

INDIA AS A GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITY

Introduction :

India the seventh largest country in the world is well marked with off from the rest of Asia by mountains and the sea, which gives the country a distinct geographical entity. India lies on the Indian Plate, the northern portion of the Indo-Australian Plate, whose continental crust forms the Indian subcontinent. The country is situated north of the equator between 8°04' to 37°06' north latitude and 68°07' to 97°25' east longitude and is surrounded by the Bay of Bengal in the east, the Arabian Sea in the west and the Indian Ocean to the south. Also, in the east lies the Bangladesh. In the north west Afghanistan and Pakistan border India. The Gulf of Manner and the Palk Straits separate India from Sri Lanka. The Andaman and Nicobar island in the Bay of Bengal and Lakshadweep in the Arabian sea are parts of the territory of India. There are as many as 200 islands in Andaman alone, extending for 350 km. There are 19 islands in Nicobar group. The Arabian sea consists of the Lakshadweep group. They are formed on a coral deposit off the Kerala coast .The southern most of this lies just to the north of the Maldives island which is an independent territory.



Fig.1: India as a geographical entity

The total length of the coastline of the mainland, Lakshadweep group of islands and Andaman and Nicobar group of islands is 7,516.5 km. It is the seventh-largest country in the world, with a total area of 3,287,263 square kilometres (1,269,219 sq mi). India measures 3,214 km (1,997 mi) from north to south and 2,933 km (1,822 mi) from east to west. It has a land frontier of 15,200 km

(9,445 mi) and a coastline of 7,516.6 km (4,671 mi).

On the south, India projects into and is bounded by the Indian Ocean in particular, by the Arabian Sea on the west, the Lakshadweep Sea to the southwest, the Bay of Bengal on the east, and the Indian Ocean proper to the South. The Palk Strait and Gulf of Manner separate India from Sri Lanka to its immediate southeast, and the Maldives are some 125 kilometres (78 mi) to the south of India's Lakshadweep Islands across the Eight Degree Channel. India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands, some 1,200 kilometres (750 mi) southeast of the mainland, share maritime borders with Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia. Kanyakumari at 8°4'41"N and 77°55'230"E is the southernmost tip of the Indian mainland, while the southernmost point in India is Indira Point on Great Nicobar Island. The northernmost point which is under Indian administration is Indira Col, Siachen Glacier. India's territorial waters extend into the sea to a distance of 12 nautical miles (13.8 mi; 22.2 km) from the coast baseline.

The northern frontiers of India are defined largely by the Himalayan mountain range, where the country borders China, Bhutan, and Nepal. Its western border with Pakistan lies in the Karakoram range, Punjab Plains, the Thar Desert and the Rann of Kutch salt marshes. In the far northeast, the Chin Hills and Kachin Hills, deeply forested mountainous regions, separate India from Burma. On the east, its border with Bangladesh is largely defined by the Khasi Hills and Mizo Hills, and the watershed region of the Indo – Gangetic Plain.

The Ganga is the longest river originating in India. The Ganga – Brahmaputra system occupies most of northern, central, and eastern India, while the Deccan Plateau occupies most of southern India. K2, in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, is the highest point in India at 8,611 m (28,251 ft) and the world's 2nd highest peak. Climate across India ranges from equatorial in the far south, to alpine and tundra in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. The geographic view of India is pretty expository and vivid in the terms of area, mountains and relief.

Although with its well marked natural boundaries India is a geographical entity but its vast size and large extent have fostered variegated characteristics in its physical as well as cultural landscape.

It is because of this diversity that the term 'sub-continent' has often been used by some foreign scholars to foment regionalism and divisive forces within the country. In the following paragraphs a brief attempt has been made to highlight some of these facets of the variegated geographical personality of India.

The Indian sub-continent is characterised by great diversity in its physical features, river system, climate, natural resource, population etc which make the country as a unique geographical entity. Some of the unique geographical entities are discussed below:

A. Physical Features :

1. Himalayan Mountain

The Himalayas and the associated mountains arcs girdling the sub continent on the stretch in a consistent north west- south east direction for about 2400 km between the gorges of the Indus and

the Tsango-Bhramaputra. The section between the Indus and the Sutlej and the Kali is termed as Kumaon Himalayas. The other two sections between the Kali and the Tista and between the latter river and the Dihang are described as the Nepal and the Assam Himalayas. Kanchanjunga (8598 Mtrs) is the highest mountain peak in India. The Greater Himalayas which have an average altitude of 6000 m have within them almost all the prominent peaks such as the Everest (8848m), Kanchenjunga (8598m), Nanga Parbat (8126m), Nanda devi (7817m) and Namcha parbat (7756m).

