

Population Distribution

Subject: Geography

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POINT: 3. Population Growth and Distribution

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

Population distribution means the pattern of where people live. World population distribution is uneven. Places which are **sparsely** populated contain few people. Places which

are **densely** populated contain many people. Sparsely populated places tend to be difficult places to live. These are usually places with hostile environments e.g. Antarctica. Places which are densely populated are habitable environments e.g. Europe. We can also define world population distribution on hemispheric level as about 90% of world population lives in northern hemisphere while less than 10% of population lives in southern hemisphere.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR UNEVEN DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION

Factors responsible for the uneven distribution of population may broadly be grouped into two major categories:

1. Physical factors
2. Biological Factors
3. Socio-economic Factors
4. Demographic Factors

PHYSICAL FACTORS

Landform

Population and influence of relief: steep slopes, exposure and ruggedness play their part in restricting the human access, habitation and cultivation. Slope and aspect have considerable influence upon the location of population along these valleys where insolation is so important. Plains are normally more advantageous to human occupancy than mountains, yet many of the world largest plains are for one reason or another only sparsely populated such as the plains of Sahara. The fact is that, the influence of landforms on distribution of the population depends upon the whole pattern of relief as well as upon other environmental and human factors.

Population and influence of Rivers:

Rivers may attract the population through their usefulness as sources of water, fish, fowl, alluvial gold and diamonds and as media of transport. They also attract by being obstacles to land transport; fords, ferries and bridges have often instigated urban growth. Settlements are often found at the spring-line, at the head of navigation, at a confluence, within a loop or bend of river, where a river forms a gap in the hills, where it leaves the hills for the plains or

where it enters a lake. But rivers are not always attractive to settlements. They may be too infested with mosquitoes or game, too liable to flooding or too deeply incised, too dangerously braided or too torrential, too narrow or too wide etc. In deserts, rivers are attractive such as no ribbon of population rivals the Nile Valley in Egypt.

Climate

It is one of the most essential elements of the physical factors which influence the spatial distribution of population through temperature conditions and the amount of precipitation. Areas with a comfortable climate, where there is not much seasonal variation exists, have been found heavily populated. Whereas, extreme climates such as very hot or cold, deserts and heavy rainfall are uncomfortable for human existence and have low population. High temperatures alone don't prevent human habitation, but in combination with low and irregular rainfall they drastically diminish habitability. Covering nearly one-fifth of the earth surface, the deserts contain only one-twenty-fifth of the total population. Cold climates are much less suitable for human habitation. The northern high latitudes have one-tenth of the total land area, but only a few thousandths of the total population. Cold climates also cause the cessation of vegetal growth, the absence of fresh vegetables and the prevalence of scurvy.

About 16.6 million square kilometer of the earth's surface is too cold for the crop growth. However, in mining, industrial and scientific centers, in both hot and cold climates, modern techniques permit solutions to such climate extremes.

Soils

Fertile loamy soils are important for agricultural and related activities. Therefore, areas which have fertile loamy soils are heavily populated as they can support intensive agriculture. The fertile alluvial soils of the deltas of South-East Asia and the Nile can support dense agriculture populations. Soil erosion is equally important as soil fertility in the location of population. Jack and Whyte stress that soil erosion may result either from sparse population giving insufficient care to the land or from great population pressure on the land. They advocate "the maximum population which the soil can support" as the best insurance against soil erosion.

Continental Influence and insularity

The main concentrations of population are marginal to the continents, and sparse populations tend to be more common in the interiors. Three quarters of world's population live within the 1000 km of the sea, and two-thirds within 500 km. Population is usually attracted by the coasts and to some extent repelled by continentally. Climatic and commercial factors are the main influences here involved. The disposition, size and shape of the continents also have a primary influence on population distributions, especially in case of high latitudes. The respective influences of continentally and insularity don't operate in isolation; they are associated with many other factors.

Vertical distribution of population: Geographers observe a clear decline in population numbers with an increasing altitude. About 56.2% of world's population lives between sea level and 200 meters above, this includes only 27.8% of the total land area. High altitudes alone impose an ultimate physiological limit upon human habitation, because the drastic reduction in atmospheric pressure and oxygen pressure is dangerous to man. High altitudes require some adaptation, but this enables permanent habitation at altitudes up to 5200 meters in the Andes. Between this height and 6700 meters are critical limits to permanent occupation.

BIOTIC FACTORS

Biota

Population distributions respond to varying distribution of plants and animals, large and small. Selvas, campos, savanna and tundra offer vastly different media for human occupation and concentration. The plant and animal realms are inseparable in their influence upon population; it is the combination of biotic factors which has exerted such pressures. As civilized man constantly finds new techniques of destroying microbes, produce medicines, house designs and other methods of defending himself against parasites; he is better equipped and has more chance of survival than Pygmies or Amazonian Indians.

Disease and Hunger

Human populations have been greatly influenced by diseases. A number of diseases influenced population concentration such as: trachoma, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, Kwashiorkor, rickets, English disease, goiter etc. Perhaps, two

third of mankind suffers from absolute or partial hunger, impairing physique but not reproductive capacity.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Mineral and energy resources

Mineral and energy resources exercise a powerful influence upon population distribution wherever there is the requisite technical ability and social organization to exploit the resources. Coal (energy mineral) has exerted a much greater stimulus to industrial location than petroleum, natural gas, atomic power or water power. Iron (non-energy mineral) also have been greatly influenced the population concentration in the world.

