



## CULTURAL AND PHYSIOGRAPHIC BASIS FOR REGIONALIZATION OF INDIA

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### Abstract

India has one of the most ancient, rich, vibrant, dynamic, extensive and varied civilization of the world which has its roots in different components of culture. Such traditions are reflected from the ancient Indian literature, history and archeological remains. Along with the physiography, it has contributed to evolving the regional characteristics. This country presents a special case where the national and regional identities have been considered as an important component of culture. The formation of the sixteen *janpads* (districts or provinces) in ancient India is the testimony of such a unique trait. Later attempts for regionalization of India did take into consideration of this feature.

**Keywords:** Culture, traditions, *mahajanpads*, regionalization, *Puranas*, *Uttarapatha* and *Dakshinapatha*.

Preparation of a research paper related to the culture and heritage of the country seems to be a very naïve exercise. But when we actually started considering the nitty-gritty of the work, we

were really lost in a vast ocean. In a culturally rich country, it was difficult to identify the components which provide better understanding about India. Further, how these components can be illustrated in order to find out the broad patterns? A spatial impression of culture has not been attempted earlier in a big way. However, some attempts were made by some geographers in this direction due to their interest in cultural geography. Further, it can be said that modern geography is developing fast in India since 1930. The integration of natural with cultural elements is being attempted so that the geographical basis of the cultural superstructure could be finally understood. Certainly, India is a laboratory for undertaking a study on the physico-cultural relationships and to investigate how the physiography has influenced the cultural set up of the country.

The heritage of India is one of the most ancient, rich, vibrant, dynamic, extensive and varied civilization of the world which has its roots in different components of culture, *i.e.* musical heritage, dances, sculptures, paintings, theatres and other fine arts, festivities, traditional beliefs, customs, ancient medicinal system and their usages, cuisines and food habits, literature and many more alike which took shape differently in respective periods. India is well known for *Unity in Cultural Diversity*. During its span of about five thousand years, several waves of immigrants representing different ethnic straits and linguistics families have merged into its population to contribute to its diversity, richness, and vitality. The strong cultural traditions are the India's real innate strength. Its culture through the ages absorbed outside influences but retained its ancient heritage. It had the spiritual foundation and philosophical thought as well. Max Muller, the famous oriental scholar wrote, "There is in fact an unbroken continuity between the most modern and the most ancient phases of Hindu thought, extending over more than three thousand years".

## **Culture and the nation**

The cultural practices have been prevailing over the years, decades, and centuries. They have become a part of the national social and cultural life. They are interrelated, spatially and even economically. They contribute towards the formation of informal, unrecognized, and unofficial networks which are devoid of any royal or government patronages over a considerable time and under different rule. Unfortunately, these networks, associations, affiliations and groupings have not been given due credits nevertheless they have played a valuable role in the unity of the country. They are our inner strength and internal



In general, there are about twenty-five associations, affiliations or networks with which a person is associated. He works, connects and interacts through such linkages. It is possible to connect people through out the length and breath of the country based on these linkages. They are spread over the snow peaks, tropical jungles across 23 major languages, about 22,000 dialects, nearly 773 districts, about 600 thousand villages and the like. There are thirty-six states and union territories having specific language or cultural affinities. The Indian identity is also through these administrative set up or their parts. This ageless civilization encompasses four major religions, nearly eighty political parties, 300 ways of cooking potato, fifty ways of cooking fish etc. Obviously to bring these heterogeneous groups of people under one flag, one constitution or national anthem can not only become possible by official orders, legislature, and federal funding. The idea of India is one of a nation that embraces different religion, caste, creed, colour, cuisine, conviction, custom and costumes. Indian pluralism is its strength (Nag, 2007).

## **India - The Nation-State**

India, *i.e.* *Bharat*, the land of venerable Ganga and revered as *Bharat Mata*, embraces major part of the South Asian realm bounded on the north by chains of mountains and on the other three sides by seas and ocean, this part of Asia has been considered as a distinct geographical unit since time immemorial. The exploration of the entire country has been completed in or about the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The literature of this period shows acquaintance with the realm of the *Pandyas* in the south and also beyond the island of Tamraparni. The word ‘India’ traces its origin in the Greek literature meaning the land of *Indoi*, the people leaving near the *Indos* (Latin Indus). It’s Persian and Avestan equivalent refers to *Hindu*, cognate with *Sindhu*, the river of ancient Sanskrit texts applied to the province of Archeamenid Empire adjacent to the Indus and meaning “the land of great river”.

