

## **CHAPTER-IV**

# **Regional Geography of USA**

### **4.01 Introduction and Location :**

United states of America is one of the developed nations of the world. Embracing a total of 50 states including Alaska, Hawain Islands and the District of Columbia, this democratic state has been in a position to attain the climax of development. Since the discovery of America by Columbus, its eastern part was under the British colonial rule. In 1776 as many as 13 such states unitedly declared freedom and combined to form United States of America. Later, 37 states were included under the sovereign jurisdiction of USA. Washington D.C, located in Columbia is the capital of USA and is bounded in the north by Canada, Atlantic Ocean in the east, Mexico and the gulf of Mexico to the south and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The mainland of USA lies between the latitudes  $25^{\circ}\text{N}$ — $43^{\circ}\text{N}$  and longitudinally between  $66^{\circ}$  west and  $125^{\circ}$  West. Therefore, the whole of USA falls within temperate climatic region. It covers a total of 96 lakh square km land area accounting for about 6.37 per cent of the total area of the earth's surface. In respect of size, it ranks 4th among the nations of the world. It is bigger by 3 times of the size of India. On the other hand, in respect of population size it ranks 3rd. As per the estimated record of 2007, its total population is 302 million (i.e. 4.6 % of the world's total population). Population size of India is more than three times than that of USA. Endowed with vast national resources, attaining top position in respect of socio-economic development, the physical structure, population scenario and cultural characteristics of USA is noteworthy.



Fig- 4.01: United States of America



### 4.02 Physical Divisions :

Based on the geo-physical structure, the whole of USA may be divided into three major physiographic divisions. These divisions from east to west are (1) Appalachian Highlands, (2) Central Plains and (3) Rocky Mountains or Cordillera.

