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CUET · GEOGRAPHY · CLASS XII · CODE 313

Human Geography

CUET unit: Human Geography — Nature and Scope

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Snapshot

- Human geography is the synthetic study of the relationship between human societies and the earth's surface, linked back to the parent discipline of geography.
- The central debates of the discipline are nomothetic vs idiographic, regional vs systematic, and the physical–human dichotomy — but nature and humans are inseparable and must be seen holistically.
- There are three conceptual paradigms — **environmental determinism**, **possibilism**, and **neodeterminism (stop-and-go determinism)** of Griffith Taylor — illustrated through the Benda (Abujh Maad) and Kari (Trondheim) stories.
- Approaches in human geography evolved from Early Colonial exploration to 1990s post-modernism (Table 1.1).
- The fields and sub-fields of human geography interface with sister social sciences (Table 1.2), alongside welfare, radical, and behavioural schools of thought of the 1970s.



Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

- Geography as a field of study is integrative, empirical and practical; every event/ phenomenon that varies over space and time can be studied geographically (NCERT §Intro, p. 1). NCERT opens by asking the student to recall the parent discipline studied in Class XI's Fundamentals of Physical Geography (NCERT 2006), reminding learners that human geography is one of the principal branches that "sprout from the body of geography" and must always be read against that integrative backbone.
- The earth comprises two major components — nature (physical environment) and life forms including human beings; physical geography studies the physical environment while human geography studies "the relationship between the physical/ natural and the human worlds, the spatial distributions of human phenomena and how they come about, the social and economic differences between different parts of the world" (Agnew, Livingstone & Rogers, 1996) (NCERT §Intro, p. 1). The textbook draws attention to this dual-component view by asking the student to

make a personal list of physical and human components of their immediate surroundings — a classroom exercise that reinforces the inseparability claim.

- The discipline has been subjected to **dualism** and debates: nomothetic (law-making/theorising) vs **idiographic** (descriptive); **regional** vs **systematic** organisation; theoretical vs historic-institutional interpretation — but the dichotomy between physical and human is finally rejected because nature and humans are inseparable (NCERT §Intro, p. 1). The NCERT presents these dualisms not as settled questions but as "issues for intellectual exercise" — that is, debates that have sharpened the discipline rather than partitioned it.
- Both physical and human phenomena are described in metaphors borrowed from human anatomy — 'face' of the earth, 'eye' of the storm, 'mouth' of the river, 'snout' of the glacier, 'neck' of the isthmus, 'profile' of the soil; networks of roads, railways and waterways are "arteries of circulation"; German geographers describe the state/country as a "living organism" (NCERT §Intro, p. 2). The textbook prompts students to collect equivalent expressions from their own language — a hint that the organic metaphor is universal and that geographical vocabulary itself carries the assumption of human-environment unity.
- Three landmark definitions of human geography are highlighted — Ratzel ("synthetic study of relationship between human societies and earth's surface" — synthesis), Ellen C. Semple ("changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable earth" — dynamism), and Paul Vidal de la Blache (new conception of interrelationships between earth and humans) (NCERT Box "Human Geography Defined", p. 2). Each definition is paired with a one-word keyword in the box — synthesis, dynamism, new conception — which is the form in which CUET typically tests the contrast.
- **Nature of human geography:** it studies the inter-relationship between the physical environment and the socio-cultural environment created by humans through mutual interaction; physical elements (landforms, soils, climate, water, vegetation, flora/fauna) form the stage on which humans create houses, villages, cities, road-rail networks, industries, farms, ports and material culture (NCERT §Nature of Human Geography, p. 2). The text is explicit that this is a two-way relationship: while the physical environment is "greatly modified by human beings", it has "in turn, impacted human lives" — a feedback loop that anticipates the later determinism-possibilism debate.
- **Naturalisation of Humans / Humanisation of Nature:** humans interact with the physical environment through **technology**, which indicates the level of cultural development; technology is born of better understanding of natural laws (friction and heat → fire; DNA/genetics → conquering disease; aerodynamics → faster planes) and "loosens the shackles of environment on human beings" (NCERT §Naturalisation... p. 2). NCERT italicises an important nuance: it is not what humans produce that matters, but "with the help of what tools and techniques do they produce and create" — technology is the index of culture.

