

CHAPTER II

THE REGION AND ITS PEOPLE

Area and Situation:

The mainland of Gujarat is divided into three broad natural regions, viz. North Gujarat, Central Gujarat and South Gujarat. The area lying between the northern hills of Aravalli and the river Sabarmati is called as North Gujarat, that between the rivers Sabarmati and Narmada as Central Gujarat, and that between the rivers Narmada and Damanganga as South Gujarat. These three regions differ from one another in viewpoint of soil, climate, rainfall and vegetation.

The region of South Gujarat forms a rough triangle as much as 80 miles wide in the north and 30 miles wide in the south. It includes the whole of Surat district and a small region of Broach district of Gujarat State. As South Gujarat coincides for the most part with the boundaries of Surat district, different aspects of the latter are discussed in greater details here.

The District of Surat lies between $20^{\circ} 15' 0''$ and $21^{\circ} 28' 0''$ north latitudes and $72^{\circ} 38' 0''$ and $73^{\circ} 30' 33''$ east longitudes, with a total area of 4066.1 square miles and a population of 18,27,842 (1951 Census). It stretches from the river Kim in the north to the river Damanganga in the South, thus covering about eighty miles of the Western Indian coastline. To the north of it lies Broach District, to ^{the} east lie the district of West Khandesh and Nasik, to its south lie the Portuguese enclave of Daman and Thana district of the State of Maharashtra and to its west lies the Arabian Sea.

Surat is the largest administrative unit of all districts of the State of Gujarat. It consists of eighteen sub-divisions: fifteen talukas, and three peta mahals.¹ Its area was enlarged in 1947 on account of the merger of the Princely States of Dharampur, Bansada and Sachin and Navsari Prant of the State of Baroda within the boundaries of Surat district.

Soil:

The area of Surat district may physically be

1 The following are the names of the 18 sub-divisions of the district of Surat:

Bansada, Bardoli, Bulsar, Chikhli, Chorasi, Darampur, Gandevi, Kamrej, Mahwa, Mandvi, Mangrol, Navsari, Olpad, Palsana, Pardi, Songadh, Valod and Vyara

divided, north to south and parallel to the coastline, into three belts, viz. the coastal, the central and the eastern belt. The region of coastal belt consists of Western parts of Olpad, Chorasi, Navsari, Gandevi, Bulsar and Pardi sub-divisions of the district. It is for the greater part, a narrow barren stretch of sand drift and salt marsh fringed here and there with small hills which mark the tidal limit of the rivers. Except some fresh water springs here and there the water is generally brackish and saline. Sometimes, even beyond the limits of tidal waters, both cultivate^d land tracks and crops are considerably damaged due to salt-dust blown by hot summer sea-winds. For these reasons cultivation is poor in this region.

The central belt lying beyond the reach of the tidal waters forms the most fertile part of the district. It consists of Palsana, Kamrej, Bardoli, Gandevi, western parts of Mangrol, Mahuwa and Chikhli and eastern parts of Bulsar sub-division of the district. It is broadest in the north, being about sixty miles, east to west, along the delta of the river Tapti.

But towards the extreme south of the district its breadth is reduced from ten to fifteen miles and, in Pardi Taluka it almost disappears where the eastern hills draw closer to the Arabian sea. This belt consists of deep loam and the land is uniformly rich and level in aspect particularly in the northern and central parts of the district; whereas towards its southern region land is poor in fertility and is eroded and inter-spersed by several swift-flowing streams having deep banks. From the point of view of the texture of the soil, the region of the central fertile belt may be divided into three distinct classes viz. (a) the black cotton soil or regur, (b) bhatta soil and (c) gorat soil or sandy loam. All the three classes of soil are supposed to be of alluvial origin formed by the deposition of decomposed trap particles carried by the river Narmada and Tapti and its innumerable tributaries. They are, as a rule, black in colour, contain a high percentage of clay and crack heavily during summer. Quite often the cracks are one inch wide and ten feet deep. They vary in depth according to position. These soils are formed by the washing down of the disintegrated

material from higher level. They are mostly found within the area of the Deccan trap.

