

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

Concept about Regional geography

Regional geography studies the specific unique characteristics of places related to their culture, economy, topography, climate, politics and environmental factors such as their different species of flora and fauna. Also, **regional geography** also studies the specific boundaries between places.

Regional geography is a [branch of geography](#) that studies the world's regions. A region itself is defined as a part of the Earth's surface with one or many similar characteristics that make it unique from other areas. Regional geography studies the specific unique characteristics of places related to their culture, economy, topography, climate, politics and environmental factors such as their different species of flora and fauna.

Also, regional geography also studies the specific boundaries between places. Often these are called transition zones which represent the start and end of a specific region and can be large or small. For example, the transition zone between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa is rather large because there is mixing between the two regions. Regional geographers study this zone as well as the distinct characteristics of Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa.

Regional Geography evolved as a branch in many countries Germany, France and England and USA. Evolution of regional geography and contributions of some prominent geographers to this branch is being discussed as follows:

A. Regional Geography in Germany: Hettner was the German geographer who pointed out that geography is chorological science of the earth aiming at the study of areas and regions. He elaborated the concept of chorology. As previously discussed, he opposed the Schluter' concept of landscape morphology. In 1906, Schluter pointed out that geography studies all forms and structures resulting from the interaction between only visible phenomena but Hettner was concerned about the only uniqueness of a region which has resulted from either by visible or non-visible phenomena. According to Hettner, the study of the uniqueness of a region is regional geography. Schluter opposed the chorological study of geography but his geography is a distinct form of regional geography. Scholars from Germany wrote various books on region geography. Ritter's book 'Erdkunde' in 19 volumes is a good example of regional geography. This book mainly covers Africa and parts of Asia. Richthofen was the first German geographer made difference between general and regional geography. He emphasized the points of regional geography must be descriptive to highlight the salient features of the region.

[Type text]

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

B. Regional Geography in France: Regional geography was the most important branch of geography in France. Vidal de la Blache initiated regional studies through the development of a concept called 'pays' (small rural region). He opposed the concept of Reine Geography and river basin as a region. Man-environment relationship shaped small region (pays) making it unique for geographical studies. Other geographers like L. Gallois and E. De Martonne also contributed to regional geography. In addition, the trends of geological and historical studies led the growth of a concept of regional synthesis. Later this concept was accepted as an approach to do a geographical analysis of a region. During this period, the regional studies were so popular that numerous books were written and published. For example, Vidal De la Blache's 'Table De La Geographie' and 'De la France' (1903), Demangeon's 'Picardie' (1905), E. De Martonne's 'Les Alps' (1926) and 'An Essay on Middle Europe' (1930- 1931), R. Blanchard's 'French Alps' were noted books which contained description of geographical features like landforms, climate, vegetation, settlement and other socialcultural structures and distinctiveness of each region and its unique man-environment relationship.

C. Regional Studies in Britain: Evolution of regional studies and trends in Britain was significantly influenced by the concept of 'Landschaft' from Germany and 'Pays' from France. For example, British scholar Patrick Geddes focussed on field studies and regional surveys for demarcating regions and regional planning. Another British geography was Andrew J. Herbertson (1865-1915) who combined Geddesian tradition of regionalization and Darwinian heritage of deterministic approach in his study of natural regions. He pointed out that natural regions in the world must be demarcated on the basis of an association of surface features, climate, and vegetation. In addition, H. Fleury offered a regional classification of the world based on problems and difficulties faced by man in achieving its basic needs on the earth surface like nutrition, reproductions, well-being.

D. Regional Geography in the USA: During early decades of the twentieth century, some American geographers were inclined to British approach to the delimitation of regions. Wesley Powell was one of the first geographers who divided the country into 16 physiographic regions but in 1914, W. L. G. Joerg used the word natural regions for dividing the regions into various small regions based on homogeneity in certain physical characteristics. Besides, N. M. Fenneman also published a study of physiographical divisions of United States in 1914. Further, C. R. Dryer came up with an approach to identify natural regions based on economic functions and natural characteristics. That is why he termed such regions as natural-economic regions. Some decades later Richard Hartshorne popularized the concept of regional paradigm in the USA. As per his view, Geography is the study of areal differentiation. Combined functions of geographical elements form a unique regional landscape. There is a difference between different regional landscapes. Such difference in regional landscapes is called areal differentiation.

