating in the Western Ghats were the main river that ran

¹ A Historical Atlas of South Asia, Schwaratzberg, Joseph E.(ed.), Oxford, 1992 also shares this view see his comments on p.211 “A single map can not hope to portray adequately the political geography of the period of Maratha prominence, and we confidently expect that future research will not only modify the view we have presented but also provide a much fuller explanation of the pattern of events.”

² Shindeshahi Itihasachi Sadhane, Vol.1 L.20/24-5-1744; Gulgule Daftar, Vol.1, L.20/24-5-1744
from West to East. Poverty in villages was widespread at the beginning of the 18th century as long years of warfare further ruined agriculture and allied economic activities. Malhar Rao Holkar and Ranoji Shinde’s families had little resources at their disposal in their respective villages. To bail out their families from economic hardship they left their family profession and moved out of their villages and joined the local Maratha sardars to earn their livelihood. About Ranoji Shinde Malleson commented in 1869, “....descendant of a decayed Rajpoot family of Kunnierkheer, a village fifteen miles east of Satara, had been reduced to such a state of poverty, that he had entered the service of the Peshwa as slipper bearer.”

Before joining Kanthaji Kadam Bande, a Maratha sardars active in west Khandesh, Malhar Holkar’s family lived in Hol village on the north bank of the Nira river in west Khandesh and earned their living by rearing goats, after the death of his father Malhar moved to the house of his maternal uncle Bhojraj Barga!, Chaugala (village officer) of Taloda with his mother.

Shahu after his return from Mughal captivity had little resources at his disposal. Royal treasury ran empty in Rajaram and Tarabai’s regime due to hectic warfare and disturbances all around. Shahu’s situation worsened with civil war and had run into debt to bankers whom Peshwa mobilized to support the financial needs of the new regime. Little scope for improvement in revenue flow from the prevailing conditions in Maharashtra forced Peshwa to look towards North. Khandesh and Malwa were prosperous Mughal subas with high agricultural production and thriving trade and commerce with Western and Northern India. It was Bajirao who chose the policy of Maratha expansion in the North as the survival strategy to bail out Shahu from the financial crisis that he was facing from the very beginning. Shrinking Mughal power in the outlying regions of Malwa, Gujarat and Khandesh was also a factor that complemented Bajirao’s plans.

In the process of its expansion in the North, Maratha power in the 18th century crossed over many geographical boundaries. Shinde and Holkar families thrived on military campaigns due to their excellent cavalry, mastery in guerilla warfare and later on their adjustments in military set up as per the requirements of

---

1 Malleson, G.B., *Recreations of An Indian Official*, London, 1872, See, the chapter on Madhajee Sindia, p.331

42
warfare in the North. First it was Khandesh, then it was Malwa Plateau and Bundelkhand, all combined had a common denomination Central India coined by British administrator James Tod & John Malcolm.¹ Later Rajasthan Delhi and Doab regions too came under Maratha dominance. After Panipat Maratha power was again established in these regions.

Contemporary Marathi literature in form of correspondences could be used for reconstructing the historical geography of the regions, covered in the process of Maratha expansion in the North. These correspondences left behind by the Maratha army commanders and their associates, writing to their concerned officials & superiors at Poona court, and later on those of Maratha sardars Shinde and Holkar abound in day to day reports on movement and developments in the Maratha camps. Details on topography while Maratha army was on the march from South to North helps in understanding Maratha state formation in Central India much better, there are numerous correspondences, narrating tackling of the topography by scores of highly mobile Maratha bands and central Maratha army as it moved from its bases and camps. Thus processes of Maratha expansion across the Vindhya Ranges and Narmada River and further North in Rajasthan, Delhi-Agra and Doab beyond Chambal and Yamuna rivers were determined by the challenges that the tracts and the mighty rivers provided on the while crossing them. Today in the era of all weather roads it is difficult to understand the challenges thrown by natural barriers to a marching army. But in those days local elite who controlled strategic entry points like fords on the river and way through mountain passes held the key, for establishing regular transport and communication in the forward areas beyond those barriers, this can not be negated. Fords on Narmada and Mukundra pass were the gateways to Malwa and Rajasthan respectively. So were the role of several other geographical features like trade and military routes, forts and fortresses, forests & ravines as local military strongholds.