The eastern belt, beyond the central belt of rich cotton soil, consists of poorer uneven land which gradually merges into hill ranges of the Sahyadris and forests of West Khandesh, the Dangs and Nasik. It consists of large parts of Mandvi, Vyara, Songadh, Bansda, Dharampur, eastern parts of Mangrol, Mahuwa, Chikhli, Bulsar and Pardi. This belt is largely covered with unlevelled and rough surface and brushwood. Cultivation is, therefore, very little and poor amounting to only a few spots of river banks and valleys and other levelled grounds of cleared forests.

Climate:

The district may be divided into two broad regions as regards its climate, viz. (i) the coastal tract of fairly moderate temperature and lighter rainfall; and (ii) the inland tract lying beyond the sea-breeze, subject to wide changes in heat and cold and heavier rainfall. To illustrate, in the western subdivisions of the district such as Olpad, Chorasi, Navsari, Gandevi,

Bulsar and Pardi, temperature ranges from 65° to 95° and rainfall from 35" to 60"; whereas in the eastern sub-divisions of the district such as Mandvi, Songadh, Vyara, Bansda, Dharampur and Chikhli, temperature ranges from 45° to 110° and rainfall from 50" to 95". Largely due to the physical and climatic factors, human life is more comfortable in the western region than in the eastern highland tract.

Crops and Vegetation:

The principal crops grown in the district are Javar (*Sorghum Vulgare*), paddy and cotton. In some areas wheat, tobacco, sugar-cane, pulses such as tur (*Cajanus indicus*), val (*Dolichos lablab*), mag (*Phaseolus radiatus*) and adad (*Phaseolus mungo*), oilseeds such as tal (*sesamum indicus*) and divefa (*Ricinus communis*), and sanbi (*Crotalaria juncea*) are grown. In poorer soils some of the inferior crops such as bajri (*Helcus spicatus*), kodra (*Pashalum sacrobiculatum*) and nagli (*eleusine coracana*) are also grown. Still less fertile tracts, towards the southern and eastern parts of the district, are used largely as grass lands.

Due to comparatively heavy rainfall there is abundant growth of brushwood in South Gujarat. Particularly the eastern and southern parts of the district are rich in forest resources. Over the whole of the district one finds wild Khajuri (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and baval (*Acacia arabica*) freely growing here and there. Along with these two types of common trees, there are some fruit and shade trees such as ambo (*Mangifera indica*) amli (*Tamarindus indica*), limdo (*Azadirachta indica*) and vad (*Ficus indica*) grown near village sites and on garden lands. These, however, are not timber-yielding trees. They are largely found in the plains of the district. The forest areas, where teak-wood, bamboos and other timber-yielding trees are found, include some tracts of the sub-divisions of Ghikhli, Bulsar, Pardi and Valod and large parts of Songadh, Bansda and Dharampur. With about 1,93,400 acres of land under forests, the district of Surat has the largest forest area in the whole of Gujarat.

Settlement Pattern:

From the point of view of settlement pattern also the district divides itself into three similar regions,

viz. (i) the coastal region, (ii) the central plains and the eastern highland tract.

Most of the villages in the western coastal region are populated by the following caste-groups viz. Machhis (fishermen), Mangelas, Tundels, Bhandaris and Kolis. In some of these villages, however, Anavils, Bhandaris, Mangelas, Dublas and Dheds are also found. But they are in a minority. Moreover, a large number of these villages are dispersed settlements. One encounters a Machhi falia (a street of fishermen) or a Mangeta vad (a street of Mangelas) at a distance of about one furlong to half a mile from the centre of the village. It is also found that the density of population and the number of towns are comparatively, less than those in the plains of the central region.

A number of villages in the central plains are inhabited by high-caste Hindus such as Anavils, Brahmins, Baniyas and Patidars. Along with them Parsis and Musalmans are also found. These villages also include in them various servicing castes such as the Suthar, Luhar, Mochi, Soni, Darji, Kumbhar, Hajam and Dhed. In addition to this there are labourers who belong to the

different groups of South Gujarat tribes such as Dublas, Naikas, Dhodias, Gamits and some others. All the villages are nucleated and multi-caste settlements. Moreover, the density of population and the number of towns is greater than those found either in the western coastal region or in the eastern highland region.

