

GEOGRAPHY OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

India is a land of diversities in the planet earth. Geography of India is an essential subject to be studied by every citizen of the country. As a nation, India occupies a significant position in the world. It is a country known for its unique culture, history, heritage, natural resources and human capital. Each part of India is unique in its geography, culture, language and socio-economic conditions.

Himachal Pradesh is one of the prominent states in India. The main objective of learning this lesson is to know about its geographic setting, people, governance and contributions in the country. Thus, in this chapter the following aspects highlighting the Indian state Himachal Pradesh are discussed in detail,

1. The physiographic setting
2. The Climate, Rainfall, Land cover and Religions
3. The Administrative divisions, Population and Education
4. Geology, Economic Resources and Contributors
5. Culture, History, Tourism and unique features of the state as a whole.

The State's Capital is Shimla. Snow Leopard is declared as the State animal and Western Tragopan(jujurana) is the State Bird and it is also referred to as 'the King of Birds'. The State Flower is Pink Rhododendron and Hindi is the official language.

The physiographic setting:

The state of Himachal Pradesh known for its natural beauty has boundaries with the Jammu and Kashmir in the North, Uttar Pradesh in the Southeast, China on east, Haryana in the South and Punjab in the West. The mountainous state has altitudes ranging from 350 to 7000 meters above the sea level.

Physiographically, the state is part of the Himalayan system. From south to north it can be topographically divided into three zones:

- The Siwaliks or outer Himalayas
- Inner Himalayas or mid-mountains, and

- Alpine zone or the greater Himalayas.

The lower hills of Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Bilaspur and the lower parts of Mandi, Solan and Sirmaur districts are part of the Siwalik range. The altitude of this zone varies from 350 meters to 1500 meters above the mean sea level. The annual rainfall varies from 1500 mm to 1800 mm. since it is made up of consolidated deposits, which can erode easily, the zone experiences deforestation and a high rate of soil erosion. The altitude of inner Himalayas ranges between 1500 meters and 4500 meters above mean sea level. This zone includes areas such as the upper parts of Pachhad and Renuka in Sirmaur district, Chachiot and Karsog tehsil of Chamba district. The quality of soil in these areas ranges from silty loam to clay loam to dark brown colour. The greater Himalayas have an altitude of 4500 meters above mean sea level. This area comprises Kinnaur district, Pangi tehsil of Chamba district and some areas of Lahaul and Spiti.

Five perennial rivers – Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab and Yamuna – flow through the state. The river system in the Himalayas cannot be exploited for irrigation as fully as in the plains, but it is the source of water for the Indus river basin. The undulating terrain limits the utility of these rivers for irrigation.

The major spoken languages of the state include: Hindi, Punjabi, Mahasui, Kulluyi, Lahauli, Kinnauri, Chambyali, Sirmauri, Gojri (by Gujjars), Bilaspuri, Pahari, Dogri, and Kangri.

The Climate, Rainfall, Land cover and Religions:

The state of Himachal Pradesh in India is a hilly region and it experiences a pleasant Climate throughout the year. It even experiences heavy snow fall during the winter months. The weather of Himachal alters with the 'change of altitude'. The temperature of Himachal Pradesh is also highly dependent on altitude and because of this the climatic conditions vary from semi - tropical to semi - arctic. Based on this the state can be divided into five zones based on altitudes and moisture regime conditions.

The region generally experiences three seasons. The winter season spans from October to February. The summer months in Himachal are the months of March to June. By July the rainy season starts in the hilly region and it ends in September. In the winter months, some parts of Himachal experiences heavy snow fall. It occurs generally in the months of December to March. The days and nights during this time of the year become very cold. The average temperature in the summer months varies from 22 degrees to 37 degree Celsius. The temperature in winter month varies from 0 degree to 15 degree Celsius.

Himachal Pradesh becomes very beautiful after the rainy season. The landscape of the place becomes lush green. But heavy rains often cause floods and landslides causing destruction to life and property. The highest amount of rainfall that has been recorded in Dharmasala is 3400 mm. The annual rainfall of Himachal Pradesh is 2909 to 3800 mm.

Land Area:

The geographic area of the state is about 55,673 km² of which the forest cover alone is about 37,033 km².

