PLACE-NAMES IN MAHARASHTRA

Place-names in Maharashtra have been generally studied on the basis of the traditional division of Indian language into two dominant families, Current names or their spoken variations receive less or no attention in themselves but are looked upon as the *apabhramśa* descendants of the Sanskrit or sankritised versions of names occurring in inscriptions, copper-plates etc., where such connection can be easily or laboriously established. The vast majority that did not find any mention in such record is not touched upon or is generally explained away through a proposed sanskritised form on the conviction that these Marathi names are descended from Sanskrit only.

The paper brings out that name-forms in folk-speech are the primary ones as everywhere else and the 'recorded old' names are their "*udbhramśa*"(upward sanskritised formation) concocted by the scribes. On the strength of the Author's investigation over years it is shown that many of these names have meanings related to nature and culture that can be explained satisfactorily from SI (South Indian) languages rather than from Sanskrit. The inquiry pursued further on these lines with the Author's SAMMATA (Sanskrit – Marathi --Tamil Unity) hypothesis will not only explain the place-names in Maharashtra but also lead to revision in the theories of the history of Indian languages and culture.

1. THE DATUM:PAST AND PRESENT

Places-names in Maharashtra, listed[1] up to about 40000 for habitation provide a fertile field for the study in geography as well as cultural history .In this respect, Maharashtra's unique position as a central meeting place of cultures in India has been sufficiently acknowledged though the interpretation of the place-names, has generally been one-sided[2,3] and leading to preconceived conclusions.

Maharashtra covers an area of about two lakh square kilometers and excavations provide evidence of human occupation and farming for five thousand years now. The extent of coverage as well as the span of antiquity of the place-names is therefore considerable. The current language of the region is Marathi, with Gujarat, Hindi, Telugu and Kannada in the adjacent areas. Marathi as such is attested for a thousand years plus and the contemporary recorded forms of the place-names have been slightly affected by the pronunciation and spelling practised by the British. Some place-names are found recorded in inscriptions as old as two thousand years and in inscriptions and copper plates upto and later than the attested-Marathi records. The language of these inscription and copper plates was not Marathi but has been assumed (or rather asserted) to be the precursor of Marathi, in Linguistics. Additionally, it is also considered to have been the speech of the native population of those periods, so that the recorded forms of the place-names therein are taken to have been the ancient or original names from which the Marathi names today should have evolved as a result of diachronic change.

The data for the study of these place-names is thus (taken to be) two-fold: the present datum consists of the corpus of current name-forms as printed in the Nagari or Roman characters while the past datum consists of the limited number of names inscribed or etched in Brahmi or early Nagari characters over fifteen centuries in the accepted language of myth and ritual of the times.

For over a hundred years now, it has been held on the basis of phonetic considerations (only), that these names in the past datum continued in their so-calls original forms[4] to date, so that speculations on racial interaction could be based on the comparison of the two datums.

It is necessary and useful to consider in depth the past datum. One common name "vaḍagāva" occurring about 200 times in the present datum in all parts of Maharashtra is attested in the following various forms in the past datum:

vaḍagrāma, varagrāma, varāhagrāma, vaṭapura, vaḍagāvagrāma, vaḍagambhāgrāma

If we follow the savants and accept that "*vaḍagāva*" is a descendant of any of these forms, the basic tenet of the regularity of phonetic change is thrown to the winds.

"An acceptable etymology must account for both the Sound and Meaning of the item in question."[5]Does this principle hold in this case? Three of the above forms mean, 'noble village''boar village' and 'Bunyan town';the remaining three have taken over the element 'vaḍa' of the present datum and added 'grāma; with or without a middle element, the meanings of which all cannot really be decipherered from the language of the past datum.

What then is the true nature of these forms? In Indian Linguistics they would be considered the original forms of the derived or "*apabhramśa*" form '*vaḍagāva*'. We have seen that this position does not hold either in sound or in meaning. Their true nature is known only from the cultural milieu in which those records were born. In the Indian subcontinent, for at least three thousand years the Sanskrit language has been considered to be the language of the gods and hence the origin of all other languages as also the sacred language to be used in all matters of religion and divinity. Sanctity and antiquity were attached to anything and everything Sanskrit. The language of the inscriptions and copper-places through the centuries is a strenuous effort towards approximating to Sanskrit. Popular speech was always different from Sanskrit of which the original sources like the Vedas did not provide terms for many common and most proper nouns. For these, therefore, the scribes invent Sanskrit-sounding vocables, bearing some similarity to the popular spoken words. We term as '*udbhramśa*' in parallel contrast to "*apabhramśa*". An outstanding example of udbhramśa from the heyday of linguistics is
'mokṣamūlara' from 'Max Mueller' – which shows how a modicum of similarity of sounds was the only requirement of udbhramśa construction. There was ample scope for imposing a meaning on udbhramśa; in fact a quaint or mythical meaning would neatly fulfill the craving for antiquity and sanctity for the record and its language.

