

Geography as a Decisive Factor of National and International Phenomena

Prof Y. Yagama Reddy¹

Abstract

The diversified forms on the earth surface are essentially the *raison d'être* of geography. In view of it being the most everlasting and ultimately inevitable factor, different facets of geography become a boon or bane to the interests of the state. Geographical causation in history, consequences of geography upon nation-state, role of geography in international studies, and relevance of geography to both geopolitics and globalization are, among others, the manifestations of geographical determinism. This study justifiably presents the candid illustrations bearing testimony to the impact of geography on ancient civilizations, human settlement evolution, Indian Ocean's maritime character predisposed to monsoon rhythm, maritime history and European colonization, dynamics of population, location as strategic significance, and the US strength hinging on location. In addition to the limitations of geography on Russia and Canada, this article deals with the restrictions of geography posed by size, shape, landlocked-ness and mountainous terrain.

Keywords: Geography, Geopolitics, Ancient Civilizations, Indian Ocean, Maritime Geography, Nation State

Introduction

If the earth's surface had been uniform, there would not have been diversified forms on the earth surface and any such discipline as geography. Geography, as a study of processes and patterns, has its focus on the study of spatial and temporal variations of the phenomena.¹ Justifiably, the well-pronounced variations in the realms of physical and human geography are the principal task of geography. Despite the anthropogenic changes on the surface of earth, geography is the most permanent and ultimately inescapable factor to understand the spatial dimensions of the world. Undeniably, the geographic demands of the states continue to remain the same. A thorough knowledge of a broad range of geographic factors, as elucidated by

¹ Prof Y. Yagama Reddy retired as Professor Emeritus (former), Centre for Southeast Asian & Pacific Studies, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati – 517 502, Andhra Pradesh, India

Harjeet Singh, “is necessary in order to effectively wield the elements of national power in pursuit of national interests.”² As much as the tangible elements grounded in geography, national power is also based on the evaluation of certain intangible elements of national power.³ Be that as it may, the elements/factors of national power of a belligerent state is a disdainful aspect which necessitates restraint through certain devices, popularly known as limitations of national power.⁴ As regards the territorial sovereignty, geography has occupied the centre-stage at all levels of the boundary formation-- definition, delineation, demarcation and defence. The renowned geographer Jared Diamond aptly posited geography as being “vital to understanding why some societies grow on the world stage and dominate others, and some societies do not.”⁵ To Robert D. Kaplan (Chief Geopolitical Analyst for the US-based Strategic Forecasting Inc. (stratfor), “people and ideas influence events, but geography largely determines them, now more than ever.”⁶

It is with this premise that this study is organized into three sections -- the first part describes the spatial and temporal variations of the phenomena as being the *raison d’etre* of geography; and the second and third units depict some illustrious cases bearing testimony to the salience of geographical determinism in the distribution pattern of phenomenon over space and time. The legitimacy of these examples is based on my thorough understanding of different facets of regional geography on account of my three-decades-long association with teaching and research at the multidisciplinary Area Studies Centre for Southeast Asian and Pacific Studies as well as my interaction with the renowned scholars at various fora that enriched my comprehension of this topic.

The Rationale of Multitudinous Roles of Geography

The ensuing discussion (in section-1) provides the benefit of understanding the geographical influence on history, political and economic development, defence and foreign policy of a nation-state as well as the prominence of geography in the international relations.

Geographical Determinism on the Historical Momentum

The viewpoints that “history is geography in motion,” or “geography stands at the foundation of history” portray complementary and interdependent relationship of geography and history as well as testify to the geographical causation in history. Of much relevance is the