The impact of nature and local topography in Maratha expansion in the North can not be overlooked and will become much clearer from the discussion that unfolds on basis of the readings from Maratha and English accounts. Flooded Ganga and Yamuna Rivers proved quite a setback for the Marathas whose logistics was badly affected as they were trapped and couldn’t chase Abdali’s army in the Doab region.

¹ Tod, James, *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, Delhi, 1971, Vol.1, p. 8, see the foot note; Malcolm, John, *A Memoir of Central India*, 2 Vols., New Delhi, 1970
was Narmada River that lay on the way to marching Maratha army when they were aiming to conquer Malwa and regions further North.

Stepping out of their homeland for the military campaigns after finishing agriculture work and celebrating *Dussehra* festival, as numerous Marathi documents mentions was not just symbolic but a practice that followed the law of nature too. Incessant rains from June to August, knee deep slush on marching tracks in the routes and flooded rivers made it difficult for the army to move along with all the baggage. So was the role of topography of each and every place on way to the final destination. Rivers were fordable only at some places. Mountain passes were only way to cross over an otherwise rugged and thorny terrain. Green patches or forest cover served as fodder for draft animals. Maratha army attempting a campaign followed a well known route in the region passing through fords and mountain passes. Local elites controlling these places were important allies for any army attempting to conquer areas lying beyond these barriers. Forts, fortresses (military stronghold) and fortalices from where local elites controlled their surrounding areas were another important landmark that a Marching army had to pass through. *Garh/garhi* or local strongholds as they were known as, became important for any army as they could be used for all types of military function from store house for food supplies, water, depot of arms and ammunitions, for lodging royal members of the chief during war (Nawal Singh family lodged in a suitable fort see Holkar Kharita records) they also acted as prison for the enemies of the states etc. This last feature in the topography was a typical man made feature throughout western India and played an important role in setting the equations between the Maratha sardars and the local elite in the area. There were different kinds of forts- hill fort (Jodhpur, Kalinjar, Asirgarh), desert fort (Merta, Nagore), mud fort (Gohad, Bharatpur), plain fort (Agra, Aligarh) that Maratha army tackled. Many more forts and fortalices lay on the way when Maratha army marched from South to North. Control over them meant control over the local elite.

So Maratha state formation in Central and North India during the 18th Century has to be first seen as countering these barriers, a complex network of geographical and man made strongholds in the region.

Also it is important to note that state formation in Central and North India had never been attempted on such a grand scale by a power moving towards North from the South. For the first time Marathas were marching against the natural course, most often rulers from North had marched to South. Whether it was Alauddin Khalji,
Muhammad bin Tughlaq or lately the Mughals under Aurangzeb. Marathas were the only powerful group located beyond Narmada River and Vindhya hill ranges that marched towards North to conquer Central India, Rajasthan and Doab regions during the Eighteenth Century. Marching through the local terrain in the frontier regions they confronted a different kind of challenge about which in the beginning they had little idea; geographical boundaries, twist and turn in the local topography and numerous natural obstacles they had to cross over before challenging the power of the local elite. Flooded Yamuna before the Battle of Panipat proved a natural setback to Maratha army's movements during the rainy season. The swollen Yamuna forbade any action in the Doab against Abdali as Bhau's army lay encamped on its southern bank from 12th August to 10th October 1760 till the time river became fordable.

In the early phases during the campaigns Maratha light horse moved over these unknown terrain in large bodies, capable of covering long distances very quickly as they had little baggage, munitions or food supplies to carry. In the beginning only weapon they carried were a lance and a sword.....they had no fire arms/muskets by then. They wore little cloth on their body too. In contrast when they were heavily loaded with baggage during the Panipat campaign of 1760-61, they had to pay the price, also because out of 'two lakh Marathas assembled at Panipat –two third of these were non-combatants'. Mahadji Shinde shed all heavy baggage after setback at Lalsot in 1787, sent back heavy guns and women to Gwalior.

