

Ancient places of Maharashtra as seen in the *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin

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Introduction

Ancient history and geography are always very meticulously connected. They cannot be kept secluded and always act and react to each other.

The early history of India is very much associated with the early geography of the country. But sometimes it's difficult to study ancient geography as the undefined chronology of Sanskrit literature makes it generally impossible to assign the geographical data of any work to a particular period. In the case of classical literature when the date of an author can be roughly identified, we are not sure whether his writings gave proper geographical conditions of that time, or they are more or less imaginary names.

We find the same name in different places, but not infrequently different names are used for the same place, tribe or natural feature. Sometimes it is because of conflicting Sanskritisation of the original Prākṛita names. Names appear to be handed down from author to author and used without any regard to the existence of the places and people concerned.

Bharatavarṣa, the ancient name assigned for India, was traditionally divided into two parts, the northern half namely *Āryāvarta* or *Uttarāpatha*, and the southern half as *Dakṣiṇāpatha*. The river Narmadā is considered a line of demarcation. The *Āryāvarta* is said to be bordered on the north and the south by the Himālaya and the Vindhya ranges respectively. *Dakṣiṇāpatha* or *Dakṣiṇa* was the name of the whole peninsula to the south of the Narmadā. In the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, the rivers Godāvarī and others originating from the Sahyādri are mentioned as rivers of *Dakṣiṇāpatha* (Bhandarkar,1928:2). Maharashtra is considered to be part of *Dakṣiṇāpatha*. The name Mahārāṣṭra seems to have been restricted to the country watered by the upper Godāvarī and the Kṛṣṇā. It is the area distinguished on the one hand from Aparānta or Northern Konkan, and from the regions on either side of the Narmadā and the Tāpī, as well as from Vidarbha on the other.

Sanskrit literature abounds with geographical information. e.g. Rājasekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsa* clearly states the five traditional divisions of India. It contains some useful geographical information about Utkala, Sumha, Niṣadha, and Kāśmīra (ch.17), Aṅga, Vaṅga, Puṇḍra, Vālhika, Pācāla, Śūrasena, etc. (ch.3). The *Raghuvamśa* (4th sarga, 35,38) and the *Meghadūta* by Kālidāsa (*Pūrvamegha*, 24,25,26), the *Naiṣadhīyacarita* by Śrīharṣa (5th sarga, 50, 98), the *Daśakumāracarita* by Daṇḍin, the *Harṣacarita* by Bāṇabhaṭṭa, may be utilized for geographical knowledge.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the places in Maharashtra from *Daśakumāracarita* of Daṇḍin to understand the geography of Maharashtra in ancient times particularly from 6th to 8th century C.E.

Daśakumāracarita of Dandīn

According to some scholars, Daṇḍin, a noted poetician and prose writer of Sanskrit, lived in the court of the Pallavas of Kanchi around 6th -7th century C.E. The works traditionally ascribed to him are the *Kāvya-darśa*, a work on poetics; the *Daśakumāracarita* and the *Avantisundarikathā*, the two prose romances.

The *Daśakumāracarita*, literally "The Stories of Ten Princes", is a text with diversified narratives containing information for historians. It has tremendous potential as the source of contemporary cultural, social and historical data. The *Daśakumāracarita* has given us a brilliant picture of Indian life in all its varied aspects. The text has been translated into many Indian and foreign languages. We get to know some references to several rivers, mountains and places of ancient India in *Daśakumāracarita*. Most of them are still found with the same names in modern times also. They are to be found, in the Puranas, and in the travels of the Chinese in the fourth and sixth centuries. In this respect, the work may be considered of historical value, as adding contemporary testimony to the correctness of the political position of a considerable part of India, as derived from other sources of information.

In the *Daśakumāracarita*, Daṇḍin had mentioned some places from Maharashtra viz. Koṅkana, Nāsikya, Vidarbha etc.

The *Daśakumāracarita* names six dependencies of Vidarbha . These kingdoms are Aśmaka , Kuntala, Murala, Rṣika, Koṅkaṇa and Sāsikya or Nāsikya as mentioned in eight ucchvāsa of *Daśakumāracarita*. Several of these names are found in inscriptions. (Archaeological Survey of Western India, IV, Ajanta inscriptions No.4, v.10, p. 131, No. 5, v.9, p. 135)

Also, in *Br̥hatSaṃhitā*, a sixth century C.E. text, Aśmakas, Koṅkaṇa, Kuntala, Kerala, Nasik and possibly the Rṣikas are mentioned together along with Daṇḍaka, and from which we may perhaps infer that they were all neighboring tribes occupying the western Deccan.

