

**VIDARBHA: EXPLORING THE EMERGENCE OF  
ITS SPATIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIO-  
POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS  
(C.1<sup>ST</sup> BCE TO 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CE)**

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts

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2023

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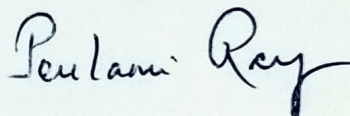
**'VIDARBHA: EXPLORING THE EMERGENCE OF ITS SPATIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS (C.1<sup>ST</sup> BCE TO 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CE)'** submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Professor Nupur Dasgupta, Department of History, Jadavpur University. And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere / elsewhere.

  
Professor Nupur Dasgupta

Supervisor

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Dated: 01.02.2023

## DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that the research work entitled '**VIDARBHA: EXPLORING THE EMERGENCE OF ITS SPATIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL AND CULTURAL DYNAMICS (C.1<sup>ST</sup> BCE TO 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY CE)**' is an original work done by me under the supervision of Prof. Nupur Dasgupta, Jadavpur University which was approved by the research committee.

To the best of my knowledge, this thesis is not substantially the same as those, which have already been submitted for a degree or other academic qualification at any other universities.

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## Introduction

The present research attempts to understand how specific geographical spaces had evolved, sometimes as settlement zones identified by archaeological remnants and often as a cultural zone observed in literary cogitation of outsiders. The problem will be explored here through a study of the history of Vidarbha as a zone of habitation. The connotation of Vidarbha as a spatial unit itself triggers some important issues that are addressed here. The term ‘Vidarbha’ has appeared in several ancient texts, and even archaeologists have picked up this term to designate a regional orbit. The latter employed it narrowly at first, indicating it to denote the area of their archaeological investigation in the Wardha – Waingangā valley. The river valley was considered the core area of Vidarbha, which is then understood as a more expansive geographical space. Rather than looking at it as an already full –fledged and distinct region, we however try to trace its emergence as a zone of human settlement through the historical phases. On the other hand, we also observe how it emerged as a cultural zone and got integrated as a part of territorial states in its neighbourhood during different historical phases. This history of Vidarbha shall be traced from a combined study of archaeological and literary sources. Deeper questions are associated with this study which dwell on whether historically significant spatial formations ever developed in early Indian context which may be defined as units beyond the concept of a region. For example, we shall explore the history of Vidarbha to understand whether it functioned as a corridor zone and a conduit or as a peripheral and adjunct space related to core areas of state societies on its flanks. Finally therefore, we take the example of Vidarbha to trace and understand how this habitation zone emerged as a region at a particular historic time and also observe how its functionality changed through diverse diachronic processes of history.

## Identification of Vidarbha:

Geographically Vidarbha has been identified as the area which covers the eastern part of Maharashtra comprising of eleven districts. This identification of Vidarbha has been mainly done by archaeologists like Reshma Sawant<sup>1</sup>, Uthara Suvarthan,<sup>2</sup>Amarendra Nath<sup>3</sup> and M.G. Dikshit<sup>4</sup> on the basis of their study of the literary evidence. One of the earliest references to Vidarbha appears in the *Udyogaparva of Mahābhārata*, where Sañjay while describing the rivers, mountains and provinces, referred to Vidarbha as an important province of Deccan.<sup>5</sup> Vidarbha has been identified as an inhabited space situated in close proximity to Daṇḍakāraṇya in several religious and non-religious texts.<sup>6</sup> In several other texts like the *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* of Varahāmihira,<sup>7</sup>the *Mālavikāgnimitra* of Kālidāsa<sup>8</sup> and even in the Puranic traditions Vidarbha has emerged as a kingdom and we also get names of mythical rulers. Certain important geographical features have been pointed out in several ancient texts. The *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* mentions a river that flows into the Vidarbha, named Venna which has been identified as the modern Waingangā River. The typical geographical

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<sup>1</sup>Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International 2012, pp. 95-123.

<sup>2</sup>Uthara Suvarthan, 'Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, pp.134-135.

<sup>3</sup>Amarendra Nath, 'Further Excavations at Pauni', *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No.97*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp.8-9.

<sup>4</sup>M.G.Dikshit, *Excavations at Kaudinyapura*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1968, pp. 1-6.

<sup>5</sup>K.M.Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, vol.II*. New Delhi: MunshiramManoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp. 68-69.

<sup>6</sup>Uthara Suvarthan, 'Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, pp. 134-135.

<sup>7</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup>.C.H.Tawney (translated), *The Malavikāgnimitra, A Sanskrit play by Kalidasa*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and co., 1981, pp.34-36.

and climatic features associated with Vidarbha have also been hinted at in some texts. This has helped the archaeologists to identify its present geographical location. The *Nalopākhyāna Parva of the Mahābhārata* contains the story which reveals the reason behind such a nomenclature. It is stated that this land (vi- darbha or destitute of darbha grass) was devoid of darbha grass due to the curse of a saint and turned extremely dry and arid.<sup>9</sup> The archaeologists have designated the eastern part of present – day Maharashtra as ‘Vidarbha’ on the basis of such descriptions. Various place names like Vatsagulma (identified as modern Washim) Kuṇḍin (identified as Kaudinyapura) and Assikanagara (identified as Adam) also led the archaeologists to identify the eastern part of Maharashtra as Vidarbha. Thus, by correlating the literary evidence with our present knowledge based on archaeological investigations it is clear that that the eastern part of Maharashtra guarded by the Satpura and Mahadeo hills in the north is what has been identified as Vidarbha in the ancient texts. The spatial identity and contour of Vidarbha changed from time to time with the changing socio-political conditions. Vidarbha has been understood in the sense of a geographical space for human habitation from the late Chalcolithic – megalithic period and its nature and function kept on changing with various emerging political and cultural trends manifest in Northern India as well as in the Deccan through time.

### **Survey of Primary Sources:**

The important literary sources that are consulted for formulating this thesis constitute the *Mahābhārata*<sup>10</sup> and the kāvyas of Kālidāsa<sup>11</sup>. These works provide the literary perceptions

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<sup>9</sup> Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, vol.II. pp. 68-69.

<sup>10</sup> K.M. Ganguly, *The Mahabharata*, vol.1-4. New Delhi: Munshiram Monoharlal, 1990.

<sup>11</sup>M.R.Kale (translated), *The Raghuvamṣa of Kalidasa*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1957, pp.38-40, Devadhar C.R. (ed.) *Meghaduta of Kālidāsa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.2015. Tawney C.H. (translated), *The Mālavikāgñimitra*, A Sanskrit play by Kalidasa, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and co. 1981.

of Vidarbha in the eyes of outsiders. *Kāvyaṃīmāṃsā of Rājāśekhara* has also been consulted for our study.<sup>12</sup> This work furnishes important textual evidence to glean at the possible historical conditions in Vidarbha pertaining to the period between seventh to ninth century CE.

The epigraphic records of the *Vākāṭaka* rulers constitute the most important body of sources for addressing our research theme.<sup>13</sup> The inscriptions of both the branches of the *Vākāṭaka* dynasty help us to understand the pattern of land administration that was prevalent at that time which offer further insight into the agrarian and living conditions in this zone of habitation. The inscriptions of the Kalacuri- Chedi era are also extremely helpful for understanding the post – *Vākāṭaka* scenario in Vidarbha.<sup>14</sup> The inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas, Ābhīras, *Vākāṭakas*, and Rāṣtrakūṭas provide rich information and help us to understand the phases of political and socio-economic developments in the Deccan in general which provide the background for the main theme of our research.<sup>15</sup> Along with

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<sup>12</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṃīmāṃsā of Rājāśekhara*, New Delhi: D.K. Print World, 2000, pp. 30-45

<sup>13</sup> V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol.v, Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Ootachamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963.

<sup>14</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. iv (part I and II) Inscriptions of the Kalachuri- Chedi Era*, Ootachamund: Government Epigraphist For India, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> F. Kielhorn, 'Dudia plates of Pravarasena II', *Epigraphia Indica, vol.3*, 1970, pp. 258-62. Kielhorn, F., 'Balaghat plates of Prithvisena II'. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 9|1981, pp. 267-71. V.B. Kolte 'Pauni Plates of Pravarasena II'. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.38, 1976, pp.53-57, V.V. Mirashi, 'Pauni Stone Inscription of the Bhara King Bhagadatta', *Epigraphia Indica, vol. XXIV, 1940*, pp.11-14, V.V. Mirashi, 'Tirodi plates of Pravarasena II', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. 22, 1938, pp. 167-76. V.V. Mirashi, 'Pattan plates of Pravarasena II', *Epigraphia Indica*, 23, 1940, pp.81-88. V.V. Mirashi, 1935. 'Anjanvati copper plate inscription of Govinda III dated 800 CE'. *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.XXIII. A.M. Shastri, 'Mandhal Copper Plate Charter of Pravarasena II, year 16'. *Epigraphia Indica*, 41, 1989, pp. 68-76. A.M. Shastri, 'Mandhal Copper Plate of Prithivasena II, year 2 and 10'. *Epigraphia Indica, vol.41*, 1989, pp. 159-180.

these, individual reports of major sites located within the sphere of our study<sup>16</sup> help immensely in understanding the field evidence for habitations, economic functions and the material culture. The seasonal and annual reports on sites<sup>17</sup> published by the Archaeological Survey of India are also useful for this work.

### **Review of Secondary Literature**

Secondary works that are used for formulating this thesis can be classified into three categories. The first category includes those works which help us to understand the political and cultural developments of Deccan. The second category of prior literature is related to the idea of state in general and also related to the specific instance of Vidarbha especially in the Vākāṭaka period. The third category of prior sources consists of conceptual literature on complex idea of space, place and region as historical categories. These are extremely important for the present study because in our perusal of the history of the zone denoted as Vidarbha is observed to indicate changes in notions as well as the functions of this zone

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<sup>16</sup> B.C. Deotare 2008. 'Excavations at Bhon', District Buldhana, Maharashtra, *Annual Report (2006-07)*, Pune: Deccan College. Deotare, B.C. 2007. Excavation at Kholapur', District Amravati, Maharashtra, *Annual Report (2007-08)*, Pune: Deccan College; R.K. Mohanty, Excavation at Mahurjhari, *Annual Report (2001-02)*, Pune: Deccan College, 2002, pp.45-47; S.B. Deo, *Excavation at Takalghat and Khapa*, 1970, Nagpur: Nagpur University. S.B. Deo *Mahurjhari Excavation 1970-72*. Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1973; R.K. Mohanty, Excavation at Mahurjhari, *Annual Report (2001-02)*, Pune: Deccan College, 2002, pp.45-47.

<sup>17</sup> A. Ghosh (ed.), *Indian Archaeological Review(IAR)*, 1955-56, pp.22-24, A.Ghosh (ed.), *IAR*, 1960-61, pp.52-54, A.Ghosh (ed.), *IAR* 1964-65, pp.26, 66, M.N. Deshpande (ed.) *IAR* 1966-67, pp.22, 58, 103. B.B.Lal, (ed.) *IAR*, 1968-69, pp.47, 13. M.N. Deshpande, (ed.) *IAR* 1971-72, pp. 31, 35. B.K.Thapar (ed.) *IAR*, (1973-74) pp.19, 45, 83. Debala Mitra(ed.) *IAR*, (1979-80) pp. 55, 103. Debala Mitra (ed.) *IAR* 1979-80, pp.55, 103. M.S. Naga Raja Rao (ed.) *IAR*, 1983-84, pp. 56-58. Jagat Pati Joshi, *IAR*, (1985-86), p.106. S.K.Mahapatra (ed.) *IAR* (1989-90), pp.55-114. B.P.Singh (ed.) *IAR* (1991-92), pp.127, 117. Hari Manjhi C. Dorje and Arundhati Bannerjee (ed.), *IAR* (1994-95), pp. 45, 89. Kasturi Gupta Misra (ed.) *IAR* (2009-10), pp.89.116. Rakesh Tiwari, (ed.) D.N. Dimri and Indu Prakash (ed.) *IAR* (2010- 11) pp. 62-75. *IAR* (2011-12), pp. 43-45.



from phase to phase. From very early times it is observed as a region of settlement in the chalcolithic – megalithic phase. In early historical times it is sometimes alluded as a cultural space. Tracing this history, we also find it to emerge as a conduit between adjacent regions and polities. The theoretical frames for understanding spatial history were therefore extremely important for this study.

### **1. Understanding Deccan as a supra – region & the place of Vidarbha**

Since Vidarbha functioned as a physiographic division of the Deccan we have got reference of Vidarbha in works related to the history of Deccan. R.G. Bhandarkar's *Early History of Dekkan* is the first book in this regard.<sup>18</sup> Next we have consulted two important works which dealt with the political history of Ancient Deccan. The first is by G. J. Dubreuil where he defined Deccan as a larger tract of country surrounded in the north by the Narmada and Mahanadi on the east by the Bay of Bengal on the West by Arabian Sea.<sup>19</sup> Ghulam Yazdani's<sup>20</sup> edited work on Deccan has provided a relatively specific and political definition. *The Age of the Satavahana* in two volumes edited by Ajay Mitra Shastri deals with various facets of the Sātavāhana rule over Deccan. Other important works are *On the edge of empire: form and substance in the Sātavāhana dynasty* by Carla M. Sinopoli,<sup>21</sup> The

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<sup>18</sup>Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, *Early History of the Dekkan*, Calcutta: Chuckerverty and Chatterjee and Co., 1928, pp.10-22.

<sup>19</sup>G.J.Dubreuil, *Ancient History of the Deccan*, Pondicherry: Alpha Editors, 1920, pp. 14-24.

<sup>20</sup> Ghulam Yazdani, *the Early History of the Deccan vol.1 and 2*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1982.

<sup>21</sup>Carla M Sinopoli, 'On the edge of empire: Form and Substance in the Satavahana dynasty' in *Empires :Perspective from Archaeology and History*, Susan E. Alcock Terence N.D. Altroy, Kathleen D. Morisson, and Kathleen D. Morrison (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.155-178.

*Gupta – Vākāṭaka Age* edited by A. S. Altekar and R.C. Majumder,<sup>22</sup>*The Vakataka Heritage: Indian Culture and The Vākāṭakas: An Essay in Hindu Iconology* by Hans Bakker have been consulted in this research.<sup>23</sup> Two major works by Aloka Parashar Sen have been consulted in writing of this thesis. Her book entitled, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Early Deccan*<sup>24</sup> and the edited volume titled, *Social and Economic History of Early Deccan: Some Interpretations* are also helpful in understanding the history of Deccan in the pre- Sātavāhana and Sātavāhana times. The work which directly refers to Vidarbha was mainly authored by the archaeologist Reshma Sawant. Her work entitled *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha* throws light on the archaeological data to understand the material culture of Deccan and also understand how Vidarbha attained its statehood under the Vākāṭakas.<sup>25</sup> Bardwell L. Smith's edited volume, *Essays on Gupta Culture*<sup>26</sup> is an extremely useful and comprehensive work on the cultural history of the Gupta- Vākāṭaka age. *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas* by V.V. Mirashi<sup>27</sup> is of course a major secondary source and has been referred in this thesis to understand how far these two dynasties exerted influence over the eastern part of Deccan. Lacey Harriet Ruth's unpublished thesis from Durham University has been of use in obtaining the recent archaeological data and perspective on the region. This thesis looks into the landscape

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<sup>22</sup>R.C.Majumder and A.S. Altekar (ed.) *The Vākāṭaka – Gupta Age: c.200-500 A.D.*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass Publishers, 1967, pp. 1-281.

<sup>23</sup> Hans T. Bakker, *Holy Ground Where Art and Text Meet: Studies in the Cultural History of India*, Boston: Brill Open, 2019, pp. 87-89.

<sup>24</sup>Aloka Parasher Sen, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Early Deccan*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2021, pp. 39-43.

<sup>25</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2012, pp. 95-123.

<sup>26</sup> Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Dass, 1983, pp. 285-287.

<sup>27</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas (Part I and Part II)*, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 1-281 and pp. 1-177.

around the Vākāṭaka ritual centre of Rāmtek in Central India. The research contextualizes the site of Rāmtek within the framework of landscape archaeology and focuses on the relationship between the Rāmtek and other neighbouring political centres.<sup>28</sup> The volume edited by Susmita Basu Majumder and S.K. Bose *Money and Money Matters in Pre-Modern South Asia* by contains a fascinating article on Kura coins. In this article, Smita Halder has referred to the coins of the local dynasties that appeared in different physiographic divisions of Early Deccan.<sup>29</sup> The numismatic evidence helps us in reformulating the early history of Deccan before the rise of the Sātāvāhanas. A comparative study of the Nasik Cave Inscription of Gautamī Balaśrī and Sannati Inscription of Siri Satakarni by Smita Halder has also been studied for formulating the thesis, especially the chapter which focuses on the influence of the Sātāvāhana rule over Vidarbha.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from these secondary works of literature, which are consulted for understanding the political matrix of Peninsular India, there is a category of work consulted to understand the Vaidarbhī rīti, which has been identified as an important cultural marker. P.C. Lahiri's work vividly discussed the concept of rīti followed by eminent Sanskrit composers like Vāmana, Daṇḍin and the doctrine of Guṇa advocated by Bharata.<sup>31</sup> V.V. Mirashi, in his work on *Bhavabhūti: His Date, Life, and Works*, has critically examined his works and provided

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<sup>28</sup> Lacey Ruth, Ramtek and its landscape: An archaeological approach to the study of the Eastern Vākāṭaka kingdom in Central India, Unpublished thesis, Durham University, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Smita Halder, 'The Kuras in Early Historic Deccan: A Numismatic Appraisal', *Money and Money Matters in Pre-Modern South Asia: Nicholas G. Rhodes Commemoration Volume*, edited by Susmita Basu Majumder and S.K. Bose, New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 243-248.

<sup>30</sup> Smita Halder, 'The Sannati Inscription of Siri Satakarnī and the Nasik Cave Inscription of Gautamī Balaśrī: A Comparative Study', *Pratnasamiksa*, vol.8, 2017, pp. 161-170.

<sup>31</sup> P.C. Lahiri, *Concepts of Riti and Guṇa in Sanskrit Poetics*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. pp. 85-111.

information related to his family life and birthplace.<sup>32</sup> Andrew Ollet in his highly significant study on the Prākṛt language and literature addresses the fact that languages interact with one another and it is impossible to characterize one language without referring to the other. Ollett cites the example of Rājaśekhara's *Karpūranmanjarī* to show different dialects within Prākṛt and also highlighted the differences between the grammarians who set certain syntax and the language practitioner who used the rules of grammar innovatively. Thus, this book gives us a detailed biography of the Prākṛt language and traces how it attained a linguistic identity around the first century BCE when the Sātavāhanas were in power.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand external factors of influences on formation and uses of languages also need to be addressed. Especially, one notes in history how politics govern the choice of language and impacted the processes of creation of literature. This is quite evident in the history of the Sanskrit as a language. Historians and epigraphists like Daud Ali<sup>34</sup> and Richard Salomon<sup>35</sup> have observed how the practice of Sanskrit culture in the royal courts had emerged as prime cultural phenomenon and how this phenomenon bestowed a semblance of authority and power. This is especially discussed in Sheldon Pollock's seminal work which shows the connection between kāvya and kingship. He also traced the origin of vernacular literature around the eighth and ninth centuries when the vernacular language made an effort to gain similar precision to that of Sanskrit and thus underwent what he calls 'grammaticization' and 'philologization.' In this way, cosmopolitan

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<sup>32</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti: His Date, Life and Works*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974, pp. 45-33.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit and the Language Order of Premodern India*, Ph. D. Thesis, Columbia: Columbia University, 2016, pp. 36-54.

<sup>34</sup> Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 172 – 173.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Salomon, *Indian Epigraphy: A Guide to the Study of Inscriptions in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and the other Indo-Aryan Languages*, oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 93 – 94.

vernaculars were born.<sup>36</sup> The article entitled as *The Prakrit Bloom* by C.B. Verma and C.B. Verma also throws light on the journey of evolution of Prakrit as a language.<sup>37</sup> These varied lenses on the uses of languages, styles of language - use and impact of language - use have been extremely important for gaining an insight into the significance of the allusion to Vaidarbhī as a style. This specific style of language - use may hold the clue to the cultural notion of Vidarbha and its heritage held by the eminent ancient litterateurs.

## 2. Perspectives from Studies on State formation

The rich and ever - growing literature on state in early historic and early medieval India forms an important category of secondary literature. These works help us to analyze the processes of emergence of the region under study within the wider and more complex political and economic matrices of history through the different phases. One important volume has been edited by Hermann Kulke and Bhairabi Prasad Sahu which includes a collection of very relevant articles on the related theme.<sup>38</sup> The editors' introduction to the volume provides an important overview on the theme and has been studied for understanding the various models suggested by eminent historians regarding state formation in the early medieval period. Hans Bakker's article from this volume<sup>39</sup> throws light on the Vākāṭaka period of Vidarbha and showed how the land grant system was a device of gaining legitimation as well as expanding the territorial jurisdiction of the Vākāṭaka rulers. On the other hand, Nandini Sinha Kapur in her article throws light on the

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<sup>36</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men; Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Pre-modern India*, California: University of California Press, pp. 1-684.

<sup>37</sup> C.B. Verma and C.B. Verma, 'The Prakrit Bloom', Sahitya Akademi: Indian Literature, 2002, pp. 139-149.

<sup>38</sup> Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke, ed., *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Baker, Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha, in Sahu and Kulke, *Interrogating Political Systems*, pp. 277-300.

nature of statehood that emerged in Vidarbha under the dominance of Eastern branch.<sup>40</sup> Both have dwelt on the evidence for the rich developments witnessed in Vidarbha under the Vākāṭakas which brought the spatial zone into the mainstream of political affairs of a state and lent it the character of a region within political and administrative frames.

### **3. Space, Place and Region as Historical Categories: Historiography and the Research Theme**

The present work demanded a clear conception of space and the nature of spatial functions. These were the two major issues needed to be unraveled in order to situate Vidarbha within the scope of the history of state formation. Investigation into these critical issues begins with the works of B.D. Chattopadhyaya, the scholar who inspired the conception of the present work. Chattopadhyaya had opened a new dimension in the study of space and region. He defined space in cultural terms and viewed that a region evolves from larger spaces. The Janapadas (inhabited space) were identified as spaces which were not homogeneous by nature, emerging with different characteristics, spatial and socio-economic. They were not only different from forest lands but in fact included or were themselves constituted of different categories of spatial units which existed within them as varied functional spaces, like villages (grama), market places (nigama) and cities (nagara).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Nandini Sinha Kaptur, 'State Formation in Vidarbha: The Case of the Eastern Vakatakas,' *Indian Historical Review*, vol.22 (2), 2005, pp.13036.

<sup>41</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Space, History and Cultural Process: Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub regional Identity', in Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (ed.) *Centres out there? Facets of Sub regional Identities in Orissa*, pp. 21-35.

Chattopadhyaya explored deeply into the importance of spatial history in early Indian context and created a model to show how cultural /historical processes shape a space into a distinctive cultural zone. In the article '*Autonomous Spaces' and the Authority of the State: the Contradiction and its Resolution in Theory and Practice in Early India*' Chattopadhyaya dealt with the nature of autonomous spaces and showed how it existed in different periods of history. He further viewed that the structure of the autonomous spaces could change and the relationship between the autonomous spaces and the state system is also not static but undergoes diachronic evolution. Chattopadhyaya has also pointed out that autonomous spaces do not exist in isolation<sup>42</sup>. He forwarded a model that negates the idea that a particular cultural pattern engulfed the entire region in pre-colonial times.<sup>43</sup> This model helps to explain the emergence of a cultural zone not necessarily as part of a state system and to locate the local level cultural dynamics, diversities and processes of integration.<sup>44</sup> Spaces to Chattopadhyaya went beyond the connotations of core areas of states, or clearly demarcated regions and demesne or ruled territories.

On the other hand, B.P. Sahu focused specifically on the concept of region. He viewed that it multiple processes of changes happening simultaneously in the domains of culture, economy and society give shape to a region. These changes took place in relation to each other. Localities were formed which served as an agrarian space, these localities joined together to form sub-regions – *deśa*. There was formation of regional agrarian bases in different parts of the Indian subcontinent. To sum up his view, regions were not

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<sup>42</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Concept of Bharatvarsha and other Essays, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2017, pp. 1-14.*

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 21-35

<sup>44</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Space, History and Cultural Process: Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub regional 'Identity'*, Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (ed.) *Centres out there? Facets of Sub regional Identities in Orissa*, pp. 21-35.

undifferentiated and they encompassed varying localities and sub-regions. The localities gathered up to shape the sub-regions, the sub regions played important role in the development of the region.<sup>45</sup>

What is most important about his idea on region is that it indicates that the processes or characteristics in the making of a region would obviously vary from one region to another and the sequences of the processes may also be different. Sahu also projected that a region's history cannot be written by simply considering that it already exists there. A researcher needs to understand the emergence or making of a region through varied factors like landscape, environment, ethnicity, culture and language which define a region.<sup>46</sup> Here then the perspective of Chattopadhyaya on spatial history and the emergence of cultural-social spaces converges with Sahu's conceptualization of cultural regions as culturally or socially homogeneous units, shaped by varied factors. However, Chattopadhyaya's perspective leaves the door open to envisaging spatial units outside the boundaries of territorially/politically homogeneous regions. In fact, Chattopadhyaya's model goes beyond the frames created by scholars who dwell on the process of state formation concomitant with the shaping of historical regions. Most of the state – centric historiography tends to fix its gaze on the core area, bypassing the developments that were taking place in the peripheral zones. This exclusive perception has been challenged by historians like B.D. Chattopadhyaya, B.P. Sahu and Hermann Kulke. The concept of integrative state is founded on exploring the formative processes of regions and states within regions which then directs attention to the spaces of varied degrees of functionality, including the political

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<sup>45</sup>Bhairabi Prasad Sahu , *The Changing Gaze: Regions and the Constructions of Early India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013; Sahu, 'From Regional Histories to Histories of Region and Beyond', *Social Scientist*, 2015, pp. 33-47

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 33-47



and economic centres, network zones and peripheries. This conception points to the complex network of relations between regions, localities and trans-regional spaces that constitute the region as a whole and form the context of state formation. Chattopadhyaya, Sahu and Kulke's works especially relate to the emergence of early medieval states. But the theses may be taken to investigate spatial history in other historical phases too.

Finally, a very crucial thesis has been introduced into this whole domain of research by Monica L. Smith. This is the node and corridor model which illustrates how political states operate in zones of networks or in spaces that were functionally favourable for networks to gain control over strategically located nodes. Smith like B.D. Chattopadhyaya gives importance to the idea of space in general and not specifically to region in her model. She shows that state by gaining control over larger, strategically located networks successfully managed resourceful economic and social landscapes.<sup>47</sup> These networks could exist and function within smaller local polities beyond major statal intervention. These then could be understood to be autonomous spaces for given phases of their history.

These theories have aided in contextualizing the historical evolution of Vidarbha as a spatial zone and even as a region in certain phases of its history. In our case study, Vidarbha has been understood in the sense of a space that was inhabited from the Late Chalcolithic – Megalithic period. In the subsequent phases this space emerged as a distinctive cultural zone. Although Vidarbha was left substantially as an autonomous space in its early phase, yet the Sātavāhanas had extended some minimal degree of influence over the region. The political process emerged more prominently in the subsequent times under the Vākātakas.

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<sup>47</sup> Monica L. Smith, Monica L. Smith, 'Territories, Corridors, and Network: A Biological Model for the Pre-modern State,' Los Angeles: *Wiley Periodicals Complexity* (12), 2006, pp. 28–35.

In fact, the model of integrative state is useful for understanding the historical developments in this period. But the post - Vākātakas phase indicates a lull in its history, which is marked by dearth of historical sources. Till more archaeological investigations yield results, we need to see this as a period of relatively low intensity in its historical functions. Evidence from adjacent polities hint at the possibility that in the period between the sixth and the ninth centuries CE Vidarbha functioned as a strategically located space or corridor of exchange that was exploited by the contemporary political powers of Deccan to gain access over larger economically prosperous landscapes.

### **Research Question**

The above discussions lay down the main premise of the research question of the present work. This is mainly focused on tracing the patterns of changes and continuities that shaped the landscape and history of Vidarbha through a long period of time to find out how this history ultimately led to the delineation of it as a unique cultural zone. The complex processes that were involved in shaping of Vidarbha as a distinct zone has been addressed from two perspectives: firstly, by understanding the historical perceptions of Vidarbha that we come across in literature of the different phases and secondly through studying the actual historical processes that were involved. This has been done through deep study of the material culture and settlement history. Although sparse, the epigraphic records, where available, provide clues for the prevalent socio-economic and political conditions. The central question of this work is to understand how the geographically bound space connoted as Vidarbha came to acquire distinctive characteristics. This long history of evolution of the zone identified as Vidarbha in early historic literature actually underwent great functional and notional changes. One needs to question whether it did function as a nodal point or a corridor connecting the interior parts of Peninsula or if it became a peripheral area of dominant political powers of Deccan in a particular historical period. Some of these

questions can only be met with tentative answers. Finally, the larger question which comes out of the study of Vidarbha is one of great significance and it involves looking at the variegated and intricate history of spaces and settlement zones in the making of more cohesive regions or territorial polities and states. We are therefore finally looking at communities in the periphery and in the corridors of networks as historical agents in the processes of state formation and state function.

### **Methodology**

We have of necessity depended on both archaeological and literary sources to address the research theme. While the literary sources mark the beginning of our investigation by offering the connotation and identity of Vidarbha, the archaeological evidence in the identified zone provided the material context and content, filling up and giving life to the space. The literary evidence shows how Vidarbha had been conceptualized in the minds of people whereas archaeological source throws light on the processes that were involved in shaping this geographical space into a distinct habitation zone. Both these sources not only highlight that this geographical space denoted as Vidarbha was inhabited from very early times. They also illuminate the later developments of the zone in its regional dimension. The dearth of archaeological sources in the later phase may be interpreted in different ways. For example, this could be understood as indicating that the zone had fallen out of the administrative scope/policy of larger states in its flanks and yet the continuation of human settlements with communities of inhabitants might be indicated. The space was brought back to the realm of administrative notice of state system tentatively with the Rāṣṭrakūṭas and later with the Yādavas in the 12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The chapter sequence of this thesis has been designed thematically and yet chronologically, keeping in mind the broader political history of Deccan. In the first chapter entitled as

**Perceptions of Vidarbha in Early Literary Sources** we have used textual evidence to understand how Vidarbha had been conceived in the minds of people who were not always from the land itself. In some texts, Vidarbha has been understood in the sense of people or janas or tribal units, whereas in most of the literary sources it was presented as a newly established kingdom. Another interesting aspect of Vidarbha revealed through these literary sources was the conceptualization of Vidarbha in connection to the Daṇḍakāraṇya. Finally literary sources also project how the notion of Vidarbha as a cultural zone had built up through exclusive tenets of Sanskrit poetics.

The second chapter **Understanding Vidarbha: The Early Tradition of Megaliths** revolves around the unique material culture trends that emerged in Vidarbha from this period onwards. Though Vidarbha was a physiographic division of Deccan, the inhabitants of this part of Deccan had developed unique mortuary practices that were absent in other parts of Deccan. The process of carving out a distinct cultural identity in this zone had thus begun very early from the Megalithic period onwards.

The third chapter entitled **Vidarbha in the context of Secondary State Formation in Early Historic Deccan (first century BCE to early third century CE)** sets out to understand the political and cultural developments that emerged in Vidarbha from pre-Sātavāhana time onwards. Here we have situated Vidarbha within the larger political orbit of Deccan and have tried to trace the new political, economic and cultural developments that took place from the pre-Sātavāhana era.<sup>48</sup> The central theme of the chapter revolves around the internal developments as well as external influences both from Gangetic plains

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<sup>48</sup>Amarendra Nath, '*Further Excavations at Pauni*', New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp.8-9.

and wider areas in peninsular India that contributed to the process of making Vidarbha a distinct habitational zone.

This is followed by the fourth chapter on **Vidarbha: Rise of a Regional Contour (mid-third century CE to the sixth century)** which deals with the new political culture that Vidarbha experienced during the Vākāṭaka rule. Here we have tried to analyze the available data in the light of integrative model as proposed by B.D. Chattopadhyaya, Hermann Kulke and B. P. Sahu. There was a major change in the settlement pattern and we observe the development of a ritual landscape surrounding Mansar – Mandhal – Rāmtek complex. Here we are also trying to trace the major internal developments that brought changes in the settlement pattern of Vidarbha.

In the fifth chapter entitled **Situating Vidarbha in the changing political and cultural dynamics of Deccan (sixth to ninth century CE)** we have tried to review the claims made by the archaeologists that there was a long period of deurbanisation after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. This phase continued till the Yādavas made Vidarbha their seat of power. By situating Vidarbha within the greater political scenario of Deccan we have tried to understand the historical trajectories experienced by this eastern part of Deccan in the post – Vākāṭaka era.<sup>49</sup> Environmental factors and political changes were much evident, impacting the fate of the inhabitants in the zone and the functionality of the region. There is description of severe draught by Daṇḍin in his *Daśakumārcarita*<sup>50</sup> and the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* gives description of goddess Śākambharī, projected as the saviour of mankind from

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<sup>49</sup> Jagat Pati Joshi and A.K. Sharma, Mansar Excavation 1998-2004: The Discovery of Pravarapura' Purāmanthan, vol.3, Nagpur: Current Advances in Indian Archaeology, 2005, pp. 1-28.

<sup>50</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcarita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, London: Society For the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846, pp. 1-30.

famine and natural calamities.<sup>51</sup> The natural calamity no doubt had some adverse effect on human lives but Vidarbha still continued to be identified as an important centre of learning in the works of Rājāśekhara composed between the ninth and tenth centuries.

The work traces the history of Vidarbha from varied lenses to understand its characteristics and function as a habitational zone from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE expressly since that is the phase when the process of development of a unique culture started to emerge in Vidarbha. We have traced this history till the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, a time when Vidarbha is still found to retain its own cultural identity in the cultural conceptions of an exclusive circle of intellectuals. By situating Vidarbha within the greater geo-political orbit of Deccan we can say that it retained its unique cultural identity and importance as a prosperous economic zone of Deccan though no contemporary political power had made it their seat. It was subsumed within the jurisdictions of polities which had their main seat of power in the northern and central India, and later in western India and Deccan, away from Vidarbha. The political powers of Deccan exploited the strategic importance of Vidarbha as it served as a corridor connecting Gangetic plain with the Deccan. The zone was mainly serving as a peripheral space and/or a network corridor. The region thus offers a different kind of dimension not only in spatial history or history of communities within regions but also illustrates the complex processes through which political states emerged and operated over the given timeframe.

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas B. Coburn, 'The Study of the Puranas and the study of Religion', *Religious Studies*, Sep., 1980, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Sep., 1980), pp. 341-352

## Chapter 1

### Perceptions of Vidarbha as Gleaned from Literary Sources

In the context of present research, it is important to understand the distinct concepts about spatial categories like space, place and region and in general try and fathom the contours and contexts of space in the given situation. These categories have been defined in many ways by scholars from different fields. In this thesis Vidarbha has been taken up as a case study to understand varied scopes of state formation from the point of spatial history. It will also help us to explore newer dimensions of regional histories where region can be seen to perform different functions –node, peripheral spaces as well as spaces within formed corridors. Geographers, cultural anthropologists, archaeologists have their own way of defining these concepts. From 1980s onwards the ideas of social and cultural identity have been attached to these terms. Geographers talk of region both at micro and macro levels- mainly in terms of physical traits. The famous geographer Norton Ginsberg opines that there is no universally accepted definition of region; generally speaking it refers to certain portions of the earth.<sup>52</sup> Dov Nir introduces a new approach in the idea of region. He defines it as ‘complex, holistic in the sense of physical – geographical - human geographical unity’. According to him society and its physical environment is not a dichotomy, he introduces the concept of a region in a holistic way, “when viewed from the inside it is something closed, something final and defined but when viewed from the outside appearing as a part of something larger.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Charles W.J. Withers, ‘Place and the “Spatial turn” in Geography and in History’, *University of Pennsylvania Press, vol.70. No.4, 2009, pp. 637- 658.*

<sup>53</sup> Dov Nir, *Region as a Socio-Environmental System: An introduction to Systematic Regional Geography*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990, p. 8

Historians like Daniel Brewer have tried to differentiate between these terms.<sup>54</sup> He has categorized different kinds of space – physical, social, epistemological space. He stated that region do not have objective existence. Bernard Cohn has talked about the conceptualizations of regions in terms of non –physical phenomenon. He distinguished regions into various types- historical, linguistic, cultural and structural. He also stated that there is no on single type of region. He identifies the river valley area to be the perennial or nuclear region. Another type of region are mainly the ones which function as shatter zones or route areas where large number of people travel for invasion or trading purpose. In those areas there is no constant political tradition, and they serve as a connector with the nuclear area. He cited Malwa as a classic example of shatter zone.<sup>55</sup> Archaeologists during the first several decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were mainly interested in analyzing the human settlement pattern.<sup>56</sup> However the emergence of the New Archaeology in the mid 1960s gave birth to the concept of regional archaeology. It introduced not only scientific methods and new analytical tools but brought the eco system approach (Kent Flannery) which emphasized the inter-relationships between human behavior and surrounding environment.<sup>57</sup> With the onset of the early historical period, the whole of Peninsular India entered a new pattern of socio-economic and political processes, which even brought new developments in Vidarbha's cultural and physical landscapes. Eminent archaeologists like Kurt F. Anschuetz, Richard H. Wilshusen, and Cherie L. Scheick have discussed four interrelated premises for explaining the landscape paradigm.

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<sup>54</sup> Charles W. J. Withers, 'Place and the "Spatial turn" in Geography and in History', pp. 637- 658.

<sup>55</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, 'Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society' in Robert I. Crane (ed.), *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Explanatory Study*, Duke University, 1966, p.5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 6-9.

<sup>57</sup> Dov Nir, *Region as a Socio-Environmental System: An introduction to Systematic Regional Geography*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990, pp. 1-4.



1. Landscapes are formed due to the cultural activities of human beings. These activities included material life, religious practices, experience, and value systems.
2. It is defined as the milieu where the communities sustain and survive.
3. Landscapes are dynamic constructions.
4. Landscapes are denoted as the medium between nature and culture. The landscape archaeology approach is the best tool for understanding relationships among human beings, spaces, and cultural contexts and how people interact with these things.<sup>58</sup>

In the words of Knapp and Ashmore, landscape archaeology helped shift the concern of the archaeologists for single sites and is now focused on studying human settlements. Physical landscape or the natural landscape includes the physical appearance of the land and its features.<sup>59</sup>

In this thesis Vidarbha has been taken up as a case study to understand varied scopes of state formation from the perspective of spatial history and to explore into newer dimensions of regional histories where region can be seen to comprise different functions and segments including core, peripheral spaces as well as spaces which form corridors and shatter zones.

The most challenging issue in our case would be to define it and also specifying its geographical limits. Archaeological investigations and literary sources have extremely contrasting methodology of looking at a region. Archaeologists have a tendency to search

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<sup>58</sup> Kurt F. Anschutz, Richard H. Wilshusen, and Cherie L. Scheick, 'Archaeology of Landscapes: Perspectives and Directions', *Journal of Archaeological Research*, vol.9, No.2, 2001, pp. 160-61.

<sup>59</sup> A. B. Knapp and W. Ashmore, *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 1-30

for the material culture of a region and define the territorial extent of a region on the basis of traces of human actions. It has been proven clearly from the archaeological sources that the fertile river basin of Vidarbha was preferred for human habitation from the earliest times of human history. As a result of the socio-political and economic changes in the later periods the contour of Vidarbha expanded and human settlement grew up in the areas away from the river valley. However, the archaeologists designated this river valley as the core area of Vidarbha. This is mainly because the archaeological investigations have revealed concentration of sites in that particular geographical location. Their way of defining the location and extent of Vidarbha is also largely on the basis of the present day geographical set up. B.P. Sahu address this problem and states that there is no point of projecting the present day political boundaries into past and considered them to be convenient categories of analysis. Rather he emphasized on the fact that it should be understood in terms of space that kept changing over time. That a region expands and contracts with the passage of time and as it experiences different historical trajectories need to be kept in mind while writing the history of the regions. The chronology and even the ingredients that went into the making of regions vary from one region to another. Environment, culture, ethnicity and language are several categories for understanding how a region developed.<sup>60</sup> Environment indeed plays a significant role in shaping human cultures and, therefore, it becomes important to understand the environmental and ecological conditions of any geographical area to understand its process of evolution.

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<sup>60</sup> B.P.Sahu, 'From Regional Histories to Histories of Region and Beyond', *Social Scientist*, 2015, pp. 33-47

## **Introducing the Geographical Features of Vidarbha -**

Vidarbha region (lat. 19 21'N and long. 76 80'30E) the study area of this work forms the Eastern part of Maharashtra and archaeological evidences are mainly collected from eleven districts, via, Buldhana, Akola, Washim, Amravati, Yavatmal, Wardha, Nagpur, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Gondia and Gadchiroli. Vidarbha has been broadly divided into two zones- Western and Eastern. The region between Ajanta and Gawilgarh hill ranges can be taken as the Western zone. This zone which includes the districts of Amravati, Buldhana and Akola has considerably high plains and hills except for the Purna valley. The Eastern Vidarbha, comprising the remaining districts primarily has a landscape of low elevation and flowing stream. <sup>61</sup>

On the basis of physiographic features, the region has been divided into a number of sub-divisions.

1. Arvi Plateau- This plateau stands between the Wardha River on the west and Kanhan on the east.
2. Nagpur Plain- This plain formed by Kanhan River and its tributaries, is the most developed sub- region of Wardha – Waingangā basin.
3. Upper Wardha Plain- River Wardha, one of the tributaries of Wainganga has formed this plain which lies between the Umrer hills on the north- east and Yeotmal plateau on the south –east. This area is covered with lime-rich black soil. It also includes Wardha, Yeotmal and parts of area are covered with lime rich black soil.

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<sup>61</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, 2012, pp. 11-12.

4. Lower Wardha Plain-The lower part of Wardha is famous for coal belt of the region. This area includes Warora, Chandrapur, Ballarpur, and Rajpur tehsils of Chandrapur.
5. Wardha- Wainganga Interfluves- The area is characterized by the tributary rivers, running north- south. It is also known as the Lake District due to heavy concentration of lakes in this area.
6. The Wainganga Plain- Wainganga emerges from Chindawara plateau in Madhya Pradesh and runs through Bhandara, Gondia, Sakoli, Brahmapuri, and Gadchiroli.<sup>62</sup>

### **Drainage systems**

Wardha and Wainganga are the two major river systems in Vidarbha. Both of these rivers originate in Satpura region in Madhya Pradesh and run almost parallel to each other. These rivers meet each other at Sironcha tehsil of Gadchiroli district. After meeting together at this place, these rivers run together by the name of Pranhita and finally meet Godavari River. Of these two rivers, Waingangā is the largest river in the region. The main tributary of Waingangā is Penganga in the west, which drains the districts of Buldhana and Yeotmal. The tributaries of Wardha are Kar, Wenna, Erai, Madu, Bembla and Penganga. Another important river Purna (a tributary of Tapi) originates in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh and flows into Buldhana district. The total length of Purna River is 334 km and its main tributaries are Pendhi, Uma, Nirguna, Man, and Katepurna. Another river that drain Vidarbha region is Kanhan, a tributary of the Godavari River.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 11-12.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

**Table 1.1- District wise drainage system**

<b>District</b>	<b>Rivers</b>
Akola	Katepurna, Morna, Nirguna, Patnar, Shahanur, Vidrun
Amravati	Chundaman, Gadga, Kapara, Purna, Pendhi, Shahanur
Bhandara	Wainganga, Chulband
Buldhana	Gyanganga, Man, Purna, Penganga
Chandrapur	Wardha, Erai, Kalva
Gadchiroli	Akeri, Bandiya, Binan, Ghatvi, Jhuri, Kathani, Kotri, Nibra, Satti, Vatirang
Gondia	Chulband, Pagol and Wagh
Nagpur	Amba, Chandrabhaga, Jamb, Kolar, Kanhan, Nag, Nand, Pench, Sur, Vena
Wardha	Amba, Chandrabhaga, Jamb, Kolar, Kanhan, Nag, Nand, Pench, Sur, Vena
Washim	Adan, Arunavati, Penganga
Yeotmal	Arunavati, Adan, Bembla, Khuni, Nirguna, Ramganga, Waghadi

In this chapter, we are trying to explore how Vidarbha had been represented in different literary sources. The number literary sources on Vidarbha are very limited and also the historical processes that went into shaping of Vidarbha as a distinctive cultural zone of Deccan cannot be gleaned from the texts. However total bypassing of textual evidence would lead to a kind of ‘archaeological determinism’ which is not acceptable from

historical perspectives.<sup>64</sup>Therefore, historical processes and perceptions are the two prisms adopted for understanding the development of Vidarbha as a region.

Simon Schama in his phenomenal work '*Landscape and Memory*' has tried to establish the connection between the concept of landscape and memory. In his work he has defined landscape in the finest way possible. According to him, landscapes are mainly cultural constructions and imaginations play a pivotal role. Certain myths, visions envisioned the idea of landscape. In case of Vidarbha, the references we find in various literary sources are mainly shrouded in mythical stories and the pictures of Vidarbha that can be gleaned from those sources are penned from the imaginations of the authors.<sup>65</sup>

The term 'many perceptions' is used in the title of this chapter to hint on the fact Vidarbha had been represented in varied manner in literary sources belonging to different historical periods. Vidarbha has been contrived sometimes just a place name, or as birth place of important person, and in some texts it is mentioned in connection with the Asmaka janapada. Therefore it can be said that term Vidarbha has been used to denote both the landscape as well as its people. But we do not get a clear idea about the geographical extension of Vidarbha from these literary sources. However the certain place names of Vidarbha mentioned in the literature has been identified after archaeological investigations that were carried out in the Wardha – Waingangā valley and also by drawing linguistic parallels with present-day places with similar names.

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<sup>64</sup> Karol Kasala and Miroslav Sifta, 'The Region as a Concept: Traditional and Constructivist view,' A.U.C. *Geographica*, 2017, pp. 6-8

<sup>65</sup>Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, New York: Vintage Books, 1995, pp.ix-652.

### **Representation of Vidarbha in several ancient texts**

The perceptions of the outsiders is considered as an important prism for understanding the nature and distinctiveness of Vidarbha as a territorial space and how it functioned in several historical periods. Such perceptions are mainly revealed through various literary sources composed in several historical periods. Agastya was the first Aryan who crossed the Vindhya and fixed his hermitage on the bank of Godavari. Deccan was made known to the people of Northern India. The first direct reference of Vidarbha along with its king appears in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. The prince Bhima was called Vaidarbha and is said to have got instructions from Parvata and Narada regarding the substitutes for soma juice. Vidarbha is not considered part of the Brahmanical heartland, the term Vidarbha appears majorly in connection to the Dakshinapatha in certain Brahmana texts. While the location of the region within Dakṣinapatha and its broad outlines could be identified, but it is not possible to precisely define its limits. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* mentions the term ‘dakṣinadis’ southern region, beyond the Kuru-Panchala country, that is, beyond the Chambal.<sup>66</sup> In Jaiminīya Upaniṣad (2.440) the way we get the name of Vidarbha is extremely unique. It is written that this place is famous for a special breed of wild dogs that were capable of killing tigers. Even the literary sources throw light on the people of this region. We get reference of one such person in the *Bṛhadarānyaka Upaniṣad*. His name was Kaudinya. He was also called Vaidarbhī Kauḍinya. This name clearly suggests that Vidarbha was able to gain recognition as an important region of Deccan from the very early stages of human history. Vidarbha was an important centre of learning and culture is also evident from such reference. The people of Vidarbha were culturally distinct from the rest of Deccan is also reflected in this

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<sup>66</sup>A.A. Macdonell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol. 2, London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1952, p.112.

text. Prasana Upaniṣad while referring to the disciples of Pipalada mentions name of one such follower – Bhargava who came from Vidarbha.<sup>67</sup>

In *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, Pāṇini divided human settlements into several categories- janapada, Sangha, grama and Nagara. It is along with Māhismatī that he refers to Kuṇḍin as an important janapada<sup>68</sup>. This Kuṇḍin even appeared in the *Sabhā parva of Mahābhārata* and after much archaeological investigation it has been inferred by the eminent archaeologists that Kuṇḍin is the modern Kaudinyapura situated in the Amravati district.

The *Mahābharata* is the most important source that deals with Vidarbha and has also referred to various mythical characters who hailed from Vidarbha. Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the dating and the nature of this particular text. It is considered to be a text of transition and has three retellings. The major obstacle for using this text for historical purpose is related to the date of this text. In the words of Maurice Winterwitz it is literary nonsense whereas R.C. Dutta views that the nucleus part of this epic is no available to us, thus difficult to use for literary purpose.<sup>69</sup> According to Christian Lassen, it has an earlier version that was written between 460 to 400 BCE. The older text was called Bharata which is cross referred in the *Asvalayana Grhya*. For Walter Ruben, the tussle between Krishna and the Magadhan king Jarasandha had some historical relevance.<sup>70</sup> R.N. Dandekar is of the opinion that the historical battle is mentioned in an epic called *Jaya*. Several attempts made by Ruben to remove Kṛṣṇa from the nucleus of this text are futile

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 297.

<sup>68</sup> V.S. Agarwala, *India as known to Panini*, Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan, 1952, p. 12

<sup>69</sup> Kanad Sinha, *From Dasarajna to Kuruksetra: Making of a Historical Tradition*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2021, pp.1-11.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* pp.12-13.



and absurd. He regarded the combat between Yudhisthira and Salya as the oldest battle where there was no involvement of Kṛṣṇa. However this view has been discarded by recent scholars like Kanad Sinha. He has also questioned the claim of J Kennedy to distinguish between different variants of Kṛṣṇa – one associated with the solar myth, another Non – Aryan hero and another derived from the legends of Christ. Soren Sorensen attempted to construct the text with 8800 slokas. E. Washburn Hopkins has viewed that the text was composed between 400-200 CE. He further added that the Puranic and the didactic elements were added between 200 to 400 CE. The Anuśāsanaparvan was thus separated from the Śāntiparvan. Adolf Holtzmann and Leopold von Schroder are the champions of the Inversion theory. According to this theory, Kauravas were the initial heroes but it was the influence of the Vaisnavite priests who made the Pandavas the real heroes. Sukthankar completely rejected this theory. In the view of F.E. Pargiter, it is a historical account that is woven around the conflict between the brāhmana – Kṣatriya. This view has been accepted by A.B.Keith and George Grierson. D.D. Kosambi upholds an interesting aspect of this text. According to him this text marks the transition from food gathering to food producing society. All these views fall under the category of ‘Analytical theory’. These views are extremely important as the scholars dissect the text critically and examine different layers of this text.

Joseph Dahlman proposed the synthetic theory, where he talked about the unity of the text. He considers the didactic text to be composed around fifth century BCE. However this view is challenged and he is criticized for giving unnecessary emphasis to the legal issues like polyandry of Draupadi. Ludwig defines it as a seasonal myth whereas Sukthanar divided the text in to three levels – mundane, ethical and metaphysical. He thinks that the core of the text has been swallowed up by the Bhṛḡus. Other two scholars who are advocates of this theory of unity are Patricia M. Greer, K.Kunjunni Raja, A.K. Ramanujan and

Radhavallabh Tripathi. They all consider the text as a synthetic whole. The composition of the critical edition of the text by Sukthnkar is considered as the termination point of the analytical studies on the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>71</sup>

Adluri vehemently opposes any kind of historical analysis of this text and believes that hermeneutics is the best way to understand this epic. However this view has no basis and only reflects his misconceptions about history as a discipline. History is no longer perceived as a discipline which is mainly a body of objective and scientific facts. It must be clarified that the two models are not mutually exclusive rather these two models help us to contextualize the time and process of this text.<sup>72</sup>

Fernando Alonso Wulff has tried to draw a similarity between Mahābhārata and Iliad. There are certain similarities in the stories but the comparison he made is far stretched. Madeleine Biardeau on the other hand opines that Mahābhārata is a tradition and posed challenged to the Critical edition of the text as formulated by Sukthankar.<sup>73</sup> Hildebeital also highlights the religious nature of this text and attached importance to the divine character of Krishna and association of Draupadi with Sri. James Fitzgerald proposes that it was mainly composed to challenge the empire of Pataliputra which embraced the heterodox sects. The main agenda of this text was to define an ideal society where people perform varna specific duties.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 12-15.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p.15.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

<sup>74</sup> Alf Hildebeitel. *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, pp. 29-62.

It was B.B. Lal who tried to analyse the text from an archaeological point of view. He showed that the major places like Kurukṣetra, Mathura, Hastinapur, and Indraprastha represented a common habitational level in the Painted Grey ware culture. Even he provides archaeological evidence to support the flood mentioned in the text. This flood was responsible for disruption of the settlement in Hastinapur and shift of the capital to Kausambi. He fixes the date of the text before sixth century BCE on the grounds that the text does not mention Rajagriha as the capital of Magadha rather Girivraja as its capital from where Jarasandha used to rule. B.D. Chattopadhyaya rejects B.B. Lal's methodology and questions the deliberate attempt to establish correlation between the archaeological and literary evidences. However Kanad Sinha do not agree with such claims and disapprove it on the ground that Chattopadhyaya is trying to privilege the Vedic literature, Buddhist texts over the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana* and the *Purāṇas*. B.B. Lal opines that the flood took place around 800 BCE and the war took place around ninth BCE. J.A.B. van Buitenen views that the text was composed originally around eighth or ninth century.<sup>75</sup>

Romila Thapar has highlighted the historical relevance of this text. She observes that the narrative part of the text is meant for the clan based society whereas Santiparvan and the Anuśāsanaparvan deal with a monarchical system of governance. She believes that sutabards were the original narrators of this story and the text underwent a process of brahmanization.<sup>76</sup> Naina Dayal views that the sutas were also not homogeneous in nature and a section of bards called pauranika sutas were accepted by the brāhmaṇas. According

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<sup>75</sup> Kanad Sinha, *From Dasarajna to Kuruksetra: Making of a Historical Tradition*, p. 24-26.

<sup>76</sup> Romila Thapar, *The Past Before us*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2013, pp. 10-14.

to her the text only experienced as process of brahmanization but also 'vaisnavisation'<sup>77</sup> R.S. Sharma observes that a tribal society with a tribal chief with features of matrilineal society is depicted in the main narrative of the epic whereas varna divided state society with proper administrative system is seen in the didactic section.<sup>78</sup>

Ruth Cecily Katz highlights the existence of several layers in the text but also suggests that there exist a basic unity in terms of its narration. According to Ruth the journey of this text started as an oral composition by the sutas. In the next stage, it turned as a tradition which was recited in the royal courts; lastly it became a written text with several influences including that of the Bhārgavas and several Bakti groups. Thus the text contains various elements of brāhmaṇas, sutaksatriyas and bhakti. Katz's analysis is well accepted and matches with the opinion of Sukthankar. Recently this analysis has been questioned by Kanad Sinha. He doubts the presence of bhakti elements in the time of Janameja and Vaisampayana and also the claim that the text underwent a process of brahmanization at the hands of Vaisampayana.<sup>79</sup> Romila Thapar has shown that the narrative and didactic sections of the text represent two remarkably distinct historical tradition and social conditions. The Santiparvan and Anuśāsanaparvan reflect a monarchical state that protected the Varna order. She agrees that the text underwent a process of brahmanization where the suta bards who were the initial story tellers lost their social status. The brāhmaṇas felt the need to control the past and that was the reason why they became eager to control

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<sup>77</sup> Kanad Sinha, *From Dasarajna to Kuruksetra: Making of a Historical Tradition*, p. 24-26.

<sup>78</sup> R.S. Sharma, *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India*, Delhi: MacMilan, 1983, pp. 135-152.

<sup>79</sup> Kanad Sinha, *From Dasarajna to Kuruksetra: Making of a Historical Tradition*, p. 24-26.

the data preserved by these bards.<sup>80</sup> Naina Dayal however views that these story tellers who were called pauranika suta were slowly accepted by the brāhmaṇas.<sup>81</sup>

R.S. Sharma finds genuine elements of the archaic state where matrilineal customs were prevalent. Similar opinion has been given by Kevin Mc Grath who finds both archaic and classical features in the text. Hildebeitel opens a new dimension in this study; he argues that *Mahābhārata* was the outcome of the activities of out of sorts Purvasikha brāhmaṇas who settled in South India after the invasions of the Indo Greeks and Śakas in the first century BCE. These brāhmaṇas settled in the Kuru – Pāñcala territory. The theory proposed by Michael Witzel is the most interesting one. He views that the Kuru kingdom was the first monarchical state in Northern India and the Bharata war led to the establishment of the peaceful reign of Parikṣit. He considers the *Mahābhārata* as a Vedic one and thinks that is a war tale dealing with the heroes of the Kuru realm of c. 100BCE. But he fails to explain the connection between the battle of Ten Kings and the Bharata war. Kanad Sinha views that these were two different wars associated with the same clan. The characters and the events mentioned in the Mahābharata appeared in several other texts of various periods. Vasudeva and Krishna are mentioned in the *Ghata Jātaka* whereas the marriage ceremony of Vasudeva is mentioned in the *Mahammunaga Jātaka* and all the five sons of Pandava are mentioned in the *Kuṇala Jātaka*. And the *Dasabrahmana Jātaka* refers to the Kuru lineage. Megasthenes also refers to the worshippers of Kṛṣṇa in Mathura and also the Arthaśāstra while referring to the bad effects of gambling mentions two famous characters- Nala and Yudhiṣṭhira.<sup>82</sup> The *Nalopākhyān Parva of Mahābhārata* describes a story which

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<sup>80</sup> Romila Thapar, *The Past Before us*, 2013, pp.10-14.