cogent remarks of Colin Gray (a foreign policy adviser to the Reagan administration) that a country political behaviour reflects the history of country, which is largely the result of its geographical location.⁷ The geographical knowledge of an ‘area’ or a ‘region’ is *sine qua non* to understand its influence on the course of history in terms of the relationship between space and time, area and era, and places and events.⁸ Such a discernible relationship of geography and history is of much help for gaining a deeper insight into foreign and national security policies of the countries concerned.⁹ Except for the likelihood of a variation in the size and shape of a state and the consequential changes in location, population, resources and production-capacity of a state, the physical features (like topography especially mountains, climate and oceanic location) would never undergo changes. Of much relevance to the present discussion are the landlocked seas (like Aral Sea, Caspian Sea and the Dead Sea) that cannot be shifted; and so is the land-sea ratio at the global level that has remained static ever since the rise of sea level to the present position consequent upon the deglaciation or Holocene glacial retreat (15000 to 20000 years ago). In fact, history is replete with the instances of struggle among the states for territory in pursuit of living space (*lebensraum*) and economic resource;¹⁰ about the same time, “geography, like history, is an age-old and essential strategy for thinking about large and complex matters.”¹¹ Of particular importance is the elucidation of the salience of South Asia’s historical geography by Robert D. Kaplan in his renowned publication, *South Asia’s Geography of Conflict*,¹² which ascribed the most profound struggles of humanity in the form of inter-state conflict to geographical determinism.

Geographical Discoveries begun to lead the World History: It is because of the pervasiveness of the Oceanic realm¹³ that the study of maritime geography, maritime history and maritime trade have acquired immense significance at various levels.¹⁴ The trading endeavours of Phoenicians around 1200 BCE facilitated the future maritime explorations by Greeks and Romans. Of much particular relevance are the commercial and cultural contacts that were sustained across the Indian Ocean from the beginning of Christian era. Ever since the renaissance, the course of world history had been mandated by geographical discoveries. Importantly, following the circumnavigation of the world in 1522 by Ferdinand Magellan, the shape of earth had begun to be considered as spherical by discarding the hoary belief of being flat; and European powers had begun to reach different parts of the world. Of much pertinence is that the Indian Ocean in conjunction with India had undergone various phases of transformation -- from a glorious chapter of cultural and trade relations on equal-footing, through European incursions into and exploitations of the indigenous societies, a theatre of

power contest by super-powers during the Cold War period. For all his own appreciation of prominence of India's geography, the first Indian PM Jawaharlal Nehru verily preferred 'a non-aligned' Indian Ocean Region, with no semblance to its glorious past of universal exposition.

Implications of Geography for Nation-state

Geography is a factor in defining the very meaning of nation-state; justifiably Napoleon Bonaparte explicated that "the policy of a state lies in its geography." Alongside shaping the borders, resource distribution and economic development of a country, geography affects politics in terms of influencing the strategic alliances and foreign policies of the country concerned. If the world, among various ways, is partitioned, "the political divisions are the *raison d'être* of international relations."¹⁵ The geography of a state cannot be ignored by men who formulate its policy; and it bears testimony to the primacy of geographical determinism that articulates a state's potential foreign policy. That the geographic characteristics are relatively unchanging and unchangeable gives credence to Spykman's inference that geography is more permanent among the factors that influence the foreign policy of the states. Nicholas J. Spykman, the Sterling Professor of International Relations at Yale University and the proponent of "Rimland" theory,¹⁶ logically sustained in his writings¹⁷ that the geographic location of a state as being important. Alongside expounding that "a state's foreign policy must reckon with geographic facts," Spykman had further resolved that the "states cannot escape their geography," and driven home the point that "the basis of world planning for peace must be world geography."

Salience of Geography in International Studies

Much as the state's growth and foreign policy are predisposed to a host of geographical variables, the pre-eminence of geography of the country forms the most important attribute of international politics and relations. It is then logical to admit that "geography has always affected and will always affect international economic, environmental, diplomatic, political, and security relationships."¹⁸ Geographical analysis offers "more towards the understanding of international politics than just an appreciation of the facts of location."¹⁹ In furtherance of this point of view, Robert D. Kaplan asserted that "realism in international politics...demands a better understanding of geography."²⁰ In his article "The Revenge of Geography," Kaplan further resolutely concluded that "geography, not the clash of civilizations, (is) the basic reason for the world conflicts."²¹ Of much significance was the Kaplan's outlook of geography as one of the basic factors that determine the events on the international scene.