द्रविडविदेहान्धाश्मकभासापुरकौडकणाः समन्त्रिषिकाः |

कुन्तलकेरलदण्डककान्तिपुरम्लेच्छसङ्करिणः || (*Br̥hatSaṃhitā*. XVI,11)

नासिक्यभोगवर्धनविराटविन्ध्याद्रिपाश्वगा देशाः |

ये च पिबन्ति सुतोयां तार्पी ये चापि गोमतीसलिलम् || (*Br̥hatSaṃhitā*. XVI,12)

The places in Maharashtra which are mentioned in *Daśakumāracarita* are as follows:

1. Aśmaka -

In *Daśakumāracarita*, Vasantbhānu was the king of Aśmaka, who has overthrown Anatavarmana, the prince of Vidarbha.

According to the *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* (Pūrva, ch.48) Aśmaka is one of the countries of Southern India (*Dākṣiṇāṭya*), but the *Kūrma Purāṇa* mentions it in connection with the countries of Punjab; the *Br̥hatSaṃhitā* (ch.14) also places it in the north-west of India. According to Prof. Rhys Davids, Aśmaka was the Assaka of the Buddhist period, and was situated immediately to the north-west of Avantī. From the 'History of Bāwary' in Spence Hardy's Manual of Buddhism, Suttanipāta, it appears, the Assaka was situated between the Godāvarī and Māhiṣmatī. It was also called Alaka or Mulaka and its capital was Pratisṭhāna on the north bank of the Godāvarī. It became a part of the Mahārāshtra country at the time of Aśoka. The *Daśakumāracarita* describes it as a dependent kingdom of Vidarbha. It is also mentioned in the *Harshacharita*. It is Aśvaka of the *Mahābhārata* as stated in *Bhīṣma Parva*. (Dey,1984:12)

According to Bhattacharyya, it is the same as the *Asska* of the Buddhist texts. It was a territory on the Godāvarī. Its earliest mention is found in Pāṇini, (IV.1.173). It is described as one of the sixteen *Mahājanapadas* in the Buddhist texts lying between Mulaka and Kaliṅga with capital at Potali, Potana, Podana or Paudanya, to be identified with modern Bodhan (18°39' N, 77°50' E) on the Godāvari in Karnataka state. In *Br̥hatSaṃhitā* (XIV.22) the Aśmaka is in the north-west division. Aśmakas are mentioned in inscriptions from Nasik and Ajanta. (Bhattacharyya,1999:75)

2. Bhojakaṭa -

Daṇḍin refers this country to the kings of Bhoja dynasty which had a stronghold at Bhojakaṭa. As mentioned in *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, Bhojakaṭa was founded by Rukmin, the father of Kṛṣṇa's wife Rukminī and son of Bhīṣmaka, king of Vidarbha. This Bhojakaṭa, as well as its king Rukmin, was also mentioned in the second *parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, in the *Digvijaya* of Sahadeva. (Collins,1907:28). It was the headquarters of the district or *viṣya*, of the Vākāṭakas which the inscription calls Bhojakaṭarājyam. Bhojakaṭa may have been one of the strongholds of this race or, quite possibly, was the citadel in which their chief, the Bhoja resided.

As stated by Dey (Dey,1984:33) the Bhojas ruled over Vidarbha and are mentioned in one of Aśoka's Edicts. In the Chammak Copperplate inscription of Pravarasena-II of the Vākāṭaka dynasty, Bhojakaṭa is described as a kingdom which coincides with Berar or ancient Vidarbha. Bhojas ruled over the country of Vidarbha or Berār and also in other parts of Maharashtra. In the inscriptions in the caves at Kuḍā (Kuḍā inscriptions no. 1,9,17,19, 23, A.S of West Ind. No.10) the name 'Mahābhoja' occurs several times, and once in an inscription at Beḍsā (No. 2, A.S of West Ind. No.10).

3. Daṇḍaka / Daṇḍkāraṇyā -

According to *Daśakumāracarita*, there was a river in the heart of Daṇḍakārṇya. The Daṇḍaka forest lay between the Narmadā and the Godāvarī. Bhattacharyya described (Bhattacharyya,1999:114) that *Sarabhaṅga Jātaka* mentioned it is the same as the modern Daṇḍakārṇya region, the capital of which was Kumbhāvati. Daṇḍakārṇya seems to have stretched from Bastar along the banks of the Godāvarī to the Daulatābād area, and part of Nasik district, as the *Mahābhārata* epic suggests.

Dey stated that (Dey,1984:52) according to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, it was situated between the Vindhya and the Saibala mountains. He further stated that according to Pargiter, Daṇḍakārṇya comprised all the forests

from Bundelkhand to the river Kṛṣṇā (*The Geography of Rāma's Exile* in *JRAS.*, 1894, p.242). Bhavabhūti places it to the west of Janasthāna (*Uttara Rāmācharita*, Act I).

