
UNIT 2 REGIONS IN INDIAN HISTORY: FORMATION AND CHARACTERISTICS

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to explain :

- Why it is necessary to know about regions if one has to understand different stages of Indian history,
- How regions emerged, and
- In what way the nature of a region could differ from that of the other.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 1 we have seen that the Indian subcontinent is constituted by a number of regions and that each region has some special characteristics of its own. In the course of the historical evolution of the country, the regions came to acquire special cultural features as well and in many ways—in the sense of shared historical tradition, in language, in social organization, in art forms—it is possible to recognize differences between one region and another. In Indian history, therefore, there have been dual processes of the evolution of common social and cultural norms and institutions as well as consolidation of the structures of recognizable regions.

It has also to be remembered that in history the processes of the emergence of regions have been uneven. Therefore, in the past, as induced even today, great dissimilarities in pattern of historical change, existed between different regions, although no region has ever remained completely isolated. This unit is concerned with elucidating the processes of the formation of regions in Indian history and with showing how they differed from one another. An understanding of the nature of regions constituting the Indian sub-continent is necessary to understand how the stages of the evolution of Indian society varied in space and time.

2.2 THE DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The differences between regions and regional cultures go back in time and can possibly be dated to the beginnings of adaptive subsistence strategies, that is, food production. The beginnings of agriculture and agrarian economy in the main river basins of the sub-continent, being essentially a process and not an event, were spread over several millennia. While Mehrgarh in the Kachhi plain (now in Pakistan) experienced early agricultural activities before 6,000 B.C. and the Indus region experienced it in the 4th-3rd millennia the Gangetic valley saw the advent of agriculture at Koldihwa (U.P) in 5000 + B.C., at Chirand (Bihar) in the second half of the 3rd millennium B.C. and at Atranjikhera (in the Doab) in the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C. In the Ganga valley, however, the beginning of full-fledged, settled agricultural activity, farming villages and the other associated traits like the emergence of towns, trade and the state system go back to the middle of the first millennium B.C.

There were various pockets in Central and Peninsular India where this transition took place only in the concluding centuries of the first millennium B.C. Similarly in the river basins of the Ganga, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri agricultural communities flourished and carried forward the civilizational process. At the same time, however, large pockets in areas such as Assam, Bengal, Orissa, Gujarat and Central India, being relatively isolated or isolated regions, remained for a long time in a stage of primitive economy, largely untouched by any such development. Finally, when the transition to the historical period took place in some of the relatively isolated regions there was not only a time gap but also perceptible differences in the nature and formation of the regions. Cultural influences from the already developed regional epicentres had a formative bearing on the development processes in these isolated areas. It is no surprise therefore, that some regions have advanced more rapidly than others and there are still others which have lagged behind.

2.2.1 Uneven Patterns of the emergence of Historical Regions

The uneven pattern of cultural growth and the differential configuration of historical forces in the numerous regions were, as we have seen in Unit-1, greatly influenced by geography. The uneven development of regions can be demonstrated through interesting historical situations. For example in the second half of the third millennium B.C. one encounters mesolithic cultures in Gujarat and at the same time neolithic cattle-keepers were traversing the landscape of the Deccan. What is striking is that the mature, advanced Harappan civilization co-existed with these cultures in other regions. Consequently there is evidence for interaction between cultures and regions at different levels of growth. Such tendencies have persisted all through Indian history. To put it differently, while the Indus and Saraswati basins were colonized in the third millennium B.C., the first large scale agricultural communities of the Deccan, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Gujarat belong essentially to the Iron Age, and can be placed in the second half of the first millennium B.C.

With the advent of iron we see rapid horizontal spread of material culture based on settled agriculture. By the third century B.C. we see a certain homogeneity in the material culture of Gangetic northern India and the fringes of Central India. Although on the basis of the geographical distribution of the Ashokan inscriptions (details in Block 5) a certain measure of cultural uniformity is normally assumed for the sub-continent, the process of the emergence of early historical, literate period with a complex social structure in the area south of the Vindhyas acquired momentum during and after the Mauryas.

In fact, the post-Mauryan period i.e., 200 B.C.-A.D. 300 was the formative period for most of the Deccan and South India. The archaeological date excavated from historic settlements in these regions support this line of argument. It may be added that vast areas of the intermediate zone or forested hills of Central India were never thoroughly colonized and, therefore, they continue to provide shelter and isolation to tribes at different stages of primitive economy. In the sub-continent civilization and a more complex culture with hierarchical social organisation reached different regions in different periods and the regional spread of a more advanced material culture was unevenly balanced.

