

18BGE43C - HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

[Syllabus, UNIT – I: Human Geography: Scope and Content – Man and Environment relationships – Determinism, Possibilism and Neo-determinism.]

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Human geography is defined as “the relationship between the physical/ natural and the human worlds, the spatial distribution of human phenomenon and how they come about, the social and economic difference between different parts of the world.” According to Ratzel “Human geography is the synthetic study of relationship between human societies and earth’s surface”. According to Ellen C. Semple “Human geography is the study of the changing relationships between the unresting man and unstable earth”. According to Paul Vidal de la Blache “Conception resulting from a more synthetic knowledge of the physical laws governing our earth and of the relations between the living beings which inhabit it.”

Regional vs. Systematic Geography

Regional Geography	Systematic Geography
Under this all the geographical elements of a region are studied as one unit. And one region is considered a different unit from another region or differentiated from another region only on the basis of these geographical differences. We need to understand this regional difference in geographical context.	Under this special geographical elements of a regional unit are studied and which are generally based on political units. Therefore, it is the individual study of a special geographical feature of a region.

Physical vs. Cultural Environment

Physical Environment	Cultural Environment
Physical environment includes all those elements which nature has made available as free gifts for human development. For example, land forms, soils, climate, water, natural flora and fauna, etc.	It includes all those physical-cultural elements which have been developed by man through his gained knowledge and technology. For example, houses, villages, towns, network of roads and railways, modes of transportation, industrial units, fields, hospitals, sports complex, means of entertainment, markets, ports and goods of daily and special use.

Physical Geography vs. Human Geography

Physical Geography	Human Geography
Physical geography Looks at the Natural process of the Earth, such as climate and plate tectonics, wind movements etc	Human geography looks at the impact and behaviour of people and their implications in the physical world
Areas of Physical Geography include:	Areas of Human Geography include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geomorphology: The shape of the structure of the Earth and how they were formed • Hydrology: Study of Earth's Water • Glaciology: Study of Earth's glaciers and ice sheets • Climatology: Study of the Earth's climate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Geography: How things like religion, language and government vary across the world • Development Geography: Standards of living and quality of life across the world • Historical Geography: How people have studied and thought about geography in the past • Urban Geography: Cities and Built-up areas
<p>Physical geography lays more emphasis on the 'location' aspect of the region it currently studies</p>	<p>Human geography concentrates both a "location" and "people aspect as well. For example, a typical study will focus on why the Western-portion of the Indian subcontinent are populated with people of Iranic and Turkish descent</p>

NATURE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Human Geography is the study of the interrelationships between people, place, and environment, and how these vary spatially and temporally across and between locations. Whereas physical geography concentrates on spatial and environmental processes that shape the natural world and tends to draw on the natural and physical sciences for its scientific underpinnings and methods of investigation, human geography concentrates on the spatial organization and processes shaping the lives and activities of people, and their interactions with places and nature. Human geography is more allied with the social sciences and humanities, sharing their philosophical approaches and methods.

Human geography consists of a number of sub-disciplinary fields that focus on different elements of human activity and organization, for example, cultural geography, economic geography, health geography, historical geography, political geography, population geography, rural geography, social geography, transport geography, and urban geography. What distinguishes human geography from other related disciplines, such as development, economics, politics, and sociology, are the application of a set of core geographical concepts to the phenomena under investigation, including space, place, scale, landscape, mobility, and nature. These concepts foreground the notion that the world operates spatially and temporally, and that social relations do not operate independently of place and environment, but are thoroughly grounded in and through them.

With respect to methods, human geography uses the full sweep of quantitative and qualitative methods from across the social sciences and humanities, mindful of using them to provide a thorough geographic analysis. It also places emphasis on fieldwork and mapping, and has made a number of contributions to developing new methods and techniques, notably in the areas of spatial analysis, spatial statistics, and GIS Science.

The long-term development of human geography has progressed in tandem with that of the discipline more generally. Since the Quantitative Revolution in the 1950s and 1960s, the philosophy underpinning human geography research has diversified enormously. The 1970s saw the introduction of behavioural geography, radical geography, and humanistic geography. These were followed in the 1980s by a turn to political economy, the development of feminist geography, and the introduction of critical social theory underpinning the cultural turn. Together these approaches formed the basis for the growth of critical geography, and the introduction of postmodern and post-structural thinking into the discipline in the 1990s. These various developments did not fully replace the theoretical approaches developed in earlier periods, but rather led to further diversification of geographic thought. For example, quantitative geography continues to be a vibrant area of geographical scholarship, especially through the growth of GIS Science. The result is that geographical thinking is presently highly pluralist in nature, with no one approach dominating.