4. Koṅkaṇa –

Daṇḍin mentioned Kumāragupta as the ruler of Koṅkaṇa. The region is the same as the modern Konkan region on the western sea coast of India, often described as *deśa* (country) and *viṣaya* (administrative division) in inscriptions. It corresponds roughly to the *Aparānta* of the traditional conception and *Ariake* of Ptolemy. Bhattacharyya described (Bhattacharyya,1999:190) Koṅkaṇa as a *viṣaya* as it is mentioned in the Nerur copper plate of the time of the Cālukyas of Badami. Koṅkaṇa *deśa* is mentioned in the Yādava records as an administrative division comprising parts of Thana district and parts of the Salsette island.

As mentioned in the *Br̥hatsaṃhitā* it is known as Paraśurāma-kṣetra (Br̥.S. ch. 14). It denotes the whole strip of land between the Western Ghat and the Arabian sea (Dey,1984:103).

Koṅkaṇa is a country whose Maurya rulers were defeated in the latter half of the sixth century by the Calukya Kīrtivarman, and in the early part of the seventh by his successor Pulakesin-II. (Aihole inscription of Pulakesin II, Ep. Ind. VI, No.1, vv.9 and 22)

5. Nāsikya -

As mentioned in *Daśakumāracarita* Nāgapāla was the prince of Nāsikya, which is the modern Nāsik situated at the source of the Godāvārī, and the Nāsikyās would therefore have been close neighbours of the Aśmakas. Their territories may have been separated by the Ajaṅṭā hills. (Collins, 45). Nasik is an archaeological site (19°59N, 73°47'E) in Maharashtra state mentioned as Deśa and as Viṣaya in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa records. As a Viṣaya it is mentioned in the Dhuli CP., *Ep.Ind.*, VIII.185. (Bhattacharyya,232). It is an ancient Pañcavaṭī on the banks of Godāvārī. (Dey,1984:147)

6. Vidarbha-

In *Daśakumāracarita*, Daṇḍin pointed the large southern power as Vidarbha, and ruler of this country was the king Anantavarmā, son of Puṇyavarmā of Bhoja race. Collins placed the southern boundary of Daṇḍin's empire either along the Kṛṣṇā or along the Varadā, and Tungabhadra rivers. On the east, it was bounded partly by Kāliṅga and possibly Kosalā, and partly by Andhra, under which name we must understand the eastern territory between the Kṛṣṇā and the Godāvārī. Within this, it must be assigned the six feudatory kingdoms of Vidarbha (Collins, 1907:42).

As stated by Dey (Dey,1984:34) with reference to Cunningham's *Bhilsa Topes*, in ancient times, the country of Vidarbha included the kingdom of Bhopal and Bhilsa to the north of Narmada River. It is also known as Berar, Khandesh, part of Nizam's territory and part of the Central Provinces. Its principal towns were Kuṇḍinanagara and Bhojakaṭapura. The Bhojas of the *Purāṇas* lived in Vidarbha.

The eighteenth verse of Vākāṭaka inscription from Ajanta tells us that Hariṣeṇa conquered Kuntala, Avanti, Kāliṅga, Kosala, Trikūṭa, Lāṭa, Andhra and possibly one or two more countries whose names are not legible. It will be seen that the area enclosed corresponds very closely indeed with that of the dominions of Vidarbha in the *Daśakumāracarita*, where the bounding kingdoms are Kosala and Kāliṅga on the east, Lāṭa on the west, Andhra and Vanavāsī on the south and the Magadhan empire (including Mālava) on the north. This close resemblance between these two areas is explained if Daṇḍin's Vidarbha represents the kingdom of the Vākāṭakas. According to Collins, Vidarbha represents kingdom of the Vākāṭakas, and the use of the name Bhoja gives an explanation that Daṇḍin wrote his text at a time when this dynasty was predominant in the south.

Summary

In *Daśakumāracarita*, Daṇḍin has covered most of the regions of India from east to west and north to south. As we have discussed the places in Maharashtra, one can find the interesting thing, that all these places are mentioned in the 8th ucchvāsa, the narrative of Viśruta. These places are mentioned in Br̥hat-saṃhitā, a 6th century text and we get references of these places in Vākāṭaka inscription from Ajanta. All the above factors show the political and geographical importance of these places in ancient Maharashtra.

The geography of Daṇḍin reveals a general resemblance with the conception of different geographical units and divisions of ancient India. He draws a considerable number of topographical details from the sources like *Purāṇas*. It is notable that old geographical names are still in identical form or in slightly changed form. The geographical setting appears to reflect with surprising accuracy with actual historical conditions. Historical elements may have entered to some extent also into his facts.

Scholars like Mark Collins, V.V. Mirashi, Walter M. Spink suggested the resemblance of Viśruta's narrative with the political history of Vākāṭakas, especially during the period of Hariṣeṇa. All these factors

support the importance of *Daśakumāracarita* as not only a great prose romance but also it has a great value as a source of history of that period.

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