The name *Bharat* bears the testimony of geographical and historical significance. The concept of *Bharat* was developed after the name of *Bharat*, the sovereign king, who visualized the fundamental unity of the country. Further, *Bharat* includes simultaneously the historic territorial concepts in terms of Dravidian and Aryan settlers which though diverse in origin could fuse together with the Hindu culture in its geographical realm since fifty odd centuries. The cultural and national integration is reflected in the location of the four *dhamas* (holy places) which are Rameshwaram in the south, Kedar-Badri in the north, Puri in the east and

Dwarka in the west. These *dhamas* are the cultural centres in the four cardinal directions within the dimensions of the country. The visit to these centres by every Indian is considered to be significant in one's life even in remote time when inaccessibility threatened movement. The well established and crystallized Indian culture and thoughts expanded their horizon beyond its precincts, primarily through Buddhism which like Jainism was a distinct stream of reformatory thought within the mainstream of the *Hindu way of life*.

## **Regional Description in Ancient Literature**

We do get descriptions about Bharat-varsha, its extent, divisions along with rivers and mountains in ancient Indian literature. Such accounts include the human occupancies as well. Hence the regional or territorial explanations incorporate physical and cultural features. According to these literary sources, this region lies between snowy mountains and the ocean. Seven mountain chains have been mentioned which are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Suktimat, Riksha, Vindhya and Páripátra. On the east of this territory dwell the Kirátas (the barbarians); on the west, the Yavanas; in the centre reside Brahmans, Kshetriyas, Vaisyas, and Súdras, occupied in their respective duties. Jambudwipa was described of having extent of hundred thousand yojanas and encircled, 'as if by a bracelet, by the ocean of salt water, of similar dimensions.' Further, following nine territories or regions or islands has been included which are Indradwípa, Kaserumat, Támravarnia, Gabhastimat, Nágadwípa, Saumya, Gandharba, and Várunia. The ninth one is Dwípa (island) surrounded by the ocean. There is a description of regions as well, such as (a) Kurus and Páncálas in the middle districts; (b) Kámarupa in the east; (c) Punídiras, Kalingas, Magadhas and southern territories in the south; (d) Sauráshtiras, Súras, Bhíras, Arbudas in extreme west; and (e) Kárushas and Málavas along the Páripátra mountains. The other regions were Sauvíras, Saindhavas, Húnas, Sálwas, Sákala, Madras, Rámas, Ambashtihās, Párasíkas and others (Nag & Debnath 2022). Rivers were associated with these regions and there was some sense of borders where people were happy and prosperous. Furthermore, Bharata was considered as the best division of Jambudwipa. In *Matsya Puran* we get similar description about Bharat Varsha.

In ancient literature we have reference to five-fold divisions of India (Dube, 1967). In the centre of the Indo-Ganga plain was the Madhyadesa stretching, according to the Brahmanical account, from the River Saraswati which flowed past Thaneswar to Allahabad and Varanasi and according to the early records of the Buddhists, to the Rajmahal hills. According to

Chatterjee (2004), the mountains specially mentioned in the ancient literature are the Himalaya, Kailash, Vindhya, Amarkantak and Chitrakut. The Himalaya lying to the north, extending from west to east have its regional divisions into Antagiri (inner Himalaya) and Bahirgiri (outer Himalaya) as mentioned in the Mahabharata. The Kailash, the heavenly abode of Lord Shiva, is said to be studded with diamond, padmaraga and other precious stones. The Chitrakut was a store house of various precious rocks and minerals. Apart from the hills and mountains, *Atharva Veda* classifies the plane lands into Udvata (uplands), Parvata (slope) and Sama (low plain) or clothed with different *ousadhis* (medicines/vegetation). References are also found of Samudra (ocean), Sindhu (Sea), Apaha (minor water bodies), Kristayah (the cultivated land) and Jalodbhava (uncultivable alluvial land of marshy nature). Plateau was known as Saila Prastha and Giri Prastha while deserts were referred to as Dhanvu and Maru.

