

REVISITING THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY: AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Birbal

Asst. Professor, Department of History and Archaeology,
M.D.University, Rohtak (Haryana)
Email: birbal7319@gmail.com

“History can’t be separated from its geographical context”

- E.H.Carr

ABSTRACT

The interrelationship between history and geography provides a crucial foundation for understanding patterns of economic development and resource management across time and space. This study revisits this relationship from an economic perspective by examining how geographical factors such as landforms, climate, rivers, and natural resources have historically influenced production systems, trade networks, settlement patterns, and the evolution of markets and institutions. It further analyzes how economic activities, technological advancements, and policy decisions have transformed geographical landscapes, reshaping resource distribution and regional development trajectories. The paper argues that economic history cannot be fully interpreted without considering spatial and environmental contexts, while geographical patterns acquire deeper significance when examined through historical economic processes. By adopting an interdisciplinary framework, the study highlights the complementary role of history and geography in explaining economic growth, regional disparities, and sustainable development. This integrated approach offers valuable insights for both economic analysis and strategic management in a rapidly changing global environment.

Keywords:

Economic geography, economic history, interrelationship, regional development, resource management, spatial analysis, trade and markets, environmental economics, institutional evolution, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION:

The English word **History**[#] is derived from the Greek word "istoria" meaning inquiry, research, exploration or information.¹ History is the organized story of human life. It is a record of important events and changes that happened in the past. History tries to describe and understand things that have already happened and can never happen again in the same way. Even though we can't know everything perfectly, history helps us remember and learn from the past.² J.B. Bury said, "History is a science, no less and no more." If history means inquiry, of search and science means finding out things, then Bury's statement gives a correct explanation of history.

Benedetto Croce said, "All history is contemporary history."

This means that history is not just a story of the past. When a historian writes history, he or she looks at the past from the point of view of the present.

According to John Robert Seeley, "History is past politics; and politics is present history." He also believed that history should be useful. We study history not just to know facts, but to understand how the state and government work.

E.H. Carr in his book, "What is History?" says that "History is a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past."

Voltaire commented, "History is only record of crimes and misfortunes."³

Like the meaning of history, scholars have given various definitions of history. The main objective of a definition is to clarify the basic elements of any subject and make it simple and understandable.⁴

Karl R. Popper believed that history has no predetermined goal. Hence, it has no meaning.⁵

History is described as a comprehensive portrayal of society. Certainly, history presents a picture of society as it develops within a particular country, time, and circumstances. From the moment human beings set foot on this earth, their history begins. The footprints they left behind and the remains of their activities serve as evidence for the writing of history.⁶

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY:

Geography[#] and history are closely connected. Geography is like the stage where the story of history happens. Just as a beautiful girl needs to eyes to see clearly, history also needs

Herodotus (C. 484-425 BCE) was an ancient Greek writer who produced the first large scale work that tried to systematically record and investigate past events rather than just tell myths. Because of this new approach later scholars especially the Roman writer Cicero – called him the "Father of History".

Eratosthenes (276-194 BCE) is called the Father of Geography. He was Greek mathematician and geographer who worked at the Library of Alexandria. He introduced the term geography, meaning, "description of the earth. He

two important things-- time and place. Time is studied through chronology, and place is studied through geography. Both time and Space help us understand history properly. Geographical factors are very important. An American geographer, Ellis Worth Huntington, believed that no nation, whether old or modern, became highly developed without the influence of a good climate.⁷

Geography seems very necessary for the study of history as a subject. HRG Johnson wrote that it is impossible to imagine history without geography and geography without history.⁸

Geographical discoveries and geographical instruments have played an important role in giving movement, direction, and meaning to history. Geographical discoveries hold great importance in modern history because they led to the beginning of a new era in the world. The civilizations of Europe and Asia, which were earlier separated from each other, came into close contact through geographical discoveries. Thus, as a result of the achievements related to geographical discoveries by European nations, a new phase in world history began.⁹

Before the fourteenth century, the geographical knowledge of Europeans was not only incomplete but also full of superstitions. In the medieval period, people believed that the Earth was flat. However, geographical explorations revealed the reality that the Earth is round and that one could reach the East by sailing westward across the sea. The invention of scientific instruments made sea travel easier. By the end of the 13th century, Europeans became familiar with the most important geographical instrument, the compass (direction-finding instrument). Later, they also learned about the astrolabe (an instrument used to determine latitude). These geographical instruments played an important role in giving direction and momentum to world history. Europeans now gained mastery in sea voyages. As necessity is the mother of invention, improvements were made in navigation instruments, and stronger ships with more sails began to be built.

