

Political Economy Of Irrigation Development In Vidarbha

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I. Introduction:

Vidarbha comprises of the (now) eleven Eastern districts in Maharashtra. As per the 1991 Census Over 17 million people live in some 13300 villages and nearly 100 small and big towns in Vidarbha, covering a total of 94400 sq km at a population density of 184 persons per sq km. Thirty four percent of these people belong to the SC/ST. While a large majority of the people speak Marathi or its dialects as their mother tongue, there is a strong influence of Hindi in all public fora. A strong sense of being discriminated against is perpetuated among the people of Vidarbha. Its origin perhaps lies in the fact that the city of Nagpur (which is the hub of all events in Vidarbha) and hence the elite living in it suffered a major diminution in importance in the country. It was the capital of the Central Provinces and Berar till 1956 and hence enjoyed a considerable say in public matters. The decision making hub shifted to Mumbai in 1956. Vidarbha elite have now got to compete for power with the more resourceful and crafty elite from Western Maharashtra. While largely an issue with the political elite, yet this sense of having been and still being wronged is significantly reinforced by the fact of relatively lower development of this region vis a vis other areas in Maharashtra. For instance the CMIE Development indexes shown below indicate significantly lower level of development for the Vidarbha area.

Levels of Development in different districts of Vidarbha

SN	District	Relative Index of Development as per CMIE
1	Akola	65
2	Amrawati	74
3	Bhandara	73
4	Buldana	59
5	Chandrapur	72
6	Gadchiroli	64
7	Nagpur	109
8	Wardha	99
9	Yavatmal	64
	Maharashtra	164

Source: "Profiles of Districts", October 1993, CMIE, Mumbai, various pages.

The subject of Vidarbha being given a step motherly treatment by Maharashtra Government has a way of coming to centre stage at frequent intervals. It goes out of the limelight as mysteriously as it comes in prominence but never does it completely die.

This paper examines whether and how the irrigation development in Vidarbha has been affected by these broader currents and developments connected with regional disparities in Maharashtra. More importantly, it attempts to reconstruct the way in which the politics

of development creates and recreates patterns of behaviour that essentially result in sharing the spoils of development to suit those who have real political power. The paper ends somewhat despondently for Vidarbha yet attempts to sketch out a course of action for the civil society to protect the vital interests of the people even after granting the fact of continued tilt in the way of the Maharashtra government.

II. Regional Disparities and Their Redress Mechanism in India

The issue of regional disparities has been at the forefront in many Indian states for decades. The following box illustrates the recently articulated issue of regional equity and disparities in various states of the country.

Regional Disparities in Various States

State	Region in the State Claiming Neglect	Current status
UP	Uttaranchal Eastern UP, Bundelkhand	separate state formed. disparities persist
Bihar	Jharkhand	separate state formed
West Bengal	Chhota Nagpur plateau	disparities persist Development Board established
MP	Chattisgarh Bundelkhand	separate state formed
Maharashtra	Vidarbha, Marathwada	disparities persist Development Boards formed
Andha Pradesh Karnataka	Telangana	disparities persist Development Board formed
J&K	Jammu	disparities claimed
Gujarat	Saurashtra Dungar vistaar	Disparities perceived disparities continue
Orissa	Western Orissa	disparities persist

Source: Self compiled based on recent newspaper reports.

At the political level the question often takes the shape of popular mobilisation for formation of a separate state for the people claiming that they suffer from discrimination and injustice. Diverse grounds for mobilisation and justification for the demand of a separate state are seen in India. They are around language (case of Maharashtra and Gujarat in the then Bombay state), ethnicity (cases of Jharkhand, Gorkhaland), historicity (Telangana, Vidarbha and Chattisgarh), culture and religion (case of Jammu) etc. However, the perception that economic development is occurring at different pace in the same state and that the impugned region is systematically "exploited" or "neglected" is the basic source that feeds the separatist movements.¹³ Thus economic disparities have tended to lead to separatist movements in the country. The Constitution of India Article

¹³ See speeches of Chiita Basu and of Nitish Kumar in the Tenth Loksabha, sixth session, (alfa.a.nic.lsdeb/10ls/ses6)

371 provides for redressing these problems within the framework of established States of the Union. Under the Article, Statutory Development Boards can be created for the impugned regions and the provision of adequate funds and monitoring their progress is directly under the charge of the Governor of the State. Further, the Governor can give directions to the State Government to take appropriate action to redress the disparities and to take steps for a balanced regional development.

Spatial (Regional) Equity

Andre Gunder Frank¹⁴ and Samir Amin¹⁵ have led the neo-marxian school that has addressed the question of regional economic disparities across countries in the world. The basic contention of Frank is that development occurs only along with underdevelopment. Popular terminology “development metropole and periphery” or just pole-periphery has come into vogue from the writings of Frank and his followers. The essential argument comprises of the following components:

- Capitalism knows no regional or national boundaries,
- Economic transactions between capitalist actors in different regions over a long period result in transfer of economic value and hence prosperity from one region to another.
- Tacit or explicit alliances between capitalists of different, even opposing regions tend to be formed to protect the vested interests of the capitalist class.
- Capitalist class as such manipulates diverse instruments of the State to suit their interests in the above process of development and underdevelopment.

While the labour class in the metropole is exploited in terms of class conflict between the capitalist and workers, the general populace in the periphery is exploited by the combine of the capitalists in the periphery with the capitalist in the pole.

Non-ideological explanations of the issue of spatial equity recognise the basic pattern of capitalist underdevelopment but make the explanations less emotive. They tend to locate the causes in social formation, resource endowments and the historicity of trade and communications network. In such a formulation, spatial equity or its absence is seen to arise out of a complex combination of factors:

- resource endowment: Regions with better natural endowments tend to move ahead economically.
- nature of population living in different regions: Some communities are more entrepreneurial. Others are more “laid back”.
- network of transport and trade,
- historicity of investments by private or public players in different lines of industry. Some regions may become suppliers of raw materials and consumers of end products while the manufacturing and value addition occurs elsewhere.
- nature of polity and its responsiveness to regional aspirations: The decision to invest in infrastructure and in facilities to develop the

¹⁴ for example see Frank, AG “On Capitalist Underdevelopment”

¹⁵ See for instance Samir Amin, “Imperialism and Globalization”, *Monthly Review* September 2002

- regions are after all taken politically. See below for the specific case of Maharashtra.
- policy about positive discrimination for favouring “backward” regions: This has been in vogue in India since the eighties and takes the form of write backs and deferment of State levies for units situated in the backward regions.
- price equalisation policies: prices of essential inputs such as fuel, electricity, minerals etc may be designed to be equal every where depriving the producing regions of the advantage of proximity to production centres.
- direct and indirect attempts to achieve balanced regional development etc: these may take the form of special Boards etc.

It is possible to argue that when an already entrepreneurial community lives in a resource rich region, it tends to make good use thereof and the community prospers. Due to forward and backward linkages and in particular due to the massive needs for services created by the entrepreneurial activity of the leading community, the region as such prospers. But such a statement can also be naïve ascription of faster regional development of a region to the drive of the community there. Regional domination may arise due to such quasi-mechanistic factors. More often it is perpetuated by deploying the instruments of the State for the continued hegemony of the established elite. This may be done through use of instruments of taxation, differential investment in infrastructure and pricing of publicly produced services and goods and more subtly by manipulating the administrative machinery of the State to suit the interest of a specific region. In this sense the neo-Marxian school has a significant insight in the phenomenon.

III. Policy Attention to Regional Equity Issues in India

In India, initial policy concern was with essentially poverty eradication alone through boosting income. It is only when the concern is no longer about homogeneous, regionally undifferentiated poverty but with existence of areas of rising economic well-being accompanied by stagnating economic zones that the policy attention shifts to regional equity issues. The following summary of systematic analysis of regional equity questions is taken from Jairam Ramesh.¹⁶

In 1967, the Planning Commission undertook an elaborate exercise which was published in the form of a report called *Regional Variations in Social Development and Levels of Living-A Study of the Impact of Plan Programmes*. This report analysed the extent of inter-state and inter-regional variations in consumption, unemployment, land holding, rural investment and debt, agricultural development, educational and health facilities and roads. This exercise was essentially a factual survey and restricted itself to measuring the extent of variation in development between states.

The first systematic attempt at identifying and classifying backward areas at a level lower than that of a state was that of the Sukhamoy Chakravarty Committee on Backward Areas (1974). The following variables were chosen to express relative variations in development:

¹⁶ Jairam Ramesh, “Planning and Social Development” downloadable from (www/jairam-ramesh.com/publications/publications.html#)

- Density of population.
- Percentage of agricultural workers to total work force.
- Gross value of food grain output per head of rural population.
- Gross value of output of all crops per head of rural population.
- Percentage of total establishments using electricity to total number of establishments.
- Percentage of household establishments using electricity to total household establishments.
- Percentage of non-household establishments using electricity to total non-household establishments.
- Number of workers in registered factories per lakh of population.
- Length of surfaced roads per 100 sq km of area-
- Length of surfaced roads per lakh of population.
- Percentage of male literate to male population.
- Percentage of female literates to female population.
- Percentage of total literates to total population.

