



DOMINANCE OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE HISTORY OF RATNAGIRI DISTRICT

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“Geography without history seems a carcass, a history without geography as a vagrant without a certain habitation.” John Smith ,1624.

To form a holistic image of any region –an attempt to understand and appreciate the role of geography and ecology in molding the character and psyche of human being of that region is necessary. That’s why researcher took stoking of the dominance of geography in the history of Ratnagiri district. Maharashtra has an extensive mountain range running parallel to its 720 km long coastline. ¹ Theses ranges are geographically part of sahyadris which form a crest along the western edge of the Deccan plateau separating it from the coastal kokan belt. Kokan, Desh, Vidarbha are three geographical parts of Maharastra. Due to physiognomy kokan belt divided into south and north kokan. Ratnagiri district is located in south kokan. It has geographical speciality, which dominates on its history.

Objectives-

- 1) Trace the geographical features of Ratnagiri district which play a significant role in its historical process.
- 2) To take stock of influence of geographical condition of Ratnagiri district on its culture.

Keywords- *Ratnagiri geography Sahyadri hill fort coastal line.*

Location of Ratnagiri district- Ratnagiri district is located in southwestern part of Maharashtra state on the Arabian Sea coast. It is bordered by Sahyadri in east and Arabian Sea on west. Beyond the Sahyadri hills there are Satara, Sangli and Kolhapur districts. It is bordered by Savitri river and Raigarh district on the north and Sindhudurg district on the south.

1 Economic Survey Of Maharashtra ,2015-2016,P.1 .

Ratnagiri district has north-south length of about 180 km and east-west extension of about 64 km.² Old Ratnagiri district divided into Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts on 1st May 1980. Mandangad, Dapoli, Khed, Guhagar, Chiplun, Ratnagiri, Sangameshwar, Lanja, Rajapur are nine talukas of Ratnagiri district. Geographical area of this district is 818300 Sq kms.³ This district receives heavy rainfall. The average annual rainfall for the district as a whole is 330 cms. Alphonso, coconut, cashewnuts, rice, nachani, wari are main agricultural products of the district. Fishing and coconut, mango, cashew nut related industries found in the Ratnagiri district. The climate is hot and humid. Shastri, Vasisthi, Amba, Jagbudi, Nalkadi, Muchkundi, Jog, Kajli and Shuk are the chief rivers of the district.

Dominance geographical features of Ratnagiri district-Ratnagiri district lies on western coastal area of India. It is formed by a narrow belt of low land, lying between the Indian Ocean and Sahyadri hills. District has hilly and rugged areas which produce many geographical features. In the foothills of the Sahyadri ranges there are dense forest in the district. It is 33 Sq.K.M. District has 51.16 % forest area. District has total 8208 Sq K.M. geographical area. Out of it 4299 Sq.K.M.⁴ is forest area. 85% of the land surface in Ratnagiri district is hilly. The coast is almost uniformly rocky and dangerous.

Ratnagiri district is divided into three divisions.

I) The Mountainous region of the Sahyadri / Hill area Zone- This area is mountainous and has considerable high above the Sea level. Large area of this region is covered by forest. About 85 % land surface is hilly. On the east this consists of the steep and forbidding scarp of the main Sahyadris. In the centre the transverse chains of the small hills, which project from the main range and develop higher elevations in their middle portions. These are separated from each other by undulating plateaus. This area is full of fluctuation. The chief Sahyadri range has very high and inaccessible peaks. They provided inaccessibility to hill forts of the district.

2 <http://www.General> Information of Ratnagiri District(M.S. India)

3 Sharma K.K.(Edt.) Intellectual's, Sandarbh Maharashtra Intellectual Book bureau, Bhopal,2004, p.314

4 Interpretation of satellite data of Oct.-Dec.2006

Kashedi, Amba, Kumbharli are main ghats of the Ratnagiri district. The landscape of Ratnagiri district is basically influenced by the Deccan lava. Origin of all rivers in the district is in the Sahyadri ranges. They flow east to west and merge in Arabian Sea. Hill, forts, forest, forest animals and birds lives found in this Zone. Many of the inaccessible peaks carry the famous Maratha hill forts. Forts of Chatrapati Shivaji in the Ratnagiri district are either in inner land or in coastal region. We found 14 hill forts and 4 land forts in Ratnagiri district. Mandangad, Palgad, Pranalakdurg, Mahipatgad, Sumargad, Rasalgad, Govalkot, Bhairavgad, Manikdurg, Navate/Gudhe, Kasardurg, Prachitgad, Bhavanigad and Mahimatgad are the hill forts of Ratnagiri district. Sathavali, Chiplun, Rajapur, Sangameswar are the land forts.⁵ They provided inaccessibility to hill forts of the district. Out of these hill forts Prachitgad is main fort and Mandangad and Mahipatgad are secondary forts. Remaining are the fortified posts.* These forts played main role in the struggle of Maratha- Siddi and Maratha- British.