Prince Henry of Portugal (1394–1460 AD), also known as Henry the Navigator, encouraged geographical discoveries. The efforts of Portugal's Bartholomeu Dias, Spain's Christopher Columbus, Portugal's Vasco da Gama, and Magellan brought the whole world into geographical exploration. As a result of these discoveries, people became familiar with the entire world, and countries came into contact with one another. From an economic perspective, these geographical discoveries brought revolutionary changes in European trade and commerce. They gave Europeans dominance in history and made them influential in shaping the destiny of the world.

Even today, not only historians but also history teachers, students, and readers receive great help from geographical maps, diagrams, atlases, and globes in writing, reading, and understanding history. Major world wars and the expansion of different empires can be easily understood through geographical maps. By studying diagrams showing the positioning of armies during wars, we can analyze victories and defeats in detail. In many wars, geographical conditions have played an important role in determining success or failure.¹⁰

accurately measured the Earth's circumference using shadows and geometry. He also developed early world maps and used latitude and longitude to locate places. His scientific methods laid the foundation of modern geography.

Out of the four main elements of History - person, place, event and time - the first three (person, place, and event) are closely related to geography.

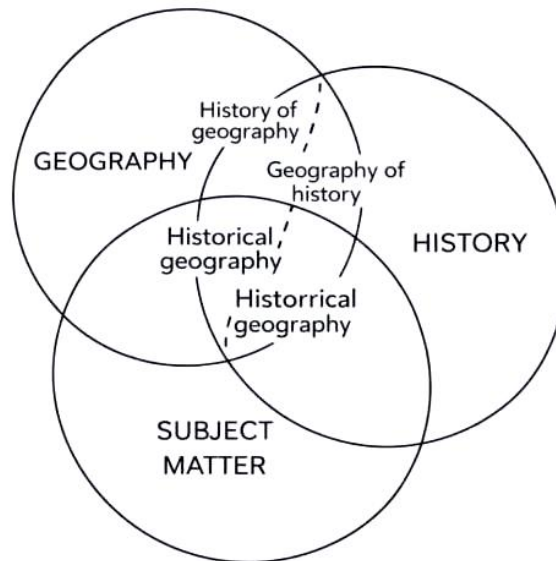
In history, we also study certain special places where important events took place. According to V. D. Ghate, geography provides a stage on which human beings perform their roles. Not only this, many historical events have also been influenced by geographical factors.¹¹

There is a respectful relationship between history and geography, both of which are regarded as real social sciences. For constitutional and diplomatic history, at least preliminary geographical knowledge is necessary. Internal history, too, has to be studied within a geographical perspective.¹²

Marc Bloch in his book- 'The Historian's Craft made an important comment about history'. He wrote: "History is the science of men in time."

History is not simply the study of the past, but the study of human beings across time, and that time is essential for understanding human actions and events.¹³

Relation between History and Geography



It's often said that geography and history are two sides of the same coin - one tells us where, and the other tells us when.

Here is a simplified breakdown of how these subjects connect, based on the above said image.

The Basics

Geography: Focuses on the "Where." It studies the Earth's surface, land, climate, and how people interact with their environment.

History: Focuses on the "When." It records and analyzes past events, people, and how societies have changed over time.

Subject Matter: These are the shared topics both subjects look at, such as culture, trade, and the economy.

Where They Meet

When History and Geography mix, they create four specific ways of looking at the world.¹⁴ Geography has always influenced history. Almost every history book explains this at the beginning. One important geographical factor is the physical shape of a country. For example, Britain, Japan and Greece have uneven coastlines. This helped them.¹⁵

The Renaissance began in Italy because of geographical reasons. **R.V. Nadkarni**, in his book "**Rise of the Marathas**" says that the land of the Maratha region, helped the Marathas rise to power in the early 17th century.¹⁶

The Himalayas and the forests of Assam protected India by limiting foreign invasions mostly to the North-West. K.M. Panikar says that the Himalayas greatly influenced the life of the country.¹⁷

In fact, geography has helped shape all countries. The Gobi and Mongolian deserts and the Himalayas kept China isolated from other regions. Egypt's geography has helped preserve its ancient civilization. The Sahara Desert separated Sub-Saharan Africa from the rest of the world. Until recent times, Australia was so isolated that animals, like the Tasmanian, Kiwi, and Kangaroo were unknown in other parts of the world.¹⁸

