Presidential Address

Geography behind History*

Jaymala Diddee, Pune

It is a pleasure to be here once again for the 32nd IIG Meet in the pink city of Jaipur. I have fond memories of the earlier conference held here - strong bonds were forged at the time, amidst vigorous academic exchange and I am delighted to be here once again - and this time as the 32nd president of this august association of Indian geographers. I accept with great humility the honour conferred on me by the distinguished members of this premier Institute of Indian Geographers. This gives me yet another opportunity to discuss new problems which confront us in the third millennium. The focal theme of the conference reflects our sensitivity to current issues which has threatened our very existence. What is worrying is the frequency and intensity of these extreme events which is continuously on the rise. With such a scholarly gathering assembled here, I am confident there will be many fruitful discussions over the next three days and we are bound to come up with new ideas to grapple with these new environmental challenges. As geographers, we have a good grounding in understanding the various aspects of the environment and hence are best suited to provide concrete measures to mitigate their impact.

The focal theme of the Meet is related to Climate Change, but since I haven't looked at this problem seriously - I decided to share some snippets from my current interest in historical geography. The basic premise here is to reassert the fact that geography affects history. Be it a strategic military position, or a convenient travelling route, geography determines to a great extent, where historical events occur The intention is to present some illustrations from my work on a map history of the rise of Maratha power in 17th and 18th century India. This is in a way also to draw attention and lodge a protest to the neglect of historical geography. May I, with your kind permission, present some slides from my work which brings out the geography behind Maratha history, using G. I. S. and R.S. technology. I have selected the case of Marathas, a regional power which rose to prominence in the latter part of the 17th century and dominated the political scene in the country for over 150 years. While focusing on the geography behind their history, which according to me has clearly, defined the course and contours of their history, I was able to construct, perhaps for the first time a map history of Marathas, using RS data on a GIS platform and demonstrated how effectively GIS and RS technology can be employed to make an exciting graphic history-(an anthology in maps)

Definition of Historical Geography

It is not certain when the term historical geography was first used, but according to Darby, it appeared in the title of Karl

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von Spruner's pioneering historical atlas in 1846. In historical atlases, concern with changes in political boundaries and with the varying extent of states and provinces has continued up to the present day. But before the end of the 20th century, the term was also used to indicate concern with the influence of geography upon history. In Adam Smith's historical atlas of the Holy Land one finds the best example of the term historical geography. The two main ideas current at the time were changing frontiers and geographical influences, though other notions also find shelter under the umbrella of the term.

The definition of historical geography as a distinct field of study has long been disputed. There are umpteen debates and questions raised: Is it properly a sub – discipline, a distinct body of knowledge, or an outlier of the discipline of geography, because of its concern with time (the province of history) rather than primarily of space (geography's focus). Baker reviews these debates and offers a sensible working definition. According to him, historical geography comprises a geographical analysis of the past. Its methods of enquiry are shared with the discipline of history and its problems with the discipline of geography. In the early 20th century, many geographers like Roxby, Baker, East and Manning started with degrees in history. One of the books which made a great impact at this time on geographers was Lucien Febvre's:" A Geographical Introduction to History, which appeared in English in 1925.

Briefly, tracing the development of historical geography since the 1970s, it is observed that historical geography has become increasingly eclectic. In a way this reflects the growing influence of allied disciplines - though before the 20th century, the term historical geography was used to describe:

I. the recreation of the geographies of the past - described in the Bible, in classical Greek and Roman narratives

II. the history of geographical exploration, discovery and

III. the geography behind history as revealed by the changing borders of states and empires.

These early writings however, had little impact on 20th century historical geography; the intellectual roots of which can be traced to the late 19th century writings on regional landscape formation by geographers such as Vidal de La Blache, A. J. Herbertson and by the German school of Anthropogeographie led by Ratzel, and later successfully promoted in the US by Ellen Semple. Research on historical landscape received further stimulus after the first World War when the reorganization of national boundaries in Europe and the Middle - East refocused attention on regional landscapes as products of long term social, economic and political evolution.

The study of regional landscape varied in different national contexts and was by no means always described by the terms Historical Geography. In the UK for example, the term historical geography was used by Darby in his research on the history of English landscape. According to him, historical geography was one of the 'twin pillars' of the larger discipline, alongside geomorphology, as both were concerned with landscape formation and evolution. The difference being that the latter was based primarily on field evidence, derived from the natural environment itself, while

the former was based on historical evidence gleaned from archival sources - particularly those that allowed geographical patterns to be created into cartographic maps. In a lighter vein – history they say is about chaps and geography is about maps! Therefore, history and geography should be kept as close together as possible, because so much of history is best appreciated through geography and so much geography is best taught through an historical approach. The former point is obvious as the human stage is the world, and the plot of the play is the activity of human beings in relation to their environment and each other.