<sup>81</sup> Kanad Sinha, *From Dasarajna to Kuruksetra*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 30-31.

unfurls the reason behind such a nomenclature. It is stated that this land (vi- darbha or devoid of darbha grass) was devoid of darbha grass due to the curse of a saint whose son died of wound from the blade of grass thus the name vi-darbha came into being.<sup>83</sup>

It is in the *Sabhā Parva of Mahābhārata* that we get reference of the term Bhojakaṭa. It is considered to be one of the important parts of Vidarbha. The king of Bhojakaṭa was Bhismaka who was defeated by Sahadeva.<sup>84</sup> Even in the *Vana Parva of Mahābhārata* it is stated that three sons- Dama, Danta and Damana and a daughter Damayanti were born to Bhismaka, the king of Vidarbha. Damayanti is called Vaidarbhi because she was born in Vidarbha. This example shows that Vidarbha was a famous division of Deccan from the early period of history.<sup>85</sup> It was Sahadeva, youngest Pandava brother who marched towards south reached Bhojakaṭa, a territorial division of Vidarbha and in a fierce encounter severely defeated the ruler Bhiṣmaka.<sup>86</sup> This Kūṇḍin again appeared in the *Udyoga Parva* where the war between Rukmi, the son of the powerful ruler Bhismaka and Kṛṣṇa is mentioned. However the former was defeated in the hands of Kṛṣṇa and returned to the capital of his kingdom which as Kuṇḍin.

In the *Bhimṣa Parva of Mahābhārata* Sanjay describes Bharatvarṣa with its rivers, mountains and different provinces, the list includes Vidarbha. *Sabhāparva* describes the dighvijaya of the Pāṇḍavas, and while Sahadeb marched towards the town of Bhojakaṭa

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<sup>83</sup> Krishna Mohan Ganguli (trans.) *The Mahābhārata of Vyasa, vol.II* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal Publishers 1990, p. 62.

<sup>84</sup> Krishna Mohan Ganguli (trans.) *The Mahābhārata of Vyasa, vol.V* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal Publishers, 1990, p. 21.

<sup>85</sup>. Krishna Mohan Ganguli (trans.) *The Mahābhārata of Vyasa, vol.II* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal Publishers 1990, p. 115.

<sup>86</sup>. Krishna Mohan Ganguli (trans.) *The Mahābhārata of Vyasa, vol.II* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharal Publishers, 1990, p.62

(we get this particular term even in the Vākātaka inscription) located in Vidarbha where he had to combat with the terribly powerful king of Vidarbha- Bhīṣmaka.<sup>87</sup> In the *Udyog Parva* (section CLIX), a mention has been made of Rukmi, son of Bhīṣmaka. This section gives the story of Rukmini's abduction. Rukmī who could not tolerate the ravishment of his sister by Kṛṣṇa, declared war against the latter but was defeated. In course of the struggle, Rukmī places the garrison at a place called Bhojakata. This name continued to remain till the sixth century CE as in the Vākātaka inscription it emerged as an important administrative unit.<sup>88</sup> In the *Tirthayatra parva of Mahābhārata* mentions the important river, namely Vena and Bhimarathi along with the river Godavari Interestingly, the king named Bhimaratha has been mentioned in the geneological list of Yādava dynasty, the name of the 40<sup>th</sup> king was Vidarbha and the 50<sup>th</sup> king was Bhimaratha.<sup>89</sup> Probably, the river mentioned in Mahābhārata as Bhimarathi can be identified with the modern river Wardha and Vena has been identified with Wainganga and to indicate the rule of Vidarbha king Bhimaratha over the Wardha valley, the river valley was named Bhimarathi. In *Mahābhārata* we also get mention of Kaundinyapur as Kuṇḍin. It was considered to be the capital of ancient Vidarbha which was situated on the bank of river Wardha. Thus analyzing *Mahābhārata* it seems to appear that Bhimarathi valley was the heartland of Vidarbha and the Vena valley was a separate dominion and was not under the control of Bhimaratha.<sup>90</sup> It is in the Nalopakhyan Parva of Vana Parva Vidarbha emerged as a powerful kingdom of Deccan where King

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<sup>87</sup> K.M. Ganguly, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.v, 1990, p.21. Also see, P.C. Roy, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, Bhimsa Parva*, vol.5, Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co. p.23.

<sup>88</sup> K.M. Ganguly, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.iv, 1990, p.303-304. P.C. Roy, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, Virat and Udyog Parva*, vol.4, Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co. p.237.

<sup>89</sup> P.C. Roy, *The Mahabharata of Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa, Vana Parva*, vol.4, Calcutta: Oriental Publishing Co. p.249-50.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 249-50.

Bhīma used to rule. Though he possessed terrible prowess but by the curse of fate he was childless. With the blessings of Brahmāśrī Daman, he became father of one daughter and three sons.<sup>91</sup>

In the Purāṇic tradition especially in the Bhagavata Purāṇas and Viṣṇu Purāṇa Vidarbha appears as a kingdom to which the Yadus migrated. Its capital was Kundin. This place was visited by Kṛṣṇa. Archaeologists identify Kundin with modern Kaudinyapur. It is in the Markēḍeya Purāṇa we come across a phrase '*Vaidarbha Daṇḍakai Saha*' which means Vidarbha along with Daṇḍaka. Scholars like F.E Partiger identify *Daṇḍakāraṇya* with the forests from Bundelkhand to the river Krishna.<sup>92</sup> According to P.V.Kane, *Daṇḍakāraṇya* or Mahakantara was the forest lands that ran through the entire Peninsula whereas D.R.Bhandarkar viewed that it was confined to the modern Maharashtra.<sup>93</sup> In the *Skanda Purāṇa* we also get a mythical story revolving around Vidarbha. According to the story, King Viduratha was the famous ruler of Vidarbha who enjoyed a prosperous reign and ruled his kingdom without facing any obstacles. It is also stated that Vidarbha comprised of five hundred thousand villages. He possessed a huge Antahpura full of queens. However his fate changed when he mistakenly killed a sage. For this sin, he spent times in hell and experienced eleven more births. In his last birth he was hanged from a tree where he saw a śiva liṅga. This paved his way to heaven and he was again born as king Viśveśa. The liṅga

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<sup>91</sup> K.M.Ganguli, *The Mahābhārata vol.II*, pp. 115.

<sup>92</sup> F.E. Partiger, 'The Geography of Rama's Exile', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol.IV, 1894, pp. 231-264.

<sup>93</sup> P.V. Kane, 'Ancient Geography and Civilization of Maharashtra', *Journal of Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXIV, 1914-1917, p. 613-616.



was worshipped by the king and the linga was famous in Vidarbha by the name Visveśa liṅga.<sup>94</sup>

In the epics Vidarbha was considered to be an essential part of the Dakṣiṇapatha and never mentioned separately. However in the Puranic records it emerged as a distinct landscape from the Daṇḍakāraṇya.<sup>95</sup> The textual representation of Vidarbha shows how and why this particular geographical space existed in the memory of the people. Apart from a few references to the Vedic texts the discussion will centre on the epics and the Purāṇas particularly *Agni*, *Vayu*, *Mātsya* and *Markeṇḍeya Purāṇas*.<sup>96</sup> Even few non-religious texts mostly located in North India has also referred to this area.<sup>97</sup>

The Purāṇas enumerate Vidarbha as one of the janapadas of Deccan and a certain importance seems to have been given to this region as Nalopakhyana, the king of Vidarbha had been styled as the lord of dākṣinatya.<sup>98</sup> Not only did the term Vidarbha denote a territory but also people, perhaps a tribal unit. The people of Vidarbha along with other tribes like Kaliṅgas, Mekhalas and Traipuras. All of them were mentioned under the general designation of Dakshinayatas. In the *Agni Purāṇa*, each janapada and its people were often depicted as possessing distinct customs and languages. Vaidarbhi has been identified as

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<sup>94</sup>.B.L.Ray, 'A Critical Study on the Puranic Geographical Account with Special Reference to the Niladri Mahadayam', Pune: *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol.66, No.1/4, 1985, pp. 239-247. Also see *The Skanda Purāṇa*, Part II, (First Edition) New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1950, p. 332.

<sup>95</sup>Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscapes of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.) *Ancient India: New Research*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 123- 129.

<sup>96</sup>S.M. Ali, *The Geography of the Puranas*, New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966, pp. 139-140.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p.140.

<sup>98</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscape of Life and Death' p. 140.

one of the four kinds of diction. It is in *Agni Purāṇa* that the region of Vidarbha has been mentioned specifically in connection to the unique diction and it has also been mentioned that Vidarbha was distinct from Daṇḍakārnya.<sup>99</sup> Even in the *Mārkeṇḍeya Purāṇa*, the region of Daṇḍekeya has been mentioned as region distinctly separate from that of Vidarbha; however the region was situated in close proximity to the forest land of *Daṇḍakārnya: Vaidarbha Dandakai saha*. We also get the name of the princess of Vidarbha – Pivar.<sup>100</sup> It has been mentioned that the region of Vidarbha lies between the Pulindas of the Vindhyan region and Daṇḍakārnya of the western part: *Pulinda Vindhyaṃulika (Ya) Vidarbha Dandakaih Saha*<sup>101</sup> lying between the Wardha and the Waingangā, the region in the north and is bounded by the Payoshini (Purna) a tributary of the Tapti and south by the Godavari. Different Purāṇas also speak about Vidarbha and its people. It was Vincent Smith who credited the Purāṇas as an important and systematic record of historical tradition. The best methodology for using Puranas has been suggested by James Tod. According to him, the way one separate pure metal from alloy similarly it is necessary to skim valuable historical materials from the Purāṇas.<sup>102</sup> However when we are using Purāṇas as a source for any kind of historical understanding we need to keep in mind that they were composed in different times. As S.G. Kantawala has rightly stated “one will have to assign separate dates to sections, chapters or even stanzas of the Purāṇas.” D.C. Hazra also gave dates for individual Purāṇas.<sup>103</sup> V.A. Smith argues that it is difficult to date *Agni Purāṇa*. Its alaṃkara section indicates that it was composed around 750- 850 CE. The

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<sup>99</sup> V.R.R. Dikshitar, *The Purāṇa Index, vol. and vol.II*, Madras: University of Madras, 1951, p. 329.

<sup>100</sup> F.E. Partiger, *The Markeṇḍeya Purāṇa*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1904, p. 76.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 316-317.

<sup>102</sup> Ludo Rocher, *A History of Indian Literature: The Puranas, vol.II*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986, pp. 100-103.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 100-103.

Devimahātmya is composed earlier than the seventh century and it was made part of the *Mārkeṇḍeya Purāṇa* before that time. Thus *Mārkeṇḍeya Purāṇa* is older than that. In the *Vāyu*, *Mātsya* the *Markedeya* the people of this region were ‘*Dakshinopatha vasindah.*’ S.M. Ali has studied the Purāṇas in detail and has presented various janapadas of four divisions of Bharatvarsha. In Southern India he mentions janapadas like Mahisaka, Kuntala, Kupatha, Aśmaka, Maulika, Paurika and Vidarbha. He further adds that Vidarbha was an important janapada that covers the Wardha and Penanga river basins. These two rivers ultimately join the Godavari River. Bhogavardhana was located in this janapada.<sup>104</sup> Thus it seems that Vidarbha was an important habited area in the long route of Dakṣinapatha. The *Mātsya Purāṇa* (44.36) and the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (95.35.36) speak of eponymous king of Vidarbha of the Yadu lineage belonging to the sub sect of Satvatas. One of their branches was Maha Bhojas.<sup>105</sup> Though there is a huge debate regarding the date of composing of the Bhagavata Purāṇa, but if we accept the view put forwarded by Winternitz then it was composed around ninth – tenth century C.E. Winternitz is not willing to accept the view of Colebrooke, Burnouf and Mac Donell.<sup>106</sup> The latter ones viewed that it was composed around 13<sup>th</sup> century C.E. *Bhagavat Purāṇa* states that Vidarbha is a kingdom named after its founder where the yadus migrated. It is recorded in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* that Vidarbha was the son of Jyamagha. Vidarbha had established his control over the Bhimarathi river valley and the river valley was named after its king Vidarbha.<sup>107</sup> It is again in the Bhagavata Purāṇa that the people of Vidarbha were referred. They were

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<sup>104</sup> S.M. Ali, *The Geography of the Purāṇas*, New Delhi: People’s Publishing House, 1986, pp. 155-157.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 156-157.

<sup>106</sup> B.N. Krishnamurti Sarma, ‘The Date of the Bhagavata Purāṇa’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, 1932-33, vol. 14, No.3/4, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, pp. 182-218.

<sup>107</sup> H.H. Wilson (trans.) *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, First Edition, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, p. 66.

portrayed as joyous and led a contented life. They took part in the festivities connected with the marriage of Rukmiṇī and Kṛṣṇa.<sup>108</sup> The Bhagavata Purāṇa also mentions the geneologies of the Yadu kings. According to Śrī Suka Vidarbha begot on her (Bhojya) and three children were born. Kusa, Kratha and Romapada. The third one was the delight of the Vidarbha family. Romapada's great grandson was Usika from whom descended the line of kings like Caidya and others (i.e. Damaghosa).

*Jātakas* are also an important category of literary sources that throw light on Vidarbha and its political history. As we all know that *Jātakas* narrate stories of former birth of the Buddha and it was found in the Theravada tradition. The dating of *Jātaka* is shrouded in controversy. But the most acceptable view is that the stories of the *Jātakas* were initially transmitted orally, around third century B.C.E. Later on some of them were depicted in the sculptures of Bharhut and on the gateways of the Sanchi Stupas.<sup>109</sup> The present form of the text was written in and around fifth century C.E. The issue of dating has been dealt clearly by E.B. Cowell. According to him these stories were initially transmitted orally later on seeing the popularity of these stories they became available in written form keeping in mind that the crux of these stories remain intact. Fick is of the opinion that the *Jātakas* surely does not represent any single cultural period. According to him some were older and can be traced back to the pre- Buddhist period. He made such suggestions based on the available archaeological evidence. He suggests that the origin of the paccupannavattu to the older portion of the Pali canon which could be dated around the beginning of the Christian era whereas the atthavattu represents much later period.<sup>110</sup> According to John Garrett Jones

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<sup>108</sup> S.M.Ali, 'The Geography of the Puranas', 1966, pp. 155-157.

<sup>109</sup>. Kumkum Roy, 'Justice in the Jātakas', *Social Scientist*, vol. 24, No.4/6, 1996, p. 23.

<sup>110</sup> R. Fick, 'The Social Organisation in North- East India in Buddha's Time', Shishir Kumar Maitra (tr.), Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1920, p. viii.

the *Jātakas* entered into the canonical literature during a period later than the Buddha. Uma Chakravarti has viewed that *Jātakas* contain various layers and thus it is difficult to arrange them chronologically. In words of Kumkum Roy “that the *Jātakas* are mentioned by name and represented through sculpture as early as the third century B.C.E (from Bhahrut, Central India) would suggest that their compilation and dissemination was a long drawn out process.”<sup>111</sup> Naomi Appleton argues that the stories in the initial phase may or may not have been in form of the *Jātakas*. Later on the verses were composed to accompany those stories and it acquired a status of canonical literature. Appleton further added that these stories continued to “develop and evolve and in most cases become lost.”<sup>112</sup>

Historians are also divided in their opinion regarding the structure of *Jātakas*. In the digital collection of the ‘Jātakas Stories’ prepared by Naomi Appleton there are nine texts. Five texts are mentioned within the rubric of texts written in Sanskrit (Āryaśūra's *Jātakamālā*, *Avadānaśataka*, *Divyāvadāna*, Haribhaṭṭa's *Jātakamālā*, and the *Mahāvastu*) and four are texts collected from the Pali tradition (*Apadāna*, *Buddhavaṃsa*, *Cariyāpiṭaka* and *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā*). This collection of several texts within the title of the ‘Jātaka stories’ is with an understanding of the *Jātaka* as a ‘genre’ with its specificity to identify a figure in the story as the *Bodhisatta/Bodhisattva*.<sup>113</sup> The volumes edited under Cowell contain about 550 stories arranged in 22 *nipātas* (books). This division is based on the number of verses. Each story begins with a preface called the *paccuppannavatthu* or ‘story of the present,’ which revolves around the particular circumstances in the Buddha’s life which led him to

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<sup>111</sup> Kumkum Roy, ‘Justice in the *Jātakas*’ p. 23.

<sup>112</sup> Naomi Appleton, *Jātaka Stories in Theravada Buddhism Narrating the Bodhisatta Path*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> E.B. Cowell (ed.), Robert Chalmer B.A. (tr.) *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manohar Publishers, 2002, p. ix.

tell the birth story and thus reveal some event in a long series of his previous existences as a Bodhisatta. The *atītavatthu* or the stories of the past are the narrated incidents from the earlier birth of the Buddha. Then, comes the *gāthā* or verse, the only portion of the text which was considered as canonical; and *samodhāna* or conclusion, where the Buddha integrates the stories and equates the situation and the protagonists of the past and present. Studying the language Cowell viewed that gathas were composed earlier. There is also a debate among historians on the initial and actual structure, form and style in which the *Jātakas* came to be written.<sup>114</sup> For Rhys Davids, the original *Jātakas* existed in the form of verses only and *Jātakatthavaṇṇanā* consisting of the commentaries of these verses.<sup>115</sup> According to Garrett, in the stories where there is only one verse, it comes towards the end of the “story of the past,” however as the number of the verses proliferated, the verses came to be spread throughout the “story of the past,” eventually taking the dimensions of an “epic poetry.”<sup>116</sup> Uma Chakravarti has made a very important observation in this regard and has recognized the mediating role of the Buddhist monk in popularizing the *Jātakas*. According to her, “the Buddhist used the dual characteristics of folklore, having both fixity of form and capacity for variation in the content.”<sup>117</sup> The tales of the *Jātaka* genre are also found in the texts of other traditions. Renate Sohnen-Theme has noted at least seventeen *Jātaka* tales showing similarities to the small stories embedded in the larger narrative of the *Mahābhārata*. There are possibilities of getting more similar motifs and characters if not tales between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Jātakas*. Fausboll’s edition of the Pāli text in

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* pp. ix-x.

<sup>115</sup> Rhys Davids, T.W. (trans.) *Buddhist Stories or Jataka Tales: The Oldest Collection of Folk-Lore Extant Being The Jātakatthavaṇṇana*, London: Trubner and Co., 1880.

<sup>116</sup> Jon Garrett Jones, *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha: The Jātaka Stories in relation to the Pali canon*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979, p.6.

<sup>117</sup> Uma Chakravarti, *Everyday Lives Everyday Histories*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006, p.201.

Roman script is in seven volumes (including the Nidāna kathā and 7th volume with indexes and postscriptum) These stories were traditionally divided into both vagga (section or group) and nipāta (falling down or descending). Each vagga consists of ten stories while there is no fixed number of Jātakas in one nipata. <sup>118</sup>Kumkum Roy talks about the structural and thematic differences between the early and later nipātas. The later nipātas, according to her, are more difficult to memorise. The narration of the later nipātas is also more difficult because more skill was required for reciting the long verse stories. <sup>119</sup>

Cowell suggests that some stories might be Buddhist in nature or reflect concerns peculiar to Buddhism; there are others that are presented in the form of folklore across various traditions. <sup>120</sup> In this context, Fick views them as an important source of cultural-history as they consist, of stories, parables or fables of animals, partly of scenes from Indian folk life of a cheering character. <sup>121</sup> Kumkum Roy argues that there was borrowing and lending in such a situation, but the recitation of a verse in the context of a specific Jātaka could evoke a variety of associations that were not necessarily confined within the immediate narrative framework. Appleton views that though the Jātaka stories have popular overtones they were not meant exclusively for the laity and had relevance for the monastic community as well. Roy suggests that the multifarious presence of the Bodhisatta is a constant reminder that

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<sup>118</sup> V. Fausboll, *The Jataka Together with its commentary Being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha*, 6 vols. London: Trubner and Co., 1877-1896.

<sup>119</sup> Kumkum Roy, 'Justice in the Jātakas,' 1996, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.* pp.ix-xi.

<sup>121</sup> R. Fick, Shishir Kumar Maitra (tr.) *The Social Organisation in North – East India in Buddha's Time*, Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1920, p.viii.

the Jātakas are not simply folktales, but were meant to serve some purpose of Buddhism as a religious faith.<sup>122</sup>

We get reference of the region of Vidarbha even in the Buddhist text like *Kumbhakara Jātaka* where it is stated that the king Nemi of Videha and Bhima, the king of Vidarbha as contemporaneous.<sup>123</sup> The Suttanipatha on the other hand, infers about a southern trade connecting settlements of Ganga plain, while referring to a sage Bavari of Deccan sending his disciple to lord Buddha to pay reverence. These disciples might have followed the track of Wainganga Valley to reach their destination<sup>124</sup>. In the Suttanipatha it appears river valley was important point in the trade route connecting Deccan with the Gangetic plain<sup>125</sup>. It is in the Sarabhanga Jātaka, Vidarbha appears as a feudatory ruler who was under the king of Dandaka. This particular Jātaka is important as it refers to the three feudatories – Kalinga, Atthaka and Bhīmaratha. This Atthaka has been identified with Aśmaka. This king Bhimaratha was not the one who belonged to the Kaśi lineage rather he was associated with the Yādava lineage. But an interesting aspect is highlighted through this particular Jātaka.<sup>126</sup> It is about the geographical location of Vidarbha and Aśmaka. From this Jātaka we can figure out that Aśmaka was located between western part of Wardha and Kaliṅga.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Kumkum Roy, *The Power of Gender and Gender of Power: Exploration in Early Indian History*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010, p.292.

<sup>123</sup> E.B Cowell (ed.) Robert Chalmer, W.H. D. Rouse, H.T. Francis, R.A. Neil, *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, vol.iii*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907, pp. 228-232.

<sup>124</sup> B.C. Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism* London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co.Ltd, pp. 2-3.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> E.B. Cowell (ed.) *The Jataka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, vol.5* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905, pp. 64-78.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 64-78.



Kalidāsa's play seems to indicate that Vidarbha was part of the Mauryan sphere of influence. Agnimitra's minister refers to the kingdom as one established not long ago (*aciradhisthita*) and compares its king, who was related to the Mauryas, to a newly planted tree (*navasamropanasithilastaru*). The story also refers to the defeat of the ruler of Vidarbha Yajñasena, a near relation of the last Mauryan king's minister by Agnimitra, son of Pusyamitra Sunga. This was because the former had imprisoned the latter's friend Madhavasena.<sup>128</sup> Ultimately, the territory was divided between Yajñasena and Madhavasena. Such division of Vidarbha has been also mentioned in the Harivaṃsa and Narada Purāṇa.<sup>129</sup> It is stated in Arthaśāstra that Agnimitra's minister refers to the kingdom as one established not long ago (*aciradhisthita*) and compares its king, who was related to the Mauryas, to a newly planted tree (*navasamropanasithilastaru*). This is a significant one as during this time the region of Vidarbha was divided into two branches one operating from Nandivardhava/Nagardhara (identified with Nagpur) and other from Vastagulma (Washim).

### **Association of Aśmaka with Vidarbha**

It is in the Aṅgūttara Nikāya, we get mention of the Aśmaka Mahājanapadas. Amarendra Nath who was closely associated with the excavation of Adam has tried to associate Aśmaka with Vidarbha. Since scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the extent of Vidarbha it is difficult to ascertain the territorial limit of the region and what has been rightly pointed out that the physical boundary of Vidarbha kept on changing from time to

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<sup>128</sup> C.H. Tawney (trans.) *Mālavikāgnimitra; A Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa (Second Edition)*, Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1891, p.11. 90-92.

<sup>129</sup> P.V. Kane, 'Ancient Geography and Civilization of Maharashtra', *Journal of Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society*, XXIV, 1914-17, pp. 613-657.

time.<sup>130</sup> This was largely due to the socio-political and economic developments that Vidarbha faced from time to time. Aśmaka one of the important janapada was located in the area between Wardha and Waingangā valley and from the archaeological sources it is clear that it contemporary to the Megalithic cultural tradition of Deccan. Regarding the extent of Aśmaka it has been pointed out that Aśmaka included Nasik, Ahmednagar and part of Berar and Khandesh. B.C Law cited *Mahāvastu* wherein it is stated that there was a hermitage on the bank of Godavari in the Aśmaka country where Sarabhanga, the son of the royal priest Brahmadata, the king of Kampilya, retired after having received ordination. Further it has been suggested by him that Asika Nagara mentioned in the Kharvela inscriptions and Assaka mentioned in the *Sutta Nipata* are identical and was a branch of the Aśsaka of north-west that probably settled in the Godavari region.<sup>131</sup> Even in the Aṅgūttara Nikāya we find reference of Assaka Mahājanapada with capital named Potana.<sup>132</sup> It is believed that Assakas were subordinates of Kāśi Mahājapanapadas and later V.K. Bhave identified Aśmaka as the region situated on the bank of Godavari.<sup>133</sup> According to V.V. Mirashi, Aśmaka comprised modern Ahmednagar and Bidar districts and may have extended in the north up to the Satamala range.<sup>134</sup> D.C. Sircar and V.V. Mirashi on the basis of the Pandurangapalli grant of the Rāstrakūta defined the extent of the Aśmakas.<sup>135</sup> In the opinion of Sircar, Aśmaka was mainly the Vastagulma where the Vakāṭakas set up their capital between fourth to sixth century CE. However with the archaeological investigation

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<sup>130</sup>B.C. Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism*, 1932, p.2-3.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>134</sup> V.V. Mirashi., 'Identification of Kuntala and Aśmaka Countries', *Studies in Indology* II, Nagpur: Vidarbha Samsodhan Mandal, 1961, pp. 164-166.

<sup>135</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) 'Pandurangapalli grant of Rāstrakūta Avidheya', *Epigraphia Indica* 36, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1965, pp. 9-24.

carried out by Amarendra Nath on Adam it becomes clear that this particular archaeological site had connection with Aśmaka. Nath made this opinion on the basis of the sealing recovered from the site. This site yielded a sealing which read 'Asakasa Janapadasa' and it has been stated by Amarendra Nath that this Asakasa was Aśmaka. On the basis of the palaeography report this sealing is dated around 150 BC making it clear that Aśmaka was a janapada which existed from the pre- Sātavāhana times. This site was a fortified site as ramparts were discovered and we found that it was fortified further in the Sātavāhana times. Since this period witnessed tussle with the Western kshtrapas such kind of fortification was necessary construction.<sup>136</sup> Thus from the literary sources and archaeological reports it can be inferred that the Aśmaka janapada was very much a territorial part of Vidarbha. This claim has been further supported by interesting evidence. This was the Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela. In this particular inscription we get the term Asika Nagara.<sup>137</sup> Reshma Sawant has suggested that the absence of the settlement in the site of Adam from the Sātavahana period was probably because the army of Kharavela marched towards this city and destroyed its habitation.<sup>138</sup>

Epigraphic records also throw light on the connection between Aśmaka and Vidarbha. In the Nasik Cave Inscription the term Aśmaka is followed by Mulaka. In the Purāṇic lists of the solar dynasty we find that King Aśmaka was succeeded by his son Mulaka. Reshma Sawant concluded that they ruled over separate independent territories which were named after their respective names. But the archaeological investigations that were carried out in

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<sup>136</sup> Amarendra Nath, 'Adam – An index to Vidarbha Archaeology', B.U. Nayak and N.C.Ghosh, ( eds.), *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol.i New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, pp. 69-70.

<sup>137</sup> K.P. Jayaswal and R.D. Banerjee, 'The Hatigumpha Inscription of Kharvela', *Epigraphia Indica*, XX, 1929-30, pp. 71-89.

<sup>138</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, pp. 20-21.

the recent times helped us to get a concrete answer to our query regarding the relationship between the kingdom of Vidarbha and Aśmaka.<sup>139</sup> Adam, the largest fortified site of the Early Historic sites yielded a seal which bear a particular term 'Asakassa Janapadasa'. Amarendra Nath interpreted it as Aśmaka Janapada. On the basis of the Paleography it has been concluded that the seal belonged to 150 BCE. The discovery of this particular seal points out that it was part of Vidarbha and this particular site of Adam was Assikanagara.<sup>140</sup>

Even Arthaśāstra refer to this land in a very interesting way. It is known from Arthaśāstra that Dakṣiṇapatha is the region lying to the south of Mahismati (identified with Mandhata) on the river Narmada. The same text refers to six kinds of diamonds, they are- i. Sabharāśtraka. ii. Madhyamarastraka. iii. Kasmaka. iv. Srikatanaka. v. Manimantaka and lastly, Indravanaka. Sabhārāśtraka is identified with Vidarbha in Bhattaswamin's commentary on Arthaśāstra. This text mentions about two other kinds of gems in details. They are diamond and pearls. Vaidurya, pusyaraga, gomutraka and gomedika are the other gems that are mentioned by the author. Vaidurya (beryl stone) was found at Vaiduryagarbha identified as Vidarbha. Even Brhatsamhita (XIV, 14) confirms to this identification.<sup>141</sup>

Another category of literature where we get direct reference of Vidarbha and even the political history of Vidarbha is reflected are the works of Kālidāsa. It has been claimed by scholars like Dr. Grierson that Kālidāsa was connected with the Guptas. It has been

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<sup>139</sup> V.V. Mirashi., *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshtrapas*, Bombay: The Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 28-32.

<sup>140</sup>Nath, 'Adam', pp. 69-70.

<sup>141</sup> Harihar Trivedi., 'The Geography of Kautilya', *India Culture*, vol.1, July, 1935, pp. 247-248.

traditionally accepted that Kalidāsa was associated with the court of Vikramāditya II. Regarding the date of Kālidāsa it can be asserted that the scholars can be divided into two groups. One group of thinkers considers that the poet can be placed around 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Another group considers that Kālidāsa belonged to the fourth century C.E. In Raghuvamśa, Kālidāsa has given reference to the Hunas. B.C. Mazumder placed Kālidāsa in the first half of the sixth century. Another way we can trace the date of Kālidāsa's works is from the famous Mandasor Inscription composed by Vatsabhūti. This particular inscription composed around 472 C.E. borrowed three verses from the works of Kālidāsa. One was taken from *Meghadūta* and the other from *Ritusamhāra* description of Mandasor Inscription in Verses 10-11 is similar to that of the Kālidāsa's Meghasandesa verse 65. Similarly, verse 31 of the inscription agrees with the *Ritusamhara*, canto V, verses 2-3 in both words and thoughts.<sup>142</sup> A Ramulu has viewed that since Kālidāsa has written an entire canto on the description of winter he could not have borrowed these from Vatsabhūti. Kālidāsa according to Ramulu lived before Vatsabhūti. Thus he sets the lower limit to Kālidāsa's date to 473 CE. He further adds that Kālidāsa has vividly given description of the six seasons in *Ritusamhara* which was the typical tradition of the Gupta times whereas the tradition in the pre- Gupta period was limited to the reference of three seasons.<sup>143</sup>

Following the rules of pradaksina Raghu went to South India after completing the eastern part. As the Purāṇas state that the barbaric uncivilized population of Kiratas and Yavanas border the land of the Aryans from the East and West where two important mountain ranges, the Himalayas and the Vindhya guard the northern and southern frontiers. However śiṣṭachar has crossed the Vindhya and entered into this land through the

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<sup>142</sup>B.C.Mazumder, 'The Date of Kālidāsa', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1909, pp. 731-39.

<sup>143</sup>A. Ramulu and A. Ramulu, 'The Times of Kālidāsa – An Epigraphical Approach', *Bulletin of Deccan College*, Pune, pp. 655-658.

endeavour of Agastya. As we know the gigantic Vindhya Range bowed down before the sage and thus opened the way for the expansion of the brahmanical culture.<sup>144</sup> By the time Kālidāsa had composed *Raghuvamśa* brahmanical culture had spread to Vindhya which lie next to the Vindhyan range. Vidarbha is mentioned in the fifth and sixth cantos of *Raghuvamśa*. Here Kālidāsa identified Kuṇḍin as the capital of Vidarbha. The inhabitants of Vidarbha were called Krata- Kaisik. He has also given vivid description of the marriage of Indumati, a princess of Vidarbha Kālidāsa just like Daṇḍin thinks that the Bhoja rulers reigned over this region.<sup>145</sup> Even *Malavikāgnimitra* composed around fourth century CE refers to a Vidarbha as a newly established kingdom. This reference of Vidarbha in this work of Kālidāsa bears special significance as it coincides with the rise of the Vākāṭakas into power.

### **Relationship between Vidarbha and the Chedi Kingdom**

Several literary sources belonging to different periods speak about the connection between the Chedis and the kingdom of Vidarbha. Jātaka and Puranic sources draw connections between the two kingdoms. It is stated in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa that Vidarbha was the son of Jyamaḡha. Vidarbha had three sons. Chedi was the grandson of Vidarbha, and son of Kauśika.<sup>146</sup> Thus this story narrated in the Purāṇas suggests a link between the two kingdoms named after these two people who were connected by blood relationships. The descendants of Chedi were known as Chaidyarājas. However at a certain point of time the relationship between the two kingdoms turned hostile. This is well recorded in the

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<sup>144</sup> S.M. Ali, *The Geography of Puranas*, 1966, pp. 155-157.

<sup>145</sup> C.H.Tawney (trans.), *The Malavikāgnimitra, A Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa*, Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and co., 1981, pp. 34–36.

<sup>146</sup> S.M. Ali, *The Geography of Puranas*, pp. 155-157. Also see, H.H. Wilson, *The Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, 1895, p. 15

*Mahābhārata*. After Sisupāla was terminated by Kṛṣṇa his son and the entire army of the Chedi kingdom joined hands with the Pandava army. On the other hand, Vidarbha appears as the contingent of the Kauravas. Thus, in *Mahābhārata* they are treated as two separate kingdoms with hostile relationships. Regarding the origin of the Chedis scholars like Rhys Davids views that they were splitted into two branches, one of them operated from Nepal and the other Bundelkhand. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar holds the same view and stated that the Vidarbha and the Chedis of Bundelkhand were initially part of the same family.<sup>147</sup>

### **Perceptions in Buddhist literature on Vidarbha and Aśmaka**

Buddhist sources also speak about Vidarbha mainly in connection with Aśmaka. In the Dighya Nikaya, Assaka was considered as one of the important territory with Potana as the capital.<sup>148</sup> In the Assaka Jātaka the city of Potali was considered to be a part of Kasi. G. Malalaseker has tried to find the association of Assaka with Potana. According to him Potana was later on named as Paithan which became the capital of the Sātavāhanas. The Sūta Nipāta mentions the geographical location of Vidarbha.<sup>149</sup> According to this particular text, Aśmaka janapada was situated between Godavari and Mahismati near the banks of river Narmada.<sup>150</sup> It is in the *Chullakaliṅga Jātaka* we get a picture of the political history of Aśmaka and Kalinga. This Jātaka mentions the name of the king who reigned over the Assaka country with Nandisena as his minister. In this text a battle between the

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<sup>147</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, 2012, p. 20.

<sup>148</sup> B.C. Law, *Geography of Early Buddhism*, p.2-3.

<sup>149</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Daśakumārcharita', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research*, 1945, vol. 26, No.1/2, pp. 21-30.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid. pp. 21-30. H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, London: Society For the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846, pp.1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, 1907, pp. 12-60.

two kingdoms were recorded where the king of Aśmaka was victorious and he married the daughter of the king of Kalinga.<sup>151</sup>

### **Vidarbha in Daṇḍin and Rājśekhara's writings: Memory and Cultural roots.**

*Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin mentions in detail about the political history of Vidarbha. There is a huge controversy regarding the date of this particular work. The political scenario of Vidarbha depicted in the eight ucchvaṣa of *Dāśakumarcarita* confirms to the fact that it was composed around sixth century CE. He refers to a king named Punyavarman. We do not get mention of any such ruler in any one of the ruling dynasties of Vidarbha but Daṇḍin describes him in detail. He traces his root back to the Yādava lineage. This virtuous ruler was succeeded by an incompetent son who became addicted to evil practices. However an old minister Vasundhara safely escorted queen of Anantavarman and her two children to the court of Māhismatī. However the half-brother of Anantavarman who was then the ruler of Mahismati felt threatened and were determined to kill the two sons. Finally they escape and met Visruta in the forests of the Vindhya. The latter promised the queen to place her son to the throne of Aśmaka. *Daśakumārcharita* ends abruptly but what is clear is that the kingdom of Anantavarman was huge. It extended from the Narmada in the north to Tungavadra in the south and from the Arabian Sea in the west to Wainganga in the East. There were various feudatories who were under the king Anantavarman. Daṇḍin also mentions that the mother of Anantavarman was the daughter of Kośala.<sup>152</sup> We find that the ruler of Kosala submitted to the Vākāṭaka ruler. This is well mentioned in the Balaghat inscription of Pṛthvisena II. It can be concluded that though the

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<sup>151</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Dandin's *Daśakumārcharita*' pp. 21-30

<sup>152</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Dasakumaracharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, 1846, pp.1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, Dissertation, pp. 12-60.



text is somewhat incomplete but it is an important source for understanding the complex political scenario of Deccan after the fifth – sixth century CE. It is clearly evident from this text that after the end of the Vākātaka rule new centres of power emerged- one is Māhismatī and the other is Banavasi. This text no doubt identifies Vidarbha as a powerful kingdom with several feudatories like Vastabhanu who was in charge of Aśmaka. This Aśmaka which has appeared in several other sources as independent kingdom probably came under the rule of the kingdom of Vidarbha. Kuntala and Rṣika (Khandesh) were also part of Vidarbha.<sup>153</sup>

Vidarbha also appeared in the works of Rājaśekhara. He identifies it as an important center of learning. He mentions various divisions of Dakṣiṇapatha. It includes

1. Mahārāṣṭra
2. Mahisaka.
3. Aśmaka
4. Vidarbha
5. Kanchi
6. Murala.
7. Simhala.
8. Dandaka.
9. Ganga.
10. Kavera.
11. Surparaka.
12. Kavera.
13. Nasikya.
14. Kaunakana.<sup>154</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the works of Rājaśekhara Vidarbha and Asmaka are recognised as two separate territories of Southern India. Another interesting work that throws light on the different divisions of Indian subcontinent and showed different cultural elements that are typical to each division is the *Natyasāstra* by *Bharatmuni*. He has divided the country into four cultural zones and has provided reason for such fourfold division. He mentions seven great mountains which were considered as the dwelling place of divine and semi divine beings. While referring to the human world (loka) he divided it into four regions based on the styles or pravrtti. They are Western (Avanti), Northern (Pāñcali),

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<sup>153</sup>V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Dandin's Daśakumārcharita', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research*, 1945, vol. 26, No.1/2, pp. 21-30.

<sup>154</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṃimamsā of Rājaśekhara*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2000, pp. 253-255.

Southern (Dakṣiṇatyā) and Eastern (Ardhamagadhī). However he does not mention of Vidarbha directly. The Southern region is identified as the area between southern sea and the Vindhya. The Southern people were reckoned as Kośala, Tosala, Dramida, Kalinga, Khasa, Andhra, Mahārātra, Vainna and Vanavasaja. According to the sage, the southerners were particularly fond of song and dance and are delicate people who all indulge in sṛṅgāra. Such a style is called kaisiki. It is defined as a unique feature of grace. He made this kind of observations about the other three regions based on the vṛttis or dramatic modes. He also emphasised on psychic attitudes of the inhabitants of each divisions.<sup>155</sup>

Rājaśekhara also associated different rītis with different parts of India. It was in Aṅga, Vanga, Kalinga, Pragjyotiṣa, Kausal, Magadha, Nepal Tamraliptaka, Malada, Mallavarttika and Brahmottara are the provinces of eastern part were Gauḍīya rīti was practiced.<sup>156</sup> Pāñcāla, Śūrasena, Hastināpura, Kaśmīra, Vālhika and Bālhika the northern parts are the place for Pāñcālī rīti. The Malaya, Kuntala, Kerala, Vidarbha, Asmaka, Kāñchi, Daṇḍak and Pandaya etc. are the regions were Vaidarbhī rīti was practiced.

Thus, we find that Vidarbha was in the minds of people from various historical phases in ancient times. Various mythical characters and events woven around this part of Deccan make it clear that it was a well known territory of Deccan. However literary sources as we have already mentioned that are unable to provide any direct historical evidence for the specificity of Vidarbha as a region. But we do get the evidence for Vidarbha as a unit of inhabitation with cultural denominations. This comes as a perception of those who authored

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<sup>155</sup> Francis Arakal, 'Culture and Geographical Descriptions as seen in the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bharatmuni: A Study', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 1999, pp. 43-152.

<sup>156</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṁimamsā of Rājaśekhara*, New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2000, pp. 253-255.

texts or compiled texts which relate in some ways to the notion of Vidarbha as an inhabited space. The transmission of these perceptions came from an exclusive sphere of intellection. Perceptions are also part of the lived historical experience which although through exclusive spheres of observation would also carry the more common notions of the people in general. Simon Schama has rightly stated that ‘landscapes are culture before nature.’<sup>157</sup> The landscape of Vidarbha had been represented in different ways in different literary sources. That Vidarbha was a culturally distinctive landscape and its people were also culturally distinguishable from the inhabitants of other parts of Deccan. Indeed the comparison between the inhabitants of different parts of Deccan in the Puranic records where the people of Vidarbha were described as superior points to a singularly exclusive notion. What we are to read from it remains a question. In the literary sources of the earlier period myths played a very important role later on in works of Rājaśekhara we find that memory gained importance. He traced his ancestral roots back to Vidarbha. One common trait that gained importance both in the memory and mythical representation of Vidarbha is that it was an important centre of learning. Certain names of places within Vidarbha came up in the stories and the memories of the writers. One such is Kuṇḍin which has been identified with the modern Kaudinyapur, named after a renowned teacher Kuṇḍin. The other is Bhojakaṭa. The latter attained greater significance as it became an important administrative division under the Vākātakas.<sup>158</sup> It can be said that the ‘constructs of imagination’<sup>159</sup> is an important prism for understanding the process of historical development of any geographical space into a cultural zone and may be a region later on.

<sup>157</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 61.

<sup>158</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) ‘Chammak Plates of Pravarasena II’, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. v, Inscriptions of the Vakatakas*, Ootachamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963, pp. 22-27.

<sup>159</sup> Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, p. 61.

## Maps and Illustrations

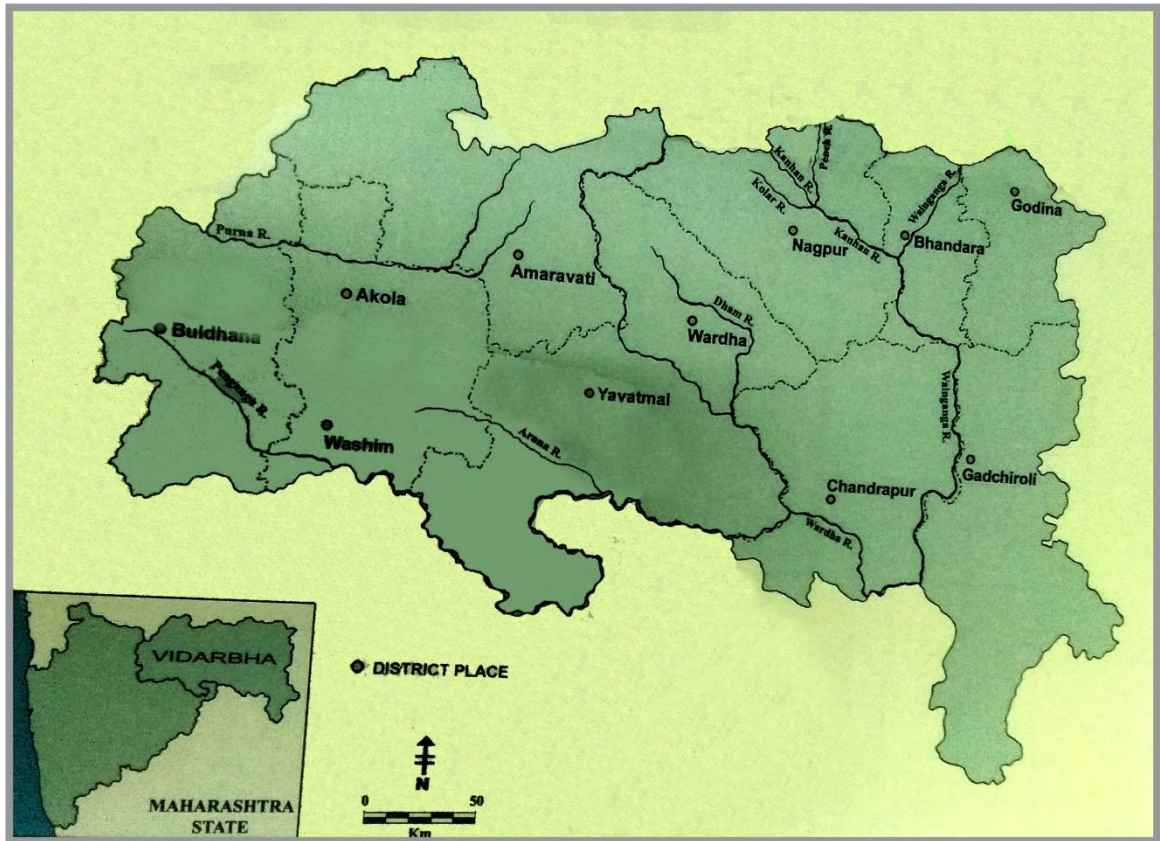


Fig. 1.1: District-wise map of Vidarbha

Courtesy: <https://mapcarta.com> and Researcher

## Chapter 2

### Understanding Vidarbha: The Early Tradition of Megaliths

Historical processes and cultural perceptions and are the two main prisms chosen to trace the history of this geographical space. In the previous chapter, we have tried to show how a connotation of the geographical space denoted as Vidarbha can be traced in literary sources which provides indications for an abstraction of the sense of this space in the minds and memory of the people in early historical and early medieval times. The perception transmitted in textual sources was not from the land itself and hailed mainly from the brahmanical heartland. We get several pictures of Vidarbha from the textual sources which were constructed either from the imaginations or from their memory. The composers of some of these texts have given reference to Vidarbha specifically when they were writing about their ancestral roots. Rājaśekhara in his *Karpūramañjarī* has given a detailed account of his childhood and also talked about his ancestors. This text is interesting as we come across a particular term used by Rājaśekhara to refer to his great grandfather. His great grandfather, Akājalada was called *Mahārāshtracūḍāmaṇi*. This term is significant as it suggests the other name for Vidarbha was Maharashtra.<sup>160</sup> This description later on helped the archaeologists to identify the ancient name of Maharashtra. Many archaeologists used the two terms – Vidarbha and Maharashtra interchangeably.<sup>161</sup> Eleven districts in the eastern part of Maharashtra make up what has been called Vidarbha in the ancient texts. Daṇḍakārṇya was situated in close proximity to the area.<sup>162</sup> The Purāṇic

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<sup>160</sup> Sten Konow and Charles Rockwell Lanman (trans.) *Raja-Cekhara's Karpura-Manjari* Harvard; Harvard University, 1901, pp. 177-180.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2015, pp.134-135.

sources clearly mention that the people of this part of Deccan were culturally different from other inhabitants of Deccan.<sup>163</sup> We also find that the texts tried to explore the connectivity between Vidarbha and Aśmaka janapada. In certain texts, they had been portrayed as two different kingdoms<sup>164</sup> while in certain other texts, Aśsikanagara was considered as an integral part of Vidarbha.<sup>165</sup> In the work of Kālidāsa<sup>166</sup> Vidarbha emerged as an independent kingdom. This text holds a special significance. The date of this text is placed around fourth century CE. This coincides with the establishment of the Vākāṭaka rule over Vidarbha. Vidarbha emerged as a well - known territory which earned its reputation as an important centre of learning. Later on, this land became associated with a particular poetic style, *Vaidarbhī*.<sup>167</sup> What is clear from these texts is that it was a habitational zone from the very early days in early historical times.

But the most ancient roots of human culture in this area is available only from archaeological records, which also supply clues for continuation of life in the region through the early phases of history. A study of these records would be our first step towards exploring the historical processes in the zone/region to track the changes in its cultural and spatial identity. We begin the survey of these processes from the Megalithic/ Early Iron Age. The evidence from this phase indicate that the inhabitants of this land were able to

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<sup>163</sup> According to the Purāṇas, the people of Vidarbha were the dwellers of the Deccan (Dakṣiṇāpathavasinaḥ) F.EPartiger (trans. and annotated), *The Mārkendeya Purāṇa* [Bibliotheca Indica: A Collection of Oriental Works published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal], Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1969, p. 335.

<sup>164</sup> K.M. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata of Krishna -Dwaipayana Vyasa, vol.II*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp. 44-51.

<sup>165</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Identification of Kuntala and Aśmaka Countries', in *Studies in Indology II*, Nagpur: Vidarbha Samsodhan Mandal, pp. 164-66.

<sup>166</sup> C.H. Tawney (trans.) *Mālavikāgnimitra: A Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa (Second Edition)*, Calcutta: Thacker Spink and Co., 1891, p.11 and pp. 90-92.

<sup>167</sup> P.C. Lahiri, *Concepts of Rīti and Guṇa in Sanskrit Poetics*, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1937, pp.112-119.

carve out their own cultural identity very early which was reflected in various social practices which have left footprints in the landscape. These activities formed the stepping stone for further cultural developments in the subsequent times. As Donald Worster writes, “The history of the region is first and foremost one of an evolving human ecology. A region emerges as people try to make a living from a particular part of the earth, as they adapt themselves to its limits and possibilities. What the regional historian should first want to know is how a people or peoples acquired a place and, then, how they perceived and tried to make use of it.”<sup>168</sup> He has emphasized the need for understanding the survival techniques that are adopted by humans, the pattern of their work and economy and the social relationships they share for understanding the processes involved in the emergence of any region.<sup>169</sup> In this chapter we are trying to explore all these aspects of as noted within our chosen area of study which will enhance the understanding of the processes of unique cultural development that Vidarbha underwent from very early phase of human history.

Historically the use of iron and iron technology is considered an integral part of megalithic culture. However, it is necessary to remember that all the Iron Age sites did not display features of megalithic culture, but iron objects were recovered from all the megalithic sites.<sup>170</sup> Traditionally, these sites were defined as ‘megalithic’ based on the pottery and the burial types. The megalithic tradition is well evident in the sites like Takalghat, Khapa,<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup>Susan H. Armitage, ‘From the Inside Out: Rewriting Regional History’, *Journal of Women Studies*, vol.22, No.13, 2001, pp. 32-47

<sup>169</sup>Ibid. p. 33

<sup>170</sup> S.B. Deo, Iron in Peninsular India, in *Dating in Indian Archaeology: Problems and Perspectives* (T.P. Verma (ed.), Mysore; Bharatiya Itihas Sankala, 1998, pp. 57-61..

<sup>171</sup> S.B. Deo, *Excavation at Takalghat and Khapa (1968-69)*, Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1970, pp. 56-80.

and Bhagimohari,<sup>172</sup> Junapani,<sup>173</sup> Kamptee,<sup>174</sup> Khairwada,<sup>175</sup> Naikund,<sup>176</sup> and Mahurjhari.<sup>177</sup> In the early Iron Age, the non-megalithic tradition was visible in Kaudinyapur<sup>178</sup> Pauni,<sup>179</sup> Kahali–Brahmapuri,<sup>180</sup> and Adam.<sup>181</sup> At these sites, megalithic cultural features were not found. But these communities co-existed with the people of the megalithic culture of Vidarbha.

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<sup>172</sup>M.D. Kajale, Archaeobotanical Investigations on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System, in *Man and Environment*, vol. XIII, 1989, pp. 87–100.

<sup>173</sup> Abbas Riza , Mayank Vahia Sobha, R.K. Mohanty, Aniket Sule, ‘Search For Archaeoastronomical Data from the Megalithic Burials of Junapani, Nagpur, Maharashtra,’ *Indian Rock Art Research Centre Nashik and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research* , 2010, pp.6-7. Tilok Thakuria ‘Architectural variations of the Vidarbha Megalithic Burials, Maharashtra’, in S.H. Jahan (ed.) *Abhijnan: Studies in South Asian Archaeology and Art History of Artefacts*, No.10, BAR International Series, 2009, pp.35-41.

<sup>174</sup> K. Mahapatra (ed.) *Indian Archaeology 1989-90- A Review*, New Delhi Archaeological Survey of India, 1994, p.68.

<sup>175</sup> J.J. Carey, ‘Stone Circles near Khairwada Wardah district’, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1871, pp. 238-39.

<sup>176</sup> Oishi Roy, ‘Evidence of Steel Making at Naikund and its Relationship with Mahurjhari, Borgaon and Khairwada, Maharashtra’ *Man and Environment*, XLIV, 2019, pp.12-20. S.B. Deo and A.P. Jamkhedkar (ed.) *Naikund excavations, 1979-80* Bombay: Department of Archaeology and Museums, 1982, pp. 2-59.

<sup>177</sup> R.K. Mohanty, ‘Excavation at Mahurjhari’, *Annual Report (200-02)*, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 45-47.

<sup>178</sup>M.G. Dikshit, ‘Excavations at Kaudinyapur’, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1968, pp.1-20.

<sup>179</sup>S.B. Deo and P.C. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation (1969-70) Pauni Excavation*, Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, pp.17-19.

<sup>180</sup>S.R. Walimbe, ‘Excavation at the early Historic site of Kahali- Brahmapuri,’ *Annual Report*, Pune: Deccan College, 2001-02, pp.39-40.

<sup>181</sup>Amarendra Nath, Adam- An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology, in *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology* , vol. I.( B.U. Nayak and N.C Ghosh Eds.), New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1992, pp. 69 -70.



### **Defining Vidarbha from Archaeological Perspective-**

Archaeologists from the Deccan College and Nagpur University have shown keen interest in exploring and excavating the area surrounding the Wardha- Waingangā river valley. The usual methodology practiced by the archaeologists is to identify a particular geographical zone and excavate the area. Later on, search for the ancient names of the excavated sites in the texts. With the advent of New Archaeology their earlier methodology of analyzing a single cultural site underwent a significant change. They focused on a cluster of sites to analyze cultural trends. In case of our chosen area of study, archaeologists like S.B. Deo,<sup>182</sup> B.C. Deotare<sup>183</sup> Amarendra Nath,<sup>184</sup> J.P. Joshi,<sup>185</sup> A.K. Sharma<sup>186</sup>, and M.D. Kajale<sup>187</sup> has excavated different sites in and around the two river valleys to elucidate various aspects of socio-cultural history. In their attempt to define and trace the name of this present river valley, they have used textual evidence, especially the stories narrated in the *Mahābhārata*. Though the historical relevance of the stories associated with the nomenclature is doubtful, an etymological analysis (Vi- darbha, i.e., without darbha grass, a dry area) confirms that the area mentioned in this text matches with the eastern part of present Maharashtra.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> S. B. Deo and M. K. Dhavalikar, Report of Paunar Excavation (1967), 'Report of Paunar Excavation' in *Nagpur University Journal (Humanities)* vol. xviii, No.3, Nagpur: Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya. S.B. Deo and A.P. Jamkhedkar, 'Excavation at Naikund 1978-79', Bombay: Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra, 1982, pp. 30-31.

<sup>183</sup>B.C. Deotare, 'Excavation at Bhon, district Buldana', Maharashtra, *Annual Report (2006-07)* Pune: Deccan College, 2008, pp.75-76.

<sup>184</sup>Nath, 'Adam- An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', pp.69-70.

<sup>185</sup>J.P. Joshi and A.K. Sharma , 'Excavation at Mansar', District Nagpur, Maharashtra-1997-2000, *Puratattva* 30, 2000, pp. 127-131

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 127-31.

<sup>187</sup>M.D. Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigation on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System', *Man and Environment*, 1989, pp. 87–100.

<sup>188</sup>K.M.Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, vol.II*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp. 68-69.

Another vital idea revealed in most texts is that Vidarbha was situated near the Daṇḍakarnya. This also helped the archaeologists to identify its present geographical area as eastern Maharashtra, covering eleven districts. This eastern part is characterized by fertile river valleys, the Arvi plateau, Gadchiroli hills, and forest tracts. Identifying the names of places mentioned in the epigraphic records with the present geographical area also helped the archaeologists establish a line of consensus between the descriptions available in the literary texts with that of the archaeological data. They have accepted the term 'Vidarbha' to designate the eastern part of present-day Maharashtra but still uses the geographical markers to denote this part of Deccan.<sup>189</sup> In their study of the megalithic culture of Deccan, they figured out that this eastern part of Maharashtra exhibited certain exclusive features which were not detected in other parts of Peninsular India. This chapter will discuss unique cultural features and the socio-economic pattern that developed during this period.