[Type text]

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

According to Hartshorne, geography has a unique methodology to study its region which was criticized by F. K. Schaefer. In other words, Schaefer rejected the concept of exceptionalism and pointed out Geography is a social science in which all scientific laws should apply. By the 1950s, geographers gradually disillusioned from the regional paradigm and inclined towards systematic geography.

History and Development of Regional Geography

Regional Concept and Regional Geography:

A Historical Perspective The region and regional geography have been a matter of discourse for scholars since Greek period. The word "region" comes from the Latin word "regime", which means 'to manage'. The region was regarded as the appropriate areal scale to manage parts of the kingdom or empire. In a broader sense, the region was defined as a bounded area, possessing some unity or organizing structures. Such study of unified geographical phenomena in a region can be termed as regional geography. In fact, this branch of geography has been viewed as one of the oldest branches. This concept of regional geography can be traced in the works of Herodotus. In the fifth century, B.C., Herodotus described threefold divisions of his known world namely Asia, Lybia and Europe. During the Greek and the Roman period, scholars regarded regional geography as a description of the empires, routes for their armies and for searching the wealth of conquered lands. For example, Strabo laid down the foundation of regional geography through in his 17 books. He used to describe human activities in a region. Such information would have been being used by military and political rulers. In addition, the word "chorology" associated with the regional concept has also been the oldest tradition in geographical inquiry, which aims at the study of the areal differentiation of the earth's surface. Gradually, the importance of the regional approach to geography grew during the Renaissance and the European colonial period. Various useful texts and maps describing the vegetation, the population, and the wealth of the new regions were created for European rulers. Later, during the nineteenth century, each colonial expedition was followed by writings in form of books, maps, and atlases of the travelled area. Therefore, for a century, regional geography had close relations with ruling European countries, trade companies, financing expeditions. In this background of common history between trade and geography, some of the publications like "Universal Geographies" and academic initiatives of Geographical Societies like the Royal Geographical Society laid the foundation of regional geography. In fact, due to links between geography and trade, the regional concept became as 3 a core theme for geography between mid of eighteen and end of the nineteenth century. Scholars like Philippe Buache (the France Geographer) brought about the concept of pure geography and demarcated region on the basis of the river basin. Later German geographer Christoph Gatterner supported the concept of river basin as a basis of identification of natural region. During this

[Type text]

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

period, scholars from two main schools of geographical thought namely German and French were competing. Scholars began to redefine the regional concept from various perspectives. For example, German scholars came with the word 'Landschaft' and/or 'landschaftskunde' (landscape). Scholars give two meanings of 'Landschaft'. One meaning is areal extent with some kind of geographical uniformity and another meaning is a tentative area of the earth in people's mind. Although writing on the regional concept can be traced from pre-classical period to modern time of Ritter and Ratzel, but both meanings of Landschaft became popular only in the beginning of 19th century, especially in Germany. For example, Humboldt and Wimmer believed in the mental impression of the aesthetic character of an area, but surprisingly, Penck's concept of 'Landschaft' did not include man. He pointed out that a region or 'Landschaft' must encompass only visible geographical phenomena. Likewise, French writers used the word 'pays' in both the meanings. In fact, Landschaft is analogous to Carl Sauer's concept of cultural landscape. As per Sauer, the natural landscape is transformed into the cultural landscape through man's interaction with nature in their cultural context and lifestyles. The contemporary American and British geographers used the word landscape as synonymous to the region. However, the word 'Landschaftskunde (or landscape Science)' was referring to the study of the types of regions and their classifications on various parameters. Regions are classified on the basis of variation of geographical features (physical, socio-economic, or both). While explaining the regional variation, Hettner focussed on the pattern of geographical features resulting from mainly physical factors in regions. Schluter concentrated on the study of distinctive regional appearance resulted from the interaction between features. Schluter's concept of 'Kulturlandschaft' (cultural landscape) seems to be similar to French word 'Pays'. 'Pays' refers to a small rural well-defined area showing functional relationship between man- environment for centuries. Schluter was in favour of inclusion of man as a part of the landscape. Each region or landscape is characterized by some attributes like areal extent, location, and boundaries.