Very simply stated, historical geography is a study of past human geography or past landscapes. A historical atlas narrates the past in maps, depicting the evolving political landscape. They are helpful in understanding the historical context. There are very few separate atlases, particularly in the Indian context to present history cartographically. Schwartzberg's '*A Historical Atlas of South Asia*' (1978) is an important and pioneering work, but being too extensive in scope, it could not devote enough space to every major region of the vast country. Similarly, Irfan Habib's '*Atlas of the Mughal Empire*' (1982) is another monumental work, but it had to restrict its scope to the Mughal period and territory. '*The political geography of the Chola country*' (1972) by Y. Subbarayalu is an early work relating to Tamilnadu. He has mapped the Cauvery delta and its surroundings during the 8th-13th centuries.

Looking at the evolution of historical atlases, until the 20th century, historical atlases' content was predominantly defined in terms of international relations – particularly warfare and shifts in control over territory. The state was assumed to be the crucial unit and objective in the historical process, and atlases were accordingly concerned with changing state boundaries, especially the rise and fall of empires. In the age of nationalism, after World War II, the focus was on maps – especially with the development, growth and interaction of states in Europe rather than the dynasties.

In conclusion, one can say that no single methodology has prevailed in historical geography since the 1970s and for all its thematic diversity, the good thing that has happened to historical geography in the 21st century is that it has become increasingly focused on the recent past - a trend partly determined by the need for reliable, spatially extensive database, but also influenced by the assumption that historical research in geography should have relevance to contemporary issues.

The aim of the present research is to trace the influence of geographical factors on the course of Maratha history. While keeping the geographical perspective in focus, the significance of economic, political, social and religious factors have not been overlooked.

A case for Historical geography of Marathas

1. The Marathas were the last native people to come close to building an empire.
2. Their history is not in the distant past. They came into prominence in the middle of the 17th century and within a period of hundred years, exercised their power over large parts of the country. '*Attke Par*' popular in Marathi folklore, stands for Maratha achievement. The Marathas often mention with pride how they watered their horses on the banks

of the river Indus, established an out - post in faraway Attock, in Afganistan and planted the Maratha flag - *Zari Patka* there. The Marathas at one time, held sway over territory from Attock to Cuttack and deep down in the south up to Ginjee in Tamil Nadu. The very mention of the word, *bargirs,* as they were referred to - spelled terror. When they sallied forth eastwards towards Bengal, they had the scared citizens of Calcutta into digging a ditch to protect the city. Even today one can see the remnants of the Maratha ditch.

3. The idea of a map history is more exciting because history is more intelligible with the aid of geography and such a study can explain the underlying processes leading to historical events in greater depth.

Sometimes one wonders, how far the Marathas appreciated the essential facts of the geography of their times – a point still very much open to debate. But according to some historians (like T. S. Shejvalkar), they were utterly indifferent to the study of geography. But this does not mean that their history was not affected by it. H.B. George puts it rather nicely, "the less they (people) knew, the more influence geography was likely to have over their destinies". My personal view is that the course of Maratha history was greatly affected by the geography of the region in which they operated. The strategy the Marathas adopted, namely, *ganimi kavas* (guerrilla tactics) were eminently suited to the terrain of Maratha lands. Shivaji laid the foundation of an independent Maratha state, using these methods which leveraged strategic factors like demographics, speed, and surprise and focused attack to defeat his more powerful enemies. In the end, the Marathas emerged victorious in the 27 year long war of Independence against the Mughals (1681-1707): the longest war ever fought in the history of India. Having said this, it is important to note that Maratha history begins from the middle of the seventeenth century and spans over a period of slightly more than 150 years. During this time their power extended far beyond the confines of Maharashtra, to virtually all parts of the country. Another important fact to be borne in mind is that the Marathas were the only native power which had locked horns with all the major powers of their time – for instance, the Mughals at Delhi, Afghans, the Abyssinian chiefs referred to as the Siddi (occupying the island fortress of Janjira, off the west coast of Maharashtra), the Muslim powers of the Deccan, including the Nizam of Hyderabad, Haider Ali and Tipoo Sultan, the Portuguese and finally the English to whom, they surrendered power.

Since the period of Maratha history is fairly extensive, and the undercurrents of geography throughout its course so varied and persistent, it is essential to consider each geographical factor individually and analyze its impact in relation to the specific period of history, wherein it played a prominent role, for example the Terrain has played a vital role in the initial rise of Maratha power.

The Maratha Empire reached its greatest extent by the middle of the 18th century (see fig. 1, on pp 8). By 1758, the two Peshwas, Bajirao I and Nanasheb, together with the Maratha chiefs: Gaekwar, Scindia, Bhonsle and Holkar extended Maratha power beyond the borders of Hindustan. Maratha authority was acknowledged from Attock, beyond the Panjab in the northwest, to Cuttack on the eastern shores of India. Geographically,

their state was centrally located and had an interlocking relationship with all major powers in North as well as South India. The Marathas were the only power who fought against the Mughals, the sultanates of Bijapur, Ahmadnagar, Golkonda, the Portuguese, Afgans and finally the British. Surprisingly this was achieved by a hand full of determined Marathas whom Chhatrapati Shivaji had inspired to free their country from alien rule.

