

# Social Geography: Concept, Origin, Nature and Scope

## Nature and Subject Matter of Social Geography

The term 'social geography' carries with it an inherent confusion. In the popular perception the distinction between social and cultural geography is not very clear. *The idea which has gained popularity with the geographers is that social geography is an analysis of social phenomena expressed in space.*

When the term emerged within the Anglo-American tradition during the 1960s, it was basically applied as a synonym for the search for patterns in the distribution of social groups.

**Social geography** is the branch of human geography that is most closely related to social theory in general and sociology in particular, dealing with the relation of social phenomena and its spatial components. Though the term itself has a tradition of more than 100 years, there is no consensus on its explicit content

However, the term '**social phenomena**' is in its developing stage and might be interpreted in a variety of ways keeping in view the specific context of the societies at different stages of social evolution in the occidental and the oriental worlds. The term 'social phenomena' encompasses the whole framework of human interaction with environment, leading to the articulation of social space by diverse human groups in different ways.

The end-product of human activity may be perceived in the spatial patterns manifest in the personality of [regions](#); each pattern acquiring its form under the overwhelming influence of social structure. Besides the patterns, the way the social phenomena are expressed in space may become a cause of concern as well. This has attracted scholarly attention, particularly **since 1945** when all-embracing changes in the political and economic order of the world started influencing the global society.

As compared to the other branches of geography social geography has a certain amount of recency. *Eyles* saw the antecedents of contemporary social Geography in the development of the philosophy of possibilism in the late nineteenth century.

*Eyles* also visualized social geography as a continuation of the philosophy of Vidal de la Blache and Bobek.

Up to 1945, social geography was mainly concerned with the identification of different regions, themselves reflecting geographic patterns of association of social phenomena. In fact, during the twenties and the thirties of the twentieth century, social geography started its agenda of research with the study of population as organized in settlements, particularly [urban settlements](#).

Socio-geographical studies of population distribution and ethnic composition in urban areas emerged as a major trend during this phase. The underlying idea was to examine the social content of the urban space which resulted from coming together of diverse ethnic groups within a city.

The [city](#) with its specific functional specialization cast these social groups in its mould, resulting in the assimilation of diverse elements into a universal urban character. However, certain ethno-cultural identities (e.g., Blacks in American cities, North- Africans in France and Asians in Britain) were so strongly defined that they continued to defy the forces of assimilation.

### **Defining Social Geography:**

There is subject matter overlap between Human Geography, Anthro-Geography, Cultural Geography and **Social Geography**. The term "Human Geography" has a vintage value; it emerged in an embryonic state as an element in the essential dichotomy of geography during the classical period itself and acquired more definitive connotation at the hands of the great French possibility.

The term "Anthro-Geography", on the other hand, arose within the rigid and inflexible conceptual framework of environmental determinism. The term "Social Geography" was **perhaps** introduced by *Vallaux* in 1908 through his *Geographic Sociale: La Mer* as a synonym for Human Geography and has since then remained ill-defined—its boundaries fluctuating at an alarming rate.

The term “*Cultural Geography*” is a gift from the new world, which, while contributing a new item in geographical glossaries, has unfortunately only added to the semantic confusion. A look at some of the standard definitions of these terms would clearly bring out the prevailing lack of clarity on these questions.

Monk house in his “A Dictionary of Geography” defines [Human Geography](#) as the “part of Geography dealing with man and human activities”. In the same volume, the learned scholar states later that Social Geography “is often used simply as the equivalent of Human Geography, or in the U.S.A. as ‘Cultural Geography’, but usually it implies studies of population, urban and rural settlements, and social activities as distinct from political and economic ones”.

Dudley Stamp in the Longman’s Dictionary of Geography defines Cultural Geography as “that which emphasizes human cultures and is commonly equated with human geography”.

—Moonis Raza, A Survey of Research in Geography 1969-72, Bombay: Allied, 1979: 63-64

Emphasis on population characteristics remained a major preoccupation of social geographers till the fifties of this century. During the fifties, the tradition continued with social geographers mainly preoccupied with population characteristics. Social geographers differentiated between [regions](#) on the basis of the dominant patterns as social phenomena, mostly based on the population characteristics. Later, under the influence of the rising tide of quantification, social geographers started employing area-specific data in order to discover spatial patterns.

As against this *Emrys Jones*’ study of Belfast gave due consideration to the role of values, meanings and sentiments in locational activity. It may, however, be pointed out that any study of the social phenomena within the city in the context of factor analysis helped only in the identification of patterns.

Emrys Jones and John Eyles who described social geography as a group approach conceded that the attempts at definition represented the viewpoints of their authors to which others may not agree .

### **Definitions**

The identification of different regions of the earth’s surface according to associations of social phenomena related to the total environment (Watson, 1957: 482) the study of the patterns and processes (required) in understanding socially defined populations in a spatial setting (Pahl, 1965: 81) the study of the areal (spatial) patterns and functional relations of social groups in the context of their social environment; the internal structure and external relations of the nodes of social activity, and the articulation of various channels of social communication (Buttimer, 1968: 144) the analysis of the social patterns and processes arising from the distribution of, and access to, scarce resources and... an examination of the societal causes of, and suggested solutions to, social and environmental problems (Eyles, 1974: 65) The understanding of ‘the patterns which arise from’ the use social groups make of space as they see it, and of the processes involved in making and changing such patterns (Jones, 1975: 7) (it) stressed structure relations in the analysis of social problems...