SCOPE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Geography as a field of study is integrative, empirical, and practical. Thus, the reach of geography is extensive and each and every phenomenon that varies over space and time can be studied geographically. Human geography is defined as “the relationship between the physical/ natural and the human worlds, the spatial distribution of human phenomenon and how they come about, the social and economic difference between different parts of the world.” The core concern of geography as a discipline is to understand the earth as home of human beings and to study all those elements that have sustained them. Human geography covers a very wide range of fields. It not only studies presence of human phenomenon but also relationship of human and physical world, the pattern and distribution of human processes including both social and economical.

It makes study of geography more relevant as it tries to relate the physical and man-made world with full causal understanding hence making it more applicable to our daily lives. It not only helps us to understand various problems, their causes and effects, but also helps us in finding a suitable solution for them. In the present scenario with increasing discord between human beings and nature resulting in environmental destruction, human geography becomes all the more relevant as it explains the relationship between human and nature and thus assumes highly important role in helping to bring back the environmental symphony and hence saving our planet.

Each of the physical, biological and social sciences has its own philosophy, methodology and scope. For example, economics deals primarily with the production, movement and consumption of goods and services; geology is concerned with the composition and interior of the earth's crust; demography pertains to the characteristics of human population; and zoology and botany examine the animals and plants kingdoms respectively. Similarly, geography examines numerous tangible and intangible natural and man-made phenomena.

In human geography, the major thrust is on the study of human societies in their relation to the habitat or environment. Dealing with the spatial distribution of societies, human geography covers a very wide field or its scope is enormous.

It embraces the study of human races; the growth, distribution and density of populations of the various parts of the world, their demographic attributes and migration patterns; and physical and cultural differences between human groups and economic activities.

It also covers the relationship between man and his natural environment, and the way in which his activities are distributed.

Human geography also takes into account the mosaic of culture, language, religion, customs and traditions; types and patterns of rural settlements, the site, size, growth and functions of urban settlements, and the functional classification of towns.

The study of spatial distribution of economic activities, industries, trade, and modes of transportations and communications as influenced by the physical environment are also the important topics of human geography.

In brief, in human geography, we study the influence of physical environment on the economic activity, society, culture and religion of the people of a region.

The impact of man on environment is also a topic of growing importance in human geography.

The adjustment of man to his physical environment in typical geographical regions like equatorial, hot deserts and tundra is of great relevance to human geography as it helps in understanding the symbiotic relationship between social groups and their natural environment.

Human geography deals with the world as it is and with the world as it might be made to be. Its emphasis is on people: where they are, what they are like, how they interact over space and time, and what kinds of landscapes of human use they erect upon the natural landscapes they occupy.

It encompasses all those interests and topics of geography that are not directly concerned with the physical environment like cartography.

Human geography's content provides integration for all the social sciences, for it gives to those sciences the necessary spatial, temporal and systems viewpoint that they otherwise lack.

At the same time, human geography draws on other social sciences in the analyses identified with its sub-fields, such as behavioural, political, economic, or social geography.

Human geography admirably serves the objectives of a liberal education. It helps us to understand the world we occupy and to appreciate the circumstances affecting peoples and nations other than our own.

It clarifies the contrasts in societies and cultures and in the human landscapes they have created in different regions of the earth.

Its models and explanations of spatial interaction allow us to better comprehend the economic, social, and political systems within which we all, singly and collectively, live and operate.

Its analyses of spatial systems make us more aware of the realities and the prospects of our own society in an increasingly troubled and competitive world.

Our study of human geography, therefore, can help make us better informed citizens, more able to understand the important issues facing our communities and our countries and better prepared to contribute to their solution.

MAN ENVIRONMENT RELATIONSHIP

Man-environment relationships refer to the interactions and feedbacks between the human and the natural components and, consequently, to the linkages between the social and the geophysical systems. The field of man-environment relationship operates with a series of concept and notions. They refer to the causes of environmental change, feedbacks and consequences for the communities, answers of the decision makers etc.