Geographical Primacy of Geopolitics and Globalization

While coining the term geopolitics in 1898, the Swedish geographer, Rudolf Kjellman, defined geopolitics as “the science of state in the realm of space.” In the context of evaluating the geographical foundations of state power, British geographer and one of the founding fathers of both geopolitics and geostrategy, Halford J. Mackinder set the stage for geopolitical discourse. His initial concept of the ‘Geographical Pivot of History (1904) remained the same in the twice-revised theories. The concept of ‘pivot area’ was rechristened as ‘Heartland’ theory (1919) and further revised as theory of Atlantic community (1943) by Mackinder, a multifaceted personality, whose prophetic visions hardly ever drew the attention of the Allied Powers vis-a-vis Nazi Germany.²² The contest of two superpowers for expanding their own spheres of influence simply testified to the influence of political power over geographical space and vice-versa. That the “geopolitical analysis is impossible without geographical understanding” was the Spykman’s candid vision; Colonel James Edmund Toth (1936-2023), who served in the US military for 50 years, looked upon geopolitics as the study of the influence of geography, economics, and demography on the politics and especially the foreign policy of state.²³ The archetypical concept of Sau B. Cohen that “geopolitics is the study of the geography of international relations” highlights geography as a key element in strategic thinking and devising a strategic policy of a state.²⁴

Just as the prevalence of geopolitical power game all through the 20th century, the post-Cold War globalization has also been counting on geographical factors, including territory, population, strategic location especially proximity to major trade-routes, vicinal (adjacent) location to global powers, natural as well as human resources, and technology in pursuit of gaining world domination. That the globalization reinforced the implications of geography was well exemplified by Robert D. Kaplan who underlined that geography serves as a common base for (geopolitical) conflicts and possible cooperation between states (globalization).²⁵ Undeniably, developing a geographical outlook is *sine qua non* for deciphering international political power that portrays the nuances of geopolitical conflict or international economic order with open access to resources and economic markets.

Pervasive Geographical Determinism: Some Illustrious Examples

The candid illustrations described henceforth (in sections 2, 3 and 4) amply testify to the impact of geography on the spatial phenomenon, viz, area, people, state, events and ideas.

Ancient Civilizations pivoting on Geography

Many a regime in the history had enjoyed their political strength based on agricultural prosperity which for over millennia was related to geographical location and climate. Besides the copious fertile lands and climate's consistency, favourable physiography including the rivers had laid the foundation for the world's earliest civilizations, viz., Egyptian (Nile valley), Mesopotamian (Tigris-Euphrates River valleys), Indian (Indus River valley) and Chinese cultures (Yangtze and Yellow River valleys). In his study, *Ahimsa: 100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization*, Devdutt Pattanaik attributed the vast diversity in the culture of the Harappan region to geography, as deciphered from various facets of society including trading bereft of nonviolence as well as distribution of domesticated animals and agricultural crops from north to south.²⁶ These early civilizations were conducive to population growth and advancements in various fields such as writing, government, and architecture.

Geography in pursuit of Human Settlement

Southeast Asia. Unlike the east-west trend Himalayas, its syntaxial bending in the east has brought about the north-south trending parallel mountain chains spreading over large part of the peninsular Southeast Asia. These narrow-constricted-elongated valleys of these mountains had facilitated historical southward migration of people from the Yunnan plateau of southern China for over a millennium from the beginning of Christian era. It was the geographical proximity to Southern China that made Southeast Asia to receive a variety of ethno-linguistic groups as, for example, Mons, Burmese, Khmers, Laotian, Vietnamese and Thais. These migrants in successive waves settled in various parts of Southeast Asia pushing the primitive dwellers deep into the mountainous terrain, which obviously turned out to be a bane for the minuscule native inhabitants or the uplanders so much as to lead a nomadic way of life. On the contrary, Southeast Asian geography in the form of floodplains, deltas and coastal plains had become a boon for the lowlanders. Besides being the areas with dense population, lowlands had emerged as the centres of political and economic power for over centuries. Undeniably, Southeast Asia's physical setting has its profound impact on the demographic pattern, characterized by large proportion (as much as 75 %) of population in the lowlands of very limited extent (25% of land area) vis-à-vis low (25 %) of population in the expansive uplands (75 % of land area). It is not merely the insignificant contribution of the uplands to the national economy, but it also becomes herculean task for the modern nation-states to integrate the sparsely populated uplands into the mainstream of the nations concerned.

