

# Ancient India and Physiography: A Historical Review of Land and Landmark – Tarain

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## Abstract

“EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT” is the new day slogan cherishing our SOVEREIGN, SOCIALIST, SECULAR, DEMOCRATIC and REPUBLIC India of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The chronicles of Bharat which defined the pathways indeed corroborates the times when our motherland was hailed as SINDHU and HINDUSTAN. Every aspect of the Indian geography defined in the domain of the North- Western Frontier led to the addition of a new chapter describing the reign of a new dynasty with a foreign invader on the land of Bharat. These routes built to provide a voyage to our land firmly acted as a catalyst of metamorphosis in terms of physiography of Bharat. The passes set in the mountain ranges of the Himalayas were a testimony of the scars of invaders on our soil. One such holocaust of history is the **Battle of Tarain I and II (1191 – 1192 A.D.) between Muhammad Ghori and Prithvi Raj Chauhan**. Invaders crossing the rugged borders making their way to TARAIN leading to the heart of our motherland shaped the history of Bharat indeed was highly influenced by the physiography of ancient India. Furthermore, the globe connected through globalization is often regarded as a brainchild of the 21<sup>st</sup> century economists. Although, the genesis of trade and commerce which connected the landmasses are buried under the layers of historical texts in the illustrations labeled as the famous SILK ROUTE. India, the hub of education, innovation and heritage was a center point taking hold of attention of scholars and philosophers. After months of travelling their chronicles became reflections of the past for the future generations to redraw the borders of Bharat. Strabo, Pliny and Megasthenese each elaborated the frontiers with their lenses describing India as snow capped mountains of the Himalayas crowned in the North, Rajputana in the West, Kamrup in the east in the Ganges basin and Cape Camorin in the South. Hence, the dominance of Bharat in relation to its contemporaries was built on culture and heritage which developed from the physiography as well as its position in the international waters.

**Keywords:** Bharat, physiography, heritage, chronicles and borders.

“Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny and now we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the whole world sleeps, INDIA will awake to life and freedom...” With a high spirit, head held high, chests pumping, hearts beating, eyes gleaming and the dream to breathe in the air of the independent India finally saw its day of light.

It was the dawn of 1947 A.D. when India commemorated itself as SOVEREIGN, DEMOCRATIC and REPUBLIC as a clear and loud blow against the long enslaved Imperialism when the crown of Bharatavarsha found its right heir. Eventually, the rule of the largest democracy of the world was commenced on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1950 on the lines of the promise which was

vowed on 29th December, 1929 on the banks of the RAVI river as an oath of “ PURNA SWARAJ : THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION”.

Article I of the Indian constitution states, “India , that is Bharat, shall be the Union of States” which presently holds 28 states along with 8 Union Territories encompassing a total area of 32, 87, 263 sq km accounting for 2.4% of world’s total surface being the seventh largest country in the world. In the present age India fits into the puzzle of the world diplomacy perfectly with its neighbors namely Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan and Afghanistan.

India which we hail and celebrate today is a complete different landscape which was once recorded in the annals of history as our motherland namely Bharat. The soil of the Shreshtha Bharata is indeed a testimony of wars, battles, bloodshed, dynasties and monarchy. Everything was dynamic but the Indian land was static. Invaders invaded and looted often called Bharata as the Golden Bird indeed went through an influx of tyranny to be what it stand today as “EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT”.

With passing centuries along with scholars and philosophers visiting the land of Bharatavarsha each one of them propounded the name of our motherland differently. The name India of the present age is derived from the river INDUS which was the lifeline of the Harappan civilization. Similarly, taking the same basis our motherland was named as “Shin-tuh” derived from Sindhu which is the other name of river Indus by China in their official documents. In addition, the Rig Veda also described the land of Bharata as “SAPT – SINDHU PRADESH” which meant the “land of seven rivers”. It had similarity to the text of Avestan Vendidad which indicated India as “HAPTA HINDU”. The Persian text of Darius and Naksh – I – Rustam elaborated the land watered by the Indus to be documented as Hi(n)du. Lastly, the father of History, Herodotus denoted our land as “INDIA” which was the twelfth division of the Persian empire while the rest of the Greek philosophers elaborated the land far away from the Persian subjection and not under the rule of Darius.

## PHILOSOPHERS’ PROPOSITION ON INDIA AND ITS PHYSIOGRAPHY

Thinkers, cartographers and historians not only from India but from all around the humankind had provided evidences of the dimensions, boundaries and extent of the Indian soil. Although some errors occurred when the works of all these were matched but altogether these literary sources corroborate evidences drawing a clear sketch of India in the ancient era.