We can conclude that the six forms of past datum given above are udhbhramśa constructs by various scribes, of the popular proper noun "*vaḍagāva''* a place name. A semblance of meaning was maintained in all of them by analyzing the popular name to mean village (*gāva*)–of the Bunyan tree (*vaḍa*) from the bracketed Marathi components. The *vaḍa* - vaṭa and *gāva*-grāma equations have been employed in the following not – too –justified instances:

vaḍūra – vaṭapuraoḍhe – vaṭamukhavaṇī – vaṭanagara-- vaṭanagarika

cincavaḍa – cincavaṭa

It will be shown later that the component 'vaḍa' in "vaḍagāva" may not mean the bunyan tree which is called 'vaḍa' in Marathi .Therefore it is obvious that the scribes of antiquity, using the place-name "vaḍagāva" were already unaware of its original import and were interpreting it in terms of the popular speech. Thus the place-name "vaḍagāva" in the present datum satisfies the dual test of near permanency since antiquity and unintelligibility in course of time. More examples selected at random will show that "vaḍagāva" indicates the rule rather than provide an exception :

Cāndūra	– candavura, candrapura,candrādityapura
Kolhāpura	– khollapura, kollāpura, ksullakapura
Vaḍūra	– vaṭapura
Koregāva	– kuregrāma,kumārīgrāma
Miraja	– miraja,mirioji
Karhegāva	– kumārīgrāma
Kānheri	– kannagiri, krsṇagiri , kanhagiri
Sopāre	– s'ūrpāraka, sopāraka
BeLagāva	– veṇugrāma, veḻugrāma
S'iravaḻa	– s'rinilaya,sirivalayapura, s'rimāḻa
Si'roḻa	– s'rīpura
Varakheḍa	– vaḍakhala, vārikheḍa
Bābhuḻagāva	– vavvulāla
Theūra	– thiuragrāma
Velhāḻe	– vavvulaodra
Soḻāpūra	- sonnaligenagara

We therefore come to the conclusion that for the study of place-names in Maharashtra, we have to start with the present datum rather than with the past datum. The change of datum implies change in the method of study as well.

2. THE MODEL AND THE METHOD

The model for the study of place-names is provided by statements of linguistic research, like those given below:

"It is not only the large numbers of Germanic loan-words that reveal to us the Frankish invasion of Gaul. The names of their settlement indicate even today the areas in which they chiefly settled.

"..The invasion of the Huns sent the West Goths off to seek a new abode … they founded a kingdom in south France. Here again the density of the place-names containing Gothic words and ending betrays the presence of those forgotten Germanic settlements."

"It has been a moot point whether the Celts were exterminated by their Anglo- Saxon conquerors or whether they amalgamated with them ……… The linguistic evidence supports the second alternative.

"For although Celtic loan-words are few in English ,the large number of Celtic personal names recorded in old English indicate that there was a prolonged and intimate contact between the two races . The distribution of place-names containing Celtic elements indicates that at least in the

western parts of England there were considerable remnants of a Celtic-speaking population."[5.1] "Even one word like *Ingle by* ('village' or "farm") of the English can reveal the intensive settlement of Yorkshire by Scandinavian invaders."

Without contesting the veracity of such statements, we can and should view them in their proper perspective comprised of:

- Limited extent of occupation – five or ten per cent of the area of Maharashtra;
- attested historicity of warlike conflicts of small tribes;
- Linguistic history uncomplicated by posited existence of different language families corresponding to races.

This perspective is obviously different from the situation in Maharashtra, which is considerably larger in extent and an integral part of the Indian subcontinent unlike insular Britain. Inhabitation here has been prehistoric and cultures none too different from the rest of India, north or south. For want of in-depth inter lingual studies, however, the NI and SI languages are taken to belong to mutually exclusive families and conclusions are drawn, on the basis of historical linguistic data, about assumed prehistoric aggression and suppressions of large population over vast areas. Witness the following from the two studies 2&3:

"Almost all the place-names from Maharashtra from early historical times are in Sanskrit or are Sanskritized'
"The place-names of Gujarat and Maharashtra do not seem to contain a SI element; only the southern areas of Miraj Sangli and Kolhapur which are the borders of Karnataka have some Kannada affinity[2].