Using different statistical techniques, the Chakravathy Committee combined these variables into a single index of regional disparities in levels of development and identified 179 districts as what it called the "hard core" of backward areas in the country. As compared to these 179 "hard core" backward areas, special programmes were in place commencing in the Fourth Plan in 298 districts under schemes relating to DPAP, Hill Areas, Tribal Areas, Investment Subsidy and Concessional Finance. The distribution of the 179 backward districts was described in terms of:

- 102 districts in the central part of India extending from the northern districts of AP through a large part of MP, Orissa, some eastern and northern districts of West Bengal, most of Bihar, eastern UP and extending partly into some central and western UP districts.
- 23 districts in the Himalayan foothill belt including districts in J&K, HP and the hill districts of UP.
- 22 districts in the Rajasthan-Gujarat belt,
- 25 districts in the north-east region,
- 7 isolated backward pockets in Gujarat, AP, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, D&NH, A&N Islands & Lakshadweep,

These backward districts were further classified into broad aerial groups with relatively homogeneous structural patterns.

- High population density areas with moderate resource endowments inefficiently exploited.
- Low to medium population density areas with slow growth and poor to moderate resource endowments.
- Low population density, large tribal population, resource rich but substantially undeveloped areas.
- Peripheral location, low population density, large tribal population, resource rich but substantially undeveloped areas-
- Ecologically unbalanced areas with special physical problems.

The Chakravathy Committee made a large number of recommendations on development approaches to be adopted for these five categories of backward areas. The Committee also made suggestions for improving planning methodology for backward area development. It commended the sub-plan methodology of planning and resource allocation as a model for ensuring a certain order of investments going into specified backward areas by earmarking of funds from state plan resources, supplemented by special Central assistance. Finally, the Committee noted that if resource transfers are needed to finance the plans of backward regions on a requisite scale, suitable measures will have to be adopted. Some of these could be Central funding for special programmes, special incentives to promote private investment, larger allocation of funds by state governments, raising of resources (e.g. in the form of labour) from within the backward regions, etc. The National Committee on the Development of Backward Areas (NCDDBA; 1980) rejected the index-based approach adopted by the Chakravathy Committee to identify backward districts. Instead, it identified "problem areas" which cannot realise their development potential unless special measures are taken to alleviate certain crucial constraints. The NCDDBA recommended that the following type of - problem areas be treated as backward for purposes of planning:

- Chronically drought-prone areas and also Desert areas
- Tribal areas
- Hill areas
- Chronically flood-affected areas
- Coastal areas affected by salinity

The focus of both the Chakravathy Committee and the NCDDBA appears to be on the industrial development of the backward area, defined in terms of district or in terms of an underlying problem or constraint to growth. The NCDDBA dealt extensively on the industrial development of backward areas and highlighted the concept of growth centres as a catalyst for backward area development. It identified five major types of development which could create such growth centres with substantial potential for generating all-round development in backward areas-industrial complexes, growing urban complex, raw material exploitation, large irrigation projects and hydal and thermal projects. Finally, the NCDDBA too commended the project-oriented sub-plan approach, as part of both the state and Central plans, on the pattern of the Integrated Tribal Development Project for the total development of backward areas.

IV. Background on Vidarbha

A Historical Backdrop

Vidarbha itself comprises of two categories of districts. The Varhad (or its anglicised name, Berar) districts Amrawati, Akola, Buldhana and Yavatmal were originally territories of the Nizam of Hyderabad. The Nizam had agreed to host the army of the East India Company in a pact in the late 1820's. He had also agreed in a truce with the Bhonsalas of Nagpur for a revenue sharing arrangement with the Bhonsalas for the Varhad districts. Under this, the Bhonsala king collected revenue and gave some 40% to Nizam. At times both the parties collected revenue and chaos would ensue causing great hardships to the peasantry. When Nizam found it difficult to make payments for its maintenance, in 1853 he leased the Varhad districts to the Company for a certain annual lease fee. The Company, being much stronger than the Bhonsalas militarily, stopped the sharing arrangement altogether and strengthened the collection mechanism in Varhad, instituting rayatwari in preference to the Permanent Settlement pattern of UP or Bengal or the Malguzari pattern of the Bhonsalas. The other four districts, Nagpur, Bhandara, Chandrapur and Wardha were a part of the kingdom of the Bhonsalas. Angry at the Company for having stopped the revenue share of Varhad, The Bhonsalas supported the First War of Independence. The brave warriors lost. After the fall of the Sitabuldi Fort in 1857, the Bhonsalas were deposed. Subsequent severe and cruel acts (a freedom fighter was hanged, one each on almost every tree on the road from Nagpur to Hoshangabad, so goes a legend) of vengeance by the forces loyal to the British throne more or less completely decimated all sections capable of wielding arms. A Resident was appointed and ruled from Nagpur after the Queen's Decree of 1858. The Resident ruled over the province called Central Provinces (CP). This included the territories of all the kings and chieftains who supported the First War of Independence in 1857, from Nagpur to Jhansi. In effect, it included all the districts of current MP and Chattisgarh except those that formed the territories of the kings who had betrayed the Indian liberation struggle. Circa 1897, Varhad was annexed to the British dominions from Nizam in a settlement of the dues which the Nizam was unable to clear. A certain agreement was signed that allowed for continued though token recognition of the Nizam's rights over the region.¹⁷ Varhad was added to CP and was subsequently clubbed with Nagvidarbha districts by every one. Vidarbha remained a part of the CP and Berar province till Independence and later till 1956. At the formation of the Greater Bombay state, Vidarbha was included in Bombay and became a part of Maharashtra from 1960.

Social Formation

Population of Vidarbha can be classified in four major categories. The first is the category of aboriginals: gonds, kolams, pradans korkus etc. The first three live in Wardha, Nagpur, Bhandara, Yavatmal, Gadchiroli and Chandrapur districts. Korkus live in the northern villages in Amrawati, Akola and Buldhana districts. The kolams are "primitive tribal groups" as per a recent GoI classification. To this category one may add nomads like the pardhis of Central India. One may also add to this category, stretching a little further, the much more aggressive and developed *banjaras* that have settled all over in the Deccan plateau regions from Marathwada to Madanpalle, including Western

¹⁷ See SG Kolarkar and GM Purandare "Vidarbha Itihas" (original Marathi) Vidarbha Sanshodhan Mandal, Nagpur 1997, pages 179-211.

Vidarbha regions. The second and quite a sizeable category is of the Scheduled Castes, notably the *mahar* community that has significant presence in Nagpur, Chandrapur and Wardha districts. The third category is the stock of middle and high caste Marathi speaking people. In Vidarbha, dominant castes are *kunbi*, and *teli*. Kunbi which is roughly equivalent to the patels of Gujarat is the main caste of land tillers and numerically strongest in West Vidarbha, having now more or less become the ruling caste of the region. *Telis* are found more in the Eastern districts and are dominant there. A third caste strong in terms of its financial muscle but numerically weak is that of the *komtis*, a community that has settled in the Eastern fringe of Deccan plateau extending well into AP and Chattisgarh. As expected, the vocal *Brahmin* community is largely confined to urban centres, is seen to be strongly affiliated to the RSS and has lost all political power though it provides a certain kind of leadership through its domination of the professions. The fourth category is of relatively recent in-migrants from other parts of the country: Rajasthan, Gujarat, MP and Chhattisgarh. There is a very strong presence of *marwari* community; both *maheswari* and *agrawal* groups. There is a significant presence of Gujarati community, mostly patels in the tendu leaf areas of the East and banias elsewhere. And there is a substantial presence of *jaiswal* community, the Central and East Indian equivalent of the Tamilnadu's *Nadars*. Finally there is a noteworthy if dwindling presence of the high-nosed Hindi speaking Brahmin community that dominated the Vidarbha region during the CP and Bajar days right up to the regime of Shuklas and Mishras (from say 1945 to 1956). These communities have settled in Vidarbha in the last one hundred and fifty years. Occupational patterns tend to vary with community. The tribals are mostly dwellers of villages in and proximate to forests, living partially on fairly inefficient farming and partially on the forest resources. Hence we find more of them in Yavatmal, Wardha and tribal belt of Nagpur, Bhandara-Gondia-Gadchiroli districts. The *telis*, *kunbis* and other middle caste people are mainly farmers. People of the SC living in rural areas tend to be wage earners while those in the urban areas have mixed occupations: government employment, small businesses and domestic service. Brahmins tend to dominate the professions. *Marwaris* in Vidarbha have been the archetypal money lender-cum-traders and have near complete stranglehold on the regional economy, a grip that is shared with the *komtis* in Eastern parts of the State. The *marwari* domination on business and economy is so complete that over three fourths of all wholesale trading establishments and registered industries are perhaps owned by persons from the *marwari* community. Three of the four leading newspapers in Vidarbha are owned and run by *marwari* community and incidentally have been strong supporters of the movement for separate Vidarbha. (*marwari* controlled newspapers are The *Hitvada*, *Navbharat* and *Lokmat*. RSS runs the fourth newspaper *Tarun Bharat*.)

