

Complementary Role of Historians and Geographers in the Study of Settlements

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Abstract: *History is the story of human experience; it encompasses other human centred disciplines such as anthropology, economics and geography. The relationship between history and geography is especially intimate. None of them can be understood in the absence of the other, so it only makes sense to study them together. Separation of these two subjects is arbitrary, anti-intellectual and ineffectual. The present paper intends to analyse the geographical approaches in the study of rural settlements. It is suggested that the integrative approach to study the settlements is much of use instead of study in isolation.*

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between history and geography is especially close because they represent two fundamental dimensions of the same phenomenon. History views human experience from the perspective of time, geography from the perspective of space. Key concepts of geography such as location, place and region are tied inseparably to major ideas of history such as time, period and events. Geography, by its nature, is the constant companion of historical studies and it is meaningless to study the one without the other. In this way there are strong complementary relationships between these two subjects.

The study of different aspects of settlements such as their evolution, distribution pattern, etc. has been very popular field of interests of both the historians as well as geographers since beginning. By adopting different methodologies, scholars from both the disciplines have recognised the importance of settlements on the earth surface. The present paper intends to analyse the approaches adopted by geographers in the study of rural settlements with special reference to India.

APPROACHES TO STUDY RURAL SETTLEMENTS

Geographers use both ideographic and nomothetic approaches in the study of rural settlement studies. In the recent past, most of the scholars have adopted quantitative approaches which are mere tools to explain the complicated problems of spatial distribution of settlements. The approaches of settlement geography mainly focus at

distribution of settlements, functional classification and hierarchy of settlements, types and spatial diffusion, etc.

RETROGRESSIVE APPROACH

In this approach the researchers mainly concentrate on the past. However, such aspects of the present pattern of rural settlement that throws light on the earlier conditions are also taken into consideration.

PROSPECTIVE APPROACH

This approach concerns with the future, but the past is considered for the understanding of the future. In this way this approach gives equal weight to the historical factors.

ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH

In this approach, the researcher focus on environmental factors like topographic conditions, forest cover, climatic conditions, availability of water, food, employment, technical abilities of people, agricultural prosperity, mineral exploitation and the development of industries. All these factors put prominent effect on the patterns, types, growth and dispersal of rural settlements in a particular region. Only the sum of the conditions as emerged from the association of above mentioned variables can be said to be a particular level of effect in developing a particular character of settlement growth, functions, spatial diffusion, concentration, dispersal and housing conditions at a specific place and time.

CASE STUDY APPROACH

In this approach, settlements are generally selected on random, systematic, clustered or nested sampling basis. The emphasis is given on a particular settlement from all geographical points of view. It also establishes as to when, where, why and how a habitat has evolved and is still continuing on a particular place.

REGIONAL APPROACH

The country may be divided into several settlement regions in this approach. This approach is influenced not by political boundaries but by physical factors. In this approach, the repetition of the same study for different units is not possible. For example, the geographical areas along the tropics may constitute separate nations but the regional condition on the tropics is the same everywhere and so is the living condition in the region.

SYSTEM ANALYSIS APPROACH

The system analysis approach concentrates on the process of feedback mechanism, open system, closed system and the corollaries of systems and sub-systems studied for different levels of settlements in different time and space.

STATISTICAL APPROACH

Statistical approach includes sampling method, model building, cost-benefit analysis, correlation, regression, multivariate analysis, principal component analysis, etc. settlements are generally selected on the basis of random, systematic, clustered, multi-stage and purposive sampling. In model building graphical and deterministic models are generally used in settlement geography.

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Under interdisciplinary approach, the methods used in other branches of geography or in allied sciences are applied to settlement geography for studying various problems, e.g., the same methods which are used in functional classification of settlements, are applied to crop combination. So far as the principle approach is concerned, the application of the theory of central place can be applied in any region with some positive result.

APPLICATIONS OF PARADIGMS, SYSTEM ANALYSIS AND PROBABILITY THEORY

These are currently changing the geographer's attitude towards rural settlement studies. In a system of steady state, it is not necessary to study the history of settlements in order to understand its form and the process going on. Such an approach does not fit into the traditional trilogy of

form, function and genesis treated as the approaches to geographical knowledge of rural settlements.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the above analysis that historians and geographers view the phenomena from different angles and analyse them from different approaches. In this way both these subjects play complementary role to get in depth knowledge of a phenomenon occurred in the past. Hence, instead of confrontation, these complementary roles should be emphasised for the development of both the subjects. Emphasis should be laid on the integrative approach rather than to study in isolation.

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