Beginning with Strabo, he claimed that all the men of the region were well versed of the area they inhabited. He also described it as Stathmi based on his journey and observation after wandering from place to place. Eratosthenes, described India to be in shape of an irregular quadrilateral namely “rhomboid”. The region was bounded by the mountains and the sea on the North, the South and the East respectively. He mentioned it was on the Western side which was the shortest of all in terms of length. However, the combined analysis, calculations and documentations of Alexander, Strabo and Megasthenes helped the modern – age historians to draw the map of ancient India in the manner described further.

The West is marked by the waters of the Indus (Attock) accounting a total length of 950 miles by the land and 1200 miles by the sea. The total estimate of area encompassing from the Ganges to the Southernmost point of the Indian landmass which is roughly 1600 miles. If all the hindrances and indented coastline are evaluated it will be approximately circumscribing 1866 miles. The stretch from

the Southern sea reaching upto the Caucasus was recorded as 2298 miles. The estimated value of distance from the Hindukush to the Cape Comorin was noted as 2275 miles. All things considered provides us the outcome of total area investigated as 61000 stadia with a total extent from East to West was 28000 stadia and from North to South 32000 stadia.

Another source marking the boundaries of Bharata of Ancient era is “MAHABHARATA”. It confirms the physiography of the ancient land based on the geometry of triangles where the whole region of India is described as an equilateral triangle. Further, it is divided into 4 smaller equilateral triangles. The Southernmost triangle is represented as the Cape Camorin and the Northernmost with the Hindukush. No other specification more than this is provided in the enriching epic saga.

Varah – Mihira, the gem of the Gupta dynasty augmented the classical age by his glorious contributions on the lines of his rich heritage work celebrated as “NAVA- KHANDA”. It provided the information namely the Panchala was the center, Magadha was the East, Kalinga was the South – East, Sindhu – Sauvira was the West, Haura – Haura in the North – west, Madra in the North and Kuninda in the North – West all forming the NINE – DIVISIONS of the Indian demarcations.

Moreover the “ VISHNU PURANA” enlightened contemporary world with the physical aspect of the Indian land where the center was positioned under the Kurus and Panchalas, East was demarcated as the Kamroop, South was bordered by the Pundras, Kalingas, Magadha, West stretching upto Sureshras, Suras, Arbudas while the North was marked by the Hunas, Sakalas, Ramas, Parasikas.

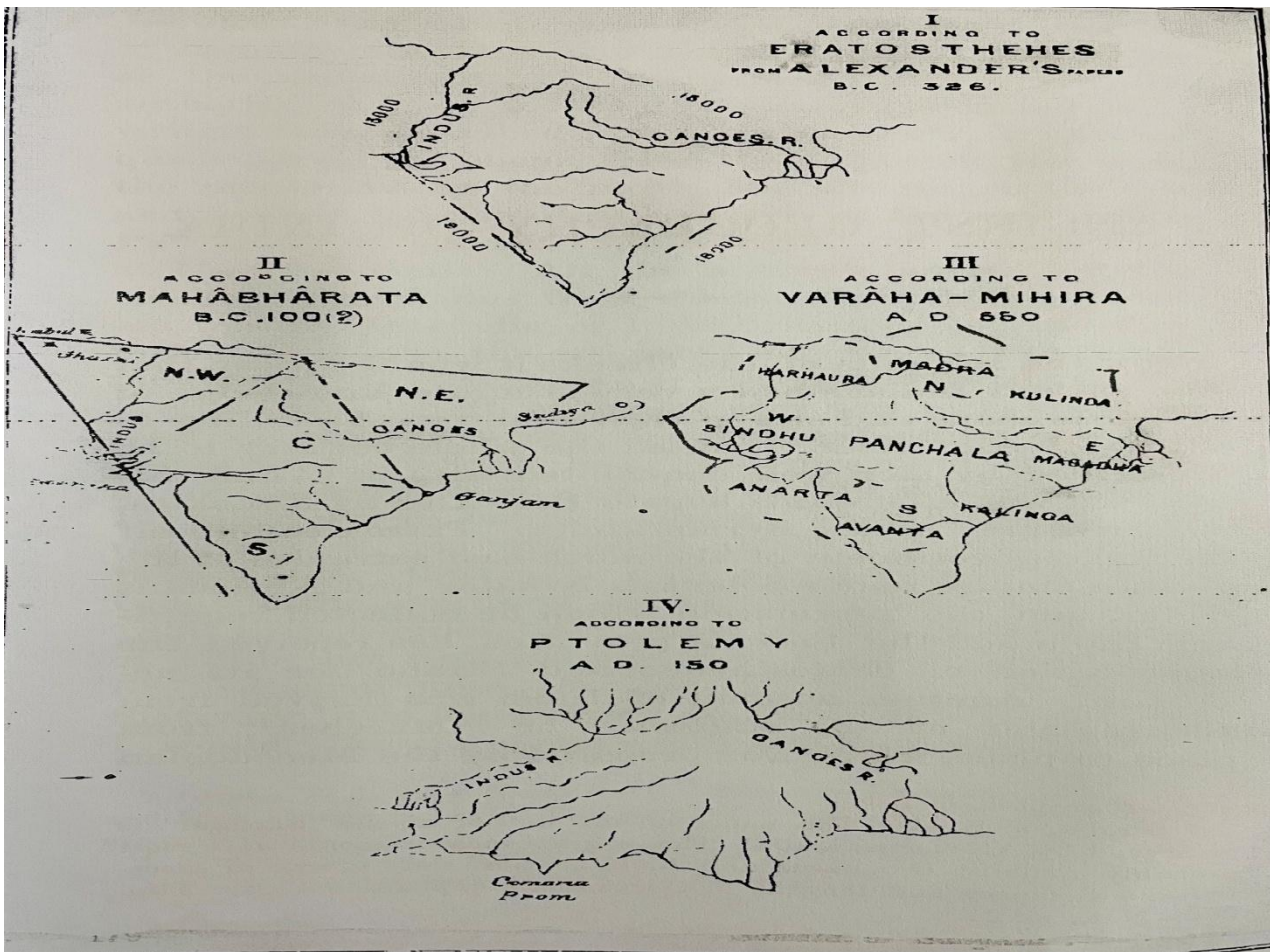
Additionally, the “FIVE INDIES” is the mapping of India in the foreign accounts of the Thangh – Ta dynasty in the ancient times. This is described as follows :

