

Geography of Maharashtra

Diddee, J. *et al* (eds.)

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Regional Geography is an important complement to Systematic Geography and had once enjoyed a pre-eminent position in geographic literature. It was written to bring out regional personality that provided a useful insight into the factors and processes responsible for the emergence of regional landscapes. Such accounts often helped empire builders, administrators and geo-strategists to carefully plan their activities during the period of its zenith. Later, however, the writings became too mechanical and monotonous to retain its original *raison de etre*. It had occupied a very important place in geography training and in the beginning it was given a prominent place in the syllabi. After emergence of quantification and theory building, its place was taken over by regional analysis. Of late, however, interest in regional geography seems to be reviving and this is reflected in a few books that are getting published. The book referred to above is one such attempt that intends to give a broad spectrum of the physical, economic and cultural landscape of the State of Maharashtra at the threshold of the twenty first century. In addition to the patterns related to various themes, regionalisation is attempted at the end that tries to synthesize the scenarios discussed earlier. The editors believe that the volume would cater to the needs of a wide section of users, including students, teachers, researchers and planners.

Edited volumes of this type have become a fashion over the last 40 years or so. They attempt to bring together the expertise of different individuals who pool their experience to enhance the quality of the volume. The attempt also saves straining of individual energy in gaining expertise in different fields before attempting a

meaningful account. This is particularly needed while writing a book on regional geography which brings together varied facets of regional landscape. The contributors to the present volume, which has been brought out on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Department of Geography, University of Pune, have mainly been drawn from the retired/in-service faculty of the Department, as well as, research students, past and present, with a view to bringing some homogeneity in perspective and approach, notwithstanding the fact that there is an admixture of experienced teachers/researchers and young enthusiastic research scholars.

The book opens with a paper by **Kale** on **Geology of the Deccan Traps**. The author has taken pains to bring out the historical sequence of major tectonic events over the trap zone and their contribution to the present make-up of the State. He has fused together the results of various studies carried out by geoscientists in India and abroad. *Jog et al* pick up the threads from the above paper and present a perspective on the **Landscape of the State**. The discussion is placed in morphogenetic perspective that is quite in keeping with the current trends in the discipline, although it must be appreciated that the structural characteristics have not been lost sight of. The discussion is quite exhaustive and illustrative. *Karlekar* has presented a systematic account of the **Landforms of Konkan Coast** bringing out the processes involved in their evolution. He has also discussed sea level changes and their impact on coastal landforms. In their paper on **Hydrology and Sediment Pattern of the rivers of Maharashtra**, *Kale et*

al examine the relationship between hydrological characteristics of the rivers and their sediment pattern. The authors have brought out certain distinct characteristics of these rivers endowed on them by their seasonal regimes and rainfed character. Human impact on hydrological characteristics has also been discussed to the extent permissible by the available information. Gadgil's paper on "Characteristics of Rainfall in the State" serves a useful purpose by putting together spatio-temporal variations in the amount of rainfall and number of rainy days. Apart from touching upon the pertinent issues such as rainfall variability, the paper has also focused on the problem of floods and drought. The relation between summer monsoon and *El Nino* has also been explained. Dikshit's account of the "Soils of Maharashtra" is conventional in nature yet marvelous. She has discussed at length evolution, characteristics and distribution of soils in the State. At the end, she has also incorporated a section on fertility levels. Dikshit's writing on the "Forests of Maharashtra" has vividly presented the factors affecting their distribution, the resulting types and spatial distribution. At the end, one finds a useful section on forest exploitation and development. He has also added useful material on conservation measures. "Wildlife in Maharashtra" by Gole is the last paper in the section on physical environment. She has examined wildlife of the State in biogeographic perspective, elaborated on its status discussing in the process the existing threats, and need for conservation. She has thrown some light on the efforts towards conservation of wildlife and difficulties faced while doing so.

