CHAPTER I

IRAN : ITS GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

Iran

Situated between latitudes 25° and 40° north and longitudes 44° and 63° east and spreading over an area of 1,648,000 sq. kms., Iran holds a prominent position in the southwest Asia. It is bordered by the U.S.S.R. and the Caspian Sea to its north, Afghanistan and Pakistan to its east, Turkey and Iraq to its west and the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea to its south (Map 1). The borders of Iran measure 7,680 kms. out of which about two-thirds are land and one-third sea. The territorial limits of Iran in its present form had practically been defined by 1914. The area which Iran covers at present is far less than the total area of ancient Iran which extended from Armenia in the northwest to the borders of Sind in the southeast; from Tigris-Euphrates basin in the southwest to Syr Darya in Central Asia and from Asia Minor in the west to the Hindu Kush in the east.¹

Iran has a long history going back to more than 2,500 years when Cyrus the Great founded the Persian empire extending far beyond the present boundaries of the country. He established a political entity that was to be the base for a new civilization marked for its glory and grandeur. Iran made a

remarkable progress in learning and evolved an advanced civilization and culture. The Persian language contributed one of the finest literatures in the world. It was mainly through this language that Iran derived its essential character as one nation. The feeling of being one nation was further reinforced by the overwhelming predominance of Shia Muslims. All the Arab countries as well as the neighbouring Afghanistan and Pakistan, by comparison, are predominantly Sunni Muslims. These cultural, linguistic and religious aspects of Iran's nationhood were cemented by the commonness of its political history.

Iran is one of the few countries in the world with continuing monarchy. The present regime is benevolent and progressive making serious efforts in transformation and modernization of the Iranian society. The country has emerged as a strong Asian power during recent years. It is on the road to industrialization with the help of indigenous resources and imported technology. The early sixties were critical in the political, economic and social history of the country. This was the time when revolutionary land reforms, breaking the backbone of the traditional feudalism, were implemented. Literacy and health corps were sent to the rural areas for social welfare of the

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people. A national policy was adopted for the rational utilization of precious oil resources. New industries, such as steel, machinery, cars, petrochemicals and electronics were set up. A network of roads was laid to interlink various parts of this extensive country. In fact, Iran is one of the few ancient nations that has succeeded in adapting itself to the modern industrial civilization. Iran is both an old and a new nation.  

Administrative Divisions

For administrative purposes, Iran was divided into 13 ostans (provinces) in 1966. An ostan is comparable to a state in India. There were, in addition, 8 farmandarikols (general governorships) analogous to mini-states. Each of the ostans and farmandarikols were divided into a number of shahrestans (townships) which were 146 in all. The shahrestans were further divided into bakhshes (sections). Their total number was 462. Although bakhshes comprised of both rural and urban areas, some of them were entirely urban. The rural parts of a bakhsh were organized into a number of dehestans (rural districts), their number being 1,520. A dehestan had a number of dehs (villages). The country had more than 65,000 villages in 1966.

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MAP 3.

IRAN Landform Regions

- Caspian Sea
- Northern Highlands
- Eastern Upland Rim
- Zagros System and the Central Mountains
- Persian Coastlands
- Soutern Basins
- South Eastern Iran
- North-Western Basins
- USSR
- Oman Sea
- Persian Gulf
- Afghanistan
Regional Divisions

Iran is overwhelmingly an area of pronounced relief with mountains as a dominant element. The average height of the land surface of the country is over 1,000 metres above mean sea level (Map 2). The entire country looks like a bowl, with a high outer rim, surrounding an irregular and lower, but not low lying, interior. The rim is made of various mountain ranges covering extensive areas. Heights above 3,000 metres are not uncommon and at places exceed even 5,000 metres. The Damavand peak in the Alborz, with a height of 5,604 metres, is the highest point. The influence of relief on all other aspects, such as climate, agriculture and population patterns, is unmistakable. The boundaries of regions drawn on the basis of various geographic elements correspond more or less with these landform regions (Map 3). Therefore, for the convenience of understanding, Iran may be divided into the following regions:

1. Caspian Lowlands  
2. Northern Highlands  
3. Northwestern Basins  
4. Zagros System and the Central Mountains

5 ibid., p. 5.

