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THEMES AND DUALISM IN GEOGRAPHY

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Themes of Geography

The convergence of multiple educational disciplines manifests as the subject of geography. Due to the complexity of the subject, there is a need to organize it into themes that facilitate the teaching of Geography in the world's schools, colleges, and universities. In 1984, a comprehensive educational tool was devised that divided the subject of Geography into five themes. This division was done with the aim to aid the educational organizations to teach Geography in a more structured manner. The National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) and the Association of American Geographers (AAG) formally adopted the themes and formalized them in the printed form in the "Guidelines for Geographic Education, Elementary, and Secondary Schools" by NCGE/AAG.

The five themes of Geography are Location, Place, Human-Environment Interaction, Movement, and Region.

Location

Location is defined as a particular place or position. Most studies of geography begin with the mention of this theme of geography. Location can be of two types: absolute location and relative location. In the former case, the location of a place is defined by its latitude and longitude or its exact address. Let us consider the case of Montreal, a city in Quebec, Canada. The coordinates 45°30'2" N 73°34'2" W define the absolute location of Montreal. However, when we say that Montreal is at a distance of approximately 540 km from Toronto, we are mentioning the relative location of Montreal. In another example, when we say that the address of the Natural History Museum of London is Cromwell Road London, SW7 5BD, United Kingdom, we are referring to its absolute location. However, we are mentioning its relative location when saying that the Natural History Museum is at a distance of about 5 km from another major tourist attraction of London, the London Eye.

Place

Place refers to the physical and human aspects of a location. This theme of geography is associated with toponym (the name of a place), site (the description of the features of the place), and situation (the environmental conditions of the place). Each place in the world has its unique characteristics. The landforms,

hydrology, biogeography, pedology, etc., of each place, is different, and so are its patterns of human habitation. The human characteristics of place are defined by the nature and size of its human population, the distinct human cultures, their ways of life, etc. The concept of “place” aids geographers to compare and contrast two places on Earth. For example, it helps to distinguish Antarctica from the Sahara Desert. One is a cold desert while the other is a hot one. While Antarctica has research stations and penguins, the Sahara has nomadic tribes and camels. Thus, in this way, the “place” theme of geography elaborates a clear picture of a place in the minds of the learners.

Human-Environment Interaction

No other species that has lived on our planet, as per our knowledge to this date, has such a profound effect on the environment as humans. Humans have adapted to the environment in ways that have allowed them to dominate all other species on Earth. Humans have also achieved what no other species have been capable of doing (at least to such a radical extent): modifying the planet to attain their goals of living. Thus, human-environment interaction needs special emphasis and has been classified as one of the five themes of geography. It involves three distinct aspects, dependency, adaptation, and modification. Dependency explores the ways in which humans are dependent on nature for a living. For example, in India, farmers across the country wait for the monsoons to arrive for the successful growth of their rain-fed crops. If monsoons are late, or the rains are insufficient, droughts and food crisis might create havoc in the highly populated country. Adaptation relates to how humans modify themselves, their lifestyles and their behavior to live in a new environment with new challenges. The different types of clothing invented by humans is one of the finest examples of how humans adapted to varying environmental conditions since the early days. While people in the cold countries adorned wool and fur clothing, those in the warmer countries adhered to cotton. The third aspect of the human-environment interaction and the most important one that allowed humans to “conquer” the world is the modification of the environment for his comfortable living. Humans built dams to water their fields in the dry season. They invented air coolers and air heaters to modify the air temperatures of the environment they inhabited. Humans also tamed the wild animals for their use, converted large tracts of dense forests to human-dominated settlements, and developed automobiles and airplanes that shortened distances between places. It is this final aspect of the human-environment interaction, the modification of the environment, that has also created huge problems in the earth today. Global warming and climate change, mass extinctions of wild species, high levels of environmental pollution, etc., have all resulted from the drastic environmental modifications triggered by the human race.

