You have already learnt earlier that India is a vast country with varied landforms. What kind of terrain do you live in? If you live in the plains you are familiar with the vast stretches of plain land. In contrast, if you live in hilly region, the rugged terrain with mountains and valleys are common features. In fact, our country has practically all major physical features of the earth i.e. mountains, plains, deserts, plateaus and islands. You must be wondering how these physical features have been formed. We will learn more about major physical features of India and how they have been formed.

We find different types of rocks; some are very hard like marble which has been used for making the Taj Mahal, and some are very soft like soap stone which is used in making talcum powder. The colour of soil varies from one place to another because soil is formed out of different types of rocks. Have you ever thought about the causes of these variations? Most of these variations are caused due to differences in rock formations.

India is a large landmass formed during different geological periods which has influenced her relief. Besides geological formations, a number of processes such as weathering, erosion and deposition have created and modified the relief to its present form.

Earth scientists have attempted to explain the formation of physical features with the help of some theories based on certain evidences. One such plausible theory is the “Theory of Plate Tectonics”. According to this theory, the crust (upper part) of the earth has been formed out of seven major and some minor plates. (Figure 2.2)

The movement of the plates results in the building up of stresses within the plates and the continental rocks above, leading to folding, faulting and volcanic activity. Broadly, these plate movements are classified into three types (Figure 2.1). While some plates come towards each other and form convergent boundary, some plates move away from each other and form divergent boundary. In the event of two plates coming together they may either collide and crumble, or one may slide under the other. At times, they may also move horizontally past
each other and form transform boundary. The
movement of these plates have changed the
position and size of the continents over millions
of years. Such movements have also influenced
the evolution of the present landform features
relief of India.

Do You Know? Most volcanoes and
earthquakes in the world are located at plate
growth, but some do occur within the plates.

Gondwanaland: It is the southern part of the ancient
super continent Pangea with Angara Land in the
northern part.

The oldest landmass, (the Peninsula part), was
a part of the Gondwana land. The Gondwanaland
included India, Australia, South Africa and South
America as one single land mass. The convoluted
currents split the crust into a number of pieces,
thus leading to the drifting of the Indo-Australian
plate after being separated from the Gondwana
land, towards north. The northward drift resulted
in the collision of the plate with the much larger
Eurasian Plate. Due to this collision, the
sedimentary rocks which were accumulated in
the geosyncline known as the Tethys were folded
to form the mountain system of western Asia and
Himalaya.

The Himalayan uplift out of the Tethys sea
and subsidence of the northern flank of the
peninsular plateau resulted in the formation
of a large basin. In due course of time this
depression, gradually got filled with deposition
of sediments by the rivers flowing from the
mountains in the north and the peninsular
plateau in the south. A flat land of extensive
alluvial deposits led to the formation of the
northern plains of India.

The land of India displays great physical
variation. Geologically, the Peninsular Plateau
constitutes one of the ancient landmasses on
the earth’s surface. It was supposed to be one
of the most stable land blocks. The Himalayas
and the Northern Plains are the most recent
landforms. From the view point of geology, HIMALAYAN mountains form an unstable zone.
The whole mountain system of Himalaya
represents a very youthful topography with
high peaks, deep valleys and fast flowing rivers.
The northern plains are formed of alluvial
PHYSICAL FEATURES OF INDIA

The peninsular plateau is composed of igneous and metamorphic rocks with gently rising hills and wide valleys.

**MAJOR PHYSIOGRAPHIC DIVISIONS**

The physical features of India can be grouped under the following physiographic divisions (Figure 2.4):

(i) The Himalayan Mountains
(ii) The Northern Plains
(iii) The Peninsular Plateau
(iv) The Indian Desert
(v) The Coastal Plains
(vi) The Islands

**The Himalayan Mountains**

The Himalayas, geologically young and structurally fold mountains stretch over the northern borders of India. These mountain ranges run in a west-east direction from the Indus to the Brahmaputra. The Himalayas represent the loftiest and one of the most rugged mountain barriers of the world. They form an arc, which covers a distance of about 2,400 Km. Their width varies from 400 Km in Kashmir to 150 Km in Arunachal Pradesh. The altitudinal variations are greater in the eastern half than those in the western half. The Himalaya consists of three parallel ranges in its longitudinal extent. A number of valleys lie between these ranges. The northern most range is known as the Great or Inner Himalayas or the ‘Himadri’. It is the most continuous range consisting of the loftiest peaks with an average height of 6,000 metres. It contains all the prominent Himalayan peaks.