NORTHERN INDIA	PUNJAB, KASHMIR, AFGHANISTAN
WESTERN INDIA	SINDH, RAJPUTANA, GUJRAT BOUNDED WITH NARMADA
CENTRAL INDIA	HIMALAYAS TO THE DELTA OF NARMADA, FROM THANESWAR TO THE MOUTH OF the GANGES
EASTERN INDIA	ASSAM, BENGAL ALL REGION WITHIN THE BASIN OF THE GANGES
SOUTHERN INDIA	NASIK TO CAPE CAMORIN ENCOMPASSING THE WHOLE PENINSULAR REGION

( The physioigraphy description of Five Indies in the chronicles of Thangh – Ta dynasty.)

All together analyzed makes us draw the extensions of the Bharata where the land is divided into five divisions supporting the text of Bhuvankosa of the Puranas and Kavyanimansa as mentioned below:

- Madhyadesa ( Central India )
- Uttarpatha ( Northern India )
- Pracya ( Eastern India )
- Dakshinapatha ( Southern India )
- Aparanta ( Western India )



Physiography of India by various philosopher ( Source : Alexander Cunningham, " The Ancient Geography of India")

## SOURCES CONFIRMING ROUTES TO THE BHARATAVARSHA

The physical geography of the ancient India explored a salient aspect interlinked with its boundaries and demarcations in the form of "TRADE ROUTES" which acted as a passage to our motherland Bharata. The Vedic Literature suggests, 'AGNI' as the agent for the clearance of these pathways expanding the boundaries and finally the routes. Hence, these routes clearly set out the picture that it was primarily developed for food and shelter though labeled as TRADE ROUTES. This term had gained its strong foundation later because of the movement of merchants, pilgrims, rulers with their intention of interest which was considerably noteworthy than mere utilization of food and fodder.

The mapping of the region could be traced from the first urban civilization such as "THE HARRAPAN CIVILISATION" which in true sense was developed in every aspect. The course of journey they followed can be considered as the first and foremost to understand the physical geography of ancient India. Mohenjodaro, the largest site was bordered by the Khyber Pass along with Bolan, Kurram, Gomal passes which gave an access to the territory. Land routes which provided a passage also had an alternative that was the sea route. The terracotta figures of boat could be considered as evidences found at Lothal, the dockyard on the banks of Bhogwa river. Meluha, Dilmun, Makran had establishments with the Mesopotamia. Dilmun which has described by the historians as the Bahrain in



Persian Gulf while Meluha labeled as “the land of Seafarers” was related to the land of Harrapan civilization.

The Vedic Age had clear evidences of both land and sea routes supported by the Rig Veda Taiterya Samhita and Aiterya Brahmana. These texts established the engagement with regions of Iraq and Turkey in connection with Tigris and Euphrates rivers. All these connections were supported by boat making profession. The later Vedic Age reflected the importance of the passage from Gandhar reaching upto Mediterranean Sea. The Romans with an abundant knowledge of Monsoon winds helped them in navigating and crossing the Arabian Sea in the month of June – July and returning back in December to their regions.

