

## Chapter I

INTRODUCTORYI: Scope of the Monograph

This monograph is a report on an aspect of a research project carried out in 1955-58. After the first four months of my work I described the aims of the project in a brief note and discussed it before a seminar, the proceedings of which were published subsequently in the form a book.<sup>(1)</sup> One aspect of the project was a study of the Vahivancha Barots of Gujarat and their genealogical, historical and mythological records. I and Shri R.G. Shroff, my colleague in the project, have reported at some length on this aspect of the project.<sup>(2)</sup> The other aspect, as it was visualised at the beginning of the project, was a field study of a Gujarat village, like the large number of village-studies being made at that time by social anthropologists in various parts of India and reported on briefly in Village India,<sup>(3)</sup> India's Villages,<sup>(4)</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>(5)</sup> The only special feature of my study was the plan to use the Barot records in an understanding of the social life of the village. The Barot records, however, were found to have certain deficiencies. I wrote in my first note, "The most important defect about Barot records is that they do not record dates, but it is possible to determine some dates at least by relating the events recorded in the book to other historical data. Therefore, historical data are also being collected" (p.176). I also mentioned that it was necessary to verify the information contained in Barot records by

relating them to other historical data (p.177). In brief, I was interested in collecting other historical data only because I thought I would use them to test the validity of Barot records.

The collection of historical data took a different turn, however, during the course of fieldwork. In order to study the pattern of landownership, tenancy and crops in the village, I began to use the land records kept by the village accountant. As a general rule, he keeps with him in the village the land records of the current year and of about ten years past, while the earlier records are kept in the Record Room in the Taluka Mamlatdar's Office. Thinking that the earlier records would provide information about inheritance of land, which in turn would be useful in testing the genealogical records of the Barots, I went to study the records in the Mamlatdar's Office at Matar. The Record Keeper and the Copy Clerk showed me all the records in current use, which go back to the year 1866, when the system of Revenue Survey Assessment was first introduced in the village. While I was getting these records copied I was frequently told that there were some records older than those of 1866. I found to my great surprise that they belonged to the period 1822-27 and contained detailed information about many aspects of social life in the village, the kind of information never found in any of the later records. Records of the same kind about other villages and towns and some other records belonging to the same period were found by Shri R.G. Shroff and Shri A.R. Shah after my project was over. This enabled us to prepare

a paper "Early Nineteenth Century Village Records in Gujarat"<sup>(6)</sup> describing the nature of the records in the whole of Gujarat.

In addition to the records of 1822-27, I discovered a stone inscription dated 1234 A.D. among the ruins of a small shrine on the outskirts of the village, and again I was surprised to find that its contents could be corroborated with the contents of the Barot records of the village.

The discovery of all these historical records opened up before me a rare opportunity not only to describe social life in a village community over a long period of time but also to discuss the relation between Sociology or Social Anthropology on the one hand and History on the other, a topic which has become controversial for quite some time. But this also means that I should present the analysis of the historical data as well as of the field-data in a single monograph. It would certainly be ideal to do so, but the analysis of historical data alone has turned out to be such a long and arduous task that I have not been able to give sufficient attention to the analysis of all the field-data with me. I have therefore chosen to present the analysis of the two types of data separately. In the present monograph I present the analysis of only the historical data.

The village selected for study is Radhvanaj, situated in the present Matar Taluka of Kaira District, about half a mile from the highway joining Bombay, Baroda, Nadiad and Ahmedabad, and about ten miles from Nadiad, a station on the Western Railway. Although the focus of my study is the