Land Tenure in Vidarbha:

Three different systems of land tenure prevailed in Vidarbha at the time of independence. Bhonsla regions had a system of *malguzari* described below:

Malguzari System of Central Provinces

A malguzar was allotted a number of villages from which he collected land revenue and paid it into the treasury. He was some thing in between a collection agent and a Zamindar. A malguzar would be allowed to retain "2 annas himself" and pay "14 annas to the Government". Thus his commission was an eighth of the land revenue. Yet he was held personally liable to pay the revenue for all the farm lands in his villages whether the farmers paid their revenue to him or not. The tough "sun-set" rule applied as it did in the Permanent Settlement areas. Malguzari rights were negotiable and transferable. Malguzars were petty landlords but their power over their villages was no less absolute than that of the Zamindars in Permanent Settlement areas. They had absolute right over every thing other than the specific plots of agricultural land owned by the peasants: the common lands, the residential areas of the village the tanks and the forests in their areas. Transfer of property by peasants needed a No Objection Certificate from the malguzar and he was allowed to charge a fee for the purpose. The malguzar employed a revenue inspector called kotwal and with his help maintained the land records with him. To top it all, he was also the Arm of the Law in the village and represented the Police.

In most of Varhad areas, rayatwari prevailed from about the time the Company took over from Nizam in 1853. This was the same system as obtained in Bombay and Madras Presidency areas. Positions of deshmukhs, moharils and deshpandes were created and they were either given plots of land and usufruct right over village commons including the village "gadhi" (a small fortress of sort). The right to use the gadhi and the commons and the right of being a deshmukh were prestigious ~~matters and the kunbi stock farmers~~ aspired for it.¹⁸

The third system that prevailed in a small portion of only the Yavatmal district was "ijardari" which was akin to the zamindari system and settlements to the ijardars were permanent with dependent tenantry. (Ijardari region also had a significant kolam population and that was another reason that made the latter submissive, non-acquisitive and myopic.)

Pre-independence Developments in Vidarbha :

Varhad was considered to be an exceptionally prosperous belt in those days. The region has fertile deep black cotton soil ("not a pebble can be found for several miles around here" was the boast of many a regions in Varhad.). The establishment of first a regular cotton exports trade from here from about 1860 and completion of the rail link to Bombay gave a boost to cotton cultivation. The Empress Mills was among the very first industrial ventures of the House of Tatas and it was located in Nagpur in 1878. Gradually, the establishment of scores of cotton textile mills both in Mumbai and Ahmedabad meant that a lucrative and more or less assured market for cotton existed for the farmers. Rainfall in Varhad was in the neighbourhood of 35 inches (850 mm). But the best part was that it was highly reliable. In effect, unlike most other regions of the Deccan Plateau, Varhad did not have a single year of famine for a whole Century from 1850 to 1950. Prosperity and stability bred complacency and lethargy. Varhad also became known for its soporific, placid and laid back society that became an easy prey first to the *marwari* money lender and then to political machinations as we shall see later. Amarawati was the most important education centre in Varhad, Vidarbha Mahavidyalaya

¹⁸ *Op.cit.*, pages 212-219.

was among the oldest colleges in the whole of Central India. While Tilak found a few sympathisers and there were sporadic leaders of the Congress (Brijlal Biyani, Bapuji Aney, Ruikar to name a few), the region was politically asleep during the British rule. Nagvidarbha region (that is, Nagpur, Wardha, and old Bhandara and Chandrapur districts) had a much more heterogeneous social composition, with tribals, marwaris, Hindi speaking babus of the CP & Berar government, Gujarati beedi industrialists, komtis and a large Bengali and Telugu population making up the society. The RSS was established by Dr. Hedgewar here in 1923. Hindu Mahasabha had some influence here. But basically here too, there was as a strong influence of Mahatma Gandhi and later Vinoba Bhave with Ashrams in Wardha and Paonar respectively. Kamalnayan Bajaj of Wardha and his children gave unstinted support to the Gandhian movement and are doing so till date. It seems that what little political activity there was in Vidarbha was a derivative of the national political movement and did not have much specific regional flavour (e.g. there was neither any equivalent of EVR here nor anything like the AdiVidarbha sub-stream of political consciousness.)¹⁹

Formation of Maharashtra and merger of Vidarbha in Maharashtra

At the time of independence, the eight districts of Vidarbha (Akola, Amrawati, Buldhana, Bhandara, Chandrapur, Nagpur, Wardha and Yavatmal) were a part of the Central Provinces and Berar State. Nagpur was the capital of this state. The state included vast tracts of Malwa, Nemad, Bastar and Chattisgarh Mahakoshal, all currently in either MP or in Chattisgarh. The remaining eighteen districts of Maharashtra came from two regions. Western Maharashtra and Konkan districts then formed a part of the bilingual Bombay State. The latter also included Presidency areas of Gujarat (Ahmedabad, Surat, Valsad, Bharuch, Mehasana, Kheda and so on.) The Marathwada districts came from the territories of the Nizam.

Owing to the perception of inequity met out to the Maharashtra regions by Morarji Desai Government, resentment started brewing in Maharashtra. For example Ambedkar records that between 1947 and 1955, the allocation of subjects to various ministers of the Bombay Cabinet followed this pattern:

Gujarati speaking Cabinet Ministers:	a total of 202 subjects
(Desai himself, Dinkar Desai, Jivaraj Mehta and Shantilal Shah)	
Marathi speaking Cabinet ministers:	a total of 88 subjects.
(Hire, Chavan, Nimbalkar and Tapase)	

More telling, the per capita expenditure made by the Government in the first three years was as follows:

Region	Population (million)	Per capita Development Expenditure (Rs.)		
		1951	1952	1953
Maharashtra	21.7	1.7	2.3	2.8
Gujarat	11.9	2.9	3.1	3.2

¹⁹ For a detailed exposition of political movement and ideas in Vidarbha, see PL Joshi (ed), "Political Ideas and Leadership in Vidarbha", Silver Jubilee Committee, Dept. Of Political Science, Nagpur University, Nagpur, 1980.

The per capita expenditure in Gujarat regions was higher by almost sixty percent! This kind of step motherly treatment to Maharashtra treatment naturally flared passions and anger against the Desai Government.²⁰

The anger took the form of demand for a separate state for Marathi speaking people. The hitch was, though dominantly a Marathi speaking area, Vidarbha was not a part of the larger Maharashtra region at all till 1956. This naturally weakened the argument of those who wanted a separate State for Marathi speaking people. To make matters worse, numerous previous Committees and Commissions had recommended forming a separate state for the Marathi speaking Vidarbha region! For example Gedam²¹ writes: "In 1888, owing to recurrent and at times intense complaints of neglect made from Marathi speaking regions of CP & Berar, it was actively debated whether to merge the Vidrabha districts into the dominantly Marathi districts of Bombay state. The Commissioner then clearly stated that the eight districts were large enough to form a viable and compact State by themselves." Later in 1938, the CP and Berar State Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution that "urged His Majesty's Government to form a separate province out of the eight districts of Vidarbha". He further states that the well known Social Anthropologist Iravati Karve had mentioned in her volume "The culture of the Marathi People" that the districts of Vidrabha dn those of Maharashtra never formed a consolidated political unit." After Congress Party itself appointed a Committee to consider the issue of linguistic reorganisation of provinces, the Commission clearly mentioned that administrative convenience and continuity with past conventions is as important a consideration for forming a state as shared language. In 1947, leading personalities in Maharashtra including DR Gadgil, Kannamwar (who later became Chief Minister), Shrimannarayan Agrawal etc. signed a pact known as the /akola Pact. This recommended that there should be two Marathi states: one to include the districts in West Maharashtra and the other to include the Vidarbha districts, that there should be separate legislatures and ministries in the two regions. To cap it all, the State Reorganisation Commission ~~recommended that Vidarbha~~ as a compact administrative unit become a State itself.

In Vidarbha itself there were two schools of thought. The dominant school preferred to remain as a separate state. This was supported by most of the well known leaders of the region: Biyani, Bajaj, Kannamwar, Aney and so on. The other, mostly led by cultural revisionists wished to join back Maharashtra since they believed that language as well as cultural had established organic links between these two regions and therefore they must unite.

