

## **CLASS-UG SEM-VI PAPER-C13T(GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT)**

### **TOPIC: Behaviouralism: It's Objectives, Salient Features and Historical Perspective**

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Dissatisfaction with the models and theories developed by the positivists, using the statistical techniques which were based on the 'economic rationality' of man led to the development of behavioural approach in geography.

It was increasingly realized by the geographers that the models propounded and tested with the help of quantitative techniques, provided poor descriptions of geographic reality and man and environment relationship. Consequently, progress towards the development of geographical theory was painfully slow and its predictive powers were weak.

Theories such as Central Place Theory, based on statistical and mathematical techniques, were found inadequate to explain the spatial organization of society. The economic rationality of decision-making was also criticized as it does not explain the behaviour of floodplain dweller, who does not leave his place despite the risk of flood.

It was a psychological turn in human geography which emphasized the role of cognitive (subjective) and decision-making variables as mediating the relationship between environment and spatial behaviour. The axiom of 'economic person' who always tries to maximize his profit was challenged by Wolpert. In an important paper, Wolpert (1964) showed that, for a sample of Swedish farmers, optimal farming practices were not attainable. He concluded that the farmers were not optimizers but, in Simon's term, satisficers.

#### **The objectives of behavioural approach were:**

1. To develop models for humanity which were alternative to the spatial location theories developed through quantitative revolution;
2. To define the cognitive (subjective) environment this determines the decision-making process of man;
3. To unfold the spatial dimensions of psychological and social theories of human decision-making and behaviour;
4. To explain the spatial dimensions of psychological, social and other theories of human decision-making and behaviour;
5. To change in emphasis from aggregate populations to the disaggregate scale of individuals and small groups;
6. To search for methods other than the mathematical and statistical that could uncover the latent structure in data and decision-making;

7. To emphasize on procession rather than structural explanations of human activity and physical environment;
8. To generate primary data about human behaviour and not to rely heavily on the published data; and
9. To adopt an interdisciplinary approach for theory-building and problem-solving.

**The fundamental arguments of the behavioural geography to achieve these objectives are that:**

- (i) People have environmental images;
- (ii) Those images can be identified accurately by researchers; and
- (iii) There is a strong relationship between environmental image and actual behaviour or the decision-making process of man.

The behavioural approach in geography was introduced in the 1960s. Its origin can be traced to the frustration that was widely felt with normative and mechanistic models developed with the help of quantitative techniques.

These normative and mechanistic models are mainly based on such unreal behavioural postulates as 'rational economic man' and isotropic earth surface. In normative models, there are always several assumptions, and generally the centre of attention is a set of omniscient (having infinite knowledge) fully rational actors (men) operating freely in a competitive manner on isotropic plane (homogeneous land surface).

Many normative models are thus grossly unrealistic as they ignore the complexities of real world situations and instead concentrate on idealized behavioural postulate such as rational economic man. People behave rationally, but within constraints—the cultures in which they have been socialized to make decisions.

Behavioural geography banks heavily on 'behaviouralism'. Behaviouralism is an important approach adopted mainly by psychologists and philosophers to analyze the man-environment relationship. The behaviouristic approach is largely inductive, aiming to build general statements out of observations of ongoing processes. The essence of behavioural approach in geography lies in the fact that the way in which people behave is mediated by their understanding of the environment in which they live or by the environment itself with which they are confronted.

In behavioural geography, an explanation for man-environment problem is founded upon the premise that environmental cognition and behaviour are intimately related. In other words, behavioural approach has taken the view that a deeper understanding of man-environment interaction can be achieved by looking at the various psychological processes through which man comes to know environment in which he lives, and by examining the way in which these processes influence the nature of resultant behaviour.

The basic philosophy of behaviouralism may be summed up as under:

The behavioural geographer recognizes that man shapes as well as responds to his environment and that man and environment are dynamically interrelated. Man is viewed as a motivated social being, whose decisions and actions are mediated by his cognition of the spatial environment.

### **Salient Features:**

#### **The salient features of behavioural geography are as under:**

1. The behavioural geographers argued that environmental cognition (perception) upon which people act may well differ markedly from the true nature of the real environment of the real world.

#### **Space (environment) thus can be said to have a dual character:**

(i) As an objective environment—the world of actuality—which may be gauged by some direct means (senses); and

(ii) As a behavioural environment—the world of the mind— which can be studied only by indirect means.

No matter how partial or selective the behavioural environment may be, it is this milieu which is the basis of decision-making and action of man. By behavioural environment it is meant: reality as is perceived by individuals. In other words, people make choices and the choices are made on the basis of knowledge.