*Figure 2.3: Himalayas*
Figure 2.4: Relief
The folds of Great Himalayas are asymmetrical in nature. The core of this part of Himalayas is composed of granite. It is perennially snow bound, and a number of glaciers descend from this range.

**Find out**
- The names of the glaciers and passes that lie in Great Himalayas
- The name of the states where highest peaks are located.

The range lying to the south of the Himadri forms the most rugged mountain system and is known as Himachal or lesser Himalaya. The ranges are mainly composed of highly compressed and altered rocks. The altitude varies between 3,700 and 4,500 metres and the average width is of 50 Km. While the Pir Panjal range forms the longest and the most important range, the Dhaula Dhar and the Mahabharat ranges are also prominent ones. This range consists of the famous valley of Kashmir, the Kangra and Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh. This region is well known for its hill stations.

**Find out**
- Location of Mussoorie, Nainital, Ranikhet from your atlas and also name the state where they are located.

The outer most range of the Himalayas is called the Shiwaliks. They extend over a width of 10-50 Km and have an altitude varying between 900 and 1100 metres. These ranges are composed of unconsolidated sediments brought down by rivers from the main Himalayan ranges located farther north. These valleys are covered with thick gravel and alluvium. The longitudinal valley lying between lesser Himalaya and the Shiwaliks are known as Duns. Dehra Dun, Kotli Dun and Patli Dun are some of the well-known Duns.

Besides the longitudinal divisions, the Himalayas have been divided on the basis of regions from west to east. These divisions have been demarcated by river valleys. For example, the part of Himalayas lying between Indus and Satluj has been traditionally known as Punjab Himalaya but it is also known regionally as Kashmir and Himachal Himalaya from west to east respectively. The part of the Himalayas lying between Satluj and Kali rivers is known as Kumaon Himalayas. The Kali and Tista rivers demarcate the Nepal Himalayas and the part lying between Tista and Dihang rivers is known as Assam Himalayas. There are regional names also in these broad categories. Find out some regional names of the Himalayas.

The Brahmaputra marks the eastern most boundary of the Himalayas. Beyond the Dihang gorge, the Himalayas bend sharply to the south and spread along the eastern boundary of India. They are known as the Purvanchal or the Eastern hills and mountains. These hills running through the north-eastern states are mostly composed of strong sandstones which are sedimentary rocks. Covered with dense forests, they mostly run as parallel ranges and valleys. The Purvanchal comprises the
Patkai hills, the Naga hills, Manipur hills and the Mizo hills.

**The Northern Plain**

The northern plain has been formed by the interplay of the three major river systems, namely— the Indus, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra along with their tributaries. This plain is formed of alluvial soil. The deposition of alluvium in a vast basin lying at the foothills of the Himalaya over millions of years, formed this fertile plain. It spreads over an area of 7 lakh sq. km. The plain being about 2400 Km long and 240 to 320 Km broad, is a densely populated physiographic division. With a rich soil cover combined with adequate water supply and favourable climate it is agriculturally a very productive part of India.

**Do You Know?**

The rivers in their lower course split into numerous channels due to the deposition of silt. These channels are known as *distributaries*.

The Northern Plain is broadly divided into three sections. The Western part of the Northern Plain is referred to as the Punjab Plains. Formed by the Indus and its tributaries, the larger part of this plain lies in Pakistan. The Indus and its tributaries—the Jhelum, the Chenab, the Ravi, the Beas and the Satluj originate in the Himalaya. This section of the plain is dominated by the *doabs*.

**Do You Know?**

'Doab' is made up of two words- ‘do’ meaning two and ‘ab’ meaning water. Similarly ‘Punjab’ is also made up two words- ‘Punj’ meaning five and ‘ab’ meaning water.

The Ganga plain extends between Ghaggar and Teesta rivers. It is spread over the states of North India, Haryana, Delhi, U.P., Bihar, partly Jharkhand and West Bengal to its East, particularly in Assam lies the Brahmaputra plain.