The western part of this area was known as the Brahmarshi-desa and the entire region was roughly equivalent to Aryavarta as described in the grammar of Patanjali. But the denotation of Aryavarta according to some other references is much broader where it is taken to mean the whole of the territory lying between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas. To the north of Madhyadesa, beyond Pehoa lay Uttarapatha or Udichya. The entire Indus valley which was the cradle of the Rig Vedic culture was included in the Uttarapatha. Mathura was included within this region. Aparanta or Pratichya (western India) was Saurashtra and the northern Konkan. Dakshinapataha was the upper Deccan, north of the River Krishna and south of the River Narmada. According to some other sources, Dakshinapatha was the region situated between the Satpura and Rameswaram. Further south is the Tamalikam or the Tamil country and to the east lays the Purvadesa or Prachya (Chatterjee, 2004).

According to *Markandeya Purana* “all the rivers are sacred and all flow towards the sea.” The geographical area occupied by the people of *Rig-Vedic* time is indicated by way of mentioning of certain river names which are easily identifiable. The most important among these are the Kubha (Kabul), Subastu (Swat), Krumu (Kurram), Gomati (Gumal), Sindhu (Indus), Sushama (Sohan), Bitasta (Jhelum), Asikni (Chenab), Marudvridha (Maru Wardwan), Parushi (Ravi), Bipas (Beas), Sutudri (Sutlej), Saraswati, Yamuna, Ganga and Sarayu. The reference to these rivers implies the possession of a considerable portion of northern India plain by the Aryans. Also, there were some other clans occupying at least some part of this tract being superseded slowly and gradually by the more powerful aryaans. The Saptakulaparvatas are the systematic list of mountains mentioned in the epics and *Puranas*.

They are (a) Mahendra near Ganjam in the Eastern Ghats and is still known as Mahadra Malai, (b) Malay on the Malabar coast, presently known as Anna Malay, (c) Sahyadri which extends from north to south, *i.e.* the Western Ghats and is still known by that name throughout Maharashtra and Konkan, (d) Suktiman, the extension of Sahyadri towards the east includes the hilly areas of Khandesa and Ajanta up to the Golkonda plateau, (e) the Riksha, extending from the Ken to River Tons, north of the Vindhya, (f) Vindhya *Parvat* refers to the parallel ranges along the northern and southern banks of the River Narmada and extends up to Kaimur range, and (g) Pariyatra, the name refers to the western Vindhya and Aravalli range together.

Since culture in a wider sense, transcends from higher forms of thoughts and creative arts to the material arts of life such as food habits, preference for particular dress, house types and building materials and agricultural techniques, the fundamental causes of these differences have to be understood. Some of the causes can be ascribed to the geography of the land as we find that the geographical environment determines largely what we shall eat, wear and what kind of houses we shall build, how we should perform our daily activities of life. It can therefore be said that in spite a unity all over India in respect of philosophical thinking and disciplined life, there are many diversities in the way we lead our daily life. The anthropological studies, as carried out in different parts of India, reveal that the material culture of northern India differs in general from that of southern India in many respects but that does not stand in the way of peace and harmony between the north and the south.

Before the coming of the Aryans to India from the Central Asia steppe country in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C., Dravidian culture in the Indus valley declined giving place to the *vedic* culture which gradually spread over the Indo-Ganga plains. The *Rig Veda* tells us about the physical geography of the Indus valley wherein the Aryans settled and its influence on their new mode of life and development of culture. In the new physical set up they could give up their nomadic life and take to permanent cultivation in the Indus plains. The *vedic* conception of the mother land has no parallel in any other treaties written outside India. Our aryan forefathers were the first to recognize the intimate relationship between man and the earth as sweet and as tender as between the mother and her children. Coming to the epic age, the *Mahabharata* is the richest single source of the ancient geography of India in which not only the landscapes but economic geography as well even in regard to the articles manufactured in different regions are well described. The *Puranas*, especially the *Markandeya Purana*, present a systematic record of the cultural unity that India achieved through successive stages in 4,000

years of which each stage was unfolded against a definite geographical background in the extensive river valleys, plains, mountains, and forests of India.