Thus, the view of behaviour was rooted in the world as perceived rather than in the world of actuality. The nature of the difference between these two environments and their implications for behaviour was neatly made by Koffka (1935-36) in an allusion to a medieval Swiss tale about a winter travel:

On a winter evening amidst a driving snow-storm a man on a horse-back arrived at an inn, happy to have reached after hours of riding over the winter-swept plain on which the blanket of snow had covered all paths and landmarks. The landlord who came to the door viewed the stranger with surprise and asked from whence he came? The man pointed in a direction away from the inn, whereupon the landlord in a tone of awe and wonder said: “Do you know that you have ridden across the Great Lake of Constance?” At which the rider dropped stone dead at his feet.

This example vividly shows the difference between the ‘objective environment’ of the ice-covered lake Constance and the rider’s subjective or ‘behavioural environment’ of a wind-swept plain. The rider reacted to the situation by travelling across the lake as if it were dryland—we may safely surmise that he would have acted otherwise had he but known!

2. Secondly, behavioural geographers give more weight to an individual rather than to groups, or organizations or society. In other words, the focus of study is the individual, not the group or

community. They assert that research must recognize the fact that the individual shapes and responds to his physical and social environment. In fact, it is necessary to recognize that the actions of each and every person have an impact upon the environment, however, slight or inadvertent that impact may be. Man is a goal-directed animal who influences the environment and in turn is influenced by it. In brief, an individual rather than a group of people or social group is more important in man-nature relationship.

3. Behavioural approach in geography postulated a mutually interacting relationship between man and his environment, whereby man shaped the environment and was subsequently shaped by it (Gold, 1980:4).

4. The fourth important feature of behavioural geography is its multidisciplinary outlook. A behavioural geographer takes the help of ideas, paradigms, and theories produced by psychologists, philosophers, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists and planners. However, the lack of theories of its own is coming in the way of rapid development of behavioural geography.

### **Historical Perspective:**

In geography, behaviouralism has a long history. Consciously or unconsciously, the behavioural approach has been adopted since the time of Immanuel Kant. In the last decades of the 19th century, Reclus, the French geographer, emphasized the point that in man- environment relationship man is not a passive agent. The landscape school in American geography focused on man as a morphological agent. Similarly, advocates of human geography—as a type of human ecology—owed much to the possibilist philosophical position (French School) that stressed the significance of choice in human behaviour.

Sauer, the leading American historical geographer, also recognized fully the important role played by man in shaping his socio-cultural environment by transforming and utilizing his physical surroundings. In 1947, Wright put emphasis on behavioural approach for the interpretation of man-nature interaction. He proposed that a profitable direction for geography would be to study geographical knowledge in all its forms, whether contained in formal geographical inquiries or in the vast range of informal sources, such as travel books, magazines, newspapers, fiction, poetry and painting. The works of Sauer, White and many others demonstrate that people act according to habits and experience not as rational persons.

Wolpert (1964) concluded in his doctoral thesis that farmers face an uncertain environment—both physical and economic—when making land use decisions, which in aggregate produce a land use map. Wolpert decided that the farmers were satisficers and not economic men. They behave on the available information and their image about the environment and the resource. Subsequently, Kirk (1952-1963) supplied one of the first behavioural models. In his model, he asserted that in space and time the same information would have different meanings for people of different socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds living in a similar geographical environment. Each individual of a society reacts differently to a piece of information about the resource, space and environment. This point may be explained by citing an example.

The highly productive Indo-Gangetic plains have different meanings for different individuals belonging to various caste, creed and religion. Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs, Sainis, Jhojas and Gadas living in the same village perceive their environment differently. A Jat farmer may like to sow sugarcane in his field, a Gada and a Jhoja may devote his land to sugarcane, wheat and rice, an Ahir may like to grow fodder crops for the milch animals, and a Saini is invariably interested in intensive cultivation, especially that of vegetables. For a Saini (vegetable grower), even five acres of arable land may be a large holding, while a Jat who uses a tractor considers even 25 acres a small holding. The perceived environment of each of these farmers living in the same environment thus differs from each other both in space and time.

The followers of behavioural geography do not recognize man as a rational person or an 'economic man' who always tries to optimize his profits. Man always does not take into consideration the profit aspect while performing an economic function. Most of his decisions are based on behavioural environment (mental map) rather than on the 'objective or real environment'.

**The fundamental arguments of behavioural geography are that:**

1. People have environmental images;
2. Those images can be identified accurately by researchers; and
3. There is a strong relationship between environmental images and actual behaviour.

The behavioural paradigm has been shown in Figure 12.1. In this paradigm, man has been depicted as a thinking individual whose transactions with the environment are mediated by mental processes and cognitive representation of external environment. In geographical circles, this concept is derived primarily from the work of Boulding (1956) who suggested that over time individuals' developmental impressions of the world (images) are formed through their everyday contacts with the environment and that these images act as the basis of their behaviour.

