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Q8

Why is India considered as a sub-continent? Elaborate your answer.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS I · 10 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

Core demand of the question

- Why is India considered as a sub-continent? Elaborate your answer
- Keep the elaboration within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

A sub-continent is a large, bounded landmass inside a continent.

Himalaya and the Indian Ocean enclose the Indian block.

The **Indian Plate** and **monsoon** give it a distinct physical regime.

Biogeography and historical civilisation match that scale.

The word is not the same as the Republic's political border.

Introduction

India is called a sub-continent because it is a large, physically bounded landmass with its own climate, biogeography, and civilisational scale, yet it is still part of Asia. The word names unity of geography, not a separate planet.

Body**Physical individuality**

- The **Himalaya**, Hindu Kush, and associated ranges wall it from Central Asia; the **Indian Ocean** walls it on three sides. That is a continental-scale enclosure.
- It rides the **Indian Plate**, once Gondwanan, now colliding with Eurasia - a tectonic personality distinct from the rest of Asia.
- **Monsoon** climate, the Deccan, the Indo-Gangetic trough, and a long tropical-to-alpine gradient pack several 'countries' of environment into one block.

Human and biogeographic scale

- Wallace-like distinctness is partial, but the **Oriental** fauna, endemic Western Ghats and Himalayan species, and a huge linguistic family map sit inside one political India plus neighbours who share the same block.
- Historically, 'India' meant a world of empires from the Indus to the seas, which Europeans already treated as a sub-continent in geography textbooks.

Why not just 'a large country'

- Size plus barriers plus **monsoon** plus plate tectonics meet the school definition of a sub-continent, like Arabia or Greenland in other texts, but India's case is the classic one in Indian geography.
- Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka share parts of the same physical block; the term is physiographic more than the 1947 border.

Flow diagram

Himalaya wall -> Sub-continent
Ocean three sides -> Sub-continent
Monsoon plate -> Sub-continent
Sub-continent -> Still part of Asia

Conclusion

India is a sub-continent because mountain, sea, **monsoon**, and plate make one giant, self-contained theatre inside Asia. The name is geographic. The republic is only the largest state on that stage.

Facts & figures

Indian Plate

Tectonic plate whose collision with Eurasia built the Himalaya.

Monsoon

Seasonal wind-rain system that unifies much of the sub-continent's climate calendar.

Indo-Gangetic plain

Foredeep that holds a civilisational density unique at this scale.

Western Ghats-Himalaya

Two biodiversity hotspots inside the same physical block.

South Asia

Political neighbourhood that sits on the same physiographic sub-continent.