### **Researches on the Megalithic/ Early Iron Age in Vidarbha**

We begin with a brief survey of the studies on this early history of the Megalithic tradition of Vidarbha. It was mainly due to the endeavour of the British officials that the investigations on the Vidarbha megalithic culture began in the first phase of the nineteenth century. However, these early efforts were mainly because of the curiosity and desire to assemble antiquities found in the burials. The early explorers used different general terminology, such as "barrow" and "mounds," for these megalithic burials. Reverend Hislop, a Scottish missionary and geologist, was entrusted with reporting megalithic graves

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<sup>189</sup>Reshma Sawant, *Historical Geography of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International and Bhopal: Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, 2012, pp. 1-160. Uthara Suvrathan also uses the title Vidarbha in her work. Mohan S. Pardhi, 'Terracotta Art of Vidarbha An appraisal', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 8.1, 2020, pp. 544-598.

from Vidarbha. He also excavated artifacts related to the megaliths from the Takalghat Khapa site in the Nagpur district.<sup>190</sup> Though the full report of his excavations was not published, later explorers and excavators such as Pearse<sup>191</sup> and Carnac<sup>192</sup> acknowledged his works in their papers. The effort made by Hislop was taken a step further by Rivet Carnac, who was then a civil servant working in Bengal. He is credited for excavating a few stone circles in Junapani, a site situated on the outskirts of Nagpur city. He made well-planned explorations at the site and is credited for preparing a map denoting distributions of the megalithic burials at Junapani.<sup>193</sup> Excavations at Junapani yielded various objects of iron, such as spearheads, knives, daggers, and axes.<sup>194</sup> Colonel Godfrey Pearse was responsible for excavation at Wurregaon, near Kamptee cantonment area, in 1867. He excavated the stone circles, which was situated east of Wurregaon village and measured their sizes. During his excavation, the double skeleton remains of humans were recovered from this site, along with iron ploughs, spatulas, and sickles. After the end of his excavations, he concluded that the builders of this burial were not civilized. He made analysis of the skeletons and viewed that the megalithic inhabitants were well-built knew horse riding and had technical knowledge required for smelting.<sup>195</sup> After Pearse, J.J. Carrey excavated few

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<sup>190</sup> R.K. Mohanty and V. Selvakumar, 'The Archaeology of the Megaliths in India: 1947-1997' in S. Settar and Ravi Korisetar (eds.) *Pre History: Archaeology of South Asia*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2001, pp. 314-320. S.B. Deo, *Excavation at Takalghat and Khapa (1968-69)*, Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1970, pp. 56-80.

<sup>191</sup> Pearse G. Notes on the excavation of a Stone circle near Kamptee in Central Province of India, in *Ethnography Society of London (4)*, pp. 428-29.

<sup>192</sup> J.H. Rivett Carnac, 'Pre-Historic Remains in Central India', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, XLVIII*, 1879, pp. 1-16.

<sup>193</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths – A Review', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, vol.41*, 1982, pp. 27-32.

<sup>194</sup> Lawrence S. Leshnik, Early Burials from the Nagpur District, *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 5, no.3*, 1970, pp. 498-511.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 498-511.

stone circles at Khairwada in the Wardha district.<sup>196</sup> He described each stone circle and observed nearly 150 barrows in and around the site. During the excavation, important artifacts included earrings; various pottery fragments, two copper bells, and an iron axe were discovered. The detailed report on Khairwada had been published in the journal of the Asiatic Society.<sup>197</sup> Mahurjhari, an important megalithic site that showed continuous stages of habitation, was first excavated by Hunter. He reported that the site had megalithic burials.<sup>198</sup> Sir Alexander Cunningham discovered dolmens near Keljhar, in Chandrapur. Henry Cousens is credited for providing a complete report of Central Provinces and Berar, where he mentioned villages having megaliths, such as Tilotakhairi,<sup>199</sup> Pipalgaon.<sup>200</sup>

After 1947, new investigations were initiated by Indian archaeologists in the field of megalithic studies. Several renowned institutions like Nagpur University, Deccan College Pune, and Archaeological Survey of India took up the task of carrying out scientific and systematic explorations and excavations of the megalithic remains of entire Deccan. S.B. Deo from Deccan College, Pune plotted the sites of Vidarbha with features of megalithic culture on the megalithic map of India. His work was not limited to excavating various megalithic sites rather he published detailed excavation reports on megalithic communities,

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<sup>196</sup> J.J. Carey, Stone Circles, found near Khairwada, Wardha districts, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1871, pp.238-39.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid. pp. 23–239.

<sup>198</sup> R.K. Mohanty, 'Excavation at Mahurjhari', *Annual Report (200-2002)*, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 45-47. And IAR 1958-59, p. 21 and IAR (1970-71), pp. 24-25, IAR (1978-79) p. 71

<sup>199</sup> Henry Cousens, *Architectural antiquities of Western India*, London: The India Society, 1926, pp. 1-7. *Indian Archaeology 1992-93- A review*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 113-114.

<sup>200</sup> Virag Sontakke, 'The Stones of Death: Archaeology of Early Iron Age in Central India', in Akinori Uesugi (ed.) *Iron Age in South Asia*, Archaeological Research Institute, Kansai University, pp.101-110. IAR, 1983-84, pp. 57-58.

their settlement pattern, economy, ceramics, and the technology they used. He also seriously tried to place Vidarbha megaliths within the broader framework of megalithic tradition.<sup>201</sup>

In the first half of the twentieth century, the archaeologists gave thrust to problem-oriented scientific work in megalithic studies. Inspections were conducted at the burial and habitation sites of the megalithic community in a microscopic manner, where the emphasis was mainly given to each site instead of focusing on the settlement study. Later, ethno-archaeological studies helped formulate new approaches for understanding the beliefs and customs involved in the construction of burials, which became an important area of research. The application of all these techniques came from the increasing influence of New Archaeology propounded by Binford. Binford also wrote about mortuary analysis, which brought forth the ideas such as the *Social Persona* of the dead.<sup>202</sup> These influenced Deo when he wrote in detail about the megalithic chronology, culture, technology, and ecology. He analyzed the percentage and number of tool types appearing in respective burials from Borgaon to show how the pastorals dominated society. Thus the influence of Binford and his social approach was seen in studies in Vidarbha.<sup>203</sup> Moorti has also categorized the tools. Moorti was deeply influenced by the methodology of New Archaeology. He has tried to

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<sup>201</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths', *New Indian Antiquary*.13, 1970, pp. 23- 31. Excavations at Takhalghat Khapa', Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1970, 'Mahurjhari Excavations', Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1973, 'Excavations at Bhokardhan', Nagpur: Vidyapeeth Mudraalaya, 1974. 'The Genesis of Maharashtra History and Culture', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, 43, pp.17-32. Tilok Thakuria, 'Chronology of Vidarbha Megalithic Culture: An Appraisal', *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 2, 2014, pp. 651-657.

<sup>202</sup> L.R. Binford, 'Archaeological as Anthropology', *American Antiquity*, vol.28, no.2, 1962, pp. 217-225.

<sup>203</sup> Deo, *The Vidarbha Megaliths – A Review*, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.41, 1982, pp.27-32.

understand the ranked society against the background of an agro-pastoral economy, a small representation of industry with ample raw materials from Vidarbha and possible trade routes. He also assigned ritualistic importance to the burials.<sup>204</sup> Thus there were attempts to identify the society and economy of the megalithic people. Later studies by Joshi were also directed toward understanding these social perspectives.<sup>205</sup> He has tried to understand the nature of the society and the economic patterns of the Megalithic culture of the entire Deccan. R.K. Mohanty suggests a shift towards field-based techniques and investigations to understand the megalithic burial ritual. He carried out an intensive surface survey at Bhagimohari.<sup>206</sup> This kind of study goes beyond general discussion on the material culture and explores new dimensions like the use of space by different communities, the economic status, and the period of burial construction.<sup>207</sup> Archaeologists have now made an attempt to analyse the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the megalithic tradition of Vidarbha. Another eminent scholar who has moved beyond the study of single site or settlement pattern and focused on exploring several aspects of the megalithic culture was G.K. Mane.<sup>208</sup> In recent times Uthara Suvrathan has also opened up a new dimension to this kind of study. She has tried to understand the megalithic culture of Deccan in spatial and

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<sup>204</sup>U.S. Moorti, *Megalithic Culture of South India: Socio-Economic Perspectives*, Varanasi: Ganga Kaveri Publishing House, 1994, pp. 13-15.

<sup>205</sup>P.S. Joshi, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths: A Cultural Study'. Dissertation submitted to University of Poona, 1993, pp.38-39.

<sup>206</sup> M.D. Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigation on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System', *Man and Environment*, 1989, pp.87–100. K. Paddayya, 'Stone Age Sites near Bhagimohari, Nagpur District, Maharashtra', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post- Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.43, 1984, pp.91-98.

<sup>207</sup> R.K.Mohanty, 'A Preliminary Report of the Excavations at Mahurjhari', 2001, *Pratnatattva* 9, pp. 41-47.

<sup>208</sup> G. K. Mane, 'Metal objects and Metallurgy of Megalithic Culture of Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.62, 2001, pp. 965-975. 'Megalithic Pottery of Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.63, pp. 1197-1203.

cultural terms. She has coined the term ‘mortuary landscape’ and has tried to trace the continuities and changes that this landscape experienced in the subsequent historical phases.<sup>209</sup> Another new aspect of this kind of study has been initiated by Reshma Sawant. She has tried to understand it from the perspective of a Historical Geography.<sup>210</sup> These two archaeologists have used the name ‘Vidarbha’ in the title of their work. This is also new approach towards this kind of study where they have not used any geographical marker to denote their area of study. Instead they have picked up the term from the literary sources.

### **Analysis of the nature of the sites and the settlement pattern of the Early Iron Age/ megalithic period (800 to 300BCE)**

The emergence of a unique megalithic culture in Vidarbha was closely related to its physical and topological features. The relief of Vidarbha features the residual hill ranges of the Satpuras with undulating black soil valleys encompassing the ranges. The geographical features of Vidarbha played a vital role in developing megalithic cultural tradition in Vidarbha. According to Suvrathan, geography played a crucial role in developing distinct personality of Vidarbha.<sup>211</sup> Bruce Trigger has provided two approaches towards the understanding of the settlement pattern. Firstly, ecological: it believes that settlement pattern results from interaction with the natural environment. Secondly, socio-political and religious factors change the existing pattern and contribute in the development of new settlement pattern in any region.<sup>212</sup> The nature and functions of the sites also reflect upon

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<sup>209</sup>Uthara Suvrathan, ‘Landscapes of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha’, *Deccan Culture, Heritage and Literature* (ed. Mohammad Nazrul Bari and H.M.Maheshwaraiah), Karnataka: University of Karnataka, 2012, p. 122-39.

<sup>210</sup>Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, pp. 1-100.

<sup>211</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, pp.144.

<sup>212</sup> Bruce Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought*, Cambridge University of Press, 2008, pp. 134–136.

the man-land relationship during any culture of the past. According to Willey, this relationship includes how man disposed of himself over the landscape he settles down. It refers to dwellings, their layout, and the nature and disposition of other buildings which are intrinsic part of community life. These settlements emulate the natural settings, the level of technology on which the builders functioned, and various social interaction and control institutions reflected in the megalithic cultural tradition.<sup>213</sup> Cultural requirements largely shaped the settlement patterns. They offered a strategic starting point for the functional interpretation of archaeological cultures.<sup>214</sup> The settlement pattern aspect of this period has been studied in detail only by Joshi (1993)<sup>215</sup> and S.B. Deo (1970, 1982, and 1985). Deo suggests that burials are on the foothills or barren, undulating landscapes since it was easy for burial buildings and habitations were situated on river banks. He also feels that eastern side of Vidarbha was preferred over the western one since the eastern side is endowed with natural resources like coal, iron ore, manganese, and forest lands.<sup>216</sup> Joshi, in his analysis tries to relate the settlement type to the environment. He divides them into three groups: a) Burial sites (B), b) Habitation sites (H) c) Habitation cum Burial (HCB) sites.<sup>217</sup> According to him, the habitational mounds are situated near the fertile area with the availability of water. Habitational cum burial sites occupied a dual niche where raw materials for craft production along with arable land for sufficient if not extensive agricultural activities were available. This type of site is found surrounded by low-lying hills and deciduous forests.

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<sup>213</sup> G.R. Willey, Prehistoric 'Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru,' *Washington: The Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin*, 1953, pp.1-453.

<sup>214</sup> G.R. Willey, 'Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Viru Valley, Peru,' pp. 1-453.

<sup>215</sup> Joshi, 1993, pp. 34-38.

<sup>216</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths', *New Indian Antiquary*, 13, 1970, pp. 23-31.

<sup>217</sup> Mohanty, 'Mahurjhari', pp. 72-77.



Sites like Takalghat,<sup>218</sup> Mahurjhari,<sup>219</sup> Khairwada<sup>220</sup> and Bhagimohari<sup>221</sup> fall into this category. However for the constructions of burials hilly terrain was preferred where stones and boulders are easily and sufficiently available.

Burial sites and associated habitation sites were not always located in close proximity to each other. The locations of the burial sites were determined by factors like availability of resources and materials for burial construction and ritual aspect. Thus it might appear that they are two separate cultural manifestations. In this case, like most habitation – cum – burial sites, have given more than one cemetery location. Mahurjhari has 11 locations of burials associated with the settlement, where they are sometimes not more than one kilometer away.<sup>222</sup> This may suggest that the burial sites outnumbered the habitational sites. The burial sites located in the west and northwest (Junapani, Mahurjhari, Dhamnalanga, and Vyahad) were probably associated with two major habitational sites- Mahurjhari and Vyahad.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Deo, 'Excavations at Takalghat- Khapa', 1970, pp. 23-27.

<sup>219</sup> Deo, 'Mahurjhari Excavations,' 1973, pp. 1-30.

<sup>220</sup> P.K. Thomas, 'Subsistence and Burial Practices based on animal remains at Khairwada', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post- Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.53, 1993, pp379-395.

<sup>221</sup> Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigation on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System', *Man and Environment XII*, 1989, pp. 87–100. K. Paddaya, 'Stone Age Sites Near Bhagimohari, Nagpur District', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.43, 1984, pp. 91-98.

<sup>222</sup> Mohanty, 'Mahurjhari', pp. 45-47.

<sup>223</sup> Ismail, Kellellu. 'Excavation at Vyahad', *Annual Conference of Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies* held at Raipur, 2006, pp. 27–29.

**Table2.1: List of burial sites (Fig: 2.1)**

Burial Sites	Location and Excavator	Remains
1. Boregaon (IAR 1980-81:40)	21° 20' N; 78° 58' E), Deccan College.	Very few human skeletons and antiquities formed – iron-made sickles, chisels, adzes, arrowheads, tridents, horse bits, axe, and stone troughs.
2. Davlameti	(21° 9.55' N; 78° 51' E), Nagpur University, 2004-05.	Mainly stone circle burial, copper hoarse ornament.
3. Dhamana Linga (IAR 2001-02:63-67)	(21° 8.30' N; 78° 51'E) Nagpur University	Stone and Cairn circle-type fragments of child burial. 1, 8, 10, and 17 provide evidence of peripheral burials.
4. Gangapur (Jose Raphel, Sushama G.Deo , Jayendra Joglekar and Bhakti Gohil, Journal of Multidiscipliary Studies in Archaeology 3, 2015, 270-82)	(20° 55' N; 78° 56' E), Nagpur University	Gangapur is the continuation of the well-known Takalghat Khapa. Stone circles, micaceous red ware. Iron objects were also found.
5. Junapani (Rivett Carnac 1879, IAR 1961-62:32-34. Dikshit1954:41)	(21° 12' N; 79° 52E)	Stone circle with a cairn
6. Khairwada	(21° 1'N; 78° 29' E)	A heavy concentration of graves was found here. It has

<p>(Carey 1871:238-39. IAR 1981-82:51-52)</p>		<p>yielded 1400 megalithic burials. Stone circle mainly made up of pebble featured with clay filling within a circle of boulders was located</p> <p>Another variety is the stone circles with loose pebbles found on this site. Potteries included varieties of bowls, especially rimless bowls, lids with knobbel, pots with globular bodies, and funnel.</p> <p>The pottery types included red and black ware and micaceous ware.</p>
<p>7.Nagalwadi (IAR1961-63:41)</p>	<p>(21°07'15N;78°71'64"E)State Department of Archaeology</p>	<p>Nine megalithic burials, pottery types- red and black ware, micaceous red ware, copper, and iron objects were found. Coarse ware is mainly red in colour and micaceous redware.</p>
<p>8. Raipur (IAR 1984-85:53-54)</p>	<p>(21°43'N;78°58') Deccan College.</p>	<p>8 Megalithic stone circles, five stone circles in the</p>

		<p>process of burial construction without any deposit were noticed. Kept ready, not for use. The ceramic assemblage of black and redware.</p> <p>Micaceous redware, coarse, coarse redware, and different iron objects.</p>
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**Table2.2: List of habitational cum burial sites**

Site	Location	Remains
Bhagimohari (IAR 1982-83:61-62,57-58)	45 km northwest of Nagpur and one kilometer from the left bank of river Tolar.	Stone circle is the common burial type found here, with various iron objects found inside the burial, including typical megalithic
Malli ( Virag Sontakke: 43-53)	Tiroda taluka of Gondia district on the left bank of Chorkhambra	Noted for various burials like stone circle cairn circles, cists menhirs, and dolmens.  Habitational mounds are located on the left bank of Chorkhambara river.

Sarandi (Virag Sontakke, Purattatva,: 262-264)	Bhivapur Taluka of Nagpur district	Cairn circle heaps and stones. The habitational mound is situated on the right bank of Bodakasa river.
Mahurjhari (Hunter 1993, IAR 1958-59:21,1970-71:24-25, 1978-79:71, Mohanty)	15km northwest of Nagpur	Evidence of double burials of men and women, the entire human skeleton is also unearthed, and many burial goods and ware were scarce.
Pachkhedi (Purattatva 32:81-88)	Bhandara district, on the bank of river Nag	Five menhirs were excavated. Redware with or without painting, black slipped ware.
Bhawar(IAR1992-93:55-56)	Located in the Amravati district.	The ceramic assemblage of Period III was characterized by micaceous redware and black and red ware.
Vyahad (IAR1968-69:17)	Taluka of Nagpur near the river Vena	Stone and cairn circles. Peripheral boulders of the circle were small compared to other megalithic sites of the region, black and red

		ware, and micaceous red ware sometimes without designs.
Naikund (IAR 1977-78:39, 1979-80:57-58)	Bank of river Pench	Ceramics of various types, red and black ware mainly were found.

**Table2.3: List of Habitational sites**

Sites	Location	Findings
Arni (IAR 1984-85:55-56)	12.6713°N and 79.2818°E, on the bank of River Arunavati, Yavatmal	Black and micaceous red ware.
Adam (IAR 1975-76:36)	20.9996°N and 79.4500°E	Coarse micaceous red ware, painted motif comprised of vertical, polished dishes, parallel horizontal line, flame designs, check board pattern.
Tharsa (IAR 1985 -86:58-60)	21.2263°N and 79.3810°E	Ceramic consisted of black, red, micaceous, and black painted ware. Both slipped, and unslipped wares are found.

Kaudinyapur (Deo and Dhavalikar 1968)	20 .9799°N and 78.1436°E	Utensils were found in bowls, dishes, and different types of pots. Black and red ware found profusely. Large shreds bearing graffiti marks on interior and exterior parts are found.
Shirkhanda (IAR 1991-92:68-69)	21.15°N and 79.20°E, left bank of river Sur.	The main pottery types collected from this site were micaceous red and black and red ware.

Joshi feels that the Nagpur plain was more used, and the Waingangā plain, Arvi- Ramtek uplands were moderately favourable. This shows that river valleys and iron ore are the two determining factors for the growth of human settlement. Joshi opines that the Megalithic/ Iron Age people were dispersed over the landscape for agro-pastoral purposes. Joshi thinks that the Megalithic/ Iron Age people had a dual cultural system and the community comprised of sedentary pastoral and nomadic people. The availability of fertile soil and iron ore were the two main reasons behind the emergence of the habitational and habitational cum burial sites. Forest resources were available at the sites of Takalghat Khapa, Naikund, Adam, Shirkhanda, Khairwada, Tharsa and Bhagimohari. The ground water level at the site of Adam was easily accessible and therefore it continued to function for a long period of time. It emerged as one of the most important urban centre in the subsequent periods.

### **Subsistence strategies**

A well-developed subsistence strategy and a hierarchical social stratification laid the foundation for developing a distinct Vidarbha megalithic tradition within the peninsular India. Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the subsistence strategies of the megalithic culture of Vidarbha. Various samples collected from several sites revealed the presence of several botanical evidences like wheat, pulses, common pea, black gram, and Indian jujube<sup>224</sup>. This suggests that they were settled community and practiced agriculture. Later on, from the excavation reports of Bhagimohari, it is revealed that the inhabitants took wheat, barley, black gram, and rice in their diet, etc. According to Kajale, the presence of these crops at different sites suggests agricultural activities were done both in Rabi and Kharif seasons.<sup>225</sup> At Takalghat, the agricultural implements and the remains of black gram were found.<sup>226</sup> Hunting was also part of the economy. This observation has been made on the basis of considerable number of arrowheads, spears, and javelins collected from these sites.<sup>227</sup> G.K. Mane has conducted a survey based on the animal bones collected from the sites of Takalghat, Naikund, Borgaon and Bhagimohari. The highest percentage of cattle bones (63.88) has been recovered from the site of Naikund. This is also a site where we get rich deposits of iron. People were engaged in agriculture and made iron implements. It was from the site of Borgaon we get highest percentage of horse bones. Horse was integral part of the burial rituals of the megalithic people. Horse bones were recovered from the burials which probably belonged to the people who were economically more stable. Use of copper

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<sup>224</sup> M.D. Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigations on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System', *Man and Environment*, vol. XIII, 1989, pp. 87–100.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 87–100.

<sup>226</sup> Deo, 'Takalghat Khapa', pp. 1-83.

<sup>227</sup> G.K. Mane, 'Socio- Economic Condition During the Megalithic Period in Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.74, 2013, pp. 966-70



sheets as horse ornaments was also a typical feature of the megaliths from Vidarbha. Bones of pigs and sheep were also recovered from these sites. G.K. Mane on the basis of his survey viewed that the people of Vidarbha mainly practiced cattle based husbandry and led a pastoral life. Bones of pigs and sheep have been also found in these sites.<sup>228</sup>Thakuria suggests that making bullock carts was a part of their professions since cutting chisels had been found at several sites. Along with these, he suggests that carpentry was advanced as one comes across different types of chisels which might be used for deep cutting, cleaning and polishing the deep-cut surfaces, curving/ scooping, and angular cutting.<sup>229</sup> Deo has illustrated eight different types of chisels from Mahurjhari. He also suggested that chisels were also used for making pillars for the houses.<sup>230</sup> They were also engaged in activities that required high-quality craftsmanship. All this evidence points towards a rural society yet engaged in specialized crafts that might have depended on this primary mode of subsistence to thrive and flourish.<sup>231</sup>The society was stratified into various occupational groups. That some exchange network existed can be inferred from the usage of gold, eye and etched beads, and iron from Naikund at all sites.<sup>232</sup> Standardization in tools, especially chisels, helps us to understand and conclude that the people of Vidarbha were mainly settled community practicing agriculture or involved in specialized craftsmanship like bead

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<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.* p.966.

<sup>229</sup>Tilok Thakuria, R.K. Mohanty and P.P. Joglekar 'Craft Specialisation and Socio-economic Behaviour of the Megalithic People of Vidarbha, Maharashtra', K.K. Basa, R.K. Mohanty, and S.B.(eds.), *Megalithic Traditions in India (Archaeology and Ethnography)* (2015, Bhopal: IGRMS, New Delhi: Aryan International, pp. 188-203. Bhopal: IGRMS, New Delhi: Aryan International.

<sup>230</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths', *New Indian Antiquary 3rd Series*, 13, 1970, pp. 23-31.

<sup>231</sup> Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths' 1970, pp. 23-31

<sup>232</sup> Oishi Roy, 'Evidence of Steel Making at Naikund and its Relationship with Mahurjhari Borgaon and Khairwada', Maharashtra', *Man and Environment*, XLIV (1), 2019, pp. 12-20

making and tool making. This strong subsistence base that the people of Vidarbha developed from this early phase of human history allowed the inhabitants of Vidarbha to carve out their unique cultural traits within the broader megalithic tradition of Deccan.<sup>233</sup>

The inhabitants of Vidarbha were the makers of the finest quality of bronze and steel. Copper metallurgy was much more advanced than the Chalcolithic cultures. Artifacts include domestic utility objects such as bowls, lids, dishes, basins, finials with bud, bird, and geese motifs and ornaments such as bangles, rings, necklaces, and horse ornaments. Horse ornaments are the zenith of craftsmanship since iron pins for riveting, and they are of different types were found in several sites. Copper bangles were made from the mixture of tin and zinc. Tin was found in Khapa<sup>234</sup> (Deo 1970) and zinc at Mahurjhari.<sup>235</sup> Casting by either open or piece moulds or lost wax techniques was probably the way of manufacture.<sup>236</sup> Welding technology was also known to the people of Vidarbha by the time. They used this technology to make copper bangles.<sup>237</sup> Horse ornaments were sewn on a leather base, probably to be mounted on the face of the horse.<sup>238</sup> Iron was integral to both the cultural traditions of Vidarbha, but the megalith builders were given credit for

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<sup>233</sup> Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths', pp. 23-31.

<sup>234</sup> Deo, 'Excavations at Takalghat and Khapa', pp. 1-83.

<sup>235</sup> R.K. Mohanty, 'Mahurjhari', pp. 45-47. G.K. Mane, 'Metal Objects and Metallurgy of Megalithic Culture of Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.62, 2001, pp. 965-975.

<sup>236</sup> Oishi Roy, 'A Study on the Iron Artefacts from the Megalithic Sites of Dhamma Linga and Dhaulmeti of Vidarbha,' *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 7, 2019, pp. 642-660. Jang Sik Park and Vasant Shivram Shinde, 'Iron technology of the ancient megalithic communities in the Vidarbha region of India', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 40(11), pp. 3811-3821.

<sup>237</sup> G.K. Mane 'Metal objects and Metallurgy of Megalithic Culture of Vidarbha', pp. 965-975.

<sup>238</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths- A Review' in *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, vol 41, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 27-32.

pioneering the introduction of iron technology. On the basis of 30 radiocarbon dates (800-300BCE) from Takalghat,<sup>239</sup> Naikund,<sup>240</sup> Khairwada and Bhagimahari<sup>241</sup> stated that the iron technology was introduced late in Vidarbha, compared to northern Gangetic plains (1800-1600BCE) and southern parts of India (2300–2000 BCE)<sup>242</sup> Steel chisels have been also recovered from the site of Mahurjhari.<sup>243</sup> The technical knowledge of the people of Vidarbha was advanced. They also knew the method of mixing alloy to make silver and gold ornaments. The use of lacquer was also known to them. From the site of Junapani, gold bangles with copper thread and necklace with leaf shaped pendent based on lacquer have been found. Casting techniques were also known to these people. Ear ornaments recovered from the site of Mahurjhari reflect that that this skill was known to them. But the use of silver was limited.<sup>244</sup>

However, it is difficult to ascertain whether an exchange system developed between the megalithic builders and inhabitants of the non-megalithic early Iron Age culture. However iron objects excavated from both megalithic burial sites and habitation-cum-burial sites were mainly used for daily life, and few implements were found for cultivation.<sup>245</sup> It is important to note that the easternmost districts of Vidarbha are endowed with rich iron ore

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<sup>239</sup> Deo, 'Takalghat', pp. 34-36.

<sup>240</sup> R.P. Pandey, 'Upper Paleolithic Element in the Stone Age Cultures of the Pench River Near Naikund (Nagpur District, Maharashtra State)', Pune, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post- Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.40, 1981, pp.223-230.

<sup>241</sup> *IAR* 1982-83, pp. 61-62. *IAR* 1983-84, pp. 57-58.

<sup>242</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Personality of Vidarbha Megaliths', pp. 23-31.

<sup>243</sup> P.P. Despande, R.K. Mohanty and V.S. Shinde, 'Metallographical studies of steel chisel found at Mahurjhari', Vidarbha, Maharashtra', *Current Science* vol.99, No.5, 2010, pp. 636-638.

<sup>244</sup> G.K. Mane 'Metal objects and Metallurgy of Megalithic Culture of Vidarbha', pp. 965-975.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

deposits of superior quality, ranging from 54 to 65% of iron. An iron -smelting furnace was found at Naikund, indicating indigenous production of iron. An iron dagger with a copper hilt and small dome-shaped bells of copper with iron tongues were recovered from the graves of Naikund.<sup>246</sup> The megalithic smelters utilized about ten to twelve kilograms of iron ore for single smelting purposes. Scholars have suggested that Naikund was the primary production and distribution centre of Vidarbha from where the manufactured products were exported to the nearby sites of Takalghat<sup>247</sup> and Mahurjhari.<sup>248</sup>

The Early Iron Age in Vidarbha was a historical phase featured differential social relations and economic activities. It was when Vidarbha experienced an occupation of the different ecological niches like river basins, mineral zones, pasture lands, and other resource zones by a technically advanced population. The community used this technological advancement to increase the product range. The period was characterized by a society which was tied by rituals and belief patterns and different arrangement of the production system. The social relations and economic activities are well reflected in these burial or mortuary rituals of people. They suggest that the society was mainly agro-pastoral and had a larger population of craftsmen.<sup>249</sup>

We have already understood that the people of Vidarbha were able to establish a strong economic base. They were engaged in various economic activities. The availability of the natural resources no doubt helped in developing a strong subsistence base. This was in turn

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<sup>246</sup> S.B. Deo and A.P. Jamkehedkar, 'Naikund Excavations', pp. 12-13.

<sup>247</sup> S.B. Deo, 'Takalghat', pp. 34-36

<sup>248</sup> R.K. Mohanty, 'Mahurjhari Excavations', pp.45-47.

<sup>249</sup> G.K. Mane, 'Socio- Economic Condition During the Megalithic period in Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.74, 2013*, pp. 826-833

gave birth to a complex society. The great variations we find in the burial structures within the entire area of Vidarbha suggest that a complex society had developed. Different communities built different styles of architecture which has almost no resemblance with those found in other parts of Deccan. The goods yielded from those burials also varied. The presence of horse skeleton in most of the burials was a typical feature of the megaliths of Vidarbha, completely absent in any of the sites of Deccan. There was also no uniformity in the rituals among the people of Vidarbha. This indicates the presence of different communities who all functioned within the same society but practiced different rituals and had different beliefs in their way of commemoration.

### **Megalithic Culture in Vidarbha: Emerging Identity**

Geographically Vidarbha is part of Peninsular India. However so far as the Megalithic tradition of Vidarbha is concerned, it stood out as a distinct cultural identity within broader megalithic tradition of Vidarbha. There were several prominent cultural traits which are exclusive to Vidarbha and were completely absent in other parts of Peninsular India. The people of Vidarbha used ceramics which were different from the rest of Deccan. Their burial architectures with inner designs and the customs through which they commemorated their deceased ones are also distinguishable cultural markers. Therefore we can say that the mortuary practices of the megalithic people made Vidarbha to stand apart from the rest of the Megalithic tradition of Peninsular India.<sup>250</sup> However the recent studies have brought into light that there was certain cultural exchange between the sites located in the upper Waingangā valley with those situated near the Durg area. We have already discussed that the people of Vidarbha were able to develop a strong economic base and displayed skilled craftsmanship. Their distinctive artistic skill was also reflected in their ceramics. The

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<sup>250</sup> G.K. Mane, 'Megalithic Pottery of Vidarbha', pp. 1197-1203.

potteries that are available from the various sites of Vidarbha are unique in their designs and use of materials. Most of the sites yielded lids which are intricately designed and were made in various shapes.<sup>251</sup> It is only at the site of Adichanallur in Peninsular India<sup>252</sup> that we find potteries with this kind of lids having finials or crests. The black and red ware with salt glazed surface is most common type of potteries that were found through the Peninsular India. In case of Vidarbha we find that the black and red wares were completely different. They are thin in nature.<sup>253</sup> Another type of pottery closely associated with the megalithic culture of South India was cut wares.<sup>254</sup> This is completely absent in Vidarbha. The most unique type of pottery which is available in the majority of the sites of Vidarbha is the micaceous red ware. G.K. Mane is of the opinion that this type of ware was produced by the people of Vidarbha because mica was readily available in this area. The soil of this area is rich in mica and magnesium. The third distinctive type of ceramics which had been found in the major habitational sites of Vidarbha is the painted black-on-red ware with geometrical paintings.<sup>255</sup>

Another important cultural marker that distinguishes Vidarbha from the rest of the Peninsular India is their burial styles. Stone circles and cairn circles are two dominant types of megalithic burials which are found in the major sites of Vidarbha. In Southern India, umbrella stones, rock-cut caves, and hood stones are found predominantly. These types were not found in Vidarbha. Since southern India is endowed with rich deposits of laterite,

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<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> Sathyabhama Badhreenath, *Excavations at Adichchanallur*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2021, pp. 1-293.

<sup>253</sup> G.K. Mane, 'Megalithic Pottery of Vidarbha', pp. 1197-1203.

<sup>254</sup> Joanna Sudyka, 'The "megalithic" Iron Age Culture in South India- Some general remarks', *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia*, vol.5, 2011, pp. 1-44.

<sup>255</sup> G. K. Mane, 'Megalithic Pottery of Vidarbha,' pp. 1197-1203.

which is the primary raw material for constructing rock-cut caves and umbrella stones. Therefore, we find these two varieties in the Southern India.<sup>256</sup>

Recent researches on the megalithic tradition of Vidarbha have revealed that there were remarkable variations among the sites that are located in the Upper Waingangā valley. Malli,<sup>257</sup> Silli,<sup>258</sup> Gangla<sup>259</sup>, Satona,<sup>260</sup> and Vadegaon<sup>261</sup> are the recently discovered sites of the river basin. Amongst all these, the most important one was Malli.<sup>262</sup> Giant burials with different typological variations are found in Malli, which are absent in other sites of the Upper Waingangā valley.<sup>263</sup> These megalithic sites in upper Waingangā valley are situated not very far from each other, yet each site displayed different burial styles. Other sites encompassed the main site of Malli.<sup>264</sup> The burial designs of the Malli were sporadic and distinct from the rest of Vidarbha. For example, a stone circle with cist inside is a unique feature of the megaliths at Malli not recovered from any documented sites of the upper

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<sup>256</sup> Joanna Sudyka, 'The "megalithic" Iron Age Culture in South India- Some general remarks', *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoviensia*, vol.5, 2011, pp.1-44.

<sup>257</sup> V. Sontakke, Malli: An Early Iron Age Site, Gondia district, Vidarbha Region Maharashtra, *Man and Environment*, vol. XL(1), 2015, pp. 43-53.

<sup>258</sup> Virag G. Sontakke, 'Exploratory Data Analysis of Megalithic Remains in Upper Wainganga Valley, Maharashtra' *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6, 2018, pp. 887-907.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 887-907.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> V. Sontakke, 'Malli: An Early Iron Age Site, Gondia district, Vidarbha Region Maharashtra', pp.43-53.

<sup>263</sup> Virag G. Sontakke, 'A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley: A new Emergence in Vidarbha Megaliths', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology*, 2014, pp. 493-515.

<sup>264</sup> V. Gopal Sontakke, Malli: An Early Iron Age Site, Gondia district, Vidarbha Region Maharashtra, *Man and Environment*, vol. XL(1), 2015, pp. 43-53.

Waingangā valley.<sup>265</sup> Only a few cairn circles were found in Malli, whereas it was the major variant in Satona and Ganglia. Cairns heaps were only found in Sarandi.<sup>266</sup>

Menhirs are also a dominant type of burials found in the Durg area. It is found in less number in Vidarbha. However it is clearly evident from the closer examination of the burial architectural styles that there existed connectivity between the sites of the Upper Waingangā valley and those of the Durg area. Few Menhirs that were found in the upper Waingangā valley can be divided into two categories: independent menhirs and menhirs inside a stone circle. The first variety is found in Janva, Gangla, and Vadegaon, while menhirs inside the stone circle are only reported from Malli.<sup>267</sup> Numerous menhirs are found at Janva, which are huge and made of various stones. Menhirs at the Gangla and Satona were more minor than those at Janva. A few slabs found in Malli were also identified as menhirs. Menhirs inside the stone circle are reported from Silli, Gangla, and Satona. There are similarities between the independent menhirs found in the Durg area with those found in the several sites of the Upper Waingangā valley.<sup>268</sup> The common patterns in certain sites led the archaeologists to suggest that the people of Vidarbha had contacts with the megalithic builders of other parts of peninsular India during this period. Cultural exchange and influences on one another played an important role in developing megalithic types and respective inner designs.

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<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 43-53.

<sup>266</sup> Sontakke, 'A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley', pp. 493-515.

<sup>267</sup> Virag Gopal Sontakke, Malli, 'An Early Iron Age Site, Gondia District, Vidarbha Region, Maharashtra' *Man and Environment XL(1)*, 2015, pp.43-53.

<sup>268</sup> G.B. Deglurkar and G.Lad, 'Megalithic Raipur' (1985-1990), Pune: Deccan College, 1992, pp.67-69.



Therefore, it can be concluded at the first glance, that the megaliths of Vidarbha appear to represent a homogeneous group, with the majority consisting of stone circles with cairn fillings. However, significant variations between sites have been identified. Excavations at several Megalithic burials in Vidarbha show that these burials were not uniform, and further variations were seen in the inner architecture of these burials.<sup>269</sup> It has been observed that the stone circles existed in clusters in the sites of the Upper Waingangā valley. The typical feature of upper Waingangā valley is stone circles with cist inside them.<sup>270</sup> Mainly single-stone circle types are documented from this study area. However, there are also examples of double and triple burial types which are made out of undressed lateritic stone. Further, it has been noticed that a cluster incorporates a minimum of five to a maximum of twenty stone circles placed adjacent to each other. The area in-between the two circles is generally filled with small stones. For Malli and adjoining areas, the most significant trait of the stone circles is the single/double/multiple cists inside the peripheral boulders. Cists are generally created in the mid of the circle.<sup>271</sup>

A cairn can be defined as a barrow formed from stone, usually circled with boulders. Cairn circles are regarded as the next dominant type of megalith after stone circles in upper Wainganga valley of the Vidarbha. Malli, Silli, Satona, Navegaon and Bharretola report this type of megalith.<sup>272</sup> For instance, in Sarandi, we found thirty-six megaliths, except one;

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<sup>269</sup> Uttara Suvarthan, 'Landscape of life and Death', pp. 122-23.

<sup>270</sup>Virag G. Sontakke, 'Exploratory Data Analysis of Megalithic Remains in Upper Wainganga Valley, Maharashtra', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 6(2018), pp.887–907.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup>Virag G. Sontakke, 'A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley: A New Emergence in Vidarbha Megalith', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* (2), 2014, p. 493.

all were cairn heaps. This variation is interesting to note since Sarandi is situated near Malli.<sup>273</sup> But we do not find stone circle in Sarandi which is the dominant type at Malli. There is also no similarity in the architectural style between the site of Malli and Sarandi. At Sarandi, we find a different type of megalith where a ring-like structure at the outer peripheral boulders was noticed. Chert and quartz were found in the vicinity which are the main raw materials required for building cairns. Thus it can be said that there are typological dissimilarities between the sites which are even closely located.<sup>274</sup> Tilok Thakuria has tried to understand the social scenario of the megalithic people from their practices. He opines that the construction of these burials with minute variations required labour force as well as wealth. The way the dead ones were commemorated was basically the decisions of the living relatives. The variations were not always related to the differences in the customs or the socio-economic status of the dead. It also depended upon the kind of death he faced. Those who died unnatural death or died during pregnancy were commemorated in a different way.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> V. Sontakke, 'Malli: An Early Iron Age Site, Gondia district, Vidarbha Region Maharashtra', *Man and Environment*, vol. XL (1), 2015, pp. 43-53.

<sup>274</sup> K.P. Rao, *The Deccan Megaliths*, New Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan, 1988, pp. 36-38.

<sup>275</sup> Tilok Thakuria, 'Architectural Variations of the Vidarbha Megalithic Burials, Maharashtra', pp. 35-40.

**Table 2.4: Showing the number of varied architectural styles in different sites of Upper- Waingāṅgā Valley**

	Stone Circle	Cairn Circle	Menhirs	Cist	Dolmens	Capstones
Malli	301	29	3	52	-	-
Silli	-	-	2	-	-	-
Gangla	8			-	-	-
Satona	55	20	4	-	-	-
Sarandi	1	35	-	-	-	-
Janva	6	-	7	-	-	-

It is also believed that there is a sharp distinction between the megalithic cultural tradition of the Upper Waingāṅgā valley and the rest of Vidarbha. But, there are striking similarities between the megalithic traditions of Upper Waingāṅgā valley with that of the neighbouring area-Durg located in the present-day state of Chhattisgarh.<sup>276</sup> For example, in Chhattisgarh, capstones, and stone circles are the most common form. Strikingly enough, these two varieties are also found in Upper Waingāṅgā valley, indicating that cultural contact existed between these two areas and influenced each other in developing designs for their burial structures. The megaliths with inner architectural designs were found in the Upper Waingāṅgā valley. It was probably unavailability of raw materials, and socio- ideological belief system that restrained the rest of the Vidarbha megalithic community from creating inner designs in their burials which was found in the Durg area. Megalith of Raipur yielded cist made up of micaceous schist, but the raw material for it was not found in the

<sup>276</sup> A.K.Sharma, *Chattisgarh Megaliths*, New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2018, pp. 37-40.

neighbouring area but brought from the upper Waingangā valley where similar structures were found.<sup>277</sup> Thus, there existed cultural contact between Upper Waingangā valleys with the neighboring Megalithic community-dwelling all over Deccan.

The table below will help us to understand the differences in the burial architecture between Vidarbha, Deccan and Southern India.

**Table2.5: Comparative study of the type of megalithic burials found in Vidarbha (mainly upper Wainganga valley), Deccan (Durg area), and Southern India**

Serial Number	Nature of burial	Vidarbha(focusing on Upper Wainganga valley)	Durg area in Chhattisgarh	South India
a.	Stone Circle	found	found	found
b.	Cairn Circle	found	found	found
c.	Cist	rare	Not available	found
d.	Menhir	few	popular	
e.	Dolmen	rare	Not Found	popular
f.	Capstone	found in the valley	popular	Not present
g.	Rock cut cave	absent	few	Found profusely

<sup>277</sup> G.B.Dglurkar, 'Megalithic Raipur, 1985-90' Deccan College Post- Graduate and Research Institute, 1992, pp. 1-157. G.B. Deglurkar and Gouri Lad, 'Raipur Megaliths: A Bird's Eye –View', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post- Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.51/52, *Professor S.M. Katre Felicitation volume*, 1991-92, pp. 431-462.

Another distinguishable cultural marker of the megalithic tradition of Vidarbha was the presence of the horse skeletons in all the sites. However we do not find this trait in case of Southern India. Stone circles at Mahurjhari (Fig 2.2) yielded a very unique type of horse remains. An iron bit was recovered from the jaws of the horse skeleton.<sup>278</sup> At the site of Khapa copper sheets ornaments have been recovered. It is believed that these sheets were mainly used for covering the face of the horse.<sup>279</sup> These types of accessories for the horses were also found from the site of Naikund.<sup>280</sup> The presence of these types of unique artifacts inside the burials of Vidarbha suggests that the megalithic people of Vidarbha practiced different customs. The way they commemorated their dead relatives was different from the other parts of Peninsular India.

### **Social Dimension of the Megalithic people**

Construction of burials was a purpose activity that required community participation and wealth investment. The study of the burials helps us understand the socio-economic status of the dead and their families. R.K. Mohanty has studied the spatial distribution of the megalithic burials in Vidarbha, and he has divided the burials into three categories.<sup>281</sup>

1. First Category: It includes the people who buried their dead ones in the cairn type of burials with peripheral boulders. In this *category*, burial goods were found.
2. Second Category: This category involves cairn types without any boulders
3. Third Category: This type involves simple pit dwellings built for people of the lower strata of society.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Deo, 'Mahurjhari Excavations', pp. 12-20.

<sup>279</sup> Deo, 'Excavations at Takalghat and Khapa 1968-69', pp. 1-83.

<sup>280</sup> Deo, 'Excavations at Naikund', 1982, pp. 12-20.

<sup>281</sup> Mohanty, 'Demographic Approach', pp. 93-103.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

In the case of Vidarbha, the artifacts collected from the burials were not only the personal belongings of the dead ones. It also included donated goods. Eye beads have been recovered from the site of Mahurjhari,<sup>283</sup> reflecting that the megalithic builders of Vidarbha believed in evil spirits. Another aspect of the belief systems of the megalithic builders of Vidarbha is known from the site of Naikund.<sup>284</sup> It is in this particular site that we find evidence of bull sacrifice. Horse sacrifice was mainly practiced by the people belonging to the upper echelons of society. The megalithic builders of Vidarbha were associated with various occupations. Thus from a critical analysis of the artifacts, it becomes clear that it reflects 'collective social persona' and 'collective economic status' of the dead ones. The feast was integral to death-related ceremonies, and food was also given at the burials. After death, the deceased no longer retain his 'social personal' but attains a 'collective social persona.'<sup>285</sup>

### **Society and Burial Rituals of the Megalithic Builders**

The way the megalithic builders of Vidarbha commemorated the deceased ones is a distinguishing cultural trait of Vidarbha. The people later chose the sites for constructing burials for developing settlements in the subsequent historical periods. Ethno-archaeological studies have revealed that the megalithic builders of Vidarbha practiced different beliefs and various rituals in the same society. As a result, we find a wide variety of megalithic monuments with different designs and patterns in the innermost sections of those burials. For example, the constructions of menhirs were mainly to commemorate the

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<sup>283</sup> R.K.Mohanty, 'A Preliminary Report of the Excavations at Mahurjhari, 2001-02: A Megalithic and Early Historic Site in Vidarbha, Maharashtra', *Pratnatattva* 9, pp. 41-48.

<sup>284</sup> V.D. Gogte, 'Discovery of Megalithic Iron Smelting Site by Three Probe Resistivity Survey', *Bulletin of Deccan College Post – Graduate Research Institute* 39, pp. 211-15.

<sup>285</sup> L.R. Binford, 'Mortuary Practices: Their Study and their Potential', *Society for American Archaeology*, 1971, pp.6-29. This idea is also borrowed from Michael Budja, 'The archaeology of death: from 'social personae to' relational personhood', *Documenta Praehistorica XXXVII*, 2010, pp. 47-51.

ones who died naturally; on the other hand, burials for children or pregnant women were completely different in their type. Ethno-archaeological research has also indicated that a highly stratified society was formed in Vidarbha by that time. It is clear from the study that Megalithic burials were not meant for all but for a particular section of society, indicated the presence of a complex stratified society.<sup>286</sup> Excavation at the site of Malli revealed that the shreds of pottery were found at various places within the burial ground.<sup>287</sup> These pottery fragments over the surface perhaps represent a different type of burial tradition of the people who belonged to the lower strata of the society. These people were unable to build megaliths due to lack of monetary resources. Various usages of megaliths are also documented from some sites of Vidarbha like Takalghat-Khapa,<sup>288</sup> Mahurjhari.<sup>289</sup> It is agreed that the construction of megaliths represents a collective effort on the part of society, and it needed time, monetary resources, and a steady flow of labor.

From the above discussion it is clear the several ecological niches within this geographical space were utilized by the people of Vidarbha for their living, economic and cultural activities. Mortuary landscapes developed in the hilly terrains where boulder and rocks were easily available whereas the fertile river valley was used for cultivation. The complexity in the socio-cultural domains of Vidarbha during this period laid the foundation for further development of it as a cultural zone in the later historical periods. Most of the habitational sites or habitational cum burial sites continued to function and those sites developed as prominent urban centers in subsequent times. This reminds us of the theory

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<sup>286</sup> Tilok Thakuria, 'Architectural Variations of the Vidarbha Megalithic Burials', pp. 35-40.

<sup>287</sup> Sontakke, 'Malli: An Early Iron Age Site', pp. 43-53.

<sup>288</sup> S.B. Deo, 'Excavations at Takalghat Khapa', pp. 34-36.

<sup>289</sup> Mohanty, 'Mahurjhari', pp. 34-36.

by Patty Limerick<sup>290</sup> and Donald Worster.<sup>291</sup> Worster has pointed out that the task of a regional historian is to know ‘how a people or peoples acquired a place and then, how they perceived and tried to make use of it.’ In case of Vidarbha we find that people of this land made use of different ecological niches for their subsistence and cultural activities. They stated that a geographical area slowly develops into a region when people settle down and try to make their living there. This phenomenon is noticed in case of Vidarbha. The inhabitants of Vidarbha no longer remained nomadic, used the landscape of Vidarbha for their living and other socio-religious activities. The mortuary landscape of Vidarbha was distinct as the inhabitants of this land built several different burial architectural patterns. This marked the beginning of the journey of Vidarbha as a habited space which underwent further changes in its spatial and cultural matrix in the subsequent periods. The mortuary landscape developed by the people of Vidarbha was not only to commemorate their dead relatives but also the specific time frame. Even variations were noticed between the sites located in the Upper – Waingangā valley and the rest of Vidarbha. A well developed economic base with a complex society served as a foundation for the development this geographical space into a distinct cultural zone of Deccan. In the next chapter we would try to understand the changes and continuities that Vidarbha faced with the onset of the Early Historic period.

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<sup>290</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, ‘Region and Reason’, in Edward L. Auers (ed.) *All over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, p88. Donald Worster, “New West, True West: Interpreting the Region’s History,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 18: 2, 1987 p. 149. Also cited in Susan H. Armitage, ‘From Inside out’, pp. 32-47.

<sup>291</sup> Susan H. Armitage, ‘From the Inside Out: Rewriting Regional History’, pp. 32–47.



## Maps and Illustrations

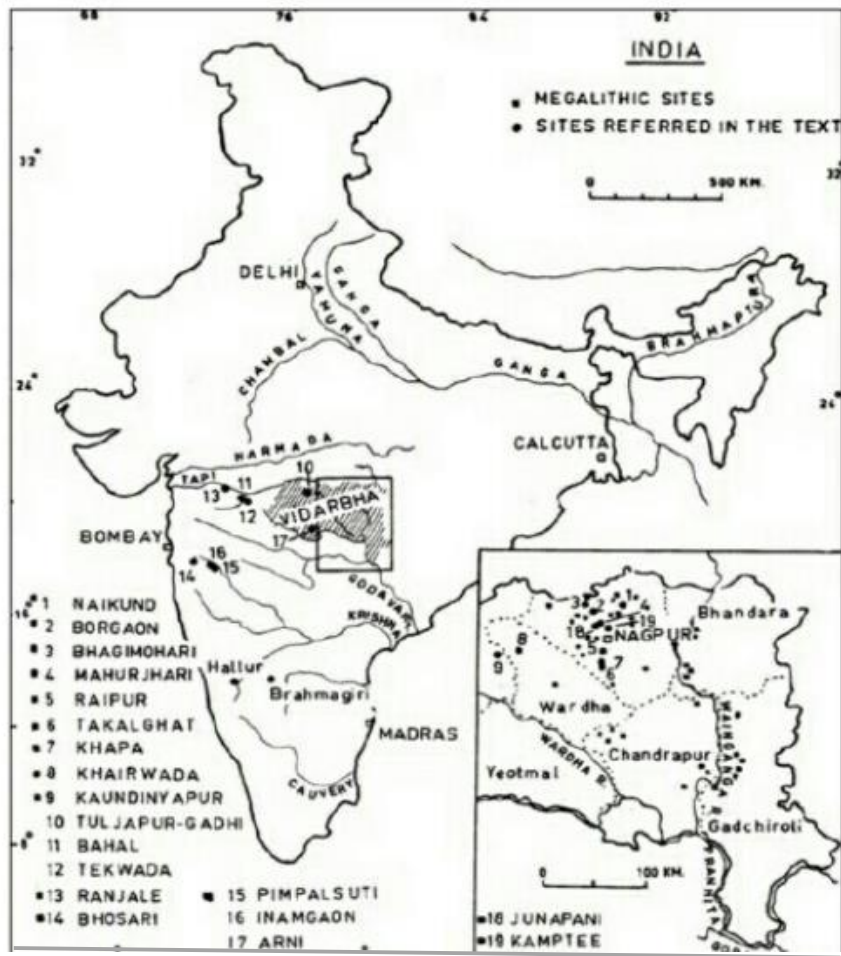


Fig. 2.1: Map showing Megalithic sites of Vidarbha

Courtesy: P.S Joshi, *The Vidarbha Megaliths: A Cultural Study*. 1993



Fig. 2.2: Stone circle at the site of Mahurjhari

Courtesy: Researcher

### Chapter 3

#### **Vidarbha in the context of Secondary State Formation in Early Historic Deccan (first century BCE to early third century CE.)**

Geographically, Vidarbha functioned as a physiographic division of Deccan and displayed distinctive cultural features from the megalithic period onwards. The central theme of discussion in the previous chapter revolves around unique cultural traits, especially mortuary practices, and subsistence strategies adopted by the people of Vidarbha. All these features are understood within the broader megalithic tradition of peninsular India. This dissimilitude made the archaeologists use the word 'Vidarbha megaliths.'<sup>292</sup> This term indicates that from the megalithic period, the landscape of Vidarbha displayed unique cultural identity with distinctive features absent in the other areas of Deccan in the Megalithic/ Early Iron Age. The complex socio-cultural traditions that evolved in Vidarbha from the megalithic period served as a basis for further development as a cultural zone in the subsequent historical periods. Aloka Parasher Sen has viewed that the megalithic culture suddenly appeared in Vidarbha, unlike coastal Andhra. It was independent of the earlier cultures.<sup>293</sup> Most of the megalithic sites of Vidarbha continued to exist, and they flourished as important urban centers from the Mauryan phase till the end of the Sātavāhana rule in Deccan. The process of secondary state formation in Deccan under the Sātavāhana times also profoundly affected the cultural identity of Vidarbha. Even the pre-state internal developments under the influence of the local level chiefs had significantly changed the socio-economic structure of Deccan. This issue has been discussed vividly by Sudharshan

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<sup>292</sup> Shantanu Vaidya, 'Burial Settlements of the Early Iron Age in Vidarbha: A fresh Analysis', *Man and Environment XLI* (2), 2016, pp. 103-104.

<sup>293</sup> Aloka Parasher Sen, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Deccan*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2011, pp. 64-71.

Seneviratne.<sup>294</sup> According to him, both internal and external factors are responsible for the process of state formation in Deccan. On the other hand, AlokParasher Sen emphasized internal factors while discussing the issue of state formation in Deccan. She has discussed the various localities that emerged in the pre- Sātavāhana times based on numismatic evidence. She has pointed out that the localities which made their appearance in the political scenario of Deccan help us to bridge the gap between the Mauryan and Sātavāhana times. The Sātavāhanas built the first state in the region of Deccan on the edifice of authority and local networks built by these local chiefs.<sup>295</sup> Sen has added a new factor- heterogeneity that was visible in Deccan from the earliest times. She has referred to the theory of Claessen, Skalnik, and Service in her discussion on the state formation in Deccan. She distinguishes between the theory of the inchoate state put forward by Claessen and Skalnik and that of the idea of chiefdom given by Service. The former attaches importance to kinship, family ties, and community, whereas the latter focuses on socio-political organizations, reflecting aristocratic values without any judicial system. She has subscribed to the opinion given by Cohen,<sup>296</sup> where the latter has pointed out the factors responsible for state formation. He has held 'pure location' as the most determining factor for state formation. In the case of Vidarbha, both factors played essential roles in state formation in the later period.

In this chapter, we are trying to investigate patterns of interaction of Vidarbha with the Northern Gangetic plains and also the rest of Deccan. We are also trying to understand the

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<sup>294</sup>Sudharshan Seneviratne, 'Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State' in Early India in Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke (eds.) *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*, Delhi: Manohar, 2015, pp. 173-198.

<sup>295</sup>Aloka Parasher Sen, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Deccan*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2011, pp. 64-71.