The conceptual framework provided by Downs has been illustrated in Figure 12.2. This framework proposes that information from environment (real world) is filtered as a result of personality, culture, beliefs, and cognitive variables to form image in the mind of man who utilizes the environment. On the basis of the image formed in the mind of the utilizer about the environment he takes a decision and uses the resources to fulfil his basic and higher needs. Downs' framework also suggests that there exist an 'objective' and a 'behavioural' environment.

**A similar but slightly more complex classification came from Porteous (1977) who recognized the existence of:**

- (i) The phenomenal environment (physical objects);

- (ii) The personal environment (perceived images of phenomenal of real environment); and
- (iii) Contextual environment (culture, religion, beliefs and expectations that influence behaviour).

Sonnenfeld (1972) went even further and proposed four levels at which the environment should be studied.

**The four-fold environment, advocated by Sonnenfeld, has been given as below:**

- (a) The geographical environment (the world);
- (b) The operational environment (those parts of the world that impinge upon a man, whether or not he is aware of them);
- (c) The perceptual (the parts of the world that man is aware of as a result of direct and indirect experience); and
- (d) The behavioural (that part of the perceptual environment that elicits a behavioural response).

The behavioural approach in geography is a fruitful one and it helps in establishing a scientific relationship between man and his physical environment. The broad scope of behavioural geography is remarkable even by the standards of human geography. There are, however, overall, biases in content towards urban topics and towards developed countries. One of the main weaknesses of behavioural geography is that it lacks in synthesis of empirical findings, poor communication, inadvertent duplication, and conflicting terminology.

In behavioural geography, the terminology and concepts remain loosely defined and poorly integrated, primarily owing to the lack of systematically-organized theoretical basis.

Another shortcoming of behavioural geography lies in the fact that most of its data are generated in laboratory experiments on animals and the findings are applied direct to human behaviour. Koestler (1975: 17) pointed to the danger of this strategy, in that behaviouralism “has replaced the anthropomorphic fallacy—ascribing to animals human faculties and sentiments—with the opposite fallacy; denying man faculties not found in lower animals; it has substituted for the erstwhile anthropomorphic view of rat, a ratomorphic view of man”. In short, behaviouralist theories are elegant but unhelpful when it comes to understanding the real world man-environment interaction.

Behavioural geography has too often put too much emphasis on ego-centred interpretations of the environment. Specifically, scholars are critical of two assumptions on which a great deal of behavioural research in geography is based. The first assumption is that there exist identifiable environmental images that can be accurately measured. It is not clear whether an environmental image can be extracted without distortion from the totality of mental imagery. Moreover, not enough effort has gone into checking and validating the methods by which images are elicited.

The second critical assumption is that there exists a strong relationship between revealed images or references and actual or real world behaviour. The main objection to this assumption is that it is an unfounded assumption because extremely little research has been undertaken to examine the congruence between image and behaviour.

A more serious criticism of behavioural approach in geography is that it frequently views man as homo-psychologicus and tends to treat environmental behaviour as a non-dimensional phenomenon to the extent that the economic, social and political considerations that act concomitantly with environmental influences are frequently overlooked.

Another significant deficiency in behavioural geography has been the gap between theory and practice. This has been most noticeable over the question of public policy. In fact, behavioural geographers remain observers rather than participants. There is a serious lack of knowledge of planning theories and methods amongst behavioural geographers, which is an impediment to more active involvement.

It is a barrier that can be removed only by developing the requisite understanding of the planning processes; it cannot be camouflaged by noble sentiments and moral tone. For instance, it will be only rarely that a small survey carried out upon a sample of students will supply the basis for far-reaching policy recommendations, yet the final paragraphs of many such works contain this seemingly obligatory element.

In other words, generalization on the basis of small sample studies should not be made the basis of wider and important policy decision-making. It is, therefore, necessary to conduct research on problems that specifically deal with policy questions, that are well-versed in planning theory and methodology, and communicate the results intelligently to the interested parties.

There are signs that such an approach is developing, but the gap is still wide. The future of behavioural geography would be bright only if it could improve its standing in the subject while maintaining its multidisciplinary links.

Despite several constraints and methodological limitations, behavioural geography is now widely accepted within the positivist orientation. It seeks to account for spatial patterns by establishing generalizations about people-environment interrelationship, which may then be used to stimulate change through environmental planning activities that modify the stimuli which affect the spatial behaviour of ourselves and others.

The research methods of behavioural geography vary substantially but the general orientation—inductive generalization leading to planning for environmental change—remains. Eventually, it is hoped, a ‘powerful new theory’ will emerge. Golledge argued that substantial advances in understanding spatial behaviour have already been made by studying ‘individual preferences, opinions, attitudes, cognitions, cognitive maps, perception, and so on—what he terms processes variables.