Be it as it may. The demand for a separate Vidarbha state naturally weakened the movement for Samyukta Maharashtra (Consolidated Maharashtra). Desai who seriously opposed the separation of Bombay State fully exploited this position. Hence it became important for the then leaders of Maharashtra to come to Nagpur and arrive at a commonly shared Memorandum of Understanding known as the Nagpur Pact. Signed in

²⁰ (Writing and Speeches of Dr. Ambedkar, Vol I 1979, Part 1, quoted in Bhongle S, "Rajkaran Panyache" (original Marathi), Rajahans, Pune, 1998 page 65)

²¹ Gedam, Shankarrao "Parivartan", Sarvottam Prakashan Nagpur, 2002, (original Marathi), pages 46-55)

1953 by leading exponents of the Maharashtra movement as well as leaders from Vidarbha, the Pact stated as below.²²

The Nagpur Pact of 1953

- “1. In the light of the current thinking of linguistic reorganisation in the country. we unanimously resolve to strengthen the case of a separate State for Marathi speaking people by agreeing as below.
- 2 Maharashtra will be formed by consolidating all the Marathi speaking and contiguous districts and regions in the current MP, Bombay and Hyderabad State into one administrative unit. The State will be named as Maharashtra or the State of Marathi Speaking People and its capital will be in Mumbai”
- 3 This state shall include Mahavidarbha, Marathwada and Rest of Maharashtra and will strive for comprehensive development of all the regions”
- 4 Without infringing upon the need for maintaining a balanced Government, development expenditure in the three regions shall be equitable and in proportion to the population, but for some time to come, special attention will be paid to the Marathwada region considering its backwardness.
- 5 Each region will receive adequate representation in each elected Government to be installed in future.
- 6 Efforts will be made to ensure that admissions to technical and professional Institutions and institutions of specialised higher learning will be made giving due attention to the population of the three regions.
- 7 The High Court for the State will be situated in Mumbai with a Division Bench in Nagpur. Adequate representation to the Bars in various regions and in particular, Nagpur will be given while appointing judges without diluting the merit requirement for the exalted positions.
8. Recruitment to State cadres and to the State supported agencies will be done keeping in mind the need to give due representation commensurate with the population of the three regions.
9. We believe that greater amity and cooperation between administrative units of the three regions can be achieved by effective decentralisation.
10. We recognise that the people of Mahavidarbha have great attachment to Nagpur that has been a Capital of CP and Berar for a long time and that they do derive several benefits from this status of the city. Attempts will be made to ensure that these benefits continue within the limitations of ordinary financial prudence. All offices of the State will be moved to Nagpur for a definite period each year and at least one Session of the Assembly will be held at Nagpur each year.
11. Treating village as a unit and using the latest Census, districts will be so re-organised as to ensure that the entire contiguous Marathi speaking regions are included in the State.

The Separate Vidarbha Movement: off again, on again!

Nagpur Pact became an instrument at the hands of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement leaders (SM Joshi, PK Atre, YB Chavan etc.) for boosting their demand for linguistic bifurcation from the Bombay state. Desai tried to suppress the movement often using force. (In one firing incident, police action killed as many as 105 people in Mumbai, the worst of the police record in Maharashtra for all times!). Yet, finally the movement won and the state of Maharashtra was carved out of the Bombay state with Mumbai as its capital.

The Nagpur Pact had applied a much needed balm on the bruised ego of the Vidarbha people. It had also raised hopes of a just and equitable rule. Recognising the need for equity, the then CM YB Chavan said on the floor of the Assembly “ All possible steps will be taken give to the Nagpur agreement legal and conventional sanction. I wish to assure the people of Vidarbha that they need have no apprehension that their legitimate interests will not be protected. On the other hand they will be zealously guarded and will

²² Gedam Shankarrao “Kala jya lagalya jeeva” (original Marathi, Gnanada, Mumbai, 1991, pp 83-114.

be treated as the sacred trust of the future Maharashtra Government. The Terms of Nagpur Act will be honoured and wherever possible, some thing more will be done.”²³

But soon a strong perception gathered that these pious commitments would remain only on paper. The Vidarbhis were also only dormant, not extinct. After initial few years of formation of the Maharashtra state and continuing throughout the last forty three odd years of the history of Maharashtra state, demand for separate Vidarbha state has been raised time and again. Five Congressmen namely Banwarilal Purohit, Shankarrao Gedam, TG Deshmukh and Madhukarrao Kimmattkar and Late Nasikrao Tirpude have remained strong supporters of this demand²⁴. Prominent and respected, these leaders have never compromised for personal gains. But they never raised mass and hysteric mobilisation in the “separatist” movement. The demand does come to the forefront once in every while. For instance during 1969-71 this demand was at its peak with ex-MP Dhote anchoring it. The apparent immediate cause for the flare up then was demand for setting up a separate Agricultural University. It then followed the familiar course of bandhs and sporadic break down of law and order. Perhaps a few buses were burnt and a few individuals suffered bullet injuries in police firing. The movement became dormant after the University was sanctioned. It arose again after the Dandekar Committee²⁵ gave its report and then again when the current Government took charge.

Soon after BJP-Shivsena Government took over in 1994, Sena Chief Thakre pooh-poohed the demand for a separate state for Vidarbha, alleging that this was essentially an agenda by the non-Marathi (read *marwari*) people to gain ascendancy. He also assured that the new Government would do every thing to avoid suspicion of a step motherly treatment. The charge that the movement was instigated to subserve marwari interest seemed to be tenable considering that all the three marwari controlled newspapers were strongly supportive of the demand then. They were supportive of the next bout of Vidarbha fever in 1999 as well when the current PDF Government took over. At least three of the most vocal leaders of the movement at this time were non-Marathi. This time there was greater public debate on the issue. There were strong allegations that the “bogey of separate Vidarbha was raised by politicians who could not get positions of power in the government”²⁶. The fact that a senior leader who was once a MPCC President but was unceremoniously dropped from the Cabinet gave this war cry made this charge a little credible. The case of another leader whose fervor for Vidarbha evaporated when he was accommodated in the Cabinet after the demand reached its peak also justified such cynicism. It was also alleged that separate Vidarbha would become a “colony of the people of Rajasthan”.

In summary, we may state our understanding of the separate Vidarbha movement as a sporadic and weak movement that has almost never touched the heart of all or even a majority of the Vidarbha people. The reasons are not far to seek.

- Culturally, Vidarbha identifies with Maharashtra icons. The “Varkari sampradaya” (the tradition of saints and their followers that worship the deity Vitthala in Pandharpur. The tradition has Sant Dnaneshwar of 13th Century

²³ Speech of YB Chavan in Maharashtra Assembly, reproduced in Gedam *op. cit.* page 90

²⁴ As narrated in an interview with Shri Shankarrao Gedam in December 2002

²⁵ Fact Finding Committee on Regional Imbalances, Chaired by VM Dandekar. See below for full discussion of the Committee’s work.

²⁶ Article of MV Omkar in Tarun Bharat in 2000.

AD as its fountainhead of spiritual inspiration and has a galaxy of illustrious Saints through the Centuries. The movement is truly pan-Hindu and has effectively succeeded in overcoming the caste boundaries in devotional and spiritual matters.) is as strong in Vidarbha as elsewhere in Maharashtra. Historically the region may never have been a part of Maharashtra, but Vidarbha's heroes and icons are the same as in Maharashtra. Common language, common spiritual heritage and allegiance and common national role models and heroes mean there is no separate "Vidarbha identity". The absence of such an identity is the major weakness of the movement.

Economically, there is an organic link with Mumbai as the development pole. The chief product of Vidarbha is electricity and the main market is Mumbai and the industrialised west. The hub of happenings and all role models for the commercial classes are all in Mumbai. As one observer succinctly put it, "even if there were a separate state of Vidarbha, its capital would be Mumbai!"

- Increasingly, there is a rising resentment against the non-Marathi traders who control all commerce in a strangle hold. It is particularly strong against *marwari* traders. This resentment is almost as intense in this laid back land as was seen in Assam and Orissa. And to make it tough for the Vidarbha movement, these elements are seen to be motivating, inciting, financing and driving the movement.
- There is certainly a sense of being given an unfair treatment. But the off-again, on again nature of the movement has bred cynicism. The strong feeling that many of the leaders who claim that they are going to struggle for justice for Vidarbha end up compromising the cause for personal gain breeds this cynicism. After all, Vidarbha sends 66 MLAs in a 288 strong Assembly and there has never been any sign of these MLAs working in unison to compel the government in making significant budgetary grants for Vidarbha. What happens time and again is momentary consolidation of the elected representatives that is placated by tokenism by a shrewd establishment.

V. Irrigation in Maharashtra: A bird's eye view

Regional equity issues are debated in the context of geographical regions that politically or administratively form one unit. Irrigation planning and investment is done in terms of river basins. Hence it is important to become familiar with the river basins and regions of the state so as to appreciate the issues of regional equity and the dynamics associated with them. Administratively, Maharashtra is divided into five broad regions: Konkan, Vidarbha, Marathwada, Nasik Division and Pune Division. Vidarbha comprises of two administrative divisions: Amrawati and Nagpur. Marathwada can be alternately called "Aurangabad" division. The Konkan division comprises of the coastal districts. In the parlance of the Development Boards, Konkan, Nasik and Pune divisions are clubbed into Rest of Maharashtra.

The administrative divisions as of now are:

Konkan: Thane, Alibagh, Raigad, Sindhudurg and Ratnagiri districts.

