

STUDY MATERIAL FOR STUDENTS OF DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY, B.P.CHALIHA COLLEGE

TOPIC: INTRODUCTION TO HUMAN GEOGRAPHY
PAPER: HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Geography looks at the earth's surface from two different but interrelated perspectives, known as systematic and regional. Accordingly, it has two broad branches: systematic geography and regional geography. Human geography is a branch of systematic geography. Human geography as a 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. The study of the interrelationships between people, place, and environment, and how these vary spatially and temporally across and between locations, its nature is interdisciplinary and integrative. Human geography is more allied with the social sciences and humanities, sharing their philosophical approaches and methods

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY DEFINATION

“Human geography is the synthetic study of relationship between human societies and earth's surface”. **Fredrich Ratzel**

Synthesis has been emphasized in the above definition.

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“Human geography is the study of “the changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable earth.” **Ellen C. Semple**

Dynamism in the relationship is the keyword in Semple’s definition.

“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”. **Paul Vidal de la Blache**

Human geography offers a new conception of the interrelationships between earth and human beings.

Since 1945 human geography has contained five main divisions. The first four—economic, social, cultural, and political—reflect both the main areas of contemporary life and the social science disciplines with which geographers interact (i.e., economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science and international relations, respectively); the fifth is historical geography. All five have remained central, being joined in the mid- to late 20th century by concentrations on particular types of areas, notably urban. Research interests in specific regions have declined, and relatively few geographers now identify themselves as experts on a particular part of the world.

Economic geography has a long pedigree. Its traditional focus has been the distribution of various productive activities—with subdivisions into, for example, the geography of agriculture, industrial geography, and the geography of services—and patterns of trade such as transport geography. Such concentrations were strengthened by the move into spatial analysis. Relatively little work in that mold is now undertaken, however, and the models of idealized economic landscapes that dominated in the 1960s and ’70s are now rarely deployed or taught. Part of the change reflects economic shifts, notably

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the extension of globalization. Transport costs have decreasing significance for many location decisions, relative to labour and other costs. Instead, the decision making of transnational corporations dominates the changing global pattern of activity, reflecting a wide range of political as well as economic concerns regarding the profitability of investing in different countries and regions. Much contemporary work studies company locational decision-making processes, the regulatory regimes of individual states (including policies designed to attract and retain investment), and their impact on the pattern of economic activity.

Economic and cultural worlds are closely intertwined. Many individual economic decisions in advanced industrial countries—e.g., what to buy, where to eat, and where to take vacations—reflect not needs but rather culturally induced preferences, which change rapidly, in part responding to advertising and media discussions of tastes and fashions. To some commentators, this generates a significant shift in the major features of capitalist production and consumption. It is moving away from mass products manufactured on large assembly lines toward myriad small niche markets with factories having relatively short production lines and rapid changes in the details of their products. Economic geographers investigate how markets for goods and services are culturally created and changed and the implications for both where production occurs and where jobs are created and destroyed.

Political geography also has a considerable pedigree, although it attracted little attention during the mid-20th century. Its main concerns are with the state and its territory—with states' external relations and the relationships between governments and citizens. The geography of conflict incorporates both local conflicts, over such matters as land use and environmental issues, and

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international conflicts, including the growth of nationalism and the creation of new states. Electoral geography is a small subfield, concerned with voting patterns and the translation of votes into legislative seats through the deployment of territorially defined electoral districts.

Social geography concentrates on divisions within society, initially class, ethnicity, and, to a lesser extent, religion; however, more recently others have been added, such as gender, sexual orientation, and age. Mapping where different groups are concentrated is a common activity, especially within urban areas, as is investigating the related inequalities and conflicts. Such mappings are complemented by more-detailed studies of the role of place and space in social behaviour—as with studies of the geography of crime and of educational provision—and in how mental representations of those geographies are created and transmitted.