Although people had been studying specific regions for decades, regional geography as a branch in geography has its roots in Europe, specifically with the French and geographer Paul Vidal de la Blanche. In the late 19th century, de la Blanche developed his ideas of the milieu, pays, and possibilisme (or possibilism). The milieu was the natural environment and pays was the country or local region. Possibilism was the theory that said the environment sets constraints and limitations on humans but human actions in response to these constraints are what develops a culture and in this case aids in defining a region. Possibilism later led to the development of [environmental determinism](#) which says the environment (and thus physical regions) is solely responsible for the development of human culture and societal development.

Regional geography began to develop in the United States specifically and parts of Europe in the period between World Wars I and II. During this time, geography was criticized for its

[Type text]

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

descriptive nature with environmental determinism and lack of a specific focus. As a result, geographers were seeking ways to keep geography as a credible university-level subject. In the 1920s and 1930s, geography became a regional science concerned with why certain places are similar and/or different and what enables people to separate one region from another. This practice became known as areal differentiation.

In the U.S., [Carl Sauer](#) and his [Berkeley School](#) of geographic thought led to the development of regional geography, especially on the west coast. During this time, regional geography was also led by Richard Hartshorne who studied German regional geography in the 1930s with famous geographers such as Alfred Hettner and Fred Schaefer. Hartshorne defined geography as a science "To provide accurate, orderly, and rational description and interpretation of the variable character of the earth surface."

For a short time during and after WWII, regional geography was a popular field of study within the discipline. However, it was later critiqued for its specific regional knowledge and it was claimed to have been too descriptive and not quantitative enough.

Regional Geography Today

Since the 1980s, regional geography has seen a resurgence as a branch of geography in many universities. Because geographers today often study a wide variety of topics, it is helpful to break the world down into regions to make information easier to process and display. This can be done by geographers who claim to be regional geographers and are experts on one or many places across the world, or by [physical](#), [cultural](#), [urban](#), and [biogeographers](#) who have a lot of information to process about given topics.

Often, many universities today offer specific regional geography courses which give an overview of the broad topic and others may offer courses related to specific world regions such as Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, or smaller scale such as "The Geography of California." In each of these region-specific courses, topics often covered are the physical and climatic attributes of the region as well as the cultural, economic and political characteristics found there.

Also, some universities today offer specific degrees in regional geography, which normally consists of general knowledge of the world's regions. A degree in regional geography is useful for those who want to teach but is also valuable in today's business world that is focused on overseas and long distance communications and networking.

Approaches to Study of Regions

There are following approaches to study a region.

[Type text]

[Type text]

Geographical thought, 6th Sem. Hons., CC-13
Study materials prepared by Surajit Let
Lect-1

A. Landscape Morphology: It refers to the study of forms and structures of visible geographical phenomena. In Landscape morphology, Schluter emphasized on the study of distinctive regional appearance resulted from the interaction between only visible geographical features, however, Hettner focussed on the uniqueness of a region resulting from either visible or non-visible geographical features. Hettner's approach seems to be more holistic to study all physical and socio-cultural structures in a region.

B. Landscape Ecology: It is also called functional approach to study region. It studies interaction and interrelation of geographical phenomena within a region. For example, City region which is delimited by the degree of interaction of people between the city center and a periphery area.

C. Landscape Chronology: It refers to the historical studies of developmental phases of a region in a sequential manner. For example, Whittlesey in 1929 discussed 'Sequent Occupance' and pointed out that each region follows sequential stages of development from an agrarian society to industrial society.

D. Regionalization: The entire Earth or a country is divided into several regions depending upon homogeneity in some physical and socio-cultural features and functions. This process is called regionalization. Regionalization could be of many types like physical, economic and cultural regionalization. Therefore, this approach helps to study a region.

E. Landscape Classification: Classification of Landscape is another approach to study a region. For example, the landscape is classified into two parts viz., natural and cultural landscapes. The classification itself gives lots of information on a region or a landscape.

[Type text]