Nasik: Nasik, Dhule, Nandurbar, Jalgaon, Ahmednagar
Pune: Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, Pune, Solapur
Aurangabad: Aurangabad, Jalna, Nanded, Parbhani, Hingoli, Latur, Solapur, Osmanabad, Beed
Amrawati: Akola, Washim, Buldhana, Yavatmal and Amrawati
Nagpur: Nagpur, Wardha, Bhandara, Gondia, Gadchiroli and Chandrapur
(Greater Bombay is not included here as it is irrelevant for this paper.)

The Fact Finding Committee on Regional Backwardness (Dandekar Committee or "Backlog Committee" as is popularly known.) divided the state in four "regions": *Vidarbha* (Amrawati and Nagpur), *Marathwada* (Solapur and Aurangabad), *Konkan* (Konkan) and *Western Maharashtra* (Nasik and Pune). See Annex 1 for river basins of Maharashtra.

Maharashtra was a party to three (Krishna, Godavari and Narmada) Inter-State Water Disputes. Water sharing arrangements regarding Tapti were settled much earlier, much of the ground work having been done in the undivided Bombay State. The Subramaniam Award on Narmada and Bachavat Award on Krishna and Godavari were announced in the seventies. Maharashtra claims that its share of water for exploitation as fixed by the Bachavat Award is smaller than the water availability in its geographic share of the river basin and hence is not fair.²⁷ Maharashtra intends to claim additional 300 TMC of Krishna waters.²⁸ The basin-wise status of irrigation development and comparative status of access to irrigation in the various regions is given in the Tables given at the end of this paper.

VI. Regional Inequity in Maharashtra

The Fact Finding Committee on Regional Imbalance in Maharashtra chaired by well known economist VM Dandekar submitted its report in April 1984. This Committee explicated the extent and area of regional imbalances in Maharashtra and also suggested ways of remedying the imbalances. It evolved physical measures of "backlog" of development in diverse areas: irrigation, roads, primary and secondary education etc. It converted these measures into their financial costs. Finally it went on to suggest the ways in which State budget could be used to address the backlog-related issues. Through out last eighteen years, the debates on regional inequity in Maharashtra have been dominated by the findings of this Committee. This section elaborates on the issue of regional inequity in Maharashtra, drawing heavily from the two reports. This elaboration is in order since the whole process of understanding, accepting, quantifying, attempting to remove (and sabotage of these attempts to remove) regional inequity is at the very core of political economy of regional development.

The Backlog Committee traces some of the history of formation of the Maharashtra State we have discussed above. It mentions how Article 371(2) of the Constitution of India was inserted by the Ninth Amendment in order to allay the fears of Vidarbha and Marathwada regions right at the time of formation of the State. The Article reads

²⁷ Maharashtra Water and Irrigation Commission (Chitale Commission), GoM, Mumbai, 1999, Vol. I, pages 177-184

²⁸ Speech of CM, Vilasrao Deshmukh quoted in *Tarun Bharat* Nagpur Dec. 4, 2002

“371 (2) Notwithstanding any thing in this Constitution, the President may by order with respect to the (State of Maharashtra and Gujarat) provide for the special responsibility of the Governor for

- a) *the establishment of separate Boards of Development for Vidarbha, Marathwada and Rest of Maharashtra (or Saurashtra, Kuchch and Rest of Gujarat) subject to the provision that the report on the working of these Boards shall be placed in the State Legislative Assembly every year,*
- b) *the equitable allocation of funds for developmental expenditure over the said regions subject to the requirement of the State as a whole and,*
- c) *equitable arrangements for providing adequate facilities for technical education, vocational training and in respect of equitable opportunities for employment in services under the control of the State government in respect of the said areas subject to the requirement of the State as a whole.”*

(It may be noted that after dragging their feet for over a decade in respect of the report, the State Government did condescend to appoint these Development Boards in 1994. We revert to this subject latter.)

The Report elaborately analyses district wise plan and non-plan expenditures across a category of heads and over an extended period of time and comes to the conclusion that there indeed was a slant in the way Government of Maharashtra used the development resources, neglecting Vidarbha and Marathwada and favouring Western Maharashtra. Summary of the data presented by the Committee is given below:

The per capita income in 1955 for Maharashtra was Rs. 294. If Greater Bombay is excluded and indexes constructed to compare the per capita incomes in Western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada on a scale rating the per capita income of Maharashtra at 100, the following picture emerges (pages 40-41)

Region	1955-56	1978-79
Maharashtra (excl Greater Bombay)	Rs. 294 = 100	Rs. 1278 = 100
Western Maharashtra	114.4	106.42
Vidarbha	89.9	84.2
Marathwada	67.7	81.06

Thus relative backwardness of Vidarbha persists and has slightly worsened., while Marathwada has considerably improved its position. It may be noted that despite this, Marathwada continued to be worse off than Vidarbha.

Assessment of Backlog in Irrigation:

The Fact Finding Committee compared the pace at which irrigation potential had been created in various areas of the state during the twenty two years since formation of the State. The results clearly bring out lop sided development in favour of Western Maharashtra. Yet, the Committee desired to come up with justifiable means of quantifying the extent of regional inequity and hence evolved a term called Backlog. For assessing the backlog in irrigation development, the Committee had to evolve a measure of comparison of the irrigation potential created. Some sources had potential to irrigate their commands over multiple seasons while some others could supply water for

irrigation only on one season. Hence the committee created a measure called Standard Rabi Equivalent irrigation potential of irrigation. The backlog was assessed in terms of this Standard Rabi Equivalent (SRE). Arithmetically, the backlog was the difference between the district (region's) irrigation potential in SRE and the State's average irrigation potential applied to its net sown area. This is indicated for the four regions in Table 6.

The Committee had suggested that an investment @Rs. 10000 per Ha of SRE had to be made to remove the backlog. On this basis, the backlog for Vidarbha came to Rs. 527.31 crores. Using fairly similar logic, the Committee had assessed the backlog of development in development of roads and in technical education etc. The Committee recommended that the development backlog could be removed by allocating specific funds towards this end and meant to be spent for the regions experiencing the backlog. The Committee recommended that 15% of each year's budgetary allocation should be made to remove the backlog.

After the Backlog Committee

Nothing much seems to have happened for at least a decade after the backlog Committee submitted its report. It was almost through out business as usual. It was only when the ShivSena-BJP combine successfully challenged the hegemony of the sugar lobby in the Congress and came to power in Maharashtra, that the picture began to change a little. The separate Development Boards were in fact set up in 1994. In 1997, a second committee was appointed to see the progress achieved during the period on removal of backlog submitted its report. This Committee, "Indicators and Backlog Committee" came to the conclusion that the backlog in regard to irrigation had actually increased! A process of specific attention to backward regions began. It made significant headway in roads sector. But as the Report of the Indicators and Backlog Committee²⁹ points out, the backlog on irrigation actually grew. This is shown in Table 7.

VII. Analysis of Process Drivers

The erudite and extremely well documented Report of the Commission on Water and Irrigation prepared by the Committee chaired by Shri Madhav Chitale very blandly records the regional differences. For instance, while recording the backlog as estimated by Dandekar Committee, the Chitale Commission simply and blandly states that "the largest , that is 57% backlog is seen for Vidarbha" (page 706. Also see 708). The Committee does not go into the causes of this lop-sided development. In fact very little official explanation for the regional imbalance is available. Bhongle³⁰ offers some explanation indirectly. He suggests that the four features distinguished Western Maharashtra region from the rest of the State.

- In the first place, a series of severe droughts and famines in the eighteenth and the nineteenth Century in much of the rain-shadow areas in this region had created and heightened a sense of importance about creating sources of irrigation in the

²⁹ Report of the Indicators and Backlog committee on Relative Levels of Development, Backlog and Removal of Regional Imbalances, Vol. I, Mumbai, 1997

³⁰ Bhongle, Sudhir, Rajkaran Panyache (original Marathi), Rajhans, Pune, 1997, pages 628-632.

local bureaucracy as well as the people. Several schemes were in fact created in this region even during the British regime either for meeting drinking water requirements or for supporting the cultivation of a second crop.

- Secondly, the topography of the region, at least in the Eastern foothills of the Western Ghats offered several sites for impounding water economically and efficiently.
- Thirdly, the “sugar revolution” that started in early fifties starting from Warana gave a major fillip to the demand for irrigation in this region. Sugar revolution created new Centres of powers and these in turn perpetuated the dominance of Western Maharashtra.
- And finally, social formations here exhibited much greater coherence and had strong familial or kinship inter-linkage with the political and administrative machinery in the State Government. This facilitated navigation of the irrigation schemes in the labyrinth of the Secretariat.

