

# DETERMINISM, POSSIBLISM, NEO-DETERMINISM & PROBABILISM



The concept of Man- Environment relationship lead to the establishment of three schools.

1. German School : supporters of DETERMINISM.
2. French School : supporters of POSSIBLISM
3. English School : Supporters of NEO-DETERMINISM

## DETERMINISM



- Also known as Environmentalism.
- Refers to the idea that everything in human life is caused by the inevitability of Natural Environment.
- Many determinists like Hippocrates, Aristotle, Strabo , Montesquieu gave their earlier views on Determinism.
- But, **Friedrich Ratzel**, was real starter of this concept.
- Ratzel argued that, “ **Similar locations lead to similar mode of life**”
- He gave more weightage to location in relation to topographic features. He said that location of a place determines the lifestyle of the people.
- Ratzel’s disciple **Ellen Churchill Semple** further explained the theory of Determinism



- Semple wrote a book 'Influences of Geographical Environment' in 1911. She says that:

**"Man is a product of the earth's surface. This means not merely that he is a child of the earth, dust of her dust; but that the earth has mothered him, fed him, set him tasks, directed his thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, given him problems of navigation or irrigation, and at the same time whispered hints for their solution. She has entered into his bone and tissue, into his mind and soul."**

- Semple in her book, distinguishes the attitudinal characteristics of the people living in different physical settings and points out that the dwellers of mountains are essentially conservative.

- The next prominent scholar who was the supporter of Determinism was Ellsworth Huntington who wrote a book '*The Principles of Human Geography*' in 1945.
- Huntington was mainly engaged in developing the idea of climate's leading role in the advancement of civilization. He said that the religion and racial characters are products of climate.
- So, Determinism says that the terrain, topography, temperature, rainfall, humidity, vegetation and soil, individually and collectively affect social and economic institutions and thereby mode of life of people, yet the role of man as a transforming agent of his physical surroundings is quite significant.
- Environment undoubtedly influences man, man in turn changes his environment and the interaction is so intricate that it is difficult to know when one influence ceases and the other begins.

## CRITICISM OF DETERMINISM

- It is regarded by many people as overly simplistic because it neglects the cultural factors that affect human behavior.
- Spate criticized the fanatic approach of Determinists and states that "environment taken by itself is a meaningless phrase; without man environment does not exist"
- Hartake argued that the role of physical factors might be taken relatively unimportant by observing the life in Sahara and Tundra.
- After much development process post World War II, determinism lost much of its importance.

# POSSIBILISM

- Possibilism in Geography developed as a reaction to Determinism.
- It presented man as an active rather than passive agent.
- It is associated with the **French School of Geography**.
- The term Possibilism was given by **Lucian Febvre**.
- But, **Vidal de la Blache** is regarded as the father of French School and Possibilism.
- Febvre said that, “ **The true and only geographical problem is that of utilization of Possibilities. There are no necessities but everywhere possibilities.**”
- The philosophy of Possibilism is the belief that people are not just the products of their environment or just pawns of natural environment.

- Blache says that : “ **Nature sets limits and offers possibilities for human settlement, but the way man reacts or adjusts to these conditions depends on his own traditional way of life**”
- Blache used the term of ‘genre de vie’ that means way of life or Lifestyle. In his opinion, lifestyles are the product and reflections of a civilization, representing the integrated result of physical, historical and social influences
- After Vidal, Jean Brunhes was a strong supporter of Possibilism. He proposed the systematic approach to study Human Geography.
- Carl O Sauer asserted that geographer’s role is to investigate and understand the nature of the transition from the natural to the **cultural landscape**.
- According to Possibilists, Nature is never more than an adviser.

# CRITICISM OF POSSIBILISM

- It exaggerated the role of culture and neglects the importance of Physical Environment.
- It promotes over anthropocentrism in Geography.
- **Taylor** opined that society as a whole should make a choice, and since only an advisory role is assigned to a geographer, his function “is not that of interpreting nature’s plan” i.e. the task of geography is to study the natural environment and its effect on man, not all the problems associated with man or the ‘cultural landscape’.



# NEO-DETERMINISM

- The Concept of Neo-Determinism was put forward by **Griffith Taylor** – a leading Australian Geographer.
- He opined that people might attempt whatever they wished with regard to their environment, but in long term, nature's plan would ensure that the environment won the battle and forced a compromise out of its human occupants.
- He says that, **Man is able to accelerate, slow or stop the progress of a country's(region's) development. But he should not, if he is wise, depart from directions as indicated by natural environment. He(man) is like the traffic Controller in a large city who alters the rate but not the direction of the progress.**
- He used the term , **"STOP AND GO"** Determinism as his philosophy can be very vividly explained by the role of a Traffic Controller.

# PROBABILISM

- This concept was put forward by **O.H.K Spate** in 1957.
- The term was proposed as a mid-way between a stark environmental determinism of Ratzel and radical Possibilism of Febvre, Blache and Sauer.
- According to Spate, **"human action was represented as not so much a matter of all-or-nothing choice or compulsion, but a balance of probabilities."**
- Geographers started to use the probability theory of to determine the man and environment relationship and also make a scientific study of the landscape.