

CHAPTER VIII

VIDARBHA

440. We now deal with the demand for the separation of the Marathi-speaking districts of the present State of Madhya Pradesh.

441. The origin of the movement for Maha Vidarbha can be traced back to 1905. In the circumstances which prevailed about fifty years ago, the demand for the creation of Maha Vidarbha inevitably took the form of a claim for separation from the Hindi-speaking areas. In recent years, however, the question whether this separation should lead to the formation of Maha Vidarbha or the integration of this area with a larger Marathi-speaking unit has assumed importance.

442. The first issue to be settled is whether there is a case for the reorganisation of the present composite State of Madhya Pradesh. It is not necessary for us to go in any detail into the charges made by those demanding the separation of the Marathi-speaking areas from the rest of the State, regarding the alleged discriminatory and unequal distribution of development and welfare activity over the two regions or the relative share of the two language groups in the State services. Judged by the evidence submitted to us on behalf of the Madhya Pradesh Government, the distribution of expenditure as between Hindi and Marathi speaking areas, at any rate in recent years, has, by no means, been unfair. However, whatever the merits of such charges and counter-charges may be, it seems to us that the demand for the separation of the Marathi-speaking areas from the Hindi-speaking areas of the State can no longer be ignored. This demand has gathered such momentum that maintenance of the *status quo* will involve an increasingly severe strain on the political life and the administrative machinery of the State. The Hindi-speaking people of the State seem to be more or less reconciled to this proposition. In the circumstances, the separation of the Marathi-speaking areas from the rest of Madhya Pradesh would appear to be unavoidable.

443. The second question which is more controversial is what should be the future alignment of the eight Marathi-speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh. The case for the integration of these areas with western Maharashtra rests primarily on the ground of linguistic homogeneity, although it has also been claimed that the

economies of the two regions are complementary. On the other hand, the arguments advanced in favour of a separate State are historical, cultural, administrative and financial.

444. We shall first deal with the four Berar districts, namely, Akola, Amravati, Buldana and Yeotmal. The history of Berar falls into certain distinct periods; and it may be useful to indicate briefly the political fortunes of Berar in each one of these periods, since it will facilitate an understanding of the demand for autonomy.

445. Before the beginning of the fourteenth century, Berar was under the domination of Deccan kingdoms like the Satavahana empire and the Vakataka, Chalukya, Rashtrakuta and Yadava kingdoms. The area was conquered for Delhi early in the fourteenth century. But about four hundred years later, it passed into the possession of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and was administered by him or on his behalf under various treaties till it was attached in 1903 to the then Central Provinces. From 1903 onwards the link with Hyderabad was, however, merely nominal. With the enactment of the present Constitution even this nominal connection with Hyderabad has come to an end.

446. The Marathi-speaking districts of the existing State of Madhya Pradesh other than the Berar districts cannot be dealt with independently of Berar. The historical links of these districts with Berar have been intimate. Geographically, economically and culturally, the Marathi-speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh outside Berar cannot be distinguished from Berar itself.

447. Historical accidents are to a large extent responsible for the feeling in favour of separation which exists today in the major part of Vidarbha. Vidarbha's financial history under the bankers, to whom the revenues were farmed out, was also so unusual that here has been understandably a certain degree of suspicion ever since of persons from outside the area.

448. Vidarbha's traditional financial surplus, so far as we are aware, continues. The size of this surplus in future will depend on a variety of factors but so far as it can be estimated, it may be a crore and a half of rupees or possibly more. In view of the satisfactory financial position of Vidarbha and since Maharashtra without Greater Bombay is likely to be a deficit area on revenue account to a very much greater extent, there is some reluctance in this area to join Maharashtra. There seems to be some *prima facie* justification for the suspicion that if Vidarbha joins Maharashtra,

it cannot be certain that its resources will be spent within its own area on suitable development schemes and projects.

449. The position will, of course, be different if Greater Bombay forms part of Maharashtra. In view, however, of our recommendation in regard to the future of Bombay State, this expectation would no longer be valid.

450. We should also like to mention certain other reasons in favour of the creation of a separate Vidarbha State which are either explicitly stated or are implied in the memoranda submitted to us. One of these is the fear that Nagpur will be completely overshadowed by the Bombay city, which would be the natural capital of a single Maharashtrian State, if it were created. Communalism, it has been stated, may also be introduced into the political life of Vidarbha if it joins Maharashtra. Land and tenancy laws in this area will have to be modelled on those of Bombay State; and a period of transition, during which Vidarbha may be struggling to maintain and safeguard its interests, may be unavoidable. Important sections of the people in Vidarbha, in these circumstances, are not willing to run this risk.

451. We have described the conditions in which the demand for the creation of a separate Vidarbha State has come into being. That there is deep-rooted regional consciousness in Vidarbha is conceded even by the leaders of the movement for Samyukta Maharashtra who have offered to make concessions to allay the fears of the people in Vidarbha. The Akola and Nagpur agreements, which aim at reconciling the different points of view, go so far as to provide for a tract-wise allocation of a defined share not only in the cabinet and the executive and judicial services, but also in educational institutions. They also contemplate the establishment of a High Court at Nagpur, the recognition of two capitals and the distribution of development expenditure on an agreed basis. As we have observed in the Chapter on the new Hyderabad State, these arrangements are not workable, and if our assessment of public opinion is correct, are no longer regarded by a section of leaders as a satisfactory means of finding a solution.

452. Without necessarily accepting all that has been urged, and after weighing the merits and demerits of the contending views, we have come to the conclusion that it will be in the interests of all concerned if the Marathi-speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh, which form a compact unit, are constituted into a separate State.

453. We recommend, therefore, that a new State should be formed in this area consisting of the following Marathi-speaking districts, namely, Buldana, Akola, Amravati, Yeotmal, Wardha, Nagpur, Bhandara and Chanda. The area and population of this State will be 36,880 square miles and 7.6 millions respectively.

454. It will be noticed that we do not propose to break up the existing districts of Nimar, Betul, Chhindwara and Balaghat to the north and Bastar to the east in order to recognise the claims made on behalf of Vidarbha mainly on linguistic grounds. As we have indicated earlier, as far as possible, adjustments below the district level should be avoided except where important administrative, economic or other considerations would justify a departure. In our view, there are no special circumstances and we are, therefore, unable to concede these claims.

455. The new State of Vidarbha will be much smaller than the other units which we have proposed. But in view of the special circumstances to which we have referred and the fact that it appears that the economy of this area will be more or less balanced and prosperous, we are not disposed to attach too much weight to mere area or numbers as such.

456. Vidarbha will be one of the most important cotton-growing areas in the country. It will, however, be reasonably industrialised at the same time. The cotton textile industry of the existing State of Madhya Pradesh is heavily concentrated in this area. Only minor and medium irrigation works have been undertaken in this area so far. But in view of the proposals to utilise the waters of the Kanhan, Penganga and Wainganga rivers, large scale development may hereafter be possible. The further opening up of the Pench and Kanhan valley coal fields will benefit this State.

457. It is difficult to forecast the details of the development plans which may be undertaken in future and it is not necessary to do so. There is enough *prima facie* evidence to suggest that Vidarbha can be a stable and prosperous State even if it stands by itself.