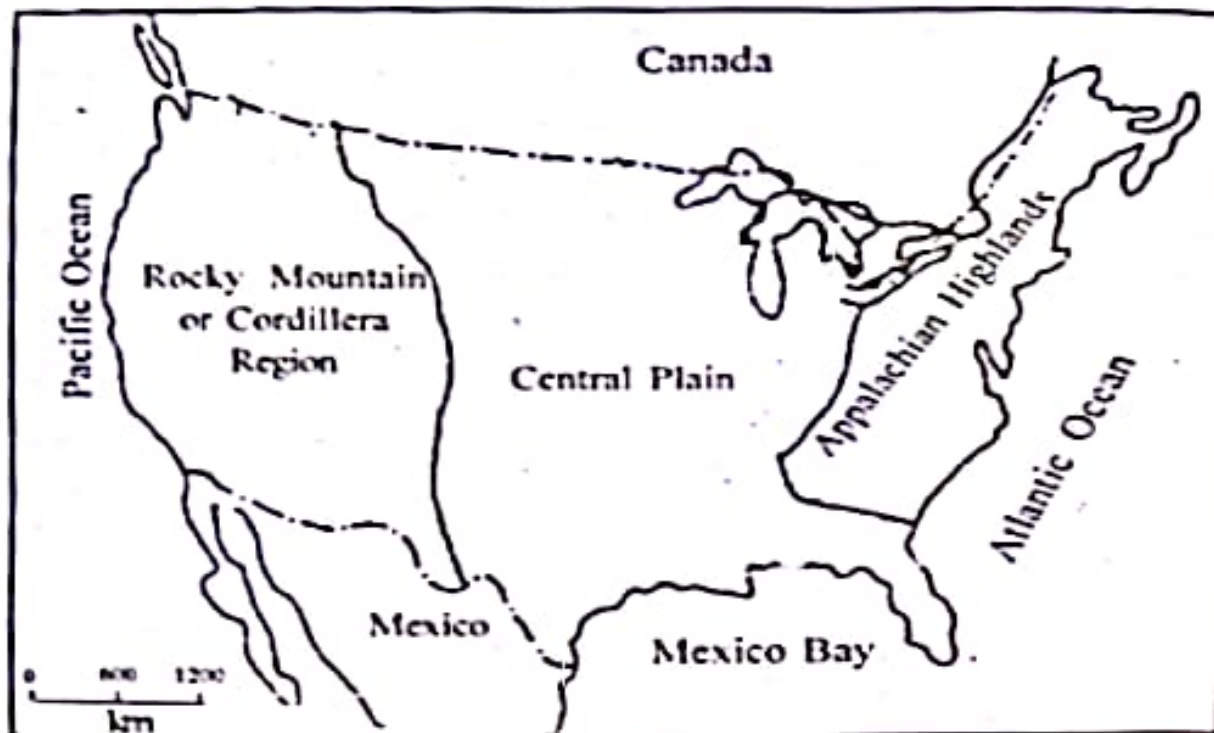


Fig.- 4.02: Physical Divisions of U.S.A

It is interesting to note that based on physiography the rainfall decrease gradually from east to the west.

(1) **The Appalachian Highlands :** The highlands of eastern part of USA located parallel to the Atlantic ocean is known as the Appalachian Highlands. Most of the parts of this land surface in true sense is covered by the Appalachian mountain. This region extends between the Hudson valley and the Erie-Onterio lakes in the north to the Alabama in the south. The physiography of this region is consisted of hills, mountains, plateau, plains etc and, hence, complex in character. Among these, Allegheny mountains in the west, Cumberland plateau in the south west, Appalachian mountain system and the valley in the east, Bloris mountain in the south and the Coastal lowlands in the east are worth mentioning.



The region receives highest annual precipitation in the form of rain. These mountain ranges originated long before the Rockies. Average altitude of these highlands is not more than 2000 meter from sea-level. The region is drained by many small and large rivers. Among them, Ohio, Tennessee, Hudson, Alabama are worth mentioning. The famous Niagara falls near Erie lake, is located in the northern margin of Appalachian mountain. The Atlantic coastal plain lies in the east and the southern side of the Appalachian highlands. The coastal plain is narrower in the north and wider in the south. The capital of USA, Washington D.C. including several metropolitan cities like—New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Atlanta etc. are located here. The Appalachian region is very rich in mineral resources like coal, petroleum, iron etc and many industrial centres have grown based on these resources. The role of well developed transport and communication network in flourishing of industrial belts are noteworthy.

**(2) The Central Plain :** The vast and extensive plain that lies between the Rockies in the west and the Appalachian Highland in the east is known as the Central Plain. The region extends between the Great Lake Region in the north to the Mexico Coast in the south. The plain as a whole is basically a part of the Mississippi-Missouri basin. The master stream Mississippi Missouri and their tributaries flowing through this region has developed this region into a vast fertile plain. Therefore, this plain region of USA is very suitable for agricultural purposes.

The Central Plain region in general may be divided into four divisions. The Highlands, the Great Lake Region, the Mississippi plain and the Mexico coastal lowlands. The foot-hill lowlands east of the Rockies is known as Highland plain. On the other hand, the plain region that lies between the Highland Plain and the Appalachian Highland drained by the Mississippi—Missouri drainage system is known as the Mississippi plain. The average altitude of the plain is not more than 300 meter from



mean sea level. In the vast and extensive plain few hillocks are found. The areas lying in and around the Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie, Ontario formed by glacial deposits is known as the Great Lake Region. The Mexican coastal lowland lies in the southern part of the Central Plain. The delta of the Mississippi is also included in this plain. The altitude of this region is below 200 meter from sea level. Frequent flood ravages the area. The important metropolises located in the Central Plain are Minneapolis, Chicago, Kansas, St. Louis, Birmingham, New Orleans, Miami, Houston etc.