* Keeping in view the Persian accent of certain names, their spellings have been slightly modified from the spellings as used by the foreign scholars. Such modified names include Alborz, Esfahan, Baluchestan, Kordestan, Kord, Talesh, Khuzestan, Mashhad etc.
5. Central Desert Basins
6. Southeastern Iran
7. Eastern Upland Rim, and
8. Southern Coastlands.

**Caspian Lowlands**

The Caspian lowlands, coinciding with the Gilan and Mazanderan ostan, extend for about 700 kms. along the Caspian Sea. With Alborz mountains to their south, these crescent shaped lowlands make a narrow belt of about 25 to 35 kms. width. They have the typical beach, marsh and plain topography that has been a product of the combined action of sea, river water and wind.

The Caspian lowlands are noted for their warm and wet climate in contrast to cold and dry climate over most parts of Iran. Temperatures range from 10° to 20° centigrade during summer and are mostly above the freezing point during winter. Precipitation increases from about 100 cm. in the south to nearly 200 cm. along the coast(Map 4). Most of it falls during autumn and winter conforming to the Mediterranean climatic regime of this area.

A large number of small streams originating from the Alborz mountains traverse through the region to reach the Caspian Sea. Sefid Rud, Harez, Tajan and Gorgan are among the prominent rivers. Among these, only Sefid Rud makes an extensive delta.
The favourable physical conditions allow intensive cultivation. Rice is the chief crop followed by tea, cotton, tobacco, maize, jute and sugar-beet. Citrus fruits and vegetables are also grown on a large scale. A notable feature of this region has been recent reclamation of marshy lands for agriculture.

Most of the industries are agro-based. These include cotton textiles, rice milling, tea processing, fruit canning and vegetable oil manufacturing. Silk textiles and woodworks based on local vegetation and canning of fish caught from the Caspian Sea are the other industries. Gorgan, Behshahr, Shahi, Chalus and Rasht are among the major industrial centres.

In terms of human geography, the Caspian lowlands are the most densely populated part of the country. These contain nearly one-eighth of Iran's population on about 4 per cent of its area. Population is distributed in dispersed settlements. Towns are numerous and closely spaced. Most of these are market centres, agro-industrial centres or tiny ports. Rasht is the biggest. It is a capital city, a regional agricultural market and an industrial centre. The Caspian coastlands have been suffering from pressure of population on land resources. This resulted in considerable out-migration, mainly to the Tehran region. The newly reclaimed agricultural lands within the region also provided some relief to land hungry people of the area.
Northern Highlands

Adjoining the Caspian lowlands to their south, southwest and southeast, this region is entirely hilly and mountainous. It comprises three major mountain systems of the Talesh in the west, the Alborz in the middle and the Khorasan in the east. Following the shape of the Caspian belt, it also has a crescent form.

The Talesh hills run in northwest-southeast direction, with an elevation ranging between 2,000 and 3,000 metres. The Alborz mountains, by comparison, are loftier. They stand out as a high wall for a distance of about 1,000 kms. Mount Damavand (5,604 metres) located approximately in their middle is the highest point in the whole of Iran. The Khorasan ranges are neither as high nor as compact as the Alborz. These have a ridge and trough topography. Thus, the northern highlands are the highest in the middle with declining elevation both toward the east and the west.

Due to their proximity to the Caspian Sea, the northern highlands receive a relatively high amount of precipitation ranging from 80 to 160 cms. on the northern slopes and 40 to 80 cms. on the southern slopes. The precipitation decreases also from the west to the east. The Khorasan ranges record only about 40 cms. of annual precipitation. With January temperatures of about -10°C, the entire region is one of the coldest parts of the country. July temperatures are in
the vicinity of 20°C. Winter precipitation is always in the form of snow. The snowfall season extends generally from the last week of November to the middle of March.