Looking on the Eastern side the voyage began with the ports of Orissa, Andhra and Kaveripatnam by crossing the 10 Degree latitude of Andaman and Nicobar to reach Malay Peninsula. The another alternative route was offered by the Sinhala Peninsula in the month of October by crossing the Sunda Strait and reaching the Malaya Peninsula upto the mouth of Mekong River having diplomatic relations with Champa. Thus, this voyage opened the routes such as crossing the south of Sumatra to reach Champa and Kambuja and crossing the Malacca strait to connect to east. Another route reaching to East started from Kamrup by crossing the valleys of Irrawady, Mekong and Salween till China.

## **BHARATVARSHA AND TRADE ROUTES**

The geographical history of ancient India can more interestingly assessed by critical analysis of the routes and related trading activities. This will establish the understanding of the terrain of the Indian land and contemporary regions with trade and prosperity alongside. The Western frontier of the passage was dominated by Iran which gave access to : linking Sindh to Iran by the sea, land route from Bactria to Gandhar and third the course of crossing the Black sea and Caspian sea to reach upto Asia. The orders of Darius I to trace the route to India set him to the voyage starting from the Red Sea followed by the Arabian waters by crossing the Indus. Ports like Baroch, Sopara, Tamralipti supported the journey. Another route traced from Arabian Sea then Persian Gulf as supported by the Jatakas.

The age of Mauryas saw Alexander who crossed and reached India by crossing Indus. One contingent of his army chose the pathway crossing Indus, Arabian waters, Red Sea to reach the land of West Asia. Moreover, the port of Mujris was important to the Romans. This age also saw the routes :

- Starting from the Kabul River, crossing Hindukush, Caspian Sea ending at the Black sea.
- From Kandhar, Heart , Persian Gulf upto Asia Minor.
- Starting from Makran coast to connect with the West.

The era after the Mauryas provided saw the rise of the Kushans, Satvahans in the North and Chera, Chola, Psadayas in the South facilitating abundance facts in connection with establishment with the various countries. The connections with the west were facilitated by tracing from the Mediterranean reaching deserts of Persia, Heart, crossing the Tigris, Syria with Khyber Pass entering the Indian region.

The passage of North – West Frontier of the Indian land offers natural barricading to defend the frontiers since ages. Though the passage is rugged but supported with passes that allow entrance to the region such as :

- Passing through the valley of Kabul a 20 miles run through the KHYBER PASS.
- Passing through Herat upto Kandhar through BOLAN PASS extending to Indus.
- Roadway through Makran Road.

The Roman historian draws the picture of the route that first reached Antioch by the means of land or sea extending upto Euphrates river. This is followed by either going by the left side of the Euphrates leading upto Seleucia or by travelling through the desert and reaching upto Baghdad. This provided access to Iran, Afghanistan and Baluchistan. The next landmark on the journey was Dasht – I – Kavir giving a clear cut entry to the ports of the Caspian Sea. Moving forward landed to the prime destinations such as Askabad, Tegin and Merv.

The passage of Grand Trunk Route expanding from Balkh to Taxila also called as “Haimavatapatha” with Heart on this route. This route first encountered Patkesar merging with Samarkand. This whole course was navigated by the course of the rivers : Blakh, Khulm and Kunduz which led to the land of Panjshir. The major destination to be crossed such as Andarab, Khinjan and finally Doshakh gave the gateway to the land of India via Grand Trunk Road with Bamyan as the last check point. Bamyan which was bordered by the Hindukush in the North and Koh –I – baba in the south, stationed between Peshawar and Bactria.

With rugged mountains and passes Indus was crossed to reach Attock on the route to India then stretching forward on the transit route starting from Pushkalavati to Dakka with Taxila to be first location. This was done by crossing the Khyber Pass with rivers offering suitable conditions. Therefore, the route with checkpoints Balkh, Bamyan, Kapisi, Pushkalavati, Udabhandia provided access to Taxila.

The passageway further led to Kasi which was covered by dense forest on its journey. Beyond this the course of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra offered connection upto Assam. Therefore summing up the region from Peshawar to Bengal the critical points were the salt range, the plains of the region of Kurukshetra and finally the hills of Rajmahal.