The northern plains are generally described as flat land with no variations in its relief. It is not true. These vast plains also have diverse relief features. According to the variations in relief features, the Northern plains can be divided into four regions. The rivers, after descending from the mountains deposit pebbles in a narrow belt of about 8 to 16 km in width lying parallel to the slopes of the Shiwaliks. It is known as *bhabar*. All the streams disappear in this *bhabar* belt. South of this belt, the streams and rivers re-emerge and create a wet, swampy and marshy region known as *terai*. This was a thickly forested region full of wildlife. The forests have been cleared to create agricultural land and to settle migrants from Pakistan after partition. Locate Dudhwa National Park in this region.

The largest part of the northern plain is formed of older alluvium. They lie above the flood plains of the rivers and present a terrace like feature. This part is known as *bhangar*.
The Deccan Plateau is a triangular landmass that lies to the south of the river Narmada. The Satpura range flanks its broad base in the north while the Mahadev, the Kaimur hills and the Maikal range form its eastern extensions. Locate these hills and ranges in the physical map of India. The Deccan Plateau is higher in the west and slopes gently eastwards. An extension of the Plateau is also visible in the northeast—locally known as the Meghalaya and Karbi-Anglong Plateau. It is separated by a fault from the Chotanagpur Plateau. Three Prominent hill ranges from the west to east are the Garo, the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills.

The Western Ghats and the Eastern Ghats mark the western and the eastern edges of the Deccan Plateau respectively. Western ghats lie parallel to the western coast. They are continuous and can be crossed through passes only. Locate the Thal, Bhor and the Pal Ghats in the Physical map of India.

The Western Ghats are higher than the Eastern Ghats. Their average elevation is 900–1600 metres as against 600 metres of the Eastern Ghats. The Eastern Ghats stretch from the Mahanadi Valley to the Nigiris in the south. The Eastern Ghats are discontinuous and irregular and dissected by rivers draining into the Bay of Bengal. The Western Ghats cause orographic rain by facing the rain bearing moist winds to rise along the western slopes of the Ghats. The Western Ghats are known by different local names. The height of the Western Ghats progressively increases from north to south. The highest peaks include the Anai Mudi (2,695 metres) and the Doda Betta (2,637 metres). Mahendragiri (1,501 metres) is the highest peak in the Eastern Ghats. Shevroy Hills and the Javadi Hills are located to the southeast of the Eastern Ghats. Locate the famous hill stations of Udagamandalam, popularly known as Ooty and the Kodaikanal.

One of the distinct features of the peninsular plateau is the black soil area known as Decean Trap. This is of volcanic origin hence the rocks are igneous. Actually these rocks have denuded over time and are responsible for the formation of black soil. The Aravali Hills lie on the western and northwestern margins of the

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The Peninsular plateau is a tableland composed of the old crystalline, igneous and metamorphic rocks. It was formed due to the breaking and drifting of the Gondwana land and thus, making it a part of the oldest landmass. The plateau has broad and shallow valleys and rounded hills. This plateau consists of two broad divisions, namely, the Central Highlands and the Deccan Plateau. The part of the Peninsular plateau lying to the north of the Narmada river covering a major area of the Malwa plateau is known as the Central Highlands. The Vindhyan range is bounded by the Central Highlands on the south and the Aravalis on the northwest. The further westward extension gradually merges with the sandy and rocky desert of Rajasthan. The flow of the rivers draining this region, namely the Chambal, the Sind, the Betwa and Ken is from southwest to northeast, thus indicating the slope. The Central Highlands are wider in the west but narrower in the east. The eastward extensions of this plateau are locally known as the Bundelkhand and Baghelkhand. The Chotonagpur plateau marks the further eastward extension, drained by the Damodar river.
peninsular plateau. These are highly eroded hills and are found as broken hills. They extend from Gujarat to Delhi in a southwest-northeast direction.

**The Indian Desert**

The Indian desert lies towards the western margins of the Aravali Hills. It is an undulating sandy plain covered with sand dunes. This region receives very low rainfall below 150 mm per year. It has arid climate with low vegetation cover. Streams appear during the rainy season. Soon after they disappear into the sand as they do not have enough water to reach the sea. Luni is the only large river in this region.

**The Coastal Plains**

The Peninsular plateau is flanked by stretch of narrow coastal strips, running along the Arabian Sea on the west and the Bay of Bengal on the east. The western coast, sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, is a narrow plain. It consists of three sections. The northern part of the coast is called the Konkan (Mumbai – Goa), the central stretch is called the Kannad Plain while the southern stretch is referred to as the Malabar coast.