On the other hand, the situation in Vidarbha was quite different. As an expert states,³¹ “Adequate justification for creating irrigation infrastructure in Vidarbha did not exist at all in the files of the Government when Maharashtra was formed. We know that the British Government was not for our development. They merely wanted to avoid emergency. Central Provinces Irrigation Commission argued in 1924 that while the rice growing areas of Eastern Vidarbha needed some irrigation infrastructure support for life saving irrigation to paddy crop, the remaining districts of Vidarbha did not need protective irrigation as they grew sorghum, pigeon pea and cotton. They had not experienced much problems for a whole period of seventy years from 1850 to 1920. Stable 35” of rain was quite enough for growing these dry crops. As such these districts would never produce famine conditions. As a result, CP & Berar Government also focused only either on Eastern Vidarbha districts or the Narmada belt growing wheat. In consequence, there were no projects whatever on shelf till 1960 for Vidarbha. Even initial survey work was not undertaken for any of the sub-basins. Only by 1965 GoM started an investigation division for Vidarbha. The staff appointed was scanty³² and so the progress of evolving projects for sanctions was very slow. There were no projects on shelf worthy of name till the end of fourth plan. Only in 1979- 80 did we manage to put 11 major and 48 medium projects for sanction.”

The project cycle for an irrigation project involves several stages:

- Technical investigation
- Project preparation
- Sanction and administrative approval

³¹ Abstract of interview with AK Shenolikar, Ex-Chief Engineer, Nagpur Division and Member, Vidarbha Development Board (interview dated Jan. 4, 2003)

- CWC sanction-particularly for using Central funds
- Taking up the sanctioned projects into budgetary process
- Allocating budgetary support to projects (project wise, with possibility of across project transfers with prior permission)
- Implementation

Shenolikar said "As luck would have it for Vidarbha, just as these 11 major and 48 medium projects were sent for Administrative approval at the State level, the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 came in force. This required approval of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, GoI if any development work were to be undertaken on forest lands. To top it all, we had this peculiarity of the zudpi jungle. This retarded small, local sector projects while the Forest Act retarded all medium and major projects."

But there are reasons to believe that there was a deliberate delay in the sanction process in Government as well. Kimmatkar, another member of the Vidarbha Board stated that at one point in time three hundred odd projects from Vidarbha were just gathering dust in the Secretariat. Several ways of reducing the pace at which projects could mature are possible and have been adopted in Maharashtra. Some of these are:

- not giving enough manpower for investigation of projects
- not taking up projects for administrative scrutiny
- sending many queries and putting up tougher standards differentially. For instance cost benefit ratios required of Vidarbha projects could be tougher than for the Krishna projects. The process is not transparent any way.
- inviting opinions of several agencies none of which can be deemed to be irrelevant, but doing so selectively for Vidarbha projects and allowing them to raise questions, slowing down the process of sanction,
- not taking proactive steps for expediting clearance under Forest Conservation Act from the Central Government
- Not holding meetings of the irrigation development corporations frequently enough
- Not giving budgetary sanctions but requiring them to use only borrowed money
- Allowing floatation of tenders only after financial closure was achieved, slowing down permission to issue bonds and ensuring that financial closure occurs with a delay etc.

Shenolikar gave an example of the impact of such dilatory tactics. The Gosikhurd project on Vainganga was prepared in 1982 and was costed at Rs. 382 crores in 1982. Though it received approvals needed for the project by 1985, there was no budgetary approval for quite some time. The Government gave Rs. 2 crores, 3 crores etc. in several annual budgets and it took 1990 before the allocation crossed Rs. 10 crores. Considering that the

³² Interview with Shri MG Kimmatkar in December 2002.

cost escalation occurs at over 6-7% obviously the project was never going to take off. It has not, even by 2002. It is estimated to cost over Rs. 2500 crores. And now, the government is bankrupt. He gave an example of the bias of GoM. The Tembhur LI project in the Krishna basin has a per Hectare cost of Rs. 72000 and needs to lift water for 405 metres. This project can never be considered desirable if power were taken at its opportunity cost. Yet not only has the project been sanctioned, over Rs. 700 crores have been spent on it already. And at the same time, several projects in Vidarbha, which have a cost of around Rs. 7000 per Ha, are languishing.

Has Marathwada been smarter?

We understand that fair and equitable distribution and allocation of development resources will always remain a mere statement of intent in the real world. Machinations of pressure groups rather than equity considerations dictate the distribution of the development pie. Why Western Maharashtra, particularly the sugar belt (Pune, Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli, Nashik and Ahmednagar) districts have got the benefit of significant investment in irrigation is quite clear. After all, these are the districts of the ruling elite of the State. Given the state of disunity and disarray in the ranks of Vidarbha people as well as the elected representatives, the lack of development of Vidarbha is also understandable. What seems most remarkable is the way another backward region, Marathwada has been able to significantly improve its position. Starting from negligible created irrigation potential in 1960, Marathwada has actually overtaken Vidarbha in created irrigation potential (see Table 6). Bhongle³³ attributes much of this progress to creation of the Jayakwadi project on Godawari river. A total of 12 lakh Ha of irrigation potential was created thanks to consistent and insistent follow up on the part of the leaders from Marathwada, including notably SB Chavan. Why could they do it and not leaders of Vidarbha? We can offer only some tentative answers. It appears to us that primarily, social formation in Marathwada was more coherent and leadership more mass based than in Vidarbha.

Vidarbha leaders and people have always seemed to resort to a sort of blackmail. Buses had to burn and a few people had to lose their lives even for establishment of an Agricultural University in Vidarbha in 1969. Tantrums and confabulations can work only up to a point. Under normal conditions, what seems to matter is how coherently does the regional leadership behave, how much influence can it bring to bear on the subject and how consistent is it in following up the matter through the deliberate machinations and tactics of an adversarial pressure group that uses techniques such as those described earlier. Unfortunately, Vidarbha did not have a powerful leadership after perhaps Panjabrao Deshmukh. Other leaders had to constantly defend their own position in the petty caste ridden politics of Vidarbha. The only persons who represented Vidarbha on Central Cabinet for a long time were Sathe and Salve. One was a Brahmin and another a Christian, neither capable of mobilising the rest of the regional leadership behind them. The rest of the crowd was successfully manipulated by the Western Maharashtra leadership on caste grounds (e.g kunbi vs teli) or language (marwari vs Marathi) so that they could never act in unison. How could purposive consolidation of public opinion occur in such a situation?

³³ Bhongle, op cit. Pages 117-125

Marathwada offers a contrast. Dominant castes of Marathwada are culturally and socially closer to the dominant castes of Western Maharashtra. More importantly, Marathwada leaders and people seldom took adversarial position vis a vis Maharashtra. There has never been a talk of separate Marathwada state. Leaders like SB Chavan, Patil-Nilangekar and Shivajirao Patil (the Ex-Speaker of Lok Sabha) could work through the same kinship network in the political and administrative complex of the Secretariat without overt tantrums or confabulations. In fact the result achieved by Marathwada in the field of irrigation can be compared by the result achieved by Vidarbha in the field of roads in the Shivsena-BJP regime when a quiet Minister achieved a lot by sheer persistence and follow up. Most observers admit that the inability to undertake systematic follow up is the single most reason why irrigation projects in Vidarbha languish.

Other than the absence of a consolidated and coherent political pressure, to an extent demand for irrigation has also been lacking in Vidarbha. Sugarcane cultivation in the vicinity of a sugar mill has for years been a sure path for rapid economic progress. Hence every possible did what he could to get the benefit. There has been no equivalent of sugar cane here. Orange orchards has been the preserve of the relatively better off farmers since it has a minimum gestation of three to four years. Besides, there is no ready and remunerative buyer for orange comparable to sugar mills. Cotton crop has been grown as a dry crop here. While there is no question that it can do with one or two irrigations post monsoon, in reality all farmers in the command of any canal system in Vidarbha seem to shift out of cotton immediately. Thus the dominant crops of the region did not generate demand for irrigation. This is of course not to argue that there is no need for irrigation, but it does seem as if there is a degree of resignation about its absence that does not become transformed into an articulated demand forcing the Government to act expeditiously. Finally, it appears that the greater backlog of irrigation development is in Amrawati Division where the scope for surface irrigation development appears to be limited. The major projects that are in the air are on the hand all in the Nagpur Division. Also the voice for Vidarbha such as it is at its strongest in Nagpur Division as well. So there seems to be incomplete congruence of interests so far as irrigation is concerned.

VIII. The Developments in recent years and the politics behind them

Circa 1997, irrigation departments were corporatised. The Vidarbha Irrigation Development Corporation (VIDC) was formed in 1997. The idea was that they would raise money from the market and use that for creating irrigation infra-structure. The VIDC did issue bonds in once in 1997 and twice again later. Subsequently in 2000, under the orders from GoM, the VIDC transferred its funds to Krishna corporation for speedier execution of their projects. The progress on Vidarbha projects again came to a grinding halt. The pretext given by the Government was that Krishna waters had to be used fast since 2000 was the deadline specified by the Bachavat award. The reality is that in fact the same award set the same deadline for Godawari waters as well! When a furore in Assembly occurred in 2001, the GoM response was truly cavalier. It stated that the affair of transfer of funds was between the two corporations and did not concern the Government at all! It was only at the instance of the then Governor that the State Government finally agreed that this money should be returned to VIDC. In December 2001, Governor of Maharashtra issued a Direction to the Government of Maharashtra

using his powers under Article 371 (2) and the Development Boards for Vidarbha, Marathwada and Rest of Maharashtra 1994. This Directive ³⁴ asking the Government to allocate funds for removal of irrigation backlog of Vidarbha in the budget annual plan for 2002-2003. This has not been complied with at all.