- **Environmental determinism:** at primitive technological stages, humans adapted to the dictates of Nature — a "naturalised human" who listened to Nature, feared its fury and worshipped it (illustrated by Benda of Abujh Maad practising shifting cultivation, thanking Loi-Lugi, the spirit of the forest) (NCERT §Naturalisation..., pp. 2–3; Box "The Naturalisation of Humans", p. 3). NCERT generalises from Benda's case to "other primitive societies which live in complete harmony with their natural environment", in which "nature is a powerful force, worshipped, revered and conserved" — and for whom "the physical environment becomes Mother Nature".
- **Possibilism:** with social and cultural development humans move from a state of necessity to a state of freedom, create possibilities from environmental resources and produce a **cultural landscape** (health resorts on highlands, urban sprawls, orchards, ports, oceanic routes, satellites) — nature gets humanised (NCERT §Humanisation of Nature, p. 3; Box "Humanisation of Nature" — Kari in Trondheim — p. 3). The Kari story compiles a textbook checklist of humanising acts: artificially heated office at 23°C, glass-domed campus, tropical fruit flown in, video-conferencing with New Delhi, day-return flights to London — all enabled by technology in a sub-Arctic Norwegian setting where "fresh vegetables and plants don't grow".
- **Neodeterminism / Stop-and-Go Determinism:** propounded by **Griffith Taylor** as a middle path (Madhyam Marg) between determinism and possibilism, using the traffic-light analogy (red = stop / amber = get set / green = go) — humans can conquer nature by obeying it; unchecked "free run" by developed economies has produced green house effect, ozone depletion, global warming, receding glaciers and degrading lands (NCERT §Neodeterminism, p. 4). Neodeterminism "conceptually attempts to bring a balance nullifying the 'either' 'or' dichotomy" — possibilities must be created within environmental limits and "there is no free run without accidents". This is effectively a sustainability statement, and CUET items frequently test it as such.
- **Broad stages of human geography (Table 1.1):** Early Colonial — Exploration and description (encyclopaedic accounts driven by imperial/trade interests); Later Colonial — Regional analysis (regions as parts of the whole earth); 1930s–inter-War — Areal differentiation (uniqueness of regions); Late 1950s–late 1960s — Spatial organisation / Quantitative Revolution (computers, statistics, laws of physics to map human phenomena); 1970s — emergence of Humanistic, Radical and Behavioural schools (reaction to dehumanised quantification); 1990s — Post-modernism (rejection of grand generalisations, emphasis on local context) (NCERT Table 1.1, pp. 4–5). The narrative arc is one of widening method and widening politics — from the imperial geographer's notebook through the statistical computer printout to the post-modern critique of universal theory.
- **Three 1970s schools of thought: Welfare/humanistic** (social well-being — housing, health, education — and the Geography of Social Well-being paper in PG curricula); **Radical** (Marxian theory — poverty, deprivation and inequality linked to capitalism); **Behavioural** (lived experience and perception of space by ethnicity,

race, religion) (NCERT Box, p. 4). These three are explicitly framed as a "discontentment with the quantitative revolution and its dehumanised manner of doing geography" — i.e., as a corrective, not a successor.

- **Fields and sub-fields (Table 1.2):** Social Geography (sub-fields: Behavioural, Geography of Social Well-being, Geography of Leisure, Cultural, Gender, Historical, Medical); Urban Geography; Political Geography (Electoral, Military); Population Geography; Settlement Geography; Economic Geography (Geography of Resources, Agriculture, Industries, Marketing, Tourism, International Trade) — each interfaces with a specific sister social-science discipline (NCERT Table 1.2, pp. 5–6). This table is the densest single source of CUET match-the-following items: every sub-field is paired with a named parent discipline (Behavioural→Psychology, Medical→Epidemiology, Electoral→Psephology, Tourism→Tourism & Travel Management, International Trade→International Trade) which examiners delight in scrambling.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

| Term | Definition | Page |
|--|--|------|
| Human Geography (Ratzel) | "Human geography is the synthetic study of relationship between human societies and earth's surface." | 2 |
| Human Geography (Ellen C. Semple) | "Human geography is the study of the changing relationship between the unresting man and the unstable earth." | 2 |
| Human Geography (Vidal de la Blache) | "Conception resulting from a more synthetic knowledge of the physical laws governing our earth and of the relations between the living beings which inhabit it." | 2 |
| Environmental determinism | Interaction between primitive human society and strong forces of nature where humans adapt to the dictates of nature owing to very low technology. | 2 |
| Naturalised human | The Stage-I figure who listens to Nature, fears its fury and worships it (Benda of Abujh Maad). | 3 |
| Possibilism | Stage at which humans, with better technology, move from necessity to freedom and create possibilities from environmental resources, humanising nature. | 3 |
| Cultural landscape | The imprint of human activities on the earth — urban sprawls, farms, ports, routes, satellites — produced as nature is humanised. | 3 |
| Neodeterminism / Stop-and-go determinism | Griffith Taylor's middle path — humans can conquer nature by obeying it; possibilities created within environmental limits (traffic-light analogy). | 4 |
| Madhyam Marg | The Indian-philosophical label the NCERT attaches to Griffith Taylor's neodeterminism — the "middle path". | 4 |