Movement

The Earth is full of movement and in a human-dominated planet, movement primarily refers to the translocation of human beings, their goods, and their ideas from one end of the planet to another. Thus, the theme of movement becomes an important part of geographical studies. Movement deals with studies of population immigration, emigration, and distribution in the countries of the world. It is this physical movement of people that has allowed the human race to inhabit all the continents and islands of the world and also explore the depths of the oceans and land on the moon. Another aspect of movement is the transport of goods from one place on the Earth to another. In other words, it is the study of human trade, a practice that has shaped human civilizations and cultures since the time the first Homo sapiens emerged. The third and an extremely vital aspect of the movement theme is the movement of ideas. It is this interchange of ideas between the nations of the world that allows the unification of the human civilization and promotes its growth and prosperity. Thus, the theme of movement forms an integral part of geographical studies.

Region

An area on the planet that is composed of places with a unifying characteristic is a region, one of the five themes of geography. A region is defined by its uniform physical or human characteristics. A region whose boundaries are formally defined is known as a formal region. For example, metropolitan cities, districts, provinces, countries, and continents can be regarded as a formal region that is unified by a common political entity. A functional region usually encompasses a central point with defined boundaries and the area around it that is connected via a well-developed network of transportation and communication systems that facilitates the movement of people, goods, and ideas within that system. A large metropolitan city including its suburbs like the New York City in the United States, Mumbai in India, Tokyo in Japan, or Beijing in China, can be regarded as functional regions. The third type of region is vernacular region. When places in the world share unifying characteristics, we tend to imagine these places being bound by an “imaginary border”. Thus, though physical maps do not formally define the boundaries of such regions, we tend to create “mental maps” of such regions. For example, we often group the countries in the Arabian Peninsula as the “Middle-East region”, though such a region is never mentioned in the physical maps of the world.

Dualism and Dichotomy in Geography

Dualism may be defined as the ideological drift which changes the basic philosophy as well as methodology of the subject. In simplest of the terms, dualism means division of subject into two branches, whereby the philosophical viewpoints governing the nature of study in such branches are different from each other.

However if the philosophy and methodology adopted in the study of subject in such branches are contradictive of each other, then such dualism attains the status of dichotomy. So dichotomy is said to exist in the subject, if the two branches are mutually contradictive of each other. Geographers throughout the history of geographical thought have been confronted with the methodological problems of dualism and dichotomy. Dualism existed in geography even in its pre-historical period, although in an obscure and vague manner. For example, Herodotus laid emphasis on the tribes and nations and their physical surroundings, Strabo concentrated on regional description. Al-Masudi, Ibn-Khaldun, Aristotle, Hippocrates and others tried to interpret the influence of physical environment on the life styles of various people. However, dualistic thinking in geography became more conspicuous during the post renaissance period in Europe. Since then a number of dichotomies appeared on the scene and with the passage of time, many more are likely to appear. The real beginning, however, has been post renaissance in Europe. Varenus and Kant, the twin propounders of classical geography, initiated the dualistic approach of systematic and regional and physical and human respectively. The modern geographers Humboldt and Ritter further nurtured it as in spite of being contemporary, they were extremely different in their ideologies and approach. The sequential order of development of dualism includes

- Systematic Vs Regional
- Physical Vs Human
- Theoretical Vs Applied
- Idiographic Vs Nomothetic
- Historical Vs Contemporary
- Determinism Vs Possibilism

Systematic Vs Regional

The genesis of it dates back the classical period (17th century) when Varenus recognized two main approach divisions of geography – general or universal and special or particular. The general approach eventually attained the status of systematic geography and particular regional geography. The general geography was the approach practiced by Humboldt, dealing with the whole world as a unit. It was restricted to the study of physical aspects. Special geography was the approach followed by Ritter, which intended to provide description of individual countries. The formulation of hypothesis thus was not possible in special geography case as unpredictable human behaviour was included. Humboldt developed systematic approach in his Kosmos. As disciple of Kant, he strongly favored systematic, analytical mode of studying

geography. The text spelt out clear differences persisting between the two approaches. Uranography (descriptive astronomy) and geography (the study of inter relationship of phenomena) were the two branches of study. In his study of different geographic regions – steppe, arid permafrost, he presented the comparative assessment favoring the dualism. Ritter on the other hand referred geography to be the study of natural phenomena as a whole in specific reference to a part. For him, the discipline was required to rise above mere description to provide logical assessment of links. This wholeness concept was in accordance to Hegel's attempt to comprehend entire Universe. With the twin contribution, the two stagal developments was attained – accurate and detailed inventory of all facts of single aspect and integrated knowledge of some particular factors and the relationship.