Except a few towns (most of which being taluka-Head Quarters) nearly all the villages in the eastern hilly tract are inhabited by tribal population which includes Dublas, Naikas, Dhodias, Kuknas, Gamits, Chodhras and others. Towards the eastern boundary of the district these tribal people live almost a primitive way of life, whereas those tribesmen who had migrated from the highland region and settled in the central plains, have come in closer contact with highcaste Hindus and have adopted traits of caste culture. Land in these hilly tracts being for the most part unlevelled and poor in fertility and climate unhealthy, it is sparsely populated and the villages are, therefore, dispersed settlements.

History:

As South Gujarat has remained an outlying region of

Gujarat for several centuries in the past, its history suffers from wide lacunae. Nevertheless, with whatever little historical information is available, a brief outline of the history of South Gujarat may be drawn as under.

During the ancient period South Gujarat was called as the Lat Pradesh, where Kshatrapas, Traikutakas, Kattachuris, Calukyas of Badami and Rastrakutas seem to have reigned between about second and tenth century. Exact territorial limits of the kingdoms of various rulers of South Gujarat have not been ascertained so far. It cannot, therefore, be firmly maintained that the whole of the present South Gujarat formed a part of all those past kingdoms.

But the area lying between the river Narmada and the river Purna was of a great historical importance. The three ancient glorious cities, viz. Bhargukachha (Broach), Navasatika (Navsari) and Nandipuri (Nandod) lay between these two rivers, and were seats of some of the ancient ruling dynasties of South Gujarat. From the eleventh to the thirteenth century, the Rajput kings of North Gujarat inflicted their control upon some parts

of South Gujarat. They were followed by the Gujarat Sultans from 1298 to 1573. More detailed information about the history of South Gujarat is available since Akbar conquered Surat in 1573. The Moguls appointed civil and military officers for administration in South Gujarat and established peace and order. The Importance of Surat as a big trading centre was increased during the Mogul period. Surat was called an emporium. Many travellers of the seventeenth century have made a note of this.² It was the increasing prosperity of Surat as a first class trading centre in India that attracted several European traders to that city during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

But the Mogul rule almost decayed after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. During the period between 1707 and 1733 the later Mogul kings appointed governors at Surat who ruled more or less independently. There was increasing disorder and insecurity during this period.

2 Gamelli Careri notes that " It (Surat) was (1695) ' the prime mart of India, all nations of the world trading there; no ship sailing in the Indian ocean, but was put into Surat to by, sell, or load".Quoted from the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency (1877) Vol. 2, Ch. V, p. 94.

Surat's prosperity was further checked by the frequent Maratha raids and the growing importance of Bombay. This was again followed by a period of about seventy years of political instability in South Gujarat. The Gaekwads, the Peshwas and the British fought among themselves to bring different parts of South Gujarat under their respective control. The British were victorious in the end. By the Treaty of Bessein in 1802 the Peshwas ceded most parts of South Gujarat to the British territory. Consequently, South Gujarat formed a part of the British territory in India and remained so until India became free from the British rule in 1947.

Land Administration:

No information regarding the administration of land in South Gujarat is available for the period of earlier rulers. It is, therefore, difficult to find out what type of land revenue system was prevalent then. But the Moguls seem to have introduced a thorough system of land administration in Gujarat. The British followed it, of course, with some important changes in it, and it has been continued until the present day.

When Akbar conquered Surat in 1573, the port of Surat was the Head Quarters of what was called as Surat Sarkar, which consisted of 993 towns or villages. Akbar appointed two distinct Officers for its administration, one military Officer called Kiledar who commanded the castle on the port and the river and the other civil Officer or revenue writer called mustsadi who administered the district of Surat. The district of Surat was divided into twenty eight Paraganas or sub-divisions. Hence it was also called as Surat athavisi. Below is given a quotation from the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency (Vol. II, Ch. 5, p. 93) which includes a comparative list of the pre-British and post-British sub-divisions of Surat athavisi.