| Term | Definition | Page |
|-----------------------------|---|------|
| Nomothetic | Law-making/theorising approach in the dualism debate of geography. | 1 |
| Idiographic | Descriptive approach — focuses on the unique character of individual phenomena/regions. | 1 |
| Regional approach | Organises geographical study by area/region. | 1 |
| Systematic approach | Organises geographical study by theme/process across all regions. | 1 |
| Dualism | The internal debate in geography between paired oppositions (physical vs human; nomothetic vs idiographic; regional vs systematic). | 1 |
| Exploration and description | Approach of the Early Colonial period — encyclopaedic accounts driven by imperial/trade interests. | 4 |
| Regional analysis | Approach of the Later Colonial period — regions seen as parts of the whole earth. | 4 |
| Areal differentiation | Approach of the 1930s–inter-War period — identifying the uniqueness of any region and how/why it differs from others. | 5 |
| Spatial organisation | Approach of late-1950s–late-1960s using computers and sophisticated statistical tools; the "Quantitative Revolution". | 5 |
| Quantitative Revolution | Mapping human phenomena via computers and statistics, applying laws of physics to social data. | 5 |
| Post-modernism in geography | 1990s rejection of grand generalisations and universal theories; emphasis on local context. | 5 |
| Welfare / Humanistic school | 1970s school concerned with social well-being — housing, health, education. | 4 |
| Radical school | 1970s school using Marxian theory to link poverty, deprivation and inequality to capitalism. | 4 |
| Behavioural school | 1970s school emphasising lived experience and perception of space by ethnicity, race, religion. | 4 |
| Psephology | Statistical study of elections — sister discipline of Electoral Geography in Table 1.2. | 5 |
| Epidemiology | Study of disease distribution — sister discipline of Medical Geography in Table 1.2. | 5 |

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Box: "Human Geography Defined"** — three definitions (Ratzel/Semple/Vidal) with their respective key ideas (synthesis, dynamism, new conception) (p. 2). The

italicised one-word tag below each definition is what NCERT/NTA uses as the answer key in match items.

- **Box: "The Naturalisation of Humans"** — Benda of Abujh Maad practising shifting cultivation in the penda, thanking Loi-Lugi the forest spirit, chewing succulent leaves, hunting Gajjhara and Kuchla herbs for the madhai (tribal fair); illustrates environmental determinism and primitive technology (p. 3). Note the loaded vocabulary — penda, Loi-Lugi, Gajjhara, Kuchla, madhai — which CUET sometimes lifts verbatim into stems.
- **Box: "Humanisation of Nature"** — Kari of Trondheim driving in dark winters with headlights on at 8 am, working in a glass-domed university kept at 23°C, eating banana/kiwi flown in, video-networking with New Delhi, day-tripping to London; the classic illustration of possibilism via technology (pp. 3–4). The closing line — "though Kari is fifty-eight years old, she is fitter and looks younger than many thirty-year-olds in other parts of the world" — emphasises that technology now shapes life-expectancy itself.
- **Traffic-light analogy** for Neodeterminism — red/amber/green = environmental determinism/get-set/possibilism; the "stop" signals are environmental limits, the "go" signals are conditions where nature permits modification (p. 4).
- **Table 1.1: Broad Stages and Thrust of Human Geography** — five rows: Early Colonial (Exploration & description), Later Colonial (Regional analysis), 1930s–inter-War (Areal differentiation), Late 1950s–late 1960s (Spatial organisation / Quantitative revolution), 1970s (Humanistic/Radical/Behavioural), 1990s (Post-modernism) (pp. 4–5). The single most tested table for chronology MCQs.
- **Table 1.2: Fields, Sub-fields and Sister Disciplines** — Social (→ Sociology, Psychology, Welfare Economics, Anthropology, Women's Studies, History, Epidemiology), Urban (→ Urban Studies and Planning), Political (→ Political Science, Psephology, Military Science), Population (→ Demography), Settlement (→ Urban/Rural Planning), Economic (→ Economics, Resource Economics, Agricultural Sciences, Industrial Economics, Business Studies/Commerce, Tourism and Travel Management, International Trade) (pp. 5–6).
- **Process flow: Naturalised human → Humanised nature → Stop-and-go balance** — the three-paradigm sequence; useful for assertion-reason items that ask which stage comes "between" the two extremes.

