Conceptualizing the *Region*: An Overview of Recent Developments and Relevance

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Abstract: Conceptualization of region has shown a considerable transformation from its inception as a differentiated segment on the earth's surface to the contemporary relational space. Earlier understanding of region by geographers as merely physical description of surface variations now seems limited when social, economic, and institutional fabric itself is in change in the context of growing interconnectivity in so-called globalization. However, spatial consequences and imprints of new trend in development processes brought by 'new world order' can be well analysed and understood by uncovering regional particularities as well as complexities.

Introduction

'Region' has been conceptualized differently for different purposes. The contemporary discourses over the "regional questions" are not as easy as they have become complex due to developmental processes. Neuman and Hull (2009) suggested that regional questions are multidisciplinary and multi-scalar and the phenomena under analysis are themselves more complex, as evidenced by an abundance of empirical and theoretical research in the last decade (Neuman and Hull 2009: 777). *Region* remains central to several academic disciplines and in applied studies also, currently the reassertion of regional dimension is worth relevant. Further, following on from the 'old-style' textbooks on regional geography which worked through a sequence of regions which seemed to have existed for all time, geographers are now more willing to question the validity of rigid borders and the stability of boundaries more generally (Allen, Massey and Cochrane, 1998: i).

Derek Gregory et al. (2009) in 'The Dictionary of Human Geography' suggest that most commonly used to designate a region is as: (a) an area or zone of indeterminate size on the surface of the Earth, whose diverse elements form a functional association; (b) one such region as part of a system of regions covering the GLOBE; or (c) a portion of one feature of the Earth, as in a particular CLIMATE region or economic region (Gregory et al, 2009: 630). These defining features of region culminate functional characteristics, linked to and form a part of larger system, and make its presence as a portion of homogeneous attributes. So far, regional geography didn't come in just one version, but was itself regionally variegated (Barnes, 2011: 148). For Forman (2008) two broad characteristics are commonly central to the concept of a region; macroclimate and cultural-social pattern (2008: 35). The former is concerned with, as he elaborates, formation of atmospheric "cells" which holds common macroclimate and makes a geographic region. Culturally determined human activities on the land determine the subset-macroclimate regions, as associated to later one. 'So, a *region* has both a common macroclimate and a common sphere of human activity and interest'. In Haughton and Counsell's view, however, the various approaches to regional studies are not wholly

separate bodies of work, having developed from each other in many ways, nor were they chronologically discrete or internally coherent in their evolution (2004:1). It means the approaches developed in the various disciplines benefited the regional conceptualizations, interpretations, and in developing a body of knowledge.

Before the institutionalization of geography, region had been as an important understanding to rulers who sought to manage their vast territories, to plan their developments (societal and spatial), to control their populations and for strategic purposes. In Foucaultian (1980) understanding, region was originally a fiscal, administrative and military notion, whereas territory was a juridico-political category, an area controlled by power (Paasi: 2011). Derek Gregory et al. have rightly said that the region has been subject to much examination as to its epistemological and ontological status (Gregory et al. Op. Cit: 630). Several studies on regions suggest these are not the physical entities which exist but are the product of the thinking and imagined intellect aimed at designating such entities. For Schrijver (2006), it is defined as a place or area which has the additional characteristics of having, possibly elastic, boundaries or territorial limits, and a number of features that make it distinct from other places (2006: 21). Whereas, for Guttenberg (1988) "regions are not natural objects" but mental constructions (cited by Hodge and Robinson 2002: 97). It entails the both normative and factual attributes in the creation of regions since 'purpose' of all that becomes to delineate it from whole whether in terms of space and resources. The concerns have been growing towards 'interdisciplinary' approaches to explore and interpret the region(al) characteristics and unexplored critical and spatial dimensions. For instance, as Misra and Niranjana (2005) suggested

that there is need to understand how different disciplines have constructed the region and to investigate the implications of this for knowledge production in general (Misra and Niranjana 2005: 4678). It means a philosophical and methodological assessment of the construction of a region, the focus of this paper, would offer a wider applicability of approaches for the relevance of regional studies in geographical work.