2.2.2 The Ceramic Evidence

Pottery, because of its indestructible quality, is a reliable identifying mark of a culture and an

important means of archaeological classification. Different cultures are identified by their characteristic pottery. We have the Ochre-Coloured Pottery Ware (OCP) which is dated earlier than 1000 B.C., the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) which roughly dated between 800-400 B.C., the Black and Red Ware (BRW) which lies in between the two and the Northern Black Polished (NBP) Ware which is dated between 500-100 B.C. The first three pottery types are basically encountered in the Indo-Gangetic divide and the upper Ganga valley, including the Doab. The Northern Black Polished Ware (NBP) has its centre of origin in the middle Gangetic plain and spread out into Central India and the Deccan during the Mauryan period.

The distribution of pottery types gives us some idea of the territorial limits of a culture and the stages of its expansion. The Indo-Gangetic divide and upper Ganga basin experienced the emergence of a new cultural pattern first in the second half of the second millennium B.C. and then there was a gradual eastward spread which, during the Mauryan period, seems to have gone beyond the Gangetic heart land.

2.2.3 The Literary Evidence

Ancient Indian literature also provides evidence regarding the geographical expansion of a cultural pattern. The geographical focus of the Rig Vedic period was the Saptasindhu (land of the Indus and its tributaries) and Indo-Gangetic divide. In the Later Vedic period the Doab became the epicentre and in the Age of the Buddha the middle Gangetic valley (Kosala and Magadha) came into prominence. It may be mentioned that the stages of geographical spread coincided with progress in material culture. The term *rastra* in the sense of territory came into use in the Later Vedic period and we see the rise of small monarchies and states in areas such as Kuru and Panchala. In the Age of the Buddha (6th century B.C.) the sixteen *Mahajanapadas* (large territorial kingdoms) emerged. Interestingly, with the exception of Gandhara in the North-West, Avanti in Malwa and Asmaka in the Deccan the *Mahajanapadas* were mostly concentrated in the upper and middle Gangetic valley. Regions such as Kalinga (ancient coastal Orissa), Andhra, Vanga (ancient Bengal), Rajasthan and Gujarat find no mention in literature focusing on that period, suggesting thereby that they were yet to emerge on the historical stage.

Kingdoms to the south of the Vindhyas like Kalinga were mentioned for the first time by Panini in the 5th century B.C. The Tamil Country in the far south was yet to register its transition to the historical period. The emergence and formation of the various regions, therefore, was a long drawn out process. "Hence it is not surprising that this difference in the technology and socio-economic development of the various regions should have been at the root of the later cultural divergences".

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?
 - i) The uneven development of regions cannot be described through historical situations. ()
 - ii) Cultural developments in the already developed regions made a bearing on isolated regions. ()
 - iii) The process of the emergence of region has been even all over. ()
 - iv) Different cultures are identified by their characteristic pottery. ()
 - v) Literature is of no help in identifying regions. ()
- 2 Discuss in about five lines the various kinds of pottery and the period it is associated with.

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2.3 FORCE OF REGIONS IN INDIAN HISTORY

The village has been the basic socially organised unit in all regions, securing subsistence for its inhabitants, supporting urban life, state structures and so on. However, some regions exhibit a

greater density of population, rural settlements and urban centres and have regularly given rise to strong expansive states. They are also characterized by a continuous record of settlement and habitation from the neolithic-chalcolithic times. By contrast, other regions do not share these traits. The difference between regions may be explained in terms of :

- geography
- the manner and period of the spread of material culture, and
- the overall configuration of historical forces such as population, technology, social organisation, communications etc.

A combination of these factors helped in the shaping and development of the personality of the regions.