2.5 Key data table (chapter facts at a glance)

| # | Fact / figure | NCERT source |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | Number of NCERT-listed definitions of human geography | 3 (Ratzel, Semple, Vidal de la Blache), p. 2 |
| 2 | Author who emphasised synthesis | Friedrich Ratzel, p. 2 |
| 3 | | Ellen C. Semple, p. 2 |

| # | Fact / figure | NCERT source |
|----|---|---|
| | Author who emphasised dynamism ("unresting man, unstable earth") | |
| 4 | Author who emphasised new conception of interrelationships | Paul Vidal de la Blache, p. 2 |
| 5 | Proponent of Neodeterminism / Stop-and-go determinism | Griffith Taylor, p. 4 |
| 6 | Number of stages in Table 1.1 (broad stages of human geography) | 6 (Early Colonial, Later Colonial, 1930s–inter-War, late 1950s–late 1960s, 1970s, 1990s), pp. 4–5 |
| 7 | Number of 1970s schools of thought | 3 (Welfare/Humanistic, Radical, Behavioural), p. 4 |
| 8 | Number of fields of human geography in Table 1.2 | 6 (Social, Urban, Political, Population, Settlement, Economic), pp. 5–6 |
| 9 | Number of sub-fields under Social Geography | 7 (Behavioural, Social Well-being, Leisure, Cultural, Gender, Historical, Medical), p. 5 |
| 10 | Number of sub-fields under Economic Geography | 6 (Resources, Agriculture, Industries, Marketing, Tourism, International Trade), p. 6 |
| 11 | Sister discipline of Electoral Geography | Psephology, p. 5 |
| 12 | Sister discipline of Medical Geography | Epidemiology, p. 5 |
| 13 | Sister discipline of Gender Geography | Sociology, Anthropology, Women's Studies, p. 5 |
| 14 | Most important factor in human-environment interaction (Exercise 1 (iii)) | Technology, p. 6 |
| 15 | Year of the source quoted for the modern definition of human geography | 1996 (Agnew, Livingstone & Rogers), p. 1 footnote |

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Determinism vs Possibilism vs Neodeterminism:** students confuse who propounded what. Only **Neodeterminism / stop-and-go determinism** is explicitly credited to **Griffith Taylor**; "Madhyam Marg" is its Indian-philosophical label. Ratzel/Semple/Vidal are NOT proponents of neodeterminism.
- **Definitions of Human Geography:** Ratzel = synthesis, Semple = dynamism / unresting man, unstable earth, Vidal de la Blache = new conception of interrelationships. NTA frequently swaps the author with the keyword.
- **Quantitative Revolution belongs to Late 1950s–Late 1960s**, not the 1970s; the 1970s gave us Humanistic, Radical and Behavioural schools as a reaction to it.
- **Three 1970s schools:** Welfare = social well-being (housing/health/education); Radical = Marxian/capitalism critique; Behavioural = perception by ethnicity/race/

religion. Do not confuse "Behavioural" school of thought (a 1970s reaction) with "Behavioural Geography" sub-field of Social Geography in Table 1.2.