Early Maratha history was enacted in West Maharashtra.–defined by a line cutting across the Western edge of the Peninsula, forming a long strip of harsh mountain country. Shivaji's words aptly sum up the strategic advantages enjoyed by Maratha lands when he warned Aurangzeb not to venture on this fool hardy course of attacking his homeland (see fig. 2, on pp 9). He says, my people born in this land, like nature here, are hardy. Should you try to subjugate my people, you will meet with strong resistance.

The Konkan region is literally squeezed between the Arabian Sea coast to the west and the Western Ghats, (referred to as the Sahyadri in Maharashtra) towards the east (see fig. 3, on pp 10). Rising to elevations of over 1000 meters, the Sahyadri Mountains run parallel to the Arabian Sea coast for about 550 km. They are considered as the backbone of Maharashtra – posing a formidable barrier to east – west communications. They have greatly influenced the march of Maratha history in Western India, during the 17th and 18th century. The Sahyadri played a vital role in the fashioning of Maratha History. Dandekar writes," the Sahyadri taught the Marathas how to live and how to die and gave the people lessons in freedom."All Konkan rivers rise in the Sahyadri mountains, barely 50-70 km from the coast and flow into the Arabian Sea, giving rise to wide creeks at their mouths, instead of good harbours. Small country craft can ply inland from their mouths up to the high tide mark –about 25km, inland. Goods from the coast could be transported inland, though further up the Ghats, pack bullocks were used. A linear chain of Market towns developed at the high tide limits which also provided the Konkan with its first north-south communication link.

The Maval zone- a highly dissected area flanked by high hills and narrow valleys, lies immediately in the eastern shadows of the Sahyadri. The Maval area provided Shivaji with the finest fighting force for his army.

The Terrain

The Jawli area in the Western Ghats has a strategic location – between the Sahyadri hills on the west and the Mahabaleshwar range towards the east- an extremely inaccessible location (see fig. 4, on pp 11, 12). The More family, vassals of the Bijapur Sultan, controlled the entire area from Mahad to Mahabaleshwar. They had the right to collect excise on goods passing through the Ghats, descending into the Konkan. They ruled over an extensive tract, including the Mahabaleshwar plateau, Jawli-Koyna valleys-Varandh Ghat, Par Ghat, Shivthar and Raireshwar plateau. This province was called *Chandrai*. On 15th January 1656, Shivaji attacked Javli and conquered Mores fief.

The campaign against the Mores, besides gaining access from the Deccan plateau to the Konkan brought under Shivaji a large territory with rich natural resources. The campaign against the Mores also proved beneficial to Shivaji in facing Afzal Khan as he understood the pitfalls of the Javli

terrain where the battle of Pratapgad took place in 1659.

Shivaji had no doubt established an independent Hindu kingdom, after a lapse of over a hundred years - the Vijayanagar Empire was already defunct by 1556. At the time of his death Shivaji was in possession of the Konkan coast, extending from Gandevi in the north - near the port of Surat and up to Goa in the south. But the Maratha state at the time was restricted to a small compact area on either side of the Sahyadri Mountains, in West Maharashtra. - This was not large enough to face the onslaught of the mighty Mughals from the north, as Aurangzeb, at the time was hell bent on destroying the Marathas. In the east too, Shivaji was hemmed in by his sworn enemy, the Adilshah of Bijapur (see fig. 8, on pp 15). Only the south was still virgin territory, and it beckoned him. Undertaking the Carnatic campaign for Shivaji had become a politico – strategic necessity. The visionary ruler and the General in him realised that if the Mughals directed the full strength of their forces against his small country, it could be easily be overrun – he did not have space enough to provide defence in depth. Carnatic could give him that space. Shivaji's Carnatic campaign fulfilled most of his objectives. An extensive area rich in resources was brought under direct control – space and time were created should there be any reverses in the Maratha country. On hind sight, how wise this move had been was proved after Sambhaji's capture and execution. His half brother, Rajaram could escape to Ginjee fort in faraway Tamilnadu on the east coast and establish a government in exile. This enabled the Marathas not only to survive the Mughal onslaught, but to wage a war of independence for 27 long years against the Mughals and win it too.

Shivaji deserves credit as Maharashtra's most versatile military leader. A simple label guerrilla deprives Shivaji the homage due to him as an infantry leader, strategist and Naval Commander who fought against the Mughals and European powers. He began his career by augmenting a series of hill forts to provide a backbone for his authority.