Early Settlers of America: The Native American tribes, who lived across a broad range of geographical features, adapted to their environment in unique ways, crafting tools, dwellings, and ways of life suited to their specific surroundings. The tribes in the Great Plains area, for example, had a nomadic lifestyle (diet, clothing, shelter, to social structure) revolved around the buffalo herds. On the contrary, the Pueblo tribes of the Southwest built permanent settlements and excelled in farming, drawing life from the few rivers.²⁷

China's limited Fertile Soil supports large Population: Geography bestows China with only 1/3rd of the productive land to support huge population. The remaining 2/3rd land area is harsher in the form of deserts and mountains which nonetheless offer great protection. Of particular significance is the mountain territory of Tibetan plateau that has given rise to two great river systems of Yellow and Yangtze Rivers which ensure the agricultural abundance to support China's huge population. Concomitantly, the Yellow River carries the stigma of "China's Sorrow," on account of devastating floods that took heavy toll of life to a tune of 9.0 million between 1887 and 1943.²⁸

Prominence of Maritime Geography: Indian Ocean a case in Point

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is appreciated as '*more of a geographical entity than a composite political one or an economic unit,*' by Peter Lehr, the author of *The Challenges of Security in the Indian Ocean in the 21st Century*.²⁹ The prophetic prudence-- '*Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia; the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters*' -- was the dictum of no less than a renowned maritime strategist, Alfred Thayer Mahan, who also served as the American Naval Officer in late 19th century.³⁰ Justifiably, the Indian Ocean geography is predisposed to evolve as good as an entity is to every other aspect.

Unique Monsoon Rhythm: As well as being semi-enclosed, the Indian Ocean is in the form of an isosceles triangle. With preponderantly large portion of its area lying south of the equator, IOR has unequal distribution of land and water on either side of the equator. The monsoon rhythm with reversal of monsoon winds in the IOR and its adjoining western Pacific region is a peculiar phenomenon largely attributed to the geographical character of IOR and the differential pressure gradients as a consequence of high elevation of the Tibetan plateau together with the Himalayas. Further, because of the deflection of winds perpendicularly at the equator, there exist two monsoon directions almost during the same period; and there are altogether four monsoon winds prevalent in a year.³¹ The pronounced spatio-temporal variations in the distribution of rainfall owe in large part to the rain-shadow effects caused by

the north-south alignment of mountain ranges and plateau region abutting the coasts.³² The logical corollary to this marked imbalance in the rainfall is the differential levels of economic performance, especially in the form of either surplus or deficit of agricultural produce forcing the Indian Ocean littorals to sustain the process of economic cooperation and trade partnership.

Maritime History-A Glorious Chapter: The commercial and cultural contacts across IOR testify to the trading system linked by an ancient sea route from the mouth of the Red River (near modern Hanoi) through the Malacca Strait to Sri Lanka and India, and as far west as the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. As discussed in the preceding section, the maritime geography typified by the unique pattern of monsoon winds/directions-- south west monsoons (June to September) and north east monsoons/retreat monsoons (October-November) -- facilitated the the sea voyages across the Indian Ocean for over two millennia from the beginning of Christian era; undeniably India's contacts with its eastern neighbours of Southeast Asia formed a glorious chapter in the maritime history of IOR. Monsoon rhythm had also been of tremendous historical significance of human geography-- settlement pattern, population distribution, cultural evolution and economic growth besides trading relationship with the neighbouring lands. Explicitly, the process of Indian cultural expansion into Southeast Asia was accomplished across the Bay of Bengal which posed no major climatic obstacles to the early mariners.

