

Part I

The oldest vestiges of Habitation in the Nagpur District are furnished by dolmens and other sepulchral monuments which can be noticed within a radius of about 48,280 km. (thirty miles) round Nagpur in the vicinity of the villages of Koradi, Kohali, Janapani, Nidhoa, Borganj, Vathora, Vadganj, Savarganj, Hingana etc. Some of these were opened first by Pearson and then by Hislop but their detailed reports are not available. They require to be excavated and studied scientifically. Hislop describes them as follows:

"They are found chiefly as barrows surrounded by a circle of stones, and as stone boxes, which when complete are styled kistvaens, and when open on one side, cromlechs. The kistvaens, if not previously disturbed, have been found to contain stone coffins and urns."

Such sepulchral monuments are generally found to contain copper and bronze weapons, tools and earthen vessels. Some scholars find in these copper and bronze objects traces of the migration route of the Vedic Aryans. This culture is supposed to be later than that of the Indus Valley, of which no traces have yet been noticed in Vidarbha.

With the advent of the Aryans we get more light on the past history of this region. It was then covered by a thick jungle. Agastya was the first Aryan who crossed the Vindhya and fixed his hermitage on the bank of the Godavari. This memorable event is commemorated in the mythological story which represents Vindhya as blending before his guru Agastya when the latter approached him. The sage asked the mountain to remain in that condition until he returned from the south, which he never did. Agastya was followed by several other sages who they were constantly harassed by the original inhabitants who established their hermitages in different regions of the south. They were constantly harassed by the original inhabitants who are called Raksasas in the Ramayana. "These shapeless and ill-looking monsters testify their abominable character by various cruel and terrific displays. They implicate the hermits in impure practices and perpetrate the greatest outrages. Changing their shapes and hiding in the thickets adjoining the hermitages, these frightful beings delight in terrifying the devotees. They cast away the sacrificial lances and vessels; They pollute the cooked oblations, and utterly defile the offerings with blood. These faithless creatures inject frightful sounds into the ears of the faithful and austere hermits. At the time of the sacrifice they snatch away the jars, the flowers, the fuel and the sacred grass of these sober-minded men."

In course of time a large kingdom was founded in this region by king Vidarbha, the son of Rsabhadeva. His capital was Kindinapura in The Amravati district, which is still known by its ancient name. The country came to be known as Vidarbha Lopamudra. He is 'the Seer' of some hymns of the Rgveda. His wife Lopamudra is also mentioned in Rgveda I 179, 4, though Vidarbha is not named therein. The country became well-known in the age of the Brahmanas and the Upanisads. Bhima, who is called Vaidarbha (i.e. the King of Vidarbha), is mentioned in the Aitareya Brahmana (VII,34) as having received instruction regarding the substitute for soma juice. The Bhadaranyaka Upanisad mentions the sage Kaundinya of Vidarbha. Among those who asked questions about philosophical matters in the Prasnopanisad, there was one named Bhargava from Vidarbha. The Ramayana in the Uttarakanda states the story of king Danda in whose time Vidarbha was devastated by a violent dust-storm. Danda was the son of Ikshvaku and grandson of Manu. He ruled over the country between the Vindhya and Saivala mountains from his capital Madhumanta. He led a voluptuous life and once upon a time violated the daughter of the sage Bhargava. The sage, then cursed the king that his whole kingdom would be devastated by a terrible dust-storm. The whole country between Vindhya and Saivala extending over a thousand yojanas was consequently turned into a great forest which since then came to be known as Dandakaranya. It was in this forest that the Sudra sage Sambuka was practising austerities. As this was an irreligious act according to the notions of those days. Rama beheaded him and revived the life of a Brahmana boy who had died prematurely. That the Nagpur region was included in the Dandaka forest is shown by the tradition which states that sambuka was practising austerities on the hill near Ramtek, about 45.062 km(28 miles) from Nagpur. The site is still shown on that hill and is marked by the temple of Dhumresvara. This tradition is at least seven hundred years old, for it is mentioned in the stone inscription of the reign of the Yadava king