The battle of Panipat (1761), fought during the regime of the third Peshwa Nanasheb, between the Marathas and the Afgan invader, Ahmad Shah Abdali (Durrani) is unique because in India's long history of several millennia, the only occasion when a power from the Deccan invaded the north Indian plains was during the Maratha period (see fig. 9, on pp 16). The battle plan clearly shows how the Maratha camp was totally cut off from their supply base at Delhi, after the Afghan forces forded the River Yamuna and blocked all the reinforcements from reaching the Marathas. The strategy of delaying the attack on Abdali was a tactical blunder on the part of the Marathas as the water levels in the Yamuna River had risen and the Marathas were caught unawares - they had made no provision for boats - for river crossing. Their troops were forced to march in the Yamuna khaddar (new alluvium – mainly clayey loam), where their cavalry and artillery action became ineffective. They were badly routed and suffered heavy casualties because they were neither familiar, nor did they understand the terrain of the Gangetic plain, and the hydrology of the Ganga-Yamuna doab went against them.

Different types of Atlases

Historical atlases are generally categorized into two types. First is the atlas with a lot of text – commonly over 50% and maps. The second consists of only maps with titles and short, if any introductory comments. The Geopolitical Atlas of Maratha Empire belongs to the former category since the Atlas of Marathas is addressed to that illusive, intelligent, serious and curious general reader- it has a substantial text and fair amount of easily accessible information – no claims here to rewriting Maratha history, but definitely to recasting it in a new format.

In the end I would like to submit that there is urgent need for comprehensive atlases for each major region of India, covering the important historical periods. An atlas of Rajasthan would be of great interest to all of us seeing the glorious history of the Rajputs.

I close with hope and trust that Transactions will continue to play its part as a leading journal, in which the new generation of geographers can take risks and experiment on new ways of approaching the vital nexus between bio (life) and geo (earth) or for want of a better expression as Jeanette Winterson calls "the livingness of the world" which has been the hallmark of geographers.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Prof. K. R Dikshit, the founder and first President of the Institute of Indian Geographers (IIG). He has been an outstanding mentor and has provided me with tremendous challenge and support. I am indebted to him for encouraging me to take up this research. His continuous advice and sharp and insightful comments have dramatically improved the quality of arguments put forth in this graphic history of Marathas. My colleague, Prof. S. R. Jog deserves more than a mere thank you. His valuable assistance in selecting the appropriate software and constant guidance for composing over a hundred (GIS based) maps at different scales – not only a stupendous task but virtually impossible for me to have accomplished without his support.

My research associate, Abhiram Sahasrabudhe has spent endless hours working on the maps and accompanying me to the archives and museums all over – I greatly appreciate his dedication to complete the task entrusted to him within the stipulated time frame. I am also indebted to my friend Jutta Dikshit, for her hospitality and for allowing us to engage in such candid and spirited discussions at her home on several occasions. Together they were all extremely open in sharing their views and displayed an enthusiasm for the research topic which was infectious – it encouraged me to continue along my chosen path, despite several pitfalls.