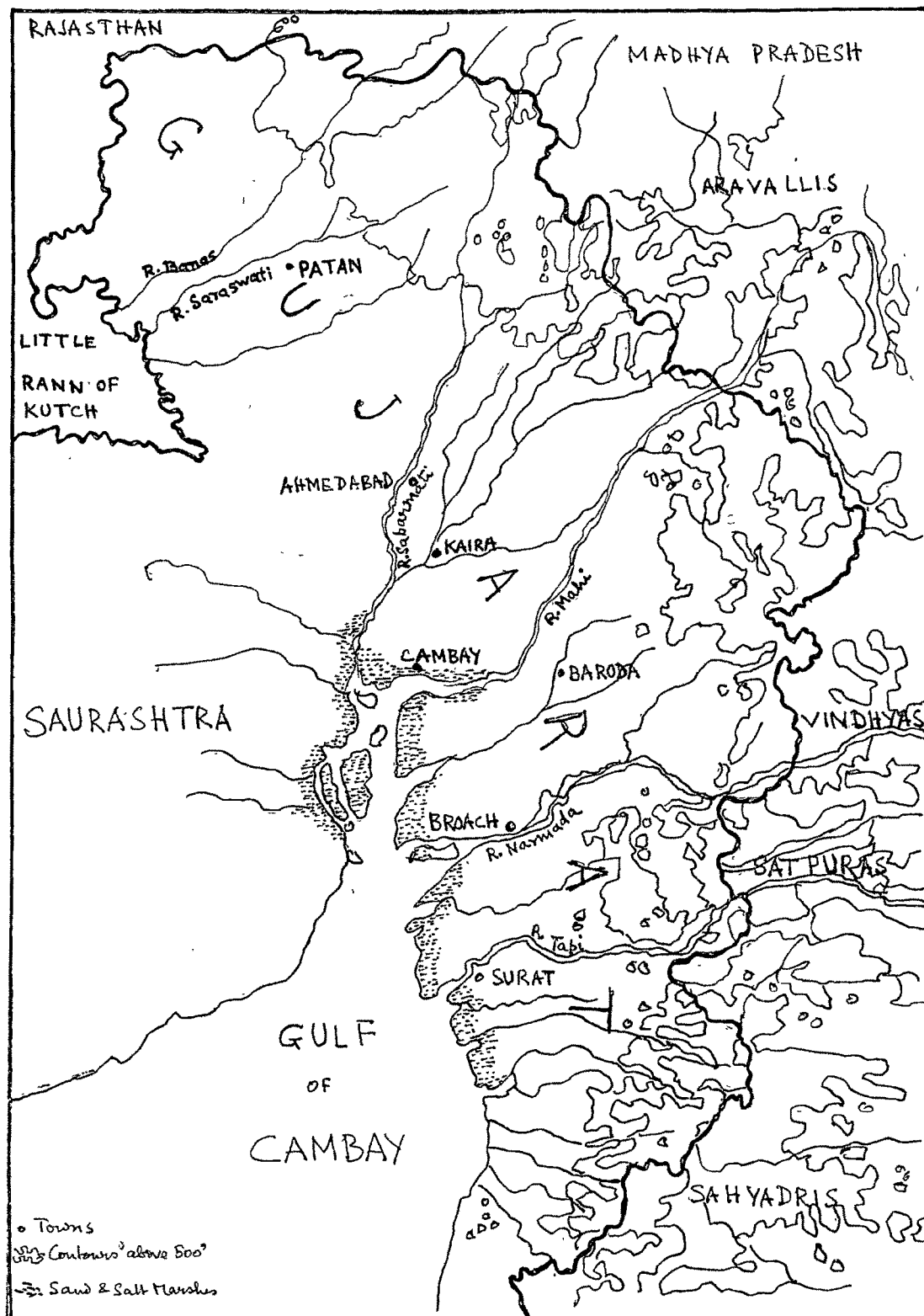
village, its social life at any time in its history cannot be understood without understanding its relation with the social life outside of it. The belief, widely prevalent among both sociologists and historians, that the Indian village community was a self-sufficient isolated republic, cannot be applied to Radhvanaj, if at all to any village in India. Professor M.N. Srinivas and I have tried to show in an article<sup>(7)</sup> how this belief is a myth, and the present monograph will support the arguments put forward in that article. I shall try to relate the village with the outside world at every stage of my analysis, but the focus of the monograph will remain the village, and I shall describe only those aspects of outside society which are relevant to the understanding of the village.

## II: Geographical Setting

This section is concerned with the features of the geographical setting of Radhvanaj, most of which were of course the same as they are found today, but there have also been a few significant changes.

The name 'Gujarat' is used in two senses. Firstly, it refers to a large culture area composed of three main parts, the mainland of Gujarat, the peninsula of Saurashtra or Kathiawad, and the small peninsula of Kutch, all of which are now comprised within the State of Gujarat (see Map 1). Secondly, 'Gujarat' refers only to the mainland. I shall use 'Gujarat' only in the latter sense, except when specified to the contrary.