Among the other scholars to have contributed to this dualism includes – Richtofen – the propounder of classical regional geography, he elaborated the analysis put forth by Ritter. He advocated the geographical purpose to be explaining the integrated interrelationship that persist between diverse phenomena on the surface of the earth. Ratzel dominated geographical ideology with systematic approach in both Europe and USA. With his comparative assessments of nations and tribal groups, the approach is precisely addressed. However, as he emphasized on genesis of things, he departed his approach substantially from that of Humboldt. Alfred Hettner claimed geography to be ideographic (regional) than nomothetic (systematic).

The subject matter of study thus was knowledge of the earth's areas as these differ from each other. Blache revived inductive empirical approach of geography to fulfill the specific studies pays the small geographic region. Geographers requires to study these pays as man-environment relation develops in these. He was thus a regional geographer, As per his approach, he propounded the concept of terrestrial whole (the earth and inhabitants have close relation). Reclus and Jean Bruhnes also propounded the regional geography. This paved way to the development of specific studies in late 19th and early 20th century.

Geography being multi dimensional, the much emphasized regional geography also had the development of branches general, compage and full description regional geography. Eventually however integrated approach of the two was advocated Berry, advocated the two approaches to be the extremes of a continuum.

Physical Vs Human:

Greek scholars initiated the dichotomy with Hecataues emphasizing physical geography while Herodotus and Strabo on human aspects. The classical period also marked the development of dualism. Varenus significantly plotted the requirements of differentiating physical and human geography. Kant initiated the

precise format of dualism emphasizing on physical geography. The other German geographers, Humboldt and Ritter also advocated physical geography, with Ritter availing anthropocentric approach of study.

Reclus, emphasized on La Terre the systematic physical geography. Collectively in the second half of 19th century physical geography was the targeted approach. Penck, German, coined the term geomorphology. Following him, Koppen, Davis put great emphasis on landform and climate. Ratzel and Semple gave importance to physical environment. Vidal-de-la-Blache founded the school of human geography. He advocated united, inseparable analysis of man-environment relation. Jean Brunhes – principal of activity and interconnected was further carried forward by Demangeon Central Place & Primate city of Jefferson and Economic determinism of Aunchin. Eventually, it was concluded that the physical and human divide of geography is artificial and illogical. All the geographical studies are aimed at developing an understanding of earth's surface and its physical-social phenomena. Hartshorne has been the most important scholar advocating the integrated approach of two.

Theoretical Vs Applied

The genesis of this dates back to prehistoric times. However post second world war and initiation of Quantitative Revolution further divided it. The development of scientific theories and model led to the beginning of practical discipline – Geography. The development of these theories is credited to Chorley and Haggett. The text 'Models in Geography' being the important. Prior to these developments W.M. Davis "Cycle of Erosion" and several other empirical concepts were developed but they lost their significance in light of scientific theories. Geography being social science failed to explain the details of flexible societal norms. Berry propounded that wherever theories fails, applied geography helps in providing the explanations. Dudley Stamp precisely developed applied geography.

In 1957, his text 'Applied Geography' emphasized that the functional identification of geography is possible only via applied analysis. The other text 'Land of Britain – use and misuse', he further elaborated the applied approach. Linton Smith, Herbertson are the other scholars to have contributed to applied geography. Linton in the text entitled, 'Geography and social revolution' and Herbertson in 'Applied Geography' emphasized the requirements of applications to make geography sustain itself. D. Smith's 'Pareto Optimarity' also avails the evidence of requirements of applied approach. Hartshorne however in his text 'Nature of Geography' has emphasized on unified requirements of both the approaches.

Idiographic Vs Nomothetic

The genesis of this dualism is credited to Kant and Humboldt. Kant was the supporter of idiographic whereas Humboldt of nomothetic. The terms however was coined by Hettner who referred geography to be idiographic (general) than nomothetic (specific).