Trend in Conceptualizations

Regions not only represent the physical features and characteristics of the earth surface where upon human activities and ongoing lives take place but also an understanding of both, between and within, human and environment interconnections and interrelationships to be summed up and designated as non-physical regions. In the mid-nineteenth century conceptions of region, the interesting descriptions and interpretations unfold the shifting perspectives of and over region from then onwards. No doubt, the concept of region is one of the fundamental concepts in geography. Region has played a key role as a 'principal organizing concept in geographical work'. Some developments in regional studies can be regarded as: region as an analytical category, as an instrument for classifying and organizing geographical data, as areas in some way distinctive from other; recognition of the role of subjective dimensions and perception of regions based on images; regions as social constructs and historical constitution of regions; and regions as space-time phenomena (Schrijver, Op. Cit., : 22).

Looking at the modern conception of region, initially there were three entangled national traditions─German, French, and British─that folded into a fourth, American. Therefore, as noted Trevor J. Barness, Germany was perhaps the most important because it was there that the twin

foundations of the institutionalized form of the discipline was laid down by Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), principally a physical scientist (the *Kosmos*, 1845), and Carl Ritter (1799-1859), principally an anthropologist (the *Erdkunde*, 1817-1859). For Ritter, as being a teleologist, regions exist and geographer has to discover them out. Under Ritter, geography experienced progress as a hybrid science: natural science and human science, the interaction of both in term of 'region' was recognized to be appropriate and justifiable. German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833-1905) defined the distinctive purpose of geography as a field of learning to focus on the diverse phenomena occurring in interrelation on the face of the earth (Dikshit 1997: 184).

In conceiving the region, the Heidelberg geographer Alfred Hettner's (1859-1941) definition of the term brought forth two points straightforward. First, the region was to be geography's primary epistemological object. Second, regions were to be studied by the scrupulous collection of geographical facts. Such an understanding of the region was based on analytical grounds and a collection of factual information in order to differentiate one region to another. Coming to Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918), a French geographer, in contrast to primacy of environment, he stressed culture as an important component and a moving force in conceptualizing the region. According to Blache, culture modified nature creating distinctive integrated assemblages of people and environment, unique ways of life, and which were, and this was the point, organized and set regionally. Thus, a region (*pays*) was the unit in which people and their environment gelled.

In UK, the British theorization of region was provided by A. J. Herbertson. According to him climate was especially important, delimiting "natural regions" and also for him regions by their constitution and construction were vitally human, but possessing a "consciousness". Another British geographer, J. F. Unstead (1916) suggested that any scheme of natural regions should be based on a combination of physical and cultural features (Ibid: 191). In American case, if any theory of region was constructed it was bound to an 'ethically suspect environmental determinism'. Later on, Hettnerian methods of studying regions become usual in various American studies. The cultural dimensions played a major role in American literature of regions.

In the post-Ritterian period, interests in regional studies was declined but in early periods of twentieth century the interest in *region* revived. Schuter (1872-1952) regarded the region or *landschaft* as a concrete unit possessing a form or structure, and he believed that different regions on the face of the earth are intimately related, so that the earth's surface may be conceptualized as being made up of a mosaic of individual landscapes or regions (Ibid : 187). Such a conception of region as unitary object was a reaction to Hettner's analytical method or scientific interpretation. But seeing region as unitary unit was an attempt to follow a path parallel to 'systematic sciences'.

By the middle of twentieth century, Hartshorne showed that regions are descriptive tools, defined according to a particular criterion to define them, such as climatic regions, agricultural regions, industrial regions etc (Chaudhary 2008: 13). What he conceived of the region was an assemblage of elements composed of unique but similar combinations of objective geographical entities. Against to the doubts of not having universally accepted regional division, some of the radical geographers, interested in *spatial sciences*, also regarded the region in organizing the geographical

information. Peter Haggett as a spatial scientist brought an innovative trend through his *Locational Analysis* (1965), a volume which was compiled into two parts. First was about theoretical forms and explanations of abstract regional space. The second part was the toolbox which provided formal techniques, procedures, algorithms and flow charts for realizing specific spatial ends (Barness, Op. Cit., : 154). This sort of analytical method of defining and delimiting was under threat and rigorously criticized during 1970s and seemed stop working. Partly it was too singular an approach in a discipline that historically was open-ended and pluralist (Ibid: 154). It was a period when 'economy' entered in understanding region and its relations with other regions. Thus, region was conceived as an arena in which new relations between capital and labour were worked out, a new thinking emerged.

