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Geography (Hons)-Paper-CT13-6th Semester

Evolution of geographical thoughts in Britain and the British School of Geographical thought

Questions

1. Discuss the evolution of geographical thought in Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Marks-5)
2. Why is Sir Halford John Mackinder considered as the founder of British School of Geography? (Marks-5)
3. How was the concept of 'region' developed by the British geographers under the influence of Paul Vidal de Lablache and F. Le Play? (Marks-5)
4. Evaluate the contribution of British geographers in the development of the concept of region. (Marks-5)
5. What do you mean by Le Play formula and Le Play Society? (Marks-5)
6. What were the objectives of the study of economic geography in Britain? (Marks-5)
7. How was the 'Man Nature interaction' dealt by the British geographers? (Marks-5)
8. How did land use research encourage the study and research of agricultural geography in Britain? (Marks-5)
9. Discuss the contribution of the British geographers for the enrichment of historical geography. (Marks-5)
10. What are the salient features of the study and research of geography in the Post Second World War Period? (Marks-10)
11. What are the new areas covered by the British geographers during the Post Second World War Period? (Marks-5)
12. What are the new concepts adopted by the British geographers during the Post Second World War Period? (Marks-10)
13. Discuss the contribution of the British geographers in the development of geography study and research according to pre World War-I, Interwar and Post World War-II Periods. (Marks-10)

The British School of Geography

Geography, one of the oldest fields of human curiosity drew very little attention in Britain until the middle of the 19th Century. Exploration of new lands, description of travels and voyages, description of the newly discovered lands and their people were considered as the areas of geographical studies. Geography was initiated in the schools at a very late stage, and in school and colleges of Britain, memorisation of facts, names of places, mountains and rivers used to be taught, by historians and geologists. Up to this period, geography was nothing but encyclopaedia of information to the Britons.

In the middle of the 19th century, academicians were busy in the accumulation of facts and information about the newly discovered places of the world. In 1859, Sir Charles Robert Darwin published his "Origin of the Species" which attracted the attention of biologists, geologists and sociologists. After this evolutionary theory, British scholars started paying attention towards earth as the home of man. It was the end part of the 19th century when geography was introduced as a discipline in the British universities.

Halford John Mackinder and the British School of Geography:

Sir Halford John Mackinder, the scholar of dynamic personality and the person who can give simple expression to complex ideas, with an imaginative mind, is known as the founder of British School of Geography. His thinking was permeated by visualization, both on the map and in the mind, of the world's regional complexes as combinations of varied physical and human elements. He considered geography as a bridge between the humanities and the natural sciences, between history and geology. He applied these concepts to the interpretation of world political affairs.

It was 1887 when Mackinder was appointed as the professor of geography at the University of Oxford that geography started growing in the United Kingdom. In the initial stage, the British geographers were concentrating in the field of Physical Geography, in which there used to be hardly any description of man as an agent of change in the physical surroundings. Mackinder identified geography as a discipline that traces the interaction of man and his physical environment. In 1904, he formulated the concept of the "Geographical Pivot of History" also known as "the Heartland Theory of Mackinder". In the Heartland Theory Mackinder identified a 'World Island' consisting of the continents of Eurasia and Africa. The most inaccessible part of the world, he called heartland. This is the area of low population and difficult accessibility.

The Concept of region:

The Concept of 'region' was a popular theme for British geographers before the First World War. The British geographers were influenced by Paul Vidal de Lablache, and the leading French sociologist F. Le Play. Sir Patrick Geddes, the Scottish geographer was a follower of Le Play-who carried on research on family life styles and family budgets. He recognised that family life is dependent on family life style and family budgets. Le Play recognised that family life is dependent on the means of obtaining subsistence, i.e. work while the character of the latter is largely determined by the nature of the environment that is place. This led to the famous **Le Play formula** which is basic to his ideas-place, work, folk as the basic concepts in the study of cities and regions.

The Geddes' scheme was widely used between the wars in teaching of geography, and by regional and city planners in their diagnostic surveys preparatory to planned action. Thus Geddes was the founder of British regional studies, especially regional survey, regionalisation and applied geography. Field observation (observation and recording in the field) was basic to

Geddes' teaching. Geddes and his follower established the **Le Play Society** which grew out of Sociological Society in order to foster regional survey. He used regional survey for regional planning.

Geddes put forward the idea that geography is not a mere descriptive science, it is an applied science, dealing with what ought to be. Geddes also influenced the study of regionalisation. **Andrew J. Herbertson** (1865- 1915) an assistant of Geddes at Oxford, presented the scheme for a division of the world into natural regions, based on surface features, climate and vegetation. Among other British geographers **A.G. Ogilvie** edited 'Great Britain-Essays in Regional Geography' in 1928. This book gives a glimpse of the regional variations in the physical and cultural landscape of Britain. **Roxby** suggested a scheme, on how the regional studies should proceed. He pointed out that a systematic regional study should deal with the geology, drainage, coastline, climate, vegetation to demarcate the natural regions, and this should follow by the 'evolution of man's relation to his physical environment.

Economic Geography:

In the inter-war period, Economic-geography was very popular field of study in Britain. In all the studies of economic geography, the influence of natural factors on the site of resources and location of economic activities has been studied. In 1905 **Herbertson** prepared a framework for natural regions for the study of world regional and economic geography.

