

GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY

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Introduction

It is often said that Geography can be subdivided into two broad branches, *physical geography* which studies the various attributes of the physical environment and *human geography* which studies the geography of human groups and activities. The physical geography sets the stage on which the humans carve out their lives. Geography explores the interrelationship between mankind and the environment. But earth surface is constantly changing and geography has taken a new turn along with this changing phenomenon. Contemporary issues have received a wide dimension in this regard. Hence human, society and environment have become the key geographical words in present day context. The geography today, therefore, revolves around man, and society.

Contemporary Approaches in Geography

Most contemporary geographers employ three analytical methods. a) Area analysis integrates the geographic features of an area or a place. b) Spatial analysis or locational analysis emphasizes interactions among places. c) Geographic systems analysis emphasizes understanding of environmental and human systems and interaction among them. Area analysis mainly focuses site and situation, relative location, and the concept of region. Spatial analysis deals with distribution, density, concentration,

movement distance-decay, diffusion etc. System analysis covers physical and human systems, human environmental interaction. Geography is one of the social sciences that contribute to understanding of human culture and cultural landscape. In the past human societies developed in greater isolation from one another than that of today, and the extraordinary diversity of human cultures and cultural landscapes testifies to human ingenuity. Different people who live in very similar environment but isolated from one another developed astonishingly different lifestyles.

Man and society is the thrust area in recent decades with the advancement of radicalism, welfare approach and feminism in geography. Social aspects came in forefront with various dimensions of poverty, vulnerability, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition and deprivation. Inadequacy in the availability of food (hunger) is an extreme manifestation of poverty, and its magnitude is much smaller than that of poverty itself. In the era of globalization these social relationships have received wide circulations.

The focus is on the inter-state, inter-district disparities in indicators of well being, inequalities in social groups, and various religious communities. India's development in the past decade has shown a move towards convergence in terms of human development outcomes of the socially excluded groups. In

2010, India ranked 119 among 192 countries across the world with a medium level HDI of 0.52 moving a bit higher as compared to 2005. However despite this, certain sections of society remain excluded especially in terms of improvement in human capabilities and entitlements.

For historical reasons, Indian society is segregated into castes and some of them are economically and socially deprived to a great extent. It is therefore essential to bridge the caste gaps and ultimately eliminate all forms of discriminating social barriers. Even the tribal groups of central and eastern India in particular have remained deprived in multiple dimensions. While counting the relationship between the caste compositions of a state and its outcome in terms of health and education, the most determining social infrastructure, it appears that Kerala and Tamilnadu have a composition of social groups similar to those in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, but better than average health and educational status, suggesting that the social composition of a state's population does not determine its 'destiny' in terms of human development outcomes.

Many of the socially constructed categories such as gender, ethnicity, religion, caste etc have evolved over a long period in history. A society, through social injunctions, threats of direct action etc, often justified by alluding to scriptures, mythology, and events in history, succeeds in excluding them on a more or less permanent basis which then results in their lack of 'capability and entitlement' in the long run. Urban centres operationalize and legitimize spatial inequalities at different periods of history. Although urbanization is credited for making traditional societies more inclusive, breaking down parochial norms and values

that cause discrimination, it creates barriers that horizontally divide a society. Cities screen and control the entry of individuals as and determine their absorption in specific zones through formal as well as informal systems. Market, societal norms, State as well as groups reinforce each other in operationalizing the rural-urban divide.

Variations in markers of well being are consistently mapped across cleavages in Indian society, based on gender, caste, religion, class and place of residence. Economic wellbeing includes income, poverty and inequality counts in changing societal framework. Social infrastructure comprising education and health needs a special attention as social well being parameters. Again vulnerable population covering child population, aged people and women forms an important part of societal group. Social safety nets have a dominant role to play in transforming the society to developed economy. These are the challenges posed today for a better society to evolve.

Social pathological issues as put forward by Smith in 1972 have gained its momentum in social geographical studies. Social public goods and services are now being increasingly demanded by the people as a legal right. The socio-economic conditions of the marginalized sections of the Indian population that is *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, the minorities, other backward groups, workers employed in the informal sectors and the vast number of children and women have in recent years emerged as the principal national concern.

In recent years the private sector has emerged as a major player in the development process and development at the cost of displacement is expanding in

size thereof. World wide experience with resettlement has shown that people who are displaced do not easily recover, much less improve, their previous standard of living. Resettlement studies have vividly documented the devastating consequences of failed resettlement projects, which create new pockets of poverty where none existed before. As regard to the issue of denial of housing and basic amenities to the urban poor within the larger framework of social security, it is apprehended that increased privatization of housing and basic services will reduce their availability to the poor, endangering the long term sustainability of cities.

Social Development Index

Man and society is on constant change. The cultural turn, economic liberalization, global impact, post modern outlook all have made the change for better society. But the challenges are still ahead for the people and the society in order to transform the whole in to a better tomorrow. Society denotes the ties that people have with others. These ties are 'social' relationships, 'social' being used in its widest sense. Again a slightly different meaning of society is of people occupying a given area of geographical space.

Societies are usually perceived as having a distinct identity and a system of meanings and values which members share. Societies are sometimes labeled to indicate their appearance in history, like pre-modern societies or modern societies or post

modern societies. Today research on man and society are directed towards important and contemporary social issues covering themes like, social justice, quality of life, social inclusion-exclusion, social pathology, social security, social change, social hazards like poverty and crime, social well being, social development, social planning so on and so forth. Recently the measure for social development has been computed by social development index (SDI). Thus geography which belongs to social science stream not only begins from describing and analyzing individuals but instead focuses on social relations between people. Social Geography has expanded the domain of studies over time incorporating the ideas from social anthropology, sociology, economics, history and environmental studies. The research nowadays needs the assistance from these fields to extend and clarify the facts and figures so to apply the specific notions properly. At the end therefore a researcher while framing the research questions should consult the allied subject experts for their comments. A holistic approach needs all the co-operations and help from all allied discipline.

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