**(3) The Rocky Mountain or Cordillera :** The region consisting of hills, mountain plateau, valleys, lakes etc that lies between the Central Plains in the east and the Pacific coastal lowland in the west is called the Cordillera region. The region is aligned in north-south direction. The structure and the physiography of the region that has grown mainly centering the Rockies are very complex. The Highlands located towards east of the region in a north-south alignment is the Rocky mountain. The Rockies, like the Himalayas are young folded mountain. Some of the peaks of the Rockies are well above 4,200 meter above the sea-level. The important mountains located west of the Cordillera are Sierra Nevada, Cascade and Coast Range. Moreover, there are few plateaus in between the two parallel ranges of the Cordillera. Among them Columbia Plateau, Great Basin and Colorado are important. Several plateaus including the Great Basin region is located in the rainshadow zone of Pacific Coastal Range. Due to scanty rainfall the area has experienced drought like situation. Several salt-water lakes are found here. Great Salt Lake located here is a famous salt-water lake. A few small-sized rivers have their source in the Cordillera. Among these Columbia, Snake and Colorado flow westward and meet with Pacific Ocean, Missouri, Arkansas, Red etc. have met with Mississippi River and finally drained into the Mexico Gulf. Rio Grande flowing towards south-east meets finally with the Gulf of



Mexico. There are several fertile valleys in the mountains located west of the Cordillera. Among them Puget Sound, Willamette and California valleys are important. World Famous Grand Canyon of Colorado and the Death valley are located in this Cordillera. The Grand Canyon with very steep cliff has a depth of 1213 meter. On the other hand the Death Valley located south of the Great Basin has an altitude of 85 meter below the sea-level. The Cordillera is very rich in mineral resources like coal, petroleum, gold, silver, copper etc.

The California coastal region is very suitable for agricultural purposes. Due to influence of Mediterranean climate rainfall occurs during winter season only. Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas etc are some of the important metropolitan cities of this region.

#### 4.03 Population Growth and Distribution :

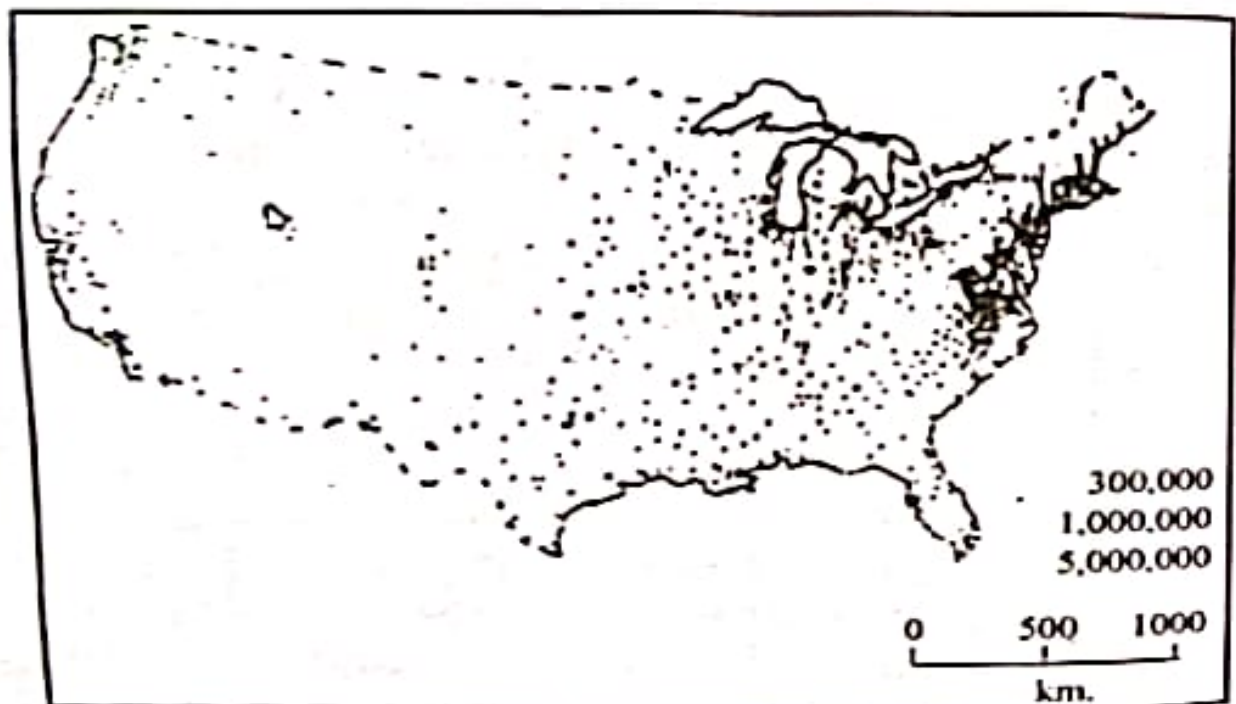
In 1776, when 13 states joined together to declare independence of the United States of America, it had a total population of only 3 million. But after independence, due to migration of people from the European countries and merging of another 37 states at different times (in course of time), its population began to rise at a faster rate. At present, with an estimated population of 302 million in 2007, it is the third largest populous country of the world.