Man Nature Interaction:

In the later parts of the 19th century till the First World War, geography in the Britain was dominated by the man and nature relationship. Geography during this period was considered as the description of the earth surface and its influence on man. The British geographers of this period delineated the major natural regions of the world to ascertain how man is playing his role in these regions. The regional synthesis advocated by the French geographers was not acceptable to the British geographers as such a synthesis is not achievable. Consequently, they paid more attention towards physical geography and a large number of monographs were published in the field of geomorphology by the British geographers. **Cyril Daryll Forde** published 'Habitat, Economy and Society' in the year 1934 to show the influence of environment on the occupation and mode of life of the people. Forde put stress on cultural groups in their areal pattern, that are dependent upon culture and cultural contacts rather than on direct impact of physical environment. The approach of 'environmental determinism' as a central theme of selection and interpretation is flatly rejected in these studies.

Agricultural Geography:

At the advent of the 20th century 'agricultural geography' became an important field of geographical research, but it was in the twenties and thirties when landuse survey attracted the attention of the British geographers. After the First World War it was realised that each unit of

land should be used judiciously. In 1920 Prof. Laurence Dudley Stamp prepared the Landuse Maps of Britain. The landuse maps prepared by Stamp were used for a variety of purposes in addition to planning of emergency crop expansion during war. After the Second World War they were the basis for the reconstruction of Britain. In 1965 in recognition of his contribution Prof. Laurence Dudley Stamp was decorated with 'Sir' and became 'Sir Dudley Stamp'. The geography of rural settlement and urbanisation made little progress during the inter-war period. Fleure and his followers made some studies of the rural settlement but they cannot be considered as substantial contributions. Virtually no attention was paid to spatial structure of city.

Historical Geography:

Historical geography was also a good hunting ground for the British geographers after the First World War. The foundation of historical geography in Britain was laid down by Mackinder. He stressed that geographers should try to rebuild past geographies and show how sequence of change has led to the present observable features; otherwise geography would become a mere description of contemporary features. Historical geography evaluates through time the changing inter-connections of man and nature. During this period some of the prominent scholars who contributed in the field of historical geography are M.I. Newbegin, E.G.R. Taylor, E.W. Gilbert and H.C. Darby.

Contemporary Trends in British Geography:

There has been a tremendous change in the philosophy, approaches, and scope of geographical studies during the last five decades. The major change was in the form of 'Quantitative Revolution'. In this period, scholars like Richard Chorley and Peter Haggett made enormous use of sophisticated statistical techniques, and formulated models and theories in the fields of human and social geography. In the post-war period, geography in Britain is recognised as a spatial science. Now geography is concerned with providing accurate, orderly, and rational description of the variable character of the earth-surface. The quantitative revolution was started from the United States and was quickly diffused in Britain. The British geographers, consequently, focused their attention on-

- quantification,
- multivariate analysis, and
- statistical description of
 - patterns,
 - formulation and
 - testing of hypotheses.

A number of books have been written by Haggett and Chorley which explain the space relations and locational analysis with the help of models.

Some of the major works are-

- 'Models in Human Geography', '
- Locational Analysis in Human Geography' and
- 'Frontiers in Geographical Teaching'.

Some other aspects on which the British geographers are paying attention are-

- inter-regional and intra-regional inequalities in the society,
- environmental degradation,
- ecological crisis and
- the environmental management.

Some of the new areas in which the British geographers are breaking new grounds are

- Public welfare,
- social amenities,
- medical geography and
- landscape ecology

Moreover, substantial contributions are being made in the fields of-

- concepts,
- physical,
- regional,
- historical,
- economic,
- transport,
- agricultural and
- political geography.

Some of the new concepts which are drawing the attention of British geographers are-

- (i) Positivism,
- (ii) Pragmatism,
- (iii) Existentialism,
- (iv) Idealism,
- (v) Realism,
- (vi) Environmental Causation,
- (vii) Radicalism and
- (viii) Dialectic Materialism.

Positivism is an important approach on which the British geographers are focusing their attention. Positivism is a naturalistic-pragmatic trend in modern thought. It is a type of empiricism which says that science can only concern itself with empirical questions (those with a factual question), not with normative questions (questions about values and factual contents).

Empirical questions are questions about how things are in reality and 'reality' is defined as the world which can be sensed. This means science is concerned with objects in the world.

Positivism holds that science we cannot investigate such things as moral norms with our senses, we should keep away from normative questions. We cannot justify our tastes scientifically. Another major aspect of positivism is its emphasis on the unity of science. Scientific status is guaranteed by a common experience of reality, common scientific language and method which ensures that observations can be repeated. Since science has unified method, there can only be one comprehensive science. In brief the followers of positivism believe that as natural sciences discovered the laws of nature, so scientific investigations of communities would discover the laws of society. They admit that social phenomena are more complex than natural phenomena but believe strongly that the laws governing society would eventually be discovered.

Some of the British geographers are concentrating on the philosophy of '**Pragmatism**' to solve the problems of societies. The concept of Pragmatism was borrowed by the Britons from America. According to this philosophy there should be more emphasis on 'practical problems'. A pragmatist believes that the 'concrete' or the particular situation is important to obtaining scientific knowledge and for understanding the world.

The concept of 'realism' is a new philosophy in the British geographical literature. In the Platonic-Socratic thought, the realism was used in opposition to nominalism for the doctrine that universal and abstract entities have real objective existence. But the same term can and does take separate forms.