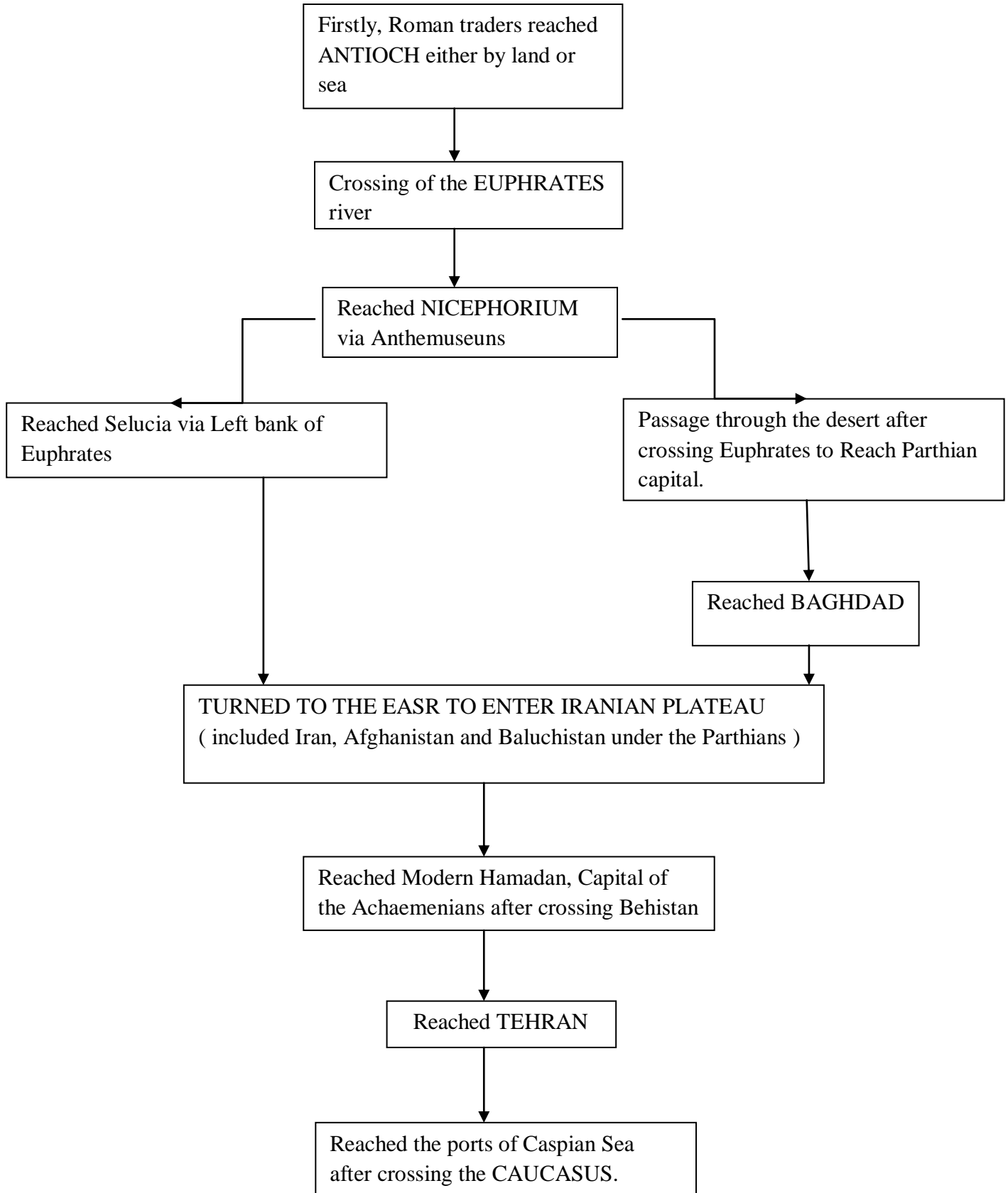
This whole mapping of the region of ancient India from North to South and East to West gave a clear picture highlighting the glorious heritage with natural frontiers. Although the North – West frontier of this geographical aspect gave a pathway of changing the course of history with every chapter added and rulers changing. One factor that made this pathway historical is its geographical aspect.

