**Population Geography:**

**Meaning and Nature of Population Geography**

Population geography as an independent sub-field of human geography is a comparatively recent phenomenon. In the expression ‘population geography’, the term ‘population’ signifies the subject matter and ‘geography’ refers to the perspective of investigation. Thus, population geography can be interpreted as the study of population in spatial perspective. Etymologically, population geography implies the investigation into human covering of the earth and its various facets with reference to physical and cultural environment.

**Defination:**

The subject matter of population geography has been a matter of debate ever since Trewartha formally raised the issue in 1953. So is the case with the definition of the sub-discipline.

According to **Trewartha,** population geography is concerned with the understanding of the regional differences in the earth’s covering of people. “Just as area differentiation is the theme of geography in general, so is of population geography, in particular” (Trewartha,). Population geography is the area analysis of population which implies “a wider range of population attributes than most geographers have ordinarily included” in their analysis. Trewartha proposed a very comprehensive outline of the content of the sub-discipline, which many subse­quent geographers seem to have adhered to. Broadly speaking, the concerns of population geography, according to Trewartha, can be grouped into three categories:

(1) A historical (pre-historic and post-historic) account of population;

(2) Dynamics of number, size, distribution and growth patterns; and

(3) Qualities of population and their regional distribution.

Regarding historical account of population, Trewartha suggested that where direct statistical evidence is not available, geographers should adopt indirect methods, and collaborate with anthropologists, demographers and economic historians. In Trewartha’s opinion, an analysis of world population patterns, population dynamics in terms of mortality and fertility, area aspect of over and under population, distribution of population by world regions and settlement types and migration of population (both international and inter-regional) form an important part of analysis in population geography. And finally, with regard to qualities of population, he suggested two broad groups – physical qualities (e.g., race, sex, age, health etc.), and socio-economic qualities (e.g., religion, education, occupation, marital status, stages of economic development, customs, habits etc.).

In his book A Geography of Population: World Patterns, published in 1969, Trewartha arranged these topics in two parts. While the first included a geographical account of population in the past, the second incorporated all the characteristics of population including biological, social, cultural and economic characteristics.

**John I. Clarke**, who is credited with bringing out the first textbook on the sub-discipline in 1965 (at least after Trewartha had made the case of population geography in 1953), suggested that population geography is mainly concerned with demonstrating how spatial variation in population and its various attributes like composition, migration and growth are related to the spatial variation in the nature of places .

He opines that the main endeavor of population geography is to unravel the complex relationship between the population phenomena, on the one hand, and cultural environment, on the other. His book on Population Geography (1972) and his treatment of the subject matter is in conformity with that of Trewartha, though not as comprehensive as that of the latter.

**W. Zelinsky**, a contemporary of Clarke, takes a similar view regarding the definition of population geography. He defines the sub-discipline as a science that deals with the ways in which geographic character of places is formed by and, in turn, reacts upon a set of population phenomena that vary within it through both space and time as they follow their own behavioural laws, interacting one with another, and with numerous non- demographic phenomena.

On the delineation of the field of population geography, Zelinsky suggested that “the list of human characteristics of practical interest in the population geography may be equated with those appearing in the census schedules and vital registration system of the more statistically advanced nations” .

**Daniel Noin** in 1979, in his book Geographie de la population, while agreeing with the scheme of Trewartha, expressed that distri­bution of population, components of its growth and characteristics are the main concerns of population geography. More recently, while discussing the methodological problems in population geography, **R.J. Proyer** suggested that population geography deals with the analysis and explanation of interrelationship between population phenomena and the geographical character of places as they both vary over space and time .

According to him, population phenomena include “the dynamics of population distribution, urban/rural location, density and growth (or decline); mortality, fertility and migration; and structural characteristics including age-sex composition, ethnicity, marital status, economic compo­sition, nationality and religion”.

Obviously, delineating the precise field of the sub-discipline has been a major problem before the scholars ever since it’s beginning. It has been argued that population geographers have spread themselves too thinly over too large a field that they have not been able to establish a niche for themselves in population studies . Scholars have, therefore, suggested that population geography should narrow its focus and concentrate on the components of population change. Woods has made a distinction between broad definition and narrow definition.

The former is described as an elaboration of Trewartha’s wide ranging agenda in which certain primacy is given to spatial variation in population, while the latter refers to approach which prefers analysis of population dynamics, namely, fertility, mortality and migration only. Noin’s survey in 1984 of the contents of population geography textbooks that appeared during the preceding two decades revealed that broad definition has been most widely used .

**Woods (1979) and Jones** (1981) proposing the narrow definition have confined the main concern of population geography to the analysis of fertility, mortality and migration at various scales. They claim that the narrow definitions reflect a new process orientation, contrary to the traditional pattern orientation of broad definitions, and are more in line with current trends in geography as a whole .

**Woods and Rees** (1986) propose the term ‘spatial demog­raphy’ in place of ‘population geography’, which differs from the latter “mainly in terms of the equal emphasis on mortality, fertility and migration as components of population change and distri­bution… its use of the statistical demographic methods and its multi disciplinary approach” .

From the above, it is, however, clear that the main difference of opinion is on the main thrust in the sub-discipline and not on approach and methodology per se. Woods himself says that the role of population geography is to provide the spatial perspective in population studies, and that population geography should be what geographers active in teaching and research do. As Woods himself admitted, the two – broad and narrow definitions – are not mutually exclusive, rather they represent differences of emphasis. They are complementary to each other, and taken together, provide the full diversity of works undertaken by researchers in the field of population geography.

Rightly remarked by Clarke that one cannot possibly do justice to all the aspects of population that appear in the census schedules or vital registration system and that some will receive more treatment than others, partly because they are more central to the theme of population geography and partly because they have attracted closer attention from geographers .