### **Ancient Regionalization**

India is thus a country of unity in diversity exhibiting manifold physical, cultural and economic contrast which is the woof and warf of the national panorama. It enfolds within its bounds the loftiest of the mountains representing the youngest mountain building epoch in the geological history of the earth and the most subdued relief in the peninsula, showing one of the earliest geological structures. Hemmed in between the two lies one of the greatest alluvial plain of the world. In the *vedic* times the whole of India, say about the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium B.C. called *Jambudvipa* was looked upon as a geographical entity after analyzing successively the regional characteristics of Brahmavarta, Brahmarshidesa, Madhya-desa and Aryavarta between the Himalaya and the Vindhyan mountains and then integrating these regional studies with that of Dakshinapataha thus completing the geographical picture of the whole country. In other words, country was divided into five macro regions: Udichya (northern India), Prachya (eastern India), Aparanta (western India), Madhyadesa (central India) and Dakshinapatha (Deccan or southern India). The modern concept of the five macro regions is based on the regional divisions of India as handed down to us from the *vedic* times. Further, it was left to Kalidasa to elaborate the geographical account of the various regions of India. He was not only a great poet, but a keen observer of the land and people which he described thoroughly in his two works, *Raghuvansa* and *Meghaduta*. In *Meghaduta*, Kalidasa describes first the important places, mountains and rivers of central India like Ramagiri (Ramteka near Nagpur), Vidisa of Malavadesa, Ujjain on the bank of the Sipra, and the Carmanavati (Chambal).

Similarly, the Sangam poems, written by the Tamil poets in the beginning of the Christian era, also give a vivid account of the three Tamil kingdoms, Chola at Pugar, Pandya at Madura and Chera at Vanji (Cranganoor). Further, the *Sandesha Kavyas* describes the geography of different kingdoms based on which Malabar was divided in historic times. Venkatnath's Hamsasandesha throws considerable light on the geography of southern India in the 14<sup>th</sup> century from Humpi, a famous cultural centre and capital of the Vijayanagar empire to the Tamraparni Valley (Tirunelveli district) through Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Tirupati hills and Anjanadri with seven peaks represented in ancient literature as the seven hoods of Adi