A number of streams takes its origin from the snow-clad parts of these mountains. Practically all of them have the Caspian Sea as their destination. Prominent among these include Atrak, Gorgan, Tajan, Haraz, Jajrud and Karaj. Some seasonal streams marking their course on the southern slopes of the Alborz terminate inland.

It is along the valleys of the various streams that pockets of cultivable land are found and human settlements scattered. Crops like wheat, barley, sugar-beet, lucerne, fruits and vegetables are raised. The higher parts of the valleys are used for summer pasturing which involves transhumance. Many villages have their satellites at a distance of 10 to 25 kms. up the valleys. These are used for the transhumance period from May to September. By comparison, the lower parts of the valleys abound in fruit orchards raising oranges, lemons, peaches, olives and mulberries.

Population is sparse and follows the distributional pattern of pockets of cultivated land. The economy of the people is a mixture of cultivation and pastoralism. A mention has already been made of summer transhumance to higher elevations. Complementary to this movement is the winter
migration from the high valleys to the towns in the Caspian belt or to Tehran. Thus, one could easily speak of a fully developed system of vertical migration: upward to summer pastures and then downward to cities during winter.

Interestingly some of the prominent cities of Iran find their location along the southern margins of these highlands. These include, from the west to the east, Qazvin, Karaj, Tehran, Semnan and Mashhad. All these places are strategically located on the traditional international route connecting China with the Mediterranean lands. Tehran is the national capital, Mashhad is famous for its biggest shrine in the country, Qazvin enjoys natural modality, Karaj is a big industrial centre and Semnan is the capital of a farmandarikol.

Northwestern Basins

Roughly rectangular in disposition, this region covers the whole of the East and West Azarbaijan ostan and parts of Kordestan ostan and Zanjan farmandarikol. It is a mosaic of a number of basins, namely Aras, Rezaiyeh, little Zab and Sirvan as well as the basin of Qezel Ozan. The Aras basin is located in the north, the Rezaiyeh basin in the middle, the little Zab and Sirvan basin in the southwest and the Qezel Ozan basin in the southeast. The total topographic effect is that of a series of highly dissected plateaus at an average
elevation of about 2,000 metres. Superimposed upon this plateau topography are the great cones of three volcanoes: Ararat in the northwest, Sabalan in the northeast and Sahand in the centre. All of them are dormant.

The Rezaiyeh lake is a notable feature of the area. Situated at nearly 1,300 metres above mean sea level, it is about 150 kms. long and about 50 kms. wide. Its depth is always less than 5 metres. It is fed by streams coming from the surrounding area, known as Rezaiyeh basin.

Due to its considerable elevation, proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, and a location beyond the sub-tropical latitudes, the region is characterised by a temperate sub-humid climate. January temperatures range between the freezing point and -10°C and the July temperatures are about 20°C. The annual precipitation ranges from 40 to 100 cms. and most of its falls in winter and spring. The region is generally under a thick blanket of snow during winter.

In spite of handicaps of topography and harsh climate, the region is known for its intensive agriculture. The abundant supply of water from the various streams, relatively high amount of rainfall and fertile volcanic soils in parts explain this phenomenon. Among the more developed agricultural areas are the middle and higher parts of Rezaiyeh basin, parts of Qezel Ozan lowlands, the Qarasu valley and Khoy basin.
The main cereal crops grown include wheat, barley, and some maize. Mediterranean fruits, including grapes, almonds and apricots are produced in abundance. Cotton, tobacco and oil seeds are also raised. Most of the cultivated land is confined to lower lying areas near the water courses. On higher altitudes, pastoral activity becomes dominant. Sheep and goats, some cattle and a few horses are raised. Thus, the economy of the northwestern region is a combination of two different ways of life—cultivation in more favoured lower lying areas and pastoral activity on higher altitudes. Nomadic activity, especially among Kordish shepherds, still continues.