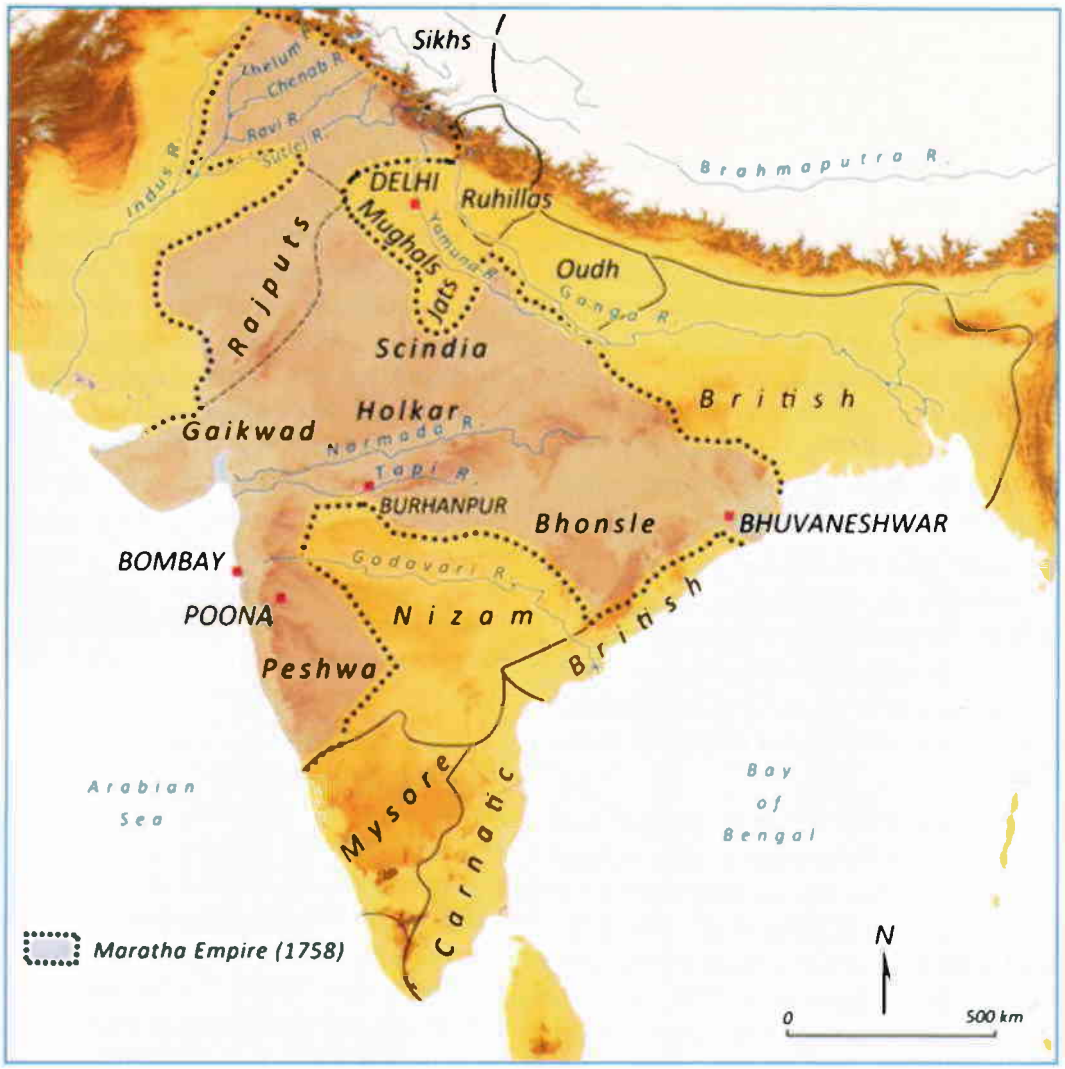

Fig 1: Spread of Maratha power by the middle of 18th century. (see pp.4)

The dominance over the upland region of the southern margin of the Gangetic basin, together with some parts of the Bundelkhand tract, made it possible for the Marathas to keep effective control over the different heterogeneous elements of the Mughal Empire. This was achieved during Nanasaheb Peshwa's regime.