2. The Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra Plain

The great plain of India is formed by the Indus, Ganga and the Brahmaputra rivers. The plain extends for 3200 km between the mouths of the Ganga and the Indus, all along the foot of the mountain rim, with a width varying from 150 to 300 km. The longitudinal extent from the banks of the Ravi and the Sutlej to the Ganga delta alone is of 2400 km. The plain is narrowest in Assam and broadens towards the west. It is 160 km wide near the Rajmahal Hills and 280 km near Allahabad. The plains are alluvial in nature.

3. Peninsular plateau

Rising from the alluvial plains of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, south of the Yamuna Ganga line, the great Indian plateau extends towards the south to encompass the whole of Peninsula. With a general elevation of 600-900m, the plateau makes an irregular triangle with its concave base lying between Delhi ridge and Rajmahal hills and the Apex formed by Kanya Kumari. The outlying projections of the peninsular plateau presented by the Aravallis, Rajmahal and Shillong hills convey some idea of its original northerly limits.

The location of another fragment of the peninsular block in the Shillong plateau gives the indication of the possible connection. The Shillong Plateau a highly dissected and jungly tract descends in a deep slope towards the Surma valley. The northern outliers are represented by the Mikir and the Rengma hills.

4. Western Ghats

The topography of the Deccan and the Karnataka Plateau is dominated by the Western Ghats, which stretch uninterruptedly to the southern tip of Peninsula. They have a general altitude of 900-1100 m but occasionally raise up to 1600 m or even more. Near Goa the highly dissected relief of the lava rocks is replaced by smoothly rounded hills of Granite and Gneiss. In this stretch the Ghats dip but rise once again in the Nilgiris. Further south the continuity of the ghats is distributed by the palghat gap and the Shencottah gap. The Cardamom Hills may be regarded as the continuation of the Western Ghats.

5. Eastern Ghats

The eastern Ghats are generally less impressive than the Western Ghats and form a discontinuous crest on the eastern periphery of the plateau. They are represented by an irregular line of hills, such as the Nallamalais, Velikondas, Palkondas and the Pachaimalais. These hills are often referred to as the northern hills in the northern sector, Cuddapah ranges in the middle and the Tamil Nadu

hills in the south.

6. The Coastal Plains and the Islands

The plateau is flanked by coastal plains of varied width extending from Kutch to Orissa. There are striking difference between the eastern and the western coastal plains; with notable exception of Gujarat the west coast has narrow alluvial margin interspersed by hilly terrain .It has indentation except in the south where the beautiful Lagoons introduce an element of diversity.

The eastern coast on the other hand has a wide plain with well developed deltas of the major rivers. The climatic transition between the south west monsoon regime of the north and the north -east monsoon regime of the south has given rise to interesting differences in the alluvial features in the two different stretches of the east coastal plain.

B. River System of India :

The rivers may be classified as follows :

The Himalayan

The Deccan

The Coastal

The rivers of the inland drainage basin

1. The Himalayan Rivers

The Himalayan rivers are generally snow-fed and flow throughout the year. During the monsoon months (June to September), the Himalayas receive very heavy rainfall and the rivers carry the maximum amount of water, causing frequent floods.

2. The Deccan Rivers

The Deccan rivers are generally rain-fed and, therefore, fluctuate greatly in volume. A very large number of them are non-perennial.

3. The Coastal Rivers

The coastal rivers, especially on the west coast, are short and have limited catchment areas. Most of these are non-perennial as well. The rivers on the inland drainage basin are few and ephemeral.

The Rivers of the Inland Drainage Basin

They drain towards individual basins or salt lakes like the Sambhar or are lost in the sands, having no outlet to the sea.

C. Others Geographical Facts :

1. Climate

The Himalayan range in the north acts as the perfect meteorological barrier for the whole country. Even though it falls under Monsoon climatically category, the climate varies from one place to another. Also despite the country's size and its varied relief, the seasonal rhythm of the monsoon is apparent throughout. Some mountains are adjoined to the north by China Nepal and Bhutan. A series of mountain ranges separate India from Burma. Although much of northern India lies beyond the tropical zone, the entire country has a tropical climate marked by relatively high temperatures and dry winters.

Rainfall is very heavy in the north-eastern region, the western slopes of the Western Ghats and parts of the Himalayas, all of which receive over 2,000 mm annually. The eastern part of the peninsula, extending up to the northern plains, receives rainfall varying from 1,000 to 2,000 mm a year, while the area from Western Deccan up to the Punjab plains gets between 100 mm and 500 mm a year. Rajasthan, Kachchh and Ladakh have hardly any rainfall. The population of India crossed the billion mark at the turn of the millennium.

2. Natural Vegetation

The Himalayan region, which is rich in vegetative life, possesses varieties that can be found practically from the tropical to tundra regions. Only the altitude influences the distribution of vegetation. In the rest of the country, the type of vegetation is largely determined by the amount of rainfall. Outside the Himalayan region, the country can be divided into three major vegetation regions: the tropical wet evergreen and semi-evergreen forests, the tropical deciduous forests, and the thorn forests and shrubs.