Himachal Pradesh has a majority of Hindus (95.4%), though the northern parts bordering Tibet have a strong Buddhist influence. The people of Lahaul-Spiti practice Tibetan Buddhism, while tribals in Kinnaur follow a mixture of Hinduism and Buddhism. There is also a small minority of Sikhs, Muslims and Christians in various parts of the state.

The Administrative Divisions, Population and Education:

The administrative divisions of the state includes 12 districts such as Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kinnaur, Kullu, Lahaul and Spiti, Mandi, Shimla, Sirmour, Solan, Una. Himachal Pradesh is governed through a parliamentary system of representative democracy, a feature the state shares with other Indian states. Universal suffrage is granted to residents. The legislature consists of elected members and special office bearers such as the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker who are elected by the members. Assembly meetings are presided over by the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker in the Speaker's absence. The judiciary is composed of the Himachal Pradesh High Court and a system of lower courts. Executive

authority is vested in the Council of Ministers headed by the Chief Minister, although the ultimate head of government is the Governor. The Governor is the head of state appointed by the President of India. People of Himachal Pradesh are represented at the Union Government by 3 MPs in the Rajya Sabha and 4 MPs in the Lok Sabha.

Population:

The population of Himachal Pradesh is 6,856,509. The State has population density of 123 persons per sq km. The sex ratio of Himachal Pradesh at 974 females to 1000 males is higher than the national average of 940. The state has a birth rate of 16.9% per 1000 people per year and a death rate of 6.9%. The State's literacy rate increased from 76.48% in 2001 to 83.78% in 2011, with male literacy at 90.83% and female at 76.60%.

Education:

Himachal Pradesh has one of the highest literacy rates in India next to Kerala. The Indian Institute of Technology - Mandi, Himachal Pradesh University - Shimla, Institute of Himalayan Bio resource Technology (IHBT, CSIR Lab) - Palampur, The National Institute of Technology - Hamirpur, The Central University - Dharamshala, The Jaypee University of Information Technology - Wagnaghat, The Chitkara University - Solan are some of the pioneer Universities located in the state. CSK Himachal Pradesh Krishi Vishwavidyalya Palampur is one of the most renowned hill Agriculture Institutes in world.

Dr.Yashwant Singh Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry has earned a unique distinction in India for imparting teaching, research and extension education in horticulture, forestry and allied disciplines. Further, state run Jawaharlal Nehru Government Engineering College started in 2006 at sundernagar is an important mile stone in higher technical education in the state. The State has got Indira Gandhi Medical College and Hospital, Homoeopathic Medical College & Hospital - Kumarhatti. Besides that there is Himachal Dental College which is the first recognised Dental Institute in the State. Himachal also has institutions to revive fading traditional skills such as those in art and architecture. The Chitera School of Art teaches the delicate style of Kangra Miniature

Paintings. The Dharmalaya Institute is working to preserve the arts of the Kangra style of traditional, vernacular earthen architecture.

Geology, Economic Resources and Contributors:

Himachal Pradesh is blessed with mineral wealth. As per investigation of Geological Survey of India, the minerals available in Himachal Pradesh include:- limestone, Barites, clays, mica, iron pyrites, salt, gypsum, slate, antimony and lead. The distribution of these minerals is scattered all over the State and includes lime stone in Bilaspur, Sirmour and Kangra districts; salt and slates in Mandi District; gypsum in Rajban, Bharli Sirmour District.; Lahaul & Spiti and Sapatu in Solan District.; barite in Sirmour, iron ore in Mandi and Kangra; and uranium in Kullu and Hamirpur districts.

Economy:

The economy of Himachal Pradesh is based mainly on agriculture, food processing, hydroelectric power and tourism . Terraced farmlands cover the lower slopes, while fruit orchards can be seen in the temperate regions. The famous red Himachali apple and apple juice are supplied to markets all over India. Agriculture contributes over 45% to the net state domestic product. It is the main source of income and employment in Himachal. Over 93% of the population in Himachal depends directly upon agriculture which provides direct employment to 71% of its people. The main cereals grown are:- wheat, maize, rice and barley. Himachal is also extremely rich in hydroelectric resources. The state has about 25% of the national potential in this respect. It has been estimated that about 20,300MW of hydroelectric power can be generated in the State by constructing various major, medium, small and mini/micro hydel projects on the five river basins. The power that is generated is sold to other cities like Delhi, Punjab and Rajasthan. Wealth from forest resources is estimated to be around 1,00,000 crores.

