

Dr. Kailash Nath Singh, YBN University



YBN University, Ranchi

GEOGRAPHY

Scope and Contemporary Relevance of Human Geography

Definition and Branches Over the period of time the shifts in paradigms resulted into different perspectives and definitions of geography discipline. The literal meaning of geography is to describe earth, especially the character of earth surface. According to American geographer Richard Hartshorne (1959) geography is concerned to provide accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface. Likewise Holt-Jensen (1980) defined geography as the study of variations in phenomena from place to place. Geographer Broek (1965) stated that geography is to understand the earth as the world of man. Likewise, Yi-Fu Tuan defined geography as the study of earth as home of people. Geography at macro level is divided into two major branches: physical geography and human geography. The uniting factor in this diversity of content from landforms to population, climate to settlements and biotic to economic aspects is the spatial perspective. Whether they are human geographers or physical geographers, virtually all geographers are interested in the way places and things are laid out, organized, and arranged on the surface of the Earth. Human geography as second major branch of geography focuses on the study of people and their social groups, cultures, economies, and interactions with the environment by studying their relations in spatiotemporal perspective. Human geographers describe and explain the human patterns of social interaction, as well as spatial level interdependencies, and how they influence or affect the earth's environment. Human geography is the study of the interrelationships between people, place, and environment, and how these vary spatially and temporally across and between locations. Human geographers focus on the spatial organization and processes shaping the lives and activities of people, and their interactions with places and environment. Some of the well-known definitions of human geography are following: "Human geography is the synthetic study of relationships between human societies and earth's surface." - F. Ratzel (1882). "Human geography is the study of changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable earth." - E.C. Semple (1911). "Human geography offers a new conception of the inter-relationships between earth and man a more synthetic knowledge of physical laws governing our earth and of the relations between the living beings which inhabit it." - Vidal de la Blache (1926). "Human geography may be defined as the study of the nature and distribution of the relationships between geographical environment and human activities and qualities." - Ellsworth Huntington (1959). "Human geography is looked upon as the study of man and his work." - Dickens, S.N. and Pitts, F.R. (1963). Human geography is the study of where and

why people and human activities are located where they are.” – Rubenstein (1983) “Human geography is concerned with the spatial differentiation and organization of human activity and with human use of the physical environment.” – Dictionary of Human Geography (Johnston, Gregory and Smith, 1994) Scope of Human Geography The close relationship between man and his physical environment was recognized and emphasized in geography from the very beginning by Greek and Roman scholars such as Hecataeus, Herodotus, Aristotle, Eratosthenes and Strabo. The Arab scholars such as Al Masudi, Al Biruni, Al Idrisi and especially Ibn-aKhaldun, also established relationships between physical environment and cultural characteristics. In the classical period of modern geography, German geographers Humboldt and Ritter focused on the relationship between social groups and their physical environment. The man-oriented perspective of Ritter was reflected in his work ‘Erdkunde’. Ritter concluded that the earth and its inhabitants stand in the closest reciprocal relation and one cannot be truly presented in all its relationships without the other. The German Geographer Friedrich Ratzel established Human Geography as an independent discipline. His two-volume work ‘Anthropogeographie’ (1882 and 1891) presented for the first time a broad vision of man and his works and a deep systematic analysis of complex relationship of human beings with a conditioning physical environment. Ratzel demonstrated that like natural phenomena the cultural phenomena can also be systematized. Before his time human geography had largely confined itself to regional studies. Ratzel developed systematic human geography. He focused on migration (especially German and Chinese emigration) and cultural geography. In the second volume of ‘Anthropogeographie’ he attempted to discuss the concentration and distribution of population, settlement forms, migration and diffusion of cultural characteristics. Ratzel analysed phenomena in human geography giving significance to natural conditions in volume first, but stressed the significance of historical development and cultural background of population in volume second. Ratzel is also recognized as the father of modern political geography with his contributions such as the concept of ‘Lebensraum’ i.e. living space and ‘State as an Organism’ in his work ‘Politische Geographie’ (Political Geography) in 1897. Under the influence of Darwin (Origin of Species, 1859) Ratzel followed deterministic perspective of environmental control over man and his activities. Ratzel’s contribution in three volumes of History of Mankind is significant for human geographers and especially anthropologists. The French geographer Vidal de la Blache is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern human geography and father of ‘Possibilism’. His ‘Principles de Geographie Humaine’ which was

published posthumously in 1922 (through the efforts of Emmanuel de Martonne) and translated in English in 1926 is regarded as a classic. In the introduction part he highlighted the principle of terrestrial unity, concept of milieu, the significance of environmental factors and of man's work. The three major parts of this book included – (i) the distribution of men on the globe; (ii) the forms of civilization; and (iii) circulation. The areas of concentration and dispersion of population were described in relation to physical as well as human factors. The races and occupation modes were described in the part on forms of civilization. The unit on circulation included movement of people and things. Blache highlighted the role of railway networks in economic advancement and national unity in Europe. Blache reflected reciprocal influences between the environment and man. Martonne added and described few aspects in the work like the origin of races, diffusion of innovations and cultural regions as well as cities. Jean Brunhes elaborated Blache's ideas on human geography and possibilism, and diffused the Vidalian tradition to other countries through his major work titled 'Geographie Humaine : essai de classification positive' (1910). This work sought to give the geography of Man a clear disciplinary basis with the identification of following scope or elements of human geography. (i) On the Basis of Evolution of Civilization: (a) Geography of the First Vital Necessity – this category included three primary needs – food, cloth and shelter which are basic needs of all persons irrespective of time and place; (b) Geography of the Earth's Exploitation – this category included the human activities and efforts in which human beings satisfy their needs based on exploitation of natural resources; (c) Geography of Social and Economic Needs – in the social category Brunhes included interdependence, cooperation, division of labour and civic system and other diverse social aspects. In economic needs production, consumption, exchange and distribution were included. (d) Political and Historical Needs – this category included description of political and historical events in relation to geographical facts.