Chapter 3

Evolution of The Regional Concept

It is probably too much to claim that the region or regional treatment of geographical phenomena is the heart of modern geography. Regional bias becomes quite evident even in the works of the masters - Ptolemy, Munster, Strabo, Varenius, Pinkerton, Malte-Brun, Carl Ritter and others. Ptolemy called Regional Geography "Chorography". Munster and Strabo described the countries of the world, their features, products as also the manners and customs of their people. Varenius divided the subject matter of geography into - (a) General Geography dealing with the Earth as a unit, and (b) Special Geography, or the description of the countries. He was also of the opinion that general world principles should be applied in such descriptions. It was here that Varenius was almost modern in conception in defining the scope and relations of geography. In fact, his was the first statement to be found in the works of early geographers, which foreshadow the scientific method of Modern Regional Geography. In the works of Pinkerton and Malte-Brun, Special Geography was approached through the application of general laws, describing the earth under the heads of celestial, terrestrial and human phenomena - an unsystematic encyclopaedic description of countries.

Carl Ritter in his "Erkunde" subdivided each continent into units or regions. His method of descriptions of these units was teleological and not based on scientific principles. Moreover, his descriptions were not systematized nor had they any correlation
between human phenomena and natural conditions. Ritter further developed the principle of coordination and established the concept of regional treatment. He first promulgated a systematic treatment of distinct regions of the earth, viewed as parts of a whole, that is, the continents based on the inter-relations of Man and Nature. He also writes of Geography that "it is to use the whole circle of sciences, to illustrate its own individuality, not to exhibit their peculiarities. It must make them all give a portion, not the whole, and yet must keep itself single and clear". Here Ritter rightly gives the keynote to the modern concept of Geography.

In another of his books entitled "Comparative Geography", Ritter affords a new approach to regional description as distinct from the usual modern method of dealing with political units. His system of regional division proceeding from the colder and less favoured to the warmer and richer regions, taking into consideration the physical conditions, people, as well as the historical development and present conditions. Sound general principles should come before regional description. For a detailed treatment of a country, Ritter was of the opinion that there should be divisions other than political divisions and these broad and fundamental concepts of his are of great utility to future geographers.

Humboldt could be considered the father of modern geography. In his works on Central Asia, Mexico, the Llanos, and in his distribution of plants, he applied the regional method of description with excellent results. He also made a comparative study of terrestrial phenomena and showed the inter-dependence of them all. Thus Humboldt served modern geography where Ritter failed, though the former did not suggest any regional divisions. In fact,
Humboldt laid the foundations of systematic regional descriptions and suggested a comparative study of like forms and regions on the earth's surface. Ritter visualized the Regional Concept but failed to apply it.

This brings us to the end of the 18th century when no further progress was made. It is interesting to note here that up to this time, British geographers were still playing with the term "Special Geography" though one of their prominent pioneers suggested "Chorography" as the most suitable term for the detailed description of the parts of the earth.

Special, or as it is now termed Regional, Geography, is the product of the twentieth century. The Regional Concept was the result of systematization, reasoned synthetic description and the correlation of physical and human facts. With the collection, systematization and cartographic representation of the distribution of natural phenomena on the earth's surface - winds, temperature, pressure, vegetation, cultivated products etc. and with the refinement of the conception of the exact scope and aim of geography, came the development and nature of the modern Regional Method.

1. FRANCE: France is the home of the Regional movement. The Regional Concept received its first expression in France in the 18th century. It was Buache who gave systematic expression to it. Up to this time, as elsewhere in the world, geographical description was based on political units. Buache's theory opened up a new chapter in that political divisions were discarded and river basins were adopted for the purpose of geographical description. Buache's theory assumed that mountain ranges, or relatively high lands bordered every basin.
Later, Dufranoy and De Beaumont proved the fallacy of Buache's theory. To quote Gallois, "The geological lines which determine the forms of the rocks define, as it were, the skeleton of a country, while the hydrographic lines only represent its purely external traits, which, on the same surface, change with time. Moreover, "river valleys are only isolated furrows whereas the general modelling of the relief of the earth is linked with geological features."