" The territory known as the Surat athavisi, or governorship of twenty eight subdivisions, may be roughly described as the lands that lie between the Kim and the Damanganga rivers, and west of Rajpipla, Bansda and Dharampur States. About one-half of this area is included in the existing district of Surat, the remainder forms part of the territory of His Highness the Gaekwar. It is difficult to determine what twenty

eight sub-divisions were originally included in the Surat governorship. The map of the Surat athavisi prepared in 1816, shows all lands south of the Kim, dividing the whole area into thirty administrative sub-divisions as follows:-

I North of the Tapti river

<u>British</u>		<u>Gaekwar</u>
1. Olpad	} Modern	1. Wasravi
2. Tadkeswar		2. Galla
3. Mandvi		

II Between the Tapti and Damanganga rivers

4. Chorasi	} Modern	3. Kamrej
5. Kharod		4. Timba
6. Sarbhan		5. Balesar
7. Walod	} Bardoli	6. Wihara
8. Buhari		7. Songarh
9. Parchol	} Modern	8. Maroli
10. Supa		9. Telari
11. Chikhli	} Jalalpor	10. Mahuwa
		11. Wisanpur
12. Balsar	} Modern	12. Gandevis
13. Parnera		13. Walwara
14. Bhulsar	} Modern	14. Wewal
15. Bhagwara		15. Anlapor
	} Pardi	16. Anawal "

The mutsadi of the Moguls and, later, the Komavisdar of the Marathas took the help of some of the local people in the task of collecting land revenue

from different parts of the district. Almost all those persons who helped them in this work belonged to a high Hindu caste, e.g. Anavils. As these persons helped the Moguls and the Marathas in collecting land revenue from different parts of the district, they were called as Desais. The mutsadi or the Kamavisdar used to fix up with the desai the amount of revenue to be collected by the latter from different paraganas. This sort of contract for the collection of a fixed amount of revenue from different paraganas was renewed with the desai every year. The amount of revenue was, however, settled by way of a bargain between the mutsadi or the kamavisdar and the Desais. From this point of view the Desais were big revenue contractors. They worked as intermediaries between the cultivators on the one hand and the rulers on the other.

For offering these services to State, the desais received some amount of remuneration which was fixed on the basis of the amount of revenue they collected from the paraganas under their respective management.

"The authorized emolument of the desais was cash allowance calculated at $2\frac{1}{4}$ per cent on the village revenues. This seems to have been the original remuneration of the office, and was formally confirmed by the Emperor Aurungzebe in A.D. 1669." ³

Although the mutsadi or the kamavisdar fixed with the Desais the amount of revenue, the latter were practically left free to collect as much revenue as possible from the cultivators. The desais paid to the State only that amount which was previously fixed, and kept the extra amount with them. The desais assumed almost unchecked powers in the affairs of revenue collection particularly after the decay of the Mogul Empire. As the rulers were frequently changed in South Gujarat during the eiteenth century, none of them was able to reorganise the decaying land revenue system. The main aim of those rulers was, however, to collect as much revenue as possible. Consequently, they pressed the Desais to pay them more and more and the desais, in turn, exacted higher sums of revenue from the cultivators. The effect of this was two fold. First, the desais rose to assume the powers of almost independent

³ See para 15 in the Papers relating to the settlement of District Hereditary Officers' Watluns in the Surat Collectorate; Bombay 1866.

masters of the people without anyone to check them. Secondly, due to the excessive exactions of revenue by the desais, the cultivators were almost ruined.⁴ The exactions from the cultivators were not always in cash but very often in kind also.⁵

The Office of the desaiship gradually became hereditary. Generally the descendants of the Desais distributed among themselves the areas of their 'ancestors'

4 Reference of the evacuation of some of the Bulsar villages is found in the Watan Commission Report (1865)

5 "In addition to their regular emolument of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, and to the possession of lands granted to them by former governments, the desais increased their revenues: I - At the expense of the government - (1) By arranging with the stipendary officer, or Kamavisdar, to pay none of the tribute due to the government for the grants of land held by them. (Mr. Morrison's Report, 1812), (ii) By reducing the area of the government or talpat lands in their villages. This they did in several ways: (a) by mortgaging it to garasias; (b) by alienating lands normally to village servants and others, but actually themselves drawing the assessment; (c) by cultivating lands by their bondsmen, or halis, and so being allowed to hold it at specially low rates. II - The desais increased their revenues at the expense of the cultivators - (i) By recovering from them land revenue in excess of the government demand (ii) By levying 'innumerable taxes'. 'Shepherds had to pay them in wool, butter and milk; oil sellers in oil; tanners in leather; cotton-cleaners in cotton. No one escaped; even the cultivators had, without hire, to lend cattle and ploughs for the use of the Desais and the village managers'. Mr. Morrison's Report dated 20th September, 1820."

desaiship. Finally it came to about the division of villages and in some cases, even of Khatas in one village among different desai families.