Agriculture is a very important sector in the economy of the State and the paper on "Agriculture in Maharashtra" by Datye and Dhonde occupies a useful *niche* in the scheme of the book. The authors have tried to present a spatio-temporal perspective on the agriculture of the State. They have worked out crop association at the district level and then gone on to identify agricultural regions. A historical

profile of agricultural productivity has further enhanced the utility of the paper. Dry farming is a characteristic of the Indian agriculture and Deosthali's paper on "Dry Farming in Maharashtra" is very valuable in this respect. She has placed dry farming in the national perspective and analysed the same in historical context. The activity has been examined in relation to relief, climate and soils to arrive at agroclimatic regions. She has proceeded to analyse the sustainability of agriculture in scarcity zones applying the concepts related to water budget. At the end, detailed study of Ahmednagar-Solapur region has been presented. Paprikar has discussed "Industries of Maharashtra" in their historical context. She examines the development of important industries in the State and the changes in the industrial landscape. An attempt has also been made to identify industrial regions. Diddee and Wakhare have highlighted the problem of "Population Growth in Maharashtra". They have tried to place the population growth in the context of the model of demographic transition. The authors have tried to explain the high population growth rate by analyzing it along with a variety of indicators related to demographic and social infrastructure. The paper ends with a note on certain issues and concerns related to population growth in the State. In her paper on "Urban Trends in Maharashtra", Kewalramani has focused attention on the process of urbanisation in the State and identified levels of urbanisation. Spatial distribution of towns belonging to different classes, their functional base as also their growth rates have been examined. **"Regional Perspective on Maharashtra's Urban Development"** is the theme of the paper by Lewis *et al.* They have studied urban development in historical perspective before discussing contemporary trends in urbanisation of the State. At the end, one also finds a section on policies pursued by the State towards systematic urban development. **"Road and Railway Transport in Maharashtra"** by Vaidya is the last paper in the

section on economic and cultural landscape. The author has traced the development of road and railway transport in the State and has tried to discuss their adequacy in terms of area and population served.

Regional synthesis forms an important theme in any book on regional geography and this has been attempted in Part III of the book. **Dikshit** has presented a comprehensive account of the Geographical Regions of the State; this is a reproduction of the material from the book written by him earlier. In addition to discussing salient features of the regional landscape, he also highlights the development issues of certain regions like Konkan. A separate chapter on **Mumbai Metropolis and its Region** is not only suggestive of its importance to economy of the State, but also brings out the problems of development associated with the region because of excessive concentration of activities.

From the foregoing, it is amply clear that the editors have been successful in bringing together the expertise of a group of geographers to bring out a book on Geography of Maharashtra, incorporating the current status which was a long felt need. They deserve to be congratulated for this effort. However, an edited book has its own limitations. In the first place, the contributors have presented their material in their own styles and according to their research interests; this has obviously left some gaps. The paper on geology talks only about the evolution of traps and the related tectonic events, but Maharashtra has in its southwestern and northeastern corners formations other than traps, which deserve a place in a book on geography of the State. This is also the case with the paper on transport which covers only road and railway transport. In fact, a section on economic and cultural landscape does not include themes like minerals, socio-cultural issues, communications and such other relevant

topics. In selecting the unit of analysis several authors have worked at the district level for the sake of convenience; this has concealed many micro level realities, e.g. the section on agriculture fails to bring out the sugar cane growing regions. At the other end of the spectrum, there are some themes like urbanization where the papers incorporated show an overlap. The section on geographical regions; is a reproduction from K.R.Dikshit's Maharashtra in Maps. The latest statistical data could have been used to portray the contemporary situation.

Cartographic reproduction of maps and diagrams is of poor quality and though some of the blame probably lies with the publisher, certain gross errors could have been avoided, for e.g. the map on pp.240 uses the choropleth technique to depict the percentage of urban population of each district to the total urban population in the state. Certain maps have been over-reduced rendering them illegible.

A volume of this type requires careful monitoring. The editors could have provided an introductory chapter, as also proper editing could have taken care of the lacunae mentioned above. Despite the above inconsistencies which may have crept in on account of the need to bring out the volume on time for the Silver Jubilee celebrations, there is little doubt that the book will serve the purpose of filling the void created by an absence of a recent book on the geography of Maharashtra, because the last one was written nearly two decades ago. The book would be useful to students at various levels as also for teachers looking for the geography of Maharashtra, reflecting some of the latest research in the subject.

V.S. Phadke
Department of Geography,
University of Mumbai,
Mumbai