- **Electoral Geography interfaces with Psephology** (not Political Science directly — that is Political Geography's parent interface). Similarly, **Medical Geography interfaces with Epidemiology**, not Medical Science.
- Technology is the **most important factor** in human–environment interaction (not human intelligence or perception) — Exercise 1 (iii) tests exactly this trap.
- **"Not a source of geographical information"** — Exercise 1 (ii) lists samples of rock materials from the moon as the wrong answer; traveller's accounts, old maps and ancient epics ARE sources.
- **Stop-and-go ≠ Possibilism:** the "go" in the traffic-light analogy is conditional on nature permitting modification, not absolute freedom. Treating neodeterminism as a synonym of possibilism is a classic trap.
- **Loi-Lugi is the spirit of the forest** in Benda's story (not a tribe, not a tree); CUET 2024 patterns have included such "name the entity" recall items.
- **Cultural landscape** is a product of possibilism (humanisation of nature), not a stage in itself.
- **German geographers** describe the state/country as a "living organism" — the organic metaphor is German, not French; the French Vidalian tradition is associated with possibilism.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This is a foundational definitional chapter that appears every year in CUET (UG) Geography (313): expect 6–8 MCQs, dominated by author–definition matching (Ratzel/Semple/Vidal), the determinism–possibilism–neodeterminism triad with Griffith Taylor's name, the chronological table of approaches (Table 1.1), and field/sub-field/sister-discipline matches from Table 1.2. NTA also recycles the NCERT exercise stems verbatim — especially "technology" as the most important factor in human–environment interaction and "Quantitative revolution" or "Areal differentiation" as approaches. See [/pyq/geography](#) for the live PYQ vault and tag-wise filters.

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.1 (CUET 2025) The following activity can be termed as an example of possibility:

- A) Forest worship B) Ports on the coasts C) Being afraid of the fury of nature D) Collecting fruits and herbs from the forest Tests: Possibilism (humans as active agents transforming nature) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.2 (CUET 2025) Which of the following statements are correct for 'technology'? (A) Understanding of concepts of friction and heat enabled us to conquer many diseases. (B) Technology indicates the level of material development of society. (C) Technology loosens the shackles of the environment on human beings. (D) Human beings interact with their physical environment with the help of technology.

- A) (A), (B) and (D) only B) (A), (B) and (C) only C) (A), (C) and (D) only D) (B), (C) and (D) only Tests: Role of technology in human–environment interaction Answer: Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.9 (CUET 2024) Match List-I with List-II (Approaches in Human Geography): (A) Areal Differentiation — (I) Identifying uniqueness of region; (B) Spatial Organisation — (II) Quantitative techniques in geography; (C) Behavioural School — (III) Discontent with quantitative revolution; (D) Post-modernism — (IV) Focus on local context.

- A) A-I, B-II, C-III, D-IV B) A-I, B-III, C-II, D-IV C) A-I, B-II, C-IV, D-III D) A-III, B-IV, C-I, D-II Tests: Characteristics of approaches in Human Geography (Table 1.1) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.35 (CUET 2024) Who defined Human Geography as "concerned with the knowledge of the physical laws governing earth and the relations between living beings"?

- A) Ratzel B) Blache C) Taylor D) Semple Tests: Author–definition matching (Ratzel/Semple/Vidal/Taylor) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.36 (CUET 2024) "Geography is the study of human beings and environment where nature dictates the lifestyle of human beings." Identify the approach mentioned.

- A) Possibilism B) Environmental Determinism C) Behaviouralism D) Regionalism Tests: Determinism–possibilism–neodeterminism triad Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.37 (CUET 2024) Which of the following geographers described the 'state/country as an organism'?

- A) French B) German C) Australian D) Indian Tests: Ratzel and the German school of geography Answer: Not in extracted key

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.1 (CUET 2023) "Human Geography is the synthetic study of relationship between human societies and earth's surface." Who said this?

- A) Griffith Taylor B) Vidal de la Blache C) Ellen C. Semple D) Ratzel Tests: Author–definition matching (Vidal de la Blache's definition) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.2 (CUET 2023) Which school of thought in Geography is concerned with the different aspects of social well-being of the people?

- A) Deterministic B) Humanistic C) Possibilistic D) Naturalistic Tests: Welfare/ Humanistic school in contemporary approaches Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.3 (CUET 2023) Military Geography is a sub-field of which field of Human Geography?

- A) Economic Geography B) Human Geography C) Political Geography D) Urban Geography Tests: Fields and sub-fields of Human Geography (Table 1.2) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.16 (CUET 2023) Arrange the following technological developments in chronological order: A. Information and Computers; B. Development of Agriculture; C. Sanitation and Medical; D. Industrial Development.

- A) D, B, A, C B) B, D, C, A C) B, D, A, C D) D, B, C, A Tests: Chronology of broad technology-society stages Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.18 (CUET 2023) Arrange the following approaches of Human Geography in chronological order: A. Spatial Organisation; B. Post-modernism; C. Exploration and Description; D. Areal Differentiation.

- A) D, C, A, B B) D, C, B, A C) C, D, A, B D) C, D, B, A Tests: Chronological table of approaches (Table 1.1) Answer: Not in extracted key

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