Apart from the Desais, the cultivators in South Gujarat were also required to pay, quite frequently, some amount of grains or cash to garasias.⁶ As the representatives of the original Hindu landowners of the district, they claimed a share in the land revenue.

At times the desais combined with the garasias and collected from the cultivators an additional amount of revenue which they divided among themselves. In a foot note on Page No.214 in the Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency, Vol. II, Ch. 8, an instance has been narrated which clearly shows that the garasias too exploited the cultivators as far as possible.

6 The garasias were not settled within the limits of the Surat territories then held by the British. Some of them lived towards northwards in Rajpipla, and others beyond the eastern frontier. During the early years of british rule, it was usual for men of this class to send an agent or selot, at the head of the body of armed followers, to collect their share of the revenue. The garasia's agent generally arranged for the payment of his master's claims with the farmer of the revenue, or desai. These demands often led to a breach of peace. Villagers refused to pay and, in retaliation, a stack of hay or straw was burnt, or one of the villagers was murdered. If this failed, the whole village was plundered, and the children were carried into captivity." (Vol.II,Ch.8, p. 214)

After assuming power in South Gujarat in 1802, the British reorganised this system of land revenue by appointing district collectors as the head administrative officers of districts, mamlatdars as taluka administrative officers and talatis as village level revenue accountants. These district, taluka and village officers were entrusted with the work of revenue collection. This change in the revenue system was brought about gradually between 1802 and 1818. The talatis were to work independently. They kept detailed records of land ownership and the amount of revenue which was to be collected from each cultivator. The land of the whole district was surveyed, first in 1833 and second, in 1863, the latter being a more comprehensive survey than the former.

While making these settlement surveys, along with other matters, the amount of revenue which was claimed by the State from each cultivator was also settled taking into consideration the quality of the ^{soil} ~~soil~~, the nature of the produce and the caste⁷ of the cultivator.

7 The Gazetteer of Bombay Presidency (1877): Vol.II, p.222:

"In consideration of their thriftiness and unsteady character, the Dublas and Dhodia, were allowed to hold land at easier rates than the skilful intelligent cultivators of the Brahman and Kanbi castes."

BULSAR TALUKA

SCALE: 1"=2 MILES



In order to put an end to the frequent disturbances created by garasias, the British, in 1812, fixed an agreeable amount, which the agents of the former collected directly from the district collector.

As a result of this change in the system of the collection of land revenue, the desais lost both their profession as revenue contractors and the political powers which they enjoyed for several generations in the past. In lieu of their previous services to the State, the British granted the desais a fixed annual allowance called as desaigiri, which the Indian government has recently discontinued paying them.

The Village:

The village Haria is situated in the Bulsar taluka of Surat district. It is located on the river Par which is the southern boundary of Bulsar taluka. It is about six miles to the south of the taluka Head Quarters, which is also named as Bulsar (pop. 25,440: 1951). An all weather approach road links the village with the National Highway No.8 which passes through Bulsar. Haria is also connected with another smaller town, Pardi (pop. 9,422: 1951), about four miles to the

south-east of it. Pardi is the Head Quarters of the southern most Pardi taluka of Surat district.

Lying on the route of the Western Railways,⁸ Haria is about 121 miles to the north of Bombay and about 48 miles to the south of Surat. To the east of Haria is situated the big dyes and pharmaceuticals factory, the Atul Products Limited, to the south of it flows river Par, to its west is village Bhagod and to its north village Dived of Bulsar taluka.