Himachal Pradesh is home to Handicrafts. The products manufactured are: woolen and pashmina shawls, carpets, silver and metal ware, embroidered chappals, grass shoes, Kangra and Gompa style

paintings, wood work, horse-hair bangles, wooden and metal utensils and various other house hold items.

Culture, history, tourism and unique features of the state:

Culture:

Himachal Pradesh has a rich tradition of folk music and dances that mark all festive occasions. The folklore is replete with themes of valor and legendary love stories. The famous 'Natti' dance of Kullu is performed mainly by men wearing short tunics and churidars (a tight legwear) and the embroidered Kullu caps. Martial dances like the 'Burah' in Sirmaur and Birsue and 'Ghugti' in upper Shimla are performed with the waving of axes and swords. Beautiful Kinnauri women dressed in traditional costumes with chunky silver jewellery perform the 'Bakayang' dance. Masked dances recounting romantic and satirical themes are performed in the Jubbal and Rohru valleys of Shimla. Throughout the year, Himachalis regale in celebration with dance and music to mark fairs and festivals. The Buddhist Gompas or monasteries have their famous mask dances, performed by the lamas. The 'Lossor festival' is celebrated with the 'chhaam' dance to celebrate the death of the oppressive 9th century Tibetan ruler Langdarma. Performed in elaborate costumes and masks, the dance marks the triumph of good over evil.

In autumn, 'Fullaich' or the Festival of flowers is celebrated in the villages of Kinnaur. Villagers collect wild flowers and make offerings to the local deity. Every twelve years, there are special celebrations, which are marked with singing, dancing, and merrymaking. The Dussehra celebrations of Kullu in October are a curious mixture of tribal and Hindu religious beliefs. Over two hundred local deities are brought into the valley on Palanquins and Lord Raghunath is worshipped to the accompaniment of music and dance.

The Dussehra festival, commemorating the victory of Lord Rama (an incarnation of Vishnu) over the demon king Ravana, is celebrated throughout the country, but has a special flavour here in Kullu. The 'Lavi' fair at Rampur on the India -Tibet road, is a centuries-old gathering of

traders from Ladakh, Tibet and Afghanistan. This ancient trade route was a lifeline for the local people, who traded in wool, dry fruits and horses. Though the entire area has opened up to the rest of the country with improved communication links, this traditional fair still holds a relevance and importance in the lives of the locals.

The other common Himalayan fairs and festivals in this region are Lohri, Maghi, Dechhang, Halda, Gochi, Baba Barbhag Singh Mela, Basant Panchmi, Char, Dhoongri fair, Banjar fair, Red Cross Fair, Kangra Festival, Ghantal festival, Ladarcha fair, Gugga fair, and Ice-Skating Carnival.

The people of the state are culturally rich and also diverse. The people are very cordial and simple and are a very well knit society. Known as the 'Fruit Bowl' of the country it has Orchards spread all over the hilly terrains. Apart from Orchards Tulips , Lilies, Roses, Chrysanthemums, Marigolds are widely cultivated in this region.

History:

The state of Himachal Pradesh was called 'Deva Bhoomi ' or the Land of the Gods. There are evidences of the existence of the pre-historic humans in this region. It is generally believed that large inhabitants of this region had actually migrated from Central Asia and the Indian plains from time to time. The first race to enter the state of Himachal Pradesh was Proto-Australoid followed by Mongoloid and the Aryan. The Rig Veda mentions about Dasyus and Nishads living in this region and their powerful king Shambra who had 99 forts. From the early period of its history, tribes like the Koilis, Halis, Daxis, Dhaugris, Dasa, Khasas, Kinnars and Kirats inhabited it.