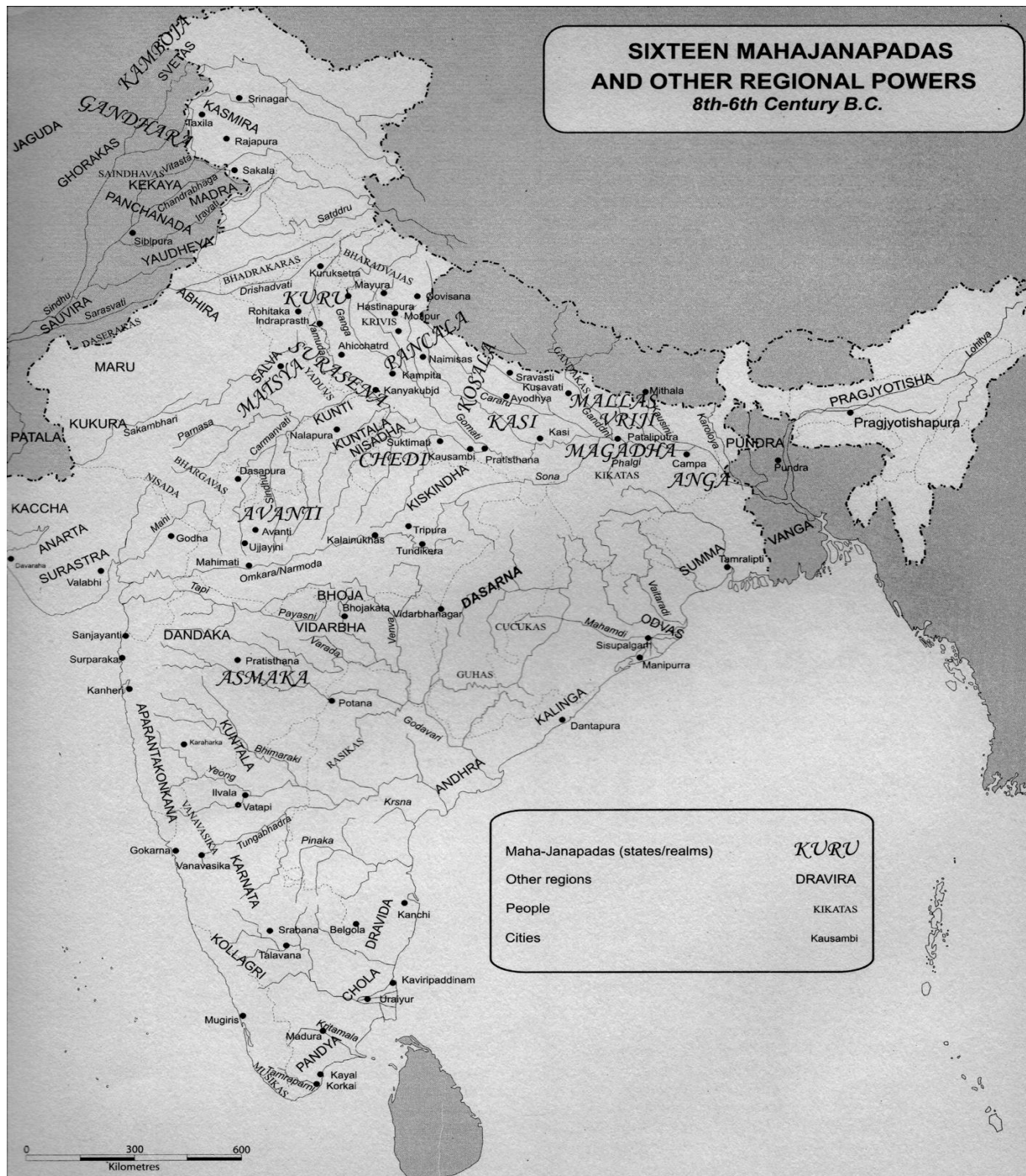
Sesha. Kanchi (Kanchipuram) in Tondaimandalam was one of the most celebrated cultural centres of India (Chatterjee, 2004).

## **Physical and Cultural Basis of Regions**

The political history around 600 B.C. can be traced from the Buddhist *Jatakas*, *Jaina Sutras* and the *Puranas*. It is felt that there was no unified central government in northern India. There were sixteen great kingdoms or *mahajanapadas* that occupied the territory from the Kabul valley up to the banks of the Godavari. These states were Anga (eastern Bihar), Magadha (southern Bihar), Kasi (Varanasi), Kosala (Oudh), Virji or Vaiji (northern Bihar), Malla (Gorakhpur district), Chedi (Bundelkhand and adjoining regions), Vatsa (Allahabad area), Kuru (Thaneshwar, Delhi and Meerut), Panchala (Rohilkhand and the Ganga-Yamuna doab), Matsya (Jaipur), Surasena (Mathura), Asmaka (upper Godavari valley), Avanti (Malwa), Gandhara (Peshwar and Rawalpindi districts) and Kamboja (southwest Kashmir and the southern part of Pamir plateau). Of the sixteen *mahajanapadas*, Kashi was probably at first the most powerful and played a prominent part in the subversion of the Videhan monarchy. Several *jatakas* bear witness to the superiority of its capital Banaras over the other cities, and the imperial ambition of its rulers. Banaras was the chief city in India. Kashi was in former times a great and prosperous realm, possessed of immense resources. The Jains also afford testimony to the greatness of Kashi and represent Asvasena, king of Banaras.