Table 4.1 population growth in the USA

Census year	population (in million)
1776	3
1800	5
1850	23
1900	76
1950	151
1970	202
2000	281
2007	302

Now, as a result of decline in natural growth as well as migration, the growth of population in the country is declining. According to the information of 2007, the rate of population growth in the United States is only 0.60% as against the world rate of 1.20%. Of the total population of the country 85 % are white christians, other 15 % are comprised of Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Black people.

Like other areas of the world, the distribution of population in the USA is not uniform due to variation in natural condition, transportation system and development processes. In general the density of population is high in the Appalachian Highlands and Atlantic Sea board located in the eastern part of the country. On the other hand the population is very less in the Central Plain and Cordillera region. But the coastal region of California in the west is thickly populated. The south and east part of Michigan state which accounts for only 1/4 th of the total area of the country, is inhabited by 2/3rd of the total populations of the nation. The average density of population in this region is 85 persons



*Fig- 4.03 : Population Distribution of the USA.*



per square kilometer as against the average density of 32 persons for the United States as a whole. The states of Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island, located in this region have population density more than 300 persons per square kilometer. It is to be noted that the density of population in the District of Colombia (D.C.) where the capital of the country (Washington D.C.) is located, is about 3600 persons. On the other hand, the density of population is only 15 persons per square km area in the Central Plain and Cordillera region of the west. In the states of Montana, Nevada, North Dakota and Wyoming, located in this region, the density of population is less than 5. This region is not suitable for human habitation and economic development because of its rugged terrain and scanty rainfall. However, some human settlements have grown centering the sources of mineral resources in the Cordillera region. Another important aspect of the distribution of population in the USA is the ratio between rural and urban population. Three fourth of its population is urban because of industrial development of the country. New York city, located in the east, has a total population of 22 million. Los Angeles, the second largest city of the country has a total population of 18 million. It is located at the extreme west of the country. Thus, it is seen that the majority of the population of the country live in urban areas.

#### **4.04. Economic Activities :**

The United States of America occupies the first place in the world in respect of natural resource, agriculture, industrial production and standard of living. The Gross National product of the country is the highest in the world. The per capita income of the nation is 38,000 dollar at present. As a result it has emerged as the largest economic power in the world. The country where, less than 5 % of the world population live, produces nearly 20 % of the world production of coal, copper and petroleum.

It occupies important place in the world in different agricultural productions also. It is the highest producer of corn,



cotton and tobacco and second highest producer of wheat and barley. It produces 46 % and 18 % of world production of corn and wheat respectively. As a result, it can export enough goods to different countries. The value of exported materials from the U.S.A accounts for more than 10 % of the total world export in the international market. It is important to note that agriculture accounts for only 2 % of the Gross National Income of the country while industry accounts for 30 % and trade, transport and communication accounts for 68 %. Regarding land use it is seen that 1/4th of the total land of the country is under permanent agriculture of the total population aged (in the age-group) between 15-64 years 79 % are engaged in different economic activities. It is interesting to note that of the total economically active population, only 5 % are dependent on agriculture. In addition to agriculture, industry, trade and services, people of this country are engaged with such economic activities like fishing animal rearing, mining and lumbering. The Prairie grassland located in the south of the country is suitable for animal rearing.