"Thus the perusal of place-names and personal names shows great degree of Aryanization – Sanskritization – in Maharashtra, and in Karnataka more of the Dravidian element."[2.3]
"The place-names of Deccan do not give much information about the tribal or aboriginal settlements in the Deccan. "[2.4]
"Suffixes like *gāva, pura,vādī* denoting settlements of the type recorded in classical Sanskrit are found in the Godavari basin and in the Vidarbha area which were the two areas which had powerful ancient empires. These seem to be the more ancient parts of Maharashtra."

The semantic similarity of these statements with the previous ones should invite pointed attention to the contrast mentioned above. The similarity is inevitable in view of the method of study adopted. It consists of the following:

- First to group the inscriptional place-names;
- then to consider the suffixes of modern place-names;
- a comparison between these two;
- Then to classify the first part by analysis of their name content.[2.5]

Isaac Taylor , author of 'Names and Their Histories', says that names in India are formed on the same model as in England, the qualifying element coming first, the descriptive element and the second part being the suffix.[2.6]

It will be seen that the method too is consciously or unconsciously governed by the 'prefix + root or nominal + suffix' structure of word-items in Sanskrit grammar. The meaning of the place-names are then sought in the same framework. In keeping with the linguists' averment that, place names 'often provide important evidence which supplements and corroborates the work of the historian and the archaeologist'[5.2] such analyses do corroborate the assumptions that precede them.

3. THE SAMMATA APPROACH

The SAMMATA (Sanskrit – Marathi – Tamil) approach consists in revision of the datum, model and method – all of them. The acronym is meant to represent unity of the NI (North Indian) SI (South Indian) and the folk speech – all, languages of India. The basis for inquiry has legitimately to be the present datum – the forms of place-names currently in speech, preferably the speech of the illiterate locals. Thus for example, 'Puna' in preference to old literary 'Puṇe' with an ultimate nasal, or now written 'Puṇe' without the nasal, or the British pronunciation ' 'Poona' in the Roman script. The form 'puna' should really be the nearest to the 'Original' name of the place as given by the pre-literate peoples. This will serve as referent for the udbhramśa forms in the records.

The model does not presume the language of the individual place-names or of the people who gave them. It does not presume the spatial boundaries or temporal beginnings of the various languages of India. It does not presume that conflict is the sole precursor to interaction of cultures or peoples. It takes cognizance of the unity of culture cutting across linguistic and ethnic distinctions, so that linguistic distinctions in the place-names do not necessarily indicate history of occupation by defined communities. In respect of meaning, 'Original' names would depict geography, topography and pre-literate culture, more than history of persons or spread of developed cultures. Our study should lead us to those original meanings of the place-names, thirty times more than those of the past datum.

The method of such open-minded study could not owe allegiance to the prefix-suffix mode of analysis. Is the name 'Paiṭhan' of the present datum to be analyzed from the udbhramśa 'pratiṣṭhāna' to mean 'prati +sthāna'or 'a contestant to the place (of gods)'and then to depict the 'Aryanisation' of Satavahanas from it ?Not in the Sammata approach. We would rather start from 'paiṭhan' and through the Prakrit from 'paiṭhāna',establish that 'pratisṭhān' is definitely an udbhramśa and not an original name. We then note that in popular parlance , the town is known by the twin-name 'MungiPaiṭhan', that Mungi' is the part-name of 'Mungighāṭ' a ghat or river-bank stair on the Godavari river girdling the town; further that a mountain ghat by same name leads to the Mahadev shrine at Shingnapur in Satara district 200km removed from Paiṭhan, where it is the practice to drown or submerge the linga with water carrier in conical containers suspended from from staffs carried on shoulders of the devotees.

With these linguistic, geographical, topographical and cultural data in the background, we set to decipher the meaning of the place-name. At first, from Marathi. 'Paiṭha' means 'entrance, ingress' which may lead the place-name to mean 'a place of entry (into the Godavari?) which is not too bad really. 'Paiṭhanī' denotes the rich gold-inlaid sari form Paiṭhan, a derivative pointing

to the prosperity and industry of the town in historic times. 'Mungī' has the only meaning of 'ant' and 'mungā' is a coral, both meanings having no apparent relation with the place-name.