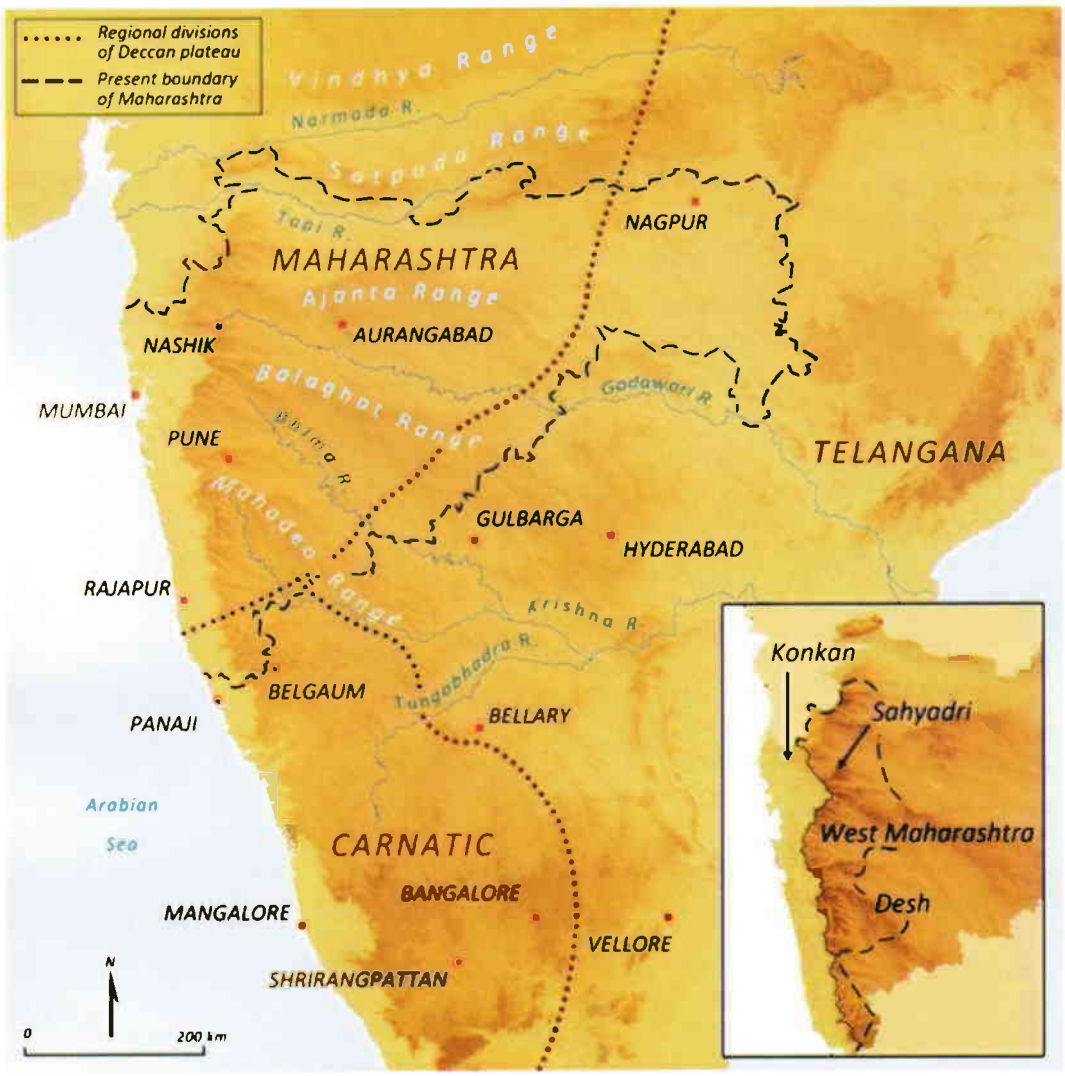

Fig 2: Divisions of the Deccan (see pp.5)

Fig: 3 showing major physical divisions of West Maharashtra: Konkan coast, Sahyadri Range, Maval and Desh (see pp.5)

Fig 4: The passes or ghats leading from the upland plateau through the Sayhadri range towards the Konkan coast. What is interesting to note here is the presence of a fort on either side of the Sahyadri so that traffic could be monitored and controlled. (see page 5)

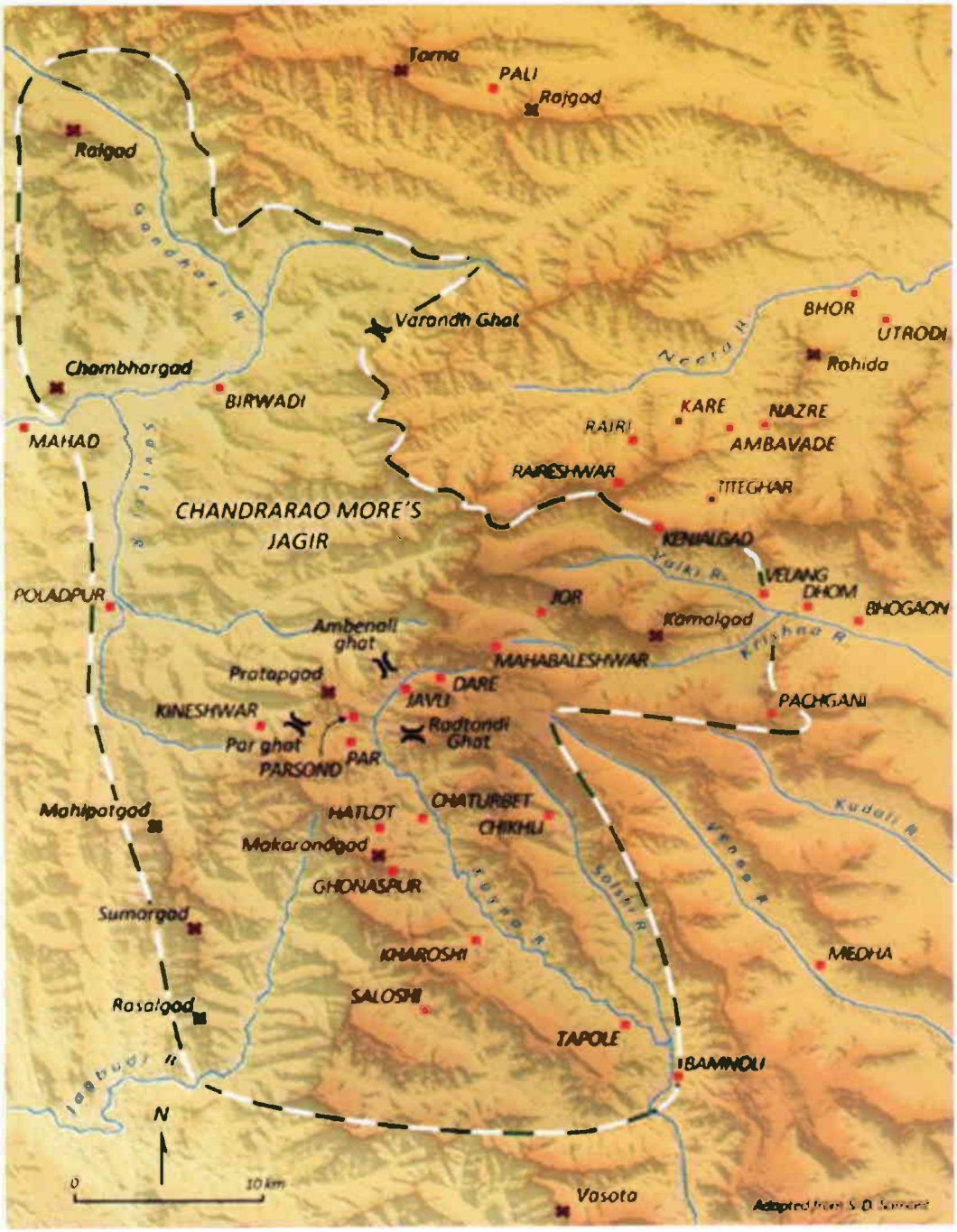

Fig 5: "Terrain of Jawali: Chandrarao More's Estate" (see page 5).