The following discussion on regional agricultural system and industrialisation gives some idea on the economic development of the country.

#### **Agricultural Belts :**

The important characteristic of the agriculture of the USA is its agricultural belts. On the basis of physiography, climate, soil etc, the country is divided into several belts from east to west. In every belt importance is paid on cultivation of a special variety of crop.

Density of population is very low and hence, agriculture is highly mechanised and extensive in type. Per capita productivity compared to other states of the world is high. The main agricultural belts of USA are extended from the Atlantic coast towards west up to 100° west longitude. The whole state may be divided into nine agricultural belts from the south to the north.



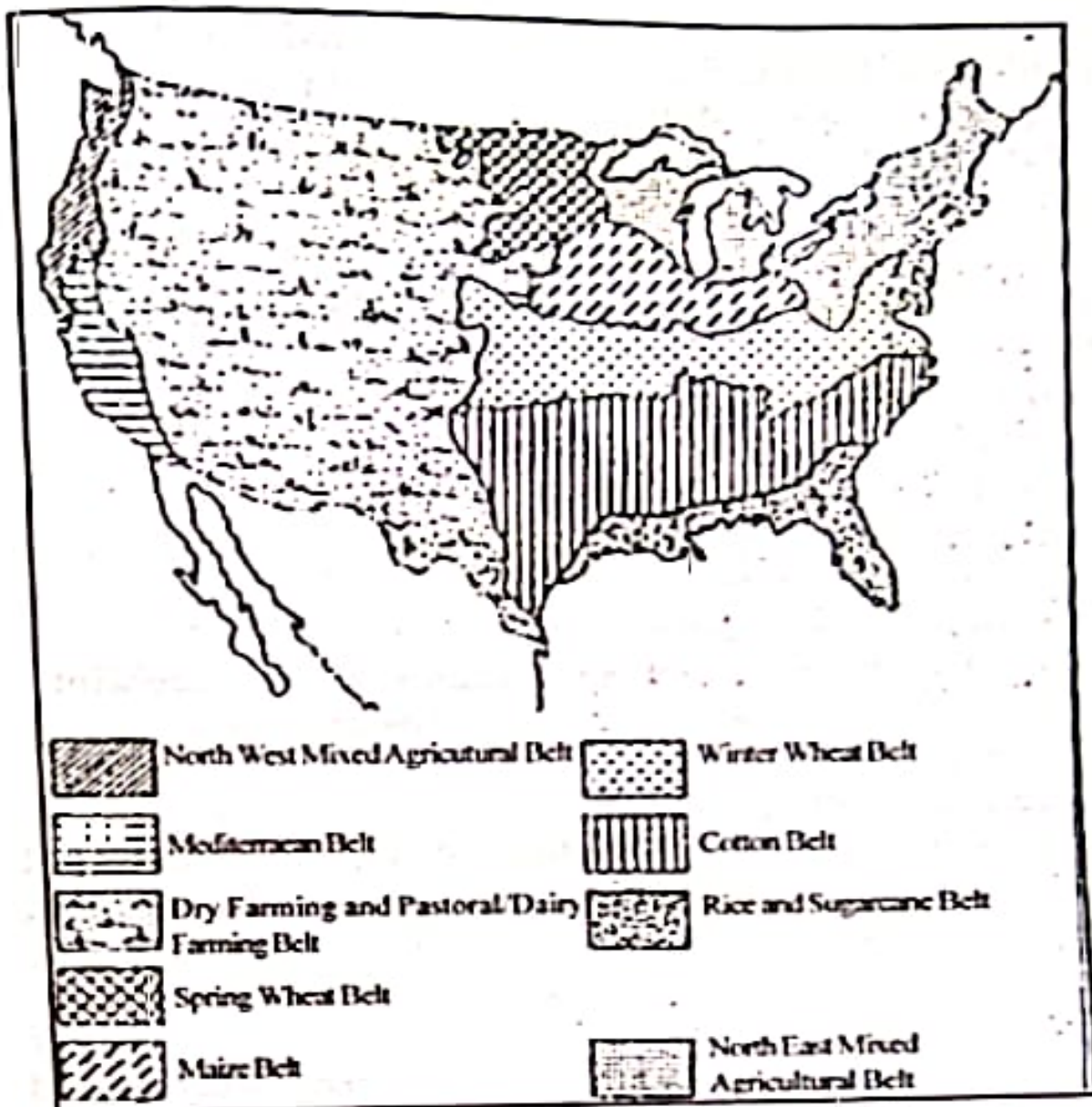


Fig. - 4.04 : Agricultural belts of USA

### (1) Rice and Sugarcane Belt :

This agricultural belt is located on the Mexican coast and includes Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and southern part of Louisiana state. Sub-tropical climate is experienced here. Like that of tropical climate, temperature and precipitation in this region is high. The region is composed of fertile alluvial soil. Rice and wheat is abundantly grown here and hence the region has



been identified as wheat and sugarcane belt. Banana and pineapple are also grown here in large quantity.

**(2) The Cotton Belt :**

Cotton is grown just north of the wheat and sugarcane belt covering the southern part of the Mississippi valley. 36° north parallel has bounded and demarcated the northern limit of the cotton belt. About 50 % of the cotton of USA is grown in Texas, Mississippi and Arkansas state.

**(3) Winter Wheat and Tobacco Belt :**

North of the Cotton belt, from the Atlantic coast to the Colorado in the west, the belt is known as winter wheat and tobacco belt covering North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, and Maryland. The eastern part of this belt produces large quantity of tobacco. The western part of this belt covering Nebraska, Kansas, East Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas produce winter wheat. USA exports maximum of its wheat to the world market from this region.

**(4) Maize Belt :**

In the north of the winter wheat belt from mid Ohio to mid Nebraska maize is produced abundantly. Most of the maize of USA is obtained from Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Nebraska.