Owing to the development of distinct and strong regional personalities and the strength of regional forces the Indian sub-continent was never completely politically united. Some regions owing to their inner strength tried to expand and attain pan-Indian or supra-regional status but such experiments were not entirely unqualified success stories. The Mauryas, Tughlaqs, Mughals and the British provided a semblance of political unity. However, it must be noted that none of them succeeded in imposing political unity on all the geographic units and culture areas, though the British came very close to it. Central India or broadly speaking the intermediate zone and the extreme end of Peninsular India have always remained outside the pale of any strong, expansive pan-Indian power. Again the Vindhyas, as noticed in Unit-1, have somewhat succeeded in separating the histories of Northern India and the Deccan peninsula. Similarly, the Aravalis extending from the mouth of the Gulf of Cambay to the Delhi gap constitute another frontier line. In fact, this has been a very effective border. Nevertheless, the lower Indus basin and Gujarat have been historical and cultural centres of activity for very long periods. Thus, while large-scale centralised states did not endure for long periods, the ancient kingdoms of Magadha, Kosala, Avanti, Andhra, Kalinga, Maharashtra, Chera, Pandya, Chola, etc. continued to thrive, under one dynasty or the other, and under one regional name or the other. Their remarkable persistence may be explained in terms of the convergence of political and cultural boundaries over most periods, in these natural regions.

2.3.1 The Chakravatia Concept

The Chakravartin (universal emperor) concept which was an important ideal in ancient Indian political theory sheds further light on the problem under discussion. The ideal *Chakravartin* was supposed to become a universal conqueror and achieve universal dominance. The realm of the emperor (*Chakravarti Kshetra*) or his universe is equated by Kautilya's *Arthashastra* with the region between the Himalayas and the sea. The said area, interestingly, is coterminous with the Indian sub-continent. Later, many other writings also echo this ideal again and again. The *Asvamedha* sacrifice was performed by a ruler who claimed the status of a universal monarch. In ancient Indian political ideas the *Chakravartin* concept remained a vital force. Kingship was thus always associated with universal dominion.

However, neither Kautilya nor his successors describe how a pan-Indian empire was to be administered. What seems possible is that the *Chakravartin* ideal meant the subordination of rivals, extension of authority over their territories and thereby the expansion of the empire. This does not mean that the subjugated territories always became a part of a uniform administrative system or that strict control was exercised over them. In other words, it meant the demonstration and exercise of superior political power which had nothing to do with such aspects as administrative regulation, management and organization.

In spite of such limitations of the ideal what is important is that its realization was prevented by the strong personality of the natural regions and the strength of regionalism. The desire to politically unite the sub-continent continued to linger on even if such aspirations remained largely unfulfilled. This is largely borne out by the inscriptions of the early historic period when even petty rulers performed *Asvamedha* sacrifices as evidence of their might and made tall claims about the extent of their sovereignty and kingdom. This, in fact, is a clear cut example which highlights the difference between the actual and the ideal and emphasises the existence of a range of differentiated natural regions all through our history.

2.4 THE HIERARCHY OF REGIONS

The term 'region' like the word 'country' is a broad inclusive term and in the present context its meaning has to be clearly specified. Geographers and social scientists have defined and delineated regions differently keeping in view the requirements of their investigation. We have thus such expressions as 'linguistic regions', 'caste regions', 'physical regions', 'natural regions', 'cultural regions', etc. However, these regional frontiers broadly correspond and appear to be coterminous, though not always very neatly. The boundaries of the physical and the natural regions converge. The natural regions happen to be independent culture areas with their own configurations of language, caste, family and kinship organization and historical tradition. However, there need not be any uniformity between two adjoining regions. Even in geographically proximate regions, as we have seen above, diverse forms of culture co-existed throughout history. The patterns of historical development in the country and the regional unevenness of the transition to the historical stage suggests the existence of a hierarchy of regions. An understanding of this hierarchy may focus on the differential characteristics of the regions and explain their chronologically phased formation and emergence.

2.4.1 Major Geographical Influences

The "major structure-lines of Indian historical geography" or important geographical features of Indian history such as the Narmada-Chhota Nagpur line or the line running from the Gulf of Cambay to Mathura, constituted by the Aravalis have considerably influenced the pattern of cultural diffusion in the sub-continent. We have four great divisions:

- The Indus plains, prone to influences from Central and West Asia,
- The Gangetic plains, which begin on the Delhi-Mathura line and have absorbed all kinds of political and cultural influences coming through the north western frontier,
- The Central Indian intermediate zone, with Gujarat and Orissa as the two extreme points, and
- Peninsular India, south of the Narmada.