The kingdom of Kosala was bounded on the west by the Gumti, on the south by the Sarpika or Sayandika (Sai) river. It included the territory of the Kalamas of Kesaputta, possibly on the Gumti and that of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu in the Nepalese *terai*. In the *Sutta Nipata* Lord Buddha says, “just besides Himavanta there lives a people endowed with the power of wealth, the inhabitants of Kosala.” They are Adichchas by family and Sakiyas by birth. Kosala proper contained three great cities, namely Ayodhyas (Oudh), Saketa and Savatthi or Sravasti, besides a number of minor towns like Setavya and Ukkattha. The only kings are Hiranyanabha, Prasenjit and Suddhodana.

**Fig 2 Source: Nag (2007)**



Anga was the country to the east of Magadha and west of Rajmahal hills. It was separated from Magadha by the River Champa. The Angha dominions, however, at one time included Magadha and probably extended to the shores of the sea. Rajagriha was the city of Anga. *Sabha-prava* mentions Anga and Vanga as forming one *vishaya* or kingdom. Champa, the famous capital of Anga, stood at the confluence of the river of the same name and the Ganga. Cunningham, the famous archologist, points out that there still exist near Bhagalpur two

villages, Champanagara and Champapura which most probably represent the actual site of the ancient capital. Down to the time of Gautam Buddha's death, it was considered as one of the six great cities of India, the other five being Rajagriha, Sravasti, Saketa, Kausambi and Banaras. Champa was noted for its wealth and commerce, and traders sailed from it to Suvarna-bhumi in the trans-Ganga region for trading purposes. Other important cities in Anga were Assapura (Asvapura) and Bhaddiya (Bhadrika). However, the success of Anga did not last long.

Brahmadatta was the last independent ruler of Anga. It became an integral part of the growing empire of Magadha which corresponds roughly with the present Patna and Gaya districts of south Bihar. It seems to have been bounded on the northwest by the rivers the Ganga and the Son, on the south by spurs of the Vindhyan range, and on the east by the River Champa which emptied itself into the Ganga near the Anga capital. Its earliest capital was Girivraja, the mountain-girt city of old Rajagriha, near Rajgir among the hills in the neighbourhood of Gaya. In the *Puranas*, the second Magadhan dynasty or king named Sisunaga Bimbisara, the contemporary of the Lord Buddha. Magadha was destined to outbid other rival kingdoms in the race for imperial supremacy of northern India.

The Vajji (Vriji) territory lay north of River Ganga and extended as far as the foothills of Nepal. It is said to have included eight confederate clans of whom the old Videhas, the Lichchavis, the Jnatikas and the Vrijis proper were the most important. Vaisali was the capital of Vajji. Further, the Malla territory, was split up into two main parts which had for their capitals the cities of Kusavati or Kusinara and Pava. Like Videha, Malla had at first a monarchical constitution. The *Kusa Jataka* mentions a Malla king named Okkaka (Ikshvaku).

The Chedis were one of the most ancient tribes of India and lived in various parts in various periods of history. Chedi was one of the countries encircling the Kurus and lay near River Jamuna. It is apparent from the *Chetiya Jataka* that the metropolis was Sotthivati-nagara. The *Mahabharata* gives its Sanskrit name as Suktimati or Sukti-Sahvaya. The city of Siktimati is placed in the neighbourhood of present-day Banda. *Mahabharata* speaks of Chedi kings like Damaghosha, his son Sisupala and Sunitha and his sons Dhrishtaketu and Sarabha.

Vatsa or Vamsa was the country south of the River Ganga of which Kausambi, modern Kosam on the River Jamuna, near Allahabad, was the capital. Udayana was the most famous among the later kings of the clan. The capital of Vatsa was a very prosperous city with rich merchant houses. The Vatsa kingdom was famous for high quality cotton fabrics. Further, the Kuru realm, according to the *Maha-Sutasoma Jataka*, was three hundred leagues in extent.

The reigning dynasty according to the Pali texts belonged to the Yuddhitthila gotta, *i.e.* the family of Yudhishtira. The capital was Indraprastha near modern New Delhi. In addition, there was also another city called Hastinapura and a number of *nigamas* or smaller towns and villages besides the capital, such as Thullakotthita, Kammassadamma, Kundi and Varanavata. Ishukara was apparently the most important king up to the time of Lord Buddha.