**(5) Spring Wheat Belt :**

This belt is located north of the Prairies. Due to severe cold during winter, wheat is practised during spring season. Wheat is obtained mainly from Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and western part of Minnesota. Superior quality of wheat is obtained from here and the excess is exported to other deficit nations of the world.

**(6) Mixed Agriculture of North East :**

The Mixed agricultural belt of USA includes the south and the eastern states of the Great Lake Region and covers Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and New England State. Besides rye and barley production animals are also reared in



large scale based on the availability of the new grasslands. The belt is also known as the dairy farming belt.

**(7) Dry Farming and Dairy Belt :**

The belt is consisted of the western part of the Central Plain and the eastern part of the Cordillera region. Rainfall here is low but well distributed throughout the year and hence grasses grow. The condition is congenial for rearing animal like sheep and cattle. Western part of Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, Idaho and Montano etc are included in this belt. Jowar and bajra are produced under dry farming method and barley and maize are practised often with irrigation. Milk, beef, meet, wool etc are important dairy products obtained from animal rearing.

**(8) The Mediterranean Agricultural Belt :**

California, located on the pacific coast of USA exhibits Mediterranean type of climate. Therefore, the belt is also called the Mediterranean agricultural belt. Besides wheat and cotton, citrus fruits like orange, grapes and other fruits like apple etc are produced in large scale.

**(9) The mixed Farming Belt of the North West Margin:**

Washington, Idaho, and Oregon located in the North-Western margin of USA are suitable for cultivation of wheat and maize. Besides production of crops, animals are reared for milk and meat. Therefore, this region is called mixed agricultural belt.

**Industrial Region :**

Three major Industrial Regions of U.S.A may be identified as folloows –

**(1) The North East Industrial Region :**

Due to availability of mineral resources like coal, iron, petroleum and well developed transport and communication network, the north-eastern part of USA as an industrial region has developed. This is known as North East Industrial region. The region extends from St Luis, South of the Lake Superior and Baltimore in the east (Atlantic Coast). The region covers



about 10 % of the total area of USA and gives home to 50 % of the total population of USA. About 75 % of the total industry of USA is concentrated here. Five industrial centres are located within this industrial region.