The mainland of Gujarat forms an arc of lowland backed by the hill chain of Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh on one side



Map 1: GUJARAT — Physical Features, Towns, and Adjoining Areas

6

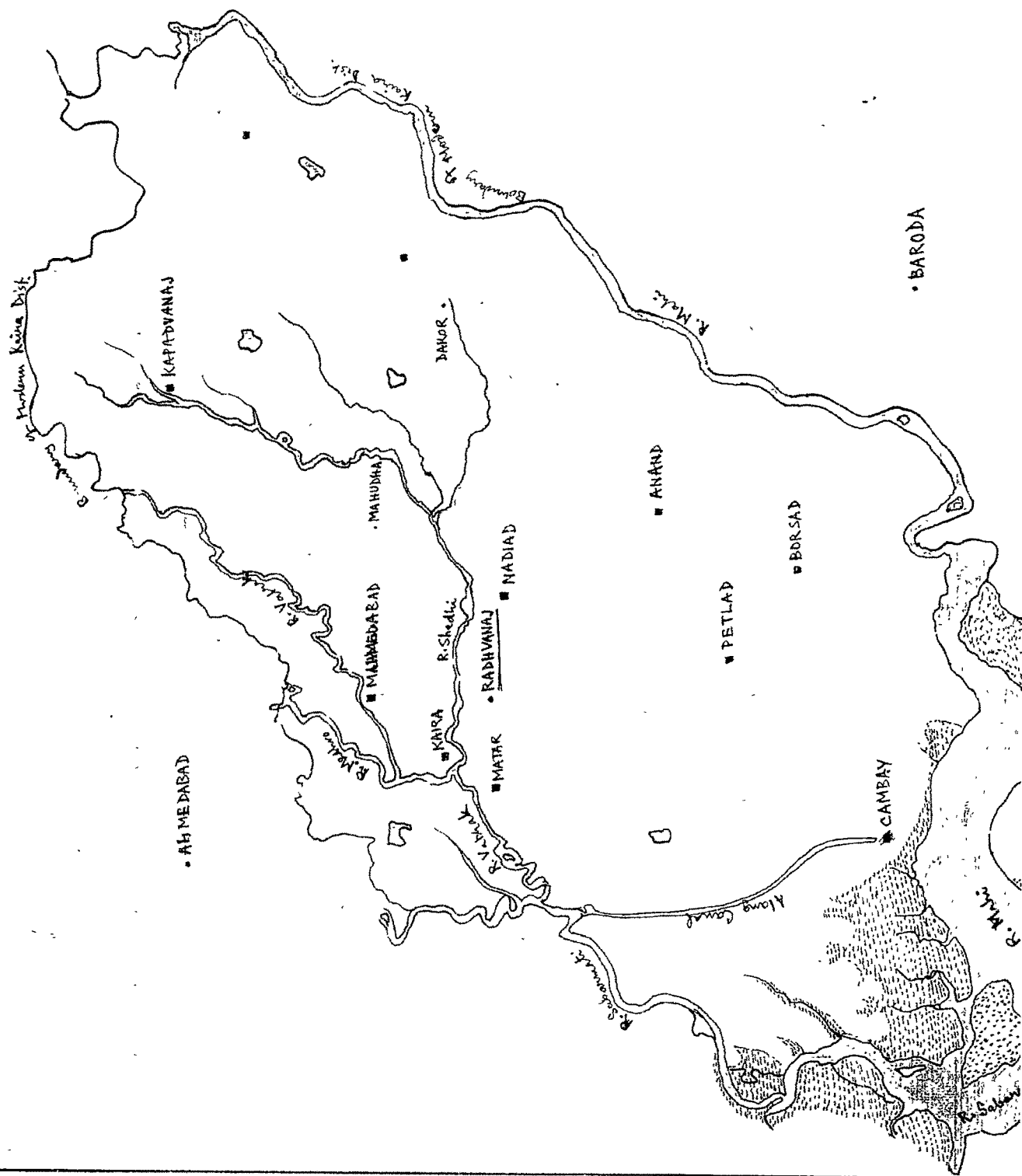
and oriented toward the Gulf of Cambay on the other. The low-land is formed of alluvium deposited by a number of rivers, the chief of which are the Sabarmati, Mahi, Narmada and Tapi. It is the most fertile and the most densely populated part of Gujarat. The highland region consists of the outliers of the Aravallis, Vindhyas, Satpuras and Sahyadris. A large part of it is under forests, the soil is eroded by streams, agriculture is poor, and population is predominantly 'tribal.' A village in the plains is usually a nucleated settlement, where habitations and other buildings form a close cluster on a definite village-site, and one settlement is marked off from other settlements by open territory. In the highlands, a village is usually a dispersed settlement, where each house or a group of a few houses, stands isolated on its own farm.<sup>(5)</sup> Radhvanaj is a nucleated village in the plains.