Along with fast movement of their army Maratha communication network too was strong that allowed faster supplies and reinforcements in forward areas. Marathas maintained regular communication network between forces fighting in the forward areas as well as those stationed at the outposts (thanas) with the camps of the Maratha sardars in their locality and their central leadership at Poona, Indore, Ujjain or Mathura. Maratha vakil at Kota, Gulgule coordinated with Maratha revenue officials...
(kamavisdars) placed at various thanas in Mewad, Kota, Bundi, Rajgarh. While Maratha officials faced Jat onslaught at various outposts in North Malwa and neighbouring Bundelkhand they were regularly communicating their position and their requirements - need for reinforcements and lack of supplies and ammunitions to local Maratha Sardar Vishwas Rao Laxman at Jhanshi. On Vishwas Rao’s feedback from Gwalior of serious reverses suffered by Maratha troops only Poona court later decided to send reinforcements under Ramchandra Ganesh and Visaji Krishna.\(^1\)

Many times bankers accompanying Marathas travelled faster with the news from the Maratha camps to South. After Panipat disaster on 14th January Peshwa Balaji Bajirao intercepted a banker’s private messenger coming from North on 24 January at Bhilsa in Malwa. He was carrying a letter which indicated by metaphors that something serious had happened to the fighting Maratha force. Metaphors relating to jewellery read: ”two pearls dissolved, twenty five gold mohurs have been lost and of the silver and copper the total number cannot be cast up” indicating Maratha loss at Panipat.\(^2\) As two pearls indicated Sadashivrao Bhau, Peshwa’s brother and Vishwasrao his eldest son, the gold mohurs stood for his sardars and silver and copper stood for captains and soldiers.

It is interesting to find out how much distance a marching army of the Marathas with all its baggage covered in one day. Marathi correspondences uses a standard term for the distance covered from one outpost to the next calling it majal dar majal i.e., stage after stage travel by a traveller without stopping.\(^3\) Majal referred to one stage of the journey/travel being undertaken. One Darmajal was equivalent to 12 kos/24 miles/38.4 km. That Marathas had acquired knowledge about territories into which they were planning to launch their military campaign also comes to light from their correspondences.

A Marathi document from the Peshwa Daftar of the year 1733 mentions local names of the areas falling under Bundelkhand region and bordering Malwa suba. Bundelkhand itself is referred as Dashanary Desh. Narwar is called as Naishad Desh Rajanal, Bodase was known as Vaarunavat Bhishmache, Chanderi was known as

\(^1\) SPD (New Series), P M Joshi(ed.). 1962, Vol.3, See L.112 to L.174
\(^3\) See the entry for majal dar majal in Molesworth Marathi English Dictionary
Chaidh Desh Raja Shishupal, Datia was called Bhadawar Desh, Gwalior was called as Brijmandal Desh.¹

Moreover, by this time the marching army had mapped the stages and total distance in kos for the march of armies into Northern India. As the Maratha traveller in a document of 1733 from Peshwa Daftar recorded each stage of his journey starting from Rajgarh near Jhanshi to Poona that he finished in 47 days covering 320 kos or about 640 miles/1024km; making it 7 kos/14miles/22.4 km per day but whether it was on foot or horseback is not clear.² But most likely it was on horseback. Kashi Bai’s entourage while on pilgrimage to Banaras & Allahabad in 1746-47 covered 5 to 6 kos distance each day.³