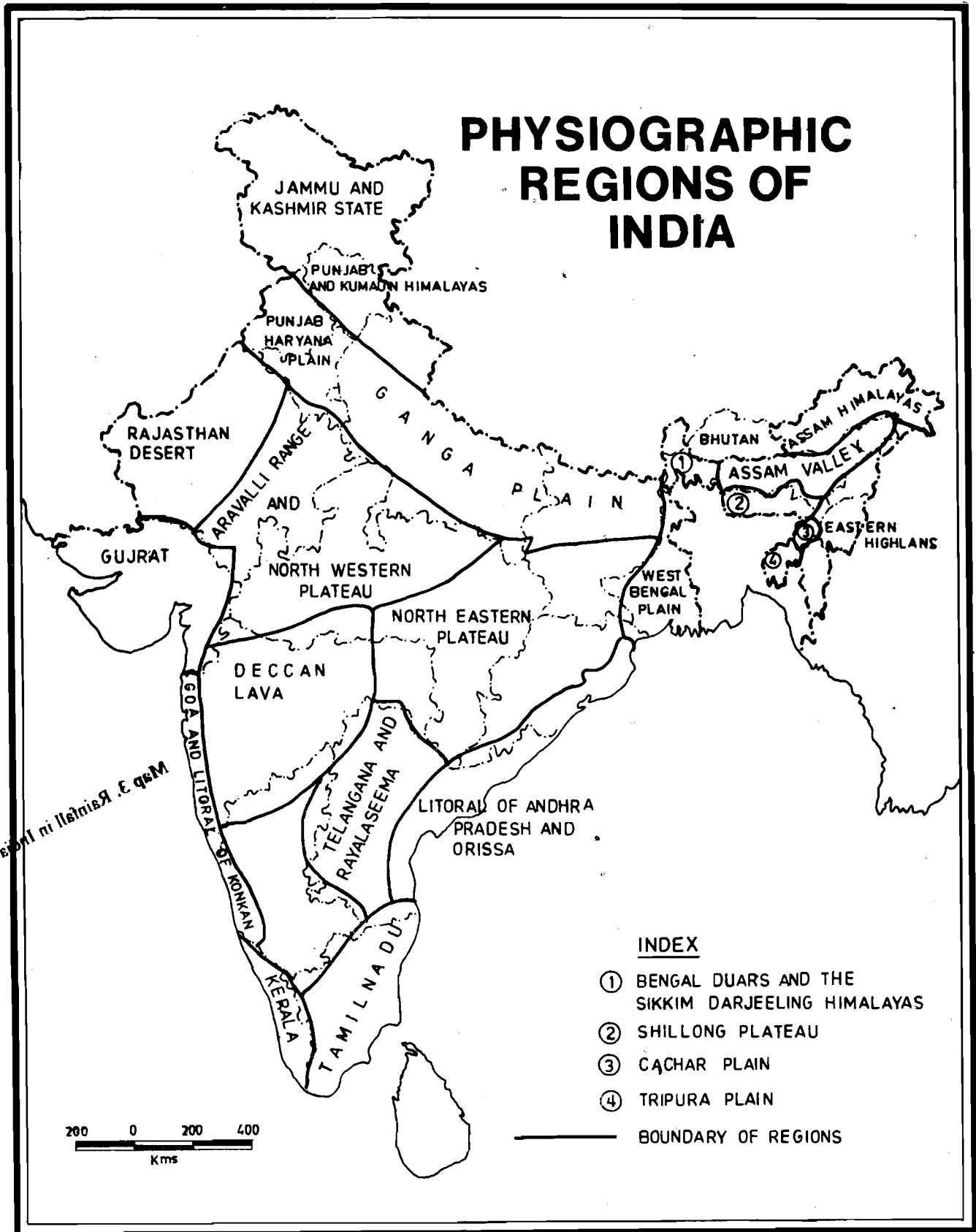
To the north and west of the Aravali line the overall cultural landscape appears to be different. Only some areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat responded to the mainstream of cultural development of the Gangetic valley in the early historical period.

The difference is somewhat more clear in the case of Punjab. After the Rig-Vedic period there seems to have been arrested growth in the Punjab. The persistence of non-monarchical *janapadas* in the region till the Gupta period suggests autonomous development. It also indicates weak property in land and poor agricultural growth. The absence of land grant inscriptions, a feature common in Gupta and post-Gupta times in the rest of the country, from the Punjab plains strengthens the assumption. Brahmanism never had deep roots in the Punjab plains, nor for that matter did the Varna structure become wholly acceptable. The Brahmanas rarely played an important role in society and the Kshatriyas soon faded out. The Khatri who claim to be Kshatriyas are usually found in professions associated with the Vaisya.