The dualism with definition of both the approaches however is seen in the work done by W. Brand (1894). He identified that the general nomothetic approach avails worldwide subject matter to geography. It thus gives general information about the factor but fails to explain details of the characters and their relationship. This approach was further elaborated by Hartshorne, Harvey and Shoper. They advocated this dualism as unscientific. In present context, however, the significance of idiographic approach is increasing.

Historical Vs Contemporary

The dichotomy of historical geography versus contemporary geography has attracted the attention of historians, geographers and other social scientists. Historical geography deals with the geography of an area, region or world as it had been in the past. For example, if we could ascertain the cropping patterns and settlement distributions in India during the medieval period, it would be an aspect of historical geography. S.M. Ali attempted to construct the geography of India in his monumental work- The Geography of Puranas. Historical geography, however, does not fit within the framework of geography as we know it but stands side by side with the geography of present times. Contemporary geography on the other hand deals with the existing patterns of spatial differentiation of the phenomenon. Contemporary geography will become historical geography with the passage of time. Contemporary geography and historical geography are mutually exclusive and must logically exist as supporting each other.

In the 2nd half of the 19th century, historical geography was conceived as a branch of geography which should be concerned with the interrelationship of phenomenon in space in a particular period or with the geography of the past period, and the influence of geographical factors on history. Whittlesey and East asserted that geographical factor in history means reconstructing the geography of a past period as part of the necessary context within which the flow of historical events may be better understood. Some geographers are of the opinion that historical geography should be the study of changing cultural landscape. The most orthodox view of historical geography is that it should be concerned with the reconstruction of geographies

of past times. There can be numerous types of historical geographies e.g., agricultural geography, urban geography, industrial geography, social geography and regional geography.

Geographical thought at any point of time is a manifestation of the interaction between the prevailing philosophical view points and the major methodological approaches. Because of the diversity of viewpoints with regard to both philosophy and methodology, there has been a constant extension and even a shift in the focus of the discipline in contemporary times. The 1970s may be termed as a turning point in the writing of modern geography. It was during this period that a number of important works advocating different philosophical departures were published. Positivism, pragmatism and functionalism were redefined; while idealism, existentialism, Marxism, radicalism, humanism and behaviouralism were inducted in geographical researches as humanistic approaches. However, we must again reiterate that historical geography and contemporary geography are one and the same. The present geography will become historical geography in due course of the time. Thus, Mackinder wrote that historical geography is the study of historical present. The geographer has to try and to put himself back into the present that existed, let us say one thousand or two thousand years ago; he has got to try and restore it.”

Determinism Vs Possibilism – In the genesis of geographical enquiry there has been several approaches of study of man–environment relation. Man-environment interaction has been one of the central themes in geography. Friedrich Ratzel, the founder of human geography, and his disciple Miss Semple treated the subject of geography as the study of man environment relationship. The theme of Geography as the study of man environment interaction has stirred a debate about the position of man in relation to the environment. The debate first focused on whether man is a part of the environment or apart from it, and then on the second issue-to what extent man is affected by nature. Currently the focus has shifted to ‘interrelationship’ between man and environment.

Early geographers emphasized that environment leaves an indelible imprint on human life in a particular region. Even the present day scholars of the discipline reiterate the same. Emphasis is laid on understanding various processes going on in the environment and on human response to adjust these processes. Human beings have always tried to adjust to the physical environment with the help of cultural and technological achievements. In this endeavor they have gone a step farther. They have not learnt only how to adjust to the environment but, in some regions, they have also attained the capability of adjusting their environment to their needs to some extent. Thus man and the environment are intimately related to one another. Environment influences man and in turn gets influenced by man. Environment determines way of life of man – his customs,

traditions, habits, his complexion, skin colour, his dwellings and activities all are influenced by his environment. Man is also an important agent of change; he with his efforts constantly modifies his environment to his tastes and comfort.

Determinism is one of the philosophy which persisted upto second world war. The point of view is that the environment controls the course of human action. The essence is that the history, culture living style and stage of development are exclusively governed by the physical factors of environment.