The Significance of Geography in History: Rahul Sankrityayan believed that geographic study is essential for writing history. According to him, just as we need accurate historical records and materials to avoid making errors, we also need to study geography. He emphasized the importance of maps, stating that just as a historian makes a list of kings and their reigns, they must also keep a map ready to understand locations, directions, and distances. In fact, he believed a map should be "imprinted on the mind" of the historian.¹⁹

The Need for Maps in Modern History

Using maps and sketches is a major requirement in modern history writing. Today's students and readers prefer history that is illustrated with maps. Many historical events become easier to understand through geography, such as:

The invasion routes of Alexander the Great. The travel paths of Faxian and Xuanzang. The conquests of Samudragupta and Napoleon Bonaparte. The boundaries of empires like those of Ashoka, Akbar, and Aurangzeb. Significant treaties like the **Treaty of Nanking** (1842 AD). The Treaty of Nanking was signed on 29th August 1842 between the United Kingdom and China. Maps bring historical events from "**thin air**" down to "**real ground**". For example, when discussing the five Chinese ports opened for trade in 1842, a map of those ports should be provided right there in the text.

How Geography Changes History: The Case of Humayun

Geographical factors directly or indirectly influence social, economic, and political events. A great example of this is the defeat of the Mughal Emperor Humayun by Sher Shah Suri at the Battles of Chausa (1539 AD) and Bilgram (1540 AD). Sher Shah Suri used geography to his advantage. During the Battle of Chausa, Humayun's army stayed in one place for three months but did not attack. Meanwhile, the clever Sher Shah was simply waiting for the monsoon season.

The Geographical Trap:

Humayun's camp was located on low-lying land between the Karmanasha and Ganges rivers. Humayun failed to realize the danger of this position. As soon as the rains started, the Mughal camp flooded, causing total chaos. This allowed Sher Shah to defeat the Mughals and temporarily establish the Afghan Empire.²⁰ There is no doubt that the geographical discoveries of the 15th and 16th centuries changed the history of the world.

Conclusion:-

In the writing, teaching, and study of history, the use of geographical maps and diagrams provides a concrete basis for historical understanding - History is concerned with human activities, and these activities are strongly influenced by geographical factors such as location, climate, terrain, and natural resources. Therefore, historical events should be interpreted in the context of geographical conditions.

History and Geography are complementary disciplines and share a close and inseparable relationship. Each influences and supports the other in explaining human development and social change. The application of geographical knowledge helps in presenting historical facts more accurately and objectively.

Thus, the use of geography in history writing, teaching and learning makes the subject not only more scientific but also clear, simpler, and easier to understand.

References:

- [1.] E. Sreedharan, (2004), *A Textbook of Historiography: (500 BC to AD 2000)*, Publisher Orient Blackswan Private Limited, Hyderabad, Telangana, p -1.
- [2.] Wallbank and Taylor, (1949), *Civilization Past and Present*, Vol. I, Publisher Scott, Foresman - Chicago, USA, pp-4-7.
- [3.] N. Jayapalan, (1999), *Historiography*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Private Ltd. New Delhi, pp-2-3. See also, E.H. Carr, (1976), *What is History?* Trinity Publisher, New Delhi, p.47.
- [4.] G.J. Renier, (1950), *History: Its Purpose and Method*, Publishers George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, p.209.
- [5.] Radhesharan, (2015), *History and Historiography*, Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, p-2.
- [6.] Ibid., p-3.

- [7.] B. Sheik Ali, (2019), *History: Its Theory and Method*, New Delhi, pp. 79-80.
- [8.] B.K. Shrivastav, (2015), *Historiography: Concepts Methods and Tools*, SBPD Publishing House, Agra, p-108.
- [9.] Ibid., p-109.
- [10.] Ibid., p-109.
- [11.] V.D. Ghate, (1954), *the Teaching of History*, Oxford University Press United Kingdom pp. 139-148.
- [12.] Arthur Marwick , (2003), *The Nature of History*, Delhi, p. 101.
- [13.] Marc Bloch, (2017), *The Historian's Craft*, Publisher Aakar Books, Delhi, pp. 22-23.
- [14.] Alan R.H. Baker, (2003), *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide*, United at the University Press, Cambridge, pp-3-4.
- [15.] N. Jayapalan, (1999), *Historiography*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Private Ltd., New Delhi, p. 13.
- [16.] Ibid.
- [17.] Ibid.
- [18.] Ibid.
- [19.] B.K. Shrivastav, (2015), *Historiography: Concepts Methods and Tools*, SBPD Publishing House, Agra, p-110.
- [20.] Ibid.