<sup>296</sup> Ronald Cohen, 'Evolution, Fission and the Early State' in H.J. Claessen and Peter Skalnik (eds.) *The Study of the State*, Mouton: The Hague, pp.81-115. Also see 'State Origins: A Reappraisal' in the same edited book, pp. 31-75.

emergence of new cultural patterns that occurred from within and how Vidarbha responded to more dominant cultural trends that developed in the larger geopolitical orbit of Deccan. Thus, the geographical space designated as Vidarbha further developed into a cultural zone through cultural and historical processes. The process of exhibiting unique cultural traits began in the Megalithic / Early Iron age. This trend continued in the subsequent period leading to the formation of a cultural zone within the greater geo-political orbit of Deccan. That Vidarbha was a prominent part of Deccan is revealed from the majority of the literary texts. Though it was situated close to the forest lands but it was conceived as a habited space where culturally distinct people lived. The Arthaśāstra mentions an interesting aspect of Vidarbha, which proves that it was an area that was endowed with resources. The text mentions six types of diamonds- 1. Sabhāraṣṭraka 2. Madhyamarāṣṭraka. 3. Kāsmaka. 4. Śrīkaṇṭaka 5. Manimantaka. 6. Indravānaka. The first type was available in Sabhāraṣṭra, which was situated in Vidarbha.<sup>297</sup> Due to the advantageous geographical location and richness of resources Vidarbha experienced an inflow of cultural elements both from the Deccan and the Gangetic plains, which largely contributed in shaping Vidarbha as a distinct cultural zone of Deccan. Interestingly enough, till the fourth century CE, no significant changes were noticed in the physical landscape of Vidarbha. Vidarbha was never under the direct control of either the Mauryas or the Sātavāhanas. The Sātavāhanas did not rise to power in Deccan immediately after the end of the Mauryan rule is also reflected in the famous work of Kālidāśa- *Mālavikāgnimitram*. The play is based on historical events. In one of the episodes of this play, Vidarbha became an independent kingdom under Yajñsena, who was a close associate of the last Mauryan ruler and did not share a friendly relationship with the Śuṅga ruler Puṣyamitra. From the play, we know that Agnimitra sent his brother-in-law Vīrsena on an expedition against Vidarbha as Yajñasena refused to release one of

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<sup>297</sup> Harihar V. Trivedi, 'The Geography of Kautilya,' *Indian Culture*, vol. I, July, Calcutta: Satish Chandra Seal, 1934, pp. 247–249.

the captives, a relative of the Śuṅga ruler. The king of Vidarbha was defeated, and his kingdom was divided between Yajñasena and Mādhavasena. They accepted the suzerainty of Puṣamitra.<sup>298</sup> This story narrated in the work of Kālidāsa also indicates that Vidarbha was a well-known territory within Deccan, and Vidarbha emerged as an independent kingdom. The popularity of Vidarbha is also understood from this story.

In this work, Vidarbha has been conceived as a geographical space suitable for human habitation since the late Chalcolithic period. Its nature and function kept on changing with various emerging political and cultural trends manifesting in Northern India and the Deccan through time. We have attempted to investigate the processes involved in shaping the distinct spatial and cultural identity of Vidarbha as a historical zone of Deccan.

### **Cultural Dynamics of Vidarbha in the Mauryan times**

The cultural elements from Northern India flowed into Deccan mainly through trading routes. Various traits typical of Northern India were visible in Vidarbha from the early historic period onwards. Vidarbha, till the rise of the Vākātakas in the mid-third century CE, was never the seat of any political power. However, it did not prevent Vidarbha from undergoing further changes in its cultural and physical landscapes. However, it functioned as an autonomous space to a large extent but had interaction with the contemporary political powers. This brings us to the opinion given by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya that no autonomous space exists in isolation. He rightly postulates that the relationship between the autonomous space and the state system is not static. It changes from time to time.<sup>299</sup> In

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<sup>298</sup>Tawney C.H. (trans.), *The Mālavikāgnimitra, A Sanskrit play by Kalidasa*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and co, 1981, pp. 265–266.

<sup>299</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Space, History and Cultural Process: Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub-regional Identity', in Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (eds.) *Centres out there? Facets of Sub regional Identities in Orissa*, pp. 21-35

the case of Vidarbha, we find that until the mid-third century, Vidarbha behaved as an autonomous space with minimal influence on the state system.

The complexity in the cultural landscape of Vidarbha was mainly due to various new socio-political developments in peninsular India. Some of those new elements were acquired with the interaction with the cultural trends of the northern part of the subcontinent and parts of peninsular India (especially the Western part of Deccan that was the core area of administration of the Sātavāhanas). As an integral territorial part of Deccan, Vidarbha reacted to the new cultural elements and displayed its unique cultural identity. In this chapter, we will trace those influences that played pivotal roles during this period.

Firstly, the deep penetration of Buddhism from the Mauryan times added a new cultural dimension to the cultural landscape of Vidarbha. This is testified by the fact that sites like Pauni,<sup>300</sup> Mandal<sup>301</sup> yielded evidence of structures of Buddhist stupa. Excavations at Pauni<sup>302</sup> in the Bhandara district have brought to light remains of a very flourishing Hinayana Buddhist establishment, dating back to the late Mauryan and early Śuṅga period. This establishment comprised two stupas – one at the Jagannath mound other at the Chandkapura about a mile due south of Pauni, and the remains of a possible brick-built monastery in the regions adjacent to these stupas. The inscriptions associated with these

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<sup>300</sup> Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavation at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp. 1-22.

<sup>301</sup> J.P. Joshi and A.K. Sharma, 'Excavation at Mandal, District Nagpur, Maharashtra-1997-98', *Purattatava* 30, 2000, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp.127-31. And also in Harriet Lacey, 'Nandivardhana and Nagardhana: Preliminary Analysis of the Surface Evidence from Nagardhan and Hamalapuri in the Eastern Vākāṭaka Territory near Rāmtek Maharashtra', *South Asian Studies*, Issue 2: *Politics, Ritual and Religion*, vol.30, 2014, pp.116-132.

<sup>302</sup> Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavation at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp.1-22.

stupas do not mention names of any kind or any other royal person. The trading community must have patronized this sizeable Buddhist monastery, as the site of Pauni was located within the trading nexus.<sup>303</sup>

One of the inscriptions from Pauni recorded a gift by the vaniya, while in the other inscription; we find that it was given by herañika. The meaning of herañika is the one who handles gold, and as mentioned in the inscription, herañika can be either the one who is a goldsmith or the one who is a treasurer of gold. We come across terms like ‘danam’ (donations) and pasado (gift) written on the pillars. A ritual landscape surrounding the site of Mansar developed around the fourth century CE. Vidarbha gained prominence only after the Vākāṭaka rulers established their direct control over this part of Deccan. It would function as a state sanctuary under the Vākāṭakas. Nevertheless, from this period onwards, the ritual landscape surrounding the Mansar– Mandhal site complex had already gained prominence as an important center for Buddhism.<sup>304</sup>

Some rock-cut rock-cut caves located about six miles from the village of Mandal, about 40 miles east of Nagpur, considered to be the earliest cave inscriptions of Vidarbha, belonged to the second century BCE. There are two inscribed records- one is more prolonged and in two lines, and the other is short and of one word only. Inscribed lines are-

*Sa vandalaka putasa*

*Apasala matikamam*<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>304</sup> J.P. Joshi and A.K. Sharma, ‘Excavation at Mandal, District Nagpur, Maharashtra- 1997-98’, pp. 127-31. And also in Harriet Lacey. ‘Nandivardhana and Nagardhana: Preliminary Analysis of the Surface Evidence from Nagardhan and Hamalapuri in the Eastern Vakataka Territory near Rāmtek Maharashtra’, pp. 116-132.

<sup>305</sup> *IAR*, 1994-95, p. 58.

Meaning the cave was the work of Apala, the son of Vandalaka.<sup>306</sup>

Another fragmentary inscription recovered from the site of Pauni records the following lines:

*Nadanagahāpatinoputasa*

*Valanakasapasado*

This inscription is interesting because it refers to the term *gahapatino*, which means gahapati. While referring to the identity of the donor named Valanka, it is mentioned that he was the son of a householder, Nandana.<sup>307</sup>

It is noteworthy that the rock-cut cave found at the site of Pauni amidst the forest was a resting place for the commuters who travelled between the two cities of Adam<sup>308</sup> and Pauni.<sup>309</sup> Most of the excavated sites that belonged to the Mauryan period continued as important urban centers under the Sātavāhanas. Large-scale trading activities played an important role in turning the habitational sites into prolific urban centers. These sites were mainly confined to Nagpur, Wardha, Yavatmal, and Bhandara districts. In most of the sites, punch-marked coins and the availability of Northern black polished wares led the archaeologists to suggest that the sites belonged to the Mauryan period. Therefore we can say that though the Mauryas did not establish political control over this part of Deccan, but the cultural traits that were closely associated with Northern India during this time

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<sup>306</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation* (1969-70), Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalay, pp. 45-49.

<sup>307</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, 'New Evidence of Hinayana Buddhism in Vidarbha' *Purattattva* (6), 1972, pp.84-86.

<sup>308</sup> Nath, 'Adam- An Index', pp. 69-79.

<sup>309</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation*, pp. 45-49.



entered.<sup>310</sup> Another striking example to show that Vidarbha had contact with the Northern part of India is evident from the excavation report of Kaundinyapura.<sup>311</sup> At this site, we find Northern Black polished wares and punch-marked coins with Ujjain symbols without crossbars, a tree with broad leaves, and a ribbon of a swastika and taurin symbols on the obverse. Another interesting coin of Ujjain –Eran type was found on this site. On the obverse of this coin there are symbols of human figure, a Shiva standing in the centre holding a staff in the right hand, and a pot in the left. Below it is a six-armed symbol; on the right are the tree and the triangle-headed standard in railing, and an indistinct symbol on the left.<sup>312</sup>

The site of Chandankheda, situated in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra, is another important site that displays twenty-one layers and is divided into five periods. It was a site from where a large quantity of iron was collected. The pre –Sātavāhana phase of this site is interesting. This site emerged as an urban center and antiquities like Red ware, red slipped ware, and Black and Red ware were collected from this site. This site also testifies to the fact that Vidarbha was under the cultural influence of the Northern Gangetic plains. The availability of fragmentary legged querns and mullers of sandstone with typical Mauryan polish and punch-marked coins from this site are important evidence to show that features associated with Northern India under the Mauryas entered in to cultural matrix of Vidarbha. Buddhism as a religious faith was able to gain a strong foothold by this time is also evident from the antiquities discovered at this site. Various terracotta objects like

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<sup>310</sup> M.G Dikshit, *Excavations at Kaundinyapur*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1968. pp. 15-20.

<sup>311</sup> Reshma Sawant, 'An Appraisal of Early Historic Fortifications in Maharashtra', *Man and Environment*, vol. xxiv (1), 2009, pp. 57-65.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 57–65.

śrīvasta, Triratna tree, and a Buddhist cave called Vijasena indicated affinity towards Buddhism. This site is situated on the trading route that connects Prayag in the North with Telangana in the South, passing over the Bundelkhand in Central India.<sup>313</sup> This was main reason why Buddhism and other cultural features of Northern India were prominently visible on this site as Chandankheda.

The only epigraphic record that indicates that there was certain degree of influence of the Mauryan rule over this part of Deccan was the Deotak inscription recovered from the small village in the Chandrapur district shows that the Mauryan rule had a certain degree of impact over Vidarbha. This inscription is similar to the Aśokan edict of Girnar in the language and content. Both the inscriptions were written in early Prakrit and prohibited animal slaughtering. In the Deotak inscription, we come across the term amācha= āmatyah. V.V. Mirashi thinks that a Dhammamahāmatra issued the edict.<sup>314</sup> The appointment of officials like 'Dhammamahāmatras' in this part of Deccan suggests a certain degree of Mauryan influence over Vidarbha. The ideals of Aśokan dhamma also spread to this part is evident from this inscription. However we cannot say clearly that Vidarbha came under the domination of the Aśokan rule. There are several other sites like Bhawar <sup>315</sup>(in the district of Bhandara) Arni<sup>316</sup>(Yavatmal district) Arambha<sup>317</sup> (Wardha district) which yielded artifacts which are closely related to the north Indian culture. From these sites a

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<sup>313</sup> Pradip Meshram, ViragSontakke, Ashok Singh Thakur and Anand Bhoyar, 'A Report on Excavations at Chandakheda (2009-10)', *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* (3), 2015, pp. 562-580.

<sup>314</sup> Meshram, Sontakke, Thakur, 'A Report on Excavations at Chandakheda (2009-10)', *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* (3), 2015, pp. 562-580.

<sup>315</sup> Chetan Sali, 'Vakataka culture: Archaeological Perspective', *Samsodhak*, 1998, pp.3-38.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 3-38.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

large number of northern black polished ware potteries of different shapes some micaceous red ware with the application of red and brown slip have been discovered. Silver and copper punch marked coins have been found at the site of Brahmapuri<sup>318</sup> situated in the present district of Chandrapur. This period also saw development in the agricultural sector. We have already discussed in our previous chapter that the megalithic people were no longer nomadic but they had settled down in the river valley and practiced agriculture and animal husbandry. Further development in the agriculture is well authenticated from the archaeological report on the site of Adam.<sup>319</sup> Evidence of rice, bean black gram, hyacinth have been recovered from the period IV phase of Adam assigned to the Mauryan period.<sup>320</sup> As Romila Thapar correctly points out, no region can develop in isolation, and regions are part of the whole. Thus influences from outside are essential factors in shaping a region.<sup>321</sup> The strategic location of Vidarbha opened the doors for various typical cultural traits of the Gangetic plains to enter, contributing to new developments in the cultural landscape of Vidarbha.

Though the cultural landscape witnessed significant developments however the spatial identity of Vidarbha did not face changes till the mid-third century CE. The sites belonging to this period were primarily situated in the Wardha-Waingangā valley. The physical landscape of Vidarbha was confined to the river valley mainly due to the easy availability of water and fertile soil. As a result, agro-based economic structures emerged during this

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<sup>318</sup> H.D. Sankalia and M.G. Dikshit, 'Excavations at Brahmapuri 1945-46' *Deccan College Monograph Series: 5*, 1952, pp.1-154.

<sup>319</sup> Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>320</sup> Nath, 'Sātavāhana Antiquities from Adam', Ajay Mitra Shastri (ed.) *The Age of the Sātavāhanas*, vol.II, 1999, pp. 460-466.

<sup>321</sup> Romila Thapar, 'The Historian and Archaeological Data,' in Thapar, *Ancient Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1975, p. 193.

period. Most of the sites of the Early Historic period are now located in Nagpur and Wardha districts. All these sites have their base in the rich alluvium zone of the Wardha-Waingangā basin.<sup>322</sup> However, few notable sites attained urban character and were important economic activity centers. Some sites like Bhagimohari have retained their rural character. Some sites like Mahurjhari transformed into production centers<sup>323</sup>, whereas sites like Adam, Pauni, and Paunar emerged as critical urban centres.<sup>324</sup> These sites began as agricultural settlements and grew over the period to become important urban centers. This suggests the expansion of subsistence, increased complexity, and its effect on settlement patterns. The essential features of these sites are as stated below:

1. The sites are located on major rivers, tributaries, and even small *nallas* (small rivulets). Settlements mainly developed surrounding the river valleys.
2. Sites range from small sites around 2-4 acres in size, from medium-sized sites to large sites such as Adam, and Pauni, which are more than 50 hectares in size.
3. The concentration of sites increases more in the Sātavāhana and later in the Vākāṭaka period (almost 70-75). The physical landscape of Vidarbha expanded in the period between the fourth to sixth centuries.
4. The sites show a layered pattern of settlements indicating a hierarchical pattern, which included regional centres/cities (Pauni, Adam, Paunar, Kholapur, Bhon), towns and big villages (Kaundinyapura, Bhawar), religious centres (Pauni, Bhon, Mandal, Mansar), manufacturing centres (Adam, Mahurjhari) and a large number of small villages.

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<sup>322</sup> Rajendra Vajpeyi, 'Opposite Pulls of Deurbanisation and Semi-Urbanization in Vidarbha in the time of the Vākāṭakas,' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.46, 1985, pp. 147-158.

<sup>323</sup> Mohanty, 'Excavation at Mahurjhari', 2002, pp. 45-47.

<sup>324</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Geography of Vidarbha*, pp. 51-64.

5. Some sites have yielded evidence for fortification (Adam and Pauni)
6. Suṅga-Sātavāhana phase is the phase of ushering urbanization in the region through the beginning of early history goes back to the Pre-Mauryan era.
7. These sites often served various purposes as political and defence centers, markets and towns, religious centres, manufacturing centers, and primary agricultural subsistence centres.
8. The newly emerged sites were located near big nallas and were dependent on smaller patches of fertile land.

The growth of rural settlements of this period cannot be viewed as a de-urban phase but an attempt to set up more primary subsistence centres to meet the needs of urban centres, Settlements were specially established to either harness the resource or intensify agriculture. The sites show a gradual rise in the number at many places in their sizes and functional purposes. The number of sites during the Mauryan period was not more than thirty. The background of the settled agro-pastoral base and craft specialization was laid in the Pre-Mauryan (Early Iron Age) period. It was this base that only expanded in the Suṅga-Sātavāhana and further developed in the Vākāṭaka phase.<sup>325</sup> The Early Iron Age was instrumental in laying a foundation of a solid agrarian base that generated a surplus, which is essential for developing a complex society. The sites on the banks of major rivers (Pauni, Paunar, Kaundinyapur, Adam) further developed as flourishing agrarian base that could support the crafts and other activities in the Mauryan times. The large scale availability of iron and other mineral resources were the main reasons of attraction for the contemporary political powers. However, we do not get any evidence to say that Vidarbha was under the

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<sup>325</sup>Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research* Oxford University Press: New Delhi, pp. 134-135.

direct rule of the Mauryas.<sup>326</sup> This brings us to the observation made by Seneviratne that the Mauryan rulers maintained relationship with the bordering territories in order to collect and gain access to the resource base but were not at all interested in organizing ‘all political affairs of a large and in principle precisely de-limitable area.’<sup>327</sup>

A brief description of the sites with antiquities that were found between 500BCE to 150 BCE are discussed in the table below-

**Table 3.1: Sites and their antiquities**

Site	Location	Archaeological Data	Reference
1. Adam (Period IV)	Nagpur	Burnt-brick structures, drains, micaceous red ware, northern black polished ware. Beads of various kinds	Nath: An Index, 69-79.
2. Arambha(Period II)	Wardha	Typical black and red ware, shell bangle, crystal bead whetstone, and fragments of an iron rod.	IAR1991-199(73-74)
3. Arni (Period II)	Yavatmal	Sherds of Northern polished ware	IAR 1978:71-72

<sup>326</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 134–135.

<sup>327</sup> Sudharshan Seneviratne, ‘Kalinga and Andhra: The Process of Secondary State Formation in Early India’ in Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke (eds.) *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2015, pp. 173-198.

4. Bhawar (Period III)	Bhandara	Redware with the application of red and brown slip, grinding stone, and terracotta beads	IAR 1992-93:55-62
5. Brahmapuri (Period II)	Chandrapur	Black-red ware, slipped, unslipped ware, copper punch-marked coin, two terracotta animal figurines, and beads	Sawant 2012:53-54
6. Kaundinyapura (Period III)	Amravati	Punch marked coins, Northern Black ware.	Nagpur University 1968:27
7. Kholapur	Amravati	Micaceous red ware, NBP, Quartz beads, artificial embankment.	
8. Pauni (Jagannath temple mound)	Bhandara	Stupa on the lateritic horizon, a few terracotta figurines of Sunga style, and Northern black polished ware	Nath 1998:7-8
9. Mansar (Period I)	Nagpur	Micaceous redware, semi-precious stones, terracotta bangles, iron objects, pestles, millers, and grinders	Puratattva 30:127-131.

Another vital characteristic during this period was the construction of ramparts or forts-like structures at different sites. Now the question may arise: what was the purpose behind the construction of such forts? As we have already stated, Vidarbha was never under the control of any contemporary political powers, so its political importance was highly insignificant. Thus, several fortified sites were not for defensive purposes, but these fortifications served the purpose of embankments. Adam, Ghugusad, BilavKuji, Chandankheda, Pauni, Mansar showed evidence of fortification.<sup>328</sup> From these sites, we get evidence of ramparts and moats and structures of brick fortification. All these sites were located near nalla or along the banks of the rivers like Wardha or Waingangā. The rampart at Adam (see fig3.2) was reconstructed and repaired at regular intervals.<sup>329</sup> The site of Chandankheda is significant due to its strategic location.<sup>330</sup> This is why this particular site was fortified. Reshma Sawant considered those constructions of ramparts to be an essential indicator of changing polity and the manifestation of a process that transformed society into a more complex one.<sup>331</sup> Since most of these sites were located along the trade routes later on when the Sātavāhana came into power they were eager to establish their control over these areas. Their rival powers i.e. the Western Kṣtrapas also had the same interest as result of which these sites showed evidence of further fortification in the subsequent phases.

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<sup>328</sup> Reshma Sawant, 'An Appraisal of Early Historic Fortifications in Maharashtra', *Man and Environment*, XXXIV(1), 2009, pp. 57-65.

<sup>329</sup>Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>330</sup> Pradip Meshram, Virag Sontakke, Ashok Singh Thakur and Anand Bhoyar, 'A Report on Excavations at Chandakheda (2009-10) in *Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* (3), 2015, pp. 562-580.

<sup>331</sup> Reshma Sawant, 'An Appraisal of Early Historic Fortifications in Maharashtra', pp. 57-65.



**Table 3.2: Different sites and their geographical location with typical features**

Site	District	Excavated or Explored	Period	Important features of a fortification
Adam	Nagpur	Excavated	Early Iron Age to the Sātavāhana period	Rampart
Arni	Yavatmal	Excavated	Iron Age to the Vākāṭaka era	Mud rampart
Mansar	Nagpur	Excavated	Mauryan phase to the Vākāṭaka era	Brick fortification
Pauni	Bhandara	Excavated	Pre-Mauryan to Vākāṭaka	Rampart, then moat, and then Parapet wall.
Chandankheda	Chandrapur	Excavated	Early Iron Age to Medieval	Fortification.

### **Geo-political history of Deccan in the Pre- Sātavāhana era**

In Deccan, we find that there was emergence of local powers before the Satavahanas established their dominion over Deccan. B.D. Chattopadhyaya has tried to analyse the nature and structure of these localities. He understood it in the sense of janapadas, which was a sort of proto-state before the Sātavāhanas made appearance in the geo-political scenario of Deccan. He further remarks that the presence of local chiefs or rulers is well authenticated from the numismatic sources in the context of the Deccan before the rise of the Sātavāhanas. Coins of the Kuras, Mahārāthis, Bhadrās, and Mitra help in a better understanding of the passage that connects the Pre- Sātavāhana era with Sātavāhana

epoch.<sup>332</sup> Chattopadhyaya also stated that the Sātavāhana rule did not bring end to the power and influence of these local ruling groups. He viewed that the rise of Mahāmeghavāhanas of Kalinga or the rise of the Ikṣvākus and the Kadambas reflect the 'local' manifestations of this process. The striking feature of the Pre- Sātavāhana epoch was thus the rise of these local rulers<sup>333</sup> According to Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, the availability of inscribed cast coins and inscribed die-struck coins suggests that the 'local chiefs' had considerable influence over their respective territorial jurisdiction. The presence of the local chiefs was also evident in the case of Vidarbha. They comprise of the Kuras in the Panchgani basin (Kolhapur), the Sadakans in the Chitaldurg area, and Hastin in the Krishna valley. The Sadas controlled the Mahishaka and coastal Andhra belt. The Kura and Hastin coins are crucial for understanding the history of western and southern parts of Deccan.<sup>334</sup> It was in Vidarbha and the coastal belt of Andhra (in the sites of Dharnikota, Kesarapallī, and Vaddamanu) that large-scale northern polished wares and punch-marked coins were available. We find the coins of the Kuras from the site of Brahmapuri of Vadgaon and Madhavpur area of Belgaum.

Next were the very important groups of chiefs, Bhojakas and Rathikas. We come across various chiefs designated as Mahābhojas in the inscriptions from Kanheri, Mahad, Bedsa, and Kuda in the Western Deccan.<sup>335</sup> Aloka Parasher Sen explored into the connection of

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<sup>332</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 84-85.

<sup>334</sup> Smita Halder, 'The Kuras in Early Historic Deccan: A Numismatic Appraisal' in Susmita Basu Majumder and S.K. Bose (eds.) *Money and Money Matters in Pre-Modern South Asia: Nicholas G. Rhodes Commemoration Volume*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2019 pp. 243- 248.

<sup>335</sup> B.D. Chattoapdhyaya, 'Transition to Early Historic Deccan: A Note' in *Studying Early India Archaeology, Texts and Historical Issues*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, p. 43.

the Bhojakas and Rathikas with this part of Deccan.<sup>336</sup> The Aśokan edicts mention the Bhojikas and the Rathikas and they also appear later in the Hāthigumphā inscription along with the Sātavāhanas.<sup>337</sup> Historians have long considered these groups of chiefs as having been under the overarching power of the Mauryas. They seem to have elevated their status with the decline of the Maurya rule and adopted titles like Mahārathis and Mahābhojas. These two ruling groups issued coins earlier than other local rulers of Deccan in the pre-Sātavāhana times. This indicates that these local-level chiefs or rulers were able to acquire substantial power and possibly held authority over economic transactions during their reign.<sup>338</sup>

The Bhojas<sup>339</sup> were also mentioned in the Udyoga Parva of Mahābhārata.<sup>340</sup> The two rulers of this dynasty mentioned in this text were Bhismaka and Bhoja. They were described as rulers from Kuṇḍin (identified with Kaudinyapura) and were supposed to have built the city named Bhojakaṭa.<sup>341</sup> Though the names of the rulers mentioned in *Mahābhārata* were mythical but interestingly enough this city of Bhojakaṭa emerged as an administrative division under the Vākāṭaka regime as noted in the Chammak plate of Pravarasena II (420-455CE.).<sup>342</sup> Bhojakaṭa also appeared in the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa composed during fifth

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<sup>336</sup> Aloka Parasher Sen, 'Localities, Coins and the transition to the Early State in the Deccan,' *Studies in History*, 23, no.2, 2007, pp. 231-269.

<sup>337</sup> J.F. Fleet, 'The Hatigumpha Inscription', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1910, pp. 824-828.

<sup>338</sup> Smita Halder, 'The Kuras in Early Historic Deccan: A Numismatic Appraisal', pp. 243-248.

<sup>339</sup> Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp.256.

<sup>340</sup> K.M. Ganguli, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. iv, 1992, pp. 303-304.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 303-304.

<sup>342</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Chammak plates of Pravarasena II', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum: Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, vol.v, Ootacamund, 1963, pp.22-28.

century CE as the kingdom of Bhoja.<sup>343</sup> The city and the local ruling group certainly has historical relevance and the importance of this place in history of Vidarbha cannot be ignored.

Another local ruling group of kings or dynasty who gained prominence in this phase were the Kuras. It is mainly from the numismatic evidence that we come to know about this dynasty.<sup>344</sup> They continued to be in power even when the Sātavāhana rule was established in Deccan. P.L. Gupta and Shailendra Bhandare have worked extensively on the Kura coins. These coins were mainly unearthed from the Brahmapuri and Kolhapur- Belgaum area. This suggests that the Kuras mainly operated from this part of Deccan. The most unique feature of the Kura coins was the symbol of bow and arrow found on the obverse side. There is difference of opinion between P. L. Gupta and Shailendra Bhandare regarding the Kura coins.<sup>345</sup> In the Kura coins we find that the rulers used two different titles, *Mahārāṭhi* and *raño*. In the view of P.L. Gupta the first term represents the title and interpreted the term *raño* as the marker of the status of the ruler.<sup>346</sup> However, Shailendra Bhandare gave a different interpretation. According to him, the coin types of the Kuras indicate presence of two different categories. One type belonged to the independent royal family and the other belonged to the feudatory group called the *Mahārāṭhi*.<sup>347</sup> In a recent

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<sup>343</sup>M.R.Kale (trans.) *The Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1957, pp. 112-113.

<sup>344</sup> Smita Halder, 'The Kuras in Early Historic Deccan: A Numismatic Appraisal', Susmita Basu Majumder and S.K.Bose (eds.) *Money and Money Matters in Pre- Modern South Asia, Nicholas G. Rhodes Commemoration Volume*, Delhi; Manohar, 2019, pp. 243-248

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* p. 252.

<sup>346</sup> P.L. Gupta, 'Coins from Brahmapuri Excavation (1945-46)' *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute, XXI*, Poona: Deccan College Post Graduate Research Institute, 1960, p. 38- 84.

<sup>347</sup> Shailendra Bhandare, 'Historical Analysis of the Satavahana Era: A Study of Coins', unpublished Ph. D. thesis submitted to the University of Mumbai, 1998.

study conducted by Smita Halder it has been pointed out that most of the rulers used both the titles. Halder further added that the title *Mahāraṭhi* was used when they were heir to the throne, and when they became ruler they used the title *raṇo*.<sup>348</sup> The neighbouring powers of the Kurus were the Kumara who operated from Karad, strategically located at the confluence of river Krishna and Koyna also issued coins of similar type.<sup>349</sup> Therefore, with the combined aid of numismatic, epigraphic and literary evidence, it is now possible to bridge the gap in the history of the select zone under study between the Mauryan and the Sātavāhana phases.

Recent excavations from Bhon<sup>350</sup> and Adam<sup>351</sup> have opened a new dimension to the study of Vidarbha. Archaeological reports on Adam<sup>352</sup> and Bhon<sup>353</sup> have revealed that Vidarbha was probably divided into two territorial units along the banks of two rivers which came under the control of two small ruling dynasties. Though these two ruling dynasties were short-lived, they gave distinct political identities to these two territorial units by issuing their coins with distinct symbols. The coins of the Bhadras and the Mitras were of a distinct type and were found in the areas along the banks of river Waingangā and Wardha, respectively.<sup>354</sup> In different parts of Deccan, there was the emergence of local ruling families. They established their sway over the river valleys. This particular political

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<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.* p. 243-248.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.* p.255.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 134-135.

<sup>351</sup> Amarendra Nath, Adam – An index to Vidarbha Archaeology, B.U. Nayak and N.C.Ghosh, (eds.), *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol.i New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, pp. 69-70.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 69–70.

<sup>353</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation (1969-70)*, Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalay, pp.45-49.

<sup>354</sup> Amiteshwar Jha, Some More Pre- Sātavāhana Coins from Vidarbha: Part 1, *IIRNSNewslines 41 (January 2004)*, 2004, p. 3-4.

development was also seen in the case of Vidarbha, where we find the Bhadras and the Mitras. Amarendra Nath has discussed the Bhadra and Mitra coins in detail with their provenance, symbols, and other details.<sup>355</sup> A.M. Shastri has worked out a relative chronology for the Bhadra rulers in the following order of sequence: Damabhadra, Dharmabhadra, Sarvabhadra, Satyabhadra and for the Mitra family: Bhūmimitra, Krishnamitra, and Suryamitra and tentatively postulated that Bhadras and Mitras were ruling simultaneously over the areas surrounding the two banks of the rivers.<sup>356</sup> Even we get a reference to counter strike coins of Suryamitra, which suggests that Mitras were significant political authority preceding the Sātavāhanas.<sup>357</sup>

The fact that these two ruling families were quite influential as well as distinct in their territorial jurisdiction. This is evident from the fact that the coins they issued bore clear distinction. The symbols that were mainly found in the coins of the Bhadras were the Ujjain symbol with pellets inside the orbs, river shown by curved lines, swastika, and tree-in-railing whereas the Mitra coins bore the image of Śiva in most cases. No other distinct cultural traits could be noticed during this period. However, these two ruling families must have been able to add a distinct political identity to these two parts of Vidarbha. Based on the massive quantity of the coins, their typology, symbols, and their execution, it can be stated that the rule of these local rulers though short-lived, enjoyed substantial prosperity.<sup>358</sup>

The period V of Adam is assigned to the Bhadras. This phase has yielded remains of a

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<sup>355</sup>Amarendra Nath, 'Some observations on the Chronology of Bhadras and Mitras in Vidarbha', *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, 1990, pp. 48-57.

<sup>356</sup>Amarendra Nath, 'Adam – An index to Vidarbha Archaeology,' B.U. Nayak and N.C.Ghosh (eds.), *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol.i, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, pp. 69-70.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 69-70.

<sup>358</sup>Amiteshwar Jha, 'Some More Pre- Satavahana Coins from Vidarbha: Part 1', *IIRNS Newslines* 41(January 2004), 2004, p. 3-4.

house in the form of a mud floor, four hearths, and antiquities like a terracotta mother goddess, beads, and a copper-cast coin.<sup>359</sup> The house must have belonged to a bead maker as artifacts like bead polishers and raw materials are recovered from the floor. The coins of the Bhadras were found from this site. The coins belonged to Damabhadra and Satyabhadra, the rulers of the Bhadra family. Even the excavation at Bhon<sup>360</sup> yielded evidence suggesting that this area was considered suitable for habitation. More than 20 brick structures were recovered from this site which suggests that this particular site was preferable for dwelling purposes. Proper water channels were found around these structures, which suggest that irrigation facilities were provided through these channels to the nearby fields. The availability of coins in large numbers and the irrigational facilities suggest that the local rulers wielded firm authority over their respective areas of control. The archaeological evidence collected from these two sites also indicates the penetration of Buddhism in the locality in this phase.<sup>361</sup> It has been reported that a row of pradakṣiṇapatha decorated with symbols was found at the site of Bhon.<sup>362</sup> The structural remnants might have been connected to Buddhist site.

We get a general idea based on the field survey that Vidarbha was split into two territorial units, one around the Wardha side and the other surrounding the Waingangā River. The coins inscribed with the term 'Bhadavatīya' are evident from the site of Bhadravati in the Chandrapur district. The term 'Bhadavatīya' inscribed in the coins led the scholars like Dr.

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<sup>359</sup> Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology' 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>360</sup> B.C. Deotare, 'Discovery of Structural Stupa at Bhon, District Bandana, Maharashtra,' *Purattatava*, 37, 2007 pp.177-185.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 177-185.

<sup>362</sup> B.C. Deotare, 'Discovery of Structural Stupa at Bhon, District Buldana, Maharashtra,' *Puratattva*, 3, 2007, pp. 177-185

B.C. Deotare to conclude that this site of Bhadravati was the political base of the Bhadra rulers.<sup>363</sup> This suggestion was proposed on the basis of the similarity in the two names. Bhadra coins were discovered in the Waingangā valley which was also the geographical location for Bhadravati. Even after the collapse of the Mauryan power in North India, the influence of North Indian cultural tradition in Vidarbha continued to exist is evident from the archaeological findings of the two important sites of Vidarbha- Adam and Bhon.<sup>364</sup> These sites have yielded similar large-scale structural activities, especially ring wells and residential complexes. The specimen from Adam is in red sandstone and yielded from a stratigraphic context (Period IV-pre-Mauryan and Mauryan), while the specimen from Bhon is in red basalt found while digging for house construction. According to Nath, the quern recovered from the site of Adam has Mauryan polish; the legged quern from Bhon is also quite similar to the northern variety of decorated legged quern. That the Northern Indian influence seems to exist in the post-Mauryan phase is evident from the archaeological findings of Adam and Bhon. The site of Taxila also yielded a similar type of quern.<sup>365</sup> It has been suggested that these types of querns had auspicious symbols in vogue during the pre-Mauryan and Mauryan periods in North India, and the quern of similar styles made their way to Vidarbha through trading connections.<sup>366</sup> Few coins have been found from the stupa area, which indicates that they were contemporaneous and perhaps the Buddhist influence in this area was one of the reasons for the occurrence of the tree–

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<sup>363</sup> Amiteshwar Jha, 'Some More Pre- Satavahana Coins from Vidarbha: Part 1', *IIRNS Newslines* 41 (January 2004), 2004, p. 3-4.

<sup>364</sup> S.B. Deo, 'Excavations at Bhon', 2008, pp. 75-76. Also see, Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', 1992, pp. 69-79. Reshma Sawant, *Historical Geography*, 2012, p. 70.

<sup>365</sup> B.C. Deotare, 'Discovery of Structural Stupa at Bhon, District Buldana, Maharashtra,' *Puratattva*, 37, 2007, pp. 177–185.

<sup>366</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2012, pp. 70-71.



in-railing as a prime symbol on the coins.<sup>367</sup> This religious influence could also be seen in other antiquities, like the large amount of Triratna-shaped amulets. This is indicative of the fact that the local rulers probably embraced Buddhism.<sup>368</sup>

**Table 3.3: Showing important coins of the Bhadras family (Coins of Damabhadra)**

Metal	Obverse Symbol	Reverse Symbol	Weight and Size	Reference
Copper	A Bull standing to the right, a Ujjain symbol of dumbbell type, river tree in railing. Legend- Damabhadra (da)	Blank	3gm 1.2x1.5cm	Nath 1990a: 51
Copper	A humped bull to the right, a dog to the right within a circle engirdled by dotted circle and srivatsa or nandipada.	Blank		

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 3–4.

<sup>368</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Winds of Change-Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 123-125.

	Legend- Damabhadasa			
Copper	A humped bull to the right, a dog to the right within a circle engirdled by a dotted circle, Ujjain symbol consists of 4 orbs without the connecting bars and a river with fish inside the meander. Legend- Damabhadasa	Blank	3.85gm 1.3x 1.6cm	Nath 1990:51
Copper	As above and the tree in the railing.	Blank	3.95gm 1.5x1.5cm	Nath 1990: 52
Copper	Bull, Ujjain Symbol with pellets inside the orbs river shown by the curved line with two bends with a fish in each	Blank	2.79, 3.39, 4.98 1.5x0.9, 1.3x 1.1, 1.6x1.5cm	Jha 2004

	meander, tree, and legend – Damabhadasa			
Copper	Brahmi legend [Da] mabhadasa, below it swastika and some indistinct symbol	Ujjain symbol with pellets inside the orbs and taurine in the intersections	0.7gm 0.7cm	Jha 2004
Copper	Elephant with an upraised trunk standing to the right, behind its tail, a small taurine, above Brahmi legend – Damabhadasa	Ujjain symbol with pellets within a circle	0.91, 0.80, 0.70, 0.75gm 0.9 , 0.8 0.7x 0.7, 0.6cm	Jha 2004: 4
Copper	Bull standing to the right, above it an indistinct symbol in front of the bull, Brahmi legend- Damabhadasa within a dotted border.	Ujjain symbol with a pellet inside the orbs. On some it looks like a small bird in the obverse.	5.60, 6.07 gm, 1.8x1.4, 2x1.6, 1.5x1.4cm	Jha 2004: 4

Copper Coin of Satyabhadra I	Four disjointed circles of the Ujjain symbol, above it legend – Sachabadasa on the left, traces of Swastika inside a circle.	On right, a dog to right within a circle engirdled by a dotted circle. A humped bull to right, a figure of a dog to right within a circle, engirdled by a dotted circle, the Ujjain symbol consisting of 4orbs without the connecting bars, river with fish inside the meander. Legend – Damabhadasa	3.23gm. 1.5x1.3cm	Jha 2004: 3-4.
Bronze coins of Damabhadra	A bull to the right, below the animal snout, a swastika,	Swastika symbol in the center with four	2.9gm 1.2x1.7cm	Nath 1990:52.

	and in the center of a circle, a noose-like device is seen. Legend- Dhamabhadasa	rectangles, each having figure of nandipada inside it. All of them are arranged in cardinal directions in the form of a cross. Taurine is seen in each of the diagonal centres.		
Bronze	A srivatsa and a dot within a crescent are placed irregularly. Legend – RanoSavabhada (sa)		3gm 1.3x1.7cm	Nath 1990: 53.
Bronze Coins of Satyabhadra II	A humped bull is standing to right, below the animal's snout, a nandipada followed by a			

	tree-in-railing device. Legend – Sacha bhada			
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**Table 3.4: Some other important coins from Mitra family**

<b>Ruler</b>	<b>Obverse</b>	<b>Reverse</b>	<b>Wt/Size</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Bhūmimitra	An elephant to right, pair of fish and tree-in – railing legend: <i>Bhumimitasa</i>	Not properly traceable	?	Nath: 1990:54
Kanhamitra	Bronze coins with legend(ka) namitasa, mainly Ujjain types	blank	3.05gm 1.2x1.4cm	Same as above
Kanhamitra	Bull standing to the right, legend Kanhamitasa	blank	3.14,2.28 2.80x3.35gm 1.1x1.2 1.3x1.1 1.4x1.1 1.3x1.3cm	Jha 2004:5
Suryamitra	Three bronze coins	1.Humped bull 2.Eight spoked	9.4gm 2.2x1.8cm, 8.06gm	Nath 1990:54-55.

		3. Bull standing to the right in front, blow the bull there is river with symbol of fish.	2x1.8cm, 7.3gm 2.4x2.4cm	
Suryamitra	Two copper coins	1.Siva as above and tree in railing and a triangle headed standard in railing, legend <i>Su(yama)ta (sa)</i> 2.Rano Suyamitar(sa)	1.Not known 2. 7.25gm 2x2cm	Nath 1990:55

### **Review of the Political History of the Sātavāhana- Kṣtrapa times**

Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the emergence of the Sātavāhanas as political power around 73-75 BCE. They believed that the Purāṇic authors had included 45 years in Deccan. It is in the epigraphic records the Sātavāhanas were referred by this name but the Puranic accounts call them Andhra or Andhra – bhṛtya.<sup>369</sup> This suggests that the Sātavāhanas at one time were subservient to the Mauryas. R.G. Bhandarkar and D.R.Bhandarkar believed in the shorter chronology and place this dynasty around 73-75 BCE. They viewed that the Purāṇic authors included 45years period of the Kanva reign

<sup>369</sup> Ajay Mitra Shastri, 'Puranas on the Satavahanas: An Archaeological – Historical Perspective', in Ajay Mitra Shastri (ed.) *The Age of the Satavahanas, vol.1*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1999, pp. 3-70.

within 112 years ascribed to the Suṅga rulers. They believed that the Sātavāhanas were responsible for overthrowing the remaining Suṅga rule.

On the basis of the epigraphic records George Buhler viewed that this dynasty made appearance in the political scenario of Deccan around third century BCE. He supported his opinion with the evidence of Hathigumpha cave inscription of Kalinga ruler Khāravela.<sup>370</sup> The accepted date of this epigraphic record is around second century BCE. This record refers to Satakarni as the rival of Kharavela. Excavations carried out at the site of Nevasa on the Pravara river further testify to the fact that Sātavāhanas came to power around this time. Period IV of this site has been designated as Early Historic period and several coins of the Sātavāhana rulers, Simuka (100BCE) and Satakarṇi I (70-60 BCE) has been recovered from this site.<sup>371</sup>

**Table 3.5: A brief chronology of the Sātavāhana dynasty**

Ruler	Regnal year
1. Simuka	100BCE
2. Kanha	100-70 BCE
3. Sātakarṇi I	70-60BCE
4. Satakarṇi II	50-25BCE
5. Imperial collapse (rise of Nahapana)	54-100CE
6. Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi I	86-110CE
7. Pulumavi	110-138 CE
8. Vāsiṣṭhiputra Sātakarṇi	138-145 CE

<sup>370</sup> J.F. Fleet, 'The Hathigumpha Inscription', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, 1910, pp. 824-828.

<sup>371</sup> Z.D. Ansari and R.S.Pappu, 'Some Observations on the Excavation at Acheulian Site, Chirki- Nevasa, District Ahmednagar, Maharashtra', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.35, No.1/2, 1975, pp. 1-8.



9. Siva Sri Pulumavi	145-152CE
10. Siva Skanda Sātakarṇi	145-152 CE
11. Yagña Sri Sātakarṇi	152-181 CE.
12. Vijaya Sātakarṇi	?
13. Candra Sri	?
14. Pulumāvi II	?
15. Abhira Isvasena	?
16. Madhariputra Sakasena	?
17. Haritiputra Sātakarṇi	?

Another great political power that emerged on the political scene of Deccan was that of the Kshaharata kshatrapas. Nahapāna was the greatest ruler of this dynasty who had a hostile relationship with the Sātavāhanas. From the Nasik, Karle and Junar inscriptions of this ruler it is clear that he ruled from 119 to 124 CE.<sup>372</sup> We come to know about the great power of this ruler from the *Periplus maris Erythraei* (*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*) dated to the first century CE. From this particular source we come to know that Nahapana who called Nambanos.<sup>373</sup> According to this text his kingdom extended up to the Gulf of Baracaa covering Barygaza and mainland Ariaca.<sup>374</sup> Nahapāna was probably defeated by Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi. The former was succeeded by Chaṣṭāna who introduced a new line of the Śaka branch that came to be known as the Kardamakas. The greatest ruler of this line was Rudradaman I. It is known from the Junagarh inscription that he established his dominion over Malwa, Saurashtra, Gujarat, and Maheshwar.<sup>375</sup> However the Sātavāhana

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<sup>372</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Bombay: Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 59-68 and pp. 95-113.

<sup>373</sup> Lionel Casson, (trans. introduction and commentary) *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p.198.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.* p. 47.

<sup>375</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, 1981, pp. 113-115.

ruler Yajña Sātakarṇī defeated him and regained these territories. They also lost territories to the Mālavas and Ābhīras.<sup>376</sup>

### Sources for the Sātavāhana epoch

We get to know about the Sātavāhana period from textual sources, inscriptions on walls of the caves, and religious establishments. Inscribed coins in ample quantity and foreign accounts are also important sources for this period. The Puranic records also speak about the Sātavāhana period and call them as Andhra and also provide dynastic lists of the Sātavāhana rulers. According to Carla Sinopoli, brahmi inscriptions were widespread throughout Deccan during this period. The royal inscriptions record donations to the religious institutions along with those found in the caves and commemorative stelae. Coins of various metals like gold and silver (in small quantity), lead, copper, and potin collected from different sites and hoards bearing the rulers' names help us reconstruct the economic history of this period. Inscriptions on the coins were primarily written in Prakṛt.<sup>377</sup>

*Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* of the first century CE is a significant book that concentrates on the maritime trade routes between Roman Egypt, Arabia, and India.<sup>378</sup> The writings of

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<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 59-68

<sup>377</sup> Carla M Sinopoli, 'On the edge of empire: Form and Substance in the Sātavāhana dynasty in *Empires: Perspective from Archaeology and History*, Susan E. Alcock Terence N.D. Alloy, Kathleen D. Morisson, and Kathleen D. Morrison (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 155–178.

<sup>378</sup> Lionel Casson, (trans. introduction and commentary) *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p.198. Also see S.B. Deo, 'The Sātavāhanas in Literature' in *The Age of the Sātavāhanas*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 1999, pp. 81-92.

Pliny<sup>379</sup>, Ptolemy<sup>380</sup> and Strabo<sup>381</sup> are also proper written records for understanding this period. These sources highlight the exchange network that was active during this phase between India and the Roman world.<sup>382</sup> The *Gāthāsaptasāī* by Hāla is a remarkable source to get a glimpse of the daily life of the rural settings of this period. Hāla has been credited for making Prākṛit a literary language in the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>383</sup> According to Ollett, the text was a literary product developed under the royal court's patronage. However, he refuted that this particular text was composed between the first BCE and third century CE because the use of consonants noted in this text is greater than what has been noted in the Sātavāhana inscriptions. On the other hand, the proposition of V.V. Mirashi is more acceptable. He viewed it as a collection of fables with a core that dates to the Sātavāhana epoch. He agrees with Ollett that it was courtly literature but has explained the 'courtliness' differently.<sup>384</sup> According to Mirashi,<sup>385</sup> the village life provided the background where sexual encounters took place and gave enjoyment to various sections of the society, be it the merchants or agrarian officials and landowners. These officials and

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<sup>379</sup>John Boston and H.T. Riley (eds.), *The Natural History of Pliny*, vol.vi, section, xxii, p.67, 1855.

<sup>380</sup> Edward Luther Stevenson (trans. and edited) with Introduction by Joseph Fischer, *Cladius Ptolemy The Geography*, New York: Dover Publications, 1991, Book viii, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>381</sup> H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer (trans.), *Strabo Geography*, vol.xv, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854, pp.1-73.

<sup>382</sup> B.N. Mukherjee, 'Greek and Latin Texts on the Andhras' in Ajay Mitra Shastri (ed.) *The Age of the Sātavāhanas*, 1999, pp. 94-101.

<sup>383</sup> Radha Govind Basak (ed. and trans.) *The Prakrit Gatha Saptasai Compiled by the Satavahana King Hala*, Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1971. Also see V.V. Mirashi, 'The date of Gāthāsaptasāī', *Studies in Indology*, vol.1, Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhana Mandal, 1960, pp. 76-88.

<sup>384</sup> Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit and the Language Order of Pre-modern India*, Columbia University, 2006, pp. 64-100

<sup>385</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Some ancient Prakrit poets', *Studies in Indology*, vol.1, Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhana Mandal, 1960, pp. 96-106.

landowners enjoyed opulence under the Sātavāhana rule.<sup>386</sup> Therefore, this text may also be situated in the context of an extended circuit around the upper echelons of early historic Deccan. The *Gāthāsaptasati* reflects the development of a courtly Prākṛit and the text is full of ‘clever speech’ (chekokti) although it focuses on rural life.<sup>387</sup> A legacy of this trend can be observed in the instances of early Prākṛit text, the *Harivijaya* composed by the Vākāṭaka ruler Sarvasena (325-55CE) and the *Setubandha* composed in Prakṛit by the Vākāṭaka ruler Pravarasena II (420-55CE).<sup>388</sup> Further connected literary allusions are available in a much later text, the *Bṛhatkalpasūtra* (c. 8<sup>th</sup> century CE), which refers to terms like Sātavāhana, Sātāhana, Salavahana and Sālivāhaṇa who had control over Paithan. The love story of a brāhmana girl from Pratisthan and the Nāga king Seshrāja has been depicted in the famous text *Prabandhachintāmaṇi of Merutuṅga* of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. This is also interesting as it gives information about geographical data of Deccan. The son who was born from the couple mentioned above is credited with victory over Vikramāditya of Ujjayinī and we get names of places like Nāgaghāt and Nāgadoha in this particular text. These places were identified as localities near Paithan.<sup>389</sup>

### **Socio- Economic Condition**

This period is noted for long distance trading activities, expansion of agriculture and proliferation of craftsmanship. During this period many urban centres developed which were notable centres of artisanal activities. The demand for the luxurious items in the Roman market encouraged the long distance trading activities. The most traded item was

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<sup>386</sup> Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*, p. 92.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>388</sup> V.V. Mirashi, ‘Some royal poets of the Vākāṭaka age’, *Studies in Indology*, vol.1, Nagpur: Vidarbha Samshodhana Mandal, 1960, pp. 96-106.

<sup>389</sup> S.B. Deo, ‘The Sātavāhanas in Literature’, Ajay Mitra Shastri (ed.) *The Age of the Sātavāhanas*, 1999, p. 89.

silk that was produced in China and reached Roman Empire covering the large overland trading activities. With the spread of the knowledge about the patterns of monsoon winds the overseas trading activities further got strengthened. This was period when different urban centres came up. From the archaeological investigations carried out in different parts of Deccan we come to know that sites like Ter<sup>390</sup> Paithan<sup>391</sup>, Sopara,<sup>392</sup> Kaudinyapur<sup>393</sup>, Nevasa<sup>394</sup>, Adam,<sup>395</sup> Bhon<sup>396</sup> and Bhokardhan<sup>397</sup> emerged as important urban centres. Some of these centres were also noted for specialized craftsmanship. Bead making at a specialized level was practiced at the sites of Ter, Karad and Paithan. Beautifully carved female figurines were collected from the site of Ter and Bhokardhan. From the site of Ter objects like terracotta figurines, lamps, cameos, beads and clay bullae had been found.<sup>398</sup> Chapekar viewed that all these objects speak of Roman influence. Even Roman influence was also

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<sup>390</sup> B.N.Chapekar, *Report on the Excavation at Ter (1958)*, Poona: Shrisaraswati Mudranalaya. Also see, M. J.Patil, 'New approach to the ivory and bone artifacts from Tagar(Ter) Dist. Osmanabad, Maharashtra, International Journal of Health Science, 62002, pp. 5796-5804.

<sup>391</sup> Derek Kennet, J. Varaprasada Rao and M. Kasturi Bai 'Excavations at Paithan, Maharashtra: Transformations in Early Historic and Early Medieval India', Michael Willis, Sam van Schaik and Lewis Doney (eds.) *Religion, Region, Language and the State*, vol.3, European Research Council, 1999, pp. 3-23.

<sup>392</sup> James Howell and A.K.Sinha 'Preliminary Report on the Exploration around Sopara, Surat and Bharuch' *South Asian Studies*, vol.10, 1994, pp. 189-199.

<sup>393</sup> M.G. Dikshit, *Excavations at Kaudinyapura*, Bombay; Government Central Press, 1968, pp. 32-39.

<sup>394</sup> Sheila Mishra, 'Pre- historic and Quaternary Studies at Nevasa: the Last Forty Years,' *Memoirs Geological Society of India*, No.32, pp. 324-332.

<sup>395</sup> Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>396</sup> B.C.Deotare, 'Excavations at Bhon, Buldhana, Maharashtra, *Annual Report (2006-07)* Pune: Deccan College, 2007-08, pp. 63-66.

<sup>397</sup> S.B. Deo, 'Excavations at Bhokardhan', 1973, Nagpur, pp. 1-230.

<sup>398</sup> Sawant, *Historical Geography*, 2012, p. 100

observed in case of the technique of manufacture and the choice of clay.<sup>399</sup> Amarendra Nath suggests that the discovery of the eleven Roman gold coins from the site of Adam also signifies that this was period when Indo-Roman trade flourished.<sup>400</sup> Important mint centre was found at the site of Nāgārjunkoṇḍa. The discovery of the minting centre at the site of Nāgārjunkoṇḍa suggests that the concentration of the Satavahana power later shifted to Eastern Deccan.<sup>401</sup> Aloka Parasher Sen has opened up a new dimension in the study of the economic growth of Deccan under the Sātavāhanas. She has divided Deccan into four distinct ecological niches. They are -Western Deccan characterized by Ghats and passages, Eastern zone noted for fertile plains, Central Deccan featured by plateau area and Southern Deccan marked by Tungabhadra plains and Mysore plateau. Though the Western zone is not fertile but provided important link for trade and commerce. The Eastern zone supported the Sātavāhana rulers with their strong agrarian base whereas the Southern belt is noted for its natural resources. The Central part of Deccan was endowed with rich iron deposits and produced huge amount of iron objects. Therefore, Sen concludes that these different ecological niches supported the Sātavāhana power in various ways; however, the influence and control of the Sātavāhana varied in terms of the chronology and degree.<sup>402</sup> Nigamasabhās played a crucial role in organizing long distance trade. The traders were wealthy and they made huge donation. This is well documented in two inscriptions- Pitalkhorā inscription<sup>403</sup> and Bedsā inscriptions.<sup>404</sup> The Junar inscription records the

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<sup>399</sup>B. N. Chapekar, *Report on the Excavation at Ter (1958)*, Poona: Shrisaraswati Mudranalaya. J.Patil, 'New approach to the ivory and bone artifacts from Tagar (Ter)', pp. 5796-5804.

<sup>400</sup> Nath, 'Adam: An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology', 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>401</sup> J. Vijaytunga, *Nagarjunakonda*, New Delhi: Albion Press, 1956, pp.1-31.

<sup>402</sup> Aloka P. Sen, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Early Deccan*, 2021, pp. 28-30.

<sup>403</sup> J.Burgess, *Report on the Buddhist cave Temples and their Inscriptions vol.iv*, , Varanasi: Bharatiya Publishing House, 1975, p.11

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22

donation by a goldsmith.<sup>405</sup> This suggests that different occupational groups prospered during this time.

The Sātavāhana rulers showed eagerness to maintain the varṇāśrama-dharma. But they also realized the advantages of giving support to the Buddhist monastery which in turn would give 'protection of trade both overland and overseas.' According to H.P. Ray this resulted in the development of a symbiotic relationship between the Sātavāhana political structure and Buddhist order. The Sātavāhana kings in order to gain legitimacy of their rule performed various Vedic sacrifices. Such Vedic sacrifices are well documented in the epigraphic records.<sup>406</sup> The Naneghat inscription of Nayanika records various sacrifices that were conducted by her late husband Satakarni I. He paid fees and gifts to the officiating priests. From this record we come to know that two horse sacrifices, one rājasūya sacrifice and one agnyadheya (kindling of the sacred fire) were performed. The brahmanas received 10,001 cows for a Bhagala-Dasarata sacrifice and 24400 coins for another sacrifice. Interestingly this inscription was composed in Prakrit and carved on the walls of Buddhist monastic rock cut caves.<sup>407</sup>

Carla M. Sinopoli has talked about an interesting feature of the Sātavāhana rulers. According to Sinopoli though the Sātavāhana rulers were brahmanas and performed vedic sacrifices in order to gain legitimacy of their rule, they had married Nāga and Śaka women. This could indicate pragmatic political/diplomatic or social factors of compulsion.<sup>408</sup> The

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<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 26-30.

<sup>406</sup> Himanshu Prabha Ray, *The Winds of Change: Buddhism and the Maritime Links of Early South Asia*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 192.

<sup>407</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, pp. 5-10.

<sup>408</sup> Carla M. Sinopoli, *On the edge of empire*, pp. 155-177.