Economic activities

The type and the scale of economic activities exercise considerable influence upon population distribution. Among agricultural societies, population distribution often responds closely to the nature of staple foods and their relationship to the physical conditions. Agriculture systems and techniques are also instrumental but wheat farming, rubber planting, bush fallowing, sheep rearing and rice growing are associated with vastly different population distribution. Changes in the distribution of population are frequently associated with technological advances. The industrial revolution made resources of energy, the great foci of cumulative industrial growth and population concentration.

Transportation and communication

Transportation and communication provides better chances of economic growth and therefore the places having good transportation and communication facilities usually have high population. Communication activities are closely linked with population concentration and urbanization, and are nowhere more demonstrably significant than in the redistribution of population in the developing territories.

Historical and social influences

The past population distribution influence present and future population concentration. In other words, there is a tendency for population distribution inertia. It is a well-known fact that humans never migrate easily to a new place. Once a person settles well at a certain place, he will never leave that area to settle in a new area. People like to settle at places where their

ancestors have lived in the past. Sons and grandsons from generation to generation live at a place which they do not leave so easily. During natural disasters like earthquakes, famines, etc. people also like to live at their native places. In this way, due to historical reasons we have Marwaris in Marwar, Marathas in Maharashtra and Bengalis in Bengal. People sharing a cultural heritage are united and feel proud of living in their own place of origin.

Political Factors

For changes in the world's population distribution, political factors are also responsible. In modern times, these factors have become more important. If the people feel that their expectations are not fulfilled by the government, or if the public is dissatisfied with the political system, then they leave that country and settle in another. In the past, such people have migrated to USA from Cuba and Pakistan etc.

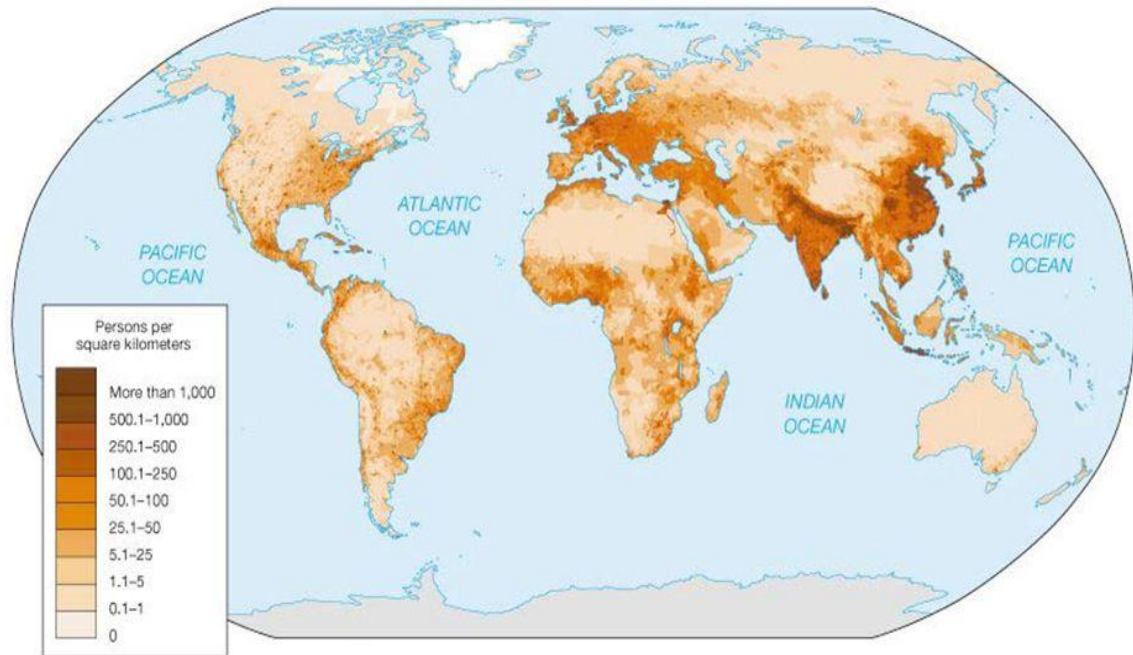
Educational Factors

In each part of the country, there remains a class which has more curiosity to gain knowledge. This class moves from one country to another according to its own economic conditions and circumstances. If the environment of the new country is adaptable to them, they tend to settle there permanently. At present, lakhs of youths from Asia and Africa have migrated to America, Canada and European countries for higher studies and after getting employment, they have settled there permanently.

Migration of Population

Every time migration of population takes place, it has an important effect on the distribution of population. The places with more opportunities of employment or possibilities of high income generation attract people from different areas. In the past, people migrated in large numbers to America, and the present day migration to Middle Eastern countries are good examples of migration due to better employment and income generation opportunities.

Population Density & Distribution



CONCLUSION

It should be apparent that the factors influencing the uneven distribution of population are so much varied. Their interpretation involves careful analysis of topographic maps, detailed climate, economic and social data and a deep knowledge of the past and an acute awareness of the complexity of the forces affecting man's presence on earth.