There are various philosophies put forwarded by various schools of thoughts to study the man environment relationship in a better and easy way which are as follows:

DETERMINISM:

In the history of geographical concepts, there have been various approaches and schools of thought to study man-environment relationship. The first approach adopted by the geographers to generalize the patterns of human occupations of the earth surface was deterministic. The philosophy of determinism opines that the decisions and actions taken by man are just effects and governed by casual laws. According to this philosophy it is believed that all the human actions are the result of antecedent factors or causes. Determinists therefore believe that all the events, including human actions are predetermined and this philosophy of man environment relationship is often considered incompatible with free will but there some who believes that it is compatible or even necessary for free will to be able to exist. Philosophy of Determinism is based upon the interaction between primitive human society and strong forces of nature. Determinism is one of the most important philosophies which persisted up to the Second World War in one shape or the other. It says that the strong forces of environment control the course of human action. This implies that the history, culture, mode of life, and the level of development of the societal groups and countries are exclusively or largely controlled by the physical environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM

The simple definition of environmental determinism is that the natural environment is responsible for all human actions. The point of view is that the physical environment controls the course of human action. In other words, the belief that variation in human behaviour around the world can be explained by the differences in the natural environment is the crux of this man-environment relationship philosophy. The deterministic school of thought is of the opinion that the history, culture, living style and the stages of development of a social group or nation are largely governed and controlled by physical factors of the environment. This philosophy says that aspects of physical geography, particularly climate, influenced the psychological mind-set of individuals, which in turn defined the behaviour and culture of the society that those individuals formed. For example, tropical climates were said to cause laziness, relaxed attitudes and promiscuity, while the frequent variability in the weather of the middle latitudes led to more determined and driven work ethics. This philosophy supports the idea that the highest achievement of civilizations like Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Indus valley, disappeared because of the climatic change. It is also believed that the attack of central Asian nomads on other civilization is because of change in climate because it was climate change which resulted into the drying up of their pastures which forced them move in different direction during 13th century.

The first attempt made to explain the influence of environmental condition on the people and their culture was made by Greek and Roman Scholar. In the opinion of Aristotle, the people of cold countries are courageous but they lack political organisation thus they are unable to rule their neighbours. Similarly, the people of Asia lacks courage thus they are under slavery. On the other hand, people of Greece who occupy the middle position are gifted with finest qualities thus they are in a position to rule the world. Similarly, Strabo—the Roman geographer—attempted to explain how slope, relief, climate all were the works of God, and how these phenomena govern the life-styles of people. Geographical determinism continued to dominate the writings of the Arab geographers.

Al-Masudi said that the land having abundant of water people are humorous and the people of dry land are short tempered. The nomads who live in the open air are having strength, physical fitness and wisdom and those who live in closed areas of the cities are not. He further said that people of northern quarter those who are living away from sun at cold places are characterised by good physique, rude behaviour, thick flesh, thin skin, blue eyes, curly and red hairs. All these qualities develop in them because predominance of moisture in their land and their cold nature discourages religious belief.

Ibn-Khaldun said that as we move away from the equator up to 64th parallel the population density increases and after 64th parallel population density again decreases. This is because at equator the population density is low because of high temperature and humidity but in temperate region the temperature is neither very high nor very low thus population density is high. After 64th parallel population density starts to decrease because of extreme cold climatic condition. The environmental causation continued throughout the 19th century when geographers themselves used to regard geography above all as natural science. Carl Ritter—

the leading German geographer— adopted an anthropocentric approach and introduced geographical determinism in the early 19th century. Ritter attempted to establish the cause variations in the physical constitution of body, physique and health of men living in different physical environmental conditions. Alexander von Humboldt, one of the founders of ‘modern geography’ and a contemporary of Ritter also asserted that the mode of life of the inhabitants of a mountainous country differs from that of the people of the plains. While dealing with man nature interaction he included man and his work but he did not give much importance to man as a major determinant.

The founder of the ‘new’ determinism was Friedrich Ratzel. He supplemented ‘classical’ geographical determinism with elements of ‘Social Darwinism’ and developed a theory of the state as an organism which owed its life to the earth and which was ever striving to seize more and more territory. In the opinion of Ratzel, “similar locations lead to similar mode of life”. He cited the example of British Isles and Japan and asserted that both these countries have insular locations, which provide natural defence against the invaders. Consequently, the people of these countries have been making rapid progress. Miss Semple defined human geography as the ‘study of changing relationship between the unresting man and unstable earth’. She is also of the opinion that man is a product of earth’s surface and nature has entered into his bones and tissues and into his mind and souls. She also gave enough importance to the concept of ‘environmentalism’ or ‘determinism’ which increased the credibility of human geography. Elseworth Huntington, an American geographer (writer of *The Principles of Human Geography* in 1945), was a protagonist of environmental determinism. Huntington’s writings on climate and civilization displayed his predilection for racial typecasting and environmentalist explanations. The basic philosophy of Huntington was that the supreme achievements of civilization in any region were always bound up with a particular type of climate and variation in climate led to ‘pulsations’ in the history of culture. Subsequent geographers like Mackinder, Chisholm, Davies, Bowman, Robert Mill, Geddes, Sauer, Herbertson, Taylor, etc., interpreted the progress of societies with a deterministic approach.