Sātavāhana rulers practiced cross cousin marriage. This type of matrimonial relationship is not acceptable in the Indo- Aryan culture. From the epigraphic records we come to know that there were marriages between the Sātavāhana nobility and two groups – Mahārāṭhis and Mahābhōjas.<sup>409</sup> The Kanheri inscription also records marital relationship between the Sātavāhanas and the Kṣtrapas.

The period following the rule of the Bhadrās and the Mītras was followed by a phase which is interesting enough. This was the time when the region of Vidarbha was under the ‘nominal domination’ of the Sātavāhanas who were ruling from Paithan, a place not far away from the heartland of Vidarbha, and may have very well been at the core while Vidarbha may have brought up the periphery. Their nominal domination over this periphery added new elements of identity to this region.<sup>410</sup> The physical, as well as cultural landscape of Vidarbha experienced new developments under the Sātavāhanas. The place of Vidarbha under the Sātavāhanas is important to this study to look for the new features, if any, which were introduced with the rise of Sātavāhanas. In the Nāsik praśasti of Gautamīputra Satakarni, he has been described as the ruler of Asika (area between the river Godavari and Kṛishna), Asaka (Aśmaka to the north of Rishika), Mūlaka (area in and around Pratiṣṭhāna) Kukura (Kathiawad) Anūpa (Māhismatī) Vidarbha (Nagpur area) Ākaravanti (Avanti located around Ujjain) This particular praśasti shows that he was able to gain control over entire Deccan. He was also praised as the ruler whose chargers drank the water of the three seas (tisamuda topyapīta vāhana).<sup>411</sup> He was also described as the lord of the mountain

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<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>410</sup> Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, p. 67-69.

<sup>411</sup> Mirashi, *The History and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas*, pp. 28-30.



(pavata-pati): vijha (Vinhya) Achhavat (ikshava, part of the Vindhya to the north of Narmada) Parichāta (Aravalli Mountains). He took the title Dakshina ā pathapati).

### **Changes and Continuities in Vidarbha in the Sātavāhana epoch**

Vidarbha came under diffusive and amorphous control of the contemporary big political powers. It was also when the geographical position of Vidarbha was exploited and underwent multiple socio-cultural changes. These changes were mainly due to its geographical position that led Vidarbha to play the role of nodal point in the vast trading network. In literary sources like Mahābhārata, we have seen that Vidarbha had been mentioned in connection to the Dakṣiṇapatha yet it was a culturally distinguishable land from the rest of Deccan. People of Vidarbha were also culturally superior to the other residents of Deccan. Vidarbha served as a nodal point in the vast overseas trading network. Several trade routes passed over Vidarbha. The two most traversed routes were one which connects Prayag with the Andhradeśa passing over the Waingāṅgā valley and the other as the one which connects Kausambi with Paithan covering other important centres like Vidisa, Ujjain and Māhiṣmatī.<sup>412</sup> This route connecting Paithan with the Gangetic plains became more vital over time. In the Sātavāhana period, this route was preferred by the merchants as Paithan was the seat of the political power of the Sātavāhanas.<sup>413</sup> Though Vidarbha was a land locked area yet it served as a corridor in this route connecting Northern Gangetic plains with the Peninsular India. Since its geographical importance grew contemporary, ruling authorities tried to have control over this part of Deccan. However, the Sātavāhanas competed with other contemporary powers like Western Kṣtrapas and

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<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 123–125.

<sup>413</sup> Nath, 'Adam', 1969, pp. 69-79.

Bhāraśivas. However, it was the 'nominal domination' (a term used by Reshma Sawant.<sup>414</sup>) of the Sātavāhanas that gave a new aspect to this region. Earlier, we saw that the two small ruling authorities made two separate river basins their area of domination. However, during the Sātavāhana epoch, the region was divided into several territorial units. Most sites that continued to exist in this period were urban, with antiquities showing Graeco- Roman affinity. For instance, Adam pottery assemblage consisted of red ware, decorated pottery similar to those found from the sites of Andhra Pradesh, where the Sātavāhanas had control. Roman gold coins, bullae, and a variety of seals, sealings, and signets are reported. Beads pendants, bangles of ivory and shell, the stylus of chalcedony, figurines of human and terracotta male heads of Graeco-Roman affinity have been excavated.<sup>415</sup>

Even the amorphous control of the Western Kṣatrapas hints that the importance of the geographical position of Vidarbha increased during this phase. This was mainly due to the growing overseas trading network. The kṣatrapas were interested in maintaining their control over this region because of Vidarbha's strategic position in the overseas trading network. The presence of the kṣatrapas is evident from the inscription found in Pauni. A fragmented pillar inscription was recovered from Pauni to testify to this fact.<sup>416</sup> This particular inscription triggered controversy among the historians, H.S. Thosar associated Rupamma to be the descendant of the Bhoja family.<sup>417</sup> From the site of Pauni the inscription of Bhagadatta belonging to the Bhara clan During the period of what has been called

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<sup>414</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, pp. 99-103.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 102–103.

<sup>416</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'A Pillar Inscription of Mahakstrapa Rupaimma from Pawni', *Epigraphia Indica* xxxvii, (pt.v), 1968, pp. 201-203. Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavations at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1994, pp. 33-35.

<sup>417</sup> H.S. Thosar, 'The Bhojas and the Mauryas of Konkan as known from their Inscriptions', *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, 22, pp. 28-40.

‘nominal domination’ of the Sātavāhanas Vidarbha, experienced growth in the material culture, and most of the sites excavated and explored gave signs of urbanization. The constructions found in the excavated sites of Vidarbha are the best examples to justify our argument. Mention may be made of the site of Mansar. At the site of Mansar, period II is assigned to the Sātavāhana period (200BCE to 250 CE). A vast palace complex with entrance West to East was constructed. The palace stands on a solid adhisthan measuring 51m. The adhisthan was embellished with pilaster mouldings, alternatively lime-plastered in red and white. From this site, we got evidence of circular coin dies of Gautamīputra – Sātakarnī. The presence of the Sātavāhanas was strong over this region is also evident from the fact that the site of Mandal is situated in the district of Nagpur. From this site, a silver coin of Sātakarnī has been recovered.<sup>418</sup>

Religious faiths like Buddhism and Jainism, embraced by the trading community, played a pivotal role in introducing these two faiths in Vidarbha. This cultural trend continued even during the time of the Sātavāhanas. From the site of Pauni (Period III and IV), an inscription of the Bhagadatta of the Bhara clan has been found. This inscription triggered controversy among historians. According to V.V. Mirashi, the character of the inscription belongs to the early Brāhmi alphabet and the Prākṛt language. Some scholars identified Bhagadatta, the king of the Bhara clan, with the Bhāraśivas<sup>419</sup>. However, the opinion given by Reshma Sawant has been accepted widely. According to her, Bhagadatta was a local ruler, probably contemporary to Sātavāhana. Pauni was a Buddhist site, this inscription

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<sup>418</sup>S.J.Mangalam, ‘Coins of Sātavāhana Contemporaries Found from Maharashtra’, *Journal of Numismatic Society of India LX- LXI*, pp.16-20.

<sup>419</sup> V.V. Mirashi, ‘Pauni Stone Inscription of the Bhara King Bhagadatta’, *Epigraphia Indica, XXIV*, 1942, pp. 11-14

must be a dedicatory type, and she drew a similarity between these inscriptions with the labelled inscription in Sanchi.<sup>420</sup>

Early historic sites in Vidarbha seem to have derived sustenance from an expanding agricultural economy with a corresponding settlement shift from hilly/forested regions (Nagpur district) to the fertile river valleys of the Waingangā and its tributaries, the Kanhan and the Dham. There is evidence for an artisanal class, and the monetized economy was well established as we find coins in large numbers. Studies have shown that the Sātavāhana coinage drew on preceding coin-making traditions, issuing their coins after incorporating regional symbolism, shapes, metals, and techniques (punch marked). Inter and intra-regional trade connections were probably well-established. There is even evidence of the trade in Roman goods, which could reflect the forging of links between Vidarbha and the western coast of the subcontinent.<sup>421</sup>

The dynamisms involved in the emergence of any region is incomplete without studying the agrarian condition. It can be argued that the foundations of this socio-political and economic complexity so apparent in the early historic age had been laid in the megalithic period, which witnessed some progress in architectural style, ceramic, metallurgy, and in agriculture. During this period, the region of Vidarbha showed large-scale development in the socio-economic sector. That was probably why most contemporary ruling dynasties were eager to have minimal control over this region. Early history has shown off a highly diversified and sophisticated economy. There has been a long history of barley and wheat

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<sup>420</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, pp. 94-101.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 94-101.

millet, and wheat was cultivated in Bhokardan,<sup>422</sup> Pauni,<sup>423</sup> and Ter (though Ter was not part of Vidarbha agricultural products cultivated in this site), an essential commodity in the intra- regional trade, especially with Vidarbha). Though the presence of rice had been in the region since 1300BCE, the total places containing rice have been on the rice since the early historic period. It has been understood that a considerable quantity of rice has been recovered from the Sātavāhana level at Adam.<sup>424</sup>

A new political culture that Vidarbha experienced under the ‘nominal domination’ of the Sātavāhanas was developed along the lines of the Sātavāhana polity. It was in the Sātavāhana period that the area of Vidarbha was divided into different units following the lines of the Sātavāhana polity as found in other areas of Deccan. This was one of the prominent influences of Deccan over Vidarbha during the Sātavāhana epoch.

Brief profile of some of the sites are given below.

Māmālāhāra:

The Karle cave inscription of the eighteenth year of Gautamīputra Sātakarni records the donation of the land in Karajagrāma in Māmālāhāra. The place Karajagrāma has been identified with the village Karajgaon<sup>425</sup> presently situated in the district of Pune.

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<sup>422</sup> Amarendra Nath, ‘Satavahana Antiquities from Adam’ *The Age of the Satavahanas*, vol.II, 1999, pp. 46-67.

<sup>423</sup> Deo, ‘Pauni Excavation’ 1972, p. 1-35.

<sup>424</sup> Amarendra Nath, ‘Adam – An index to Vidarbha Archaeology’, B.U. Nayak and N.C.Ghosh (eds.) *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol. i, New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, pp. 69-70.

<sup>425</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History, and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 131-132.

Govardhanāhāra:

The Nasik cave inscription of the nineteenth and twenty-second years of Vasiṣṭhaputra Pulumāvī, the king granted the village of Salmalipadagrāma in Govardhanahara.<sup>426</sup> This Salmalipadagrāma is identified with the present-day Savagaon in the Nasik district.

As mentioned in the Nasik cave inscription of the nineteenth and twenty-second years of Vasiṣṭhaputra Pulumavi, the king granted the village Salmalipadagrāma in Govardhanāhara in the place of Sudarsanagrama to Bhadavaiya Bhikshusaṃgha. The place Salmalipadagrāma may be identical to the village Savargaon in Niphad taluk of Nasik district.<sup>427</sup>

Sorparakaāhara:

It has been mentioned in the Kanheri Buddhist cave inscription. It must have included the region Sopara in taluka Wasai, district Thane.<sup>428</sup>

Benakaṭaka:

This administrative unit is interesting because the name remained unaltered even when Vidrabha was under the Vākāṭakas. The Nasik inscription of the nineteenth and twenty-second year of Gautamīputra Śatakarni describes this place differently in the epigraphs. This has been identified as the birthplace of a monk.<sup>429</sup> The division has been identified with the region on the river Waingāṅgā in Bhandara and Balaghat districts. The area drained

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<sup>426</sup>Malati Mahajan, 'Administrative Divisions and Place Names from Sātavāhana Inscriptions Found in Maharashtra: A Case Study', in *The Age of Sātavāhana*, vol. ii, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, pp. 408-418.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 408–418.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>429</sup>V.V. Mirashi, *The History, and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 23-28.

by the river Benna has been identified with this particular administrative division.<sup>430</sup> According to Malati Mahajan, this river was the Waingangā.<sup>431</sup>

Deccan had emerged as the nucleus for the first state formation in South India. Seneviratne's work<sup>432</sup> throws significant light on the process with respect to Andhra and Kalinga. Vidarbha, an integral territorial part of Deccan, entered into that process from the Sātavāhana period onwards. Nevertheless, many of its characteristics had not matured in the structure of a state or as an integral part of a state such as the Sātavāhana state. But it had a long cultural tradition which evolved as a result of social, economic and cultural processes. The setting of the Sātavāhana state would open the region to newer experiences in terms of economic and cultural transactions which will be further manifest in the next historical phase. To understand the changes in the spatial identity of Vidarbha, it is necessary to study the settlement that emerged in Vidarbha during the Sātavāhana epoch.

It was from the post –Mauryan phase that Vidarbha showed steady qualitative progress in the material culture, and the habitational sites testify to this fact.<sup>433</sup> Though we have discussed that many sites were fortified and the reason behind this was mainly for defense against natural calamities, the tussle between the two contemporary powers -Western Kṣatrapas and the Sātavāhanas cannot be ignored while explaining the reason behind fortification. In sites like Bhawar, Arni, and Kaundinyapur, wedge-shaped bricks were

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<sup>430</sup>Malati Mahajan, Administrative Divisions and Place Names from Sātavāhana Inscriptions Found in Maharashtra: A Case Study, A.M. Shastri, (ed.), *The Age of Sātavāhanas* vol. i, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, pp. 408-418.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> Sudarshan Seneviratne 'Kalinga and Andhra', pp. 173-198.

<sup>433</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', pp. 134-135.

found. In the case of the site Kaundinyapur,<sup>434</sup> a large pavement of bricks was noticed. Oblong houses of stone and burnt bricks were noticed in Pauni.<sup>435</sup> The ring and brick wells were also found in good numbers. The pottery assemblage of various types- red slipped ware, burnished red ware, micaceous red ware, multi-slipped vases, and cups. That Vidarbha excelled in its material culture during this phase is well evident from the reports of the various sites. Apart from the sites mentioned above, we get some explored sites found in the region of Vidarbha, which are shown in the table below-

**Table 3.6: Explored sites of Vidarbha**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Reported Archaeological remains</b>	<b>Reference</b>
1. Bhandak	Stone saddle quern, terracotta hopscotch, and remnants of red and black ware	IAR1981-82:96
2. Darwah	Stone pestles, remnants of red and black ware, and plain red wares	IAR1981-82:98
3. Deulgaon Raja(district-Buldhana)	Terracotta votive tank, stone pestle, and sherds of black and red ware	IAR 1981-82:95.
4. Kalamb (district- Yavatmal)	Sherds of black and red ware and red sipped ware, coarse red ware and red micaceous ware and two thin black and red ware sherds with grafitti .	IAR 1981-83:95

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 134–135.

<sup>435</sup> Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavations at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp. 1-22.



5.Karbi (district Yavatmal)	Black and red ware coarse red ware, glass bangles, beads of ivory, carnelian shells, copper cast coin, depicting three arched hills on the obverse and hollow cross on the reverse.	IAR 1989:50-55.
6.Lonar(district: Buldhana)	Shell bangles and sherds of red ware associated with black–red ware.	IAR 1981:82-95.
7. Pullar (district: Nagpur)	Rock-cut caves with stone pillars.	
8.Sindkhed Raja(district: Buldhana)	Remnants of black and red ware and black-painted wares	IAR1981:82.

During the Sātavāhana times, the overseas trading activities reached their zenith. In the significant sites of Vidarbha, we find coins of the two contemporary powers -Sātavāhanas and the Western Kṣtrapas. They were in a conflicting relationship with each other, mainly on the issue of gaining supremacy over the trading network. Most common coins from Vidarbha have an elephant on the obverse and an Ujjain symbol on the reverse. Lakshmi – type coin of Śri – Satakarnī has also been reported from Kaundinyapura. From Bhon, we get a fascinating coin with a legend's name- Sadavahana. Other types bear a symbol of bold taurine similar to the Ujjain type, a symbol with a Pellet inside and a legend 'no Sri Sātavāhana.' Coins of the Kṣatrapas have been reported from Adam, Washim, Bhatkuli, and Paunar. The most common type of coins bears the symbol of the bust of a king on both sides, the hill symbol in the center with the wavy horizontal line denoting a river at the

base, a crescent-shaped structure on the left side, and a star on the right near the top with legends on both sides.<sup>436</sup>

In delineating Vidarbha as a cultural zone, we could find both changes and continuities in the physical and cultural landscape of Vidarbha. There was continuity of internal socio-economic growth and in the patterns of power base from the Stone Age to the megalithic phase and beyond into the early historic period. On the other hand, some new cultural elements flowed into Vidarbha, from the northern India and the wider areas in Deccan. It can be argued that the foundations of this socio-political and economic complexity so apparent in the early historical period had been laid in the megalithic period. The Megalithic period was characterized by social stratification and complexity, hierarchization of settlement size, exchange, craft specialization, and varied subsistence base. This phase cannot thus be understood only in terms of integration or association of Vidarbha with the contemporary political authorities, be it the Mauryas or the Sātavāhanas. The historical developments have to be traced from the continuous evolution from within the region and with linkages with northern India as well as with the rest of Deccan. The internal dynamics included a long history of settlement, agricultural subsistence, qualitative material progress, craft specialization, and the rise of local ruling groups, and local elite groups around them. At another level, there were external factors like linkages with other parts of the subcontinent through trade and commerce, use of NBPW, currency system, Roman artifacts as well as the introduction of Buddhism and Jainism.<sup>437</sup> Therefore we can say that no isolated factor was responsible for the formation of Vidarbha as a distinct cultural zone. The strategic position of Vidarbha and its function as an important network zone connecting

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<sup>436</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Two Kshatrapa Coins from Vidarbha', *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, vol.30, 1989, pp. 92-95.

<sup>437</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, pp. 102-103.

Northern India with Paithan led to the penetration of these external cultural influences. Vidarbha thus experienced several processes which, combined, gave rise to a distinct multifaceted, multilayered history that led to its emergence as a distinctive cultural zone. Similar patterns were also observed in other parts of Deccan in the pre- Sātavāhana times. Thus, it can be said that the dynamic web of social, economic, and political ties added new dimensions to cultural and physical landscape of Vidarbha. We can relate the history of Vidarbha partly as a case study to exemplify the theory of ‘autonomous spaces’ proposed by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya. His optic leads historians to look beyond the frames of state or beyond state-centric perspectives. Autonomous spaces exist without the overarching parameters that regulated the life set within the centre or the core of the state. He has opined that the structure of the autonomous spaces could change, and the relationship between the autonomous spaces and the state system is dynamic. Chattopadhyaya has however also pointed out that autonomous spaces do not exist in isolation.<sup>438</sup> In the context of the emergence of sub-regional identities, he has also proposed that it is not historically true that only a particular cultural pattern would prevail or be visible throughout an entire region in any given time in pre-colonial times.<sup>439</sup> These observations help explain the emergence of multiple cultural zones within spaces that are understood to form a region and also help in appreciating the reality of changing variable and dynamics in any given regional or sub – regional orbit. The studies in history should lead us to try and locate the local cultural dynamics, processes of adoption and integration, as well as elements of diversities and divergences that play pivotal role the making of cultural landscapes and spaces beyond the core of state systems. These theories also lead us to situate the history of societies in a more

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<sup>438</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Concept of Bharatvarsha and other Essay*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2017, pp. 1-14.

<sup>439</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 21-35

comprehensive matrix, beyond states and regions, bringing light on peripheries, corridors, conduit areas and borders.

## Maps and Illustrations



Fig. 3.1: Vidarbha within the larger territorial orbit of Deccan

Courtesy: Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, 2012.

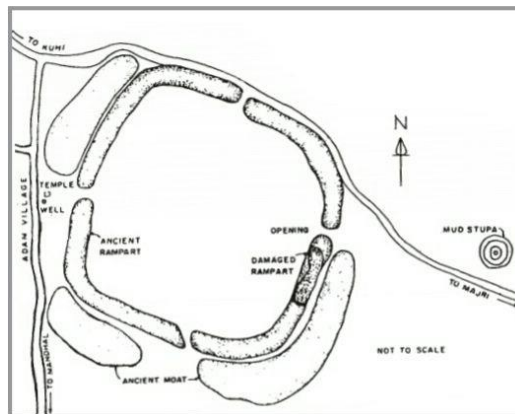


Fig. 3.2: Vidarbha within the larger territorial orbit of Deccan

Courtesy: Amarendra Nath, *Adam- An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology*, 1992

## Chapter 4

### **Vidarbha: Rise of a Regional Contour (mid-third century C.E. to sixth-century C.E.)**

In the previous chapter, we have seen that internal cultural dynamism and external influences were the main forces involved in shaping Vidarbha as a distinguished cultural zone of Deccan from first to third century CE. The strategic location of Vidarbha was also an essential factor in achieving such distinguishable cultural identity within the Deccan trap. It was from the pre – Vākāṭaka era, Vidarbha played a major role in overseas mercantile activities. As a result of which external influences, mainly from Northern India, flowed into Vidarbha and brought changes in its cultural matrix. Vidarbha, till the mid-third century CE, was never under any political power, yet this did not prevent Vidarbha from entering into the process of gaining a cultural identity. The complex web of socio-cultural processes that began in the Megalithic period continued in the subsequent periods and contributed in shaping this geographical space into a distinguished cultural zone.

We have already discussed in our previous chapters that it was from the late Chalcolithic period, evidences of human actions in the river valleys was seen. Large numbers of Megaliths were available in the eastern side of the valley. This was mainly because the eastern part was endowed with rich natural resources. Excavation and exploration of many sites belonging to the Early Iron Age suggest that the population also accelerated during that time. The megalithic people were able to develop a complex and varied economic structure.<sup>440</sup> From the archaeozoological and archaeo-botanical evidence<sup>441</sup> it can be

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<sup>440</sup>S.B. Deo, 'The Megaliths: Their Culture, Ecology, Economy, and Technology', S.B. Deo and D.K. Sinha (eds.) *Recent Advances in Indian Archaeology*, Pune: Deccan College, 1989, pp. 89-91.

<sup>441</sup>M.D. Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigation on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System,' *Man and Environment XII*, 1989, pp. 87-100.

inferred that the practice of animal rearing and agriculture were the main economic activities of the Megalithic people. In sites like Adam<sup>442</sup> and Bhagimohari<sup>443</sup> evidence of domesticated versions of crops like wheat, pulses, barley, and rice were available. The presence of a complex economic set up of the megalithic/ Early Age is also evident from the specialized craftsmanship that developed in Vidarbha. This craftsmanship was reflected in the works related to metallurgy, lapidary, and ceramics.<sup>444</sup> Beads produced in Mahurjhari were an important item for local trade. This is also clearly understood from the detailed archaeological report on Mahurjhari.<sup>445</sup> That Vidarbha was an active participant in the local trading networks is understood from the available materials that were not produced locally. In several sites of Vidarbha artefacts like gold and marine shells were found which indicates that local exchange systems operated between the sites. This can be inferred from the availability of iron-made tools and instruments at Mahurjhari,<sup>446</sup> Khapa<sup>447</sup> and Borgaon.<sup>448</sup> These iron implements were manufactured at the iron-smelting furnace at Naikund.<sup>449</sup> Therefore, it became clear that there existed social coordination and a well-organized network system within the landscape of Vidarbha. The complex subsistence strategies, unique way of commemorating the deceased and distinguishable ceramics were the

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<sup>442</sup> Nath, Amarendra. 'Adam- An Index to Vidarbha Archaeology,' B.U Nayak and N.C.Ghosh (eds.) *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol. i New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1992, pp. 69-79.

<sup>443</sup> M.D. Kajale, 'Archaeobotanical Investigation on Megalithic Bhagimohari and its significance for Ancient Indian Agricultural System', *Man and Environment XII*, 1989, pp. 87-100.

<sup>444</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths', 1982, pp. 27-32.

<sup>445</sup> R.K.Mohanty, 'Excavation at Mahurjhari', *Annual Report (200-2002)*, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 45-47.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>447</sup> Chetan Sali, 'Vākātaka Culture: Archaeological Perspective,' *Sanshodhak*, 1998, pp.3-38.

<sup>448</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>449</sup> V.D. Gogte, 'Megalithic Iron Smelting at Naikund (Part -I): Discovery by three-Probe Resistivity Survey', S.B. Deo and A.P. Jamkhedkar (eds.), *Excavations at Naikund (1978-80)* Nagpur: Nagpur University, 1982, pp. 52-55.

important cultural markers which suggest that the inhabitants of Vidarbha were eager to carve out their own cultural identity from this early phase of human history. This trend continued in the subsequent periods. Contact with the Northern India in the subsequent times brought further changes in the cultural matrix of Vidarbha.<sup>450</sup>

In Northern India, the Early Historic period displayed certain important features like the emergence of new kingdoms, political consolidation, and economic changes. This period saw the emergence of janapadas under the rule of local chiefs who aspired to become rulers. Through annexation, larger territorial units were formed, which came to be known as the mahajanapadas. Magadha emerged as the centre of power on the Gangetic plains and significant part of the north India came under the rule of the Mauryas.<sup>451</sup> Magadha was agriculturally prosperous its initial spread of power and control across neighbouring areas was achieved through conquest and annexation of territory.<sup>452</sup> The Early Historic period in Vidarbha also displayed features closely associated with the Gangetic Northern India. These features included the inception of written records, the proliferation of towns, and excessive use of brick, metal currency, ceramics (notably Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and institutionalized religion.<sup>453</sup> Certain cultural features which are typically associated with Northern Gangetic plain entered into Vidarbha through trade connections. In the major sites of Vidarbha we find Northern Black polished ware, punch-marked coins, and Buddhist structures. Buddhism entered into the soil of Vidarbha through trade routes.

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<sup>450</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths – A Review,' *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.41, 1982, pp. 27-32.

<sup>451</sup> Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in Mid-First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.189.

<sup>452</sup> Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 283-284.

<sup>453</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscapes of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', Mohammad Nazrul Bari and H.M.Maheshwaraiah (eds.), *Deccan Culture, Heritage and Literature*, Karnataka: University of Karnataka, 2012, p. 122.



Pauni is an important example for this.<sup>454</sup> The Mauryan rulers did not exert direct control over this part of Deccan. The Mauryan contact with central India was mainly motivated to access raw materials and gain dominance over the active trade routes of the Dakṣiṇāpatha.<sup>455</sup> Later on, Aśokan edicts were erected at different places over the empire to integrate different communities politically and ideologically. These edicts emerged as monumental symbols of authority.<sup>456</sup> However no such edicts were recovered from Vidarbha. This indicates that the influence of the Mauryas were minimal over this part of Deccan. Both the Chalcolithic to Iron Age transition and the Iron Age/Megalithic to Early Historic transition display a great deal of uninterruptedness, especially in terms of spatial identity. The Early Historic period in Vidarbha did not manifest a complete transformation from previous Megalithic society.<sup>457</sup> From Adam's excavation report, we understand that the Early Historic periods presented brick structures, tiles, ring/brick wells, and a public drainage system.<sup>458</sup> Extensive structural activities were also noticed at Bhon. At the site of Bhon, a brick canal and an early stupa probably built around the second century BCE was recovered.<sup>459</sup> The archaeological investigations revealed that many sites which were purely habitational in the Megalithic period attained urban character. The sites meant for human settlement varied in size, and some major sites like Adam,<sup>460</sup> Bhon<sup>461</sup> showed evidence of

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<sup>454</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation (1969-70)*, Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalay, 1970, pp. 45-49.

<sup>455</sup> Romila Thapar, 'Towards the Definition of an Empire: The Mauryan State,' B.P. Sahu and Hermann Kulke, *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, pp. 141-172.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscapes of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha', *Deccan Culture, Heritage and Literature* (ed. Mohammad Nazrul Bari and H.M. Maheshwaraiah), Karnataka: University of Karnataka, 2012, p.122.

<sup>458</sup> Nath, 'Adam', pp. 69-79.

<sup>459</sup> Deotare, B.C. 'Excavations at Bhon, District Buldana, Maharashtra', *Annual Report (2006-07)*, Pune: Deccan College, 2008, pp.75-76.

<sup>460</sup> Nath, 'Adam', pp. 69-79.

<sup>461</sup> B.C. Deotare, 'Excavations at Bhon, District Buldana, Maharashtra' pp.75-76.

advanced agro-based economy and craft specialization. These prominent sites of the Megalithic/Early Iron Age transformed into important urban centres. Interestingly enough, these sites (Adam, Bhon) ceased to exist in the Vākātaka era.<sup>462</sup>

From the numismatic evidence, it is clearly understood that before the rise of the Sātavāhanas, various local-level rulers gained prominence in the different pockets of Deccan.<sup>463</sup> Within central India, the local power base that developed in different parts of Deccan was the harbinger of the Sātavāhana rule. The Sātavāhana were able to form a significant polity from the mid to second half of the 1st century BCE until the early 3rd century C.E. This political trend was also noticed in our case. Vidarbha in the pre-Sātavāhana period witnessed the emergence of two local level rulers – Bhadras and Mitras who were quite powerful. Though these rulers enjoyed a brief period of reign but issued coins of their own.<sup>464</sup>

But how far the Sātavāhana rulers exerted their authority over Vidarbha is difficult to understand. Reshma Sawant has coined the term 'nominal domination' to explain the influence of the Sātavāhana rule over Vidarbha.<sup>465</sup> However, we find numerous coins from the several sites of Vidarbha which belonged to the Sātavāhana rulers. This suggests that Vidarbha was an active participant in the overseas trading network. It served as a nodal point in the trade route that connected Kausambi with Prathisthan. This route is a vital one for establishing overseas trading network as it connects important urban centres like Vidiśā,

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<sup>462</sup> Uthara Suvathan, 'Landscape of Life and Death', pp. 123-125.

<sup>463</sup>. Aloka Parasher Sen, 'Introduction- Problems of Interpretation' in Aloka Parasher Sen (ed.) *Social and Economic History of Early Deccan Some Interpretations*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2020, pp.6-7.

<sup>464</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Archaeology of Vidarbha*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, pp. 65-70.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 78-81.

Ujjain and Māhiṣmatī with Paithan.<sup>466</sup> The central habitational zone of Vidarbha, i.e., the Wardha – Waingāṅgā valley, turned into a contestation ground for the Sātavāhanas, and the Western Kṣtrapas. In the later phase, ramparts were constructed in several sites. Both these power understood the significance of the location of Vidarbha and were eager to exploit it. The Megalithic sites which were burial cum habitational or meant purely for habitation emerged as important urban centers.<sup>467</sup> This phenomenon was closely associated with expanding an agrarian economy and flourishing trading networks. In Vidarbha, 'urban' life has been demonstrated at sites such as Adam, Bhon, Brahmapuri,<sup>468</sup> Paunar,<sup>469</sup> Pauni<sup>470</sup> and Kaundinyapura.<sup>471</sup> The availability of coins in large numbers from the sites of the Sātavāhana period suggests that a fully monetized economic system had developed, which aided in building overseas trading networks.<sup>472</sup> It was during this period that influences from Northern India flowed into Vidarbha. Buddhism entered into the cultural landscape of Vidarbha along the trade routes. As a result, we find Buddhist structures in Pauni where Hinayana Buddhism flourished around the third to first century BCE.<sup>473</sup> This site of Pauni

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<sup>466</sup> Kathleen D. Morrison, 'Trade, Urbanism and Agricultural Expansion: Buddhism Monastic Institutions and the State in the Early Historic Western Deccan,' *World Archaeology*, vol.27, 1995, pp. 203–221.

<sup>467</sup> Aloka Parasher Sen, *Settlement and Local Histories of the Early Deccan*, Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2020, pp. 121-124.

<sup>468</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavation (1969-70)*, Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalay, pp. 45-49.

<sup>469</sup> K.S. Chandra, 'A Comparative Study of Material Culture Found from Excavations at Bhokardan and Paunar in Maharashtra', Rajesh S.V. Abhayan G.S. Preeta Nayar and Ehshan Rahmath Ilahi (eds.) *Human and Heritage: An Archaeological Spectrum of Asiatic Countries* (Felicitation to Professor Ajit Kumar), vol. i, New Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 2019, pp. 397-403.

<sup>470</sup> Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavations at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp. 1-22.

<sup>471</sup> M.G. Dikshitar, *Excavations at Kaudinyapur*, Bombay: Government Central Press.1995, pp. 45-56.

<sup>472</sup> Kathleen D. Morrison, 'Trade, Urbanism and Agricultural Expansion: Buddhism Monastic Institutions and the State in the Early Historic Western Deccan,' *World Archaeology*, vol.27, 1995, pp. 203–221.

<sup>473</sup> S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, *Pauni Excavations (1969-70)*, 1972, pp. 1-22.

comprises of two stupas – one at the Jagannath mound and the other at the Chandkapura about a mile south of Pauni- and the remains of a possible brick-built monastery was also found adjacent to these stupas. The inscriptions associated with those stupas did not mention any king or royal person.<sup>474</sup> It is believed that the traders must have patronized this kind of large Buddhist monastery.<sup>475</sup>

The period from third to fifth century is a turning point in the history of Vidarbha. This was the first time when Vidarbha came under the direct rule of any political authority. It was the Vākātakas who made Vidarbha their center of power.<sup>476</sup> They ruled over Vidarbha when the Guptas had established their rule over the Northern Gangetic plains. The two dynasties were diplomatically connected and we find influence of the Gupta polity on the administrative set up of the Vākāṭaka. State formation and regional development were the significant features of the Gupta- Vākāṭaka age. The socio-economic and political transformation was tied with the process of expansion in the agricultural sector. New lands were made cultivable, investment in structural religious monuments and 'Brahmanization' of peripheral areas and appropriation of the local cults marked this era.<sup>477</sup> In the fourth to sixth century CE, Central India experienced the complex, multilayered process of cult assimilation accompanied by state formation. In the context of assimilation of the local cults within the brahmanical folds, Ashish Kumar cited the classic the example of Piṣṭapurikadevi. She was the local deity of the Dahala country. With the expansion of the state society into the peripheral areas these local deities were accepted within the folds of

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<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>476</sup> Hans Bakker 'Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha,' in *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India.* ( ed. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke) New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, pp. 277–300.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

brahmanical tradition. This expansion of the state society led to the shrinking of the autonomous spaces.<sup>478</sup> This was also noticed in case of Vidarbha. The Vākāṭaka rulers showed keen interest in expanding their jurisdiction. They practiced the system of land grants which led to the spread of the brahmanical culture into the peripheral areas. However it has been clearly mentioned by Hans Bakker that the Vākāṭaka realm was a kind of federation of collateral branches with their actual power limited to the river valley area.<sup>479</sup>

### Sources

The major source for writing the history of this period is the epigraphic records of the both the branches of the Vākāṭaka. They provide us with information on geneology, economy and also cultural trends that feature this particular era. Most of these inscriptions were written in Sanskrit except the Basim grant of Vindhyaśakti. However, the genealogical record of this grant was written in Sanskrit. The epigraphic records were mainly written in prose. Apart from the epigraphic records, *Meghdūta*<sup>480</sup> and *Malavikāgnimitra* by Kālidāsa<sup>481</sup> are also important sources for this period. The social life of the people of Vidarbha can be gleaned from the former one. It is believed that Kālidāsa composed this work when he was in Vidarbha. The main theme of *Meghdūta* was that the message which a yakṣa, exiled from Alakā due to his dereliction of duty, sends by a cloud – messenger to his beloved as the monsoon set in. While describing various mountains and places the

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<sup>478</sup> Ashish Kumar, 'Two Rājyas and a Devi: State Formation and Religious Processes in Central India (circa Fifth – Sixth century C.E.),' *Indian Historical Review*, vol.47, Issue 2, 2020, pp. 330-346.

<sup>479</sup> Baker, 'Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha', p. 285.

<sup>480</sup> C. R. Devadhar (ed. with English trans.), *Meghadūta of Kālidāsa*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasiidass Publishers Private Limited, 2001, pp. 1-24.

<sup>481</sup> C.H.Tawney (trans.) *The Malavikāgnimitra: A Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa*, (second edition), Calcutta: Thackers Spink and Co.1891, p. 11.

Yakṣa mentions the name of Rāmgiri. This Rāmgiri is the present-day Rāmṭek located in the district of Nagpur.<sup>482</sup>

Prākṛt poetry also received momentum during the regime of the Vākāṭaka rulers. The kings were not only patrons but even composers themselves. The founder of the Vatsagulma branch Sarvaṣeṇa was also the composer of the Prākṛt kāvya *Harivijaya*. The full text is not available, but the theme and nature of the text are available in other literary works. Kuṇṭaka, the composer of the text *Vakroktijīvitam*, equates Sarvaṣeṇa with Kalidāśa. According to Kuṇṭaka, both of them were class writers and designated them composers in the category of Sukumārmarga. Hemachandra, the Jain composer, has also referred to this text in his vivṛti on *Alaṃkarachūḍamani*. From his work, we know that Sarvaṣeṇa wrote his kāvya in one meter.<sup>483</sup> During the rule of Sarvaṣeṇa, Vatsagulma emerged as an important centre of learning and was the place from where a particular style vachchhomi (vatsagulmī) evolved. He uses this style prominently in the opening verse of his *Karpūramanjarī*. In the later period, this style was reflected in the works of Rājaśekhara.<sup>484</sup>

Pravaraṣeṇa II was also the renowned author of the Prakrit kāvya *Setubandha*. It was written in artistic style. As we know that *Gāthāsapṣatī* underwent six or seven recessions, and it is claimed that verse – 45, 64, 202, 208, and 216 were composed by Pravaraṣeṇa II. *Avantisundarīkathā* composed during this age was believed to be the work of fifty-six poets (chhapannaya)<sup>485</sup>It can be said that under the Vākāṭakas, Vidarbha functioned as an

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<sup>482</sup> C.B. Verma and C.B. Verma, 'The Prakrit Bloom', *Sahitya Akademi*, vol.46, No.1, 2002, pp. 139-149.

<sup>483</sup> V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. v, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Ootachamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963, pp. liii- lix.

<sup>484</sup> Sten Konow (ed.) and Charles Rockwell Lanman (trans.) *Rāja-cekhara's Karpūramanjarī*, Harvard: Harvard University, 1901, pp.204-206.

<sup>485</sup> V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. v, pp. liii-lix'

important learning center and the rulers were also inclined towards such literary activities. Apart from these literary sources we have a huge corpus of epigraphic records issued by the Vākāṭaka which throw light on the several aspects of this period.

### **Political Scene: Middle of the third to the sixth century CE.**

Several historians like Hans Bakker,<sup>486</sup> S.R. Goyal,<sup>487</sup> and V.V. Mirashi<sup>488</sup> have extensively worked on the political history of this famous dynasty. It was under the Vākāṭakas that Vidarbha emerged as a political base of a dynasty and attained statehood. The Vākāṭakas were divided into two branches – the western branch was operated from Vastagulma and was founded by Sarvaṣeṇa. Scholars are divided in their opinion regarding the political history of this dynasty. Majority of the historians address the Vākāṭaka kingdom singularly. It was mainly after 1939, that the division in this dynasty was well accepted. D.C Sircar wrote that kingdom was divided under the reign of Pravaraṣeṇa I, whereas A.M. Shastri held Pravaraṣeṇa I responsible for such division. B.N. Mukherjee viewed that the rule of the original family came to an end with the reign of Vindhyaśakti. However the most commonly accepted view is that there was a division and it was the Eastern branch that dominated the other branch. The most common view is that the rulers operated from two different centres – Nandivardhana and Vatsagulma. According to A.S. Altekar, Vatsagulma branch was the ‘subsidiary branch’<sup>489</sup>. D.C. Sircar designates it as the collateral branch and the Nandivardhana branch as the main branch.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Bakker, ‘Throne and Temple’, *Interrogating Political Systems*, 2015, pp. 278-293.

<sup>487</sup> S.R. Goyal, ‘Vākāṭaka Historiography: The Old and the New’, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.70, 2009-10, pp. 101-115.

<sup>488</sup> Mirashi, *Corpus vol.v*, pp. liii-lix.

<sup>489</sup> R.C. Majumder and A.S. Altekar (ed.) *The Vākāṭaka – Gupta Age (circa 200-550 A.D.)*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 1967, pp. 93-123.

<sup>490</sup> S.R. Goyal, ‘Vākāṭaka Historiography: The Old and the New,’ pp.101-115.

Vatsagulma emerged as the state capital that was also popular as a famous center of learning and culture and attained religious significance.<sup>491</sup> Even in the 10th -11<sup>th</sup> century, we find mention of this place as an important center of learning. The founder of this dynasty was Sarvaṣeṇa, who was succeeded by his son Vindhyaśakti II. The Western Vākātakas were tolerant in their religious matters. Though they embraced the Brahmanical faith, it was under their reign that patronage was provided to the Buddhist monasteries. Hariṣeṇa embraced Saivism but has been accredited with developing the famous Buddhist caves at Ajanta.

Based on archaeological reports and inscriptions, it can be inferred that the Western branch was not as influential as the Eastern branch of the Vākātakas until around the middle of the fifth century C.E. The epigraphical evidence of the Western branch is less in number. In the thirty-seventh regnal year, Vindhyaṣeṇa issued the Basim plate from the royal capital of Vatsagulma. This inscription is interesting because half of it, i.e., the part which covers the genealogical list, was written in classical Sanskrit. But the section which provides information about the grant was written in Prākṛt. This shows Prākṛt was meant for the commoners; thus, the grant-related records were composed in that language which could be easily understood. The regnal period of Pravaraṣeṇa II was of short duration.<sup>492</sup> From the Ajanta inscription, we know that a boy prince who was eight years old came to power. However, it was minister Kīrti who ruled on the behalf of this boy.<sup>493</sup> The fragmented Berar inscription issued from Vatsagulma informs us about the mighty ruler of this branch Devaṣeṇa, and his capable minister Hastibhoja. The last ruler of this branch was

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<sup>491</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. v, pp. introduction (i-xi)

<sup>492</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.5, *Basim Plates of Vindhyaśakti II*, pp. 93-100.

<sup>493</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.5, *Ajanta Cave Inscription*, pp. 103-109.



Hariṣeṇa.<sup>494</sup> Hariṣeṇa followed an expansion policy and established his control over the major trade routes through his military expedition. He gained wealth for the Western Vākāṭaka kingdom through his policy of aggression and plundered rich neighbouring territories. Furthermore, he extended his suzerainty over the agricultural and resource-rich areas of the Eastern Vākāṭaka kingdom, where king Narendrasena lost his dominance.<sup>495</sup>

During the reign of Hariṣeṇa, the Western Vākāṭakas witnessed significant religious and artistic developments, which can be inferred from the excavation of caves at Ghatotkacha, Bagh, and Ajanta.<sup>496</sup> The development of Mahāyana Buddhism at these sites was stylistically comparable and considered contemporaneous. Bakker thinks that after the decline in the power of the Eastern branch rulers, artisans sought new patronage and migrated towards Vatsagulma, where they contributed to the development of the Ajanta caves.<sup>497</sup> Thus we find a strong resemblance between the temple decoration and iconography at Rāmṭek and Ajanta. Unfortunately, the achievements of the Western Vākāṭakas were short-lived, and later, they were weakened under pressure from the growing power of the Aśmakas. This is narrated in the work of Daṇḍin talks about a young, intelligent prince of Vidarbha whom the king of Aśmaka deceived. Though the last chapter of *Daśakumārcarita*, i.e., the *Viśrūtacharita*, ends abruptly, it is clear that the prowess of this branch declined, and new political powers emerged in the political scenario of Deccan. Māhiṣmatī emerged as the new center of imperial power.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.5, pp. introduction (i- xii)

<sup>495</sup> Goyal, *A History of the Vākāṭaka – Gupta Relations*, Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Publication, 2006, pp. 77-95.

<sup>496</sup> M.K. Dhavalikar, *Ajanta: A Cultural Study*, PhD. dissertation submitted to Poona University, Department of Archaeology, 1973, pp.26-29.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>498</sup> H.H. Wilson (ed.) *Dasakumarcharita or Adventures of ten princes by Srī Daṇḍi*, London: Society for the Publication of Oriental texts, 1846, pp. 1-30.

Padmapura was the political base of the Eastern branch of the Vākāṭaka, with Rudraśeṇa I was the founder. This branch of the Vākāṭakas emerged around 330 CE. Regarding the location of Padmapura, it has been suggested that it was the modern Paunar in the Wardha district. The Mandhal copper plate, considered the earliest one, belonged to him, where we come across several place names like Mandhal, Pauni, and Deotak.<sup>499</sup> This suggests that they were critical semi-urban centers that flourished under this branch of the Vākāṭakas. Prīthvīśeṇa I was the next ruler who was highly eulogized for his virtues like courage, political acumen, and charity in his inscriptions. Under his rule, the Vākāṭakas attained prosperity, and he was also credited for striking a harmonious relationship with the Guptas. He was a worshipper of Śiva. He shifted the capital to Nandivardhana, a prudent decision taken up by him to protect his kingdom.<sup>500</sup> Fortified structures of Ghughusadh and surrounded this site of Nandivardhana.<sup>501</sup>

### **Relationship of the Vākāṭakas with the Guptas and other Peripheral powers**

The work entitled as '*The History of Gupta- Vākāṭaka Relations*' by S.R. Goyal evaluates the dynamics of the Vākāṭaka- Gupta relationship. It is mainly from the epigraphic records we come to know about the nature of the relationships between these two powers. It has generally seen that there was a cordial relationship between the Eastern branch and Guptas in the North though the balance of power was in favor of the Guptas.<sup>502</sup> Bakker viewed that the cordial relationship with the Guptas contributed enormously to the material and cultural development of the Eastern Vākāṭakas. The marriage of Prabhāvatī Gupta who was the

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<sup>499</sup> A.M. Shastri and Ch. Gupta, 'Mandhal Plates of Vākāṭaka Rudrasena II, Year 5', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 78, 1997, pp. 143-57.

<sup>500</sup> R.C. Majumder and A.S. Altekar (eds.), *The Vakataka- Gupta Age*, 1946, pp. 86-114.

<sup>501</sup> Reshma Sawant, 'An appraisal of Early Historic Fortifications in Maharashtra', 2009, pp. 57-65.

<sup>502</sup> S.R. Goyal, *A History of the Vākāṭaka – Gupta Relations*, pp. 77-95.

daughter of Chandragupta, and a princess of the Nāga dynasty in this family carried immense political value. This marital bond, in return, generated diplomatic ties between the Vākāṭaka kingdom in Vidarbha, the Guptas in the North and the Nāgas around Udayagiri-Vidisha.<sup>503</sup>

Hermann Kulke viewed that Gupta influence encouraged vital developments within the Vākāṭaka kingdom, such as the increased use of copper-plate inscriptions, formation of administrative units, and also the emergence of the Rāmṭek- Mansar temple complex, which was under the total sponsorship of the state.<sup>504</sup> Bakker has suggested that Prabhāvatī Gupta was influenced by her paternal side, reshaping Udayagiri into a holy place under Chandragupta II, which motivated her to construct her holy mountain on Rāmṭek hill. It is not known clearly how long Padmapura functioned as the capital. However, in the 13th year of her regency, inscriptions revealed the name of a new capital - Nandivardhana, identified with present-day Nagardhan, close to the major religious site of Rāmṭek.<sup>505</sup> From the Rāmṭek inscription, it is known that Pravarasena II, in order to protect his realm, was eager to strike a cordial relationship with the ruler of Kuntala, the enemy of the Western branch. There was a period of turmoil following the death of Pravaraṣeṇa I and Bhavanāga. Taking advantage of this situation, Samudragupta launched a campaign. However we do not know clearly whether Samudragupta acquired territories of the Vākāṭakas. From the Eran inscription we know that he occupied Eran (ancient city of Airikiṇa) considering its strategic position. He considered that the occupation of Eran would enable him to establish

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<sup>503</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunga Issacson, 'The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala Narasimha Temple,' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London: Cambridge University Press on behalf of SOAS, 2019, pp.46-74.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>505</sup> Lacey Harriet Ruth, *Ramtek and its landscape: An archeological approach to studying the Eastern Vakataka kingdom in Central India*, Unpublished thesis from Durham University, pp. 39-43.

his control over the Bundelkhand areas and also served the purpose of defense for the entire Gangetic plains.<sup>506</sup> S.R. Goyal opines that the conquest of Eran and extension of the Gupta powers to the Vindhya suggests that for a brief period of time the Vākātakas had to accept the suzerainty of the Guptas.<sup>507</sup> We come to know about Narendrasena from the Balaghat inscription. It is stated in this inscription that Narendrasena was able to subjugate his enemies and gain control over Malwa.<sup>508</sup> From the Mandhal inscription of Prithvīśeṇa II, we know that the glory of Narendrasena was taken away by Devasena of the Eastern branch.<sup>509</sup> Under Prithvīśeṇa II, the Eastern branch regained its lost glory, and he successfully reinstated the power of his branch. The recent discovered Rāmtek Prabhavātīgupta Memorial inscription provides us more detail information on the Gupta – Vākāṭaka relationships. The third stanza of this inscription refers to the sovereign monarch whose feet were touched by crest jewels (chuḍamani) of the rulers who were subordinates. This sovereign ruler was the Gupta emperor Chandragupta II Vikramāditya. In the verse 9 of this inscription; we come to know about him. He has been described as the parinapuṛṇa – vṛtta (perfect character) and dai dē va dēva (a god of gods). From this inscription, we know that his daughter Prabhavātīgupta was married to Rudrasena II. The temple was erected in the memory of Prabhavātīgupta after his death. There was a drastic change in the politics of Deccan during the reign of Kumāragupta.<sup>510</sup> The contemporary political powers formed two groups- one group comprised of the Guptas and the Nāgas, and the other one had Vākāṭaka and the Kaḍambas of Kuṇṭala. The Malwa plateau, Bundelkhand, and

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<sup>506</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Rāmtek Inscriptions II: The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala- Narasiṃha Temple', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 56, 1993, pp.46-74.

<sup>507</sup> S.R. Goyal, *A History of the Vākāṭaka- Gupta Relations*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>508</sup> V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. v, pp.79-81.

<sup>509</sup> A.M. Shastri and Ch. Gupta, 'Mandhal Plates of Vākāṭaka Rudrasena II, Year 5', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 78, 1997, pp.143-57.

<sup>510</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Rāmtek Inscriptions II: The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala- Narasiṃha Temple', pp. 46-74.

Baghelkhand were the main areas of this struggle. V.V. Mirashi has suggested that the Uchchakalpa king Jayanath who was the son of Viagra accepted the suzerainty of the Vākātakas. He further strengthened his opinion by citing the example of the Indore plate copper inscription which begins with the phrase 'Tripurī vāsakāt' (meaning that it was the temporary dwelling place of Tripuri) This Tripuri is the modern Tewar located in present Madhya Pradesh. Thus it can be said the influence of the Vākātakas extended to the North of Narmada to the Dahala country. The Balaghat inscription of Prithvisena also explicitly states that the command of the Vākātika rulers extended to Mekala and Kośala.<sup>511</sup> The Vākātika rulers also strong influence over the Valkhā kingdom. They were the neighbours of the Valkhā kingdom and the northern frontiers of the Vākātika kingdom collided with the Valkhā territory. The Valkhās were also influenced by the administrative divisions formed by the Vākātakas. Suchandra Ghosh has pointed out that the expressions like *Narmadā- pāra-kule*, *Narmmadā- dakṣiṇa-tate* and *Narmadā Uttare taṭe* found in the Bagh copper plate inscription show that they were influenced by the way the Vākātakas denoted the location of the donated lands.<sup>512</sup>

This period also witnessed the rise of another political power, which was a nomadic group called Ābhīras. In the *Mahābhārata*, they were called 'Gavali Rājas'.<sup>513</sup> However, the earliest reference to this tribal group is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmana*<sup>514</sup> where they were called mlechchas. Even in the *Mahābharata*, they were designated as mlechcha.

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<sup>511</sup> S.R. Goyal, *A History of the Vākātika – Gupta Relations*, Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Book World, 2006, pp. 19-33.

<sup>512</sup> Suchandra Ghosh, 'A Hoard of Copper Plates: Patronage and the Early Valkhā State' in *Sage Publications*, 2015, p. 5

<sup>513</sup> H.S.Thosar, 'The Ābhīras in Indian History,' in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.55, 1990, pp. 56-65.

<sup>514</sup> A. Weber (ed.), *Śatapatha Brāhmana*, 3.2.1. Varanasi: Chowkambha Sanskrit Series, 1964, pp.23-24.

*Bahabo mlechharājānah prithibāyam manudādhipa/ mrisānusasinah pāpā  
mrisābādaparayenāh// āndhrāh śakām pulindāscha yavanāscha naradhipah/ kamboja  
bahlikah sūrāstamabhīrā narottama.*<sup>515</sup>

They were considered mlechcha. Their aggressive nature of the Ābhiras was narrated in various stories of Mahābhārata. It is the *Bhismaparva* of *Mahābhārata*; it is mentioned that they attacked mighty Arjuna on his way back from Dwarka and humiliated many women of Panchanada. Again it is stated in the *Mahābhārata* that Nakula collected tribute from the powerful Gramaniya and Abhiras, who were from the area near the bank of river Saraswati. It is the *Matsyapurāṇa*, Ābhiras were described as an important political power that rose into prominence after the end of the Sātavāhana rule in Deccan.<sup>516</sup> Even in this text, they have been described as mlecchas, a tribal community, just like the Sabar, Kumaras, Kerealas, Cholas Sailushas, and Mushikas. Only in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*<sup>517</sup> they were not considered mlechcha. The most accepted historical explanation regarding the rise of bhiras can be gleaned from the epigraphic records of the Western Kshtrapas. The *Visnupurāṇa* states that they were servants of the Andhras, i.e. the Sātavāhanas.<sup>518</sup> In the *Periplus of the Erythean Sea*, the country of the Ābhīras was considered as next to Saurashtra.<sup>519</sup>

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<sup>515</sup> Haridas Siddhantabagish (ed.) *Mahābharatam (in Bengali), Banaparva, vol.9, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)*, 1384, Bangabda, pp. 1596-1597.

<sup>516</sup> Panchanan Tarkaratna (ed.), *Matsyapurāsa*, Kolkata: Bangabasi Electronic Press, 1316, Bangabda, p.181. Cited from H.S. Thosar, 'The Abhiras in Indian History', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.51, 1990, pp. 56-65.

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 56-65.

<sup>518</sup> Dev Kumar Jhanjh, 'Changing Social Contours of the Abhiras in Early India,' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.76, 2015, pp. 101-109.

<sup>519</sup> Lionel Casson, 'Sakas versus Andhras in the Periplus Maris Erythraei,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History*, vol.26, No.2, 1983, pp. 164-177. Lionel Casson (trans. with commentary) *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 77.

"To the Gulf of Barake succeeds that of Barygaza and the mainland of Ariake, a district which forms the frontier of the kingdom of Mombaros and of all India. The interior part of it which borders on Skythia is called Aberia, and its sea-board Saurashtrene."<sup>520</sup>

The famous Greek geographer Ptolemy also has written about the Ābhīradeśa. The locational details given by Ptolemy and Periplus helped ascertain the territorial limits of the Ābhīras. The Viṣṇupurāṇa also agrees with the description given in these two texts. According to Viṣṇupurāṇa, Ābhīradeśa was an extension of the Saurashtra and shared boundary with Arbuda, Malava, on Pariyar Mountain, i.e., the Aravalli range. These nomadic groups settled in various parts of Deccan.<sup>521</sup> From the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa we come to know that the settlement of the Abhiras grew up in areas like Konkan, Bhṛgukachchhas, and along the banks of river Vena. The Nasik Cave Inscription of Iśvaraṣeṇa states that the Ābhīras had firm control over Khandesh around the third century C.E. The presence of the Ābhīras in the geopolitical orbit of Deccan as administrators was reflected in the Gundā Inscription (181 CE), where they were mentioned as Senāpati. The name of the Senapāti who served the Kṣtrapa ruler Rudrasimha was Rudrabhuti Ābhīra.

( ...tra muhurt[e] Ābhīrena śenāpati – Bāpakasya putrena śenāpati – Rudrabh  
[u] tinā.<sup>522</sup>

His father was Bāpaka, who also served as Senāpati. The Ābhīras ruled as an independent ruler first to know from the Nasik Cave of Iṣvarasena. Iṣvarasena was called raja in this particular inscription ( *Sidamrājnah Mahāriputrasya Śivadatt – Ābhīraputrasya/ Ābhīrasy/*

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<sup>520</sup>. Lionel Casson (trans. with commentary) *The Periplus Maris Erythraei*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 77.

<sup>521</sup>E. Senart, 'Nasik Inscriptions' (No.15, Plate VII), *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.8. New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp.88-89.

<sup>522</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History, and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Bombay, 1981, pp.130-32.

