

## **SYNOPSIS**

**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)**

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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>, UtharaSuvrathan,<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 *Varahāmhira*,<sup>7</sup>the

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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 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.

<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 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.

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

*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 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.

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

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

## 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 of Vidarbha in the eyes of outsiders. *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā of Rājaśekhara* 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

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<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.

<sup>12</sup> Sadhana Parashar, *Kāvyaṁīmāṁsā of Rājaśekhara*, 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.

developments in the Deccan in general which provide the background for the main theme of our research.<sup>15</sup> Along with 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

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<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. 91981, 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, 'Pattanplates 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.

<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.

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 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

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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.

Carla M. Sinopoli,<sup>21</sup> *The 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

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<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.

<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.



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 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 Vaidarbhīrīti, which has been identified as an important cultural marker. P.C. Lahiri's work vividly discussed the concept of riti followed by eminent Sanskrit composers like Vāmana, Daṇḍin and the doctrine

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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.

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 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. Ollet cites the example of Rājasekhara'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

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

<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.

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 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

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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.

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 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

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<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.

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

within them as varied functional spaces, like villages (Grama), market places (nigama) and cities (nagara).<sup>41</sup>

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.

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<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.

<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.

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 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

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<sup>45</sup>Bhairabi Prasad Sahu , *The Changing Gaze: Regions and the COstructions 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

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 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

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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.

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 Vākāṭakas. In fact, the model of integrative state is useful for understanding the historical developments in this period. But the post - Vākāṭakas 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 statal 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

showshow 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 Rāṣṭrakuṭas 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 a 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** throws light on 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 started 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 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.

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

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 *MārkaṇḍeyaPurāṇa* gives description of goddess Śākambharī, projected as the saviour of mankind from 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 Rājaśekhara 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

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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.

<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

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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