GoM has been threatened legal action by protagonists of Vidarbha for non-compliance. To save the face, on February 4, 2003 the MLAs from Western Maharashtra aggressively pleaded with the current Governor to keep this Directive in abeyance³⁵, take a fresh look at the whole issue of backlog and pay special attention to the drought hit regions of Western Maharashtra. In the meanwhile, irrigation projects of Vidarbha continue to languish. As of going to press, VIDC has money for paying salary to its staff for the next two months and no more. All the projects have been stopped.

IX . Summary and Concluding Comments

This paper attempts to reconstruct the way in which the politics of development creates and recreates patterns of behaviour that essentially result in sharing the spoils of development to suit those who have real political power. It starts with the discussion on the national policy bringing out the salient features of the concerns of regional equity and the ways adopted by the GoI to address them. It notes that time and again issues of real or perceived regional imbalances within States of the Union and some times ~~these~~ have resulted in strident demands for creation of smaller states.

It takes a look at the historical evolution of the region currently known as Vidarbha. This comprises of eleven districts as of now, occupying Central and Eastern parts of the State. Vidarbha itself has been formed out of two separate regions: Varhad (Berar) and NagVidarbha. The former was a territory of the Nizam prior to its merger in the Crown administered Central Provinces. The latter was annexed by the British Crown upon fall of the Bhosla kingdom in the First War of Independence in 1857. The Vidarbha region, though inhabited largely by Marathi speaking people, is much more pluralistic than the rest of Maharashtra. Economically, cotton cultivation, orange orchards and forest based activities (including the tendu leaf lobby) form three major interest groups. The economy of the region, like many other Central and Eastern Indian provinces, is strongly dominated by the *marwari* traders. Though there has been little cultural basis for the people of Vidarbha to have their own identity, a series of quixotic events culminated in the State Reorganisation Commission recommending a separate State for Vidarbha. To strengthen their hands in forming a single State for the Marathi speaking people, the leaders of the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement entered into an agreement called the

³⁴ Letter of the Governor to Chief Secretary, letter number GS/DS/DB/Directives?2001/338, dated Dec. 15, 2001.

³⁵ See Tarun Bharat, Feb. 5, 2003

Nagpur Pact that attempted to placate the people of Vidarbha and assure them equitable share of development. Subsequently, this assurance was embodied in the Article 371 (2) of the Constitution of India.

The NagVidarbha region had a fair number of malguzari tanks that provided supplementary irrigation to save the kharif paddy crop from wilting in the event of a dry patch during monsoon. Vidarbha region in general has always had a long series of stable and predictable monsoon. A fairly reliable and adequate (850-900 mm) rainfall ensured that the cotton, pigeon-pea and sorghum crops of the Varhad region would not wither away in monsoon. As a consequence of these agro-climatic features, Central Provinces Irrigation Commission that looked into the aspects of irrigation development for the limited purpose of avoidance of famine like conditions categorically stated that there was no need to create irrigation infrastructure for Varhad. This meant that investigation work had been undertaken for few of the possible irrigation projects at the time of formation of Maharashtra State. There was no project for Vidarbha on the shelf for inclusion in the Second or the Third Five Year Plans. The seventies saw creation of few major dams in Vidarbha: the multi-purpose Pench project the Itiadh project, the Kali Sarad project etc. Virtually no irrigation infrastructure was created in Varhad still, Upper Wardha came later. The investigation work that began in the mid-sixties resulted in a portfolio of a reasonable size was ready only by the end of seventies.

By contrast, emergence of sugar co-operative mills gave a tremendous boost to the demand for irrigation in Western Maharashtra. The power in the newly formed State of Maharashtra was concentrated in the hands of the Maratha lobby from the sugar belt. An active demand, a history of significant work on analysis and investigation of irrigation sites and control on State resources made a handy combination for progress of creation of irrigation potential in Western Maharashtra. In thirty years of Maharashtra State, irrigation potential in Western Maharashtra crossed 50% of the net sown area (on SRE basis) while Vidarbha saw progress from 10.6 to only about 23%. Interestingly, Marathwada, considered to be the most backward regions at the time of formation of Maharashtra and which started with negligible irrigation potential, overtook Vidarbha in creation of irrigation potential during this time.

The Fact Finding Committee brought the regional inequity out in the open and suggested ways of addressing the problem. Nothing much had been done for over fifteen years to correct the situation. This was obvious when a re-look at the regional development issues by the Committee on Indicators and Backlog confirmed in 1997 that the Vidarbha region had been given a short shrift in irrigation development, resulting in huge backlog, most of it in Amravati Division.

The ground situation has not changed at all. A series of skilful and insensitive machinations are adopted by the powerful Western Maharashtra lobby to ensure that development resources are used for their region. While socio-cultural proximity, alert leadership and consistent and insistent follow up has seen that Marathwada region caught up in the race, problems of Vidarbha persist and show no sign of nearing any satisfactory conclusion. Several problems in the political arena appear to have contributed to this state of affairs. The two leaders from Vidarbha who assumed significantly powerful positions in Centre were unable, unwilling or both, to create a mass mobilisation for the cause of irrigation development in Vidarbha. They came from marginal communities of Brahmin and Christians respectively. Political unity in Vidarbha has been beset with petty rivalries and dissension based on caste or language grounds. These are fully exploited by a crafty Maharashtra leadership. This weak political articulation tends to take consistently adversarial stance vis a vis Western Maharashtra and resorts to blackmail by all the time raising the bogey of a separate State. Confabulations, tantrums and vituperations accompany frequently rising bubbles of the Vidarbha activism. This is more often than not neutered merely by politically accommodating the vocal leaders. What is clearly evident is the inability or unwillingness of the political leadership from Vidarbha to consistently follow up and navigate irrigation projects of the region through the crafty machinations of the wily bureaucratic machinery ably supported by their political bosses from Western Maharashtra. This has meant that while a lot of steam rises every once in a while on Backlog of Development, no progress occurs on the ground. Clearly the weak and the guileless must satisfy themselves with such crumbs as the powerful and the wily allow to fall from their table.

The conclusion is decidedly despondent for the people of Vidarbha. As the State of Maharashtra now sinks into bankruptcy, its ability to find funds for undertaking capital intensive irrigation projects has become negligible. Now on, the people of Vidarbha will have to put up even a harder struggle to get any thing out of the dwindling resources of the State. It is possible that the parched lands in Vidarbha and its impoverished people will have an extremely long wait for getting their officially acknowledged dues of irrigation benefits. What should the people and the agencies who mean well by them do then? Fortunately, there is abundant ground water available in the region³⁶. Recent methods make it possible for rainwater harvesting for ground water recharge. Newer technologies³⁷ make it possible for much reduced need for water for growing crops. It is perhaps better that people and the Civil Society organisations focus their energies on them, leaving the game of shouting about backlog to their political leaders. And one can always hope. Who knows? The insistent shouts may actually be heard and make a difference some time.

³⁶ Phasnalkar, op cit

³⁷ Technologies such as micro-irrigation kits and Easydrip rolls reduce water needs by as much as 80%.

Table 1 :**Irrigation Status Across River Basins in Maharashtra**

SN	Basin	GA '000 sq km	CA Lakh Ha	IA till 1995 Lakh Ha	IA/CA%	UPA for irrigation (lakh Ha)
1	Godawari	152.81	112.56	14.67	13.03	26.01
2	Krishna	69.03	56.27	10.69	19	9.20
3	Tapi	51.3	37.31	3.47	9.30	3.29
4	Narmada	1.05	0.64	0	0	0.22
5	Kokan basins	33.23	18.64	0.59	3.17	17.86
	Total	307.42	225.42	29.42	13.05	56.58