Geographical spread of the Marathas was also enhanced by movement of civilian population once the Maratha army had subdued the local elite. The camp followers and later on pilgrims, bankers, traders, merchants, Banjaras, Gosains (worshippers of Shiva) and the Pindaris joined them in conquered areas. As they moved under the protection of Maratha army or that of its local ally it added to Maratha expansion in the North. Pilgrimage to areas outside Maharashtra by Peshwa family⁴ and other Maratha pilgrims was next to military and trading community’s movement from South to North. Kashi Bai, Balaji Bajirao’s mother while going to Banaras on pilgrimage in 1746 was accompanied by a large number of men including a security force led by a sardar named Visaji Dadaji.⁵ Later Kashi Bai and Visaji Dadaji asked for 2000 strong contingent to escort her from Kalpi onwards ⁶ as Bundelkhand was in a disturbed condition.⁷ During Shinde and Holkar’s presence in the North ordinary persons too went for pilgrimage under escort provided by the arranged by these sardars in cooperation with the local elite in whose area they traveled. There are several instances described in kharitas referring to pilgrims visiting Pushkar, Nathdwara, Mathura and other places nearby the Jaipur state.⁸ So

¹ Selection from the Peshwa Daftar, Vol.14, G S Sardesai (ed.), Bombay, 1931, No.7/24-5-1733
² SPD, Vol.14, No.7/24-5-1733, The document is unique, Jhansi to Poona each and every outpost is described along with the arrival date at each outpost, See Appendix at the end of this chapter.
³ SPD (New Series) Vol.1, P M Joshi(ed.), Bombay, 1957, No.72/17-4-1746
⁴ Ibid., No.68/18-1-1746
⁵ Ibid., No.68/18-1-1746 & No.69/4-4-1746
⁶ Ibid., No.71-72/17-4-1746
⁷ Ibid., No.70/4-4-1746
⁸ Gwalior Kharita No. 102, Aasoj Sudi 7,1842/1787; Gwalior Kharita No. 69, Sawan Badi 9,1854/1797;
was the case of traders, merchants, astrologers and learned people venturing out. Jaipur state was asked to provide escort to these pilgrims and travellers in course of their journey within the state.¹

For better transport of their supplies in the ever shifting camps Marathas hired the services of local groups. For the grain supplies to their camps Marathas hired the services of Banjaras, a local tribal community engaged in trading of goods and services in those days. When this practice started is yet not established but particularly during their campaigns in Rajasthan in 1780s and 1790s, Banjaras played a key role in times of war in maintaining supplies of food and other essential items, probably arms and ammunitions too.² Banjaras brought grain & fruit from Gwalior during the Lalsot campaign as per the Persian news letters of the Lalsot campaign.³ Faqir Khair-ud-din Allahabadi in his Ibratnamah reports a grain convoy of 6,000 oxen and 700 camels coming to Shinde’s camp from the eastern side.⁴ Even they brought seven camels loaded with mohars and rupees to Shinde’s camp at Lalsot from Gwalior in 1787.⁵ In July 1787 during the Lalsot Campaign Mahadji presented scarf (shela) and turban (pagoti) to the Banjara chief.⁶ Shinde certainly was trying to reiterate his faith in this local group and expected better cooperation with Banjaras in transport of supplies to the grain markets in his camp near Lalsot, when prices had gone up. “5 seers of flour, 6 seers of barley, 5 seers of dal, 7 seers of bajra and jawar were being sold for a Nana Shahi rupee”.⁷ Further Shinde also abolished octroi duty (mahsul) to please the Banjaras.⁸

Pindaris famous for their loot and plunder as they followed Maratha camps appeared as a part of Maratha army raising their number and created terror amongst the local population. They engaged in loot of animals and other items from the rival camps. During the Lalsot campaign Hiru Pindara accompanying Shinde’s camp was

---

¹ Gwalior Kharita No. 12 Bhadon Badi 1, 1827/1770; Gwalior Kharita No.127, Ashad Badi 9, 1829/1772
² Sindhia as Regent of Delhi, Sarkar, JN(trans & ed), pp.2,14
³ Ibid.,
⁴ Ibid., p.60
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., p.4
⁷ Ibid.,
⁸ Ibid.
reported lifting many animals from the rival Jaipur camp. They made the Maratha army look much more threatening as they indulged in loot and plunder once the Maratha camp moved forward. Holkar's army in the later stages had a substantial number of Pindaris following their camps.