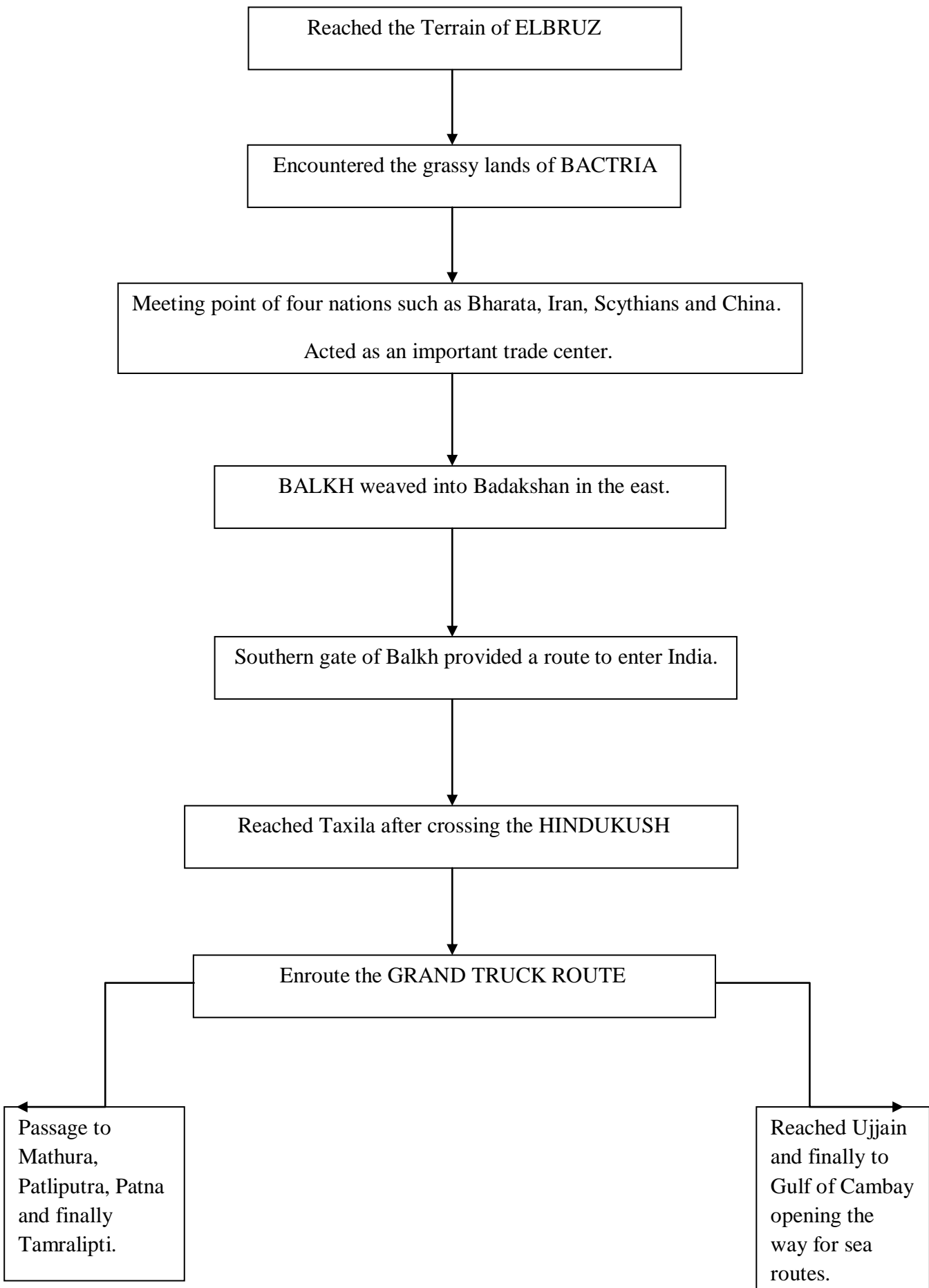
## **BHARATVARSHA AND THE NORTH – WESTERN FRONTIER**

The geographical expansion of Bharata in relation to the North – Western demarcation in the ancient period was bordered by Bamian and Kandahar on its West and Bolan Pass in the South covering the region expanding bounding the present age Afghanistan. This boundary was bordered by Kabul and Ghazni in the West, Lamghan and Jalabad in the North, Swat and Peshawar in the East, Bolan in the North – East and Banu and Opokein in the South.

In addition the Hindu Kush Mountain differentiated the North Western frontier of the Bharatavarsha which provided the means of access to our motherland via rugged passes. The Khyber Pass which is 3400 feet above the sea level connected Peshawar and Kabul and was the most suitable means to raid into the fertile land of Bharatvarsha. On the other hand, Gomal pass connected India with Pakistan by

the means of gaining connection between Punjab and Baluchistan. Furthermore, Bolan Pass provided the toughest access to our motherland provided means of access via Punjab. For further elaboration the narrative of reaching into the territory of Bharata is explained as mentioned below:



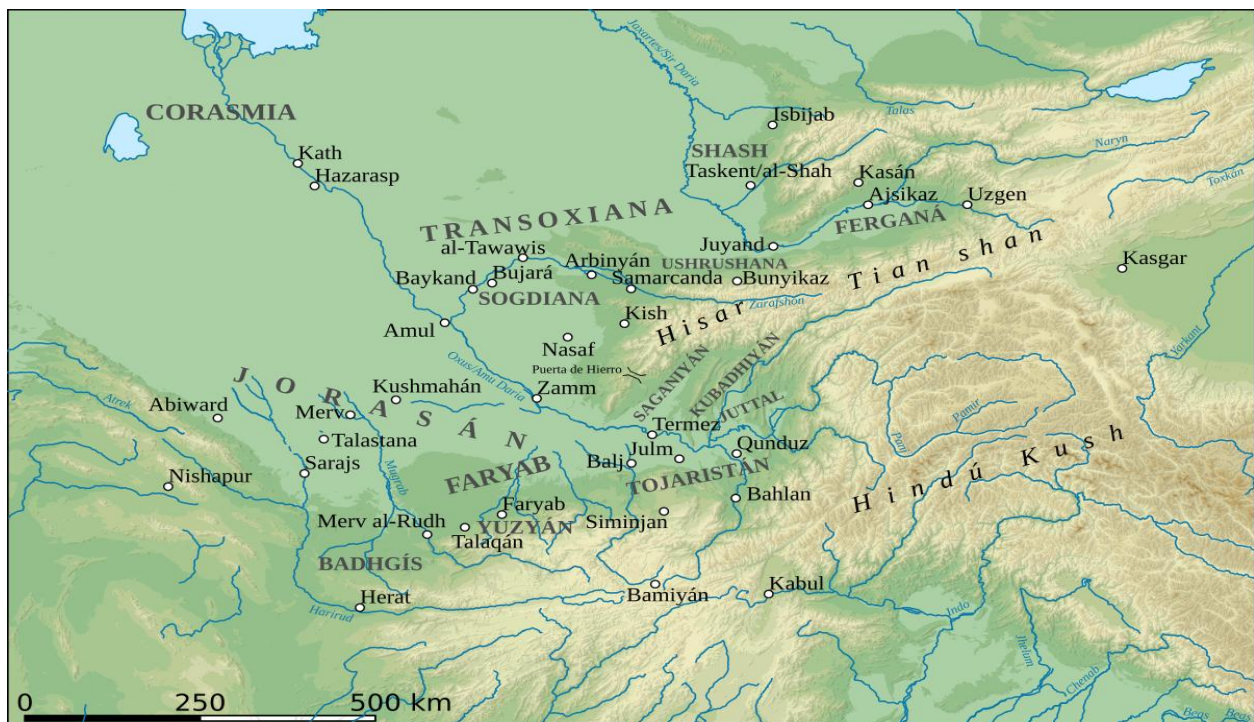




## RIVER UNDUS AND THE NORTH – WESTERN FRONTIER

Rivers play a significant role for the sustenance of a civilization since its inception beginning from carrying sediments to forming the alluvial fertile land along with providing a regular supply of water. Furthermore, they also augment the civilization by a distinct feature of culture. One such river is Indus which is not only responsible for providing fertile land and water but also proved as a basis of a civilization namely the Harappan civilization. The river as stated earlier provided a strong reference to denote our motherland on a global arena in the official documents of various contemporary dynasties.

Indus has its origin from the Tibetan plateau which runs through West and North – West for almost 800 miles between the Trans Himalayan and Great Himalayan ranges. Hence, forming the NORTH – WESTERN FRONTIER of the ancient India. Indus also called as the Mouth of the Lion then cuts a narrow and deep gorge forming between the Himalayas and the Karakoram. As soon as it enters the plain it meanders encompassing the region of Punjab, Baluchistan and Sindh. Indus along with its tributaries such as Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi and Sutlej ranging from West to East all with the origin from the Himalayas finally join to form Panchanad or Punjab. Thus, providing Indus river as the physical barrier demarcating the North – Western frontier of the Bharatvarsha as a factor turning the tables of the Indian history.



(Transoxiana of the 8<sup>th</sup> century) Source : [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/83/Transoxiana\\_8th\\_century-es.svg/1200px-Transoxiana\\_8th\\_century-es.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/8/83/Transoxiana_8th_century-es.svg/1200px-Transoxiana_8th_century-es.svg.png)

## NORTH WESTERN FRONTIER AND THE RAI PITHORA

Prithvi Raj Chauhan III or Rai Pithora rose to the throne of the Chauhan empire after the death of his father Someshvara Chauhan in 1177 A.D. He was a minor at the time of his coronation. Therefore, his mother Rani Karpurdevi daughter of the Achal Raja of Kalachuris of Tripuri took charge of the administration. She appointed Kadambvasa as the Pradhan Mantri and Bhuvana Kamal as the the

Senapati along with various deputations made by her on the basis of one's mettle and potential. At a mere age of 15 years Prithvi Raj Chauhan assumed the throne of Ajmer and was later titled as Rai Pithora because of his great military tactics and valor confirmed by sources namely "PRITHVI RAJ RASO" of Chanda Bardai and "PRITHVI RAJ VIJAYA"