*Eśvarasenayasa samvatsare navama....*) Meaning Íśvarasena became the king and gained control over his earlier overlords – śakas and Kṣatriyas. This particular inscription also indicates a change in the social contour of Ābhīras. As we can understand from the previous discussion, the Ābhīras were divided into several branches and settled in various parts of Deccan. The ones settled in Khandesh and Nasik area were relegated to the status of Kṣatriya. This inscription highlights the importance of Ābhīras as political power and shows that as rulers, they endorsed the mercantile community and helped them to grow.<sup>523</sup> Dev Kumar Jhanjh thinks that they gained the status of Kṣatriyas because of their martial skills, not because of their origin.<sup>524</sup> Interestingly, the Ābhīras were projected as gaṇa with a local power base in the Allahabad praśasti of Samudragupta.<sup>525</sup> These Ābhīras who paid annual tribute to Samudragupta were not the rulers of Khandesh but rather an offshoot of the Ābhīras of Khandesh.<sup>526</sup> Though they were operating from the area which was situated near the political base of the Vākātakas but we do not get any information regarding their association with the Vākātakas.

The Vākāṭaka regime had connection with the Nāgas. Pravaraṣeṇa II had matrimonial ties with the Nagas. He had contracted santana saṅdhi with them by setting up marital ties between his son and the Naga daughter. The Nāgas operated from two centers- Mathura and Padam – Pawaya (a small village in Gwalior). The Nāga rulers of the Padmavati house issued coins bearing the symbol of the king carrying śiva liṅga on the shoulder. However, the claim that Bhāraśivas and the Nāgas were same is still clouded in mystery. We find a

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<sup>523</sup> E. Senart, 'Nasik Inscriptions (No.15, PlateVIII)' *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.8, pp.88-89.

<sup>524</sup> Dev Kumar Jhanjh, '*Changing Social Contours of the Abhiras in Early India*,' pp. 101-105.

<sup>525</sup> J.F.Fleet, (ed.) *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Inscriptions of the Early Gupta and their Successors*, vol. iii, Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1960, pp. 1-8.

<sup>526</sup> Jhanjh, '*Changing Social Contours of the Abhiras in Early India*,' pp. 101-105.



name of a Bhāraśiva ruler -Bhavanāga, who used the suffix nāga to his name, ruled during the fourth century CE. Later on the Nagas were defeated by the powerful Gupta ruler and both of them entered into a matrimonial alliance where Chandragupta II was married to the Nāga queen Kuberanāga. He had a cordial relationship with Pravarasena I. Both played diplomatic roles in making Rudrasena I the ruler after Pravarasena I. Though the latter had four sons, one of them was Sarvasena, who founded a new branch. Rudrasena was called 'dauhitra' of Bhavanāga.<sup>527</sup> Traikūṭakas another short-lived yet impactful dynasty of Deccan who were contemporaries of the Vākāṭakas had control over the northern Konkan, south Gujarat and Nasik area. This dynasty derived their name from the sacred land of Trikuta. The Kanheri plates the rule of the Traikūṭakas refers to the glorious reign of the Traikūṭakas. Epigraphic records provide us information about this dynasty.

*(Traikūṭakana(m)pravarddha–mana-rājya-sa(m)vvatsara-sata.* –

*dvayepanchachatvari(m)sad-uttare.*<sup>528</sup>

According to B.D. Chattopadhyaya, the name Traikūṭaka indicates the association of this family with Trikūṭaka in the Aparanta. In the Surat Plates of Vyaghrasena, he had used the epithet 'Aparāntadideśapati. Suraj Pandit has proposed that the Traikūṭakas operated within the larger economic circle set up by the Guptas and the Vākāṭakas. They had an important role in the revival of trade on the west coast. It is known from the epigraphical records that they gave security to the mercantile community when they travelled across the urban centres under their control. The Traikūṭaka coins were found in the four major hoards (viz Daman in Central Province), Kazan (Pune, Maharashtra), Dahigaon (Buldhana district in

<sup>527</sup> S.R. Goyal, *A History of the Vākāṭaka – Gupta Relations*, Jodhpur: Kusumanjali Book World, 2006, pp. 19-33.

<sup>528</sup> Suraj Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas Coins, Inscriptions and Art*, New Delhi: Agamkala Prakashan, 2012, pp. 27-29.

Maharashtra). The availability of these coins in the Buldhana district, which was part of Vidarbha, indicates that though the long-distance trading activities diminished in this phase, internal trade relationships existed.<sup>529</sup> B.D. Chattopadhyaya has brought new research on epigraphs and coins of the Traikūṭakas. He has opined that the Traikūṭakas cast coins similar to the Western Kṣatrapas. They had figures of legends cast on their coins resembling the kṣatrapa types. He further adds that the term *paramvaisnav* was seen on the coins, which suggest that they belonged to Dahrasena and Vyaghrasena. He negated the assumption that the Kṣatrapa coins were no longer in circulation as the Guptas controlled Gujarat and Kathiawad peninsula. He rather pointed out that the circulation of the Traikūṭaka coins which mainly were made in silver, were in circulation in the coast of Konkan, Maratha country and Southern Ghats.<sup>530</sup>

There were cultural exchanges with the Vidarbha and the areas under the influence of Traikūṭakas. This has been claimed by Gopal Joge, Abhijit Dandekar, Anjay Dhanawade, Shrikant Ganvir and Hemant Dalavi in their extensive studies on the Rock cut caves at Katalgaon in the present Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra.<sup>531</sup> These scholars have chalked out certain basic features of the iconographic depiction and strongly advocated that certain commonalities existed between this cave temple and the Kevala Narasiṃha temple in Rāmtek. It is known from the Pardi<sup>532</sup> and Surat plates<sup>533</sup> that the rulers of the Traikūṭaka

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<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 157-159.

<sup>530</sup> B. D. Chattopadhyaya, *Coins and Currency System in South India*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Oriental Book Publishers, 1977, pp. 20-25.

<sup>531</sup> Gopal Joge, Abhijit Dandekar, Anjay Dhanawade, Shrikant Ganvir, and Hemant Dalavi, 'Early Brahmanical Rock Cut Caves at Katalgaon – Javade, District Ramagiri, Maharashtra, India,' *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Srilanka(N.S.)*, vol.62 Part 2, 2018, pp. 65-113.

<sup>532</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Pardi Plates of Dahrsena, the year 207', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. x, 1909-10, pp. 51-53.

<sup>533</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Surat Plates of Vyaghrasena the year 241', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xi, 1911-12, pp. 219-220

dynasty were worshippers of Viṣṇu and Dahrasena and used the title 'param Vaisnava.' Certain affinities were observed between the Katalgaon temples and the Narasiṃha temple of Rāmtek. Both these temples had a central deity with subsidiary deities. Narrative reliefs were also noticed in the case of these temples. The only sharp difference was the presence of cakra in the Katalgaon temple. Both the temples were constructed around the fifth century C.E. The popularity of the Narasiṃha form of Viṣṇu in Vidarbha and Konkan area unfurls a new dimension in the study of early Vaishnavism in Deccan.<sup>534</sup> It also opened new avenues in the research on the geographical extent and influence of the Vākāṭakas. The narrative themes found at Katalgaon Javade is similar to that of the reliefs found from the site Bhadravati in the district of Chandrapur. This suggests that there was a close cultural nexus between the Traikūṭakas and the Vākāṭakas.

### **Nature of Administration under the Vākāṭaka regime**

The two salient features of the administrative system that developed under the Vākāṭaka were the non departmental and personal character of the administrative structure. In this kind of structure there is hardly any kind of hierarchy and the ruler directly gives instructions to the concerned officer. We come to know about the administrative set up of Vidarbha under the Vākāṭakas only after Rudraśeṇa II came into power. It is in the Mandhal inscription of Rudraśeṇa II we come to know that the king gave instruction to a official whose name was Vibhisana.<sup>535</sup> He held the post of senāpati. The reign of Pravarasena II witnessed emergence of a broader frame of administration. Under his reign there were other officials whose name were sarvadhaksa (superintendent) senāpati (in charge of the army) rājuka (revenue officer) rājyadhikṛta (territorial administrator).<sup>536</sup> Most of the people who

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<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 65-113.

<sup>535</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.v, pp. xxxiv-xl.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv-xl.

held this high posts were from the extended royal family. We find reference of the term ‘kulaputra’ in several inscriptions. Herman Kulke opined that Vidarbha during the period from fourth to sixth century CE was under a patrimonial administration. This kind of administrative system was set up under the influence of the Guptas. He strengthened his argument by citing the example from the Poona copper plate of Prabhāvatīgupta who was the daughter of the famous Gupta ruler married to the Vākāṭaka family. From the Poona copper plate we learnt that she directly gave ājnāpayati (instructions) to the kuṭumbin (householder) brāhmaṇas and the mahāttaras (elders of the family). This direct involvement of the rulers while giving orders to the local level authority is also noticed in case of Pravarāṣeṇa II. His inscriptions end with the statement ‘ājnā svayam’ (which means the king himself) followed by the name of the writer (who was generally the senāpati).

It is in the Chammak plates of Pravarāṣeṇa II we get names of administrative units and names of several officials like Sarvadhyaṅga (civic superintendent) senāpati (commander in chief) rājuka ( in charge of revenue collection) and rājyadhikṛta( in charge of territorial administration) <sup>537</sup> From the copper plates issued by the Vākāṭaka rulers, we find that there were different administrative divisions. The following are some of the administrative divisions from the Vākāṭaka inscriptions

Rāstra: Sabhārāstra

Rājya (province): Arammi rājya, Bhojakaṭa rājya

Viśaya: Panchagarta Viśaya

Ahara (district): Supratisthahara

Bhoga (district): Bennakarpara bhoga, Hiranyapur Bhoga, Lohanāgara bhoga,

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<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv-xl.

Bhukti: Aśi-bhukti, Anarttapura Bhukti.<sup>538</sup>

Different administrative units were known for studying the inscriptions belonging to the Vākāṭaka rulers. They are discussed as follows-

### **Bhojakaṭa rājya**

It has been mentioned in the Chammak plates of the eighteenth regnal year of Pravarasena II. The donated place Charmanka on the bank of the river Madhu was situated in this rājya<sup>539</sup>. The donated place Charmanka is modern Chammak in Achalpur taluka of Amravati district. Bhojakata may be identical to the village named Bhatkuli, eight miles from Amravati. The river Madhunadi is present Chandrabhaga, and the division thus included portions of the Chandor and Amravati taluka of present Amravati district.

### **Arammi rājya**

The term Arammi rājya has been mentioned in the Dudia grant of the twenty-third regnal year and the Pandhurna plates of the twenty-ninth regnal year of Pravarasena II.<sup>540</sup> The first charter references the donation of land in Darbhamalaka in the Chandrapura Sangamika, and Karmakaragrama in the Hiraṇyapurabhoga in Arammi rājya has been mentioned. The order is issued to the officers in Arammi rājya. According to the second grant, land from Lekhapallika and Sangamika in the Arammi rājya was donated. Besides these, it is the

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<sup>538</sup> R.N. Misra, 'Village Life and Settlements in the Light of Vākāṭaka Inscription', B.M. Pande and B.D. Chattopadhyaya, (eds.), *Archaeology and History, Essays in Memory of Shri A. Ghosh, vol. ii*, 1987, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, pp. 643-647.

<sup>539</sup> V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), 'Chammak Plates of Pravarasena II', *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, vol. v, Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas*, Ootachamund: Government Epigraphist for India, 1963, pp.22-27.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.* Dudia Plates of Pravarasena II, pp.43-48.

Mahurjhari grant of the seventeenth regnal year of Prithvisena II that references this rājya.<sup>541</sup>

From the Mahurjhari plates, we know that a donated place, Jamalakheta was situated in this rājya. It was east of Nandipuraka, west of Somadari, North of Jalakutkubhaka, and south of Ubbhilaka. All these places have been located in the Savner taluka of Nagpur district.<sup>542</sup>

### **Varuchcha rājya**

The third rājya mentioned in the Vakataka records is Varuchcha rājya. It has been referred to in the Padhurna plates of the twenty-ninth regnal year of PravarasenaII. A village Dhuvavataka from which the land was donated, was situated in this rājya. Dhuvavataka was to the west of Brahmanavataka, to the North of the road leading to Ajakarna, to the east of Badarigrama, and the south of Darbhpatha. Varuchchha, the chief place of this rājya, has been identified with Vadegaon, four miles east of Pandhurna in Chhindwada district.<sup>543</sup>

### **Rāṣṭra**

It is another division mentioned in the Vākāṭaka records. There is only one division with this suffix. Pakkana Raṣṭra is referred to in the Belora plates of the eleventh regnal year of PravarasenaII. The charter refers to the donation of the place named Dirghadraha, situated in the Pakkana rāṣṭra.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv-xxxvi.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.* pp. xxxiv-xxxvi.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.* Pandhurna Plates of Pravarasena II, pp. 63-69.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.* Belora Plates (Set A and Set B) of Pravarasena II, pp. 16-18.

### **Nandikada**

The Basim plates of the thirty-seventh regnal year of Vindhyaśakti II constitute the first record mentioning this division. In this particular plate, the donation of the village Akasapadda in the Uttaramārga of Nandikada has been recorded. Except for the Uttarmārga lying between this division's headquarters and the Vākāṭaka capital Vatsagulma, no other information about it is available from our records.<sup>545</sup>

### **Benna kaṭa**

This division is mentioned in Tirodi plates of twenty-third regnal year of Pravarasena II. A village named Benin in the Gondia taluka of Bhandara district appears to have been this division's headquarters.<sup>546</sup>

### **Krishnaleśali kaṭaka**

This unit has been mentioned in the Pauni plates of thirty-second regnal year of Pravarasena II. According to the charter, the donated place called Achalapura was situated in the Krishnaleśali kataka. Scholars have identified this Achalapura with the modern town of Achalpur, a taluka place in the Amrāvartī district. The name Krishnaleśali kataka suggests that the region was on the bank of the river Krishna.<sup>547</sup>

### **Nangarakaṭaka**

The India office plates of Devasena record the donation of a place probably named Yappajja, situated in Nangarakaṭa.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.* Basim Plates of Vindhyaśakti II, pp. 93-94.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.* Tirodi plates of Pravarasena II, pp. 48-49.

<sup>547</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 48-49.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.* India Office Plate of Devasena, pp.101.

Introduction of this political culture by the Vākāṭakas brought new changes in the culture and spatial identity of Vidarbha. As Vidarbha functioned as the main seat of power of the Vākāṭakas, its physical space also underwent significant changes. Earlier it was confined to the river valley area. The policy followed by the rulers resulted in the extension of the contour of Vidarbha. The recipients of the land grants were mainly the brāhmanas, who spread their ideology in the peripheral areas often occupied by aboriginal ones. We find names of various settlements in several inscriptions of Pravaraṣeṇa II. The new settlements named as Brahmapūraka<sup>549</sup> and Brahmanavātaka<sup>550</sup> suggest that they were meant for the brāhmanas whereas the settlement named Kollapuraka<sup>551</sup> suggests that they were inhabited by the tribal people (probably the Kol tribe). The inhabitants of the peripheral areas were also accepted within the administrative structure. Some of them were also brahmanized and relegated to the status of a priest. It is from the Indore copper plate we come to know about a person with a very significant name. He was called Goṇarya. It is presumed that he was the chief of the Gond tribe who as an effect of brahmanization promoted to the post of the priest of that tribal group.<sup>552</sup>

### **Socio- Economic Conditions under the Vākāṭakas**

According to V.V. Mirashi, the Vākāṭaka rulers were of brāhmaṇa origin, belonging to the Viṣṇuvridhha gotra. However, we find that the rulers married to different varṇas. It was Rudrasena II who married the vaiśya princess Prabhavatigupta. The marriage did not make her inferior rather; she was designated as agramashi (crowned queen) of the Vākāṭaka king.

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<sup>549</sup> Kumar Amarendra Singh, 'Some Aspects of Agrarian under the Vākāṭakas' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.46*, 1985, pp. 159-169.

<sup>550</sup> Shrimali, 'Patterns of Settlements under the Vākāṭakas', 1983, pp. 101-112.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>552</sup> Bakker, 'Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha' pp. 282-83.



<sup>553</sup>It was her son who ascended the throne. During this time, the brāhmanas enjoyed the highest status and the rulers. It is from the inscriptions that we know about a special category of Brahmanas who were interested in leading a life of celibacy. They were called naisthika brahmachāriṇs. In the Jamb plate, we get mention of a brahmana called Kaluttaka who belonged to this category. There were hierarchies within the Brāhmaṇas. A special category of Brahmanas who were mainly the officiating priests were in complete charge of the sacrifices and rites. One such brahmana was ācharya Chanalasvāmin whose name has been mentioned in the Poonā plates of Prabhāvātīgupta. He was the devotee of Bhagavad – bhakta (a devotee of Viṣṇu) and stayed at Ramgiri. He was the officiating priest of the temple of Ramachandra and the main recipient of the village grant called Danguna. We also get names Brahmanas who were given administrative posts. It is in the Riddhapur plates of Prabhavātīgupta that we get the name Dévanandasvāmin who was given the post of Dūtaka. A typical feature of the Brāhmaṇas of Vidarbha has been gleaned from the epigraphic records. Their names usually ended in sarman, acharyas, or Svāmin. None of the recipients of the grants belonged to Rigvédins and Sāmavedins. The majority of the brāhmanas belonged to the Taittiriya sākha.<sup>554</sup>

Next to the brāhmanas were the Kṣatriyas, who enjoyed high rank in the administrative system. We come across names like Chamidāsa, Namidāsa, Bāppadéva, Kātyayāna, and Mādhappa who were appointed as Śenāpati. The scribes also belong to the Kṣatriya caste, as evident from another epigraphical record. In the Riddhapur plates it is stated that the scribe Prabhusiṃha belongs to the Kṣatriya caste. The mercantile community was the wealthiest could be furnished from the Indore plates. This plate mentions a merchant (vāṅjika) named Chandra, who purchased half of a village. The names of the sculptors,

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<sup>553</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.), *Corpus*, vol.v, pp. xlv-llii.

<sup>554</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.v, Riddhapur plates of Prabhavātīgupta, pp. 33-38.

painters, and artisans were not mentioned in any epigraphic records.<sup>555</sup> The existence of various social groups is confirmed from the names of villages mentioned in the records. For instance, Suvaṇṇagrāma, Charmmānka, Lekhapallikā, Karmmakāra and Śailapura suggests that they were inhabited by goldsmiths, shell cutters or shell- dealers, leather workers, scribes, bronze- smiths, iron smiths, stone cutters and brick makers respectively.

The lifestyle of the people of Vidarbha is known from the inscriptions of Ajanta XVII, XIX, XVI and also from the works of Kalidāsa. Kalidāsa, in his *Meghdūta* gives descriptions of the palatial buildings of Kundinapura.<sup>556</sup> It has been claimed by Mirashi that unlike other works of Kālidāsa, *Meghdūta* was composed in Vidarbha. This particular work along with *Setubandha* of Pravarasena throw light on the social conditions of this period. The paintings at Ajanta depicted a certain group of people with different physical attributes. According to Mirashi, they were aboriginal people who belonged to the Naga race. They were painted as people with flat noses, short in height with hoods of serpents over their head. The cave paintings of XVI, XVII, and XIX give us a clear idea of the costumes and jewellery worn by the people of Vidarbha. The majority of them used to wear short dresses (antariyaka) with pleats or nivi. Men wore uttariya (upper garment) round the shoulder. The fresco paintings at Ajanta depict women with different hairstyles and beautiful pieces of jewellery. Kālidāsa writes how women wearing griddles called maṇimékhalās used to attract domestic swans. From the pictures of kings and princes who gathered to hear the sermon of Buddha, we can say that rich men also preferred wearing jewellery.<sup>557</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> *Ibid. Corpus, vol.v, pp. xlv- vii.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

The flourishing economic conditions of the earlier period discontinued. However it would be wrong to assume that there was no trading activities. It is in the copper plate inscription we get names of a trader who purchased large tracts of land. But the elaborate land grant system practiced by the Vākāṭaka rulers suggests that agriculture was the main economic pursuit. As Monica L. Smith has stated that boundaries of a polity can be defined by number of different factors and they change from time to time. The rulers often showed keen interest in expanding their territorial jurisdiction in order to gain access over the 'unutilised' land resources.<sup>558</sup> This was actually what Vidarbha experienced in this particular phase. The rulers wanted agrarian expansion over the areas which had remained uncultivated over the years and were mainly occupied by tribal groups. It was period which witnessed emergence of rural and semi rural centres.<sup>559</sup> The urban centres which flourished in the Sātavāhana times no longer existed.

Another striking feature of the economy of this period was the circulation of coins of different other rulers. It has been stated by E. J. Rapson that the silver coins of the Western Kṣtrapas were in circulation throughout Vidarbha during this period.<sup>560</sup> The Visnukundin types of coins were also unearthed from the surface of the site of Paunar.<sup>561</sup> Mangalam viewed that these coins were quite sharper and its alloy was fully made up of bronze. Most of these coins carry the symbol of bull on its obverse side.<sup>562</sup> The discovery of many coins

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<sup>558</sup> Monica L Smith, 'Territories, Corridors, and Networks: A Biological Model for the pre modern State', Los Angeles: *Willey Periodicals*, vol.12 No.4, pp. 32-33.

<sup>559</sup> S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, 'Report of Paunar Excavation', 1967, pp. 1-137.

<sup>560</sup> E.J. Rapson, *Catalogue of the Coins of the Andhra Dynasty, the Western Kshtrapas, the Traikutaka Dynasty and the 'Bodhi' Dynasty*, New Delhi, 1975, p.clviii and V.V. Mirashi, 'Three More Kshtrapa coins from Vidarbha', *Journal of Numismatic Society of India*, 33, 1971, pp. 117-119.

<sup>561</sup> S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, 'Report of Paunar Excavation', 1967, pp. 1-137.

<sup>562</sup> S.J. Mangalam, 'New Varieties of Visnukundin type coins from Maharashtra', A.V. Narasimha Murty (ed.), *Studies in South Indian coins*, vol.v, Madras: New Era Publications, 1995, pp. 63-67.

at Washim excavations in 1992-93 made it clear that the Vākāṭakas also had their coinage.<sup>563</sup> The coins with the legend Vṛddhi and those with a seated bull on the obverse found in the Washim excavation were profusely used in the Vākāṭaka copper plates. These coins were found in the river bed with the names of rulers spelled. The first read is *Śri Mahārāja Prithvī*. The second records Narendra and the third spell *Pravara (se) Nasya r jya?* Thus these coins bring to light the names of three different rulers of the main branch.<sup>564</sup> The coins fit very well in metrology and style with Gupta copper coins and style with Gupta copper coins and those of the Nāgas. The Gupta coins are thin and broad so are the Vākāṭaka coins. Kulkarni has also successfully established that the copper currency of the Vākāṭaka was derived from their contemporaries- the Nāgas, and the Guptas.<sup>565</sup> That the Vākāṭaka rulers issued coins in large quantity is further attested from the Indore copper plate inscription of the 23<sup>rd</sup> year wherein the purchase of half a village by a merchant called Chandra has been mentioned.<sup>566</sup> The Rāmtek stone slab refers to the purchase of a piece of land by Prabhavati Gupta's son. This means that large land transactions were made in the Vākāṭaka kingdom which suggests that they had their own coins.<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Dr. Rakesh Tiwari (ed.) *IAR 2013-14*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 2016, pp. 76-77.

<sup>564</sup> A.M. Shastri, 'Unique Coin of Vākāṭaka Prithvisena (II)?' *Indian Society Newsletter*, No.4, Nagpur, 1990, p. 2.

<sup>565</sup> P.S. Kulkarni, 'Coins of Vākāṭakas' in *Numismatic Digest*, 25-26, 2003, pp. 65-68.

<sup>566</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.), 'Indore copper plate inscription' *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Inscriptions of the Vakatakas*, vol. v, p. 38.

<sup>567</sup> S.R. Goyal *A History of the Vākāṭaka – Gupta Relations*, pp. 77-95.

**Table 4.1: Coins issued by the Vākāṭaka rulers with their details**

Issuer	Provenance	Weight		Legends		Source
Pravarasena II	Yavatmal	Cp	440mg 11mm	Brahmi legend-Pravara (se) / nasya ra (jya)	Humped bull seated to the right	Kulkarni 2003: 69-70.
Prithvisena	Yavatmal	Cp	632mg 9mm	Brahmi legend- Sri ma ] haraja-Prithvi	In the center, a device consisting of a circle with a smaller circle attached to its left portion, the whole within a beaded circle, a part of which is visible.	Shastri 1997: 138
Narendrasena	”	Cp	360mg 1 cm	Legend can be read as rendra		Ibid:139
”		”	275mg 8x6mm	Bold box-headed Brahmi letter na within a partially accommodate border of dots.	Partially accommodated conch shell	Ibid:139
”		”	249mg 10mm	Two bold letters in the	Boldly executed svastika	Ibid: 140

				box headed Brahmi- Jaya	within a beaded border	
”	Yavatmal	”	363mg 10mm	Box-headed Brahmi letters first are Ya second looks like ra	Boldly executed svastika within a beaded border. And a dot in each arm of the Svastika.	Ibid. 40.
Prithvisena	Yavatmal	”	210mg 9x8m	Legend Vriddhi in the box headed Brahmi within circular beaded border	In the center, a device consisting of a circle with a smaller circle attached to its left portion, the whole within a beaded circle	Ibid:140
-----		”	6.80g 23mm	Boldly inscribed legend- Vriddhi in the center	A vividly depicted figure of a running lion to the right with a gaping mouth and curled tail	Ibid:140- 41
-----	-----		8.10g 27mm	As above	Humped bull walking to the right	Ibid: 140-41.

-----	Paunar		440mg 9x10 mm	Bold Brahmi characters- ya vri ddhi	Humped bull seated to the right	Kulkarni 2003:71.
-----	Paunar		620mg 9x10mm	Humped bull seated to the left within a beaded border	Diagram of lazy heart– like circle drawn with a knot at the top within a beaded border.	Ibid: 72
-----	Vidisha		1.770mg 15x16mm	Humped bull seated to the right	Diagram of a lazy heart like a circle drawn with a knot at the top within a beaded border.	Ibid: 73
-----	-----		790gm 11x12mm			Ibid: 74
-----	-----		420gm 9x10mm	Srivastava symbol was drawn by lines, surrounded by a dotted border.	Diagram of a lazy heart-like circle drawn with a knot at the top within a beaded border	Ibid: 74- 75.

From the above discussion it is clear that Vidarbha during this period saw the emergence of a new political culture. It was during this time that Vidarbha experienced significant internal developments. The physical space of Vidarbha was divided into several administrative units. The political influence of the rulers was no longer confined to the river

valley area and it extended to the outlying areas. From the time of Pravarāṣeṇa II, the process of donating lands increased. He set up a new capital at Pravara-pura; thus, there was a shift in the geopolitical center of the Vākāṭaka state from Nandivaradhana (located in the north-east Vidarbha) to the center of Vidarbha. All seventeen land grant charters clearly reveal the political and territorial integration and legitimation process in creating a solid state under the Vākāṭakas.<sup>568</sup> This shift indicates a greater degree of territorial integration by Pravarāṣeṇa II over a period of time. He made extensive land grants (including some agrahāra grants) in Vidarbha to many brāhmanas.<sup>569</sup> Hans Bakker, in his study of the religious dimension of the Vākāṭaka political power, observes that the Vākāṭaka rulers succeeded in bringing central' unification of patchwork of supposedly more or less autonomous agrarian units of the Waingangā plain and tribal societies of the wastelands'.<sup>570</sup>

Scholars like Hermann Kulke and B.P.Sahu has understood the political developments of Vidarbha and emergence of the statehood in the light of integrative paradigm. This model provokes the historian to shift their gaze from the centre to the periphery.<sup>571</sup> It is of no doubt that during this period there were new developments in the peripheral areas and the territorial jurisdiction of the rulers extended beyond the river valleys. The brahmanas served as agents who spread their ideology to these areas which were earlier 'autonomous'

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<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13-36.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 13-36.

<sup>570</sup> Hans Bakker, 'Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha' in Bhairabhi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke, *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-Modern India*, pp. 278-299

<sup>571</sup> Hermann Kulke, 'The Integrative Model of State Formation in Early Medieval India: Some Historiographic Remarks', B.P.Sahu and Hermann Kulke (ed.) *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*, Delhi: Manohar, 2015, pp. 55-80.



in nature and were inhabited by aboriginal people. These people were brought under the folds of the brahmanical faith and some of them also functioned as local level officials.<sup>572</sup>

The Vākāṭaka rulers borrowed various elements related to the administrative functions from their contemporary Gupta rulers of Northern India. Formal land grant system was not a new economic system, it was prevalent both in the Mauryan and in the Sātavāhana epoch, but it became a major trend in the Gupta -Vākāṭaka age. This process led to the emergence of local notables or influential people who were accommodated within the administrative structure of the Vākāṭaka. The influences from Northern India were visible in the pre - Vākāṭaka era in Vidarbha, but it even continued in this period. The Guptas and the Vākāṭakas had similarities in their respective political systems, and both of them adopted a model of kingship that was stated in Arthaśāstra.<sup>573</sup> In the period between the fourth to sixth century C.E., the Vidarbha included areas that were not yet used for cultivation and were not under the influence of the brahmanical faith. B.P.Sahu has shown that the Vākāṭaka kings mainly followed the guidelines as prescribed by Kauṭilya in his Arthaśāstra.<sup>574</sup> It has been stated in the Arthaśāstra that to be a righteous ruler, he must give recognition to the learned men (brāhmaṇa) and perform certain philanthropic works which would benefit the helpless ones (dharmavyavahāra). Further, he should uproot the evil ones, specifically the mlechha. It is the duty of the king to place men from his country also the ones who were in disfavor with his enemies. A detailed examination of the Vākāṭaka inscriptions suggests the kings, attempted to carry out these directives. Both the branches strengthened their power through the spread of Brahmanical religion by donating to the brāhmaṇas. In return,

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<sup>572</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Space, History and Cultural Process; Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub regional 'Identity'', Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (eds.) *Centres Out There? Facets of Sub regional Identities in Orissa*, Delhi: Manohar, 2011, p. 23.

<sup>573</sup> Bakker, 'Throne and Temple,' pp.1-14.

<sup>574</sup> Bakker, 'Throne and Temple', pp. 277-300.

the brāhmana beneficiaries played a pivotal role in developing the economic sector, especially the agrarian base, and also brought changes in the social framework by bringing people under the folds of Brahmanical tradition. According to B.P.Sahu, the legitimation of the political power was not something that happened mechanically, nor was any uniform strategy with general applicability cutting across time, spaces and culture possible.<sup>575</sup> The recipients of the land grants by the Vākāṭaka kings were the main agents for bringing changes in the ritual, political and cultural landscapes of Vidarbha.<sup>576</sup>

### **Changes in the Spatial Identity of Vidarbha**

So far, we have studied the changes that Vidarbha witnessed due to the arrival of a new political culture that the Vākāṭaka regime established. This period also witnessed major changes in the spatial identity of Vidarbha. There was significant change in the way several new sites were distributed. The territorial limit of Vidarbha did not remain confine to the river valley. The urban centres of the preceding period no longer existed. This period witnessed the rise of new sites which were rural and semi rural in nature. The locations of the sites were mainly away from the river valley. From the archaeological investigation it becomes clear that new sites that came up were not situated in the river valley, making a major change in the contour of Vidarbha. They were basically single cultural sites. However it is be noted that the main centre from where the rulers exercised their power was the core river valley area. Hans Bakker in this connection identified the nature of the Vākāṭaka regime in Vidarbha. According to him the Vākāṭaka regime was basically a federation of collateral branches. Even if we look at the epigraphic records, we find that

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<sup>575</sup> Bhairabi Prasad Sahu, 'From Regional Histories to Histories of the Regions and Beyond', *Social Scientist*, vol.43, No.3/4 (March – April), 2015, pp. 33-47.

<sup>576</sup>V.V. Mirashi, (ed.) *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol.v, pp. 222-27.

the donated villages were located in the outlying areas.<sup>577</sup> The location of the donated villages has been identified. It has been found that they were located in the hilly terrains of Satpura and Maikhal range. This indicates that the elaborate process of land grant system practiced by the rulers brought major change in the spatial identity of Vidarbha, extending its contour to the hilly tracts. What we understood by Vidarbha in terms of its spatial identity in the preceding eras underwent a major change under the Vākāṭaka regime. This change in turn brought new developments in its cultural sphere. The recipients of these donations were mainly brāhmaṇas who served as agents for spreading the brahmanical culture in these peripheral areas. We get one striking example in the Chammak plate where we find name of a person - Koṇḍararāja and his father's name was Narayaṇrāja.<sup>578</sup> They made donations to brāhmaṇas. They actually belonged to the Gond tribe and probably gained some sort of official posts in the local level administration.

Some of the names of settlements mentioned in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions are stated below-

1. Khetaka: Kinihikhetaka, Asvatthakhetaka, Varadakhetaka
2. Vāṭaka: Bonthikavāṭaka, Dhuvavāṭaka, Anjanavāṭaka, Brahman-vāṭaka, Pavarajjavāṭaka, Vishakharya-vāṭaka, Vijayavalli-vāṭaka
3. Palli: Chinchpalli, Vijayapalli, Lekhapallika, Manapallika
4. Grama: Sirisagrāma, Niligrāma, Griddhagrama, Mandukigrāma, Badarigrāma, Karmakara-grāma
5. Pura: Kolipura, Candrapura, Hiranoyapura, Brahmapuraka, Gepura, Yasapura, Sudhapaura, Pravarapura, Padmapura
6. Nagara: Asvatthanagara, Lohanagara
7. Gulma: Vatsagulma
8. Vardhana: Nandivardhana

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<sup>577</sup> Hans Bakker, 'Throne and Temple', pp. 284-285.

<sup>578</sup> V.V. Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus*, vol.5, pp. 22-27.

**Table 4.2: List of Inscriptions and their location**

Inscriptions	Objects of Donations	Location in Vidarbha
1. Deotak stone inscription of Rudrasena II	Construction of dharma-sthana (temple) at Chikkamburi.	Chikmara in Wardha region in Central Vidarbha
2. Poona Plates of Prabhavati Gupta (418 CE)	Danguna in Supratisthana ahara	Hingaghat in Wardha in Central Vidarbha
3. Inscriptions of Pravarasena II Jamb plates.	Kothuraka in Supratistha – ahara	Mangeon on the right bank of river Wunna in South- Central Vidarbha
4. Belora Plates ‘A’(perhaps 431 CE)	Mahalla- Lata in Asi bhuktī , Sailapura marga	Ladki in Morsi , Amravati District in Western Vidarbha
5. Belora plates ‘B’	Mahallama – Lata and Dirghadraha in Asi bhukti , Sailapura marga and Pakkana rastra	West central Vidarbha
6. Mandhal copper plate inscription	Myasagrama in Aparapatta	Mandhal in the East
7. Dudia copper plate	25 nivartana of land, Darbhamalaks in Chandrapura Sangamika and 60 nivartana of land in Karmmaka in the Hiranyapura bhoga	The village is not identified
8. Ridhpur plate of Prabhavatigupta	Asrathanagara in Kosikagrama	Pattan in Northern Vidarbha
9. Pauni plates (450-45 CE)	50 nivartans of land in exchange for some other land in Ladkapalli	Ladhkal in Yavatmal district in North – Western Vidarbha

**Table 4.3: Showing different categories of sites of the Vākāṭaka period**

Serial Number	Urban	Semi- Urban	Rural
1.	Mansar	Arambha	Lohadongri
2.	Nagardhana	Arni	Mulchera
3.	Paunar	Gaurala	Nagara
4.	Pauni	Hamalpuri	Vivekanandapur
5.	Theresa	Kahali-Brahmapuri	
6.	Wasim	Mahurjhari	
7.		Mandal	
8.		Ramtek	

### **Emergence of a Ritual landscape**

The political policy of the rulers brought new developments in the cultural milieu of Vidarbha. The change in the spatial identity of Vidarbha brought new cultural elements into Vidarbha. The contour of Vidarbha expanded and there was also the emergence of a ritual landscape where Buddhism and Brahmanism along few local deities co-existed. Various studies have been conducted on the temple complex of Rāmtek. Jamkhedkar has studied the style of architecture and focused on the chronological developments of the temples. The architectural styles and the use of materials for the construction of the temple displayed strong regional identity. This temple marked the beginning of free- standing architecture. The introduction of this style of architecture is considered to be an opposition to the rock –cut architecture. Even in the use of the materials we find that they stood apart from the other areas. Instead of following the general trend of using basalt for constructing the pillars the temple of Rāmtek was built by locally available red sandstone. Rāmtek is situated not in the core area of Vidarbha i.e. the river valley, but in the outlying area near the Satpura –Maikhal range. It has been claimed that the place Ramgiri mentioned by

Kālidāśa is the present Rāmtek. The Bhogarama temple, Trivikrama temple, old temples of Varāha and Narasiṃha constituted the temple complex of Rāmtek. According to Bakker, the temple of Varāha was built around fifth century. The large basalt of Varāha placed within the temple also displayed unique regional trait. It is in the Udaigiri cave we find a large figure of Varāha which is anthropomorphic in nature whereas the one in Ramtek was theomorphic in nature. The Nāga king is placed at his feet purposefully to indicate that Nāgas were subordinate to the powerful Guptas. On the other hand in case of Rāmtek we find that Varāha rests on a serpent. Since Prabhavatigupta had matrilineal ties with the Nāgas we find the serpent deity to gain prominence within this temple complex.<sup>579</sup>

The temple complex of Rāmtek is an outstanding example of cultural development of Vidarbha in this period. Archaeologists view monuments and temple buildings as an indication of social complexity and an attempt on the part of the rulers to gain control over the larger population and exercise their power.<sup>580</sup> The temple-building activities sponsored by the Vākāṭaka rulers were commemorative symbols of power exercised upon the newly administered area inhabited by tribal people. Rāmtek and Mansar emerged as state-sponsored temples. That the local tribal culture was accepted within the mainstream Brahmanical order is evident from the presence of the temple of Bhogarama. The temple represents the serpent deity of Bhogarama (where bhoga means hood). The serpent was accepted within the folds of the Brahmanical faith. But the main temple

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<sup>579</sup> Hans Bakker, 'Trivikrama: Word and Statue: A New Interpretation of Ramgiri Evidence' in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol.63, No.3, 2010, pp.241-247. Also see Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Ramtek Inscription II : The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala Narasimha temple, pp.46-74.

<sup>580</sup> Hans Bakker, 'Trivikrama: Word and Statue: A New Interpretation of Ramgiri Evidence' in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol.63, No.3, 2010, pp. 241-247. Also see Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Ramtek Inscription II', pp.46-74.

complex of Rāmtek has been identified as Ramagiristhāna in the Rāmtek inscription. It was associated with the Viṣṇu deity.<sup>581</sup>

The site of Rāmtek developed near the two important political centers of Vidarbha – Nandivardhana, identified as Nagardhan and Pravarapura, identified as Mansar. This complex of sites surrounding Rāmtek was situated not in the Wardha – Waingangā river valley, which was considered the main habitational area of Vidarbha but near the hilly tracts of the Satpura. Both of these centers were purely habitational sites having palace complexes. The Pune copper-plates of Prabhavati Gupta record the name-Nandivardhana<sup>582</sup> Moreover, most of the other inscriptions of Pravarasena II bearing evidence of land grants were issued from Nandivardhana. However, there is no doubt that the site of Rāmtek, noted for its religious activities, attained prominence mainly because it was surrounded by purely habitational sites. Scholars have claimed that Pravarasena II, ruler of the Eastern branch of the Vākāṭaka, shifted his capital from Nandivardhana to Pravarapura (Mansar) which gave an added factor for its prominence.

Even the Kevala – Narasiṃha temple (see fig: 4.5 and 4.8) on the Rāmtek hill holds immense significance. This temple is noted for its inscription (See Fig 4.4). Significantly, the inscription records that the temple was constructed in the memory of Prabhavati Gupta. The temple was dedicated to Viṣṇu deity. According to this inscription, it was constructed in the second quarter of the fifth century CE, probably by a daughter of Prabhavati Gupta whose name was Atibavati. This inscription refers to a village, Kadalivataka, and lands

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<sup>581</sup> Lacey Harriet Ruth, 'Rāmtek and its landscape: An archaeological approach to the study of the Eastern Vākāṭaka kingdom in Central India', Doctoral thesis, Durham University, 2017, pp.88-89.

<sup>582</sup> V.V. Mirashi(ed.), 'Poona copper plate inscription of Prabhavatigupta', *Corpus vol.v*, p.5

were donated for the maintenance of the temple.<sup>583</sup> Within the temple complex of Rāmtek, there was co-existence of high-order Brahmanical faith along with the local cults.<sup>584</sup> Rāmtek not only displayed religious plurality but also gained recognition for being the centre of unique Vākāṭaka culture. This particular aspect of Rāmtek is known from the style of the Narasiṃha temple and the deity itself. The image of Narasiṃha showed uniqueness in its features, independent of the Gupta influence. This indicates that between the fourth to sixth centuries CE. Rāmtek gained recognition as a site with distinctive cultural traits of the Vākāṭakas. This in turn gave a regional identity to Vidarbha. The Vākāṭaka rulers gave patronage to both Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. The Narasiṃha and Varāha sculptures at Rāmtek and the numerous liṅga shrines associated with the śaiva cult at Mansar are important evidences in support of this claim. Sculptural evidences from the site of Mandal, Mansar, and Hamlapuri reveal that the Pāśupata cult was also popular during this time. The Mandal inscription refers to one of the three Brahmanical temples at the site being dedicated to Mondasvāmin (identified with Viṣṇu), whereas Vaiṣṇava sculptures were found at the site of Paunar.<sup>585</sup> A detailed excavation report from the site of Mandal reveals both Vaiṣṇava and Saiva sculptures. Such findings highlight the cordial co-existence of the Bhagavata and Māheśvaras. Though Rāmtek developed later than Mandhal, but it became a state-sponsored sanctuary. It was dedicated to the avatars of Viṣṇu, whereas the cult of Rāma gained prominence due to the influence of Prabhāvatīgupta.

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<sup>583</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Vakataka Inscription in the Kevala Narasimha Temple', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London: Cambridge University Press on behalf of SOAS, pp. 46-74. Hans Bakker, 'The Ramtek Inscriptions', pp. 467-496.

<sup>584</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala Narasimha Temple', pp.46-74

<sup>585</sup> S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, Report of Paunar Excavation (1967) in *Nagpur University Journal (Humanities)*, vol. xviii, No.3, Nagpur: Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, pp. 102-103.



The Rudra – Narasiṃha temple (see fig: 4.6) was constructed in memory of Rudrasena. It resembles fire pits. The construction of this temple indicates that Bhagavata faith gained prominence in Vidarbha. The deity was depicted in a very uncommon manner- Mahārājālīlasana (royal posture) and a calm look is presented instead of the violent gesture where Varaha is seen killing Hiraṇyakasipu. Presently only pillars holding the dilapidated mandapa of the Viṣṇu Trivikrama temple have been found. It is believed that the Kevala Narasiṃha inscription was initially placed inside the temple. The affiliation towards Vaiṣṇavism among the Vākātaka rulers is considered a Gupta influence, but there was also the rise of local Vaiṣṇava groups in Vidarbha.

The Vākātaka rulers also gave their allegiance and patronage to the savaites, who were eager to gain royal patronage. Period III of Mansar has been assigned to the Vākātakas. The archaeologist has stated that the Vākātakas occupied an abandoned palace built in the Sātavāhana epoch, and the only change they brought was the enlargement of the adīsthana and addition of four bastions-like square projections. Unlike Rāmtek, where Vaiṣṇavism flourished along with the worship of local cults, Mansar yielded temple structures and sculptures belonging to the Saivite cult. Head of an ascetic (believed to be of Shiva) with a series of small linga shrines have been recovered from Mansar. Within the complex of Rāmtek- Mansar- Nagardhana, the proliferation of a diverse religious trend was noticed during this period. As a religious site, Rāmtek was supported by these two sites having immense political significance. A symbiotic relationship had developed between the temple complex of Rāmtek and these two habitational sites with immense political importance.

**Table 4.4- Layout of Mansar (See Fig 4.2 and 4.3)**

Site Name	Area	Description
MNS I		Flat areas are mainly structures made up of brick.
MNS II	Monastery	The Palace site identified as Pravarapura, along with the state sanctuary
MNS III	Hidimba Tekdi	Huge Temple of Mahadeva: Pravarsvara
MNS IV		Habitational is small in size.
MNS V and VI		linga temple was found

A sculpture of a local deity was found on the site of Mansar (M71), demonstrating an early presence of folk religious trends along with Brahmanism.<sup>586</sup> Thus multi-religious trend operated during this period in Vidarbha. Hawkes on his study on the Rāmték – Mansar – Nagardhana refused to accept it as an urban conglomeration. He could not find any archaeological findings related to urbanism and theorized that the local economy and polity functioned to a relatively lower degree.<sup>587</sup> Few important rural and semi-urban sites came up in the area near Rāmték –Mansar, which was identified as the hinterland.

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<sup>586</sup> Mansar, pp. 127-131.

<sup>587</sup> Jason Hawkes, 'One size does not fit all: Landscapes of Religious Change in Vindhya Pradesh', *South Asian Studies* 30 (1), pp. 1-15.

**Table 4.5: Rural and Semi-urban sites from the Rāmtek-Mansar area**

Site	Present Location	Agency	Artifacts	Sources
Kunwara Bhimsen	1.5km from Mansar	ASI		
Pandharbodi	15km from Nagardhana, towards the hill tracts.	ASI	Village where three caves were found containing images of Vishnu.	Sali, 1998.
Save		”	Narasimha images, Kṣhtrapa coins, and structural stone inscriptions.	Sali, 1998.
Summer	Close to the site Mansar	ASI	Few structural remains	Sali.
Tilorakhedi	12km from Mansar	Nagpur University.	Habitational site	Sali

The site of Mansar exhibited complexities in the architectural features and underwent several constructional changes at different phases of history. The layout of the sites indicates a long history of human occupation from Pre- Mauryan times to the Post-Vākāṭaka period, i.e., till the Yādava period.<sup>588</sup>MNSII did not undergo the three phases of construction, but Bakker suggested that the significant developments occurred under the

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<sup>588</sup>R. K. Mohanty, Excavation at Mahurjhari, Annual Report (200-2002), Pune; Deccan College, pp. 45-47.

Vākāṭaka regime. Hamlapuri, a rural site situated east of Nagardhana, has been identified as an important religious center because a variety of Vākāṭaka sculptures of *Ganeśa*, *Mahiṣamardinī*, *Viṣṇu*, and *Lajjā Gaurī* have been recovered from the site.<sup>589</sup> Three bronze images of Buddha were unearthed near the site, out of which one of the images resembles the Gupta style from Mathura. The large sculpture of Ganeśa at Hamlapuri showed similarities to the Varāha and Narasiṃha sculptures on Rāmtek hill in their stylistic appearances.<sup>590</sup> The elephant-headed God sitting in *sukhāsana* pose resembled the Śiva sculpture found at the site of Mansar.<sup>591</sup> This image is conceptualized as the main of the temple. Several other sculptures, which included the head of Viṣṇu and Mahiṣamardinī, were also collected from this site. This image is similar in features to the one found in Cave VI at Udayagiri. The Vākāṭaka sculptures recovered from the site of Hamlapuri belonged to the period dated to the first half of the fifth century CE.<sup>592</sup> R.K. Mohanty explored the site of Mahurjhari along the Sur River and identified this site to be a habitation site.<sup>593</sup> This site was prominent from the Megalithic period and uninterruptedly functioned until the end of the Vākāṭaka period. The sites yielded evidence testifying that inter-regional trade flourished during this period. Even the beads manufactured from the factories of this site

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<sup>589</sup>Lacey Harriet Ruth, 'Nandivardhana and Nagardhana: Preliminary Analysis of the Surface Evidence from Nagardha and Hamalapuri in the Eastern Vākāṭaka Territory near Rāmtek Maharashtra', *South Asian Studies*, vol.30, 2014, Issue 2: *Politics, Ritual and Religion*, 2014, pp.116-132.

<sup>590</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson, 'The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala Narasiṃha Temple', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London: Cambridge University Press on behalf of SOAS, pp. 46-74.

<sup>591</sup> S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, Report of Paunar Excavation (1967), *Nagpur University Journal (Humanities)*, vol. xviii, No.3, Nagpur: Nagpur Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, 1967, pp. 1-138.

<sup>592</sup> Bhagyashree Kale, 'A study in the Iconography of Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist Images from Vidarbha (from c. 300 B.C to 1300 A.D.)', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post – Graduate and Research Institute*, Diamond Jubilee volume, vol.60/61, pp. 501-504.

<sup>593</sup>R.K. Mohanty, 'Excavation at Mahurjhari', *Annual Report (200-2002)*, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 45-47.

were important item of export.<sup>594</sup> The seals of the Nāgas in rock crystal were also collected from this site.<sup>595</sup> It was when various semi-urban and rural sites came up not only along the river valley but also in the forested lands. Bakker has suggested that the Vākāṭaka elites practiced śaiva worship, and it would have been iconic to emphasize their status, whereas the iconic *līṅga* worship had more extensive appeal to the people of the rural areas.<sup>596</sup> During this phase, similarities were seen in the sculpture of a *Gaṇa*-type figure was located at Koteswar temple in Nagardhan with that of the ‘Nude Śiva *Gaṇa*’ discovered at Mansar (M35) and other Vākāṭaka sculptures that presently preserved at the Nagpur Museum. This most distinctive iconographical feature of this period was that the figures were mainly voluptuous, a pot-bellied sculpture made from red sandstone, while some displayed features like broad chest, big belly, and prominent wide hip. These features were typical of Eastern Vākāṭaka and are believed to be free from the Gupta style. This was the most distinguishing feature of the fifth century style that evolved in Vidarbha giving it a unique regional identity.<sup>597</sup> The three Buddhist bronze statues recovered near Nandivardhana suggest that a section of local communities embraced Buddhism as religious faith and co-existed with the Brahmanical temples. There was Buddhist activity, but no architectural remains have been found, unlike at Pauni, where decorative railing related to an Early Historic stupa was found.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>594</sup>R.K. Mohanty, ‘The Importance of Mahurjhari in the Archaeology of Stone Bead Manufacturing Centres in Ancient India’, *Bead Study Trust Newsletter No.41*, pp. 8-15.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>596</sup> V.G. Sontakke, Shantanu Vaidya, Shrikant Ganvir, ‘Excavation at Nagardhan, Nagpur District, Maharashtra(2015-16)’, *History Today*, No.17, 2016, pp. 43-46.

<sup>597</sup> Bhagyashree Kale, ‘A Study in the Iconography of Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist images from Vidarbha(from c. 300B.C.to 1300 AD),’ *Bulletin of Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, vol.60, 2001, pp. 501–504.

<sup>598</sup> Lacey Harriet Ruth, *Ramtek and its landscape*, pp. 357-359.

The emergence of Rāmṭek as a centre of immense religious importance was mainly due to the political move played by the rulers to extend the influence of the Vākāṭaka state strengthen networks of resource exploitation and agricultural production in the peripheral areas. As we know, during this period, the economy was mainly based on agriculture; thus, the rulers felt the need to expand the contour of their realm to bring more lands under agriculture. As a result of this expansion, cultivated lands promoted development of hinterland to support sites of royal importance. The growing importance of Rāmṭek is a clear evidence to prove that the Vākāṭaka rulers had aimed to solidify their domination over the peripheral areas situated away from the core Wardha – Waingangā river basin. However, epigraphic evidence supports the suggestion that earlier capitals were not abandoned following the shift of the capital to Nandivardhana. The Masod Plates of Pravarāṣeṇa II still refers to the earlier capital of Padmapura.<sup>599</sup> The nature of the Eastern Vākāṭaka relationship with the agricultural area around Rāmṭek was mainly due to the adaptive strategy practiced by the rulers to engage local communities and establish their legitimate rule over the newly acquired lands. The spread of state-society into peripheral areas generated a reciprocal relationship whereby the local areas were connected with the broader networks, and the state was also localized through the introduction of rural elements. In the case of Vidarbha, both the branches provided religious patronage and ritualism to strengthen their authority, although they manifested differently due to their adaptation to two different local environments.

Though the Brahmanical faith became dominant as the rulers were mainly inclined to them to gain legitimation, this did not prevent the spread of Buddhism. The site of Mansar is an

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<sup>599</sup> Hans Bakker and Harunaga Isaacson ‘The Vākāṭaka Inscription in the Kevala Narasimha Temple’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, London: Cambridge University Press on behalf of SOAS, pp.46-74.

outstanding example in this regard. By critically studying the Mansar- Rāmtek site complex, we can understand how the socio-economic and political order changes led to the new development in the ritual-cultural landscape of Vidarbha. Even before the fourth century CE, Buddhism had entered into this part of Deccan is well attested from the site of Pauni<sup>600</sup> and Paunar<sup>601</sup>. From this site of Pauni, evidence of Hinayana Buddhism and a sandstone Buddha image similar to those found in Mathura has been recovered from Paunar. Buddhism has penetrated this portion of Deccan through trade links.<sup>602</sup>As the Eastern branch sought allegiance to the Brahmanical faith, the Western Vākāṭaka rulers embraced Buddhism to engage with the local inhabitants and legitimize their reign. The Western Vākāṭakas followed such policy as they inherited territory that was under the strong influence of the Sātavāhanas and thus encountered a strong Buddhist presence. The Western branch of the Vākāṭaka rulers derived their financial prosperity from the flourishing trading activities along the Western coast. The Buddhist patrons and merchants also provided huge donations. The depictions of the grand frescos at Ajanta around the fifth to sixth century CE testify to the fact that the economy of the Western ranch was mainly based on trading activities.<sup>603</sup> In contrast, economic prosperity is also manifested through the construction of monumental religious establishments at Mansar and Rāmtek. The economic prosperity of the Eastern Vākāṭakas was based on their agriculture without significant evidence of overseas trading activities. This is the reason why a strong tradition of the land-grant system was prevalent in the Eastern Vākāṭakas kingdom compared to the Western Vākāṭaka. This signifies the adoption of a different political and economic

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<sup>600</sup>S.B. Deo and J.P. Joshi, Pauni Excavation 1969-70, Nagpur: Nagpur University Vidyapeeth Mudranalaya, p. 1-138.

<sup>601</sup>S.B. Deo and M.K. Dhavalikar, Report of Paunar Excavation (1967), pp. 23-29.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-29.

<sup>603</sup> M. Somathilake, 'Ajanta Murals and their Chronology: A critical Analysis', in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Srilanka New Series*, vol.61, No.1, 2016, pp.1-31.

response of both the branch based on their respective local conditions and environments.<sup>604</sup> It may be theorized that this branch adapted to the environment and social conditions they faced to involve and communicate with the existing local people successfully. That was the reason they embraced Buddhism. It is also believed that the second phase of Ajanta caves were built during the time of Hariṣeṇa under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism. Cave No.16 of Ajanta was donated by Varahadeva who was the minister of Hariṣeṇa (built around 475-500CE) and cave No.17 by a prince who was probably a feudatory of the Vākātakas.<sup>605</sup>

This brings us to the concept of a local system and the node and network suggested by Monica L. Smith. This model helps us to understand how states grow in size using networks that are located at strategic points and control the nodes across the region. The idea of a local system is appropriate for understanding the functioning of Rāmtek temple complex. Rāmtek and its surrounding landscape was a conglomeration of related sites with a productive hinterland. This 'node- and – network' approach helps us to engage with the landscape where nodes operated as 'resource interest centers' connected by access corridors.<sup>606</sup> Rāmtek temple complex functioned as nodes situated in landscape endowed with local resources and received immediate support from the immediate hinterland. As Monica L Smith writes that the node and corridor approach is an important strategy for developing polity and for the expansion of the state system. This strategy was adopted by the Vākātika rulers in order to expand their territorial jurisdiction. It was due to this particular strategy that Rāmtek temple complex located away from the river valley gained

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<sup>604</sup> Reshma Sawant, *Historical Geography of Vidarbha*, 2012, p. 104-105.

<sup>605</sup> Walter M. Spink, 'The Archaeology of Ajanta', *Ars Orientalis*, vol.21, University of Michigan, 1991, pp. 67-94.

<sup>606</sup> Monica L. Smith, 'Territories, Corridors and Networks: A Biological Model for the Pre modern State', Los Angeles: *Willey Periodicals*, 2007, pp. 32-33.



prominence and emerged as a state sponsored temple complex. The area surrounding this temple complex also became part of the Vākāṭaka kingdom.

### **A new cultural trait in Iconography**

The most common style of iconography that was prevalent throughout this period in Deccan was the Anugraha type. Strikingly it was completely absent in Vidarbha. The images like Vilakshana Sadaśiva, Ashtamurti, Sarvaparsvamukha can be taken as a significant contribution of eastern Vidarbha. They are the best examples of the stage of development in carving the multi-headed icons and rare examples in iconography. This is a unique contribution of the Vidarbha based on the historical development, style, representation of iconographic types, and knowledge of the history of cultural growth, background, and tradition. The Śaiva icons reported from Mandala<sup>607</sup> and Mansar<sup>608</sup> (see fig 4.7) are heavy figures with bulky volumes. Puffy noses and lips with famous pouts, wide open outsized eyes, sharp, arch-like eyebrows, and long thick curly hair arranged in ringlets are the significant characteristics of these images, which owe their origin to the local trends in art or folk art. Furthermore, due to this excellent mixture of tribal or folk elements a new iconographical style evolved in Vidarbha during this period that provided a prominent regional identity.<sup>609</sup>

Vidarbha, under the reign of the Vākāṭakas, attained a position in their state system. The process of its emergence can be viewed in the light of the integrative paradigm. This model

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<sup>607</sup> Bhagyashree Kale, 'A study in the Iconography of Hindu, Jaina and Buddhist Images from Vidarbha (from c. 300 B.C to 1300 A.D.)', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post – Graduate and Research Institute*, Diamond Jubilee volume, vol.60/61, pp. 501-504.