Vegetation of the Assam region in the east is luxuriant with evergreen forests, occasional thick clumps of bamboo and tall grasses. The Gangetic plain is largely under cultivation. The Deccan tableland supports vegetation from scrub to mixed deciduous forests. The Malabar region is rich in forest vegetation. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have evergreen, mangrove, beach and diluvia forests. Much of the country's flora originated three million years ago and are unique to the sub-continent.

3. Population

The population of India crossed the billion mark at the turn of the millennium. The mammoth census of 2001 is in the process of being compiled. In 1996, the population was 945 million with 73% in rural areas. In terms of population, India is the world's second-largest country, after China. 16% of the world's population lives in India. The average population density is 320 per sq km (in 1996), though it reaches 6,888 per sq km in the larger cities. In July 2003 it was 1,049,700,118 (est.). The population of India as per 2011 census was 1,210,193,422. India added 181.5 million to its population since 2001. India, with 2.4% of the world's surface area, accounts for 17.5% of its population. Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state with roughly 200 million people. Over half the population resided in the six most populous states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Of the 1.21 billion Indians, 833 million (68.84%) live in rural areas while 377 million stay in urban areas. 453.6 million people in India are migrants, which is 37.8% of total population. India's 2019 population is estimated at 1.37 billion based on

the most recent UN data. India, located in South Asia, is bordered by the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean, and is also bordered by the countries of Pakistan, Bhutan, China, Nepal, Myanmar (formerly Burma), and Bangladesh. India is the world's 7th largest country by area and the 2nd most populous country with more than 1.3 billion residents. 1 of every 6 people on the planet live in India, and between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, the country grew by 17.7%, adding 181.5 million people. India is the homeland of major belief systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism, while also being home to several indigenous faiths and tribal religions which have survived the influence of major religions for centuries.

4. Languages

India, according to a recent census has 1,652 dialects. Needless to say that most of them are only spoken dialects. The principal languages with rich literary heritage are: - Assamese, Bengali, English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. More than 19,500 languages or dialects are spoken in India as mother tongues, according to the latest analysis of a census released this week. The total number of languages arrived at is 121. The **121** languages are presented in two parts -- languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, comprising **22** languages and languages not included in the Eighth Schedule, comprising of **99** languages plus the category "total of other languages", which includes all other languages and mother tongues which returned less than **10,000** speakers each at the all-India level or were not identifiable on the basis of the linguistic information available. The number of scheduled languages was 22 at the time of presentation of the 2001. The same 22 languages are maintained in 2011 census also. The non-scheduled languages are 99 in 2011 against 100 in 2001. Of the total population of India, 96.71 percent have one of the scheduled languages as their mother tongue, the remaining 3.29 per cent is accounted for other languages. There are total 270 identifiable mother tongues which have returned 10,000 or more speakers each at the all-India level, comprising 123 mother tongues grouped under the scheduled languages and 147 mother tongues grouped under the non-scheduled languages. Those mother tongues which have returned less than 10,000 speakers each and which have been classified under a particular language are included in "others" under that language.

5. Natural resources

The total cultivable area in India is 19, 45,355 km² (56.78% of its total land area), which is shrinking due to population pressures and rapid urbanisation. India has a total water surface area of 360,400 km². India's major mineral resources include Coal (4th largest reserves in the world), Iron ore, Manganese ore (7th largest reserve in the world as in 2013), Mica, Bauxite (5th largest reserve in the world as in 2013), Chromite, Natural gas, Diamonds, Limestone and Thorium. India's oil reserves, found in Bombay High off the coast of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and in eastern Assam meet 25% of the country's demand.[[]

6. Environment-current issues

There are many **environmental issues in India**. Air pollution, water pollution, garbage

domestically prohibited goods and pollution of the natural environment are all challenges for India. Nature is also causing some drastic effects on India. The situation was worse between 1947 through 1995. According to data collection and environment assessment studies of World Bank experts, between 1995 through 2010, India has made some of the fastest progress in addressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality in the world. Still, India has a long way to go to reach environmental quality similar to those enjoyed in developed economies. Pollution remains a major challenge and opportunity for India. Environmental issues are one of the primary causes of disease, health issues and long term livelihood impact for India.

India is one of the oldest civilizations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety and rich cultural heritage. It has achieved all-round socio-economic progress during the last 65 years of its Independence. India has become self-sufficient in agricultural production and is now one of the top industrialized countries in the world and one of the few nations to have gone into outer space to conquer nature for the benefit of the people. As the 7th largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by mountains and the sea, which give the country a distinct geographical entity. Bounded by the Great Himalayas in the north, it stretches southwards and at the Tropic of Cancer, tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west. India is a land of incredible diversity. The diversity of the Indian population is matched by the incredible physical diversity. The 22 official languages of India, the five major religions, and the caste system create somewhat chaotic conditions for the nation. It dominates South Asian subcontinent; near important Indian Ocean trade routes.