Gujarat is divided conventionally into four parts:

(i) Central Gujarat, the plains region lying roughly between the towns of Ahmedabad and Baroda, (ii) East Gujarat, the highland region to the east of Central Gujarat, (iii) North Gujarat, the highland as well as the plains region to the north of Central Gujarat, and (iv) South Gujarat, the highland as well as the plains region to the south of Central Gujarat. Radhvanaj is situated in Central Gujarat.

Two big rivers, the Mahi and Sabarmati, flow on the eastern and western sides respectively of Central Gujarat, and both meet the Gulf of Cambay in the south (see Map 2). The two rivers have several tributaries. All the rivers have steep banks and sandy beds, and do not retain much

# CENTRAL GUJARAT.



water during winter and summer. The landscape is monotonously flat; the only relieving features are village tanks and deep ravines on the banks of rivers.

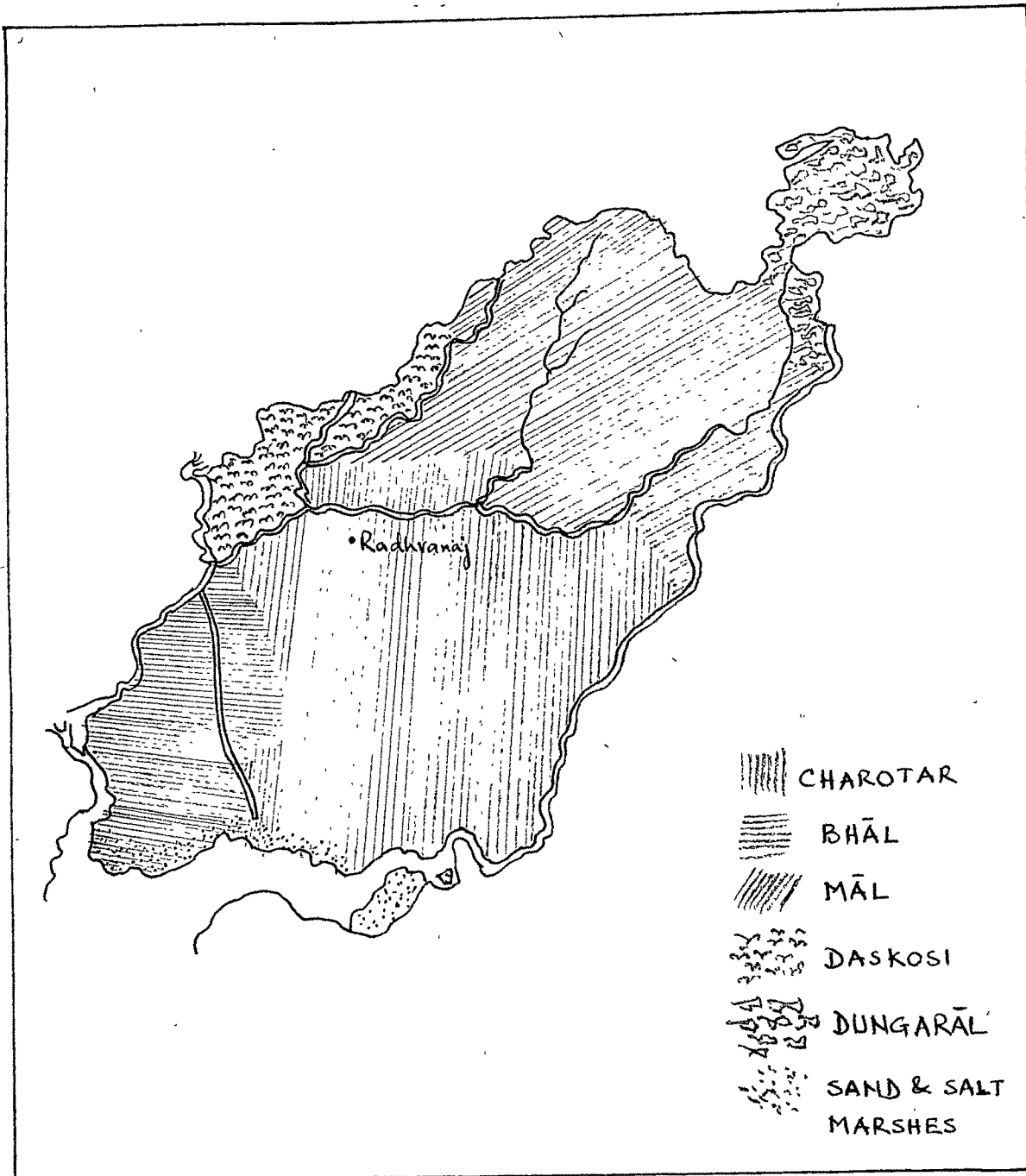
Like most other parts of Gujarat, Central Gujarat experiences extremes of both cold and hot weather. The average temperature for the year is 82°F. In winter, which lasts from November to February, the daily mean temperature ranges from 80° to 60°. January is the coldest month when both days and nights are cold. Sometimes the temperature goes below 45°, and there are chances of frost. In summer, lasting from March to the middle of June, the daily mean temperature ranges from 70° to 100°. May is the hottest month when both days and nights are hot. A maximum temperature of 110° or higher is at times recorded during the period April to June.

