NATURE AND SCOPE OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

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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**

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 behavioral, 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.