Other sub disciplines associated with social geography are sometimes seen as separate. Population geography is largely concerned with the three main demographic characteristics of fertility, mortality, and migration; investigations using census and other data are complemented by detailed case studies of decision making, such as whether and where to migrate and how relevant information is received and processed. Medical geography focuses on patterns of disease and death—of how diseases spread, for example, and how variations in morbidity and mortality rates reflect local environments—and on geographies of health care provision.

In its original manifestations, cultural geography had close links with anthropology, especially in the work of Sauer's Berkeley school. This has been

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superseded by a wider appreciation of the interrelationships among people and societies as well as between people and their environments. Cultures are sets of beliefs transmitted in various ways. Many involve texts, not only written but also visual and constructed (e.g., works of art and architecture) and aural (e.g., soundscapes); some may never be recorded but are transitory moments in people's movements and expressions. Interpreting them involves deconstructing what people say and do, activities that bring geographers into contact with the humanities as well as the social sciences in developing appreciations of meanings in texts and actions, including the landscapes and townscapes—large and small, personal and intimate, as well as grand and public—created in the process.

Places are central to this diverse range of contemporary work, especially in the study of cultural change, which involves mixing people from different backgrounds and areas as they move through space. Cultures are fluid and continually renegotiated, as are the spaces they create and occupy. Many negotiations involve conflict and the exercise of power—for example, the imperial strategies in the construction of 19th- and 20th-century worlds and postcolonial responses to others' worldviews imposed on them.

One of the most popular fields of study from the 1960s to the '80s was urban geography, under the banner of which much pioneering work in the locational analysis approach was conducted. Cities and towns were field laboratories for testing models of least-cost decision making. When those models were dismissed as oversimplifying complex realities and the search for spatial laws about cities declined, interest turned to contemporary concerns regarding urban areas and life. Cities are major globalization nodes, economic power being centralized in a small number of world cities (London, New York City, and Tokyo are usually placed at the top of city hierarchies).

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Given that the majority of people in the industrialized world live in cities, it is not surprising that urban geography has received much more attention than rural geography. Relatively little work was done on aspects of rural areas other than agriculture before the 1970s, just when, according to some, much of the particularity of rural areas was disappearing as many features of urban society were reaching into the countryside. To others, however, issues unique to rural, low-density areas call for a separate rural geography; although typical urban problems such as poverty, homelessness, social exclusion, and access to public facilities are also characteristic of rural low-density areas, particular issues there include the society-nature relationships, common images of the “rural,” and the role of tourism in reinvigorating rural economies.

Historical geography has retained its identity and distinction, although historical geographers have not distanced themselves from changes elsewhere in the discipline, with which their focus on interpreting the past from available evidence resonates. The developments in locational analysis stimulated some new ways to study available data. For others, the later developments, especially in cultural geography, coincided with their deployment of a wide range of nonquantitative sources to reconstruct the real and imagined, as well as the abstract (spatial analysis), worlds of the past; issues of postcolonialism have attracted the attention of historical geographers as well as those interested in current cultural issues. Detailed analyses of particular places and times are complemented by major syntheses—such as Donald Meinig’s four-volume *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* (1986–2002).

A great range of sources is now used in such endeavours, not only maps but also, for example, travelers’ writings about worlds they have encountered.

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Within this enterprise is a rejuvenated interest in the history of geography itself, not merely as a means of better appreciating where the discipline has come from but also of illustrating the importance of place and context in its evolution; geography, like so much else, is a range of practices that emerged and evolved in response to local stimuli. Geographers have produced particular forms of knowledge that have been significantly influenced by how people have encountered the world.

People and the environment: the physical and the human

Historical geographers have long investigated landscape change. Their work now informs investigations of global environmental changes as well as illustrating past human-induced environmental modifications. Other research evaluates contemporary environmental changes and their implications not only for environmental futures but also for individual life chances.

Such studies occupy the intersection of physical and human geography, although relatively little work involves collaboration among human and physical geographers. For the latter, it involves incorporating human-induced changes to models of environmental processes and systems. Human geographers' concerns range widely, from pragmatically applied work on environmental policy and management through political ecology to explorations of culture-nature interrelations.

Reference

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