Gujarat receives rain from the south-west monsoon, the rainy season starting in the latter half of June or the first half of July and lasting until September. October is the month of transition from monsoon to winter. The depth of the monsoon current decreases from South Gujarat to North Gujarat. Central Gujarat receives an average of 30" of rain. There are however large variations in rainfall from year to year. During the last two decades the rainfall ranged from 15" in 1948 to 49" in 1950. From 1876 to 1959 there were nine years of very heavy rainfall and fifteen years of scarcity. Roughly every third year is an abnormal year. The rainy days are also few—about 40 in a normal year—and they are also unevenly distributed over the monsoon months. Rain is thus erratic in Central Gujarat.



The coastal strip near Cambay is a tract of sand and salt marshes useful only for the production of salt until recently. The soils in the rest of **Central** Gujarat are popularly classified into five main types, namely, goradu (lit., light yellow), kali (black), besar (medium between goradu and kali), retal (sandy), and bhattha (alluvial). Texturally they are all loams, and the practical classification is based on the varying content of sand, clay and fertile organic matter. The goradu or light yellow soil is the most prominent type of soil. It contains about 80 per cent of fine sand and 15 per cent of silt and clay, and is rich in organic matter. Inferior goradu soil contains more of coarse sand and less of fine sand, silt and clay, and is deficient in organic matter. The retal or sandy soil, which is the least fertile, contains a still higher proportion of coarse sand. The kali or black soil contains about fifty per cent of fine sand and forty per cent of silt and clay. The black soil of Central Gujarat has a sandy sub-soil, and is not clayey to a very great depth like the black cotton soil of South Gujarat. It is formed by recent deposition (in geological time) of finer materials on sandy soil by flood waters and is found only in low lying areas. Black soil land is usually divided into kyaris, small plots with low ridges, for cultivation. Another name for black soil is therefore kyari soil.

The proportion of clay to sand is more in the besar or medium soil than in the goradu or light yellow. It is rich in organic matter like the light yellow and is usually



MAP 3: Agricultural Tracts in Central Gujarat

considered to be a variety of the latter. The bhatha or alluvial soil is formed of fresh deposits of alluvium on the banks of rivers almost every year and therefore contains a large proportion of silt and clay and is very rich in organic matter. It yields good crops without the necessity of the application of manure.

Gujarat is popularly divided into several tracts, such as Charotar, Daskosi, Bhal, Mal, Kanam, Vakal, Chorasi, Pal, Nalkantha, Chumval, and Vandhav (see Map 3). Each of these tracts is associated with certain physical and cultural characteristics. Most of Central Gujarat is known as Charotar, and Radhvanaj is situated in this tract. Charotar roughly lies between the Mahi in the west and the Vatrak in the east, and between the Shedi in the north and the town of Cambay in the south. It is the most fertile among all the tracts in Gujarat. The goradu and besar soils are found in all the tracts, but they are the most prominent, and also of richer variety, in Charotar. In comparison with several other tracts, Charotar is also luxuriant in vegetation.