Punjab thus provides a good example of both late historical transition and regional variation from the perspective of the Ganga Valley. Similarly, the Narmada-Chhota Nagpur line is a major divide for, barring Gujarat, Maharashtra and Orissa, the rest of the cultural regions to the South of this line have a somewhat different individuality being largely influenced by the Tamil plains in the formative period. They share a separate zone of kinship organisation and caste hierarchy. Maharashtra, because of its contiguity with Malwa, which shares the Deccan lavas and has been the great bridge between the Ganga Valley and the Deccan, has had a different pattern of growth. It may not be out of place to mention that all major movements and territorial expansion into the South have taken this route.

2.4.2 Nuclear Regions

In Indian history we see the early emergence of some regions as perennial bases of power. In such regions we observe an uninterrupted succession of powerful kingdoms. In contrast, there were other less favoured regions too. Geographers and Historians thus speak in terms of perennial nuclear regions, areas of relative isolation and areas of isolation. The perennial nuclear regions correspond to the major river valleys, such as the Ganga, Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna and Kaveri, and they have been areas of attraction for human settlements. The



availability of resources and the convergence of trade and communication routes have added to their importance. Logically they have emerged as important centres of power. Let it, however, be remembered that geography and resource potentials only provide possibilities or set limitations and the nuclearity or otherwise of a region is linked with how historical factors converge on it. There are historical examples of the Kakatiya state of Warangal or the Chalukya state of Gujarat emerging outside the nuclear regions and such examples can be multiplied. Areas of relative isolation in Central India such as the country of the Bhils, Bastar and the Rajmahal hills, in terms of structure of settlements, agrarian history, social organization and state systems, differed from the nuclear regions. Because regions developed historically, the distinction between the three types of regions was not unalterably fixed once for all. Transformation from one category to the other was possible at a certain point.

2.4.3 Settlement Structure in Time and Space

The settlement structure of the regions did not remain static. Regions comprised villages, hamlets, towns and cities. Some regions like the middle Ganga plain and the Deccan were endowed with a greater number of towns. As we proceed to the post-Gupta period, the urban centres die out. There is increasing evidence of agrarian expansion and the emergence of new rural settlements. In some cases earlier tribal hamlets were transformed into peasant villages. There were differences between Brahmana and non-Brahmana settlements at the level of economic activity and social stratification. These differences gradually extended to areas which had initially remained peripheral to mainstream developments. They experienced transition from tribalism to more complex social structures. For example the basis for the rise of organised religion and state and of class society was laid in these regions. This transition would imply a proliferation of new settlements in these regions and a rise in population. Regions with a higher population density have always played a leading role in Indian history. The Ganga valley, the Tamil plains and the East coast were all regions with a higher density of population. Areas with resource potential and other attractions were naturally densely populated and a steady supply of manpower always added to the military strength of the State.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Discuss in about ten lines the factors which hindered the political unification of the Indian sub-continent.

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- 2 Discuss in about five lines what you understand by the concept of Chakravartin.

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3 Fill in the blanks:

- i) The natural regions happen to be (independent/dependant) culture areas.
- ii) Diverse forms of culture (never existed/co-existed) in history.
- iii) Cultural developments in Punjab were (different/similar) to those of the Gangetic valley.
- iv) Regions with a (higher/lesser) population density have played a leading role in Indian (Astronomy/History).

2.5 FORMATION OF SOME REGIONS IN EARLY INDIA

The Ganga-Yamuna doab, the Middle Ganga valley, Malwa, the Northern Deccan, Andhra, Kalinga (coastal Orissa) and the Tamil plains are the major perennial nuclear regions which emerged, quite early, as bases of power. But there have been smaller areas as well (which may be called sub-regions) which have preserved their individuality. The Konkan, Kanara and Chattisgarh fall in this category. Some areas such as the Raichur Doab between the Krishna and Tungabhadra and Vengi between the Godavari and Krishna have been continuously fought over for their agricultural resource potential, which could add immensely to the strength of the adjoining regions. The major nuclear regions have been the major agricultural areas with vast expanses of fertile alluvial. Let us now look into the dynamics and the pattern of the formation of regions by taking up a few illustrative examples.