The Maratha camp in the North attained huge size at later stages. When the army moved it was like a city moving from one place to the other with all sorts of people in the bandwagon from bankers, traders, shopkeepers, astrologers, with separate markets for each type of commodity. All kinds of goods sold in the market besides the Maratha camp. C W Malet, British Resident with Marathas aptly describes the scene at one such camp that spread over the space of 12 miles, the Bazaar formed a very long broad street to the tent of the chief, where shopkeepers, handicrafts and every species of profession carry on their callings. Maratha presence in the North is visible more in their camps than in conquest and consolidations (in the Mughal style) by tracing the presence and posting of their officials Sar-Subhadar, Kamavisdars and Mamlatdars in the parganas. From these camps Maratha sardars also collected taxes from chiefs located nearby, after victory at Patan & Merta in 1790 over Jaipur and Jodhpur forces, Mahadji's stay in Rajasthan fits above descriptions as he halted at several places collecting money from local chieftains.

Marathas mobility in the given geographical space during the long time span of their stay in the North reveals much more about the limited options they had. Given the fact that during the later part of the Mughal period jagirdars and zamindars by maximizing revenue demand had already impoverished the farmers especially in the Deccan, Marathas needed to be on the move and survive by collecting whatever money they could manage in an age of great disturbance in the North. For Marathas it was also necessary to adjust with other powers and survive within the narrow geographical limits in the North, they couldn't go back to Maharashtra, other powers

---

1 Ibid.,
2 C W Malet's Memoranda on the Maratha Army quoted by Jadunath Sarkar in Fall of the Mughal Empire, Vol.2, pp.206-207
3 See Sindhia as Regent of Delhi, pp.45-58 several incidences of Mahadji collecting money from local Rajput chiefs are mentioned from the Persian News letters, on p.45 it reads, "In every march of Mahadji Sindhia, Ambaji and Deshmukh with the fauj and guns used to go ahead and collect 2 or 3 lakhs from the villages and garhis of Shekhawati, such as Madhogarh, etc., and bring away grain and cattle and hostages for contributions." This was also because as per Kharita details Marathas had failed to collect much from Rajputs by peaceful means.
couldn't be conquered Shinde and Holkar had to co-exist with the English in the East, Sikhs in the North, Gaikwads in Gujarat and Bhonsles in South-East.

Thus Maratha army didn't march alone, local people also joined as Banjaras found employment in their company, Pindaries made a living, shopkeepers and merchants followed the camp selling their products. Marathas themselves had their wives and relatives with them; in 1788 all of them were cast off and sent to Ujjain as Marathas were facing reverses.

Let us recreate the picture of an area under control of the local elite. In the Eighteenth Century milieu, residences and headquarters of the local chieftains of Central India stood over hilltops and hillocks in closely guarded fortifications. Beyond the numerous forts and fortalices dotting the length and width of the region lay rolling fertile agricultural tracts of the ryots and their villages. There were smaller fortifications called garhis of his subordinates too, in the nearby locality. This whole area was approached by one or more military and trade route connecting it to the headquarters of the regional political power and local trade and commerce center.

Above description suited the area occupied by Khichis of Raghogarh in Central India during the 18th century. Khichis state came up during the Mughal period with its capital at Raghogarh, 40 miles away in the north-west from the major commercial centre Sironj. Sironj lay on the Agra-Gwalior-Burhanpur route with regular military and trade convoys passing by. Khichis domain extended up to Betwa rive in the East to Andheri River, a tributary of Parvati in the west. They had under their sway several local petty chieftains. Later as Maratha came to Malwa Khichis had to become a Maratha tributary. “With the expansion of Maratha rule over Malwa, a shorter route to the Deccan was opened, leaving the royal highway at Shivpuri, 65 miles south west of Gwalior, and turning south-westwards to Ujjain and Indore.”

Both Shinde and Holkar made Khichis their tributary during the period of Maratha rule in Malwa but Khichi’s unique position in the regional setting made them important local elite due to their presence near the main highway from North to South.