In association with its intensive agriculture, the northwestern region ranks as one of the more densely populated parts of the country. Population is concentrated particularly in lower lying areas which are gifted with fertile soils, have an easy accessibility to the river waters and are sheltered from bitter winter winds. Settlement is mostly in the form of villages that show a tendency to cluster near drainage lines. The population density, almost twice the national average, has been exerting a severe pressure on land resources impelling considerable out-migration from the region, especially to Tehran. Traditionally also, the area has been in active contact with the neighbouring countries through its trade in wool, leather and dry fruits. As a consequence, people are
enterprising and avail themselves of any new economic opportunities. Out-migration has been a tradition with them.

For reasons of political history and geographical contiguity with Turkey, most of the people in the region are Turkish speaking. This feature of the region's population geography imparts it a kind of psychological unity to an area which is otherwise so diverse from the physical point of view. Tabriz long served as its cultural and political heart. It has been a focus of major routes radiating in various directions. It is now the capital of East Azarbaijan ostan. Other important places in the region include Rezaiyeh, the capital of Western Azarbaijan ostan, Sanandaj, the capital of Kordestan ostan, and Zanjan, the capital of Zanjan farmandarikol.

Zagros System and Central Mountains

Covering about one-fourth of the total area of the country, the Zagros mountains make a prominent macro-region of Iran. The mountains extend for about 1,250 kms. from northwest to southeast and have a width of 300 to 400 kms. These present a picture of remarkable fold structures attaining elevations of more than 3,000 metres at many points. Most of the Zagros system has an elevation of 2,000 to more than 3,000 metres. Thus, the average height of the Zagros is more than that of Alborz although the latter can pride in having the country's highest peak of Damavand.
The Zagros are often divided into two groups – high Zagros and Zagros foothills, on the basis of altitude. The high Zagros are the main Zagros with a typical fold mountain topography while the Zagros foothills adjoin them to the west and are highly dissected. The eastern side of the high Zagros is practically devoid of foothills. Here the mountains rise abruptly above the neighbouring lowlands of central Iran.

The high Zagros are traditionally divided into various sub-regions on the basis of drainage basins of various streams. This speaks of the great importance which Iranians attach to rivers as a source of water to sustain life. The sub-regions from northwest to southeast are the basins of Sirvan, Saimareh, Dez, Karun, Marun, Zohreh, Shahpur, Mond, Khamir, Shur and inland basins of Neyriz and Shiraz. The Zagros foothills are also sub-divided into the Zimkan to Ab-e-Gangir, Posht-e-Kuh, the Karkheh to Dez, lower Bakhtiyari and Ab-e-Aala to Bushehr on the basis of nature of local topography.

From the viewpoint of total geography, the climatic division of the Zagros into the sub-humid northwest and the arid southeast is more critical. The northwest receives an annual precipitation of 50 to 100 cms., and the southeast of less than 50 cms. Rather the precipitation is less than 25 cms. over a large part of the southeastern Zagros. These differences in precipitation are reflected in sharp differences in the drainage systems of the two areas. In the northwest, rivers are numerous and mostly perennial; in the southeast,
these are mostly seasonal and make only a short journey before losing themselves in an enclosed basin. The important streams in the northwest include Sirvan, Qarasu, Saimareh, Karkheh, Karun and Jarahi. Zohreh, Daleki, Mond, Rud-e-Khamir and Shur are the streams worthy of some note in the case of southeast Zagros. The northwest Zagros, with a higher latitudinal location, is not only more humid but also cooler than the southeast Zagros.

These differences in climate and potency of drainage lines of the northwest and southeast Zagros are strongly manifest in the patterns of land utilization and human settlements in the two areas. The northwest is more intensively cultivated and densely populated than the southeast. The availability of fertile alluvial pockets along the drainage lines in combination with relatively high precipitation in the northwest explains this phenomenon.