2.5.1 The Gangetic Basin

The Ganga plain by virtue of its high agricultural productivity and rich population base has enjoyed a dominant position in the Indian sub-continent. No other region has had a comparable power base. However, the entire plain, as mentioned in Unit-1, is not a homogeneous geographical piece. We have already seen that the Middle Ganga plains, for a variety of reasons, emerged more successful than the Upper and Lower plains and by the time of the Mauryas had attained undisputed hegemony in the sub-continent. During the Rig Vedic period the centre for this was the Indo-Gangetic divide. In the 'Later Vedic' period, around 1000 B.C., the geographical focus shifted to the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. With it the eastward movement of the Vedic people had begun. However, the more important developments were the beginnings of settled agrarian life, with the help of the plough yoked to oxen, and consequently the emergence of the idea of territory and territorial kingdoms (*rastra, janapada*), Kuru and Panchala are good examples of such territories. By the 6th century B.C. the process of the emergence of *janapadas* tended to accelerate. For the first time we come to see the growth of *mahajanapadas* which incorporated smaller *janapadas* and contemporary literature puts their total number at sixteen.

Dense jungles had to be cleared for habitation by fire and metallic tools. In the paddy growing Middle Ganga Valley surplus generation was made possible by the deep ploughing iron ploughshare. It was necessitated by the growing population, a section of which like the rulers, officials, monks and priests did not engage in any kind of direct production. Agricultural surpluses helped in the rise and growth of towns. The distinctive pottery of the period was the NBP which appeared around 500 B.C. Simultaneously we come across the first system of coinage. The need for it was generated by regular trade and commerce. The spread of the NBP from Kosala and Magadha to such far flung areas as Taxila in north west, Ujjain in Western Malwa and Amaravati in coastal Andhra suggests the existence of organized commerce and a good communication network, which linked these towns among others. These developments were accompanied by sweeping social changes. Settled life helped in shedding pastoral and tribal traits. The Later Vedic people came into closer touch with the autochthons and there is evidence in Later Vedic literature for this interaction and inter-mingling. These developments together with some kind of division of labour first and next the diversification and specialization of occupations produced conditions congenial for the rise of the caste system within the four-fold *varna* frame.

The emergence of *Janapadas* and *Mahajanapadas* (for details see Block 4) signalled sweeping social, economic and political changes. The *grama* (village), *nigama* (a bigger settlement where commercial exchange also took place) and *nagara* (town) were the usual components of the *Janapada*. Woods and Jungles (*vana*) were also parts of it. A *Janapada* was basically a socio-cultural region. It provided the basis for state formation which actualised in the 6th century

B.C. Together with the rise of the *Mahajanapadas* we notice the growth of *Mahanagaras* (big cities) and the concomitant affluent and impoverished social categories. The process under discussion came into its own and blossomed fully in the middle Ganga valley during the Mauryan period. State society had thus arrived and the state was willing to make use of powerful religious systems such as Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism and so on to maintain itself and the social order. With these developments Gangetic northern India emerges into the full view of history.

2.5.2 The Tamil Country

The anthologies of early Tamil poems collectively known as Sangam literature provide a vivid account of the transition to a state society in the ancient Tamil country (Tamilakam) from an earlier tribal-pastoral stage. They indicate simultaneous existence of different ecological regions and suggest how different but interrelated lifeways ranging from food gathering, marginal agriculture, fishing and cattle-tending to intensive agriculture co-existed. In the fertile river valleys (*Marutam* regions) of the Kaveri, Periyar and Yaigai agricultural surpluses were produced and these precisely were the strongholds of the three ancient clan chiefs, the Chola, Chera and Pandya. Although the scene in the pre-Christian centuries was dominated by warrior chiefs, cattle-raids, war and booty, slowly people began to settle down as peasants and gradually a stratified society emerged with the peasants, bards, warriors and chieftains as the principal categories. The cult of war catapulted the warrior groups under their chiefs to a dominant position. The peasantry looking for protection and immunity from raids and plunder tended to be absorbed into a system in which a rudimentary state came into existence. The process of state formation was accelerated by the :

- Roman trade, in the early Christian centuries,
- the rise of towns, and
- the penetration of northern sanskritic (Aryan) culture along with the Brahmanas.