Panchala comprised of Rohilkhand and a part of central *doab*. *Mahabharata* refers to the division of this country into two parts, *viz.*, (a) Uttara or northern Panchala, and (b) Dakshina or southern Panchala. The Bhagirathi formed the dividing line. Ahichhatra or Chhatravati was the capital of northern Panchala (modern Ramanagar in the Bareilly district) while Kampilya was the capital of southern Panchala which extended from the River Ganga to River Chambal. During the time of Bimbisara, the only king may be referred to be Durmukha. His capital was Kampilla *nagara*. Furthermore, Matsa was the extensive territory between the hills near the Chambal and the forests that skirted the Sarasvati, of which the centre was Virata-nagara in the till recently Jaipur state.

The Surasena country had its capital at Mathura, stood at the River Yamuna. In the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, the ruling family of this territory is known as Yadu or Yadava family. Asmaka was situated on the banks of the River Godavari. Its capital was Potali or Potana. It is learnt from the *Asmaka Jataka* that at one time the city of Potali was included in the kingdom of Kashi (present-day Varanasi), and that its prince, Assaka, was presumably a vassal of the Kashi monarch. The *Chulla Kalinga Jataka* mentions a king of Asmaka named Aruna and his minister Nandisena and refers to a victory which they won over the king of Kalinga.

Avanti roughly corresponds to the Ujjain region, together with a part of the Narmada valley from Mandhata to Maheshwar, and certain adjoining districts. The *janapada* (district or territory) was divided into two parts by the Vindhya: the northern part drained by River Sipra and other streams had its capital at Ujjain; and the southern part washed by River Narmada had its centre at Mahissati or Mahishmati usually identified with the rocky island of Mandhata. The *Mahagovinda Suttanta* mentions Mahissati as the capital of the Avanti. The *Puranas* attribute the foundation of Mahishmati, Avanti and Vidarbha to scions of the Yadu family.

The kingdom of Gandhara included within its boundaries the vale of Kashmira and the ancient metropolis of Takshasila, which lay 2,000 leagues from Banaras (now Varanasi), nevertheless attracted students from the most distant provinces. The *Puranas* represent the Gandhara princes as the descendants of Druhyu. Kamboja is constantly associated with

Gandhara in literature and inscriptions. Like Gandhara, it is included in the Uttarapatha, *i.e.* the far north of India. The Kambojas in the epic period had their metropolis probably at Rajpura. The *vedic* texts do not mention any king of Kamboja but they refer to a teacher named Kamboja Aupamanyava who was probably connected with this territory. The epics do mention of their kings Chandravar and Sudakshina.

An interesting account of the characteristics of the people of most of the *mahajanapadas* described above is to be found in the Karna-parva of the *Mahabharata*. Of these sixteen great kingdoms Kashi, Kosala, Anga, Magadha, Vatsa, Kuru, Panchala, Avanti, Viriji, Gandhara and Malla were in limelight. Though most of these kingdoms had monarchical constitution, there were tribal republics like Vriji, Malla, Sakya, Mauriya, Kalam and the like. The sixteen kingdoms were engaged in national strife for mastery and in the long run the monarchical kingdoms of Avanti, Vatsa, Kosala and Magadha emerged powerful.

An outline of the political vicissitudes of northern India has been given above. Considerable portion of the Deccan passed from the accession of Parikshit to Bimbisara. In the sixth century B.C., the Achaemenian dynasty of Iran extended its dominion over the northwestern parts of South Asia by conquering Afghanistan, Gandhara, Sind and western Punjab. The influence of Persian culture is evidenced from the use of Armanic Kharoshti scripts in the inscriptions. A number of literary works known as *Samhitas*, *Brahmans*, *Aranyaks*, *Upanishads* and *Vedangas* were composed which embodied the knowledge gained by the aryan in the various fields of learning. The *Vishnu Purana* mentions for the first time the name Uttarapatha for the area occupied by the aryan where Varnasramdharma was practiced. Two great epics, *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, were composed during this period. The cultural front of the country also flourished to a great extent during this period. Dravidian culture in the Indus valley preceded the Aryan culture. It was the latter culture which spread all over Uttarapatha and influenced that of the Dakshinapatha in later ages.