The economy of the people in the northwest is a combination of regular cropping, transhumance and semi-nomadism. Sedentary cultivation is confined to patches of alluvium scattered around compact, stone built settlements. Wheat, barley, fruits and vegetables are the main crops. Some cultivation of rice is carried on the warmer, southern aspects of the mountains. Transhumance involving movement of the people at different altitudes within the small locality is quite common. The same is the case with semi-nomadism which
involves seasonal migration from one area to another for pastoral activities.

The entire northwest Zagros has been undergoing remarkable changes during recent years. The construction of trans-Iranian railway and of many new roads broke its isolation. Its proximity to the Khuzestan oilfields and petrochemical centres along the Persian Gulf was also instrumental in its development. Agriculture, in particular has become more intensive. Also, the oil fields and industrial centres offered new employment opportunities for the Zagros people. This stimulated considerable out-migration during recent years.

One meets a conspicuous change in land utilization and human settlements as one moves into the southeastern Zagros. With climate becoming warmer and drier, millets assume greater importance. Citrus fruits and dates take the place of apples, pears, cherries, apricots and peaches that are more dominant in the northwest. Irrigation is a must for successful agriculture. Incidence of nomadism increases and that of transhumance decreases. Pastures are serviceable for a longer duration in a year because of relatively mild winters. Temperatures do not vary sharply at different elevations in local areas and hence vertical migration of the people is not that common. The southeast Zagros is much less populated than its northwestern counterpart.
The northwest Zagros is more developed than the southeast Zagros. Towns are bigger and more frequent in the former area. Important places located here include Kermanshah, Hamadan, Khorramabad and Esfahan. Kermanshah is the capital of an ostan by the same name. It enjoys a nodal position in western Iran and is strategically located in relation to Iraq. Hamadan, situated in the foothills of Alvand mountains is a city of great historic antiquity. It is the capital of Hamadan ostan. Like Hamadan, Esfahan is located in the foothill zone of central mountains. It was the capital of Iran from the early sixteenth to the end of eighteenth century. Khorramabad, enjoying a central location in the Zagros, is a link-town between north and south Iran and is a big market place for the variety of hill produce. By comparison, Shiraz is the only prominent place in the southeast Zagros. It is rather the most glorious town in the whole Zagros system. It was long famous for its gardens and poetry; Sheikh Saadi and Hafez were born in this city. With its pleasant climate, historical monuments and convenient accessibility, Shiraz has a great appeal as a tourist centre.

6 In 1966, Hamadan was a capital of a farmandarikol and not of an ostan.
Central Desert Basins

Nearly a half of Iran is covered by desert basins spreading over the eastern half of the country. Girdled by high lands on all sides, these are generally areas of subdued relief, their elevation being generally less than 1,000 metres above mean sea level. The various basins are separated from each other by mountain chains having an elevation of 2,000 to 3,000 metres.

For convenience of understanding, these desert basins may be classified into three groups: (i) the northern group including the Dasht-e-Kavir and its subsidiaries; (ii) the southern Dasht-e-Lut; and (iii) the southwestern basins. The northern group of basins lies immediately south of the Alborz. Dasht-e-Kavir is the biggest among these. Covered mostly with a sheet of salt encrusted mud, it is a desolate wilderness bare of vegetation. The southern Dasht-e-Lut is a wide oval depression surrounded by hills on all sides. It drops to an elevation less than three hundred metres in its southern part. Shifting sand dunes dominate its topography. The southwestern basins are comparatively small, scattered between parallel mountain ranges at a distance of about 50 kms. from each other. They are also mostly salt-basins and present a desolate appearance.

These desert basins were extensive lakes in the past. The recent discovery of rich coal reserves indicates that the
area earlier had humid and hot climate. The processes of desiccation gradually turned them into a group of deserts. The old lakes were transformed into vast expanses of silt and mud overlain by crystalline salts.