The Aryan influence over this area dates back to the period before the Rig Veda. The Aryans with their superior war tactics defeated the local tribes and settled here permanently. The period also saw the establishment of small Janapadas or Republics in Himachal Pradesh. They maintained a good relationship with the Mauryans so that they can remain independent for a long time. They lost their independence with the rise of the Guptas in

the North Gangetic plains. After the decline of the Guptas, several small kingdoms ruled this hilly state and established their power in its different regions. Sankar Varma, the king of Kashmir exercised his influence over the regions of Himachal Pradesh in about 883 AD. This region witnessed the invasion of Mahmud of Ghazni in 1009 AD. In about 1043 AD, the Rajputs ruled over this territory. The Mughal rulers erected several works of art as an admiration of this land. The Rajputs, under the leadership of Sansar Chand owned this region in 1773 AD, till the attack by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1804 AD, which crushed the Rajput power here. Later the Gurkhas conquered this area and ravaged it.

In about the early 19th century AD, the British exercised their influence and annexed the areas of Shimla after the Gurkhas War of 1815-16. The British established many hill stations in this region to protect themselves from the extreme heat and dust of the northern plains in the summer. Shimla became the summer capital of India and even today, many old houses and buildings tell the story of English grandeur. Himachal Pradesh was made a centrally administered territory in 1948 with the integration of 31 hill states and obtained additional regions in 1966. It had the status of a union territory after independence till it was granted statehood in 1971.

Tourism and Unique features of the State:

Himachal Pradesh stands to be the nirvana for tourists as its location in the lap of Himalayas has been a great source of Himachal Pradesh tourism. With snowcapped mountains, deep valleys and meandering rivers, Himachal Pradesh always remains ready to allure you completely. Tourism in Himachal Pradesh has reached its soaring heights as the places like Mandi, Shimla, Manali, Dalhousie, Chamba, etc. await you with captivating beauty. Adventure freaks and sports lovers have reasons to rejoice as various sports such as river rafting, trekking, skiing, ice skating, para gliding etc. can be enjoyed to the fullest. Thus, Himachal Pradesh tourism has reached a cut above the rest of the hill stations.

Himachal Pradesh tourism witnesses the existence of diverse culture following unique religion and customs. As you visit Himachal Pradesh, you come across various tourist spots such as Chail, Rajgarh Valley, Maharana Pratap Sagar, Pragpur, Kangra Fort, etc. The extreme serenity and fascinating beauty of nature promote tourism in Himachal Pradesh to a great extent.

Himachal Tourism has been divided into four interesting travel circuits:

- The Sutlej Voyage circuit passes through the siwalik foot hills through apple orchards, forests of pine, oak and deodar, majestic monuments of the Raj, snow covered ski slopes and the furious Sutlej River. This circuit covers Delhi - Rohru - Rampur - Sarahan - Narkanda - Naldehra - Tattapani - Shimla - Kiarighat - Delhi. This voyage also includes Renuka, Paonta Sahib and Nahan.
- The Beas Voyage covers the highly picturesque Beas valley - the valley of gods. Flower covered meadows, terraced fields of apple, paddy, maize and the sparkling Beas River. It covers Delhi - Shimla - Mandi - Rewalsar - KulluManali - Rohtang - Nagar Manikaran - Delhi. One can also continue to Leh across the Baralacha pass.
- The Dhauladhar Voyage circuit passes in the shadow of the mighty and majestic snow clad Dhauladhar ranges, which dominate the beautiful Kangra valley, dotted by flower filled meadows, temples, tea gardens and flocks of sheep. It covers: Delhi - Chintpurni - Jwalamukhi - Kangra - Dalhousie - Khajjiar - Chamba - Dharamshala - Chamunda - Palampur - Jogindernagar - Delhi.
- The Tribal Voyage Circuit passes through a spectacular terrain of river valleys, cold desert mountains, high passes, snowcapped peaks, icy lakes, and mighty glaciers an exotic tribal country dotted by monasteries. It covers: Delhi - Shimla - Narkanda/Hatkoti - Sarahan - Sangla - Kalpa - Pooh - Nako - Tabo - Dhankar - Kaza - Losar - Kunzam

- Koksar - Sissu - Keylong - Udaipur - Trilokpur - Rohtang - Manali - Delhi.

The major tourist attractions in the state are :

- Vajreshwari temple
- Simla
- Kufri
- Chail
- Chamba
- Manali
- Dharamsala
- Lahaul and
- Spiti

So far we have seen only some salient features of geography of this state. There are lot more things to be studied about this state. We will see them in future modules.