

A **cultural realm** is an area in which numerous artifacts or cultural complexes are adhered to by most of the population. The term cultural realm signifies a large area that has fundamental unity in the composition, arrangement, and integration of significant traits, which distinguishes it from other cultural realms. Cultural realms are in fact macro-regions, which are defined on the basis of the most dominant cultural traits.

A **cultural hearth** is a source area where a culture complex has become so well established and advanced that its attributes are passed to future generations within and outside the immediate hearth area. Historically, cultural hearths were repositories of human traditions, where cultural traditions became stabilised and in which the human way of living defined the standard of what human living ought to be. Out of these hearths, rules of living, technologies, traditions, and human systems spread to other territories. Examples of major historically important cultural hearths are the *Mesopotamia* (Tigris-Euphrates rivers) in Iraq, the *Nile Valley* in Egypt, the *Indus Valley* in South Asia, the *Hwang Ho (Yellow River) Valley* in China. Examples of secondary cultural hearth are the *Mayan civilization* (northern Central America and Southern Mexico), the *Aztec* (Central Mexico), the *Inca* (developed during 1500 B. C. in the middle Andean Mountain areas in Peru and Bolivia) and the *Bantu* developed in West Africa.

SAQ 4

Define cultural region

8.6 CULTURAL REGION: MEANING, TYPES, ORIGIN, FORMATION AND PERSISTANCE

A cultural region is an area occupied by people who share one or more cultural traits in common (language, religion, idea, material culture); or a spatial unit that functions politically, socially, technologically or economically as a distinct entity, or an area perceived by its inhabitants to be culturally distinct from its surrounding areas.

From above definition, three types of cultural regions can be identified – formal, functional and vernacular. A **formal cultural region** is a region inhabited by people who have one or more cultural traits in common (e.g. linguistic region). Formal cultural regions are characterised by cultural homogeneity in a given contiguous geographical area. Cultural geographers delimit formal cultural region by grouping people with similar cultural traits in a defined area. Cultural regionalisation is a tool cultural geographers use to describe spatial differences/variations in cultural traits. For example, an Oriya-language cultural region can be drawn on a map of India showing the distribution of speakers of different languages, and it would include the area where Oriya is spoken. An example of coconut farming region would describe the parts of India where coconut is a major crop. Nirmal Kumar

Bose (1956), the famous anthropo-geographer based various material cultural traits to divide India into 18 cultural zones in India. These cultural regions are simplest levels of cultural regions based on single cultural trait. Cultural regions can be delimited on the bases of multiple related cultural traits or complex as well.

Functional cultural region, on the other hand, is a region that functions politically, socially, or culturally as a unit (e.g. district headquarters, zone of influence of a city, a temple, a factory). Functional cultural regions are based on nodes and their linkages with surroundings.

The **vernacular or perceptual cultural region** is a region perceived to exist by its inhabitants (based in the collective spatial perception/feelings of the population at large), as evidenced by the widespread acceptance and use of a regional names and nicknames. Examples of vernacular cultural region are *Shekhawati* region in Rajasthan and *Braj* region in Western Uttar Pradesh.

To understand the origin, formation and persistence of cultural region, we need to consider three characteristics traits of human beings, i.e., *biological*, *ecological* and *social*. Humans' biological traits (i.e., sensory organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin) fulfill his requirements of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Historically, these organs together influenced behaviours and habits of human beings and their methods of interaction with the environment.

Ecological environment also influences people's culture. In the process of adapting themselves to the natural environment and establishing harmony or hegemony with it, human beings develop cultural traits. It should be noted that human's biological traits have remained more or less unchanged for a long time. In contrast, culture has always been evolving. It could be attributed to abilities of human beings to innovate new things in order to adjust themselves to the changing ecological environments of the earth.

As a social animal, human beings possess social and intellectual traits. They interact with fellow human beings. Living in social group, they develop distinct language, literature, art, beliefs, style, ideologies and symbols. Human beings have capacity to learn and invent new things to meet the needs and requirements of individuals and groups. Human beings have remarkable abilities to form splendid ideas out of their experiences and then act on the basis of these ideas. They can change not only physical environments; but they can knowingly change them in directions suggested by their experiences. It is primarily due to their social and intellectual abilities that human beings have reached present stage of cultural evolution by passing through the gathering, hunting and agricultural stages.

Cultural regions originate due to interaction of people (living in specific area) with specific social and intellectual traits with their surroundings. When people with particular social and intellectual traits inhabit a geographically distinct region for a long time, they develop their own distinct cultural traits and complexes. A new trait, such as irrigated

agriculture or plough, might be invented by people living in an area, and this could lead to increase crop yield and permanent settlement.

When particular cultural traits or cultural complexes are distributed consistently over a well defined part of the earth's surface, they take the form of a cultural region. Cultural region is also formed around a functional node or centre, such as a city or a temple. A cultural region may also come into existence when people living in a contiguous area feel that they are culturally different from their surrounding areas. It should be noted that the distinctiveness of that cultural region comes from geographical environment or social and intellectual traits of the people or combination of both.

As mentioned above, cultural regions originate in specific geographical environments due to interaction between physical environment and people. River valleys have provided fertile grounds for the development of cultural hearth. For example, cities first originated in river valleys of the world, such as in Indus river valley (South Asia), Huang Ho valley (China), Nile river valley (Egypt) and Tigris and Euphrates river valleys (Mesopotamia). Other geographical regions, such as mountain valleys, plateau and island, have also witnessed development of cultural hearths. For example, the first farming villages were on the hill side above the river flood plain. Similarly, early civilizations blossomed in mountains and plateau as well, such as in Meso America (Mayan civilization), Mexico (Aztec civilization) and Peru and Bolivia (Inca civilization).

Cultural regions are not permanent. Their regional boundaries keep on either expanding or contracting. But some cultural regions may persist for long while others only for short time. A cultural region persists due to long period of persistent isolation or relative isolation. The isolation is created due to geographical or political barriers. Today, many minority and ethnic groups are struggling to preserve their established ways of life due to globalisation.

SAQ 5

What are the three different types of cultural regions?

8.7 PROBLEMS OF DELIMITATION OF CULTURAL REGIONS OF THE WORLD

According to Broek and Webb (1967), any division of the earth, including the division of the earth into cultural regions, involves following decisions:

1. *Criteria* – what criterion or criteria to be employed for defining cultural regions?
2. *Dateline* – because cultural regions are dynamic, what date is to be used for delimiting cultural regions?