Fig 6: Till the 18th century, many passes or *Ghats* through which lines of communications ran, were at the best of times passable only for men and pack animals and were totally closed during the monsoons. Even today, one of the old passes, Nane Ghat, cannot take wheeled traffic. (see page 5)

Fig 7: Nane Ghat (courtesy: Shri Amey Utturkar) (see page 5).

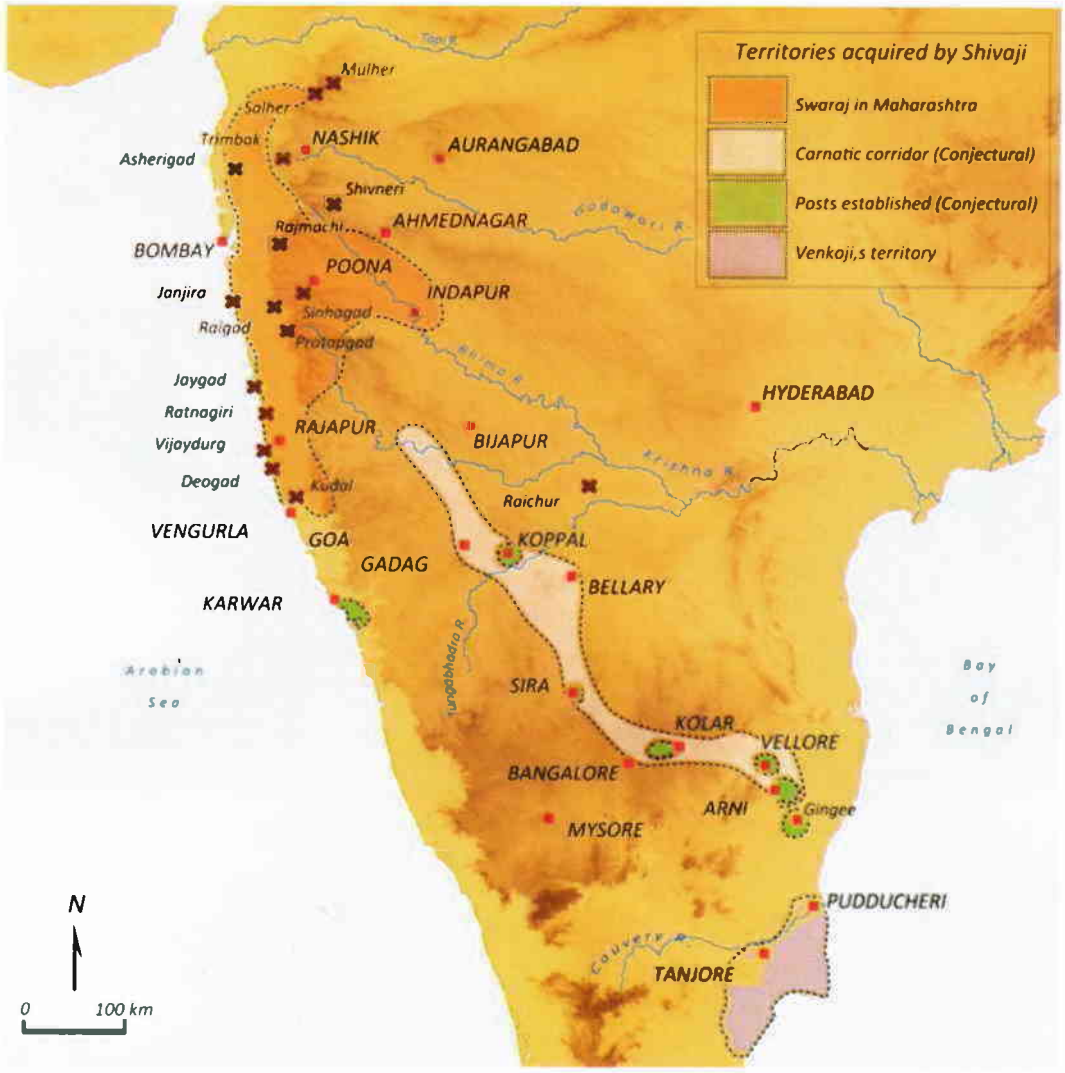

Fig.8: Extent of Chhatrapati Shivaji's Kingdom in 1680, (at the time of his death) (see page 6).