Central India comprising of three constituent geographical regions of Malwa, Khandesh and Bundelkhand, had a mix of rich agricultural tracts dotted with numerous forts and fortalices sitting over hilltops and close to a perennial source of

---

1 Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, New Delhi, 1973, Vol.3, p.212
water either a big pond, a stream, a rivulet or a local river. Further, headquarters of locally powerful groups were very close to thriving trade and commerce centers all along the famous Surat- Burhanpur- Agra trade route and another route bifurcating from Burhanpur to Ujjain, going up to Ajmer in Rajasthan. For Marathas, to have access to this famous trade route of those days, Maratha army had to first control nearby fort of Asirgarh controlled by a Mughal Faujdar. Narmada River was another big challenge as Maratha army could only cross over the mighty river at a ford near Barwaghat controlled by a local chieftain Nandlal Chaudhuri. In 1715, nearly 10,000 Marathas are described crossing the Narmada River at Barwaghat and demanding tribute for the last three years from the amil of Kampel but he managed to flee to Ujjain, the Mughal headquarter for Suba Malwa. In his absence Nandlal Chaudhuri negotiated with the Marathas by providing them two horses and some cash. Holkar’s Marathi records from 1720-173\ shows that Malhar Rao Holkar was regularly in touch with Nandlal and the latter was paying tribute before a Maratha revenue collector replaced him.

Areas south of Chambal were safe bases once the Maratha forces subdued local powers. Here they recharged themselves for fresh campaigns as well as took refuge after hectic warfare, as it happened after the famous Lalsot campaign of 1787 against Jaipur ruler. Seriously challenged and retreating Maratha forces took refuge in the areas south of Chambal River.

Marathas were not so successful in reducing Jat territory in the Bharatpur-Dholpur region of strong mud fortifications developed by Jat ruler Surajmal. Mud forts of Kumbher and Dig defied gun attacks and Holkar family lost its future ruler Khanderao during the battle near Kumbher. Gohad was another such mud fortification in the east. Holkar laid a siege to reduce Gohad Jats in 1765 but died a year later without having full control over them. Holkar seem to have mobilized his whole armed strength to capture Gwalior and Gohad areas in cooperation with his daughter –in- law Ahilyabai (arranging for supply of ammunitions). But the operation had to be abandoned when even Raghunath Rao who joined later, failed to reduce Gohad fortifications. Shinde could conquer it after prolonged warfare and huge expenditure.
Ranthambor fort which was crucial for any power trying to control Rajasthan was made over to Madho Singh in 1753 by the Mughals.\(^1\) And since then it remained the bone of contention between the Marathas and the Jaipur ruler.\(^2\) Ranthambor was the gate way to Rajasthan. Forts under Maratha control acted not only as garrison for the army but also as prison for keeping his enemies, and even as state treasury for storing wealth. Agra was within Shinde’s sphere of influence, a garrison town where even his general Perron lodged his family as late as 1803 before seeking protection from British.\(^3\) Aligarh had also become Shinde’s garrison town where Perron also had a *jaydad* given by Shinde for maintaining his troops. Aligarh was a strong fort and well garrisoned. On 4\(^{th}\) September 1803 Aligarh was lost from Maratha possession by the storming of the British forces.\(^4\) Beyond Agra in the east Shinde was not in control and British forces were powerful in the 1790s and the first decade of the 19\(^{th}\) century. Whereas Shinde’s European officers who had shown dissent and become prisoners were lodged in the Agra fort.\(^5\) Khichi chief Balwant Singh was confined to Gwalior fort after he surrendered.\(^6\) When Agra Fort was stormed on 10\(^{th}\) October 1803 and English force evacuated Maratha forces on 18\(^{th}\) October they took possession of a treasure worth rupees 25 lakhs from the fort compound.\(^7\)

---

\(^{1}\) Shastri, R P, *op.cit.*, p.38

\(^{2}\) *Gwalior Kharita* No. 165, Magh Sudi1, 1815/1758; *Gwalior Kharita* No.166, Posh Badi10,1815/1758

\(^{3}\) Smith, L F, *op.cit.*, p. 33

\(^{4}\) Ibid., p. 33

\(^{5}\) Ibid., p.38

\(^{6}\) Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, Vol.3, p.211

\(^{7}\) L F Smith, *op.cit.*, p.39