Extreme aridity is the hallmark of these desert basins. The annual precipitation amounts to hardly 3 to 15 cms. and practically the whole of it falls in six winter months. Summers are almost cloudless and extremely hot. The diurnal range of temperature is very large and is responsible for rock exfoliation on a massive scale.

Cursed by extremely hot and dry climate and virtually devoid of any vegetation, the central desert basins permit neither cultivation, nor pastoral activity of any significance. Some mining in chrome, lead, copper, zinc, coal and sulphur is carried on in local areas (Map 5). Population is extremely sparse, there being hardly one person per sq. km. of area. Most of the population is distributed along the margins of the desert basins where the severity of physical conditions is less harsh. The few towns of the region also find their location in the contact zone of the desert basins with the adjoining high lands. Notable among these are Kashan, Yazd, Kerman and Zahedan. All of them are market towns having strategic location on the major caravan routes.
Southeastern Iran

Inhabited by Baluchi speaking people, the southeastern Iran makes a distinctive geographical region of Iran. It is composed of three traditional sub-regions of Makran in the south, the Iranian Baluchestan in the middle and Sistan in the north. The region as a whole covers nearly one-tenth of the country.

Physically speaking the southeastern Iran is far from being uniform. It comprises of a coastal plain in the south and west, a girdle of mountain ranges in the north and the inland basin of Jazmurian in the middle. The mountain girdle is formed of a series of ridges coming from different directions. Ridges are often less than 2,000 metres in elevation and enclose the basin of Jazmurian at an average elevation of 300 metres. To the south of this mountain girdle lies the Makran coastal lowland which extends for a length of about 400 kms. with a width ranging from one to forty kilometres.

Very hot summers and mild winters are typical. July temperatures are often around 40° C and the January temperatures range between 10° and 20° C. The southeastern region is one of very dry parts of the country as the annual precipitation amounts to less than 20 cms.

Although the climate is arid yet some parts of the region are lucky in receiving waters from perennial streams originating from the mountain girdle as also from adjoining
hills in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Sistan in the north receives water from the Hirmand river coming from Afghanistan. Jazmurian basin in the middle benefits from the waters of Rud-e-Bampur, Halil Rud and their tributaries. The Makran coastal lowland in the south is also drained by perennial streams like Jagin, Gabrich, Rabeh and Dashtiyari, taking their origin from the mountains to the north. The areas adjacent to perennial drainage lines are fairly cultivated and populated. The Hirmand basin of Sistan is known for its cultivation of wheat, barley and some beans during winter, and sorghum, cotton and vegetables during summers. In Jazmurian basin, crops like wheat, barley and dates are grown. Vegetables are important and some citrus fruits are raised. Most of the agricultural development in the Makran coastal lowland has taken place round Minab where two small perennial streams run close to each other. Dates, cereals like wheat and barley, citrus fruits and banana are produced in large quantity. The entire region is capable of being further developed from agricultural point of view if its available water resources are properly harnessed.

Population distribution follows the availability of cultivated land. Most of the population is concentrated along the perennial streams. The total population size is small as hardly one per cent of the total area is under cultivation. The pastoral population inhabits the mountainous
parts of the region and their distribution is extremely sparse. Towns are few and far between. Zahedan is the only place worthy of note. It is the administrative headquarters of Sistan and Baluchestan ostan. It enjoys a strategic location due to its proximity to both Pakistan and Afghanistan (Map 6).

**Eastern Upland Rim**

The eastern margins of Iran adjoining with Afghanistan present a distinct topographical pattern. Here we find a bunch of fold mountains separated by unevenly distributed lowlands. The highest among these is Kuh-e-Sorkh which attains an elevation of about 3,000 metres. To its east lies the Kuh-e-Bizak which is adjoined by Kuh-e-Khaf to its southeast. These mountains as a group are known as Qayen highlands. To their south lies the Qayenat lowland which forms an intervening zone between the Qayen highlands to the north and Birjand highlands to the south. The Birjand highlands are again a group of mountains including Kuh-e-Ahangaren and Kuh-e-Shah. To the east of these mountains lies another lowland which makes a frontier zone between Iran and Afghanistan.