**(a) Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Cleveland Industrial Centre :**

This Industrial centre has grown based on the Appalachian coal centering Pennsylvania and Ohio. High quality of coal is found here, well developed transport and communication network and the better variety of iron ore available in and around the Lake Superior region, have facilitated the development of iron and steel industry in Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Wheeling, Cleveland etc. Pittsburgh has also developed in glass making and cotton textile industries. Arakon located here is the largest rubber producing Industry of the world.

**(b) New York, Philadelphia-Baltimore Industrial Centre:**

This vast industrial centre has grown covering the large metropolitan cities like New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore including major part of north New Jersey and parts of Pennsylvania. Here, iron and steel industry, textile industry, tin, petroleum and copper refining industry in Baltimore; textile, electrical appliances, petroleum, sugar and rubber industry in Philadelphia; iron and steel industry, rail engine in east Pennsylvania; Textile, electrical goods, utensils making industry in New Jersey are world famous. On the other hand, New York is full of variety of industrial centres.

**(c) Southern New England Industrial Centre :**

As the region is deficient in coal and other mineral resources it mainly has textile and textile machinery and leather industry based mainly on the hydroelectric power produced here. It also has paper and pulp industry depending on the softwood forest of the region. Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Connecticut are the main industrial states of the region.



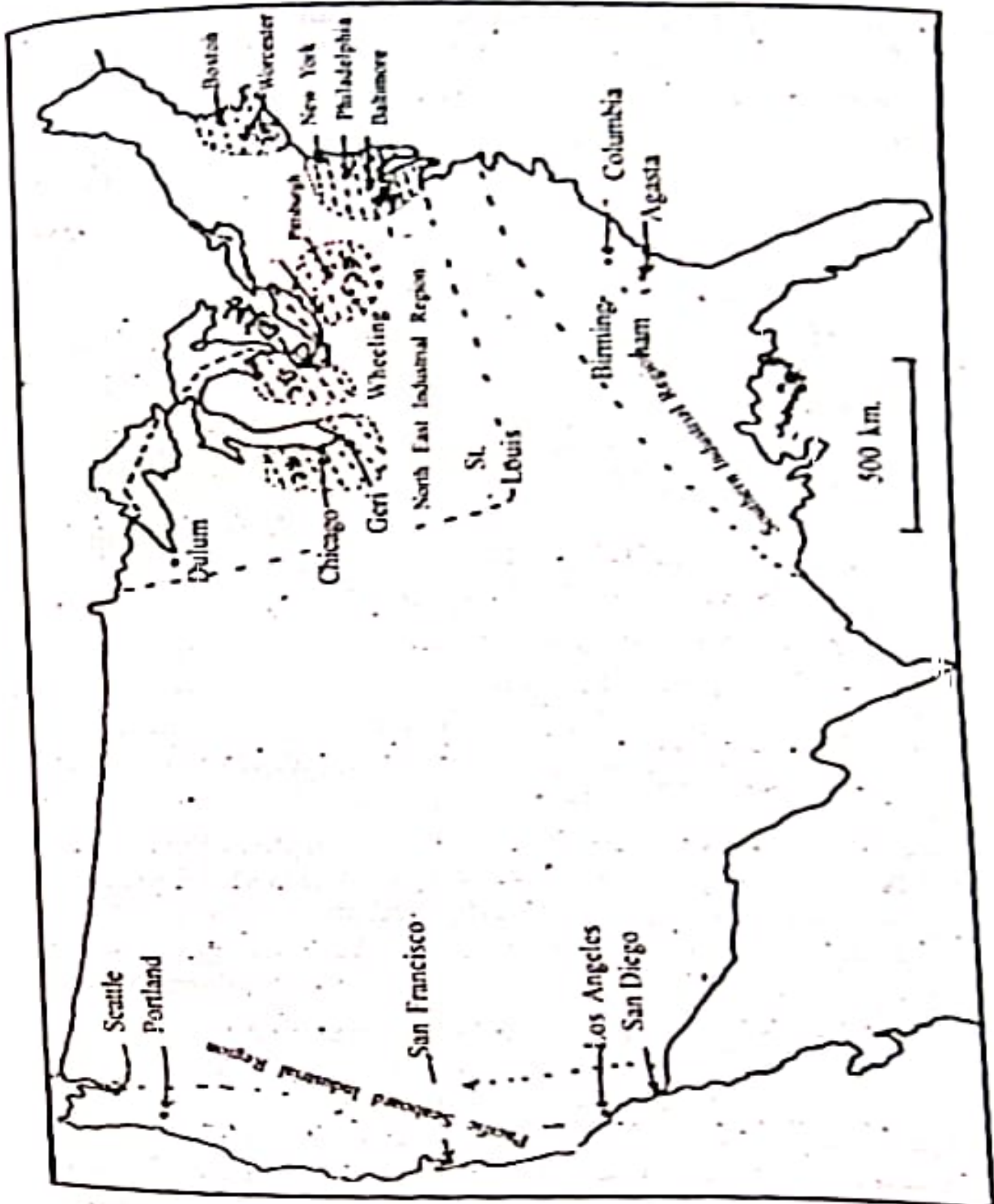


Fig.- 4.05: Industrial regions of USA



**(d) Detroit Industrial Centre :**

Detroit is one of the major automobile manufacturing centres of the world. Earlier the carriage building industry flourished here due to original hardwood forest of the area. Moreover, iron ore and coal producing areas are also situated within a short distance. Lansing, Flint, Pontiac, Jackson are the important places of iron and steel, automobile and other associated industries.

**(e) Southern Michigan Industrial Centre :**

Due to easy access to iron ore and coal, many industries like iron and steel, railway locomotives and cars, farm machinery and automobile industries have been developed in this region. Moreover, Chicago is the world's largest meat packing centre.