In the period of Bimbisara, the region of Magadh kingdom pulsated with intellectual and spiritual activities. Two of the greatest philosophers and saints, Gautama Buddha and Vardhamana Mahabir were born, lived and preached new religions, Buddhism and Jainism respectively. There were a number of internationally famous educational centres like Vikramsila, Nalanda, Takshasila and Sarnath. A tradition of mystical teachings grew up, one that had a profound effect on Indian religion.

From the above description, it is apparent that the regions were either well quite distinct with the help of physical features such as river, range and valleys; or developed around important

cities or group of cities. Over the years these regions have developed their own character, identity and culture; and subsequently supported certain religious practices. Further, in addition, the spiritual experiences are the essence of all religions. Moreover, the importance of religions on cultural life of a nation is very great in developing philosophy, literature, architecture, painting, sculpture and music.

The flourishing period of the sixteen *mahajanapadas* ended in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. The history of the succeeding age is a story of the absorption of these states into a number of powerful kingdoms, and ultimately into one empire, namely, the empire of Magadha. These sixteen autonomous kingdoms also played important role in the progress of India's civilization. The Uttara Kuru became famous for national prosperity; the Madras and Kathas distinguished themselves for learning; the Kshudrakas and Malavya became famous for bravery; the Vrishnis and Andhakas earned fame for political wisdom and spirit of independence; the Vrijis were renowned for power; the Sakyas became most distinguished for philosophical knowledge, social equality and for law. These states made some indelible stamp on the national life and culture of India. Their imprints still persist over the national scene.

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## **Recent Attempts for Regionalization**

During the mid of last century, several attempts were made to identify different regions and their hierarchical arrangements. There were Indian and foreign geo-scientists who made valuable contributions. However, in their schemes, there was reflections of their affiliations and expertise. Ahmad (1941), Chhibber (1945), Pithawalla (1948), Chatterjee (1962), Rafiullah (1967), Sen Gupta and Galina Sdasyuk (1968) and Singh (1971) gave varied emphasis on geological, physical and cultural factors in working out regional schemes for India. Chhibber in his book on *Physical Basis of Geography of India* included Pakistan and partly Burma (now Myanmar). According to him Topography is result of continued geological observations. Chatterjee's attempt has been reflected in the *National Atlas of*

*India* (Plate 41). He divided Indian physiographically into seven divisions, twenty subdivisions and 59 provinces. However, in his latter work, he also included physiographic, climatic, demographic and economic conditions. He identified economic regions and natural regions as well. Further, he also integrated historical and cultural factors with physical regions. His order regions were primarily based on geology and physiography; while for the lower order regions, he depended on economic and cultural features. Singh also followed similar principles in identifying regions. He also gave due importance to historical and cultural factors as well. Furthermore, the Registrar General of India also identified different regions based on population features.

As mentioned earlier, the scholars from abroad were also attracted in the regionalization of India. The earliest known contribution is by Kiepert Henery, a German cartographer who prepared *A Map of Ancient India* in 1853. He identified different regions considering physiography and drainage. Other foreign geographers who contributed to this field were Spate (1948, 1957) and Stamp (1967). They also presented their understanding about the regions of India. Hence, regionalization of India appealed scholars within the country and abroad.

## **Conclusion**

From the above description, it is apparent that the regions were either well defined with the help of physical features such as river, range and valleys; or developed around important cities or group of cities. Over the years these regions have developed their own character, identity and culture; and subsequently supported certain religious practices. Spiritual experience is the essence of all religions. Moreover, the importance of religions on cultural life of a nation is very great in developing philosophy, literature, architecture, painting, sculpture and music. These sixteen autonomous kingdoms also played important role in the progress of India's civilization. These territories or states made some indelible impression on the national life and culture of India. Since time immemorial, there are reflections of the combination of physical and cultural factors in recognizing these regions. However, emphasis may vary over time and for different purposes. Such combinations can be gathered even from varying sources ranging from ancient Indian literature to modern cartography and statistical information.

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