

Meaning and Scope of Human Geography

Meaning and Definition

Based on systematic approach, Geography can be divided into two major branches i.e. Physical Geography and Human Geography. Human geography as second major branch of Geography studies the interrelationship between the physical environment and socio-cultural environment created by human beings through mutual interaction with each other. In other words, Human Geography is the study of the interrelationships between people, place, and environment, and how these vary spatially and temporally across and between locations. Friedrich Ratzel (German scholar) who wrote the famous book “Anthropogeography” is known as the father of human geography.

Some of the outstanding definitions of Human Geography are following -

[1] Human geography is the synthetic study of relationships between human societies and earth's surface. **Friedrich Ratzel** (1882 – Germany)

[2] Human geography is the study of changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable earth. **Ellen Churchill Semple** (1911 – American Geographer)

[3] 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. **Paul Vidal de La Blache** (1926 - French)

[4] Human geography is primarily concerned with the relations between man, ways of life and the places in which they live. **George F. Carter** (1974 – American Scholar)

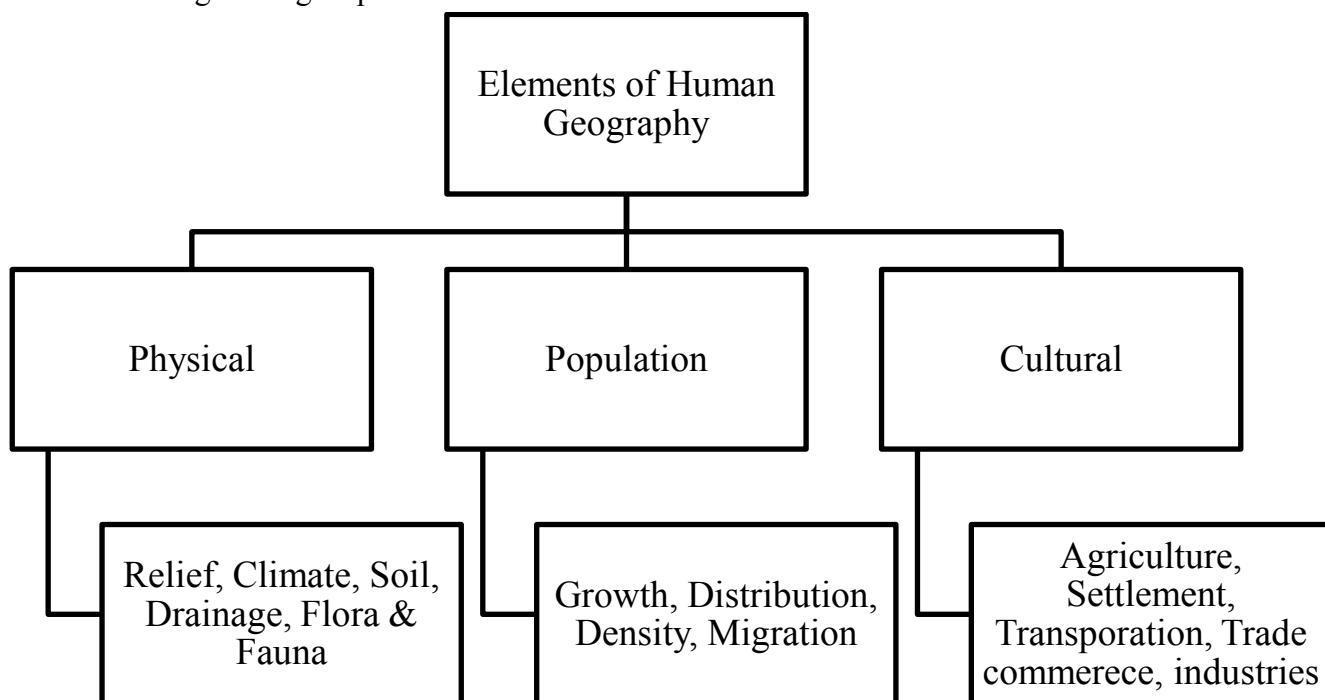
[5] Human geography is the study of where and why people and human activities are located where they are. **James M. Rubenstein** (1983 – American Scholar)

In conclusions, we can say that Human Geography is the study of man and his adjustment to the natural environment.

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-a- Khaldun, 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 ‘Anthropogeographie’ 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. The French geographer Vidal de la Blache is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern human geography. 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). Vernor C. Finch and Glenn T. Trewartha (1957) have classified all elements of human geography into following three groups -



Over the period of time the human geography has widened its scope and changes in perspectives have enriched its subject matter and nature. Quantitative revolution and Behaviouralism dominated in 1950s and 1960s respectively. In 1970s diversified approaches of welfare geography, radical geography and humanism and feminism played a major role in addressing the contemporary issues. Over the period of time the sub-fields and sub-sub-fields of human geography have evolved and established themselves focusing on different elements of human activity and organization.

Branches of Human Geography

1. Agricultural Geography
2. Population Geography
3. Urban Geography
4. Rural Geography / Rural Development
5. Settlement Geography
6. Political Geography
7. Cultural Geography
8. Social Geography / Welfare Geography
9. Medical Geography
10. Historical Geography
11. Economic Geography

12. Industrial Geography

13. Resource Geography

14. Historical Geography

Today, human geography is focused on the scientific study of location of people and activities over the earth surface and the reasons for their distribution including density, concentration and pattern analysis. Human geographers try to understand and explain why differences exist and how social customs are related to cultural landscape. It helps in understanding cultural features such as languages, religions and ethnicities across earth. Human geography clarifies the contrasts in societies and cultures and in the human landscapes they have created in different parts of the world. Human geographers are different from other social scientists because they never forget physical environment as they are trained in both social and physical-biological sciences. Human geographers address urban problems and help in process of sustainable urbanization. The concepts, explanations, models and theories of human geography help in clear understanding to interconnections of the physical, economic, social and political systems within which we live and operate. Further the analysis of these interconnections makes us more aware about the realities and prospects of our own society in an increasingly competitive world. This way human geography helps in developing better informed citizens, more capable of understanding contemporary challenges faced by communities and countries and finally better prepared to contribute in overcoming these challenges.