2) Coastal region-Along the coast line on the west of the district, the soil is sand mixed. Near the coast is flat low land .This is known as the coastal region. This area contains the western slops of Sahyadri and extends to 10-15 k.m. from seacoast. Most of activities in this area are connected with sea. In this region sometimes mountain screed slops of Sahyadri break into sea. Due to nearness of sea this area provided inaccessible places to built sea forts. These mountain screed slops provided sufficient inaccessibility to sea forts. Coast line was important to way of transportation include inland and sea water. It was used for military and commercial purpose in medieval age.

The coast line is irregular and marked by alternating bluff and curving bays. The sea adjoining the district is a source of abundant marine wealth. Now adays Ratnagiri district has 9 minor ports.

5 Pethakar Jyoti, Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Forts of Ratnagiri District- A Historical Study, p.67 .

*Main fort-A large fort which was capable of holding a garrison of over 500 troops. it was well stocked with weapons ,well provisioned & capable to resist a long siege. From this type of fort offensive & defensive military operations could be undertaken. Secondary Fort-A fairly large fort which is capable of holding a garrison of over 200 troops. It was sufficient stocked to resist a siege a moderate duration. The main function of this type of fort was

defensive in nature & to act as an extension of the main fort & increase its circle of control. Fortified post-A small fort & not capable of holding a garrison of over 200 troops .It was not capable to resist a siege of any significant duration without external support. It's main function was to act as a shelter to the main or secondary fort & to increase the range of reconnaissance, patrolling & communication.

Bankot, Borya, Dabhol, Harnai, Jaygad, Kelsi, Palshet and Varvade are the minor ports of Ratnagiri district. Dabhol was known as Mecca-port. Whence members of the royal family and lay Muslims sailed to the holy land Mecca.⁶ It was a centre of trade under the shahas of Bijapur.⁷ Jaygad and Ratnagiri were busy with local trade. Rajapur was an inland port from where the important articles passed to the interior.⁸ This zone carried important trade route to import and export in medieval age because of sea coast. Ratnagiri district have 13 coastal forts. Bankot, Goa, Kanakdurg, Fattedurg, Suvarndurg, Dabhol, Gopalgad, Vijaygad, Jaygad, Ratnagiri Purngad, Yashawantgad, Ambolgad are coastal forts of Ratnagiri district. Out of these coastal forts Ratnagiri, Bankot, Suvarndurg and Gopalgad were main forts .Jaygad was secondary fort and remaining were fortified posts. These forts have played an important role in the history of Ratnagiri district. They were important for naval activities.

Chatrapati shivaji constructed and developed his navy with the help of ports & coastal forts of Ratnagiri district. The coast of Ratnagiri is hemmed in with a network of forts. They are three types- inland, head land and island. There are many forts along the sea coast as well as along the hilly area of Ratnagiri district. These forts have played an important role in the history of Ratnagiri district.

All along the coast a number of creeks with deep waters served as anchorages & mouth of the creeks guarded by forts as at Bankot, Gopalgad, Jaygad formed excellent naval bases. The light & broad Maratha ships were well suited for the shallow waters of the Ratnagiri coast.⁹

3) The Foothill region / Middle zone-This area lies between the coastal & hill areas. There are stretches of more or less flat land in the foothill region. Soil of some places of this region is alluvial & fertile. In others it is red. Livelihood of people of this region is depends upon sea, forest and crops of this area.

6 Apte B.K.,A history of the Maratha Navy & Merchantships,State Board of Literature Culture ,Govt. of Maharashtra,Bombay,1973, p.14.

7 Loc cit.

8 Loc cit. 5 Apte B.K.,A history of the Maratha Navy & Merchantships,State Board of Literature Culture ,Govt. of Maharashtra,Bombay,1973, p.14.

9 Apte B.K.,Op cit ,p.87.

These things as well as ecological & geographical conditions influenced the cultural life of folk.They have various cultural activities like folk dances & drama, local arts & crafts. Ratnagiri district is famous for it's Koli dance, Jakadi dance ,Kalgi-Tura & Dashavtari drama.Ganesh festival,Narali pornima & shimga/Holi are main festivals which are integral factors of kokan's cultural life.

Coclusion-

1)Geographical features of Ratnagiri district played a significant role in the historical process of Ratnagiri district.

2)Geographical condition of Ratnagiri district dominance it's the political, military ,naval, commercial & cultural history .

3)The ecological & geographical condition of Ratnagiri district influenced it's cultural life.

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