<sup>608</sup> J.P. Joshi and A.K. Sharma, 'Excavation at Mansar, District Nagpur', Maharashtra, 1997-200, *Puratattva* 30, pp. 127-131.

<sup>609</sup> Lacey Harriet Ruth, *Ramtek and its landscape*, pp. 357-359.

provokes a historian to shift focus from the centre to the developments in the peripheral areas. The model has to be juxtaposed with theory of corridor and network proposed by Smith.<sup>610</sup> The advocates of the first theory argue that integration is a process that is always ongoing and never complete. The proponents of this integrative model discuss interactions and engagements between several localities, sub-regions, and regions.<sup>611</sup> They tie up the state formation process with processes of cultural integration. Recently this process of integration is observed from a more nuanced point of view which also takes in processes of confrontation and violent appropriative actions into consideration. Penetration of peripheral regions around the core of a state necessarily involved many layered actions of exchanges and developments. In case of Vidarbha, we find that the contour expanded with the penetration of the state society into new lands. Local culture, faith and deities were appropriated, and in return for donations to the Brāhmanas, the kings derived their legitimacy. The emergence of the Rāmṭek temple complex attests to this fact. The Vākāṭaka rule brought changes in its cultural as well as the physical landscape. From a geographical space which was preferred for human settlement from the early days of human history Vidarbha evolved as a distinct cultural zone of Deccan. By the end of the sixth century CE with further changes and new developments in socio-economic patterns, Vidarbha emerged as a full-fledged region. The emergence of nodes and networks occurring in the process of state's extensive economic and political actions ran in integration with the extension of political influence of state authority as well as state sponsored processes. These were accompanied with integrative and appropriative actions. Vidarbha stood as both a part of that action under the Vākāṭaka regime as well as a corridor for such transactions. This was

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<sup>610</sup> Monica L Smith, 'Territories, Corridors, and Networks: A Biological Model for the pre-modern State', Los Angeles: *Willey Periodicals*, vol.12 No.4, pp. 32-33.

<sup>611</sup> Hermann Kulke, 'The Integrative Model of State Formation in Early Medieval India: Some Historiographic Remarks,' in B.P.Sahu and Hermann Kulke (eds.) *Interrogating Political Systems Integrative Processes and States in Pre- modern India*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2015, pp. 56-73.

the reason why Rāmṅtek and its surrounding areas gained prominence. Therefore, citing the example of Vidarbha, we can say that the study of region unravels with a different kind of dimension not only in spatial history or history of people within regions but also helps us in exploring the complex processes through which political states emerged and operated over the given timeframe.

## Maps and Illustrations

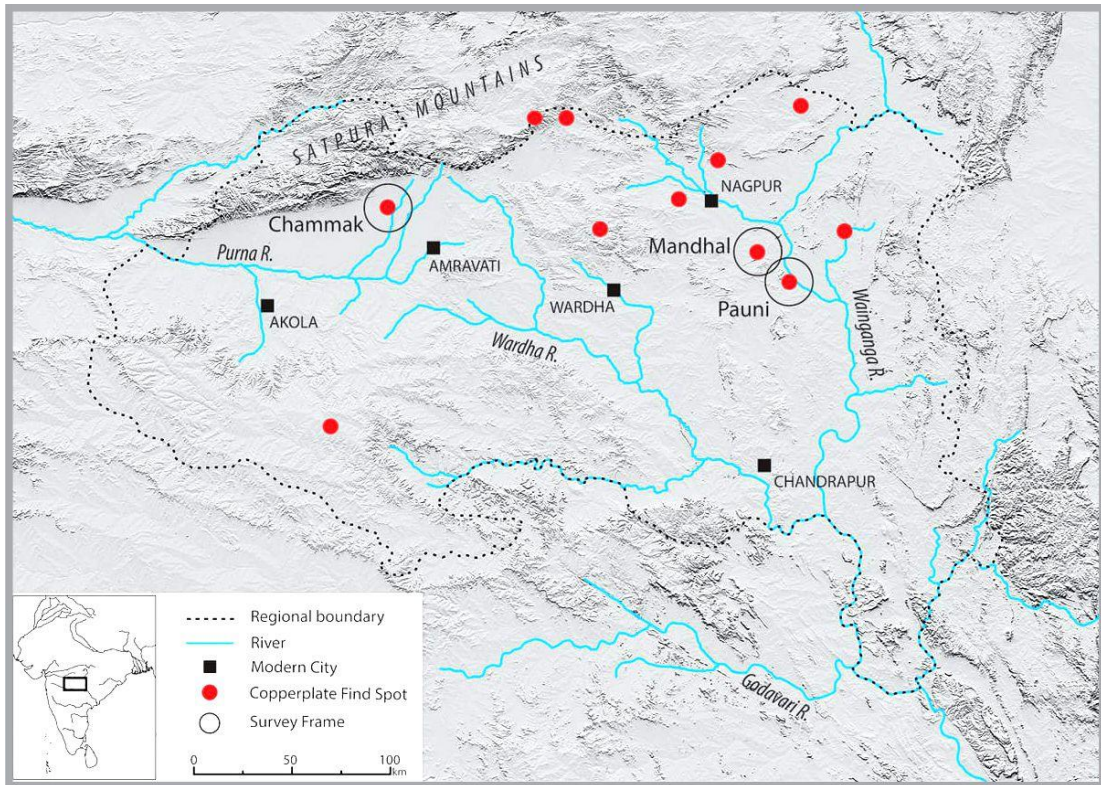


Fig. 4.1: Map showing site of Vidarbha (mid third century to sixth century CE)

Courtesy: Coline Lefrancq, Jason Hawkes Jaseera C.M. and R..K Mohanty, 'A Typological Ceramics from Mahurjhari', 2019.

Source: ResearchGate.



Fig. 4.2: Mansar (Site: MNS V) The Stellate-Plan Śiv Temple with Circular Garbhgṛha

Courtesy: Photograph taken by researcher



Fig. 4.3: Mansar Palace Site (MNSII)

Courtesy: Photograph taken by researcher



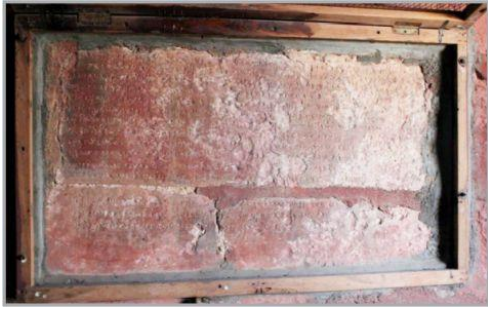


Fig. 4.4: Inscription of the Kevala-Narasimha Temple (Courtesy: Researcher)



Fig. 4.5: Decorative panel of the Kevala-Narasimha Temple (Courtesy: Researcher)

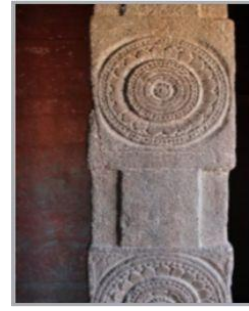


Fig. 4.6: Lotus design in the column of Rudra-Narasimha Temple  
Courtesy: Researcher



Fig. 4.7: Śiva of Mansar  
Courtesy: Delhi National Museum

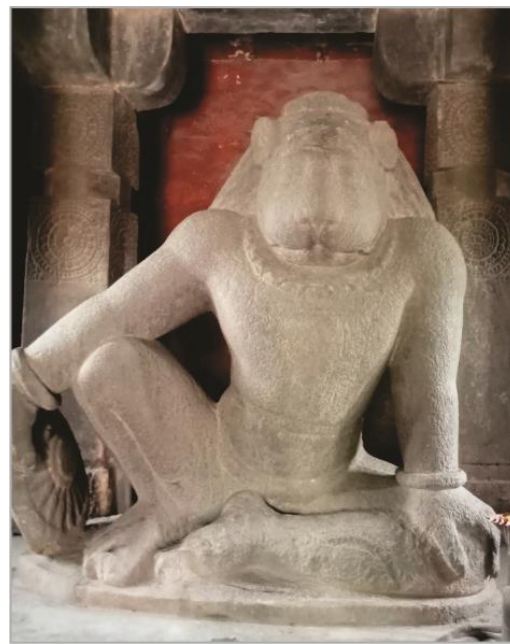


Fig. 4.8: Narasimha of Rāmtek  
Courtesy: Researcher.

## Chapter-5

### **Situating Vidarbha in the changing political and cultural dynamics of Deccan (sixth to ninth Century CE)**

We have conceived Vidarbha as a geographical space inhabited by people from the late Chalcolithic period. The megalithic people used the physical landscape for dwelling and economic purposes and built burials to commemorate the deceased. Eminent archaeologists like R.K. Mohanty,<sup>612</sup> Shantanu Vaidya<sup>613</sup> and S.B. Deo<sup>614</sup> have pointed out that the megalithic builders of Deccan preferred the hilly terrain for burial construction. The megalithic people exclusively used the fertile riverine belt for habitational purposes. This thesis begins with the megalithic period as this phase carries a cultural connotation and also throws light on the idea that the people of Vidarbha tended to carve out unique cultural identities from the early period onwards. The mortuary practices, burial styles, and ceramic assemblage reflected such uniqueness. It also helps us to understand that this was an inhabited space from the Late Chalcolithic period. Dolmens and menhirs, which are typical burial types of Deccan, were almost absent in this eastern part. Instead, we find stone circles to be the predominant burial type in Vidarbha.<sup>615</sup> Thus the process of gaining a distinctive cultural identity had already set in from the megalithic period, which further accelerated in the subsequent periods when Vidarbha came under the influence of changing socio-political and cultural dynamics of the whole of Peninsular India.

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<sup>612</sup> R. K. Mohanty, Excavation at Mahurjhari, *Annual Report (200-2002)*, Pune: Deccan College, pp. 45-47.

<sup>613</sup> Shantanu Vaidya, 'Burial Settlements of the Early Iron Age in Vidarbha: A fresh Analysis,' *Man and Environment XLI (2)*, 2016, pp. 103-104.

<sup>614</sup> S. B. Deo, 'The Megaliths: Their Culture, Ecology, Economy, and Technology', in *Recent Advances in Indian Archaeology* S.B. Deo and D.K. Sinha (eds.) Pune: Deccan College, 1989, pp. 89-91.

<sup>615</sup> S.B. Deo, 'The Vidarbha Megaliths – A Review', *Bulletin of the Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute, vol.41*, 1982, pp. 27-32.

Literary sources are crucial for writing the history of Vidarbha. They are essential for understanding how contemporary people conceived this part of Deccan. Perceptions are also an important prism for writing the history of any region. Perceptions are part of lived historical experiences. Here lies the importance of the literary sources for writing the history of Vidarbha. In the case of Vidarbha, literary sources do not throw light on the processes that shaped this geographical space into a cultural zone. However, they show how the onlookers perceived it in different historical phases. The issue of nomenclature has been well understood from the various mythical stories narrated in the texts. Vidarbha in the ancient literary texts appeared as a name of a king<sup>616</sup> and sometimes as a powerful kingdom. We also got names of several places which were located in Vidarbha. Names of various mythical rulers and a teacher who hailed from Vidarbha are known from various literary sources like *Mahābhārata*<sup>617</sup> and the plays by Kālidāsa.<sup>618</sup> We get stories related to these mythical characters in different sections of *Mahābhārata*.<sup>619</sup> The typical geographical feature that led to the naming of this eastern part of Deccan as Vidarbha is noted in the ancient texts. From the *Nalopakhyan parva* of *Mahābhārata*, it is known that due to the curse of a saint, this land turned arid with no darbha grass. That is why it was called Vidarbha (= devoid of darbha grass).<sup>620</sup> There are mentions of several place names in the ancient texts, which the archaeologists later identified. Some of them are Kuṇḍin (as

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<sup>616</sup> Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index of Names and Subjects*, vol.2, 1912, p. 297.

<sup>617</sup> M .Ganguli, *The Mahābhārata*, vol. II. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp. 68-69, 115.

<sup>618</sup> C.H. Tawney (trans.) *The Malavikāgnimitra: A Sanskrit play by Kālidāsa* (2nd Edition), Calcutta: Thackers Spink and Co.1891, p.11.

<sup>619</sup> K. M .Ganguli, *The Mahabharata*, vol.II. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp.68-69.

<sup>620</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.



Kaudinyapura)<sup>621</sup> Assikanagara(Adam)<sup>622</sup> Vastagulma (Washim).<sup>623</sup> In Pāṇini's *Astadhyāyī*, certain categories of the settlement are mentioned, and the city of Kuṇḍina was designated as Vidarbha-Nagarī.<sup>624</sup> The *Sabhāparva* of *Mahābhārata* records the name of a place Bhojakaṭa. Sahadeb conquered this particular place.<sup>625</sup> Interestingly enough, this particular name reappears in the inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas as an important administrative division. Vidarbha was situated near daṇḍakāraṇya, but in the literary sources, it emerged as a janapada and earned popularity as a notable center of learning.<sup>626</sup> In *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* we get the term 'Dakṣiṇa-patha vāsinah.' The Purāṇic records help us to identify the cultural characteristics of the people of this land.<sup>627</sup> The Savaras, Pulindas, Dandakas, and Vaidarbhīs were commonly called 'dakṣiṇapatha vāsinah'<sup>628</sup>. However, the ones who were Vaidarbhī (people of Vidarbha) were culturally different from the rest of the inhabitants of Deccan and the region of Dandaka was separately mentioned from that of Vidarbha. The people of Vidarbha was not called *udantya* (beyond the borders of the Aryandom) like the Andhras, Pundras, Savaras and Pulinda who were also the inhabitants of Deccan<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>621</sup> M. R. Dikshit, *Excavations at Kaudinyapur*, Bombay: Government Central Press, 1968.

<sup>622</sup> Amarendra Nath, 'Adam', pp. 69-79.

<sup>623</sup> Chetan Sali, 'Vakataka Culture', pp. 3-38.

<sup>624</sup> V.S. Agarwala, *India as Known to Pāṇini*, Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan, 1963, pp. 78-79.

<sup>625</sup> K. M. Ganguli, *The Mahabharata, vol. II*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, p. 62.

<sup>626</sup> Uthara Suvrathan, 'Landscapes of Life and Death', p.122

<sup>627</sup> F.E. Pargiter (trans. and annotated), *The Markandeya Purana* [Bibliotheca India: A collection of Oriental Works, published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal], Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1969, p. 335.

M.R.Singh, *Geographical Data in Early Purāṇas: A critical study*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1972, pp. 43-44.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.* p. 335.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.* p. 283 and G. Yazdani, *The Early History of Deccan*, p. 15.

Archaeologists have taken up the term 'Vidarbha' from literary sources. They identified the place names mentioned in the literary texts with their present location. They concluded that the term *Vidarbha* denotes the eastern part of present-day Maharashtra, covering eleven districts. Initially, they mainly focused on the Wardha–Waingangā valley for their investigations. Later on, with the discovery of many inscriptions of the Vākāṭaka rulers, the archaeologists shifted their gaze to the hilly tracts of Satpura and Maikhal, where they excavated new single cultural sites and identified some of them with the donated villages mentioned in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions. Therefore, it is seen that the contour of Vidarbha did not remain static. It changed from time to time as Vidarbha interacted with the new socio-political developments of Deccan.

Instead of considering it as a region in the first place, we have understood Vidarbha as a geographical space. It witnessed human habitation from the late Chalcolithic period. Due to several historical and cultural processes, Vidarbha emerged as a distinctive cultural zone of Deccan. Therefore this case study of Vidarbha aptly fits into the model proposed by eminent historian Brajadulal Chattopadhyay. Chattopadhyaya has proposed a model to explain the emergence of any cultural zone due to local- level cultural dynamics, integration, and diversities.<sup>630</sup> This model focuses on how space emerges as a distinctive cultural zone due to historical and cultural processes. Vidarbha functioned as a corridor or network zone connecting the Northern Gangetic plains with peninsular India. In the earlier period, the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kṣtrapas were interested in establishing a certain degree of control over Vidarbha. The presence of the Sātavāhana power is evident from the

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<sup>630</sup> Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Space, History and Cultural Process: Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub-regional Identity', in Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (ed.) *Centres out there? Facets of Subregional Identities in Orissa*, pp. 21-35.

Nasik inscriptions of Gautamiputra Śātakarṇi.<sup>631</sup> In this particular inscription, we get the term *Vidabha*, meaning Vidarbha. This inscription testifies to the fact that Vidarbha was absorbed within the territorial jurisdiction of the Sātavāhanas. However, it is necessary to point out that no administrative divisions developed in Vidarbha following the lines of the Sātavāhana polity.<sup>632</sup> Even the domination of the Western Kṣtrapas was well evident in Vidarbha. The period between the first to third centuries C.E. saw massive fortifications in several sites of Vidarbha, and even large numbers of coins of the Western Kṣtrapas were recovered from the several sites of Vidarbha. These two political powers were interested in extending their network by controlling this vital corridor in Deccan connecting the heartland of Deccan with the Western coast as well as offering routes to the northern plains. Their control over this nodal point helped them to manage more significant, economically prosperous landscapes. The nature and function of Vidarbha as a space changed from time to time as it interacted with new political and cultural trends of Deccan as well as Northern Gangetic plains. It functioned as an autonomous space to a certain degree where the influence of the agencies of the state was minimal till the second century CE. However, the strategic location of Vidarbha was exploited by the contemporary political powers of Deccan. Certain cultural trends typical of Northern India flowed into Vidarbha. This period saw the penetration of Buddhism in Vidarbha. This happened mainly due to the endeavor of the mercantile community. Pauni flourished as a Buddhist site during this phase.<sup>633</sup> The inscription of Kṣtrapas written in the early Brāhmi character has been recovered from this site.

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<sup>631</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History, and Inscriptions of the Satavahanas and the Western Kshtrapas*, Maharashtra, State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 28-31.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 28-31.

<sup>633</sup> Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavations at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1998, pp. 8-9.

Text:

*Sidham Mahakhattava- Kumarasa  
Rupiammasa chaya  
Khambo.*<sup>634</sup>

The objective of this inscription is to record that a structured pillar (chhāyā – khambho) was erected in memory of Mahākṣatrapa Kumār Rupaimma. Rupaimma, according to Mirashi, belonged to the Saka clan. Both the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kṣatrapas had nominal domination over Vidarbha.<sup>635</sup> This is because both these political powers understood the importance of the geographical location of Vidarbha and were interested in establishing control over this part of Deccan. The trade route connecting Prayag with Pratiṣṭhana is considered the safest one, passing through Vidarbha. It served as a nodal point connecting Northern India with Prathisṭhan.<sup>636</sup>

Vidarbha was never the seat of any political power until the mid-third century C.E. This did not prevent Vidarbha from attaining a unique cultural identity. Various cultural trends of the Gangetic plains and Deccan flowed into Vidarbha, leading to its emergence as a distinctive cultural zone. Apart from the external factors, internal developments were prominently visible between the fourth and sixth centuries, further adding cultural distinctiveness to Vidarbha.

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<sup>634</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'A Pillar Inscription of Mahakshtrapa Rupaimma from Pawni', *Epigraphia Indica, XXXVII (pt.v)*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1968, pp. 201-203.

<sup>635</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *The History, and Inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Western Kshatrapas*, Maharashtra State Board for Literature and Culture, 1981, pp. 1-41.

<sup>636</sup> K.D. Morrison, 'Trade, Urbanism, and Agricultural Expansion: Buddhism Monastic Institutions and the State in the Early Historic Western Deccan', *World Archaeology* 27, pp.203–221. Motichandra, *Sarthavaha*, Patna: Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, 1966, pp. 23–26.

The establishment of the Vākāṭaka rule brought further changes in the cultural settings of Vidarbha.<sup>637</sup> According to Bakker, the power of the Vākāṭaka dynasty was based on surplus agricultural production. The mid-third to sixth century C.E. witnessed agricultural expansion. New lands were cultivated, leading to increased agricultural production. The contour of Vidarbha expanded, and these newly added agricultural lands were inhabited by 'tribal people' who were identified as the ancestors of the Gonds, Gaolis, and Ahirs.<sup>638</sup> These aboriginals came under the folds of the Brahmanical tradition.<sup>639</sup> The identification of the donated villages mentioned in the Vākāṭaka inscriptions makes it clear that they were located along the foothills of the Satpura and Maikhal ranges. Vidarbha also displayed unique traits in terms of the iconographical style. During this period, various myths of Śiva and Viṣṇu were popular in Deccan. The Saṃhāra and the Anugraha forms of both the deities became famous all over Deccan due to these myths. Nevertheless, in Vidarbha, no Anugraha image of Śiva or Viṣṇu has been recorded which belongs to this group. Instead, images like Vilaṅṣana Sadāśiva, Aṣṭamūrti, Saṛvapārśvamukha can be taken as a significant contribution of Vidarbha. They are the best examples of multi-headed icons and rare ones in iconography. This is also a distinctive cultural trait of Vidarbha not seen elsewhere in Deccan. The sculptures of Lakṣmī, Kubera, Kinnara, Yakṣas Nāgas were recovered from the site of Mansar. These sculptures had typical features, mainly pot-bellied with broad hips, and demi-gods like the Kinnara, Yakṣas, and Vidyādhāra share standard stylistic features with the famous Padmapāni found in the Ajanta caves even though their cultic

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<sup>637</sup> F.E. Partiger, 'The Geography of Rama's Exile', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. iv, 1894, pp. 231-264

<sup>638</sup> Hans Baker, 'Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha', in *Interrogating Political Systems: Integrative Processes and States in Pre-modern India*. (ed. Bhairabi Prasad Sahu and Hermann Kulke) New Delhi: Manohar, 2007, pp. 277-300.

<sup>639</sup> Hans Baker, 'Throne and Temple', pp. 277-300.

affiliations were different.<sup>640</sup> Throughout this period, this temple complex of Rāmṭek gained popularity which helped both the branches of the Vākāṭaka kingdom to engage successfully with the local communities. Under the Vākāṭaka regime, the temple complex of Rāmṭek- Mansar developed. This temple complex was situated away from the core area of Vidarbha. Monica L. Smith gave the concept of the node–corridor model to show how states expand their network to control the nodes.<sup>641</sup> The Vākāṭaka rulers adopted such policy to gain access over the larger resourceful landscape. Vidarbha was strategically located in connection with Central Indian landscape, rich in natural and mineral resources. Due to this strategy, the Rāmṭek and its surrounding landscape gained prominence and acquired the status of state sanctuary. After the end of the Vākāṭaka rule, the new political powers that came up in the political scenario of Deccan annexed portions of Vidarbha and subsumed it within their territorial dominion. It continued to function as an important revenue-yielding zone which seemed lucrative for these new political powers. After the battle with the Nalas, the Viṣṇukuṇḍin rulers established their domination over this temple complex. This eastern part of Deccan continued to function as revenue-yielding zone and served as a conduit for the political powers to gain access over a larger part of Peninsular India. It was V.V. Mirashi who pointed out the problems of tracing the history of Vidarbha after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. He believes there is a lack of archaeological investigation in this part of Deccan. This is the main reason why we are unable to frame the historical trajectories that took place in the periods following the end of the Vākāṭaka rule till the rise of the Yadavas.<sup>642</sup> Scholars have jumped to the Yādava period that started around twelfth

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<sup>640</sup> Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi: Motilal BanarasiDass, 1983, pp. 285–287.

<sup>641</sup> Monica L. Smith, 'Territories, Corridors, and Network: A Biological Model for the Pre-modern State,' Los Angeles: *Wiley Periodicals Complexity* (12), 2006, pp. 28–35.

<sup>642</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Lacunae in the study of the Ancient History of Vidarbha', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, vol.34, Part- I*, 1960, pp. 188-90.

century C.E. completely ignoring the seven centuries following the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. This is because scholars get access to a vast corpus of epigraphical records of the Yādavas to write the history of Vidarbha. Even Hans Bakker, in his article '*Throne and Temple: Political Power and Religious Prestige in Vidarbha*' shifted abruptly to the Yādavas period after completing his discussions on the Vākāṭakas.<sup>643</sup> Though the political identity acquired under the Vākāṭakas ceased to exist, there were several other ways Vidarbha manifested its spatial and cultural identities and performed new functions when subsumed within the territorial jurisdiction of the political powers that appeared after the end of the Vākāṭaka era.

### **Last days of the Vākāṭaka rule**

The death of Pravaraṣeṇa II brought drastic changes in the political life of Vidarbha. A hostile relationship developed between the two branches. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya opined that the imprudent policies practiced by the later Vākāṭaka rulers were ultimately responsible for their decline.<sup>644</sup> Pravaraṣeṇa II of the main branch was succeeded by his son Narendrasena whereas Devasena was succeeded by his son Hariṣeṇa on the throne of Basim. Thus both of them were contemporaries. The two branches were eager to establish their control over Malwa, Kosala and Mekhala. The Balaghat records show that the kings of Kosala, Mekala, and Malwa accepted the suzerainty of Nendraṣeṇa (475-500CE). He entered into a matrimonial alliance with Kuntala princess Ajitabhṭṭarikā. He is further described as *apahṛtavamśasṛiya* (someone who had been able to bring back the fortunes of his family)<sup>645</sup> On the other hand, it is stated in the Ajanta inscription of Hariṣeṇa (480-

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<sup>643</sup> Bakker, 'Throne and Temple', 2015, pp. 278-286.

<sup>644</sup> Sudhakar Chattoapdhyaya, *Some Early Dynasties of South India*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974, pp.181-82.

<sup>645</sup> Mirashi, *Corpus*, vol.5, pp.79-82.

505CE) that he subjugated Lata, Andhra, Kuntala and Trikūṭa.<sup>646</sup> Sudhakar Chattopdhyaya has explained the term *apahrtavaṃśaśriyaḥ* and tried to figure out the relationship between the Vākāṭakas and Traikūṭakas (457-534 C.E.)<sup>647</sup> It was believed that Traikūṭakas were defeated by Vākāṭakas. However this view is not acceptable because the Traikūṭakas were important political power of Deccan. They did not accept the suzerainty of the Vākāṭakas. They ruled over a considerable period of time, issued land grants and minted coins of their own. It is also claimed that they played a very important role in the revival of trading networks. This was a period when long distance trading activities were not as vibrant as it was in preceding period but intraregional trading activities took place. The Kanheri inscriptions attest to it. It is in this particular inscription we get names of donors who came from Sopara. The depiction of the Bactrian camels in the cave no.3 suggests that there was some kind of trade connections between Deccan and Central Asia. According to Suraj A Pandit this trade route was later used by the mercantile community of Northern India.<sup>648</sup> In the Candravalli inscription of Mayūraśarman, we get the name of the Traikūṭakas for the first time.<sup>649</sup> The name of the dynasty was after the Traikūṭaka Mountain, as mentioned by Kalidāsa in his *Raghuvamśa*.<sup>650</sup> According to Kalidāsa, this dynasty was situated in the Aparanta.<sup>651</sup> There is reference to the mountain Tiranhu in the Nasik inscriptions of the Sātavāhana period. The Ābhira inscription from Nasik caves (first century CE) refers to a hill with a cave called Triraśmi. These two were identified as the Trikūṭaka hills.

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<sup>646</sup> Mirashi, *Corpus vol.5*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>647</sup> Suraj Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas*, p. 9.

<sup>648</sup> Suraj Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas*, p. 62.

<sup>649</sup> *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department*, Bangalore: Government Press, 1929, p. 50.

<sup>650</sup> C. R. Devadhar (ed. with English trans.) *Raghuvamśa of Kalidasa*, (4<sup>th</sup> Edition), Varanasi: Motilal Banarasidass, 2015, p.58.

<sup>651</sup> Suraj A. Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas Coins, Inscriptions and Art*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2012, pp. 23-38



Aniruddhapura was identified as the capital. Shobhana Gokhale identified it with Andheri. However such claim has been rejected by Thosar. It is from the three primary inscriptions- Pardi Plates of Dahrasena, year 207 Kalacurī Era (K.E.)<sup>652</sup> Surat plates of Vyaghrasena, year 241 K.E.<sup>653</sup> Kanheri plates of the Traikūṭakas we come to know about the Traikūṭakas.<sup>654</sup> The inscriptions mentioned above makes it possible to trace the genealogy of the Traikūṭaka rulers. The Traikūṭakas, served the Ābhiras. Later on, they were able to gain independent status.<sup>655</sup>

**Table 5.1: Geneological List of the Traikūṭaka rulers.**

Ruler	Provenance	Date	Date in terms of Shaka era	Dating in terms of Kalacurī- Era
Darhasena	Pardi	207	ca 285	457+1
Vyaghrasena	Surat	241	ca 319	490+1
-	Kanheri	245	ca 323	494+1
Madhyamasena	Matvan	256	ca 334	506+1
Vikramasena	Matvan	284	ca 362	534+1

The existence of maharaja Indradatta is well known from the coins and inscriptions of his successor In the Pardi inscription of Dahrasena he called himself *Bhagavat-pāda-*

<sup>652</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) ‘Pardi Plates of Dahrsena, the year 207’, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. x, 1909-10, pp. 51-53. Also see V.V. Mirashi, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Inscriptions of the Kalachuri- Chedi era*, vol.iv, part I, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1955, pp. 24-25.

<sup>653</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) ‘Surat Plates of Vyaghrasena, the year 241’, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xi, 1911-12, pp. 219-220. Also see V.V. Mirashi, *Corpus*, vol. iv, part –I, pp. 25-26.

<sup>654</sup> Suraj A. Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas Coins, Inscriptions and Art*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2012, pp. 27-32.

<sup>655</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23-38

*karmakara* (meaning servant of lord Viṣṇu).<sup>656</sup> This particular inscription records that Maharaja Dahrasena issued an order for all his officials residing in the viśaya of Antara Maṇḍali stating that a renowned Brāhmaṇa Naṇṇasvāmin resident of Kāpura, was granted a donation of the village called Tadasarika till the moon, the sun and the ocean exists. Dahrasēna was succeeded by his son Vyaghrasena who is well known from the Surat plate of the year KE 241. According to Mirashi, he ruled from 415-440 CE. The inscription consisting of a single plate, was found inside a Buddhist stupa at Kanheri in Northern Konkan.<sup>657</sup> This inscription refers to the victorious reign of the Traikūṭakas. It records the construction of a chaitya dedicated by one of the foremost disciples of Buddha. The main branch of the Vākāṭakas was not in a cordial relationship with the Traikūṭakas, whereas the one operating from Basim shared good terms with the latter. This friendship with the Traikūṭakas was another reason for the tussle between the two branches of the Vākāṭakas.<sup>658</sup> Coins of the Traikūṭakas are also important sources for understanding the political dynamics of Deccan and the importance of Vidarbha within that context. The coins of the Traikūṭakas had a strong resemblance with that of the Kṣtrapas. According to Suraj Pandit the coins of Dahrasena were contemporary with the Kṣtrapa coins of Bhatrudaman and Vishvasiṃha. Roman traders widely accepted the coins of the Western Kṣtrapas. This was probably why the Traikūṭakas followed the stylistic pattern of their coins.<sup>659</sup> The Traikūṭaka

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<sup>656</sup> E.Hultzsch (ed.) 'Pardi Plates of Dahrsena, the year 207', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.x, 1909-10, pp. 51-53. Also see, Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas Coins, Inscriptions and Art*, Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 2012, pp. 23-25. V.V. Mirashi, *Corpus vol.iv, part I*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>657</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Surat Plates of Vyaghrasena, the year 241', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xi, 1911-12, pp. 219-220. Also see V.V. Mirashi, *Corpus vo.iv, part I*, pp.24-25.

<sup>658</sup> Pandit, *Age of Traikutakas Coins, Inscriptions and Art*, 2012, pp. 28-29

<sup>659</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Surat Plates of Vyaghrasena, the year 241', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xi, 1911-12, pp. 219-220.

coins were found in Karad and Kazad in Poona district in Maharashtra.<sup>660</sup>B.D. Chattopadhyaya has pointed out that the coins of the Traikūṭakas were mainly imitations of the coins minted by the Western Kṣtrapas. However, he raised a vital question regarding this issue of imitation. He rightly states that the coins of the Western Kṣtrapas ceased to exist once Chandragupta II defeated the Western Kṣtrapas. The coins of the Traikūṭakas were available on the Konkan coast and southern Gujarat, and these coins were of similar weight to those of the coins issued by Bhartrdaman (which is 32.4 gm) of the Western Kṣtrapas. He views that though the Guptas issued coins of their own which were in circulation in the Kathiawad region, the coins of the Kṣtrapas did not cease to exist altogether. This triggers further question. How could the Traikūṭaka rulers imitate coins of the Kṣtrapas which were no longer in circulation? Chattopadhyaya has argued that the circulation of silver coins minted by the Guptas were limited to the northern side whereas the coins of Traikūṭakas were available in Southern Gujarat and the other side of the Western Ghat where there was hardly any influence of the Gupta rule. This minting of the coins by the Traikūṭaka rulers which were widely circulated suggests that there was existence of intra regional trade in this period.<sup>661</sup> There was strong trading network between these contemporary dynasties and the strategic location of Vidarbha was exploited by all these rulers who were contemporary of the Vākāṭakas. It was Hariṣeṇa who uprooted the Traikūṭakas and helped the Nalas establish their claim over certain parts of Vidarbha. This is also supported by recent archaeological investigation carried out at the site of Mansar.

Towards the end of the fifth century CE, there was a tussle between the two branches of the Vākāṭakas over Kośala and Malwa. The Bamhani plate of the Pāṇḍava king Bharatavala

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<sup>660</sup> B. D. Chattopadhyaya, 'Dates of the Traikutaka Kings of Western Deccan and of their coins', *The Numismatic Chronicle, Seventh Series, vol.9*, 1969, pp. 291-99.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*

is significant in this context. It refers to a dynasty of four rulers of Mēkala- Jayavala- Vatsarāja (Drōṇobhaṭṭārikā) - Mahārāja Nagavala- Bharatavala or Indra.<sup>662</sup> This inscription refers to a royal donor Bharatavala who was called (Sarvabhauma) According to Chhabra, the term ‘sarvabhauma’ means emperor. This particular inscription also refers to his overlord Narēndrasēna. This Narēndrasēna was the Vākāṭaka ruler of the main branch. This particular inscription also refers to the genealogical list of the ruler Bharatavala. He belongs to the lunar race, whereas his overlord Narēndrasēna was part of a soumya race. According to Chhabra, Soumya means auspicious, referring to the Brāhmaṇa origin. Bharatavala married the Kośalan princes. This marriage had immense significance in the history of Deccan. With this marital relationship, Kośala also came under the subjugation of Narēndrasēna. This Kośalan affair triggered further conflict between the two branches of the Vākāṭakas.<sup>663</sup> It can be concluded that the imprudent policies practiced by the rulers of both the branches and their unnecessary interference in the political affairs of the other states brought end to this dynasty. Though historical relevance of this text is often doubted but it has been rightly pointed out by Daṇḍin that the succession of the weak rulers after Hariṣena weakened the Vākāṭaka rule over Vidarbha. Taking advantage of this situation feudatories rose into prominence.

### **Understanding post – Vākāṭaka phase (sixth to ninth century CE.) from material cultural remains**

The archaeologists accept the story of famine narrated in the *Daśakumārcharita* on the ground that they did not find any signs of settlements in Vidarbha in the post – Vākāṭaka

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<sup>662</sup> B.C. Chhabra and N. Lakshminarayan Rao, ‘Bamhani plate of the Pāṇḍava king Bharatavala’, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. xxvii, 1947-48, New Delhi: Government of India Press, pp. 132-134.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 132–134.

period. They have also pointed out that in the period following the sixth century C.E., the worship of the goddess Śākambarī became widely popular. This goddess was worshipped by people whenever there was a natural calamity. The table below will help us to understand that the majority of the sites ceased to exist after sixth century CE. Sites like Mahurjhari, Mandhal, Arambha, Tharsa, Khairwada no longer functioned. It was only the site of Pauni and Mansar that continued even after the end of the Vākāṭaka era. Mansar functioned as a Buddhist site where the Mahāvihāra was established under the influence of the Viṣṇukuṇḍin rulers.<sup>664</sup>

**Table 5.2: Sites Showing Periods of Human Occupation up to Post- Vākāṭaka period**

District	Site	Ir/MG	Mauryan	Sat	VKT	Post VKT	Ref
Nagpur	Adam	H	H	H	-	-	IAR 1990-91
	Bhagimohari	H	-	-	-	-	IAR 2003-04
	Mahurjhari	H	-	H	H	-	IAR 2003-04
	Mandhal			H	H	-	Shastri 1978
	Mansar		H	H	H	H	IAR 1994-95
	Naikund	H	-	-	-	-	Deo and Jamkhedkar 1982

<sup>664</sup> Jagat Pati Joshi and A.K. Sharma, 'Mansar Excavations 1998-2004: The Discovery of Pravaraapur', *Puramanthan*, No. 3, Nagpur, 2005, pp. 1-28.

	Pachkheri	H	H	H	H	-	IAR 1992-93.
	Raipur - Hingana	H	-	-	-	-	Deglurkar and Lad1992
	Shirkhanda	H	-	-	H	-	IAR 1991-92.
	Takalghat- Khapa	H			-		
	Tharsa	H			H		
Wardha (3 Sites)	Arambha	H			H		IAR 1991-92
	Khairwada	H			H		IAR 1981-82
	Paunar	H			-		Deo and Dhavalikar 1967

Archaeologists termed the period following the end of the Vākāṭaka rule till the coming up of the Yādavas as a period of 'de urbanization.'<sup>665</sup> Nevertheless, such an explanation cannot be acceptable from a historian's point of view. By situating Vidarbha within the broader political scenario of Deccan, it is possible to understand the historical trajectories experienced by this eastern part of Deccan in the post – Vākāṭaka era. It is clear that Vidarbha was included within the territorial limits of the Viṣṇukuṇḍins. Later on, the Kalacurīs of Tripuri had control over this part of Deccan. It ceased to function as the center of any political power but did not lose its strategic importance and continued to function as a crucial revenue-yielding area. The coins of the Viṣṇukuṇḍin ruler Mahendravarman II have been found at the site of Mansar. The palace complex of the Vākāṭaka was converted

<sup>665</sup> Sawant, *Historical Archaeology*, p. 154.

into a Mahāvihāra. The Buddhists of the Mahayana cult occupied this area of Mansar. Buddhist bronze statues were also recovered from the site of Nagardhan. However, the prosperity of this Mahāvihāra was short-lived, and archaeologists like Jagat Pati Joshi viewed that it was abandoned and suffered the vagaries of nature.<sup>666</sup>

### **Vidarbha in the post- Vākāṭaka period from the epigraphic records**

It is difficult to sketch the political history of Vidarbha after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. This is mainly due to the lack of concrete historical evidence. From the eleventh century onwards, we get epigraphical records of the Yādavas which shows that Vidarbha again rose into prominence. Scholars have given various propositions to bridge the gap between the Vākāṭaka and the Yādava period. What is clear from all the propositions is that different pockets of power emerged within the whole of Deccan. These powers splitted Vidarbha into several parts and established their control over them. Therefore there was a major change in the functions of Vidarbha. It no longer remained the base of any political power but served as a conduit through which these rising powers of Deccan got access over larger, economically viable landscape.

Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya has proposed two theories regarding the decline of this powerful dynasty of Vidarbha. According to him, Viṣṇukundin king Mādhavarman I became mighty and occupied a large portion of the Vākāṭaka territory.<sup>667</sup> The first theory is based on epigraphical evidence. It has been stated in Khanapur plates that the ruler Mādhavarman acquired control over entire Maharashtra and performed eleven aśvamedhas. Mādhavarman of the Viṣṇukundin dynasty had matrimonial ties with the Vākāṭakas. The son of

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<sup>666</sup> Jagat Pati Joshi and A.K. Sharma, 'Mansar Excavations 1998-2004: The Discovery of Pravaraipur' *Puramanthan*, pp. 1-28.

<sup>667</sup> Sudhakar, *Some Early Dynasties of South India*, pp. 182-186.

Mādhavarman I was Vikramēndravarman II, who ascended the throne around 535 CE.<sup>668</sup> It is in the *Chikkulla* plates that he has been described as the *Viṣṇukuni- Vakāta- vamsa-dvayalankrta- jammā* (meaning he was the son of the son-in-law of the Vākātakas)<sup>669</sup> His second theory is based on the epigraphical records of the Rāṣṭrakūtas. The Kauthem plates of the later Chālukya king Vikramāditya refer to the Rāṣṭrakūta king Iṅdra, the son of Kriṣṇa. They were described as mighty rulers. They had a strong army with eight hundred elephants. However, they were defeated at the hands of the Chālukya ruler Jayasiṃha. A hostile relationship between the two dynasties is well understood from this plate.<sup>670</sup> Both were probably eager to gain control over this part of Deccan that resulted in turning their relationship hostile. There are two vital records – the Undikavatika grant<sup>671</sup> and the Pāṇḍuraṅgapallī plates that throw light on the post – Vākāṭaka era of Vidarbha.<sup>672</sup> Both these plates mention the ruler Manāṅka who belonged to the Rāṣṭrakūta family. He was praised as an 'ornament of the Rāṣṭrakūtas.'<sup>673</sup> The Pāṇḍuraṅgapallī plates speak of Manāṅka as the conqueror of Vidarbha, Aśmaka, and Aṅga. On the same plate, Mānāṅka was described as the crusher of the Kadambas of the Kuntaladeśa. These two plates are meaningful evidence to show that the Rāṣṭrakūtas rose into power and that the royal house of Mānāṅka had its headquarters in Manapura. V.V. Mirashi located it in the district of Satara. This epigraphic record shows that Vidarbha came under the control of Manāṅka.

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<sup>668</sup> Y.R. Gupte, 'Khanapur copper-plate of Madhavavarman' *Quarterly vol. viii*, p.163. Also see *Gazetteers*, Satara District.

<sup>669</sup> F. Kielhorn (ed.) 'Chikkulla plaes of Vikramēndravarman II', *Epigraphia Indica vol. iv*, Calcutta: Office of the Suprintendent of Government Printing, 1896-97, pp. 193-197.

<sup>670</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Kauthem Plate' *Epigraphia Indica, vol. iv*, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1896-97, pp.193-96.

<sup>671</sup> E. Hultzsch (ed.) 'Undikavatika grant of Abhimanyu', in *Epigraphia Indica vol. viii*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1981, pp.163-167.

<sup>672</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Pandarangapalli grant of Rashtrakuta Avidheya', *Epigraphia Indica 36*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 9-24.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*



This epigraphic record is also significant because it throws light on the history of Vidarbha after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule and mentions the name of the ruler who established his hold over Vidarbha.<sup>674</sup> Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya thinks that the rise of Māṇāka was the reason behind the decline of the Vākāṭaka regime, and he also entered into a hostile relationship with the Kadambas of the Kuntala country.<sup>675</sup>

**Table 5.3: Dynastic History of the Early Rāṣtrakūṭas**

Ruler	Period of Reign
Māṇāka	375-400CE.
Devarāja	400-425CE.
Vibhurāja	425-447CE.
Avidheya	447-455CE.
Bhaviṣya	455-470CE.
Abhimanyu	470-490CE.

Another proposition was that there was the rise of Sōmavaṃsī dynasty under Tivaradēva. This dynasty was able to establish its supremacy over the present district of Bhandak around the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. It was a short-lived dynasty that ruled for only three generations. He had issued two important charters- Baloda<sup>676</sup> and Rajim plates<sup>677</sup>. It is from the Baloda plates that Tivaradēva has described himself as the lord of the entire Kośala. He declared from the camp of Śripura that he was also the overlord of the neighbouring regions. This indicates that Vidarbha was also under his jurisdiction for a brief period of time. Later on,

<sup>674</sup> Sudhakar, *Some Early Dynasties of South India*, p.182.

<sup>675</sup> *Annual Report Mysore Archaeological Department*, 1929, Bangalore: The Government Press, 1931, pp.209-210.

<sup>676</sup> E.J. Hultzsch, 'Baloda Plates of Tivaradeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.7, 1902-103, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 102-107.

<sup>677</sup> Rai Bahadur Hiralal, *Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar*, Nagpur: Government Printing, 1932, p. 97.

he was crushed by the Viṣṇukuṇḍin king Mādhavavarman I. Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya has stated that Tivaradēva established his dominion over the eastern part of the former Vākāṭaka territory.<sup>678</sup> Therefore we can say that the chronological gap can be bridged if we try to situate Vidarbha within the greater geo-political orbit of Deccan. The attack of the Nala king was the most accepted view regarding the political situation of Vidarbha after sixth century CE. Even archaeological sources testify to this claim. The Nala king Bhavdaṭṭa Varman attacked Vidarbha when Pṛthvīsenā II was the ruler. The Vākāṭakas had matrimonial ties with the Viṣṇukuṇḍins. So the famous Viṣṇukuṇḍin ruler Madhavavarman II Janasraya came to help the ruler. Though Nalas were defeated, the authority of the Vākāṭakas weakened. The Balaghat plate of Pṛthvīsenā II even indicates such political developments. It was the Viṣṇukuṇḍins who were able to establish a strong foothold over Vidarbha after this battle. That there was a fierce battle with the Nalas is well evident from the archaeological remains recovered from the burnt palace complex of Mansar. The remains included ash, burnt wooden poles, charred bricks, and leaning walls.<sup>679</sup> After the defeat of the Nalas, the Viṣṇukuṇḍins took control over the complex of Mansar. This is well understood from the Tummalaguden plate dated 556CE. This inscription records the marriage of Madhavarman with the daughter of Pṛthvīsenā II. Numismatic sources well attest to the presence of the Viṣṇukuṇḍin in Vidarbha. Their coins were found at the site of Paunar. Since the family of Madhavavarman was Buddhists thus, we find a Buddhist stupa within the complex of Mansar. Later the entire palace complex was transformed into a Mahāvihāra. However, it has been reported that the Mahāvihāra only functioned briefly. It was partially destroyed by the Nala king Arthapati and later abandoned due to natural

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<sup>678</sup> Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Some Early Dynasties of South India*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>679</sup> Jagat Pati Joshi and A.K. Sharma, 'Mansar Excavations 1998-2004: The Discovery of Pravarapur', pp. 1-28.

calamities.<sup>680</sup> The initial phase of Mahāvihāra flourished only for twenty-five years as Ar̥thapati Bhaṭṭaraka, the grandson of Bhavadaṭṭavarman, again attempted to conquer Vidarbha. The Mahāvihāra was built after the fierce battle with the Nalas. This area was later accepted within the territorial jurisdiction of the Kalacurīs of the Dahala country. This can be understood from the epigraphic records of the Kalacurīs, who had their capital at Tripuri.<sup>681</sup> That the Kalacurīs exerted their control over Vidarbha is confirmed by the *Sankheda plate of Saṅkargaṇa*. This particular plate was issued from the victorious camp at Nirgundipadraka by Santilla, who was the balādhikṛta (military officer) of Nirihullaka. The latter submitted to Saṅkaragaṇa is also known from this record. The Kalachuris had extended their control from Malwa to Maharashtra and Andhra in the South.<sup>682</sup> It is mainly from the *Ratanpur Stone inscription of Jajalaladeva*<sup>683</sup> and the fragmentary *Tewar inscription of King Bhimapala*<sup>684</sup> we come to know that the Kalacurīs had a vast area of Deccan under their control. The northern boundary of their territory extended up to the lower course of river Gāṅga, i.e., from Allahabad to Benaras, as indicated in the inscriptions of Karna.<sup>685</sup> The southern part of the Kalacurīs included the entire Narmada valley and even covered the areas around the Maikhal range. This proves that Vidarbha was included within the jurisdiction of the Kalacurīs. Śaṅkargaṇa issued the Abhoṇa plate of the Kalacurī year 347(597CE) He was the successor of the famous ruler Kṛṣṇa. This inscription suggests that certain parts of Vidarbha came under the territorial jurisdiction of the Kalacurīs. This

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<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 1-28.

<sup>681</sup> Mirashi (ed.), *Corpus*, vol.5, pp. 103–105.

<sup>682</sup> Mirashi (ed.), *Corpus*, vol.4 Part I, pp. 44–46.

<sup>683</sup> Prof. F. Kielhorn, 'Ratanpur Stone inscription of Jajalaladeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. I, 1983, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, pp. 32–36.

<sup>684</sup> Hira Lal Rai Bahadur, *Inscriptions in the Central Provinces and Berar*, Nagpur: Government Press, 1916, pp. 27-29.

<sup>685</sup> Rajiv K. Verma, *Feudal Social Formation in Early Medieval India*, New Delhi: Anamika Publishers and Distributors (P), Ltd., 2002, pp. 15–20.

epigraphic record states a grant of a hundred nīvartanas of land in the village of Vallisikā in the viśaya of Bhōgvardhana. This particular grant was given to the brāhmaṇa, a village resident called Kallivana. V.V. Mirashi identified it with the modern Kalvan in the district of Nasik.<sup>686</sup> The provenance of this plate was in Ābhōna, which is situated close to the town of Kalvan (Nasik district). Valliska is identified with modern Valsa, seven miles south of Bhōkardhan.<sup>687</sup> The identification of the present location of the donated village indicates that Vidarbha entered into the dominion of the early Kalacurīs is testified from this record. The epigraphic records also suggest that the Rāṣtrakūṭas had established their control over Vidarbha. Four copper plates belonging to Gōvinda II have been recovered from Vidarbha. The earliest of them was issued in the Śaka year 722. This inscription shows that village called Amjaṇa-vamtī (modern Anjanvati in the Amravati district of Vidarbha) was donated. Its boundary villages, Gōhasodva, Sallaimāla, Kurē, and Vaṭapura, are now represented by Gahva, Salora-Amla, Kurha, and Vadur, respectively. Veyaghana and Talevataka were the two places where the donees of the grant resided. They are identical to Waigaon and Talegaon, respectively, located in the vicinity of Anjanvati.<sup>688</sup> Three more grants dated in the Śaka years 725, 729, and 734 have been found at Sirso in the Murtizapur taluka of the Akola district. They record Govinda's donations to the villages Jharika (modern Jhari in the Kelapur taluka of the Yeotmal district), Sisavai (identical to Sirso), and Lohara (in the Murtizapur taluka), respectively. Their boundary villages also can be identified in their vicinity. Most of the grants of Govinda were issued from Mayurakhandi. It was his capital.<sup>689</sup> There is a debate among scholars regarding the identification of Mayurkhandi.

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<sup>686</sup> Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus vol.4, Part 1*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>687</sup> Mirashi (ed.) *Corpus, vol 4 Part 1*, pp. 38-39.

<sup>688</sup> V.V. Mirashi and L.R. Kulkarni (eds.), 'Anjanvati copper plate inscription of Govinda III; Saka year 722, *Epigraphia Indica, vol. XXIII*, 1935, pp. 8-9.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 8-9.

A.S Altekar suggests that it was the place of Morkhand situated in the Nasik district. V.V. Mirashi identified Mayurkandi with Markandi, located in the Chandrapur district. Thus according to his view, Markandi is located within Vidarbha.<sup>690</sup>

Another critical inscription issued by Kṛṣṇa III records the name of a village, Tālapurumshaka. The donation of this village is recorded in the Deoli Plates of Kṛṣṇa III. The donated village is located close to Nandivardhana, which is presently located in the Nagpur district.<sup>691</sup> Bhandak plates of Kṛṣṇarāja I were issued when the ruler was camping at Nandipuravari, identified as Nandura. This particular inscription was issued in the year 772 CE. Nagna was the village donated to maintain a temple of Āditya situated in the town of Udumvaramanti. Nagamagrama bounded this town in the east, Umvaragrāma in the South, Anataraigrama in the west, and Kapiddhagrāma in the North. All the villages were situated in the adjacent area of two districts- Yeotmal and Chanda. The location of the donated villages shows that the Rāṣṭrakūṭa kings had exerted a considerable degree of control over Vidarbha during the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E.<sup>692</sup> Therefore we can say that the history of Vidarbha in the period between sixth to ninth centuries can be traced if we place it within the wider political context.

Since it was revenue yielding fertile zone of Deccan, different political powers were eager to establish their control over this part. Finally it was Kalacurīs and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas who were able to establish their control over this fertile zone of Deccan.

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<sup>690</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>691</sup> R.G. Bhandarkar, Deoli plates of Krishna III, Saka –Samvat 862, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. v, 1899, pp.188-189. Also see V.R. Deoras, 'Fresh Light on the Southern Campaigns of the Rashtrakuta Emperor Krishna II,' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol.20, 1957, pp.133-140.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 133–140.

### **Vidarbha in the post – Vākāṭaka phase from literary sources**

Though there is doubt regarding the historical relevance of the kings mentioned in *Daśakumārcharita*, this work by Daṇḍin is vital to understand the political scenario of Vidarbha after the end of Hariṣeṇa's reign. It is from *Avantisundarīkathā*<sup>693</sup> we come to know about the biography of Daṇḍin. There is huge debate among the scholars regarding the date of Daṇḍin. The most accepted view is that he belonged to the period close to seventh century or the beginning of the eighth century. He was the court poet of Pallava kings. He belonged to a reputed family and his great grandfather Dāmodara was from Vidarbha. He came to the Pallava court of Siṃhaviṣṇu. His parents died when he was child and led a life of wanderer till Cālukyans were defeated by Parameśvaravarman, the famous Pallava ruler. He enjoyed prestigious status at his court and his son Narasiṃhavarman.

<sup>694</sup>From this text, we know that weak rulers succeeded Hariṣeṇa, and there was an increase in the power of the feudatories who used to serve the Vākāṭakas. This period also witnessed the emergence of new political centres in Deccan, and Vidarbha was subsumed within the territorial jurisdiction of these new political powers of Deccan. This text also show that a new centre of power developed in Central India centering Māhiṣmatī.

Historians are divided in their opinion regarding the historical relevance of this text. The weakness of the Vākāṭakas was already apparent and is also known from this important literary source. From the *Daśakumārcharita*, we know that the successors of Hariṣeṇa were weak, and the feudatories rose into rebellion. Furthermore, the Kaḍambas of the Kuṇṭala countries ultimately attacked the Vākāṭaka kingdom. However, the veracity of this incident

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<sup>693</sup> V.A.R Sastri, *Avantisundarīkathā of Ācārya Daṇḍin*, Travancore: Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, 1954, pp. 1-24.

<sup>694</sup> Dharmendra Kumar Gupta, *Society and Culture in the Time of Dandin*, Delhi: Mearchand Lachhmandas, 1972, pp. 16-20 and 26.

is doubtful because epigraphic records speak of a different political scenario. V.V. Mirashi, to a certain extent, agrees with the historical relevance of this text and argues that this particular text helps us to understand the last days of the Vākāṭaka rule over Vidarbha. He stated that Daṇḍin, like his predecessor Kālidāsa and his successors Rājaśekhara and Padmagupta, changed the name of the characters. However, the incidents narrated in this text reflect the last days of the Vākāṭaka rule.<sup>695</sup> There is considerable debate regarding the dating of this particular text. Some scholars place it around the sixth century C.E. In contrast, the most accepted view is that it was composed around the ninth century C.E. H.H. Wilson has provided an excellent argument regarding the dating issue of this particular text. Wilson viewed that the name of the author – Daṇḍi- means 'staff bearer' and is commonly used to designate a group of mendicants devoted to the spiritual ideals of Śaṅkarāchārya. These groups were popular around the eighth century C.E. Therefore, he dates this text around eighth century CE. *Daśakumārcharita* is about the adventure of ten Kumāras, who were mainly the followers of the king of Magadha named Rājahaṃsa.<sup>696</sup> The story of Viśruta, one of the Kumāras narrated in the last Uchhvāsa, is exceptionally relevant for understanding Vidarbha's political scenario. This story has been used as a political metaphor to show how the Vākāṭaka rulers slowly lost their glory.<sup>697</sup> This last chapter tells the story of a king who belonged to the famous family of Bhoja. His name was Punyavarman. He has been described as a benevolent monarch who was protective towards his subjects and famous for patronizing the learned men. He was succeeded by his son

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<sup>695</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Daṇḍin's *Daśakumārcharita*,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, vol.26, No.1/2, 1945, pp. 20-31.

<sup>696</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, London: Society For the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846, pp. 1-5.

<sup>697</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, London: Society For the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846, pp. 1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, 1907, pp. 12-60.