Indian Ocean Region, a Thoroughfare for all Powers: It is the greater strategic significance of the IOR is to be analyzed in conjunction with its eastern littoral zone (Southeast Asia) as well. Furthermore, Southeast Asia's location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans confers on it a critical strategic significance entailing the region to get exposed to external influences. As a sequel to the discovery of sea routes to the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, the exploitation of geography manifested in the establishment of colonial empires around the world by the European powers from the beginning of 16th century. Though the other European powers sailed through the Indian Ocean to reach their colonial domains in this region, Indian Ocean turned to become the 'British Lake,' on account of its unquestionable supremacy of naval power. The maritime character of IOR together with Southeast Asia is characterized by higher proportion of coastline (to the total land area)³³ resulting from the territorial fragmentation in the form of peninsulas and several thousands of islands. Justifiably, the predominance of peninsularity and the insularity have made the oceanic shipping possible for the Europeans through the IOR. In consequence, the shipping routes circumvented any possibility of getting collided or territorial transgression in the process of reaching their respective colonial domains, viz., the British India (as well as its other domains of Burma and Malaya in the Indian Ocean

littoral zone), the French Indochina (composed of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). Interestingly, the Spanish power sailed through the Pacific Ocean to reach its Philippines colony. Of much significance is the trans-oceanic location that made Southeast Asia a theatre of war (World War II) and a zone of super-powers' contest for gaining control over this shattered strategic belt (Cold War).

Locations that acquired Strategic Significance

The maritime character in the form of higher proportion of coastline (to the total land area) resulting from the territorial fragmentation acquires much strategic significance. Countries with broken coasts -- such as Britain, Japan, and Greece -- had a significant influence on their history, especially in strengthening their naval forces and expanding their empire. The Silk Road, an ancient network of trade routes connecting Asia and Europe, fostered cultural diffusion and contributed to the development of diverse civilizations. India's geographic position, rather its 'centrality' in Asia, had impressed the former British Viceroy, George N. Curzon, so much as to observe that India could exert influence in many directions -- on Persia, Afghanistan and China as well as the sea routes to Australasia and the China Seas.³⁴

Among various other strategic locations, the waterways / sea routes /choke points-- passing through the straits, narrow seas and canals-- have for long played significant role in maritime trade and naval warfare all through the history. Of paramount strategic significance are the Suez Canal (the Mediterranean and Red Seas), the Panama Canal (Pacific and Atlantic Oceans) and the Malacca straits (connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans). Purchase of shares in the Suez Canal in 1875 by the British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, cozily termed as 'Disraeli coup,' turned to be of immense strategic consequence by way of phenomenal decrease in the distance between Great Britain and British India, as opposed to traditional route circumambulating the entire African continent. Similarly, the US acquisition of the French assets in the Panama Canal for US \$40 million in 1902 proved to be of strategic significance for the movement of trade and naval fleet of the US between Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Inter-oceanic location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans has made Southeast Asia an arena of domineering strategic implication on account of SLOCs through which half of the world's merchandise passing.

US Strength owes to its Geographical Location

Thanks to its avowed manifest destiny, the territorial expansion of US from the east coast to west coast through either conquest or diplomacy has made the US to emerge like an

“island-nation.” As a logical corollary, the US has gained access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the distinction of which confers immense geostrategic advantage on the US. The Louisiana purchase of 828,000 sq. km in 1803 from France doubled the size of the US and has strengthened the country materially and strategically; similarly, the US-acquisition of Alaska in 1867 from Russia has also bolstered geostrategic advantage as much as its overseas territories. The former US president Abraham Lincoln, who was said to have been sensitive to geography, was quoted to have appreciated the entire region (from the Appalachians to the Rockies drained by the mighty Mississippi River) as the economic stronghold of the US.³⁵ Abraham Lincoln had also reportedly commented that all the combined armies of the world with all the treasure of the earth in their chest could not by force attack the US.³⁶ Thanks to the extraordinary security that geography provides, the United States has faced no existential threats from invasion or occupation and accomplished economic growth to the extent of emerging a major power in the world.