Since the early 1980s and later the region reemerged as central concept in thinking about the emerging character of the growing economy. In seeking a framework to understand and study the changes brought, geographers such as Massey (1979), Harvey (1989) and colleagues put forth "the regional question" in the context of arguments about equity and social justice (Christopherson and Clark 2007: 3). For them the regional question offered a way of knowing social relations in space and the very forces affecting and shaping the people's opportunities and livelihoods with capital circulations. Lagendijk writes, Massey was one of the first to discuss to what extent the region itself presents a causal force or an agent versus the wider spatial structures through which regions are constituted, such as the spatial division of labour controlled by corporate power (Lagendijk 2007: 1194). This thinking could emerge due to widespread impacts on people, there needed to be analysis, theoretical scrutiny, explanation, a calling

to account (Barness, Op. Cit,: 155). There has been a growing acceptance of studies in 'economic' implications and the capitalism at regional for a call for new regional geography in association social theory. According to Barness in the first half of the 1980s Allan Pred (1984) and Nigel Thrift (1983) drawing upon the Swedish geographer Tosrton Hagerstrand, and the British sociologist Anthony Giddens to outline, and Pred's case later empirically fill in, a socially theoretical informed notion of the region that drew on ideas of recursiveness (Ibid : 156).

The recognition of use and value of 'place' become very crucial in reformed regional geography apart from 'space'. In 1985, Scargill argued that we do not reject space, but our call is to restore balance to geography by giving greater attention to the other two themes-place and region (Scargill 1985: 138). It came as a creative reaction to undermined scope of regional studies and sought for its revival. According to Scargill the region must be seen not as some artificial compartment imposed on the earth's surface by tidy-minded geographers, but as a set of active agents, conditioning the impact of the social, economic and political processes that are at work in the world (Ibid: 139). Whereas, Hoekveld and Hoekvel-Meijer argues that place (as process, actors, and artifacts) and society (as structure) are related but distinct properties of a region (1995: 159). Therefore, *place* got its recognition in the social science studies in relation to region in the recent past.

'Relational Thinking' or 'Relational Turn', and Beyond?

In human geography, thinking relationally is, in part, an attempt to reimagine either/or constructions of binary thinking and to recognize the important elements of interconnection which go into the

construction of any identity (Massey 1999: 12). Getting away from absolute and relative analysis, there has been growing concern for the 'relational thinking'. For Jones (2009) 'thinking space relationally' is becoming the mantra of early twenty-first century in human geography and its importance is being discussed in various subfields (2009: 488). The relational reading and analysis of cities and regions offers a different reading of such complex entities, elements and phenomenon.

According to Martin Jones, the absolute (substantival) space is a condition in which space exists independently of any object(s) or relations: space is a discrete and autonomous *container*. Perhaps, pre-1950s regional geography largely concerned with delimiting natural, climatic and latter human regions best illustrates the use of such an approach. Against to it is relative space which rests on two assumptions. Relative space: (a) it may be defined in relation to objects, things and processes taking place in space and time, (b) there is no defined or fixed relationship for locating things under consideration (Ibid : 490).

Having no defined or fixed relationship for things that changes over time and across space, space and time maintain a 'positional quality'. What happens is that traditional three dimensions of space, plus a separate one for time, are merged into a single unified 'spacetime'. There emerged critical comments on relative approaches, as early as 1969, Harvey raised questions like what is the source and structure of spacetime and what are the bounded or 'boundary conditions' that permit certain activities and relations to take place? (Ibid: 490) In geography, there have been serious attempts and widespread concerns and debates on how to uncover, explain, analyze, and represent the interrelations and interconnections between spaces and objects. But there remained 'difficulties of

delivering analytic and narrative forms of analyses', perhaps it could provide a space for *relational* thinking. Coming to relational perspective, it is worth quoting to Martin Jones (2009):

Relational thinking is a paradigmatic departure from the concerns of absolute and relative space, because it dissolves the boundaries between objects and space, and rejects forms of spatial totality. Space does not exist as an entity in and of itself, over and above material objects and their spatiotemporal relations and extensions (Ibid : 491).

