

Topography Influencing Culture

Nilakshi Kayal

Undergraduate Student of Presidency University, Kolkata
E-mail: blue.nila9@gmail.com

Abstract—Ever wondered how saffron became a speciality of Kashmiri cuisine? Why do traditional dressing of Rajasthani men is white kurta and dhoti with multi-coloured turban? Why is Baisakhi festival so popular and important in Punjab? Many such questions often make us curious bringing lot of question in our mind. These all are due to numerous cultural practices that exists in India .

When we discuss about a civilization or modern day society, we focus on its culture. Every society reflects its own culture. And on the basis of its cultural traits we are able to have knowledge about the social and cultural attributes of that particular area. This includes- lifestyle, language, food habit (cuisine), attire (dressing and ornaments), ritual and customs, festivals, communication and interaction pattern, occupation and economy, and many more. And in all these, topography is intensely related, along with location and climatic characteristics of that place.

Different types of geographical feature forms a distinctive landscape. Mountain range, coastal plain, plateau, river valley, desert, and several other topographical features have its own exclusive characteristic. These features of topography, not only inherits physical features but are also influential to the social structure of that area.

Carl O. Sauer, an American geographer, defined- "The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result."

India is a country with huge geographical diversity. This variety in India's topography resulted in the formation of numerous cultural groups or community. Topography being so influential is intensely related to cultural geography of a place. Thus it is about how the geographical diversity gives rise to cultural diversity.

Introduction

There are numerous factors that determine a typical set of characteristics that an area will inherit. For instance Coastal area inherits equable type of climate, Thar desert and Rann of Kutch have arid climate, Northern Himalayan belt have mountainous climate, etc.

Kesar of Kashmir Valley

From Himalayan climatic zone, a popular cultural group is of Kashmir Valley. And one of its speciality is frequent use of "Kesar"(Saffron) in its cuisine. But the origin of Kesar has an

interesting past which initiated with long and extremely complex geomorphic phenomenon. During Pleistocene ice-age cycle, Kashmir experienced four distinct glaciations with three interglacial stages. This cycle led to advance and retreat of ice multiple times, which ultimately resulted in the formation of plateau like river terraces called "Karewas". These Karewas have highly fertile soil with unique texture. They are in great abundance along the basin of river Jhelum. And near Pampur(Pampore) region along the Jhelum basin, the flower "kang posh" is cultivated on these karewas. The dried stigma of these flowers are the kesar, which is one of the costliest spice and famous around the globe for its unique essence. It is used in several Kashmiri dishes like Modur pulav, Zafrani pulav, Gustaba, etc. Along with Kashmir, kesar is also an important spice in many other Indian cuisine as well. Apart from cuisine, kesar is used in several rituals not only by adding in food also by applying on skin. This is due to its health beneficial values and colour adding quality.

All these are just because of the initially occurred geographical phenomenon, which eventually through complex processes created such topography leading to growth of "Kang Posh" flower and giving Kesar as a product(stigma).

Western Rajasthan and its Fashion

Rajasthan and its alluring beauty is known to all for its cultural heritage as well as royalty. If just observed in the Western Rajasthan, the region alone itself reflects several cultural traits. One of which is famous colourful Rajasthani costumes. Though the common daily attires of men is most of the western villages are white "angarkhi"(type of shirt) of fine cotton with dhoti and multi-coloured turban. It has been in their cultural practice since a long duration, but if we really look into it, we will find it is due to direct impact of climate and landscape on them. The harsh arid climate of this region has very high temperature during daytime. So wearing light coloured(preferably white) angarkhi, made of cotton became necessary to reflect heat (while dark colour absorbs more heat). And if scientifically observed then these turbans are not only important culturally but also protects Rajasthani men from the direct scorching heat of sun. The outgoing men are more prone to heat strokes as they stay under the sun more often and for longer duration compared to women, for

working purposes. So their turban acts like a shield to restrict sun rays. Thus can be said cultural practices designed to cope up with geographical pattern of the place.

Food habits and Bengalis

Language is one of the most basic component of a culture. It plays a major role in determination of a cultural group. Thus there is to discuss about Bengali community, as bengali is the second most widely spoken language in India (after Hindi). This community is known for its typical rice and fish eating culture and habit of taking afternoon nap.

The soil in this region is fertile alluvial type, and this region experiences high rainfall which supports paddy cultivation, leading to production of rice, jute etc. With these, supply of fish is easily available in this region from river Ganges(Hooghly), Sunderban region, East Calcutta Wetlands (for the capital) and local ponds in many places. The temperature in most the months are very hot and humid especially in South Bengal where most of the population resides. So prevailing of this type of temperature causes heavy sweating, which makes people lethargic and tired easily.

On the other hand staple food of Bengalis is rice, which contains high amount of carbohydrates in complex form. This not only takes time to metabolize but also makes people feel sleepy, generating the need of afternoon nap just after lunch. And thus inducing these habits as a nature among Bengali community.

Agriculture and Culture

North-Western India is famous for its agricultural advancement. During winter, the Mediterranean sea develops cyclone over it while it is high pressure in the North-Western parts of India. So due to low pressure in the Mediterranean region, the originated jet stream travel towards high pressure zone of North-Western India through Western Asia. These moisture carrying winds causes rainfall after reaching this area (phenomenon known as western disturbances). Though termed as disturbances, it has immense importance on agricultural. It helps the rabi crops to grow. And thus people belonging to Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh celebrates the Lohri festival during the coldest days of January just before harvesting the crops. Followed by this, there is the "Baisakhi" festival of this region which is the famous harvesting festival celebrated during the 13th day of april. It is a festival of Punjabi New year. It has also religious significance along with cultural. It is celebrated when the crops are ready to be harvested.

These are basically thanksgiving festival where people thanks god for the prosperous growth of their crops. These festivals are so important to this cultural group as most of their occupation is agriculture. This region of India is agriculturally most developed and produces largest amount of wheat, along with sugarcane, barley, maize, etc every year.

Both of these harvested festivals are celebrated wearing traditional costumes, and performing folk songs and dances (Bhangra,Giddah) which causes social gathering.

Other such harvesting festivals popular among different parts of India are: Bhogali Bihu in Assam, Nuakhai in Western Odisha, Nabanna in West Bengal, Onam in Kerala, Pongal in Tamil Nadu.

River Island and its Uniqueness

When we look into the map of India, will find few places which are totally unique. The geomorphology of such places are not only rare but are also less known. One such place is the Ganga Sagar island, popularly known as the Sagar Dwip. It is the largest river island located near the mouth of river Ganga, where it enters the Bay of Bengal. It belongs to the district of South 24 Parganas of West Bengal. It has religious importance among hindus (from mythological perspective it was the residing place of Kapil Muni who is the reason for bringing river Ganga at this place, and has a long background story with it) and thus this place is a pilgrim to many believers. The visitors come to this place as they believe taking a bath in the river Ganga flowing at this region particularly on the day of Makar Sankranti festival, will purify their soul and help them to get rid of all the sins they have committed. The uniqueness of this place is the collision of river and sea water, producing high velocity waves striking the island. Due to this phenomenon; visitors believes that the place is also having supernatural power. Due to which tourism is one of the major source of income for people living here. Otherwise this place is highly disturbed by several natural disasters. Being located in one of the most uncertain region, the edges of the island faces lots of erosional activities. Apart from this, it is prone to tropical cyclones, floods, eventually leading to salinization of many parts hampering agriculture. This way the geographical features of this region is destructive but is also the reason of sustaining there backed by its cultural practices.

References

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