The total area of the village Haria is 911.7 acres, or about 1.25 sq. miles. According to the census I took in the village in 1957, its population was 1466. The village people live in the gām taliā (lit. village site), which is surrounded on all sides by farms. While there are a few kyāris in which paddy is raised, the rest of the farms are covered with fruit trees. As the groves of mango and some other fruit trees are scattered along all sides of the gām taliā, the village looks like a beautiful green island.

8 Haria is not a railway station now. But it was a flag station on this route in 1872. It was closed with -in two years because of insufficient passenger and goods traffic. (See The Gazetteer (1872) p.165.

Haria is populated by nine Hindu castes, Muslims and three families of ^{Atul factory workers.} ~~outsiders~~. Below in Table I is given a list of all castes of Haria, arranged in order of their population strength in the village, together with the traditional occupation of each caste.

Table I

TABLE I*

Castes and their Traditional Occupations in Haria

No.	Name of caste	Traditional occupation	Population		Percentage to the total population
			No. of persons	No. of families	
1.	ANAVIL	Landowners and Cultivators	529	115	36.4
2.	DUBLA	Labourers	455	84	31.3
3.	NAIKA	Labourers	252	49	17.2
4.	DHED	Weavers and Village peons	171	41	10.3
5.	MOCHI	Shoe-makers	15	2	1.3
6.	BARBER (Muslim)	Barbers	9	1	0.7
7.	KOLI	Landowners and Cultivators	8	1	0.6
8.	DHODIA	Railway Crossing Signal Man and Labourer	7	1	0.5
9.	VAIRAGI (Bawa)	Non-Brahman Temple Priest	5	1	0.4
10.	BRAHMAN	Village Doctor	4	1	0.3
11.	"FOREIGN-ERS"	Atul Workers	11	3	0.8
Total:			1,466	299	99.8 (100.0)

*Note: This table is based on the Family Census. I conducted in Haria in May, 1957. In this Family Census enquiry I covered all families of the village.

It will be seen from the above table that while only four of ten groups form the bulk of the village population, the rest of them are in a much smaller minority. The Brahman doctor and the Koli have settled in the village. Both of them migrated to the village only about a decade ago. While the doctor lives in a rented house, the Koli lives in his own house. The former does not possess any land in the village, but the latter possesses about fourteen acres of land. The third immigrant, the Dhodia signal man who has migrated to the village about fifteen years ago and is living in a hut built nearby the crossing. He also makes use of a single-room railway quarter built near the crossing. Therefore, he is popularly known as bangali (small quarter) walo. Moreover, there are three families of outsiders, indicated in this Table as "foreigners". They have been living in the village for the last three years in hired houses. Although they form a part of the village population, they are much less attached with community life in the village.

The pattern of residence in Haria resembles that of a nucleated village. The Anavils live in well

3. A Scene of Duba street. Mark the way in which the huts have been raised on uneven ground. He Dubla is standing with his sister and a woman from another hut and some children of the street are seated. That youth is employed in the Atul factory and wears an under-wear and half-pants. The huts have been roofed with hay. The roofs are so low that while entering the hut one has to bow down a little.

4. An Anavil street. Mark the evenness of ground and orderliness of houses. Also note that all houses have verandahs - (open spaces) where wooden benches are placed. They are usual seats for different gossip-groups in evenings.



3



4

arranged houses forming the three main streets in the centre of the village. The huts of Dublas and Naikas are scattered around the Anavil streets. These huts are not arranged in order and are raised on unlevelled ground forming four separate clusters in different directions of the village. The Koli, the Mochi, the Vairagi and the Hajam live at the ends of the Anavil streets. The Doctor's family and the three other families of the "Foreigners" live in Anavil streets. But the Dheds being untouchables reside on a low level ground at a noticeable distance of half a furlong from the Anavil streets.

No records are available regarding the inhabitation of the village. According to some of the village informants, Haria is a fairly old village. The survey settlement Report of Bulsar Taluka (1833) points out that during the Mogul and Maratha periods Haria was included in the Parnera paragnā of the Surat athāvisi. But after the amalgamation of Parnera paraganā with the Bulsar sub-division by the British, it came under the jurisdiction of the Bulsar taluka of Surat district; and since then it has continued to remain so until the present day.