This constructed statement shows the growing recognition of relational thinking in the studies of space, place and region too. Schatzki suggests that in its relational version, it is a system of relations among objects and thus not independent of the latter (1991: 651). While dealing with 'spatial characteristics of social formations' and its theorization, Schatzki's views on objective space (absolute and relational) and social space may be summed up as: whereas objective space is a medium or set of relations at least to some extent independent of human existence, social space, as the opening and occupation of sites for human existence, is by its nature present only so long as human life occurs (Ibid: 651). What is crucial to be mentioned here is it is position of "social space" which is questioning the relevance of relative space in contemporary changing societal and spatial conditions and transforming world order. Though *relational thinking* holds an important place as Jones summed up, advocates suggest that the conditions of economic circulation, hypermobility, time-space compression, and cultural insignia warrant a completely new conceptualization of space (Op. Cit.: 492). In these concerns, *scale* based conceptualization is no more appropriate

amidst changing world order and openness of local and growing impacts of social, economic, and political processes. It is similar to what Marston et al. (2005) argued conception of 'human geography without scale'. Allen et al. (1998, 43) put forth that an adequate understanding of the *region* and its futures can only come through a conception of places as open, discontinuous, relational and internally diverse (Quoted in Jones and MacLeodt : 436). In current mobile world a relational approach to space, place and region seems justified one accomplishing the various transformations affecting the 'bounded' entities. In "relational nature of space" as contrasting vision is of a more complex crosscutting articulation of scales or spaces, giving a much greater fuzzyness to borders, boundaries and more traditional bounded spaces (Glasson and Tim Marshal 2007: 7).

Taking a different tack against too-much emphasized 'relational approach', Jones and MacLeodt argue while looking at South West region in London that when performing their practical politics, agents often imagine and identify a discrete, bounded space characterized by a shared understanding of the opportunities or problems which are motivating the very nature of political action (Jones and MacLeodt, Op Cit.: 437). It appears, under space specific circumstances, region may be perceived as practical and 'prescientific' bounded territorial space that has been institutionalized through particular struggles and societal process shaped its 'identity' and also based on 'regional consciousness'. Jones (2009) critically argues that despite the multiple potentials of space flagged in relational thinking, factors can constrain and structure space. All things considered potential does not necessarily become an actual (Jones, Op. Cit.: 493). Viewing region as unbounded and non-territorial, places in the region as open, discontinuous, and relational but not connected is

exacerbated imagination. Region plays an important as well as a critical role in the present globalizing world─as network of flows. So, the role of regions in national economies has changed significantly in recent times as a result of globalization and neoliberalization. Though amidst certain circumstances region may be figured out as unbounded and open, local conditions and "contextual forces" still determine the position and connectivity of a region. Anyways, a region retains its own distinct characteristics which shape the economic and political relationships and its wider connectivity. However, relational region seems powerless amidst globalizing order and in 'the face of globalization'.

More skeptical of present 'relational thinking' is Martin Jones who identifies certain limits in the concept. While linking relational thinking with *idealist relationists* wherein true statements about space are made true by *facts about human minds,* it lacks a widely applicable and observable material basis. According to Jones (2010: 243-255) following are the relevant measures in overcoming limits in 'thinking space relationally':

1. Thinking space in a connected manner opens up a field for political geometry, whereby researchers can track multifarious spatial synchronizations and when these are in synch, they can be institutionalized as contiguous and symmetrical or territorial shapes,

2. Neoliberal context-focusing on territories, space and flows, articulation of collaboration and coherence is required,

3. Such a relational space is the active product of reciprocal relationships between economic behaviour, the politics of representation and identity, state power

geometries, and the sedimentation of these practices in spacetime, and

4. The c*onnected relational space* is a way of taking forward the notion of 'multitude of politics'.

In regional studies, problematizing 'territory' in the study of regions is a constructive debate for reconceptualization of regions. Among such debates, "territorial politics" approach has been largely critiqued due to its failure in making sense of *recent economic and political societal upheaval*. This sort of debate has given rise to several controversies including 'analytical challenges'. According to Carter and Pasquier (2010), three controversies are crucial which revolve around: (i) regions as 'bounded' places, (ii) territorial politics as mono-cultural, and (iii) regions either as 'objects' or 'subjects' of political change (Carter and Pasquier 2010). Thus, they conceptualized regions as 'spaces for politics' while dealing with 'territory' and 'strategic action'. This renewed sociological treatment of region aims at: (i) conceiving of the region as an institutionalizing space, (ii) conceptualizing 'territory' as a social construction, and (iii) the political sociology of 'strategic action'.