Determinist considers man to be the passive agent on which the physical factors are constantly acting and thus determining his attitude and process of decision making. The first attempt to explain the physical features and character traits of various people influenced by natural environment is Environmental determinism, which was contributed mostly by the prehistoric contributors. In the Greco–Roman period, regional studies were closely bound up with the study of history Thucydides and Xenophon saw Athena’s natural conditions and geographical positions as the factor underlying its greatness. Erastosthenese referred Ekumene world in outlining habitability increasing with increasing distance from equator. Strabo, referred mightiness and greatness of Rome on the reference of its location. Aristotle recognized warm climate induces lack of spirit which is the cause of slavery in Asia. Determinism continued to dominate the writing of Arab geographers. They divided the habitable world into seven Kishwars (climatic zones) and highlighted the characteristics of races and culture in these. Al Masudi, Ibn-khaldun, Al-Idrisi, Al-Biruni all attempted man-environment interrelation. These extreme ideology of interrelation, interpretations reveals lack of human technological knowhow and thus nature dominating the course of living.

This environmental causation continued as modern geographic pillars contributed to Geographical determinism. Humboldt strongly advocated the regions bounded in the similarities of natural conditions, will incorporate unity in the human response. Differentiated from it was Ritter’s anthropocentric determinism. He outlined the concept of Unity in Diversity. This refers that the regions bounded in the similarity of natural conditions can incorporate diversities in human response within the limits of natural dictates.

The scientific ideology in the latter half of 19th century was dominated by Darwin’s ideas, and Newton’s cause and effect relationship Friedrich Ratzel became the founder of Social Darwinism and developed a theory of the state as an organism. In his opinion, similar locations developed similar mode of life. His

disciple E.C Semple advocated and advanced Neo Environmental Determinism. This approach was quite widespread in USA during 20th century. Semple distinguished the attitudinal characteristics of people living in different physical settings and points out that mountainous people are generally conservative. There is little in their environment to stimulate them to change. Huntington took most decisive step towards new and conclusive environmental causation. He developed the idea that climate plays leading role in the advancement of civilization. He postulated that the supreme achievement of civilization in any region is always bound to particular type of climate and variations in climate leads to pulsations in the history of culture. After Second World War, the approach was strongly criticized.

Many geographers in USA, UK and Canada drew attention to one sided approach by environmentalism. O.H.K Spate outlined environment to be meaningless phrase without man. Neo Determinism thus was followed; it was put forth by Griffith Taylor. It is also called stop and go determinism. It refers that man has the capacity of accelerate, slowing down or stopping the progress, but if wise he would not depart from the directions indicated by nature.

Possibilism in geography developed passive as a reaction to extreme generalization of environmental determinism which presented man as an active rather than passive agent. This approach asserts that natural environment provides options, the number of which increases as knowledge and technology of cultural group develops. Led by French geographers, the followers of Lucian Febvere, he recognized the true and only geographical problem is that of utilization of possibilities. Vidal-de-la Blache founded French school of geography. They saw that physical environment provides a series of possibilities for human development but argued that the actual ways in which development took place were related to the culture of the people concerned. Central to Vidal's work were the life styles that develop in different geographical environments. In his opinion, life styles are products and reflection of civilization. Variations in the altitudes and habits create numerous possibilities for human communities. After Blache, Jean Bruhnes enunciated the first explicit formulation of human geography as a systematic approach of studying geography. Barrow, a prominent ecologist, gave greater importance to man than environment.

A more acceptable view of possibilism was presented by Sauer, Neo-possibilism. He asserted that geographer's role is to investigate and understand the nature of the transition from the natural to cultural landscape. Though nature is not more than an advisor, the range of possibilities in every region is limited

more by the price man is willing to pay for what he wants than by the dictates of environment. In spite of the fact that man has numerous possibilities in a given physical setting, he cannot go against the nature's direction. Possibilism was thus criticized by different scholars. It was therefore that the intermediary approaches like cultural determinism and probabilism were propounded. James, Bowman, Ullman were the prominent supporter of cultural determinism. The approach recognizes man to be having significant role in man–environment interrelation, as nature is neutral and its role is determined by the level of technological advancement. The primitive societies have more dominating role played by nature.

Probabilism on the other hand recognizes that though nature does not drive man to one particular path and man is free to choose, but that some of the choices are more probable to be chosen. In most of the references, easiest of the possibilities is most probable.

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