Geography of Land and its Influence

The most civilized man has become, the more he is able to utilize and develop the national resources of the region in which he lives, and the less he is limited by the disadvantages of his environment. He can overcome many natural disadvantages such as the lack of water by irrigation schemes, marshy land by drainage and the prevalence of disease by medical knowledge etc. He no longer relies entirely on local supplies of food and raw materials, but through the development of trade and commerce has access to the vast resources of the whole world.¹

Geographical facts influence the course of history.² History is thus unintelligible without reference to geography. No one will disagree however firmly he may believe in free will that destinies of man are to a large extent determined by environment.³

It was in search of this India that the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the French and the English, and their famous captains - Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Magellan, and cook-braved the dangers of the unknown seas and faced the hardships of unfamiliar climes. For this India the poets of England dreamed and sung. Milton had in his mind when he spoke of

"... the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her Kings barbaric pearl and gold".
Or when Shakespeare praised his Rosalind,
"From the east to western Ind
No jewel is like Rosalind".
Or when Christopher Marlowe said,
"I'll have them fly of India for gold
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl".

To arrive a full understanding of the history of a country the character
of its people, the growth of its institution and civilization it is necessary to
prepare the background of the geography.

In no country in the world has geographical position, relatively to
surrounding continents and seas, shaped the history and the destinies of the
people more surely than in India. General wavel has rightly remarked
keeping the Geostatellite in mind that geography of a land determines the
course of battle.

India both on this side and beyond the Ganges was known even to the
ancients, especially after the time of Alexander the great as is shown by the
historians and his exploits composed by illustrious writer’s Pliny, who
studied many of those histories which are now no longer extent, writes that
the land inhabited by the Indian race begins from the mountains of Emodus
and is bounded not only by that sea which lies towards the west but also by
the southern ocean, which he calls the Indian ocean. He also says that the
part of India which directly faces the east measures in all including
indentations 1875 miles, while in the south, according to Eratosthenes the
coast measures 2475 miles as far as the indus, which is the western boundary
of India. However he adds that a number of authors reckon the total length
of India at forty days and night voyage for a sailing vessel, while the breadth
from north to south is 2750 miles.

So far as land is concerned, its relief presents two strikingly
complementary regions. One is the vast Himalayan range of the north which
towers like a gigantic rampart over the Indo-Genetic plains, and the second
is the peninsular tableland, whose plateaus decline precipitously towards the west and subside gently into the Bay of Bengal in the east.

The Himalayas are young in age. They rose in recent geological times from the great geosynclinals Sea of Tethys and are therefore built of sedimentary strata. They are the most magnificent of the mountains of the world. They are the legislators of India's climate, the abode of eternal snow. They direct the rain-laden clouds of the monsoons over the plains and obstruct the passage of icy winds sweeping south from Siberia. Their glaciers and springs nourish the rivers which irrigate the northern plains and enrich their soil with alluvial deposits. The land through which the Sindh, the Ganga, the Brahmaputra and their tributaries flow is indeed the gift of the Himalayas.  

But the Himalayan range is but a child of yesterday compared to the Aravallis which separate Rajasthan from Malwa, and run from Gujarat in the north-eastern direction to Delhi. The Aravallis are as ancient as the earliest rocks of the earth's Crust - Achaean. Time has smoothed down their crests. They pass through a dry and rugged land where rainfall is scarce, human habitations scattered, and seminomadism prevalent.

Below the great northern plains, the land rises into uplands which extend with ups and downs to Kanya Kumari. They consist of the Vindhyan ranges and the Deccan plateaus. Both the scarps of the Vindhyas and the lavas of the Deccan go back to the Cambrian times and come down to the Cretaceous age. Naturally they are formed of sandstone, shales and gneisses. In their valleys are sheltered grass lands, acacia scrubs and wild forests.

The Western Ghats extend perpendicularly from the Vindhyas to the far south. They form the western ridge of Deccan block. They lie a thwart the path of the monsoons which move from the sea inland, and precipitate
the clouds in bursts of torrential rains. The crags on their spurs are natural
strongholds which offer perches for fortresses and castles.

The Eastern littoral is a fairly broad alluvial plain flanked by low hills
with wide gaps through which rivers lazily flow down to the sea making
deltas at their embouchures.\(^8\)

The broad northern trough between the Himalayas and the Vindhyas
was at one time an arm of the sea which has been filled up by silt brought
down from the mountains. It lies in thickness of thousands of feet over the
ancient sea bottom. Its layers are devoid of minerals, but it is abundantly
suited for agriculture. Thirty thousand square miles in area, it "is one of the
world's greatest expanses of rich, tillable soil, and thus one of the world's
greatest agricultural regions." On the other hand, peninsular India is a
storehouse of diamonds, gold, iron, coal, manganese, aluminum and other
metals; and its extremities in the east and the west - Assam and Kathiawad
harbour reservoirs of oil of unknown magnitude.\(^9\)

India has four major basins with their river systems - the Panjab where
the river Indus and its feeders flow from east to west; the Genetic trough
which inclines from west to east and carries the waters of the Ganga and its
affluents; the Central Uplands which are drained westward into the Arabian
Sea by the Narbada and the Tapti systems; and the Deccan whose rivers rise
in the Western Ghats and debouch eastwards into the Bay of Bengal:

\[ गंगा यमुने चैव गोदाबरी सरस्वती।

नरमि सिन्धु कावेरि तीर्थेःस्मिनस्थिनिधिः कुरु।। \]

Each one of these riverine tracts has been the cradle of people and
principalities which have played their parts on the stage of Indian history.