Region and Regionalism: *Development* at the Centre Stage

Planning regions of the precursors of today's region planning were not only large, but they also encompassed a complex of rural and urban elements, all their interconnections, and the land and other natural resources located therein (Hodge and Robinson, Op. Cit.:75). Further development in regional planning paid much attention on interrelationships between but to lesser extent within human and natural landscape and environments. Regions, in imagination, are considered as and represent the *expression of a need* to delineate and delimit an area for particular purpose such as planning. In early twentieth century, a broad and holistic approach to the study of regions was prevailing. Scottish biologist Patrick Geddes proposed a "synoptic vision" of regions combining geographical, economic, social, and political dimensions.

In America, an "ecological regionalism" was conceived in which city and countryside, industry and nature were viewed as a whole. Another conception of region was based on culture by the "cultural regionalists" by University of North Carolina, who sought to preserve the unique social values and traditions found in regions. Since 1940s economic activity remained central, for long, in defining regions. During this period, regional theory emphasized the importance of first, *scale economies*, secondly, *city systems and the urban hierarchy*, and finally *minimization of transport cost* in locational analysis. In Wheeler's view, in the 1960s and 1970s neo-Marxist regional economic geographers and sociologists such David Harvey and Manuel Castells brought new analysis of power to the study of regions, looking at the way economic capital, social movements, elites groups, and "growth machines" dominate urban and regional development (2004: 136). In a sense "socio-spatial dialectic", "social-spatial process", and "social spatial relations" also become useful in understanding the dynamics of regions.

In recent years, a growing movement calling for regional solutions to sustainability-related problems has emerged as termed "New Regionalism". The encompassing issues central to the new thinking are equity within metropolitan regions; dealing with growth and suburban sprawl; and growing importance of urban regions in the global economy. It has associations with the rapid growth of urban

regions worldwide, a new wave of environmental planning emphasizing bioregions and landscapes, and concern about growing income and wealth disparities. Amin (2004) highlighted that most versions of the new regionalism share the conviction that region-building and regional protection is the answer for local economic prosperity, democracy and cultural expression (2004: 3).

Planning regions contain two basic attributes: (a) they encompass supra-urban space, and (b) they always comprise two or more jurisdictions. So far as planning dimension is concerned it comprises both normative elements and the means of implementing them. In addition, different planners have different purposes to delineate regions based on different but distinct in size, characteristics and boundaries. What is interesting in defining regions for planning is each of conceptual approaches had their own understanding of 'region', such a large continent, or as small city and its immediate surroundings or a area and part of countryside. The historical and spatial context is completely determinant of what a region is seen to consist of, and therefore regional planning as a concept is highly elastic (Glasson and Marshal, Op. Cit.: 6).

According to Guttenberg (1977), there are four different modes of defining regions: (a) *referential mode* or perceived conditions, (b) *appraisive mode* or phenomenal conditions, (c) *prescriptive mode* or problem-resolving strategy, and (d) *optative mode* or expression of issue-consciousness (Cited in Hodge and Robinson : 98).   Problem-solving strategy underlies the planning activities and tackling the regional issues. The elasticity in the meaning of region affects the planning conception. It is certainly the norm that in planning the concept refers to sub-national territories, that is to say that it mostly refers to a scale below the nation state, and

virtually always to a scale above the municipal or communal government jurisdiction (Glasson and Marshal, Op. Cit.: 8). Major attributes of regional planning can be regarded as:

1. Regional planning involves a concern with both a region dimension and planning process dimension.

2. Regional planning is concerned with harmonizing human use and natural resources development, with achieving a regional balance.

3. The natural region is the proper delimitation of planning region.

4. Planning regions are large in size.

5. Planning regions comprise several public jurisdictions.

Therefore, in regional planning we actually create and construct regions that do not exist already, we literally "carve out" a new space from a larger space or territory. But knowing about or developing a better understanding of regions is considered as "complex, recursive, reflexive process". However, regional planners need to go beyond descriptive, objective facts in order to achieve the broader understanding required for better planning, especially when this planning consists of designing future patters of activities and facilities (Hodge and Robinson, Op. Cit.: 99).