Charotar does not have rivers or streams to drain off flood waters during monsoon. About a hundred years ago, flood waters used to log up in low lying areas and sometimes submerge entire villages. Between 1837 and 1842 A.D. a number of drains (kans) were dug to enable flood waters to flow away from low lying areas into the Vatrak or the Mahi or into the Alang Canal. Among these drains there was also a drain from Radhvanaj to the Vatrak.<sup>(2)</sup>

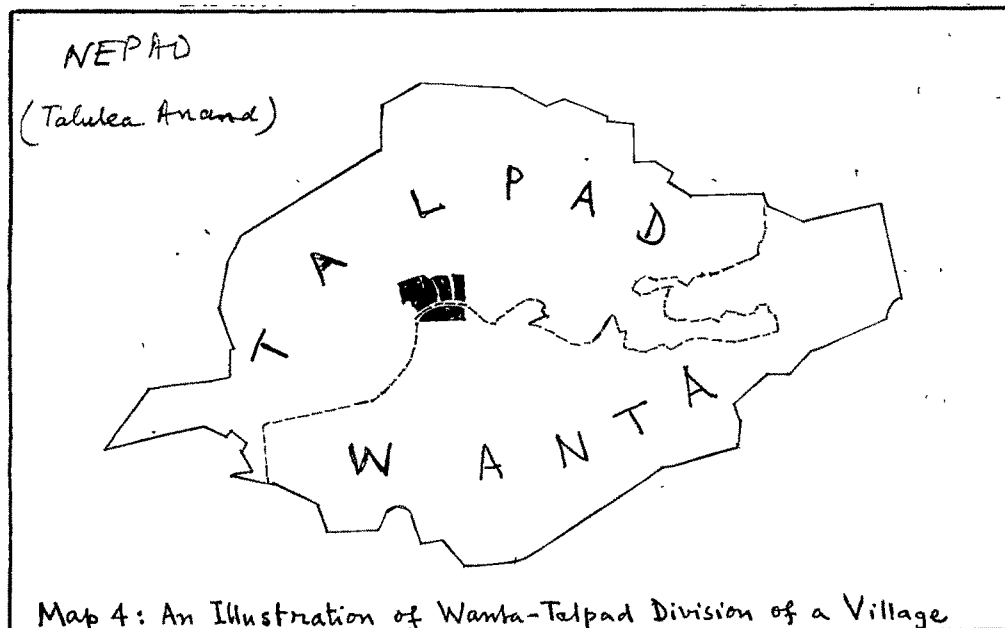
Mal (lit., upland), the tract to the north of Charotar, is so called because it is at a higher altitude and is roughened by rocks and streams. Daskosi, to the north-west of Charotar, is a tract almost entirely of black soil, well known for a long time for producing rice by canal irrigation. Its subsoil is saline, and vegetation is therefore poor. Bhal is the low lying tract of black soil near the mouth of the Sabarmati. A large part of it is flooded during monsoon by the Sabarmati, and monsoon crops are therefore impossible. The soil is however sufficiently deep to retain moisture during winter, and thus makes Bhal eminently suitable for cultivation of wheat. Bhal is very poor in vegetation. Radhvanaj is actually situated on the north-western fringe of Charotar and has always had important economic and social relations with the neighbouring tracts Daskosi, Bhal and Mal.

### III: A Note on the Word 'Village'

It will be clear as we proceed in our analysis that the word 'village' should be used with precision. In areas of nucleated settlements it is used not only for the village-site but also for the territorial unit recognized for administrative purposes. Radhvanaj is the name not only of the village-site (gam-tal, gam-than) but also of the administrative unit. The administrative unit is called mouza all over North India since at least the sixteenth century, and is translated variously as 'administrative village,' 'revenue village' and 'survey village.' The land lying between the village-site and the boundaries of the administrative village is called sim in Central Gujarat, and I will translate it as 'village-land.' It is always necessary to keep in mind the distinction

between the village-site, the village-land, and the administrative village in mind. It is however very clumsy to use such phrases as 'the village-site of Radhvanaj,' 'the administrative village of Radhvanaj' and 'the village-land of Radhvanaj' again and again. I will therefore frequently use 'Radhvanaj' and 'village' only and leave it to the reader to understand the specific meaning according to the context.

Another complication should also be mentioned here. Map 4 shows the division of the village-site as well as of the village-land of a village into two administrative villages



called Wanta and Talpad. Such a dual division into Wanta and Talpad exists in about a dozen villages in Kaira District, and even in a village which has grown into a town.

#### IV: Plan of Chapters

The analysis of the historical data about the village and the region is presented in nine chapters, divided into two Parts. Part I, consisting of Chapters II and III, deals with the period from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century, and Part II, consisting of Chapter IV to XII deals with the period 1803-27.