Anatavarman who fell prey to evil practices, indulged in pleasure, and completely ignored daṇḍanīti that was taught by the most experienced minister of the kingdom – Vasurakṣita. Slowly, Vidarbha entered into a phase of enormous turmoil. Taking advantage of this situation, Vasantanabhānu, then the ruler of Aśmaka, sent his minister to the court of Vidarbha. This initiated a hostile condition, leading to a war between the ruler of Aśmaka and Vanavāsi on one side and Anantavarman and his feudatories on the other. His feudatories included Avantideva of Kuntala, Virasena of Murala, Ekavira of Rṣika, Kumāragupta, the ruler of Konkan, and Nāgapala of Nāsikya. However, Vasantaḥbhānu successfully turned all the feudatories in his favor, who ultimately betrayed the ruler of Vidarbha, and the latter was killed. A faction fight among the feudatories followed after this and ultimately, the ruler of Aśmaka and Banavasi enjoyed the fruits of this war. Vidarbha was brought under the control of Vasantaḥbhānu, the ruler of Aśmaka. This entire episode occurred on the bank of the river Vardha, identified as present Wardha. With the minister's aid, the former Queen of Vidarbha and her two sons came to the court of Māhiṣmatī for refuge. Later on, when they found their lives to be under threat, they escaped and met Viśruta in the forests of the Vindhya Range. However, the end of the narrative is quite abrupt. It is stated that Viśruta took charge of the kingdom of Māhiṣmatī and looked after the state affairs.<sup>698</sup>

This particular literary source is interesting as it shows that Vidarbha and Aśmaka were two separate kingdoms by this time. Although we need to observe this whole region comprising both Vidarbha and Aśmaka as a whole when reviewing the history of the zone

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<sup>698</sup>H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumāracharita*, pp. 1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, pp. 12-60. V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Dasakumārcharita,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research*, 1945, vol. 26, No.1/2, pp. 21-30.



under our focus, this story offers important clues in understanding the changing spatial notions. The characters mentioned in this text bear no historical relevance, but the geopolitical situations narrated through this story carry a certain degree of historical pertinence. From the text, it is known that after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule, the center of power shifted to three new places, viz., Māhiṣmatī and Malava in the North and Vanavasi in the South. This is also known from epigraphic sources, namely the Barwani copper plate inscription<sup>699</sup> and the Gwalior copper plates<sup>700</sup> where we come across the name of a ruler called Subandhu. It is stated in both the epigraphic records that he was the ruler of Mahismati and did not belong to the Vākāṭaka family. It is clearly understood from Daśakumārcharita that after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule, there was a chaotic situation in Deccan and this period witnessed the emergence of minor ruling dynasties. We come across three ruling families. They comprise of Candavarman of Malava, Bhanuvarman of Vanavasi, and Avantīdeva of Kuṇṭala.

The most historically pertinent data that can be gleaned from this text is that by the end of the sixth century, Vidarbha became a huge kingdom with few notable feudatories who served the rulers. They are Vastabhanu, who was the ruler of Aśmaka. That Aśmaka was initially under the control of Vidarbha and was not a separate kingdom, is also understood from this text. But the story indicated the rise of this feudatorial power and its probable gain of victory over the suzerain. Aśmaka is mainly identified as lying in the area between the Sātmālā range and the Godavari River. The Rāṣṭrakuṭas conquered both of these areas. The *Pāṇḍaraṅgapallī plate of the Rāṣṭrakuṭa king Avidheya* states that the kingdom of

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<sup>699</sup> Hirananda Sastri (ed.) ‘Barwani Copper-plate Inscription of Maharaja Subandhu, Year 167’, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.xix, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1983, pp. 261-62.

<sup>700</sup> Annual Administration Report of the Archaeological Department, Gwalior State, Gwalior: Alijah Darbar Press, 1940, p. 19

Aśmaka was within the territorial jurisdiction of Vidarbha, which they conquered.<sup>701</sup> However, in the Ajanta Cave inscription no. XXVI Aśmaka appears to have been under a separate ruler with two ministers.<sup>702</sup> The next feudatory ruler who served the Vākāṭakas was Avantideva of Kuntala. The country of Kuntala was adjacent to Vidarbha, and thus they were often on hostile terms with each other. The inscription in the cave XVI at Ajanta records that the Vākāṭakas won the battle against them under Sarvaṣeṇa and Hariṣeṇa. Later, with the weak successors, the Kuntala country gained dominance over certain parts of Vidarbha. Ekavira of Rṣīka was another ruler who had served the Vākāṭakas. Rṣīka is an ancient name given to Khandesh, with Valkhā (Vaghli) as the capital. From the cave inscriptions of Ajanta (XVII), we get names of princes connected with the ruling family of Valkhā. In that list, we get the names of Harisena, which suggests that Valkhā (300-600CE.) was under the jurisdiction of the Vākāṭaka rule.<sup>703</sup> Suchandra Ghosh has shown that the Valkhās were neighbouring powers of the Vākāṭakas and this entire region was linked with arterial routes through narrow passageways. The Vākāṭakas influenced the Valkhā administrative system.<sup>704</sup>

Another important ruler mentioned in the text was Kumāragupta of Konkan. Initially, the rulers had good diplomatic relations with the Traikūṭakas. Later, their allegiance shifted to the Vākāṭakas. The two other rulers mentioned in this text were Nagapala of Naiki and Virasena of Murala. This last prince was connected with the royal family of the

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<sup>701</sup> V.V. Mirashi 'Pandarangapalli grant of Rashtrakuta Avidheya', *Epigraphia Indica* 37, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1968, pp. 9-24.

<sup>702</sup> Mirashi, 'Ajanta Cave Inscription', *Corpus vol.5*, pp. 103-105.

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 103-105.

<sup>704</sup> Suchandra Ghosh, 'A Hoard of Copper Plates', p. 4.

Traikūṭakas.<sup>705</sup> The text does not provide much information about this dynasty, but Murala was identified as the area closer to the Godavari River.<sup>706</sup> On the basis of his analysis of *Daśakumārcharita* Robert DeCaroli<sup>707</sup> points out that by the time the Pallava ruler Narasiṃhavarman II<sup>708</sup> came to the throne the Vākāṭaka territories were brought under his control. B.V. Shetti agrees with him and has pointed out that artists who built the famous Kailāshnāth temple at Kancī and Mamallapuram shore temple were basically descendents of the Vākāṭaka territory who all migrated when there was turmoil in the territories of the Vākāṭakas.<sup>709</sup> This would be dated sometime in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

The decline of Vidarbha as a viable sub region in economic infrastructure of its neighbouring states might be traced in a different way again in the same kind of sources, i.e., in literary references. Daṇḍin, in his *Daśakumārcharita*, has described a severe famine that had devastating effects on the entire Peninsula and might be the reason behind the disruption of settlements.<sup>710</sup> The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, which belonged to the period

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<sup>705</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, (first edition) London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1846, pp. 1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, 1907, pp. 12-60. V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Dandin's Dasakumarcharita,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research*, 1945, vol. 26, No.1/2, pp. 21-30.

<sup>706</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in Daṇḍin's Daśakumārcharita,' *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research*, 1945, vol. 26, No.1/2, pp. 21-30.

<sup>707</sup> Robert DeCaroli, 'An Analysis of Daṇḍin's Daśakumārcharita and its Implications for Both the Vakataka and Pallava Courts' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1995, vol.115, No.4, pp. 671-678.

<sup>708</sup> Thomas Foulkes, 'The Pallavas', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 1885: pp.183 - p. 220/ 203.

<sup>709</sup> B.V. Shetti, "Gupta- Vakataka Parallels in Chalukyan Art", K. Khandalavala *The Golden Age: Gupta – Art Empire, Province, Influence*, Bombay: Marg Publications, 1991, pp. 103-108.

<sup>710</sup> H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcharita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, pp. 1-30. Also see Mark Collins, *The Geographical Data of the Raghuvamśa and Daśakumārcharita*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, 1907, pp. 12-60. V.V. Mirashi, 'Historical Data in

between the 6th to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. records the severity of a prolonged drought that affected human settlement and also describes goddess Śākambharī, projected as the savior of humanity from famine and natural calamities. This appalling natural calamity that hit Deccan would have naturally adversely affected the human settlements in Vidarbha.<sup>711</sup> The effects of this famine are well evident in the works of Rājasekhara composed between the ninth and tenth century CE. But the phase would have passed and Vidarbha remained an important centre of learning.

### **Vidarbha and the efflorescence of literature: Sanskrit and Prākṛt**

The changing history of Vidarbha either as almost a region, or a sub-region or an integrated periphery or a corridor appeared throughout these phases from our study of the archaeological, epigraphic and literary sources. However, it is in literature and in literary heritage that we have to seek its cultural identity, which appears as the most visible and conspicuous in literature. For this we need to start with the rich literary heritage connected to the broad region of Deccan which is linked with the evolution of both Prākṛt and Sanskrit compositions. As to the heritage of Sanskrit literature, Vidarbha appeared on the centre-stage with Kālidāsa and later with Bhavabhūti who was the most important literary figure drawing his ancestry from the region of Vidarbha. In his famous play, *Mahāvīracharita*, he writes that his forefathers were called the *umbra*, as they hailed from the place identified as Umarkhed in the present Yeotmal district, which is situated in the Wardha-Wainganga valley. Later his ancestors shifted to Padmapura, the seat of the Vākāṭaka rulers. In Rājasekhara's (9<sup>th</sup> – early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) *Kāvyaṃimamsā*, we get the term Vachchomi

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Dandin's *Dasakumarcharita*, pp. 21-30. Janaki Nath Bhattacharyya (trans.) *Daśakumārcharita*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Press Depository, 1889, p. xi.

<sup>711</sup> Thomas B. Coburn, *The Study of the Puranas and the study of Religion*, *Religious Studies*, vol. 16, No. 3, 1980, pp. 341-352.

which is synonymous with Vastagulma, the centre of one of the Vākāṭaka branches. It was located within Vidarbha.<sup>712</sup> Vidarbha is described as a heavenly place in the writings of Rājaśekhara, whose ancestral roots were associated with the zone. In his *Kāvyamimamsā*, he glorified his ancestral place, stating that it was the abode of God.<sup>713</sup> Thus, it is clear that the famine had wrought devastations for a period but that the land of Vidarbha and its people regained its former conditions later on.<sup>714</sup> Rājaśekhara's ancestors Akālalada, Tarala, and Surānanda had their roots connected with Vastagulma. He was a Yāyāvāra brāhmaṇa. His grandfather was called *Mahāraṣṭracūḍamaṇi* and he also claimed to be originally from Mahāraṣṭra in his *Bālarāmāyana*. Another renowned ancestor Surānanda was bestowed with the epithet of *Cedīmaṇḍalamaṇḍanam* meaning 'an ornament of the country of the Cedis'.<sup>715</sup> Rājaśekhara was also associated with the court of Chedī rulers which is clearly known from the Bilhari inscription.<sup>716</sup>

*suśliṣṭabandhaghaṭanā vismitakavirājśekhhararastutyā  
āstāmiyamā kalpam kṛtiśca kīrtiśca pūrvvā ca*

Thus, in our attempt to interrogate the cultural developments of Vidarbha after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule, we find that it remained an important center of cultural activities. Not only that we can also trace histories of migrations, movements which connected Vidarbha with a wider geographical and cultural orbit in the Cedi kingdom and in the Pallava and Rāṣṭrakūṭa domains.

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<sup>712</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyamimamsā of Rājaśekhara*, New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2000, p. 40.

<sup>713</sup> Sten Konow (ed.) *Karpūra- Manjarī, Essay on Rājasekhara's Life and Writings Part III*, pp. 180-85.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>715</sup> Sten Konow (ed.) *Karpūra- Manjarī, Essay on Rājasekhara's Life and Writings Part III*, pp. 180-85.

<sup>716</sup> F. Kielhorn (ed.) 'Bilhari Inscription of the rulers of Chedi', *Epigraphia Indica, vol.i 1890*, pp. 251-270.

### **Blooming of Prākṛit as a cultural marker**

The Bharata *Nāṭyaśāstra* variously dated between 200 BCE and 500CE is the most authoritative treatise on Indian dramaturgy where we get reference to seven kinds of Prākṛit – Māgadhī, Avantija, Prācyā, Śaurasenī, Ardhamāgadhī, Bāhlika, and Dākṣiṇātya. Vararuci attached the most importance to the Mahāraṣṭrī Prākṛit as he devoted four chapters to the grammar and syntax of this particular type of Prākṛit. He devoted one chapter each for the other types.<sup>717</sup> The Mahāraṣṭrī type of Prākṛit is one of the critical cultural markers for Vidabrha and the whole of Deccan. This is visible from the fact that the ruling class gave importance to this particular type and the upper echelons in courtly circuit composed literary works in this medium. The *Gāthasattasai*<sup>718</sup> and *Setubandha*<sup>719</sup> were composed in this medium. The six types of Prakrit mentioned by Bharata have been assigned specific geographical locations. The purest form of Prākṛit is the Śaurasenī one which had its root in Mathura. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* stated that the drama dialogues are best written in this type of Prākṛit, and the female characters in the drama must speak in this language.<sup>720</sup> The Mahārashtrī Prākṛit is considered best suitable for composing songs and for ornamental language -use. It is also called the Dākṣiṇātya Prākṛit, and its root can be traced to the Godavari basin.<sup>721</sup> Andrew Ollett has pointed out that with the end of the Sātavāhana rule the age of Prākṛit also experienced a temporary setback. The Śakas of Ujjainī and their

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<sup>717</sup> C.B. Varma and C.B. Varma, 'The Prakrit Bloom,' *Indian Literature*, January – February, vol. 46, No.1, pp. 139-149.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144.

<sup>719</sup> Krishna Kanta Handiqui, (trans. with critical notes) *Pravarasena's Setubandha, Original text in Prakrit accompanied with Sanskrit rendering*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas, 1976.

<sup>720</sup> Adya Rangacharya (trans. with critical notes) *The Nāṭyaśāstra*, (first edition) New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 1984, pp. 53-64.

<sup>721</sup> Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes Prakrit Sanskrit and the Language Order of Pre-modern India*, pp. 69-75.

allies Ābhīras considered the end of the Sātavāhana rule as a cultural victory. This is why we find an inscription composed in Sanskrit just a few miles away from the Queen's cave at Nasik. This particular inscription was composed during the reign of the Ābhīra king Madhariputra Ísvarasena.<sup>722</sup> But Ikṣvākus of Vijyapuri chose to follow the cultural path of the Sātavāhanas and the Kṣatrapas. Ollett further added that the Sātavāhanas and the successors in Deccan infused cultural energies into Prākṛt literature. According to him, this literature was no less sophisticated and had the feature of courtliness. The *Gāthāsaptasāthī* was considered the product of the royal court. The myth was that it was composed with the blessings of some supernatural power. The divine intervention for the origin of the text has been claimed based on the story revolving around the goddess Bhāratī. Even Bāṇabhaṭṭa, in his famous *Harṣacarita*, applauded the Sātavāhanas for patronizing such an incredible literary work as the *Gāthāsaptasāthī*.

*“avināśinam agrāmyam ākarot sātavāhanāḥ Viśuddhajātibhi  
kośaṃ ratnair iva subhāṣitāḥ”*

Meaning: “Sātavāhana has made an inexhaustible and urbane treasury of well-turned verses, all in the same meter, like jewels of proven quality.”<sup>723</sup>

This work is considered to have set the beginning of the Prākṛt language in the literary domain. The Vākāṭakas followed this trend. This popularity of Prākṛit as a literary language leads us to say that in the making of Vidarbha as a cultural region, Prākṛit as much as

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<sup>722</sup> Bhagwansingh Suryavanshi, *The Abhiras: Their History and Culture*, Baroda: Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1962, pp. 97-100.

<sup>723</sup> A.A. Fuhrer (ed.) *Deeds of Harṣa (Harṣacharita of Banabhaṭṭa: Banabhata's Biography of King Harshavardhana of Sthāṇīśvara*, Bombay: Governmental Central Press, 1909, p. 14 Also cited in Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes*, p. 98.

Sanskrit language served as an essential ingredient. Two works were composed in Prākṛit by two famous rulers of the Vākāṭaka dynasty, the *Harivijaya* by Sarvaṣeṇa (founder of the Vatsagulma branch, 325-340 CE) and the *Setubandha* by Pravaraṣena II (420-455CE).

However, we find that soon the relationship with the Guptas not only had a bearing on the diplomatic front but also impacted the use of language. The inscriptions of Prabhāvatīgupta were composed in Sanskrit. We note that the inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas were all composed in Sanskrit. The tradition of Prākṛit literature was therefore put to the background for a period of time but revived again around ninth- tenth century CE with the composition of *Karpūramañjarī* by Rājaśekhara in Śaurasēnī prākṛit. We can say that the cultural identity that Vidarbha acquired was not lost with the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. Instead, it continued to flourish as a centre of learning and knowledge.<sup>724</sup> Trivikramabhaṭṭa, a renowned poet of tenth century CE and composer of the *Nalacampū kāvyā* who flourished in the court of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in the time of Indra III was also associated by lineage with Vidarbha.

### **Vidarbha and the Vaidarbhī rīti**

In the period following the end of the Vākāṭaka rule, we find that the function of this zone of habitation underwent a significant change. It was no longer the centre from where the political powers exercised their authority but remained a fertile agricultural belt over which rising political powers on the flanks established their control. Apart from its role as a conduit for economic transactions and a settlement zone, it retained its identity in a very significant way in the high world of literary culture. We see how the style or use of Sanskrit language in terms of poetics was formulated in the grammatical rule of mārḡa which later

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<sup>724</sup> C.B. Varma and C.B. Varma, 'The Prakrit Bloom', p. 146.



came to be denoted as *rīti*, a major style being the *Vaidarbhī mārga* or *rīti*. This was naturally the one that was popular among the authors connected to the whole of Deccan, but was distinct and significant cultural marker of Vidarbha as well. It was considered as a diction that was popular in the whole of Peninsular India. The features and types of *rīti* varied from one poet to the other. But for all the poets this *Vaidarbhī rīti* was the best and soft in nature suitable for narrating love and erotic expressions. It is first in *Agṇi Purāṇa* that we get the term ‘*vaidarbhī*’.

In the *Kāvyaṃimamsā*, Rājasekhara has mentioned that *Gauḍiya rīti* was used by the poets of the eastern part. He writes that in Malaya, Kuntala, Mahisaka, Aśmaka, and Vidarbha, the poetic style used was *Vaidarbhī rīti*.<sup>725</sup> Rājasekhara gives four geographical/cultural divisions based on his study of *rīti*.<sup>726</sup> (see fig:5.1)

**Table 5.4: Showing the general division of various *rītis* and *pravṛttis***

Western Regions	Pāñcāla	Avantī	Southern States
Bhāratī <i>rīti</i>	Sattavati <i>vṛtti</i>	Kauśikī	
Audhara – Māgadhī <i>pravṛtti</i>	Pāñcālamadhyama <i>Pravṛtti</i> .	Avantī <i>pravṛtti</i>	Dakṣiṇāyata <i>pravṛtti</i>
Gauḍiya <i>rīti</i>	Pāñcāla <i>rīti</i>		Vaidarbhī <i>rīti</i>

<sup>725</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṃimamsā*, p. 39

<sup>726</sup> *Ibid.* p. 38.

**Table 5.5: Showing features of different rīti according to Daṇḍin**

SR. No	Name of the rīti	Features
1	Pāñcāla	Moderate compounds, limited use of alliteration, and yogarūḍhi (restricted etymological significance)
2.	Gauḍīya	Long compounds with excessive use of metaphors
3.	Vaidarbha	No extended use of compounds, highly soft.
4.	Lāṭīya	Little use of compounds with no excessive use of metaphor with repetition of exact words.

Daṇḍin (around sixth –seventh century CE) the other great litterateur and exponent of Sanskrit poetics on the other hand, has referred to two styles of poetic composition – Vaidarbhī and Gauḍī. Daṇḍin is the first to coin the term rīti instead of mārga and he made this division on the basis of guṇas. Vāmana (9<sup>th</sup> century CE) viewed that the soul of poetry lies in the rīti. In his work *Kavyālaṃkārasūtra* –vr̥ṭṭi, he has described three rītis- Vaidarbhī, Gauḍī, and Pāñcālī. Vāmana, however, questions the association of particular rīti or style with a particular region. He rejected regional appellation and believed that naming the different styles only signifies that the poets of those regions used these styles. He agreed with Daṇḍin however on the quality of the Vaidarbhī rīti and points out that it characterized use of Sanskrit language which was full of expressions. Whereas other rītis lacked one or the other features of poetics, all elements were present exclusively in the Vaidarbhī rīti. He traces back the root of Vaidarbhī rīti to the times of Kālidāsa and considers the Śakuntalā as the classic example of this style. That the particular rītis were associated with the specific geographical locations has been confirmed by an eminent scholar of the Rāṣṭrakuṭa era. His name was Raṇaśrījñāna (10<sup>th</sup> century CE). He illustrates his point in the commentary on *Kāvyādarśa*, taking the example of sandalwood. He remarks that sandalwood may be available elsewhere (other than Malaya), but it does not indicate that sandalwood is

indigenous to those places. Similarly, Vaidarbhī rīti may be followed by the poets from other geographical location but it typically belongs to Vidarbha. Vaidarbhī rīti is native (sahaja) to the southerners as Gauḍiya rīti is to the people of the east.<sup>727</sup> In the words of Bhavabhūti (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE), Vaidarbha rīti is the best one as it possesses all qualities required for composing the best poetic style. Bhavabhūti has also categorized rītis based on the suitability of different rasas. In his view, Vaidarbhī rīti is the most appropriate one to emote rasas like śṛṅgāra and Karuṇa rasa, whereas the Gauḍī rīti is suitable for vīra, raudra, and bibhatsa rasas. The use of Vaidarbhī rīti was reflected in his literary creations like *Mālatī – Mādhava* and *Uttar Rāmacarita*.<sup>728</sup> Vāmana can be praised for making rīti a separate category in poetics. His *Kāvyaḷaṃkarasūtra* (composed in the ninth century CE.) defined rīti as *viśiṣṭa padarcana*. He considered Vaidarbhī rīti the best among all.

We may refer to Rājasekhara once again and note how the story of origin of Sanskrit language and poetics had been woven into myth by the poet, and how regional centres of learning and literary culture had been intertwined and represented in that myth. Rājasekhara devoted a chapter on the origin of literature, the allegorical story of the Primal Being of Poetry or Poetry Man in *Kāvyaṃmāmsā* in the following manner. Kāvyaṃpuruṣa, the son of the goddess of Speech was composed of Sanskrit which resided in his mouth, Prākṛt graced his arms, Apabhraṃśa formed his groin and his feet were adorned with Paisāca. His chest carried a mixed language. His companion was Sāhityavidyā. The duo travelled about in search of the vocabulary of different regions. They chanced upon the different regional styles prevalent in the east, north and eventually came down to the south. Here, the

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<sup>727</sup> Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Pre-modern India*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009, p. 214.

<sup>728</sup> V.V. Mirashi, *Bhavabhūti: His Date, Life, and Work*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996, pp. 317–319.

Kāvya-purūṣa spoke in verses with moderate alliteration, no compounds, and simple words, which became known as the Vaidarbha path/ mārga.<sup>729</sup>

Vāmana added, "Vaidarbha is simple in meaning devoid of figuration, clear, straight, soft in phonological texture and easy to listen to; it would only differ as a song would." With its figuration, sophistication, substance learning, and orderliness, Gauḍīya can be as excellent as Vaidarbha.<sup>730</sup>

**Table 5.6: Showing different divisions of rīti and their respective theorists**

Theorist	Categories	Basis
Daṇḍin	Vaidarbhī and Gauḍīya	guṇas
Vāmana	Along with the above two, Pāñcālī is added.	guṇas
Ānandavardhana	Asamasa, dirghamāsa and madhyamamāsa	compounds
Kuntaka	Sukumāra, vicitṛa, madhyama	Nature also depends on the practice of the poets
Rudrata	Vaidarbhī, Gauḍīya, Pāñcālī, lāṭīya.	Use of compounds
Bhoja	Vaidarbhī, Gauḍīya, Pāñcālī, Lāṭīya, Māgadhī, Avantika.	Based on alaṃkāra
Mammaṭa	Paruṣa, komala	Mode of composition and arrangement of letters
Viśvanātha	Vaidarbhī, Gauḍīya, Pāñcālī, Lāṭīya	Compounds an arrangement of letters

<sup>729</sup> Parashar, *Kāvya-mimāṃsā*, p. 30-40.

<sup>730</sup> P.C. Lahiri, *Concept of Rīti and Guṇa in Sanskrit Poetics*, Dacca: University of Dacca, 1937, p. 85-111.

Sheldon Pollock projected that this was the most robust case of the 'cultural–political project' which was intertwined with the vernacularization process. It also indicates that the southern vernacular writers derived their identity from their language and style. Pollock further stressed that it would not be correct to give immense emphasis on the literary-cultural-ecology. In the later period, especially from the late tenth century onwards, different literary ways were conceived as components of literary language without attaching any regionality to it. However, it is evident that geospatial connection had been built over the centuries at the initial stage of their formation.

We can say that the cultural identity that Vidarbha acquired was not lost with the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. Instead, it continued to flourish as a center of learning and knowledge. As we have observed above, Rājasekhara's great grandfather, Akālalada who was from Vidarbha was hailed as 'Mahārāshtracūḍamaṇi.' This term is significant as it suggests the other name for Vidarbha was Mahāraṣṭra. It was a culturally rich area with which many renowned scholars were associated.<sup>731</sup> Even the composer of Nalachampū kāvya – Trivikramabhaṭṭa (915CE)<sup>732</sup> who was closely associated with the court of the Rāṣṭrakūṭas, was from Vidarbha.<sup>733</sup> Some renowned litterateurs in their writings have glorified Vidarbha showing that it was a culturally sophisticated and distinct zone of Deccan. In this way, we find at least in the abstract cultural sense Vidarbha gained a distinct identity though in reality of the political – economic sense it was subsumed within the jurisdictions of the powers in the wider regions of Deccan. In this process we can locate the Viṣṇukūṇḍins,

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<sup>731</sup> Sten Konow and Charles Rockwell Lanman (trans.) *Rāja-Cekhara's Karpūra-Manjarī* Harvard: Harvard University, 1901, pp. 177-180.

<sup>732</sup> Sukumari Bhattacharji, 'A Survey of Sataka poetry', *Sahitya Akademi*, 1980, p. 38.

<sup>733</sup> Menna Kumari Devi, *Nala, and the Swan Messenger: A Critical Study of the Nalachampū of Trivikramabhaṭṭa*, Calcutta: Pusti Pustak, 2006, pp.20-22.

followed by the Kalacurīs and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas who ruled in the wider regions around Vidarbha in different phases. Vidarbha was brought into the periphery of their territorial dominion and the strategic importance of Vidarbha led to its function as a corridor<sup>734</sup> connecting the Gangetic plain with the Deccan.

We have discussed above how Vidarbha featured in the statal perspective and policies of the rising political powers of Deccan after sixth century CE. Vidarbha no longer remained the seat of any political power rather functioned as a conduit through which these powers gained access over larger economically profitable landscape. However, the proposition given by the archaeologists that the human habitations had declined severely in the zone cannot be accepted completely, even if the famine had hit Vidarbha. It only seems to have had some temporal effects. Such a high revenue generating area of Deccan did not perish completely. Rather the presence of the new political powers around Vidarbha as gleaned from epigraphic and literary evidence suggests that it remained revenue yielding zone of Deccan which was brought under the territorial jurisdiction of these powers.

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<sup>734</sup> Monica L. Smith, 'Territories, Corridors and Networks: A Biological Model for the Pre modern State', Los Angeles: *Willey Periodicals*, 2007, pp. 32-33.

## Maps and Illustrations

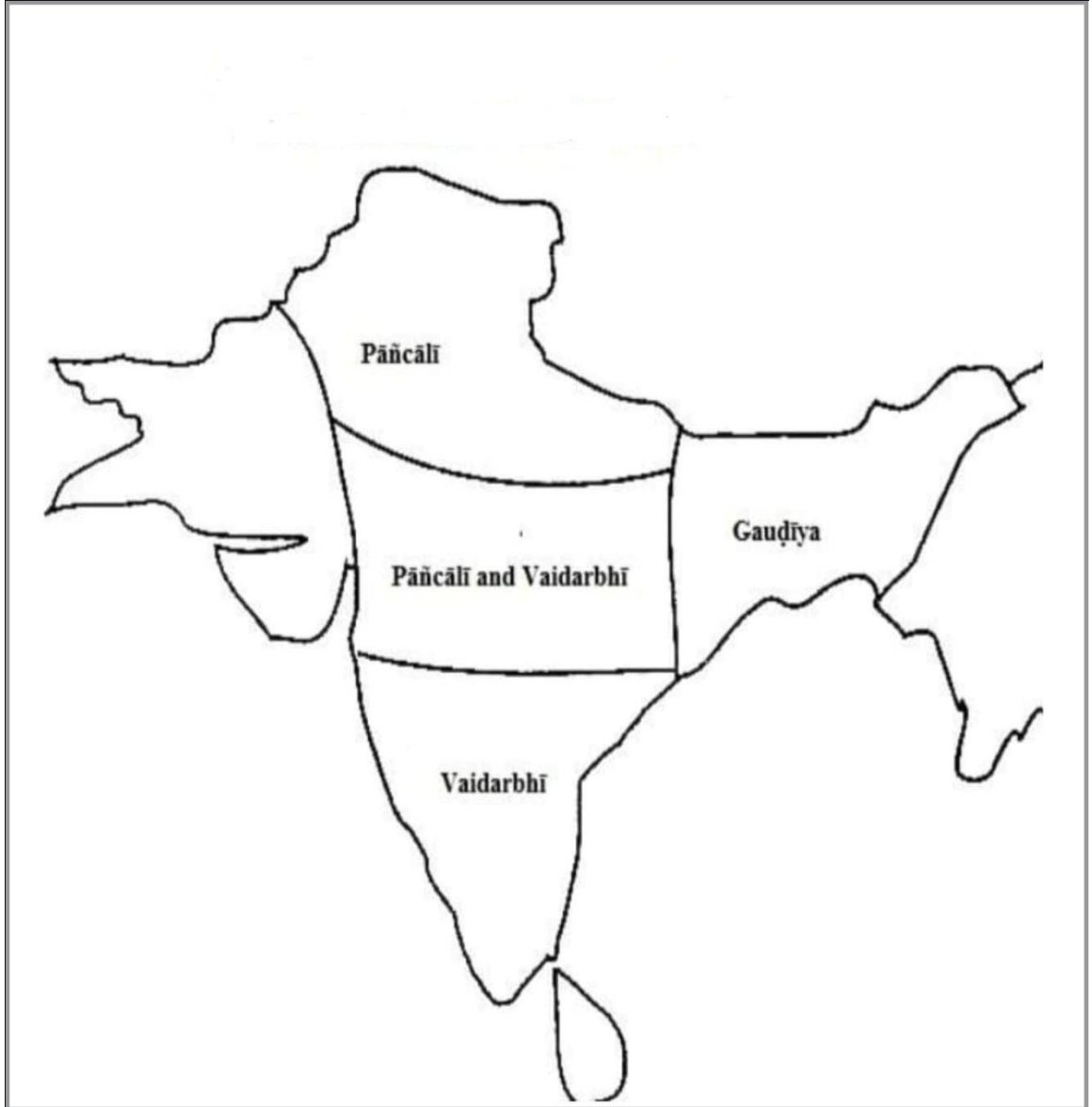


Fig. 5.1: Rājaśekhara's Concepts on Regional Literary Styles

Courtesy: Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṁimāṁsā*, 2000

## Conclusion

In this work, we have tried to analyze how the geographical space referred as Vidarbha evolved as a distinct cultural zone over a long period of time. The concept and the functionality of this geographical space changed from time to time as it interacted with the broader socio-political and cultural dynamics of Deccan as well as the Northern Gangetic plains. Instead of designating Vidarbha as a full-fledged and evolved region in the first place, we have tried to show the processes through which this geographical space emerged as a zone, inhabited from the earliest times and utilized for various human activities. The landscape bore the imprints of the socio-economic changes and historical experiences which are reflected in myriad of cultural artifacts that bear the marks of a rich and complex history. These changes took place due to internal developments and external cultural factors that flowed into Vidarbha through several historical phases. The complex procedures involved in the making of Vidarbha as a distinct cultural zone has been interpreted from two perspectives: first, by acknowledging the historical cognizance of Vidarbha that is reflected in the literary sources belonging to different phases. Secondly, we trace through the actual historical processes that this zone of habitation underwent. For the first aspect we look into the perceptions found in the literary sources as one of the parameters of understanding the cultural identity of Vidarbha. The second method was to follow the archaeological indices for the evolution of the inhabited zone. This includes the study of the settlement pattern and material culture of the region.

We have already discussed how archaeologists have picked up the term Vidarbha from literary sources. For the archaeologists, the cultural parameters found in the Wardha-Waingangā valley represented the culture of Vidarbha. The descriptions of geographical features given in the texts, names of places, rivers, and persons they came across while studying literature of various periods have provided the archaeologists with concrete



evidence to identify its present geographical location. In fact, it is from the study of the literary sources that Vidarbha as a well-known demarcated space seems to have received recognition from the litterateurs of the ancient past. These authors were not always from the land itself. Thus, we needed to begin with the early historical perceptions in the textual evidence. However, it is from the archaeological sources that we derive the clear conception of the material basis of the history of this zone.

The earliest literary evidence for Vidarbha is found in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>735</sup> The Wardha-Waingangā valley has been identified as the core area of Vidarbha, where human settlements grew up from the late Chalcolithic period. Several sites like – Adam, Bhon, Kaudinyapura, etc., were inhabited by people mainly because of the advantageous location and availability of resources. The literary sources throw light on the connection between Vidarbha and Aśmaka janapada. Amarendra Nath, in his detailed report on Adam, made it clear that Adam was the Assikanagara mentioned in the ancient texts.<sup>736</sup> Perceptions are essential for writing the history of a region in any given context. In the case of Vidarbha, various references in the texts were mainly the perceptions of the onlookers because none of these texts were directly from Vidarbha; the settings of these texts were mainly northern India. We know from these texts how Vidarbha was conceptualized in the memory of the people who were not the dwellers of this land but often had an ancestral link with it. Texts composed in different historical periods are unanimous at a point that Vidarbha was a settled area though situated near the forest lands. Mythical rulers mentioned in the texts were depicted in ways that indicate ancient political processes which were already prevalent

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<sup>735</sup>Martin Haug (trans.) *The Aitareya Brahmana of the Rigveda (The Sacred Books of the Hindus)*, Allahabad: Sudhindra Nath Vasu 1922, p. 34.

<sup>736</sup>Amarendra Nath, Adam – An index to Vidarbha Archaeology, B.U. Nayak and N.C.Ghosh(eds.) *New Trends in Indian Art and Archaeology*, vol.i, New Delhi:Aditya Prakashan, pp. 69-70.

and directed toward gaining control over this portion of Deccan. For example, in the *Sabhā Parva* of *Mahābhārata*, a terrible encounter between Sahadeva and the king of Bhojakaṭa-Bhiṣmaka has been recorded.<sup>737</sup> Though the name of the king is not recorded in any other historical source from ancient past, the place Bhojakaṭa reappeared as an administrative unit under the Vākāṭakas. Vidarbha appeared in interesting mythical episodes like the story of the abduction of Rukmiṇī, who hailed from Vidarbha, or the story of Naḷa and Damayantī. Various eminent ancient personalities from Vidarbha also highlighted that this was a land noted for the efflorescence of knowledge and culture.<sup>738</sup> Archaeologists have identified the present location of places mentioned in literary sources like- Assikanagara, Kuṇḍin, Vidharbhapura, and Vachchomi. Very early in the 5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE we find *Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī* mentioning the city of Kuṇḍina as Vidarbha-Nagari<sup>739</sup>. Later Vastagulma was mentioned in the works of Rājaśekhara. Vastagulma was the place from where one of the branches of the Vākāṭaka rulers operated in the subsequent times. Daṇḍakāraṇya, the deep and wild forest zone, was negatively portrayed in most of the texts. It was described to be devoid of human civilization. Yet, Vidarbha, which was situated close to the Daṇḍakāraṇya, was remembered not only as a powerful kingdom but also a land with culturally distinct inhabitants.<sup>740</sup> Thus we can say that the ancient texts belonging to different periods have perceived Vidarbha in various ways. These conceptualizations may reflect the actual diachronic historical processes but must also be addressed as reflections of perceived notions, which are also integral parts of historical experiences. By

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<sup>737</sup>K.M. Ganguli, *The Mahābhārata*, vol.II, New Delhi: MunshiramManoharlal Publishers, 1990, pp. 68-69.

<sup>738</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 72–75.

<sup>739</sup>V.S. Agarwala, *India as Known to Panini*, Varanasi: Prithvi Prakashan, 1963, pp.113-115.

<sup>740</sup>Uthara Suvathan, *Landscape of Life and Death: Considering the Region of Vidarbha*, in Upinder Singh and Nayanjot Lahiri (eds.), *Ancient India: New Research*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi, 2015, pp.134-135.

referring to the literary and archaeological evidence it is not specifically that we attempt to force a consensus between archaeological data and the textual evidence, but the combined methodology allows us to look deeper into the issues around the history of Vidarbha as a space and as a cultural landscape in the context of the Deccan. One vital fact cannot be denied; both sources reveal that this part of Deccan was a vibrant zone of human habitation from the early days of history. Understanding megalithic culture of Vidarbha was crucial for us in tracing the complex procedures that were active in making Vidarbha into a distinct cultural zone. The evidenced from this phase revealed that from the end of the second millennium BCE, the core area, i.e., the Wardha – Waingangā valley, was used for human habitation with distinct social and cultural formations. The megalithic builders of Vidarbha mainly preferred stone circles, whereas cists and menhirs were rare. Menhirs, a popular style of burial found in Deccan, especially in the Durg area was not found in Vidarbha.<sup>741</sup> Thus, the people of Vidarbha showed cultural distinctiveness in their burial styles. A wide range of occupations was practiced in Vidarbha, although quite naturally agriculture and animal husbandry were dominant patterns of livelihood. Even mining was a vital profession for the people of Vidarbha, as we found a large iron smelting furnace from Naikund.<sup>742</sup> Apart from iron smelting people of Vidarbha were also involved in copper objects mainly used for domestic purposes and beads making. A well-developed economic system further accelerated the process of gaining regional identity. The complexities of the Megalithic / Early Iron age laid the foundation for subsequent socio-cultural developments in Vidarbha. In order to show how from the megalithic period onwards, Vidarbha was able to carve out its distinctive cultural identity, we have used specific important theoretical

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<sup>741</sup>Virag G. Sontakke, A Review of Inner Layout of Megalithic Burials in Upper Wainganga Valley: A New Emergence in Vidarbha Megaliths, *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* (2), 2014, pp. 493–515.

<sup>742</sup>S.B. Deo and A. P. Jamkhedkar, *Excavations at Naikund 1978-79*. Bombay: Department of Archaeology and Museums of Government of Maharashtra, 1982, pp. 112-123.

parameters provided by eminent archaeologists. We have discussed the opinions of Patricia Nelson Limerick and Donald Worster. They have highlighted the importance of connecting regional history with social history. The survival techniques, subsistence strategies, and why a particular geographical space was preferred for settlement were some of the vital questions that have been studied while exploring this history.<sup>743</sup> In understanding the megalithic tradition of Vidarbha, we have also tried to understand the social relationships that existed through their mortuary practices and subsistence strategies. The settlement pattern made it clear that the Wardha- Waingangā basin was the core area. The burial sites were distantly located from the river valley, and interestingly, the pure habitational sites continued till the end of the Sātavāhana epoch. There were few changes in the settlement patterns until the mid-third century CE. The richness of the Wardha – Waingangā river valley attracted human settlement, and these sites later emerged as well-developed urban centres in subsequent historical periods.

It is from the early historic times that we have initiated the deeper probe into the rudimentary political processes in the zone, searching for the socio-economic patterns which were intertwined with the complex process of state formation over the period. The present study in this context observed that Vidarbha emerged as a cultural zone where direct and prolonged political control was not an essential criterion for its sustenance. As A.B. Knapp and W. Ashmore<sup>744</sup> noted, cultural landscapes are dynamic constructions; they are

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<sup>743</sup>Patricia Nelson Limerick, 'Region and Reason, in All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions', Edward L. Ayers (ed.) 1996, pp.88 cited in Armitage, op. pp. 32-47. Donald Worster, 'New West, True West: Interpreting the Region's History,' *Western Historical Quarterly*, 18: 2 cited in Armitage, pp.32-47.

<sup>744</sup> W. Ashmore and A.B. Knapp, *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives*, Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p.20.

an arena where all community activities are noticed.<sup>745</sup> The archaeological evidence at Vidarbha and its longue durée history from the second to the 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE highlight the possibilities of communities of inhabitants and thoroughfare experiences having played major role in its history.

But this history has also to be seen in the light of the history of the wider region and supra – regional orbit. For writing the history of a region, it is essential to explore the larger socio-cultural and political developments, and thus in understanding Vidarbha as a zone of habitation we have observed the historical processes that happened in the wider areas around it. As Romila Thapar rightly points out, a region is a part of the whole, not a whole.<sup>746</sup> Similarly, in the case of Vidarbha, Deccan's socio-political and cultural trends impacted the process involved in shaping it as a unique cultural zone. Our study also found that certain cultural elements from northern India flowed into Vidarbha due to trading and cultural activities. Moreover, nearer home, the socio-cultural developments in Deccan had deep impact on the process of evolution of Vidarbha as a region. Changes and continuities shaped and reshaped the landscape as well as the cultural matrix of Vidarbha.

Vidarbha stood culturally distinct from the rest of Deccan and we do not have evidence for major political developments towards state formation till the middle of the third century CE. Neither the Mauryas nor the powerful Sātavāhana rulers had direct control over Vidarbha. However, it stood illuminated in literary references in the *Mahābhārata* and later creative literature as a distinct historical and cultural zone of Deccan. The geographical position of Vidarbha and the availability of natural resources were the two critical factors

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<sup>745</sup>*Ibid.* p.20

<sup>746</sup>Romila Thapar, “The Historian and Archaeological Data”, Thapar, *Ancient Social History: Some Interpretations*, New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd, 1975, p. 193.

that led to the emergence of Vidarbha as a distinct cultural zone. The strategic location of Vidarbha connecting northern India with peninsular south India linked Vidarbha with overseas trading activities. It served as a corridor in the Dakṣiṇapatha. From the *Mahābhārata*, we have learned that the route going through Vidarbha connecting Prayag via Wardha Waingāṅgā valley and Bundelkhand connecting Andhra Pradesh was the safest way. This route was probably operational till the post- Sātavāhana period.<sup>747</sup>

We have mentioned earlier that the functions and spatial identity of this geographical space was never static, it kept on changing with the developing socio-political conditions of Deccan as well as northern India. We have discussed the external and internal factors responsible for shaping Vidarbha as a distinct cultural zone. We find that external factors were more influential between the Maurya and the Sātavāhana phases. Internal developments mainly took place between the mid-thirds to sixth centuries CE. Changes occurred especially with the beginning of the Vākāṭaka rule. New elements were added to the socio-cultural life of Vidarbha when it functioned as the centre of power from where the Vākāṭaka rulers exercised their authority.

Two major developments, however, took place in Vidarbha in the Mauryan times. One was the introduction of Buddhism. This phenomenon did not occur through any political process, neither did this leave any long-term politico-cultural remnant. But the phenomenon was linked with the trading communities and led to the emergence of Buddhism with a strong foothold in this part of Deccan. Interestingly, no Aśokan inscriptions were found in this part but the Buddhist stupas discovered at Pauni indicate a strong presence of the faith

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<sup>747</sup> F. E. Partiger The Geography of Rama's Exile, *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. iv, 1894, pp.231-264.

and its adherents for some time.<sup>748</sup> Secondly, for a brief period in the Pre- Sātavāhana times (150-200CE), Vidarbha witnessed the rise of local ruling families, the Bhadrās and the Mitras,<sup>749</sup> which is supported by numismatic evidence. Minting and circulation of coins indicate vibrant economic activities in this phase. Mainly un-inscribed in small and medium denominations and sometimes inscribed coins with tree railing as prime symbols were minted in large quantities, and were still in circulation when the Sātavāhanas came into power, reflecting that during these times the region enjoyed economic prosperity. This brings us to the opinion given by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya. He noted the importance of the 'locality rule' in the pre – Sātavāhana period in Deccan.<sup>750</sup> This phase, possibly coinciding with the *Mahābhārata* evidence may have heralded the beginning of more complex processes of resource accession and framing of political hierarchy from within. The archaeological traits of the pre – Sātavāhana times continued in the Sātavāhana epoch. Chattopadhyaya has rightly doubted whether the Sātavāhanas could ever have brought the entire Deccan under their domination. The rise of small ruling groups was a phenomenon that was visible in different parts of Deccan prior to the establishment of the Sātavāhana power. Vidarbha also underwent such political developments. Interestingly enough the influence of the Sātavāhana power over Vidarbha was minimal and the process of state formation that was experienced by other parts of Deccan had less impact upon Vidarbha. However, the two contemporary powers, the Western Kṣtrapas and the Sātavāhanas were eager to exploit the advantageous location of Vidarbha in order to gain better access to the trade routes that connected Paithan with Kausambi.

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<sup>748</sup>Amarendra Nath, *Further Excavations at Pauni*, New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India, 1994, pp.33-35.

<sup>749</sup>Amiteshwar Jha, 'Some More Pre- Sātavāhana Coins from Vidarbha' *IIRNS Newslines* 41 (January 2004), 2004, p.3-4.

<sup>750</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Studying Early India: Archaeology, Texts, and Historical Issues*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2011, pp. 39-47.

Significant changes in the perimeters of the zone were noticed between the fourth to sixth century CE when the two branches of the Vākāṭaka rulers established their direct control over Vidarbha and its boundaries got extended. Before the Vākāṭaka rule, Vidarbha was not functioning under any major regional or supra-regional political state. The zone was never divided into territorial or administrative units. It was only from the Maurya period onwards that the sites showed signs of urbanity, primarily due to the overseas trading network that connected the zone with various external points. The locations of the sites show there was no expansion in the contour of Vidarbha in this early phase, and it was confined to the river valley area. As a result of long-distance trade, we find punch-marked coins and other artifacts like ring wells and querns, and habitational remnants like roof tiles and ramparts, indicative of external influence.

With the coming of the Vākāṭakas and the adaptation of their territorial expansion policy, the contour of the zone expanded and administrative units were created. In this way, new internal developments brought changes in the physical extent of the region/zone. It is mainly from inscriptions of the Vākāṭaka era that we note evidence which point to the essential changes in the spatial and cultural identity of Vidarbha.<sup>751</sup> The epigraphic records of the Vākāṭaka era also elucidate the emergence of statehood in the eastern part during this phase. We now find that the development of Vidarbha was getting increasingly intertwined with the complex process of state formation which occurred on its flanks. Taking cue from the integrative state theory proposed by Hermann Kulke and Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, we attempted to start locating the roots of political processes within the select zone. However, in the case of Vidarbha, we have noticed that the changes were coming from

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<sup>751</sup>V.V. Mirashi, (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. v, pp. i-xi



within as well as due to trans-local linkages.<sup>752</sup> For example, the Rāmtekkomplex offers us with the evidence for the adaptive strategies taken up by the Eastern branch of the Vākātakas to involve local inhabitants in the process of state formation.<sup>753</sup> On the other hand, so far as external or trans-local linkages were concerned the extension of the state society into peripheral areas led to reciprocal relationships, and these areas and inhabitants were integrated into broader networks of economic and political functions. Thus, as we attempt to trace a new dimension in the study of the variegated history of space, Vidarbha emerges as a good example offering a complex diachronic history of the formation of cultural zones, the concept of cohesive regions, and the role played by the peripheries in the larger territorial states. It was a period where long-distance trading activities were absent, but agricultural expansion was palpable. The land grants made by the Vākātika rulers were an attempt to legitimize their rule; the Eastern Vākātakas had strengthened their power through Brahmanical order, whereas the Western branch executed a program of giving patronage to Buddhism, and it has been observed that the Western branch got control over the area which was under the more significant influence of Buddhism. From the inscriptions, names of the donated villages were identified, suggesting that they were located not on the river valley but the Satpura and Maikhhal ranges suggesting an expansion in the contour of Vidarbha. The economy was mainly agriculture based. There was an inter-regional trading operation, and Vidarbha was one of the participants. Most of the sites of the preceding periods no longer existed; instead, new sites came up, which were single cultural ones and displayed no signs of urbanity. A ritual landscape developed surrounding Rāmtek – Mansar Mandhal complex. Rāmtek was affiliated with Vaiṣṇavism and

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<sup>752</sup>Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Space, History and Cultural Process: Some Ideas on the Ingredients of Sub-regional Identity,' in Hermann Kulke and Georg Berkemer (eds.) *Centres out there? Facets of Sub regional Identities in Orissa*, pp. 21-35

<sup>753</sup> Lacey Ruth, *Ramtek and its landscape*, pp. 23-26.

incorporated local cults, whereas Mansar was noted for the Śaivite cult.<sup>754</sup> The new style reflected in the iconography was free from the Gupta influence, and it was also an important cultural marker that lent a distinctive regional identity to Vidarbha. Under the Vākātakas, Vidarbha experienced a new political culture and experienced a significant change in its spatial identity. It was no longer confined to the river valley but extended to the hilly areas. Major cultural developments were visible in the peripheral areas, and well-structured territorial units were formed. Thus the process of emergence of a strong polity centred in the zone led to its clear delineation as a region.

The most fascinating phase in the history of Vidarbha was the period after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule till the emergence of the Yādavas. Archaeologists have designated this phase as the period of deurbanisation. They have called it so due to the lack of evidence related to the material culture of this phase. In 1960, V.V. Mirashi<sup>755</sup> also discussed the problems related to the study of Vidarbha after the end of the Vākāṭaka rule. He points out a considerable gap in the study of Vidarbha, which has not been addressed so far. The search for new evidence to bridge the gap between the history of the Vākāṭaka and the Yādava era in the context of Vidarbha therefore remains a significant and open task. We have attempted to tentatively bridge the history in the present research through a perusal of literary sources. But even for this we need to start with the political processes in its flanks which rendered the structural frame in the wider region into a significant history. It is this frame that is particularly relatable with what Vidarbha underwent in the post – Vākāṭaka and pre – Yādava phase.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 57–59.

<sup>755</sup> V.V. Mirashi, 'Lacunae in the study of the Ancient History of Vidarbha', pp.188-90.

<sup>756</sup> D.G. Kopakkar, 'Katelgaon Plates of Yadava Mahadeva', *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.xxxii, 1957, pp. 31-32.

In the material sense Vidarbha emerged as an agriculturally prosperous zone with new lands cultivated under the Vākāṭaka rule. The power of the Vākāṭakas was based on surplus agricultural production. However, in literary texts like *Daśakumārcarita*<sup>757</sup> and the *Mārkeṇḍeya Purāṇa*<sup>758</sup> there is mention of a famine that hit the entire Deccan badly. While the *Purāṇa* (3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century CE) may allude to a calamity occurring around the the Vākāṭaka times, Daṇḍin’s *Daśakumārcarita* represent an even in the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries. Vidarbha, apart of Deccan, would have been adversely affected by such recurrent famines. However, the natural disasters would have had a temporary effect and in spite of lack of much hard evidence for continued flourish of the society in Vidarbha, later literary allusions to the region offer significant clues to the aftermath. This hidden history can only be gleaned from the survey of the history of wider spaces around the zone.

This has to be searched in the epigraphic records of the dynasties of Deccan which emerged after the Vākāṭaka rule. These dynasties like those of the Kalacurīs and the Rāṣṭrakūṣas did not have their power base located near Vidarbha, but Vidarbha was subsumed within their territorial jurisdiction. Thus, there was a significant change in the functionality of Vidarbha during this phase. In order to understand this change in the functionality of Vidarbha, we can cite the theory put forward by Monica L. Smith. She showed how states were eager to gain control over important conduits or corridors to access rich, economically prosperous zones.<sup>759</sup> The Kalacurīs and the Rāṣṭrakūṣas would have established their dominations over wide territories from the seventh century CE onward. Vidarbha, which had ceased to function as a centre from where the political powers exercised their control, continued to

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<sup>757</sup>H.H. Wilson, *The Daśakumārcarita or Adventures of Ten Princes*, pp.1-30.

<sup>758</sup>M.R.Singh, *Geographical Data in Early Purāṇas: A critical study*, Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1972, pp.43-44

<sup>759</sup>Monica L. Smith, Territories, ‘Corridors, and Network: A Biological Model for the Pre-modern State’, pp.28–35.

function as an adjunct territory. It seemed to have retained its identity through its literary style and performed the vital function of a corridor in this phase. It might have served as a network - corridor for Deccan's powerful states, allowing them to gain control over larger, economically prosperous landscapes. By placing Vidarbha within the greater geo-political orbit of Deccan, it is possible to tease out how it could have functioned as a conduit connecting different zones that added economic prosperity to the contemporary political powers of Deccan.

The crucial cultural marker that added distinctiveness to this phase of the history of Vidarbha was the literary concept of Vaidarbhīrīti. This rīti gained prominence in the writings of Bhāmaha (7<sup>th</sup> century CE), Daṇḍin (7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE),<sup>760</sup> and Rājaśekhara (9<sup>th</sup>- 10<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>761</sup> This rīti was considered the best according to Daṇḍin. He pointed out that it was enriched with all the good qualities of poetic style.<sup>762</sup> In the *Kāvyamīmāṃsā*, Rājaśekhara demarcates the areas where different rītis were used, and mentioned that Vaidarbhīrīti was popular in the Peninsular India. The Vaidarbhīrīti was also said to be used by the poets of Western India (sahaja), like the Gauḍiyārīti by the easterners. We have discussed this theme and observed how it illuminates the emergence of a distinct cultural perception associated with this zone, which may then be observed as having assumed the status of a cultural region. Thus, at least its cultural associations offer us the scope of looking at the complex nature of Vidarbha as a space which could have emerged as a

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<sup>760</sup> L.D. Barnett, 'The Date of Daṇḍī and Bhāmaha', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. 37, Issue, 4, pp. 841 – 842; Yigal Bronner, 'A Question of Priority: Revisiting the Bhāmaha-Daṇḍin Debate', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, (2012) 40(1):67–118.

<sup>761</sup> Anthony Kennedy Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, Vol. V, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, p. 413.

<sup>762</sup> P.C. Lahiri, *Concept of Rīti and Guṇa in Sanskrit Poetics*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 1974, pp.113-115.

cultural zone at a time when its political function and status remains unavailable due to dearth of archaeological evidence.

Vidarbha however, stands as an excellent example to illustrate that the role of a centralized state is minimal in the process through which some spaces and societies inhabiting them may attain a unique social and spatio-cultural identity. The significance of Vidarbha continued to grace the literary sensibilities of eminent intellectuals even though it ceased to function as the centre of any political authority after sixth century CE. While the new rising powers in the wider areas around it exploited the strategic importance of Vidarbha and used it as a corridor to connect with larger economically profitable landscape, this cultural zone remained exclusively bound within the abstract perception of an elite class of intellectuals in the early medieval times. In a political sense for a long time in the post - Vākāṭaka phase, Vidarbha as a zone or habitation remained peripheral to the states functioning on its flanks. It is with the Yādavas in the eleventh - twelfth centuries that the region / sub region or corridor-zone was brought into the larger orbit of statal experience once more after the Vākāṭaka rule. Apart from functioning as a corridor in later times, Vidarbha continued to function in the greater socio-cultural politics of Deccan as a settlement zone. The ritual landscape that had developed in Vidarbha during the Vākāṭaka times probably never lost its importance. This is well evident from the Rāmtek inscriptions of the Yādava times (thirteenth century CE).<sup>763</sup> Though it has been clearly mentioned by Hans Bakker,<sup>764</sup> that the Rāmtek hill was never the centre of political affairs under the Yādava king Siṃhaṇa, the place had emerged as the centre of activities of a particular sect, the Mahābhāvas and attracted pilgrimage from distant places. This sect was founded by

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<sup>763</sup> V.V. Mirashi, Ramtek Stone Inscription of the time of Ramchandra, *Epigraphia Indica*, vol.xxv, pp. 7-10, 1939.

<sup>764</sup> Hans T. Bakker, 'The Ramtek Inscriptions', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol.lii, 1989, pp. 467-96.

Cakradhāra. It was believed that he stayed in the Bhogagrāma temple that was built during the Vākāṭaka times. That the ritual landscape continued to be a place for pilgrim attraction is also testified from the fact that eminent poets of that era like Trivikramabhaṭṭa who had composed the *Nalacampū* and the *Madālasācampu* had visited this hill. Therefore, it is necessary to point out that instead of searching for evidence for state powers to bridge the history of Vidarbha between the Vākāṭaka and the Yādava periods, we can explore different dimensions of history. We note how communities of local inhabitants could be attested by the sustenance of the ritual landscape that developed surrounding the Rāmtek hill in the tenth and eleventh century, and how the confluence of pilgrimages can offer a flavour of spatial history of a different kind. Therefore, the theme offers new avenues of research. The present study makes a rudimentary attempt to tease out these new dimensions in the study of spatial history or history of communities within regions through observation of the complex historical processes following the clues left by multiple categories of sources.

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