The issues of regionalism and concerns of development are linked to each other and critically. Ethnicity based on social, cultural, faith and relations constitutes identity. The identity is inherited in regionalism which surfaces times and again whenever conflicts begin over the *development*. Since development is to do with

bringing qualitative changes in the societal environments, it appears political in its visions and actions. Inter and intra-regional variations are associated with developmental practices and the level of development. Growing regionalism is often conceived as a threat to nation-state and federal structure of a country. But, the continuous exploitation, discrimination and exclusion of societies and communities gives space to a collective regional feeling directly or indirectly against to biased as well as exclusionary development practices. Quite often, as in India, the regionalism feelings reach to a demand of separate statehood. Several regions in India are raising their voices for either an autonomous region or a separate state grounding on physical or social boundaries out of the present jurisdictions.

In a globalizing world and neoliberalizing nation-states regions are conceptualized as unbound and open, the local or regional reassertions and demands depicts them bounded and closed. It appears once regions happened to get legal statehood and by creating their own legitimate institutional structures, they would try─in their own style─to link with globalizing world through grasping the possibilities and opportunities. However, the "regional political elites" try to suppress the regional assertions and come up with smart policies rhetorically aiming at achieving balanced regional development. For instance, the case of Andhra Pradesh (India) seems an appropriate case to highlight here. Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh is proved backward (with statistics) on indicators of development. State government announced (late-1990s) a policy to make Hyderabad, the capital of state (located in Telangana) as a hub of Information and Communication Technology. By all means, state government went ahead and pursued the goals of the neoliberal policy, the region of Telangana (Now

a State) remained backward. Years of political exclusion and discrimination made people keep on demanding for a separate Statehood. Similar demands are raised for Vidharbha in Maharashtra, Bodoland in Assam etc.

Thinking and Doing Regionally: Relevance of 'Regional Studies'

Kennedy and Zérah (2008) in their urban studies found that growing emphasis on "city-centric growth strategies" shows a shift in India's public policy responses and development scenario. Urban places are the gateways to the flows of capital and for the global connectivity and maximizing the economic growth of a country. But region matters too in its historical position and political economic changes take place. Structural economic and political change produces extreme wealth and extreme poverty, concentrated power and concentrated powerlessness, ghettoization and citadelization, and not by incident: the decrease at the one ends is in large part the result of the increase at the other (Marcuse and Kempen 2000: 249-275). However, it appears the regional question in Indian context has not been given due attention in the academic interpretations and theory building exercises. The inter and intra-regional imbalances, increasing inequalities, displacements, backwardness, exclusion of communities despite the constitutional guarantees, gender disparities, insurgent politics and inequitable political representation not in numbers but in realizing societal development and allocations brings the regional studies at the forefront. The challenges raised by intra-regional disparities and their compounding implications on living conditions and governance are enormous (Diwakar 2009).

Region remains important entity in academics as well as popular perceptions. The significance of

region and regional is well appropriate to the developing world, and the emerging economies of in this belt. Even the "governance" and "development", "neglected histories" and "women in development" etc can be looked at and through thinking regionally. To deal with such en-number of issues regional studies has to widen its scope and academic canvas in order to develop epistemological and ontological base. Coming to *urban*, the attention is shifting from "city" and "suburb" to region in terms of "metropolitan development"-a regional approach in planning, development and management of fragmented urban landscape. Peter Hall suggest that [T]he city region concept has hugely changed the ways it which urban analysts seek to understand the changing spatial dynamics of urban areas: the Mega-City Region concept is about to have equally momentous intellectual implications (Hall 2009). Therefore thinking regionally has great relevance in dealing with social, economic, political phenomena taking place under distinct processes. Postmodern discourse offers to an extent the similar accounts of the changing world and growing importance relevance of diversity and heterogeneity.