In the early centuries of the Christian era there was the growing importance of Roman trade; simultaneously there was a rise in inland trade within Tamilakam and between Tamilakam and the Deccan. Kerala was an integral part of Tamilakam during this early period. The numerous minor chieftaincies in hilly, marginal agricultural zones were increasingly brought within the spheres of the three kingdoms. Socially, the process is reflected in the formation of caste society with the peasants being reduced to the Sudra status. The basis of the emergence of the state was thus laid in early Tamil Nadu.

2.5.3 The Deccan : Andhra and Maharashtra

In Andhra and the Northern Deccan, the iron-using Megalithic communities which followed the Neolithic-Chalcolithic cultures provided the base for settled agriculture and helped in the transformation of these regions. High yielding paddy cultivation was resorted to in the occupied coastal tracts of Andhra during the 5th-3rd century B.C. The Megalithic burials have produced evidence for :

- rudimentary craft specialization,
- a rudimentary exchange network, which transported mineral resources to the Northern Deccan, and
- status differentiation.

There is evidence for a profusion of Black-and-Red ware sites suggesting a possible rise in population. The transformation of the Megalithic phase from around the third century B.C. marks the beginnings of change in a largely egalitarian, ranked society into a stratified society. By the second century B.C. there is evidence for metallic money, Roman trade and urbanization. Both inscriptions and archaeology reveal the existence of a number of towns in Andhra and Maharashtra during this period. By this time Buddhism had spread in Deccan and we see the growth of monasteries and Buddhist centres. In the meantime another kind of development had begun in the form of the historical spread of the Mauryan state, which accelerated the pace of these developments.

With the coming of the Mauryas the Megalithic culture gave way to early historical settlements. Many urban centres and monasteries in the Deccan, some of which emerged as nodal points, date to that period. It is precisely this interaction that led to the emergence of localities in the Deccan. Localities may be taken to approximate, to use a north Indian

parallel, the term *Janpada*. The emergence of localities seems to be a significant development by the time of the Satavahanas. They provided the basis for early historic state formation in the Deccan. From the 2nd century B.C. we see the gradual expansion of agricultural settlements and the integration of new communities. First, the monasteries and Buddhism and later the Brahmanas and Brahmanism helped the process of social integration. There developed a triangular relationship between the settled communities, the state and the monasteries and or the Brahmanas. The historical process advanced further under the Ikshvakus in coastal Andhra, the Kadambas in Karnataka and the Vakatakas in Maharashtra. By the middle of the first millennium A.D. the two regions registered their distinct individual presence.

2.5.4 Kalinga and Ancient Orissa

The land of Orissa, like the Deccan, experienced significant changes from around the 4th - 3rd century B.C. Between c.300 B.C. and c. 4th century A.D. the history of Orissa is one of internal transformation of the tribal society. The transition was partly autonomous and partly stimulated by contracts with the Sanskrit culture of the Gangetic plains, the beginnings of which can be traced back to the times of the Nandas and Mauryas. The subsequent period i.e. the 4th-9th centuries experienced the emergence of a series of sub-regional states in different pockets of the region. The specificities of the emerging pattern were well laid by the 10th century. The process, however, was not uniform nor evenly spread.

The littoral zone of the deltaic coast experienced transition to the historical stage earlier than the inland forest tracts and the rolling uplands, which have much in common with the adjoining Chhattisgarh and Bastar sub-regions. The tribal situation in central and western Orissa accounted for the arrested and uneven process of transformation in the region. The large concentration of tribals and the physiography of the land prevented a repetition of the Gangetic socio-economic pattern. Caste society within the *Varna* structure was late to emerge in Orissa and when it did there was a difference in the broad essentials. In terms of social structure Orissa presents an interesting case of regional variation.

2.5.5 The North-West

It must be clear that very little has been said so far about Sindh and Baluchistan in the North-West. This is mainly because of their peripheral location. For much of the early historical period they were cut off from the mainstream of cultural development by the great Indian Desert. This is not to argue that the area was culturally barren. In our period of study whenever anything of consequence happened there, it was mostly in relation to central Asia, Afghanistan or Persia (Iran). It was only from the Kushana period that these areas formed a part of a supra-regional political system which included a major part of northern India. However, in the North-West the Gandhara region was an exception.