**(2) Southern Industrial Region :**

In the recent years the government has tried to decentralise industries from the North East to other parts of the country. As a part of this policy a large industrial belt from Texas state in the west to North Carolina state in the Atlantic coast of the east in the southern part of the country has been developed. At least 20% of the country's total labourers are engaged in these industries. Based on the hydroelectricity, coal, petroleum, natural gas, iron and other mineral resources, forest resources of Appalachian and agricultural resources (cotton, tobacco, sugarcane etc) many industries have been developed in the region. This Industrial region can be divided into two parts (a) South Eastern Industrial Centre and (b) South Western Industrial Centre. The South Western centre is famous for aeroplane (aircraft) building industry.

**(3) Pacific Coast Industrial Region :**

The region is comprised of Washington, Oregon and California state situated in the coast of the Pacific Ocean in the west. This is the country's smallest and youngest industrial centre. Nearly 10% of the total labour force work in these industries. Los Angeles and San Francisco located in this region are famous industrial region. Using hydroelectricity and petroleum several



industries like iron and steel, aviation, paper and wine manufacturing industries have flourished here. The film industry developed in California area of USA is very famous in the world.

### Exercise

1. Write in short the locational and geographical characteristics of USA.
2. Divide USA into physical divisions. Give a comprehensive description of each of them.
3. Show on a sketch the physical divisions of USA.
4. Discuss with the help of a sketch the growth and the distribution of population in USA.
5. Discuss the role of agriculture in the economy of USA.
6. What do you mean by agricultural belt? How many agricultural belts have been recognised in USA? Show them on a sketch and describe each of them briefly.
7. Name the major industries of USA, and show them on a map. Describe any one of them.
8. Write short notes on the following
  - (a) Physiography of the Rocky mountainous region.
  - (b) Physiography of Appalachian highland.
  - (c) Drainages of central plain.
  - (d) Urbanisation of USA and the principal urban centres.
  - (e) Economic characteristics of USA.
  - (f) Agricultural belts of USA.
  - (g) North-Eastern Industrial region of USA.
  - (h) Pacific coastal Industries of USA.
  - (i) Dry agriculture and Dairy farming belt of USA.
  - (j) Mineral resources of USA.

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