On the other hand, a small principality of Ghur located between the Ghaznavid and Seljiks empire of the 12<sup>th</sup> century can be located in the present day Afghanistan. The soil of the Ghur forces can be traced to the region on the west of Ghazni and east of the Heart in the valley of the Heart River which rose Muhammad Ghori or Muizzudin Muhammad Ghori with his intentions of annexing the territories of the Bharatvarsha decided to chose the GOMAL PASS instead of the KHYBER PASS. His determination of choosing a different route was based on two strategic decisions:

- The Gomal pass provided a shorter route with a safer passage.
- Significantly, the Khyber Pass was bordered by the Ghaznavid forces. Therefore, in order to avoid any resistance in his initial journey of annexing Hindustan he avoided the already explored route to India.

His globetrotting vision of vanquishing the rulers of Bharata was commenced by destroying the standing army of Multan and Uchh in 1175 A.D. from the Karmatia rulers. This was solely achieved to use the conquered territories as military set up checking rebellious activities within and outside the borders. Soon his enthusiasm was crushed by the courage of the Chalukyan ruler BHIMA II. His valor and tactics made the aggressive attacks put the ambitions of the Ghori army on a pause.

Therefore, in 1179 A.D. Muhammad Ghori decided to re – strategize his course of action by capturing Peshawar via KHYBER PASS. This attack was planned to gain a strategic point to repulse the future attacks from the soldiers of Bharata. In 1182 A.D. Sind was acquired from the Sumras and later in 1185 A.D. Sialkot was added as a safe zone for the Ghurid invaders. Lahore became a territory of treachery by the Ghurid forces as in 1181 A.D. It forced a treaty on Khusrau Malik by making his son a hostage and later in 1187 A.D. He assured a negotiation which turned into another trap where Ghori annexed Lahore without waging a war. Khusrau Malik was made a hostage and later executed in 1192 A.D. along with his son.

Lahore was made the headquarter of the Ghurid force to keep a check on the wave coming from the land of Rajputana. He deployed 12000 armed soldiers on the Indian land and returned back to Ghazni for raising a huge army. All the endeavours were made in order to raise an army equivalent to the valor of the Great Ruler of the Rajputana, PRITHVI RAJ CHAUHAN III. The soil of Tarain indeed witnessed the battle that led the land of Bharatvarsha into the dark period of the medieval age with the Battle of Tarain I and II. Tarain or Torvan as per the chronicles of Cunningham locate it as a small village situated between Sirsa and Bathinda while Elphinstone stated its location between Karnal and Thanesar.

Although, it was the fall of Bathinda that brought the Chauhan ruler in an alarming state and take swift actions. However, the first Battle of Tarain in 1191 A.D. proved to a mark of glory for the Rajputana by crushing and defeating the invader Ghori on the land of Tarain. But, it was the Battle of Tarain II in 1192 A.D. that changed the course of history and added the chapter of Ghori victory on

Bharatvarsha with Tarain as the battle field which beheld the sight of the fall the Rajputana forces with in time period of mere 12 months.

The loss of the Rai Pithora can be critically analyzed on various factors ranging from fragmentation of the politics of Bharatvarsha to the lack of united war waged from the Indian rulers. Although, considering the physiography it can be credited to supreme breed of horses of central Asia and abundance of metalliferous mountain ranges which provided metals such as iron of finest quality. Nevertheless zeal was equivalent on both sides to demolish the opponent with the best soldiers.

## CONCLUSION:

The physiography of the ancient land of shreshtha Bharata had dominated its position on a global realm with an interplay of writing the verses of history along with the crown choosing its right heir. The snow – capped mountains jeweled in the North and the long coastline bordering the land gave access to the humankind of the foreign land. The passes of the mountains were rugged and the sea was unpredictable yet, the eyes of the East and the West were set on the heart of Bharat. History stands tall that once the pathway which gave access to food, shelter and knowledge soon turned hostile in order to challenge the crown of the Bharata. One such invader from the Central India set on a voyage not just on a mission to loot the wealth but to rule the land of Bharatvarsha. Despite various hurdles encompassing from tough terrain, challenging climatic conditions and challenging forces yet he won the Battle of Tarrain ( 1192 A.D. ). The zeal, military tactics and strategy to cross the North – Western Frontier made Ghori successful to live his dream of rule the Indian soil which finally led to the foundation of Delhi Sultanate. The Sultans ruled from 1206 A.D. to 1526 A.D. added the Medieval era of the Indian history simply because of undefended and unopposed frontier of the North – Western India.

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