Analysis is based on interrelated material reality and the social contradictions this produces; which are seen as the motive force for change, and thus responsible for the development of problems like different level-of-living conditions (Asheim, 1979: 8) the study of consumption, whether by individuals or by groups (Johnston, 1981: 205) It is an interactionist perspective which aims to uncover how social structure is defined and maintained through social interaction, and which studies how social life is constituted geographically through the spatial structure of social relations (Jackson and Smith, 1984: vii) John Eyles, *Social Geography in International Perspective*, London: Groom Helm, 1988; 4-5. The progress of social geography in the decades since 1960 has taken three main paths, each cluster of research acquiring the status of a school of thought in its own way.

(a) A welfare or humanistic school mainly concerned with the state of social well-being 35 expressed by territorial indicators of housing, health and social pathology largely within the theoretical framework of welfare economics.

(b) A radical school which employed Marxian theory to explain the basic causes of poverty and social inequality. This school of thought related the contemporary social problems to the development of capitalism particularly the internal contradictions of capitalism. For example, cities and the communities within the city were perceived as organized spatially in response to the class relations and the Marxian interpretation was that a welfare approach might not be helpful.

(c) A phenomenological school which laid an extraordinary emphasis on lived experience and on the perception of space by social categories based on ethnicity, race or religion. It is thus obvious that contemporary social geography is in line with the theoretical development in human geography as a whole. This does not mean that the welfare or humanistic concerns or the quest for the causes of social inequality and class-based exploitation or phenomenological perceptions of space have replaced the tradition of areal differentiation or region formation. All these approaches have continued to co-exist.

Western social geography, particularly the school of thought pursuing social welfare approach, attached the highest importance to the concept of social well-being.' It was hypothesized that well-being characterizes a state in which the basic human needs of a given population are satisfied because the people have sufficient income for their basic needs.

The state of well-being is achieved only when the income is sufficient to fulfill the basic needs, meaning thereby that the poverty has been eradicated and when the services are available to all sections of the society on a sustainable basis.

In the seventies of the twentieth century, the Centre for the Study of Regional Development at the JNU emerged as a new nucleus of research with a vast potential for a dialogue with other social sciences.

### Issues

Issues such as tribal underdevelopment, agony of the masses hit by a syndrome of droughts, scarcities and famines, poverty, [urban poverty](#) and particularly rural poverty, social underdevelopment as expressed in illiteracy and levels of educational backwardness, destability in tribal areas in the wake of developmental projects, displacement of people by big river valley projects, disparities in levels of development in drought-prone, mountain and hill areas, etc., received increased research attention.

This new academic environment enriched geography's adaptability to social science discourse. In a way the JNU experiment laid down a new agenda for social geographical research building systematically on the tradition of V.L.S. Prakasa Rao and his associates who focused their efforts on the problems of perspective planning for national and regional development. Social geography at the JNU paved the ground for more give-and-take between disciplines, enabling geography to find a place in the realm of Indian social science.

### Scope Of Social Geography

Social Geography is primarily concerned with the ways in which **social relations, identities and inequalities** are created.

- How these social creations vary over space and the role of space in their construction is the principle distinction between sociology and social geography.

- *Social Interaction and relations*

- According to PANONIO, 1997, Social interaction refers to the mutual inter stimulation and response between two or more persons and groups through symbols, language, gestures and expression of ideas.

- Social interaction is the foundation of society. Without interaction there would be no group life.

Social interaction has different form of interaction:

1. Between individual to individual
2. Between Individual to Groups
3. Between groups to groups
4. Between individual and culture

### **Formation of Social Groups**

• Unit of interacting personalities with interdependence of roles and statuses existing between and among themselves • Collection of people where members interact on a regular basis, guide by structure and agreements, defined by roles and responsibilities.

### **Characteristics of Social groups**

- Group members interact on a fairly regular basis through communication.
- Members should develop a structure where each member assumes a specific status and adopts a particular role.
- Certain orderly procedures and values are agreed upon. • The members of the group feel a sense of identity.

### **Types of Social Groups**

Below are the types of Social Groups:

1. Primary Group (Families, Play groups)
2. Secondary Group (industrial workers, Faculty Staff)
3. According Self-identification
4. According to purpose
5. According to geographic location

### **Community and Society**

• The Primary difference between a community and Society is that a community is limited to a specific geographic location, but a society can be made up of people who live in different places. Another difference is that a society is made up of direct and indirect social connections between people, but a community is made up of individuals who are more closely connected. For example, people who live in town represent a community, whereas everyone who lives in the state the town is located in makes up a society.

Several communities can be located within a society but each society is separate from another.

- Societies often include more diversity, with people from different backgrounds, social classes and races.

People in communities most often share similar characteristics.

### **Concept of Social Space**

• A social space is physical or virtual space such as a social center, online social media, or other gathering place where people gather and interact. • Some social spaces such as town squares or parks are public places and others such as pubs, websites or shopping malls are

private places. • Henri emphasized that in human society all “Space is social: It involves assigning more or less appropriated places to social relations.

### **Socio-cultural Region**

Socio cultural regions helps us to understand the soul of the place. The well we know the socio cultural regions, it is easier to understand the people, agriculture, traditions seasons, and buying selling periods

We can also plot them. For Example Cooking Medium .Some Socio Cultural regions are mustard oil users and some may be ground nut oil users. We can also map hard and soft water. A social planner have many maps. These maps helps us to know about the particular region.