POSSIBILISM

The theory of Possibilism was born in the beginning of 20th century. The concept of determinism which was conservative cannot be accepted by a society which is civilised and advanced. The reason behind this is that man with the help of technological development has modified the nature for example he has created canals for making the water available in the extreme desert areas for making it suitable for living. The concept of possibilism says that nature provide a number of opportunities and possibilities from among which man is free to select or choose. The philosophy states that man with the help of his mind and will changes the influence of nature on him. The philosophy of possibilism attempts to explain the man and environment relationship in different way taking man as an active agent. The philosophy further states that nature provides opportunities and the number of opportunities increases as the knowledge and technology of a cultural group increases. The hypothesis of possibilism was put forwarded by Lucian Febvre who is of the opinion that man is the most powerful agent who modifies the terrestrial surface of the earth. Lucian said that ‘there are no

necessities but everywhere possibilities' for example man invented iron and it was up to him that how he makes the use of that iron. It was up to him whether he uses the iron for making hammer or a bicycle, a car, a ship or a plane it depends on his technological development. So

the example proves that there are possibilities everywhere but there are no necessities. Prior to the invention of iron though there was no necessity for a plane ship or a car but possibilities were still there. Vidal de Lablache further advocated and preached the philosophy of possibilism. In his work he has minimised the influence of environment on man. He tries to explain the differences between groups living in the same environmental condition. He said that the differences are not because of the natural environmental condition but due to the variation in the attitude values and habits of man. The possibility school of thought tries to explain the differences in human society on the basis of man himself bringing the changes and influencing the environment and it is not only the nature solely responsible for bringing the changes or differences in human society. After Vidal de Lablache it was Jean Brunhes who became strong supporter of possibilism in France. Sauer, another supporter of possibilism said that it is the work of a geographer that he should investigate and understand that how a natural landscape transforms into a cultural landscape. From such work the geographer will be able to identify the major changes in that particular area that has resulted because of succession of human groups. For example, wheat does not have high yield where it was first domesticated (south-west Asia) but in America, Europe and some of the Asian countries. Thus after the Second World War the philosophy of environmentalism was attacked. Many geographers in Britain, Canada and USA said that explanation of phenomena only on the basis of nature and its forces is incomplete and unsatisfactory until and unless man is included into it.

NEO-DETERMINISM

The concept of neo-determinism was put forward by Griffith Taylor which reflects middle path between the two ideas of environmental determinism and possibilism. In his opinion the best economic programme for a country to follow is largely determined by nature and it is a duty of a geographer to interpret this programme. He says that man is like a traffic controller who can accelerate, slow or stop down the progress but he cannot change the direction, this is the reason why this philosophy is also called as stop and go determinism. The concept shows that there is neither a situation of absolute necessity (environmental determinism) nor is there a condition of absolute freedom (possibilism) in other words we can say that there is neither a condition fully dominated by nature (determinism) neither a condition fully controlled by man (Possibilism). It means that human being can conquer nature by obeying it. Men have to respond the red signals and can proceed on the path of development only when nature permits the modification. It means that possibilities can be created within the limits provided by nature which do not damage the environment and there is no free run without the accidents meaning that if one runs freely he will have larger chances to meet accidents. For example, the developed countries of the world have chosen the path of free run, these countries are not obeying the nature, these countries are not judiciously chosen the path offered or as planned by the nature, this is the reason why these developed countries are facing the problem of greenhouse effect, ozone layer depletion, receding glaciers and degrading lands and overall environment. In short we can say that the concept of neo-determinism tries to bring a balance between the philosophies of environmental determinism and possibilism. In the opinion of Taylor, the main task of geography is to study the natural environment and its effect on man and not with all the problems connected with man or the cultural landscape. Possibilism does

not support or encourage the study of natural environment but it overemphasises the anthropocentrism in geography.

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