To the disappointment of the critics of Buache, this criticism "found no echo", for it was far ahead of its time.

Modern Regional Geography had its founder in Vidal de la Blache, who in 1905 published his model, "Tableau de la Geographie de la France". Vidal de la Blache with his ardent pupil, Lucien Gallois, who published his "Regions naturelles et noms de pays: Etude de la Region Parisienna" (1906) laid the foundation of Modern Geography and paved the way for systematic regional thought. With them started the French School of Modern Geography with regional study as its kernel.

Demangeon - Picardie (1905), Blanchard-Flanders (1906), Vallaux-la Basse Bretagne (1907), J. Sein-Les Paysans de la Normandie Orientale (1909), Levaunville-Le Morvan (1909) - these echoed the thought of La Blache and championed his regional method as evidenced by the numerous monographs and communications in "Annales de Geographie". Brunhes is another stalwart of La Blache's school of Modern Geography. In his "Human Geography", he advocated and practised the Regional Method. Demangeon writing an appreciation of La Blache's regional method says, "Every region has its unique character to which contribute the features of the soil, atmosphere, plants, and man. The aim of all research consists of the analysis of these features. The aim of description is
to synthesize them, and to show the interlocking of all the phenomena which comprise the regional types*. Gallois, in his regional division of the Paris Basin is of the opinion that a region must have "une impression d'ensemble*. According to him, "Climate, altitude and structure should be considered in regional delimitation, and a region so defined will be a "natural" region since it is based on natural features*. Gallois maintains that climatic variations are only marked over large areas of the earth's surface while structural variations occur frequently over small areas giving rise to distinct local contrasts of land-form and vegetation. Hence, structure should be the main criterion in defining small units e.g. the subdivisions of the Paris Basin.

2. GERMANY: During the last years of the 19th century, there was little development in Regional study in Germany. The Central Commission on the Regional Geography of Germany, which was established in 1886, encouraged the preparation of monographs under the title of "Forschungen zur deutschen Landes- und Völkerkunde", edited by Lehmann, and later by A. Kirchhoff. The last named also edited the "Länderkunde von Europa" from 1887 to 1893 to which contributions were made by Pank, Supan, Fischer and Lehmann. The German School differed from the French School in regional identification and method of treatment. The German studies lacked the synthetic approach which characterized the French School especially in the treatment of human adjustment to environment. Some striking examples of such attitudes are as follows:

1. 'The towns of the North German Plain, in relation to the configuration of the land' by Dr. Hahn.

2. 'The Plain of the Upper Rhine and its neighbouring mountains' by R. Lepsius.
It was Penck in his 'Morphologie der Erdoberfläche' who first drew attention to land units with similarity in land forms. He identified regions in terms of 'Landschaft' topographic form and wrote of regions or landscapes of morainic areas, dune regions, and volcanic regions under the German term 'Moranelandschaft'.

In the early part of the present century, Alfred Hettner who belongs to the modern school of German Geographers suggested a scheme for the division of the world into its component natural regions according to topographic form. In his articles on 'The Division of the lands' in the 'Geographische Zeitschrift' (Leipzig) in 1906, Hettner emphasizes that there are regions of varying orders - Landschaften, Lands, and Erdteile, which are quite distinct and which require progressive arrangement according to human factors. He first divided the earth into land and water units. Land was further divided into continents and islands. Islands were classed as oceanic and continental and the latter type were grouped with the continents. Finally, each continent was further subdivided taking position, climate, and structure into consideration.

Hettner's division of Asia into five major natural regions with further subdivisions given below will serve to illustrate the method of his scheme:

1. Northern Siberia - (a) Western Siberia
   (b) Eastern Siberia

II. The Near East - (a) Oral - Caspian Depression
    (b) Fold mountains, and from Asia minor to Iran.
    (c) Syrian - Arabian
Hettner's valuable contribution was largely responsible for marked developments in this field among German Geographers. Of these, one of the most outstanding is Professor Passarge of Hamburg both for his original methods and wide publications. The German term 'Landschaft' which means 'Landscape' though still retained by geographers was, accepted to be equivalent to 'Environment' and finally to 'Region' as the nearest equivalent in the sense of a definite area of the Earth's surface including natural phenomena as well as the works of Man and Man himself. Passarge holds that the unit of geographical study is the 'Landschaft' - an area with a characteristic grouping of phenomena. The size of the Landschaft may vary but the criterion will be unity of relief or drainage conditions. In the determination of the regions, Passarge takes into account only the physical characteristics excluding climate and natural vegetation. Professor Carl Troll writing in the new periodical 'Stadium Generale' (April 1950), includes a discussion on nomenclature distinguishing between regional and comparative geography. According to this great geographer, continents can be divided into world climatic belts which again can be further subdivided from consideration of build, relief, soil, and hydrology, till eventually a small unit is reached which is impracticable to
subdivide and which is found occurring in association with others to form a Landschaft. These small units Passarge calls 'Okotop' or cells which occur in characteristic associations with a clear distribution pattern. The 'Okotop' are harmonious structures which can only be understood as a whole and from the relations of their composite elements. Thus we see that in the German School, emphasis on natural landscapes relegating the human factor to a secondary position became the special, rather novel, feature of geographic studies.

3. GREAT BRITAIN: British Geographers will probably be the first to claim that the Regional Concept is a distinct contribution of the geographers of the world. Britain, however, is second to France or Germany with respect to original contributions to regional thought or concept. Of course, Britain had her thought-provoking masters like, Mackinder, Chisholm, Mill, Herbertson, Roxby, Lyde, Uistead, Geddes, Fawcett and Taylor. One should look to the pioneers like Mill, Mackinder and Roxby who drew upon German and French sources for their chief inspiration at the close of the last century. Mill suggested a scheme for the study of a small area in the southwest of Sussex on the same lines as the geological reports in the Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales. Mackinder adopted the same procedure but it was mostly used by students for dissertation work.

In the beginning of the present century, Professor A.J. Herbertson prepared a scheme for the division of the world based on general climatic distributions - a concept and elaboration of a world scheme of natural environments or regions. His famous paper "The Major Natural Regions" published in the Geography Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, London, (Volume 25 - 1905), remains to this day as a significant landmark in the field of general
geography as well as one of the most fruitful and constructive achievements in the development of Modern Geography. Herbertson classified the world into Natural Regions as under:— (See Map No. I).

1. **POLAR REGIONS**
   (a) Lowlands (Tundra)
   (b) Highlands or Ice Caps (Greenland)

2. **COOL TEMPERATE REGIONS**
   (a) Western margin or West European Type
   (b) Eastern margin or St. Lawrence Type
   (c) Interior Lowlands or Siberian Type
   (d) Interior highlands or Altai Type

3. **WARM TEMPERATE REGIONS**
   (a) Western margin or Mediterranean Type
   (b) Eastern margin with summer rains or China Type
   (c) Interior Lowlands or Turan Type
   (d) Persian or Iran Type

4. **HOT REGIONS — TROPICAL**
   (a) Western Desert or Sahara Type
   (b) Monsoon Summer rain Type
   (c) Summer rain type of interior or Sudan Type

5. **LOFTY TROPICAL OR SUBTROPICAL MOUNTAINS**
   (a) Tibetan Type

6. **EQUATORIAL TYPE**
   (a) Wet Equatorial Lowlands or Amazon Type.

In the words of Professor Instead, "The idea of Natural Regions was not a new one but Herbertson stated it more precisely than had hitherto been done and by establishing the types of regions, introduced the comparative method."

Thus we find that so far there were two schemes for the division of the world into its component natural regions on the basis of physical criteria by two Schools of Geography almost independently — one by Hettner on behalf of the German School who took the Continents as the basis, and the other by Herbertson who
took the world as the basis, the latter, namely, the world view, and the grouping of regions with similar environments, being more acceptable.

Roxby's treatment of the 'Historical Geography of East Anglia', (Geographical Teacher 1807-08), is a typical example of regional study comparable to French contributions. He defines a natural region as an area throughout which a particular set of physical conditions will lead to a particular type of economic life. Professor Roxby rightly stresses on the importance of space relations (vide "The Theory of Natural Regions", by Roxby, in the Geographical Teacher, 1926). He writes, "It is the comprehensive study of the region and of inter-regional relations, which gives unity and distinctiveness to Geographical investigation, and the region so conceived may be compared to an organism, at least as implying a complex entity made up of a particular integration of different elements, physical, biological and human".