Barchans (crescent shaped dunes) cover larger areas but longitudinal dunes become more prominent near the Indo-Pakistan boundary. If you visit Jaisalmer, you may go to see a group of barchans.

**The Islands**

You have already seen that India has a vast mainland. Besides this, the country has also two groups of islands. Can you identify these island groups?

Locate the Lakshadweep Islands group lying close to the Malabar coast of Kerala. This group of islands is composed of small coral islands. Earlier they were known as Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindive. In 1973 these were...
Corals

Coral polyps are short-lived microscopic organisms, which live in colonies. They flourish in shallow, mud free and warm waters. They secrete hard rock like substance. The coral secretion and their skeletons from coral deposits in the form of reefs; they are mainly of three kinds: barrier reef, fringing reef and atolls. The Great Barrier Reef of Australia is a good example of the first kind of coral reefs. Atolls are circular or horse shoe shaped coral reefs.

Now you see the elongated chain of islands located in the Bay of Bengal extending from north to south. These are Andaman and Nicobar islands. They are bigger in size and are more numerous and scattered. The entire group of islands is divided into two broad categories – The Andaman in the north and the Nicobar in the south. It is believed that these islands are an elevated portion of submarine mountains. These island groups are of great strategic importance for the country. There is great diversity of flora and fauna in this group of islands too. These islands lie close to equator and experience equatorial climate and has thick forest cover.

Do You Know? India’s only active volcano is found on Barren island in Andaman and Nicobar group of Islands.

A detailed account of the different physiographic units highlights the unique features of each region. It would, however, be clear that each region complements the other and makes the country richer in its natural resources. The northern mountains are the major sources of water and forest wealth. The northern plains are the granaries of the country. They provide the base for early civilisations. The plateau is a storehouse of minerals, which has played a crucial role in the industrialisation of the country. The coastal region and island groups provide sites for fishing and port activities. Thus, the diverse physical features of the land have immense future possibilities of development.

**Exercise**

1. Choose the right answer from the four alternatives given below.
   
   (i) A landmass bounded by sea on three sides is referred to as
   
   (a) Coast  
   (b) Island  
   (c) Peninsula  
   (d) none of the above

   (ii) Mountain ranges in the eastern part of India forming its boundary with Myanmar are collectively called as

   (a) Himachal  
   (b) Uttarakhand  
   (c) Purvanchal  
   (d) none of the above

   (iii) The western coastal strip, south of Goa is referred to as

   (a) Coromandal  
   (b) Konkan  
   (c) Kannad  
   (d) Northern Circar

   (iv) The highest peak in the Eastern Ghats is

   (a) Anal Mudi  
   (b) Kanchenjunga  
   (c) Mahendragiri  
   (d) Khasi

2. Answer the following questions briefly.

   (i) What are tectonic plates?
   (ii) Which continents of today were part of the Gondwana land?
(iii) What is the bhabar?
(iv) Name the three major divisions of the Himalayas from north to south.
(v) Which plateau lies between the Aravali and the Vindhyan ranges?
(vi) Name the island group of India having coral origin.

3. Distinguish between
   (i) Converging and diverging tectonic plates
   (ii) Bhanger and Khadar
   (iii) Western Ghats and Eastern Ghats

4. Describe how the Himalayas were formed.

5. Which are the major physiographic divisions of India? Contrast the relief of the Himalayan region with that of the Peninsula plateau.

6. Give an account of the Northern Plains of India.

7. Write short notes on the following.
   (i) The Indian Desert
   (ii) The Central Highlands
   (iii) The Island groups of India

**Map Skills**

On an outline map of India show the following.
   (i) Mountain and hill ranges – the Karakoram, the Zaskar, the Patkai Bum, the Jaintia, the Vindhya range, the Aravali, and the Cardamom hills.
   (ii) Peaks – K2, Kanchenjunga, Nanga Parbat and the Anai Mudi.
   (iii) Plateaus, Chotanagpur and Malwa
   (iv) The Indian Desert, Western Ghats, Lakshadweep Islands

**Project/Activity**

Locate the peaks, passes, ranges, plateaus, hills, and dunes hidden in the puzzle. Try to find where these features are located. You may start your search horizontally, vertically or diagonally.