The region is characterised by a harsh climate. Summers are hot, arid and windy and winters are cold with some precipitation mostly in the form of snow. Winter temperatures swing around the freezing point and the summer temperatures are around 30° C. The annual precipitation is less than 20 cms. There is a conspicuous lack of perennial streams.
Some agriculture is carried on in small cultivable pockets along the streams, particularly at places where these leave the uplands. Wheat, barley and fruits like grapes, figs, and pomegranate dominate. Pastoral activities are of primary importance on the highlands.

Population distribution is sparse. The foot hill zones of the uplands, where some water is available, are dotted with closely spaced village settlements. These settlements are often small in size due to limited amount of cultivated land. Qayenat and Birjand are the two large towns surrounded by comparatively rich agricultural areas. Land peripheral to them is very intensively cultivated with cereals, fruits and vegetables and saffron. Birjand is famous for its carpet industry.

Southern Coastlands

The southern coastlands comprising of the Khuzestan plain and the Persian Gulf lowlands make yet another distinctive region of Iran. The area has come into a great prominence during recent decades because of its rich oil reserves and recent development of several oil based industries. The greatly enhanced economic and political importance of Iran derives its strength from the oil in this region.

In physical terms, Khuzestan is the most extensive alluvial plain in the whole country. It is roughly triangular in shape and is a part of a great valley of Mesopotamia. It has been formed by the material deposited by Karun and Karkheh
rivers originating from the Zagros mountains to the north. The Persian Gulf lowlands to the east do not make a continuous plain. These are interspersed by a number of spurs projecting out from the Zagros chain. These lowlands are traversed by a number of perennial streams, namely Zohreh, Shur, Mond, Mehran and Kol.

Apparently agricultural potentiality of the southern coastlands seems to be great. The irony is that water of many rivers, particularly in the Persian Gulf lowlands, becomes saline and unfit for irrigation while passing through the coastal areas. Rivers themselves have produced saline marshes over extensive areas, especially near the coast line where the frequent tidal waves contribute to the same. To cap all this, climate of this coastal region is very hot and dry. Summer temperatures are above 40°C and winter temperature about 20°C. The region is rightly known as the garmair in the language of the local people who find it an extremely hot place. Annual precipitation amounts to hardly 20 cms. which is an unusually low figure for a coastal area.

Cultivation is confined to the northern parts of the region, adjoining the Zagros mountains where sweet water is available for irrigation. River barrages have been constructed at a number of points. Wheat, barley, sugar-cane, vegetables and some rice make the cropping pattern. By contrast, the southern part of the region adjoining the sea is practically
unfit for agriculture. It contains large pockets of salt marshes and swamps. Salinity of soils and water is the major problem.

Nature has compensated this region by bestowing it with rich oil resources. It is one of the major oil producing areas in the world enabling Iran to become the second largest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia. The foreign exchange earned through export of oil is being utilized for an over-all development of the country. The major oil fields are located at Masjed-e-Soleiman, Haftgel, Gachsaran, Naft-e-Sefid, Lali, Aghajari, Ahvaz and Pazanan. Drilling has now been extended to the continental shelf of the Persian Gulf. Oil is also being used for numerous petrochemical industries scattered over the whole area. Ahvaz, Bushehr, Khark and Abadan are the prominent industrial centres. Haftgel is famous for its sugar mill. Abadan is one of the biggest refineries in the whole world.

The oil fields and oil based industries have stimulated considerable in-migration from almost all parts of the country. The population composition of the area is a mosaic of all variety of people, usually characteristic of metropolitan cities.

Thus, Iran displays a great regional diversity in term of its physical, economic and human resources. These diversities have made their impact on the population geography of different parts of the country. The discussions in the
chapters to follow is a testimony to this. It seems that two material things - water and oil - are all important to Iran today, and also two spiritual things - history and Islam. 