F.G. Umstead also expounded the theory of natural regions. His division of the world into natural environments was similar to Herbertson's. Like Roxby, he was of the opinion that major natural regions should combine a distinctive association of intrinsic conditions with a definite set of space relations, the smaller the units the narrower the basis of differentiation. Later he suggested a synthetic method of delineating regions which should take into account the physical and human elements. According to Umstead, 'A natural region should have a certain unity of configuration, climate and vegetation'. Consulting maps of those days, (1910, 1911 etc.) one would find that they were compiled taking relief and climate as the important considerations. Other factors, e.g. natural resources were not considered independent and of equal importance but rather the result of relief and climate.
Professor Uustead came to the following conclusions:

1. The present delimitation of natural regions is based on physical conditions whereas geographical regions should correlate human and physical factors.

2. Geographical units should be obtained as far as possible by considering the synthetic effect of various analysed elements including isotherms, isohyets, etc.

3. Geographical units should be determined as areas having common predominant characteristics in which all features both major and minor are recorded accurately as well as quantitatively.

4. The method hitherto adopted analyses the world into large divisions but it had been proposed that the procedure should be synthetic by building up larger regions from smaller ones.

The contributions of Professors Fleure and Fawcett have opened up new angles of visions. Fleure emphasized on the aspect of action and inter-action between Man and his Environment.

Fleure's concept of human life in response to similar natural conditions (Scottish Geographic Magazine 1919) is indeed a valuable contribution to Human geography. Regions of Debilitation (Equatorial Forests), Regions of Effort (Lowlands of Northwest Europe), Regions of Increment (fertile sections of the Mediterranean), and Regions of Wandering (Grasslands of Asia) are some of the human regions after Fleure.

In the American periodical 'Economic Geography', Professor C.B. Fawcett worked out agricultural regions of different orders for each continent — a boon to the study of Economic Geography. In the case of England and Wales, he worked on city regions, that is, "regions within which one great city dominates economic, social and administrative activities". It is claimed that these city regions should serve as a more rational basis for the re-organisation of administrative areas.
4. **U.S.A.** American geographers and other specialists have given the Regional Concept serious thought and investigation. In fact, the Regional Concept appears to have ingrained itself in American society. Regionalism is considered as a substitute for sectionalism. A region is considered as a tool for American development and the world must be divided into areas which represent the land as Man sees fit to use it. Whilst recognizing regions of several orders on the basis of different phenomena, the U.S.A. has been divided into physiographic regions, Regions of human activities, etc. Fenneman's Physiographic Regions, Marbet's Soil Provinces, and Strong's Cultural Regions are too well known to need special mention. Clark University, through its Geographical Department, by means of its Quarterly Economic Geography is playing an outstanding role in the development of regional thought in America. Professor J. Rusell Smith's division of North America into 'Human-use' regions and the recognition of the cultural and 'endemic' regions like California, the South, the Northeast, the Middle West, etc. have really opened up new phases in Regional thought. The phrase 'Cultural Landscape' is probably nowhere so current in Regional thought as in the U.S.A., and this is in alignment with the modern concept of geography. Both geographers as well as Sociologists in the U.S.A., the latter especially under the leadership of Professor Odum, have contributed to the development of the regional thought. The Sesqui-centennial Publication (1945) by the University of Carolina (edited by Professors Odum and Jocher) and the contributions in 'Social Forces', bear testimony to the part that is being played by the
American Sociologists in the sphere of Regionalism.

Thus we see, that though geographers do not claim for their discipline exclusive rights to the Regional Concept, yet they are in general agreement that regional study is an essential part of their craft. In geography, the subject of investigation and presentation is the areal differentiation of the face of the earth: In other words, geographers are Area specialists, and this, of course, is reflected throughout geography curricula and articles in geography journals, though as we have seen (above), some of the best known works in regionalism in recent years, seem to have been written by non-geographers.