Table 2 :**Sub-basin wise Area under crops and Irrigated Area**

SN	Sub-basin	NSA ('000 Ha)	Net irrigated area ('000Ha)	NIA/NSA %	% share in State NSA
1	Upper Godawari up to Paithan dam	1013	166	16.39	6.59
2	Upper Godawari below Paithan	441	103	23.36	4.09
3	Lower Godawari	1283	199	15.51	7.9
4	Poorna Dudhna	1237	130	10.51	5.16
5	Manjra	1139	153	13.43	6.07
6	Rest Godawari	48	4	8.33	0.16
7	Painganga	1529	89	8.82	3.53
8	Wardha	1296	97	7.48	3.86
9	Mid Vainganga	861	241	27.99	9.57
10	Lower Vainganga-Pranhita	234	46	19.66	1.83
11	Lower Vainganga-Ichampalli	7	2	28.57	0.08
12	Lower Vainganga-Indrawati	77	19	24.68	0.75
13	Poorna (Tapi)	1231	66	5.36	2.62
14	Girna	659	102	15.48	4.05
15	Panjra	185	20	10.81	0.79
16	Middle Tapi (Satpura)	595	64	10.76	2.54
17	Middle Tapi DakshinBurai	661	83	12.95	3.29
18	Narmada	59	6	10.17	0.24
19	U, Krihna N-W	790	156	19.75	6.19
19	U. Krishna SW	52	9	17.31	0.36
20	U Krishna Erna	255	46	18.0	1.83
21	Upper Krishna (Agrani)	93	15	16.13	0.6
22	Upper Bhima (up to Ujani)	980	193	19.69	7.66
23	Rest Bhima (Neera)	454	88	19.38	3.49
24	Rest Bhima (below Ujani Man)	768	131	17.06	5.2
25	Seena-Bori Benitula	1177	222	19.75	9.3
26	Kokan Basins	924	58	6.27	2.30
27	Maharashtra	18031	2519	13.97	100

Source Page 319, Vol. 1 Report of the Maharashtra Water and Irrigation Commission, June 1999

Table 3 :

**Comparison of Vidarbha with West Maharashtra in terms of
Irrigation Development**

SN	District	NSA	NIA	NIA/NSA%	Share of state's NIA
1	Nasik	900	133	14.8	5.3
2	Dhule	739	76	10.3	3
3	Jalgao	814	133	16.3	5.3
4	Ahmednagar	1160	272	23.5	10.8
5	Pune	994	189	19	7.5
6	Satara	570	132	23.1	5.2
7	Sangli	599	94	15.7	3.7
8	Solapur	1125	190	16.9	7.5
9	Kolhapur	413	74	17.8	2.9
	Maharashtra	18031	2519	13.97	100
1	Buldhana	686	42	6.2	1.7
2	Akola	800	26	3.2	1
3	Amarawati	723	45	6.2	1.8
4	Yavatmal	863	34	3.9	1.3
5	Wardha	441	14	3.2	0.6
6	Nagpur	553	65	11.7	2.6
7	Chandrapur	488	92	18.8	3.6
8	Bhandara*	355	168	47.4	6.7
9	Gadchiroli*	199	49	24.5	1.9

Source Page 318, Vol. 1, Report of the Maharashtra Water and Irrigation Commission, June 1999

* Bhandara and Gadchiroli have high reported NIA primarily due to the high area under the now defunct malguzari tanks in these areas and not because of functioning dam-canal systems. In fact barring the Chauras area of Bhandara, there is hardly any second crop in these crops and they are poorer even than the non-irrigated districts of Vidarbha.³⁸ Also see the Report of The Fact Finding Committee on Regional Imbalances, 1984, pages 126-131.

³⁸ See e.g. Phansalkar, "Understanding Underdevelopment", IWMI-Tata paper series.

TABLE 4 :

DISTRICT WISE PER CAPITA INCOME ESTIMATES FOR 1993-94

(Shares in % of the total, Income in Rupees, Population in millions)

SN	District	Population	Per capita income	Share of			Total
		n		Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	
1	Greater Mumbai	10.3	23354	3.5	36.7	59.8	100
2	Thana	5.84	14515	8.2	48.9	42.9	100
3	Raigadh	1.91	22528	12.2	73.5	14.3	
4	Ratnagiri	1.58	8537	38.5	28.1	32.9	
5	S'durg	0.85	10246	55.8	16.1	28.1	
6	Nasik	4.07	10190	28.4	37.4	34.2	
7	Dhule	2.65	6082	29.9	29.9	40.2	
8	Jalgaon	3.32	8058	36.6	31.5	31.9	
9	Ahmednagar	3.53	7631	33.2	40.8	26.0	
10	Pune	5.89	13902	17.4	43.2	39.5	
11	Satara	0.55	9529	40.4	26.7	32.9	
12	Sangli	2.29	9654	43.1	20.9	36.0	
13	Solapur	3.38	7726	32.4	31.1	36.5	
14	Kolhapur	3.09	10690	39.2	25.5	35.5	
	Average for Western Maharashtra		9273				
15	Aurangabad	2.42	9095	29.2	45.3	25.5	
16	Jalna	1.49	5787	44.8	15.5	39.7	
17	Parabhani	2.18	8986	47.2	16.8	36.0	
18	Beed	1.90	9802	45.8	26.8	27.4	
19	Nanded	2.49	6817	42.9	15.9	41.0	
20	Osmanabad	1.36	7354	55.7	8.8	35.5	
21	Latur	1.78	8502	48.3	11.9	39.8	
22	Buldhana	1.98	6587	46.2	12.8	41.0	
23	Akola	2.30	7253	46.6	12.8	40.8	
24	Amrawati	2.27	7245	44.7	13.7	41.6	
25	Yavatmal	2.16	7569	46.2	17.0	43.8	
26	Wardha	1.1	7506	42.1	17.3	40.7	
27	Nagpur	3.46	11192	21.6	34.5	43.9	
28	Bhandara	2.17	7210	28.8	29.3	41.9	
29	Chandrapur	1.86	8437	41.5	26.3	32.2	
30	Gadchiroli	0.82	7078	44.7	16.9	38.4	
	Average for Vidarbha		7786				

Source: Table 2.6.3, page 123, Vol 3, Report of the Maharashtra Water and Irrigation Commission, June 1999

Table 5:**Development Expenditure Across Regions**

Item	Kokan	Western Maharashtra	Marathwada	Vidarbha
Per capita expenditure on district level schemes (1974-83)	503.06	430.7	489.19	477.98
Per Capita Expenditure on major irrigation 1974-82	39.17	202.13	256.92	73.94
Per capita expenditure on power 1974-82	248.17	399.43	99.57	144.93
Per Capita expenditure on package scheme of incentives	34	12.10	7.52	7.38
Per capita plan expenditure 1974-82	809.87	724.16	762.62	561.55
Per capita non-Plan expenditure 1979-80	66.66	94.53	72.82	72.25

Source: Report of the Fact Finding Committee, pages 81-101

Table 5

SN	Item	Kokan	Western Maharashtra	Marathwada	Vidarbha
1	Irrigation potential-1960 (% NSA)	0.21	5.06	0.25	1.33
2	Irrigation potential 1982 (%NSA)	6.13	15.05	10.41	9.46
3	Irrigation potential (SRE) as % of NSA	10.64	31.35	20.06	14.22
4	Backlog in irrigation potential in SRE '000 Ha	105.58	30.73	260.67	527.31

Source Report of the Fact finding Committee pages 126-132.

Table 6 :**Backlog in Irrigation as in 1994**

SN	Item	Kokan	Western Maharashtra	Marathwada	Vidarbha
1	Net sown Area thousand Ha	878	7320	4755	5106
2	Created Irrigation Potential (SRE) thousand Ha	201	4068	1239	1217
3	Irrigation potential % of Sown area	22.9	55.57	26.06	23.85
4	Backlog Amount (Rupees crores)	630	600	2770	4265 (incl Amrawati division, 3630)

Source: Report of the Indicators and Backlog Committee 1997, page 52.

Annex 1

River Basins of Maharashtra

Rivers	Important Tributaries
Krishna	Koyana, Bhima, Mula, Mutha
Godavari	Pravara, Vainganga (with its tributaries Wardha and Chulband), Painganga
Tapti	Nalganga, Poorna
Narmada	none in Maharashtra

In addition, Several rivers such as Vaitharana flow West into the Arabian sea from the Western Ghats

Geo-hydrologically, Maharashtra can be divided in the following broad river basins:

Konkan basin, that is drained by a large number of short rivers and streams rising in the Western Ghats and running into the Arabian sea. This covers basically the Konkan Division.

Narmada basin: the small territories in the Dhule and Nandurbar districts that are riparian to Narmada Covers small parts of Nasik Division or "Rest of Maharashtra" Region.

Tapi (Tapti) basin lies in North Maharashtra, South of the Narmada basin. This covers basically "Rest of Maharashtra" Region.

Poorna basin Covers mostly Vidarbha Region (in fact the Varhad region almost entirely coincides with Poorna basin. People of Varhad identify themselves as "*Poornamaichi Lekre*" that is, children of mother Poorna.)

Upper, and middle Godawari basins (and the sub-basins of its tributaries) The upper basin goes into Rest of Maharashtra while the middle basin covers Marthwada region.

Upper and middle Krishna basins (and the sub-basins of its tributaries) Lies entirely in the Rest of Maharashtra Region, forms the "Maratha bastion" or can also be called as the "land of the sugar barons".

Painganga basin Falls mostly in Marathwada region.

Middle and lower Vainganga Basin Falls entirely in Vidarbha region.

Wardha basin Falls entirely in Vidarbha region.

Note: I have not given full list of sub-basins as per the Irrigation Commission for Godavari and Krishna. This list has been provided here to facilitate understanding of the facts pertaining to irrigation development and its importance in Vidarbha.