We turn to SI words. Tamil 'muṅgu' means 'to be immersed' and is cognate with a whole list of items in various SI languages. This meaning fits nicely with topography and culture at both mungi-ghat mentioned above. For the twin 'paiṭhan' the nearest Tamil is 'paittu meaning greenness, freshness: derived from 'pai (-tt-)' beauty, to become green etc[6.2]. So paittana would designate a green, prospering, beautiful town. The green fields would contrast with the submerging ghat, or rather the bank.

So, we arrive at the conclusion that 'paiṭhan' has its origins in some word which is preserved in varied forms in present-day SI languages including Tamil. It can be surmised that popular Marathi folk-etymology so related the undeciphered name to its situation as a ford, that the word 'paiṭha' was coined as a derivative from 'paiṭhan'.

4. WHAT THEY SIGNIFY

After the prestigious 'partisṭhāna' – sort of a watchword in the established linguistic method, we consider some minor place-names in an ancient cave-monuments area carrying inscriptions that provide the past document: the Shelarwadi – Bhaja caves spur.
The map shows bare details of the hilly ridge, omitting the slopes and the names of many hamlets. Just south-east of the area is a small village with the characteristic name *'Theragāva'* : village of the *thera's* or monks. This shows how the antiquity of habitation has been preserved in the place-names. At the western end is the village *'valak'* which has been identified with *'valūraka'* occurring in an inscription in the Karla caves nearby. By the Sammata approach we can reach the meaning of *'valūraka'* which is not available in the established identification:

valūraka	=	*val+ ūr + ka*, a diminutive suffix
val	:	strong, hard; corresponding to the rocky terrain.
ūr	:	village, town

The words are Tamil[6.3]. They indicate, along with others from the same stock, the proto-language of the early inhabitants. Village *Ambī* is on the IndrayaniRiver. *'āmpi'* : small boat, raft; in SI[6.4]clearly shows that this was place for crossing the river. The name Shelarwadi is:

śel*ā*rav*ā*ḍī	cel + ār + vāḍī (pāṭi)
cel	flow, ār : river,
pāṭi:	hamlet, pastoral village that is a hamlet by the swift stretch of the river (perhaps on account of the bend in the river) which could not operate an 'āmpi'.

To the *north* of the hilly stretch is 'vaḍagāva' a name deliberated above. This name of the present datum is explained thus:

vaḍagāva   = vaḍa + gāva

vaḍa : vaṭa	: northern.	
gāva : kāvu	: enclosure[6.5]	

The name signifies direction of location (north) with reference to a prominent feature of topography, a hillock. A similar name occurs in a similar location: 'vaḍakī' lying north of a long spur. On the south of this spur is a village '*Dive*' and the ghat is also called '*Diveghāt*'. 'Dive' is easily connected to Tamil '*tivavu*' meaning 'steps cut on the sides of a mountain. the name of the river on the south is 'karhā' which in Marathi means 'a water pitcher with a raised hole as a short spout', related to Tamil *karakam* meaning almost the same.

On the bank of the river in the north, is the village '*theūr*', unexplained for meaning, yet one of the acknowledged eight sites of god Vinayaka. The place obviously meant 'town of the deity or Lord', from Tamil '*tē*'+'*ūr*'. Nearby lies the village *Nāyagāva* of the '*nāya*' people or family : whose name figures in one of the oldest inscriptions, namely at Bhaja. 'Nāya' has obvious relatives in 'Nayars, Nayudu's etc. in the south and Naiks or Nayaks in Marathi country and all of them were probably appellatively related to '*nāy*' : dog' in the bygone hunting age.

These random non-stock examples of names of modest places from the heartland of Maharashtra lead us to the conclusion that:
.SI languages explain the meanings of many place-names in Maharashtra.
.Many of the place-names signify geographical, topographical and proto-cultural features rather than historical;
.Detailed study of the place-names in Maharashtra along Sammata lines will lead to revision of many traditionally accepted notions about the prehistory of Maharashtra and India, about the division into families of the languages in India and about the history of development of culture in India.

5. THE LARGER CONTEXT

This Paper devoted to the study of Place-names as such is a part of the Author's investigations in languages and culture, in the context of multiple disciplines. The Author's published work has dealt with place-names non-repetitively as briefly indicated under 'References' the other studies covering linguistics and mythology provide the basis for revising the theories and hypotheses that have held the field in these disciplines for the past two centuries. They are a help in, as well as helped by the study of place-names in Maharashtra.

This Paper was placed before the Place-Names Society of India with the hope and confidence that the Sammata method can be applied in the larger context of the study of Place-Names, Languages and Culture in India.

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