According to Dear this epistemology is 'foundational' in character; it searches for universal truth and meaning, usually through some kind of metadiscourses or metanarratives (1988: 265). Postmodernism celebrates heterogeneity and diversity to explore the various dimensions of elements and entities under study. Earlier formulation of region such 'city regions' have gone a sea change and so the established conceptions are under scrutiny and debates. Neuman and Hull says that megacities, megalopolises, mega-city regions, mega-regions, megapolitan regions, and polycentric metropolises all represent fundamentally new constructs and sometimes conflicting understanding of the patterns of urbanity (Op. Cit.: 777). The

conventional concept of region is contested when it comes to postmodern culture-based interpretations. Walter Leimgruber et al. suggest that cultural geographers have found it more useful to view regions as fields of interactions rather than as containers for a particular homogenous culture. Postmodern emphasizes on the importance of differences, heterogeneity, and diversity of space and processes supports this view (Leimgruber, Majoral, and Lee 2003: 8). With growing value of connections and traverses, the *rhizomatic concept* of a region differs from the traditional nodal concept of a region in lacking a dominant node as the centre of the region.[i] Though there will remain centres more important than other, the rhizomatic region will consider connections between remote areas of the region and between places in the region and places in other regions to be as important as centre periphery flows (Schrijver, Op. Cit.: 26).

Looking at global connectedness, the process of globalization, in which places and societies around the world are increasingly interconnected, has not brought about sameness between places, but has emphasized the continuing significance of territorial diversity and differences (Ibid: 26). There are critiques on relevance of long held concept of region such as Christopherson and Clark (2007) argued that in particular, the region has been conceptualized in ways that limit out ability to ask and answer critical questions about how regional spaces are being re-made and for what and whose purposes (Christopherson and Clark, Op. Cit.: 3). In postmodern landscape cities and suburbs have expanded in several directions over land so much that it makes sense to think in terms of *regional city*. Perhaps, regions survive in postmodernism as surface styles and images. Another feature of the global economics dominating cities and regions is that alongside these new global and regional hierarchies of cities is a vast territory that has

become increasingly peripheral, increasingly excluded from the major economic processes that are seen as fueling economic growth in the new global economy (Sassen 2000: 82). Postmodernism is supportive of diversity and fragmented elements; there has been a shift in focus from the abstract to concrete, from general to the particular. In contrast to the view of a locality used as an 'object' to test the universal validity of a (pre)conceived theoretical abstraction, knowledge originates with the discourse(s) of the concrete and the particular specific to a locality (Banai 1993: 388).

Concluding Remarks

Conceptualizing 'region' has registered a significant transformation from its inception to contemporary uses in academia. Earlier understanding of the term by geographers maintained a physical or spatial description of earth as whole and its elements. In spite of developments in man and environment relation and harmony of nature, geography remains basically an *areal study*, achieving a distinction not in terms of its material content rather in viewpoints and ways of exploring new things. Region was conceived as quite unique and distinct entity separate from its surrounding has gone a sea change- from Hettner's analytical method to Haggett's locational analysis, and later reactions to the scientific justifications (new or quantitative geography).

Since the second half of twentieth century economic activity sensitive works has highlighted limits of the earlier conceptions of region. New thinking brought approaches of place and space in understanding diverse and complex processes and uncovering their impacts on the society. Moving away from absolute understanding of region, relational thinking has got much recognition in the description and explanation of social, economic and

political process. It also looks at various forces affecting space and its spatial organization. This paper highlights the shifts in way of conceptualization of region and at the same time the importance of region in planning process. In dealing with several issues and concerns taking new highs, regional studies reemerge as a promising academic platform in addressing global regional issues and explaining the impacts of contextual conditions. In the postmodern way of thinking on space and region, the significance of local is emphasized and reasserted. This also helps in analyzing the impacts of external forces on regions, uneven development, inequalities and the processes operate behind the scene. Therefore, what remains yet to be tackled are questions like do regions still maintain their homogeneity amidst growing 'interconnections', 'interrelations' and declining importance of physical distance? Does region hide spatial, social and ecological consequences of global (economic) changes and its consequent impacts on living conditions and resources? How does institutional landscape determine and influence the regionality and regional identity?

Notes

[1] In the opinion of Crang (1998), Deleuze believes 'that traditional classification of regions which is bounded up in an *arborescent* metaphor-that is, in branching tree diagrams of hierarchical, mutually distinct categories-and thus looks to find identity in a system of *roots*. Deleuze suggests thinking of routes of identity formed through connections and traverses, as mobile and changing all the time rather than dividing up and splitting categories apart. This sort of logic is termed *rhizomatic* (cited in Leimgruber, Majoral, and Lee, 2003)

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