As early as the 6th century B.C. Gandhara was listed among the sixteen *Mahajanapadas*. Bimbisara, the king of Magadha had diplomatic contacts with the king of Gandhara. Taxila, the capital of Gandhara was a centre of learning and trade. It had a wide economic reach. There is evidence for trade with Mathura, Central India and the Romans. Owing to her geographical location Gandhara continued to be a meeting place of various people and cultures. In the last quarter of the 6th century B.C. the region was politically a part of the Achaemenid (persian) empire. There is evidence for continuous urban life at Taxila from c.500 B.C. to c. A.D. 500. However, urban life was at its peak between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. This is the period when the celebrated Gandhara school of art flowered. This school of art is generally described as Graeco-Buddhist in content because it is seen to be a product of interaction between Hellenistic art and Buddhism. However, increasingly it is being realised that the Gandhara school had a Bactrian substraction too: Therefore, the influence of the Bactrian school in the formation of the Gandhara school cannot be brushed aside. The point that we are trying to make is that:

- i) first, in the North-West, Gandhara provides a different picture of development which contrasts with Sindh and Baluchistan, and
- ii) secondly, in the early christian centuries the personality of the region was shaped by different influences because of her very geographical setting.

Check Your Progress 3

1 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×)?

- i) The Gangetic basin is a homogeneous geographical base. ()
- ii) The need for coinage was generated through trade and commerce. ()

- iii) The Janapada provided the basis for state formation. ()
- iv) The Sangam literature throws no light on state formation in ancient Tamil country. ()
- v) The development of Gandhara region was shaped by different cultural influences. ()

2 Fill in the blanks :

- i) Agricultural surpluses helped in the (growth/decay) of towns.
- ii) The rise of (Janapadas/Mahajanpadas) led to the growth of Mahanagaras.
- iii) High yielding (wheat/paddy) cultivation was taken up in coastal Andhra during (5-3rd/1-2). B.C.
- iv) The (non-Tribal/Tribal) situation in Orissa arrested the transformation in the (sub-continent/region).

2.6 LET US SUM UP

A general survey of the problem of regions and regionalism in our history and the above examples trying to explain the process of the formation of regions very clearly show that the socio-cultural differentiation of regions is historically old. The emergence of natural physical regions as historical/cultural regions can be traced back to the formative period of Indian history. Subsequently these regions evolved their distinct socio-cultural ethos leading to the emergence of separate socio-political entities. Some regions surfaced earlier and faster than others owing to the early convergence of certain historical forces in them. Developments in other areas were triggered off by interaction with and cultural diffusion from these primary centres. This may partly explain the differential traits of the varied regions.

Regional variation expressed itself more conspicuously in many forms such as language, architecture, sculpture and the caste system in the Gupta and post-Gupta centuries. Almost all the regional language evolved during the said period. Simultaneously region-specific caste structures emerged. Such differences existed not only between regions but also within regions. Although regions tend to be somewhat homogeneous units, the persistence of sub-regions within regions cannot be ignored either. Already we have seen that Gangetic northern India is not all one homogeneous region. The ecological variations within ancient Tamilakam (Tamil Nadu) also need to be remembered. The same holds true for Andhra, Orissa, Punjab and Gujarat. The sub-regions had their ancient names too. However, the changing political patterns and the configurations of sub-regions were responsible for grafting new inclusive broad-based names on areas that earlier had different names. Regions as territorial units emerge through historical process and to understand Indian history one has to understand their characteristics and the process of their formation.

2.7 KEY WORDS

Autochthonous: Indigenous, native, aboriginal

Colonized: Settle in a colony

Concomitant: Along with

Dynamics: Pattern of Change development and growth in any field

Epicentre: Centre of origin of earthquake

Ethos: Character, disposition of a community or culture

Formative: Giving shape, moulding

Social Stratification: Division of Society according to rank caste and strata

Static: Lacking vitality

2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 i) × ii) ✓ iii) × iv) ✓ v) ×
- 2 Hint: OCP, PGW and give their timing. See Sub-sec 2.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Your answer should include the development of strong regional personalities; strength of regional personalities; strength of regional forces etc. See Section 2.3.
- 2 See Sub. sec 2.3.1
- 3 i) independent ii) Co-existed iii) different iv) higher, history

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 i) × ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) × v) ✓
- 2 i) growth ii) Mahajanpadas iii) paddy, 5-3rd iv) tribal, region.