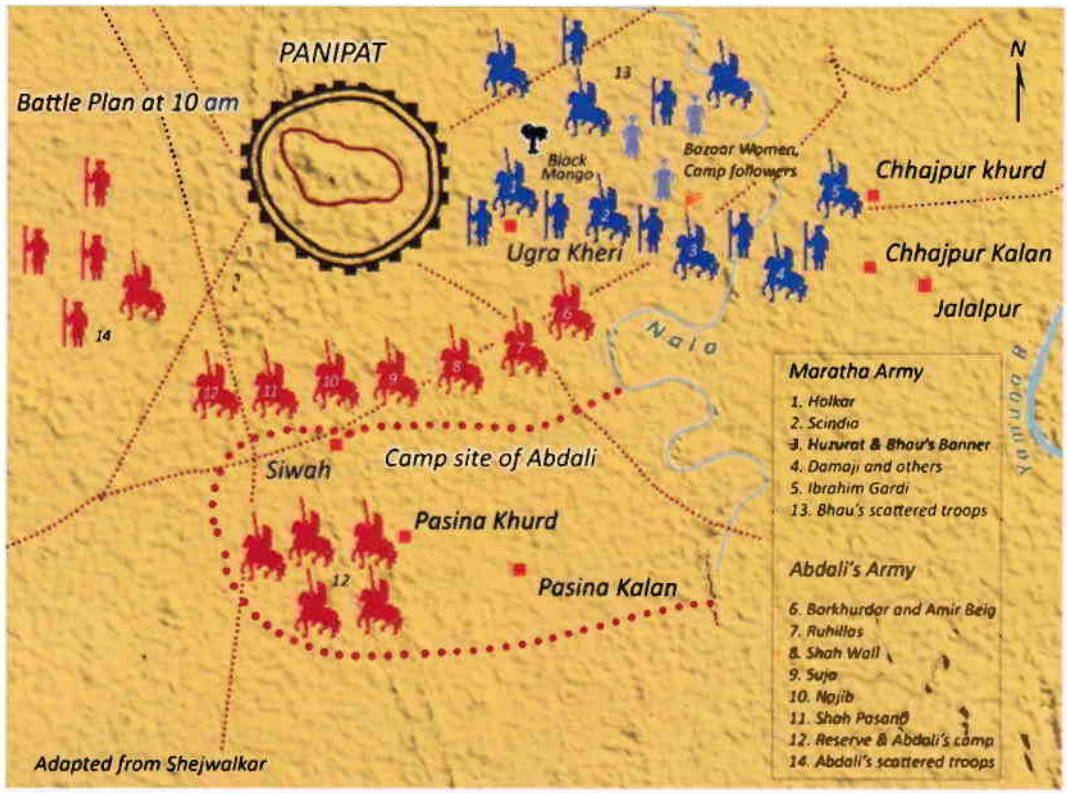

Fig 9: Positions of the Maratha and Afgan forces at the battle of Panipat (14th January 1761 at 10 am) (see page 6).

The Urban Fringe of Indian Cities

Edited by Jutta K. Dikshit

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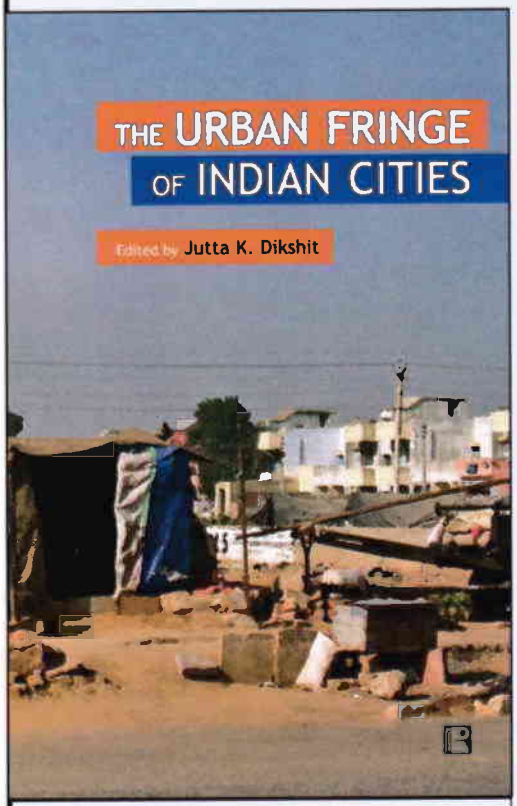

Urban fringe is the most sought after and at the same time most problematic area of a periurban region. This is the area of future growth, the area in which the city expands, yet, is often subjected to a chaotic development before it is finally merged in the city. An area of transition, between the rural and the urban, the fringe has been the subject of study by different disciplines.

The present volume is a collection of essays written by some of the well-known geographers, architects, planners and social scientists from India and abroad who present their own perspective on the nature of the fringe. It acquaints the reader with the historic development of suburban areas and the manifestations of the present urban expansion. The book explores the rural– urban dichotomy, the fastpaced welcome and unwelcome changes, the problems of its development, and an overall impact of urban expansion on the economic life of the people. It evaluates the role of urban planning and the shortcomings that creep in during the period of plan implementation, following invariable interference from politicians and land speculators. The book would be a useful reading for students of urbanism and all others who are interested in India's urban future.

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Fig. 2: Location of the Cross Section (see page 25).

Fig: 11: The canal excavated by local people to drain out water of the lake and marsh land into the river of Dhanlakha (see page 20).