Furthermore, the US accrues the benefits not merely of its physical geography, but also of the human geography (cross-cultural population and workforce) and economic geography (abundant resources and a wide range of economic activities). The absolute strength of US is attributed to a host of these geographical opportunities, as enlisted by the most important American strategist of the 19th century, Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914).³⁷ Of much relevance was the striking assertion of Colin Gray a foreign policy adviser to the Reagan administration that “the history of this country (USA) is largely the result of its geographical location.”³⁸

Perpetual Geographical Constraint

Russia and Canada stricken by Geography: The 3-ocean access in the case of Soviet Union / Russia has been of no significance on account of the limitation imposed by the frozen Arctic Ocean abutting its northern frontier, besides the overwhelmingly expansive Siberia. This geographical constraint has all through period of history made the Russian territory to endure a sort of “land-locked” situation that has impinged on access to ocean-trade routes. Historiography also bears testimony to the unsuccessful attempts made by Russia all through the 19th century to gain access from Black Sea into the Mediterranean Sea through Straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Though the post-World War II developments enabled the Soviet Union to gain access into the Mediterranean Sea, its Pacific naval fleet and Black Sea fleet were forced to undertake a long sea voyage from the Sea of Japan through Pacific Ocean-Indian Ocean-Mediterranean Sea to Black Sea. Geography has not been kind enough to Russia in the

form of very sparse population that rendered trans-Siberian railway of little utility. Though Canada has 3-ocean access, vast expansive of its frigid northern territory fragmented into several thousands of islands abutting the Arctic Ocean is absolutely uninhabitable; and geography has restricted the its southern part to rely on only one road connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Implications of Countries' Size, Shape and Landlocked Character: On the face of it, a nation-state gets afflicted with the small size, shape and landlocked situation. In the first instance, the size of the territory, though a numerical measure, confronts with inherent limitations. Setting aside the struggle for living space, a country invariably depends on others for all its supplies; and security is always at peril in the event of being invaded. Small European countries, for example, were overrun by Nazi army, whilst the big countries like the erstwhile Soviet Union could bargain space with the invading Nazi army during the Second World War.

Alongside the size of the territory being larger, the elongated shape confers long borders on many countries as, for example, Canada vs United States, Kazakhstan vs Russia, Argentina vs Chile, China vs Mongolia, Bangladesh vs India, Vietnam vs Laos and Cambodia, Norway vs Sweden, Finland vs Russia. Trust-deficit among such states with long borders, if at all, is tantamount to incurring heavy expenditure on border security. Geographical setting of South Asia is so peculiar that India has its land borders shared with four other neighbouring countries, while all other countries have no common land borders, except for Pakistan and Afghanistan. In consequence, South Asia suffers from lack of functional-oriented physical connectivity, leave alone Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan being the victims of land-locked character. But for being free from flooding, tsunamis, hurricanes and sea-invasion, all the 44 landlocked countries have confronted with a host of inherent liabilities mainly stemmed from lack of accessibility.³⁹

Mountainous Terrain a Barrier: The parallel mountain chains of Himalayas have sharply changed to southward at its western and eastern extremities, thanks to the geological processes, familiarly known as geosynclines syntaxial bends.⁴⁰ Not only the Himalayas are the geological fascinating mountain ranges, but they are also identified for paramount role in historical geography. These lofty mountain ranges have formed as a roof over India and got the Indian subcontinent physically separated from the hinterland of Europe and the Asia interior as well as acted as barriers against incursions from India's north, save the Alexander's invasion in 3rd century BC. Unquestionably, India virtually remained as a geographical entity in isolation until the discovery of sea route circumbulating the African continent by Vasco de Gama at the turn of 15th century. So has been the Aran Yoma a physical barrier between India and Southeast

Asia. The people of Southeast Asia have for long been divided by the mountain ranges which had however served as frontiers between the powerful lowland political regimes. Regional imbalances owe much to inaccessibility imposed by the deeply dissected mountain chains of Southeast Asia.⁴¹ Be that as it may, mountainous geography facilitated the invading Thais to the extent of inflicting a decisive defeat on the lowland-based Khmer empire. The Annamite Chains, besides remaining an impenetrable barrier between Vietnam and Laos-Cambodia had acquired phenomenal significance of war logistics and turned to be advantageous for the Vietnamese forces to sustain the guerilla warfare in their fight against the US forces during the 1960s; similarly, the war logistics across the Himalayan ranges became detrimental to India during the Sino-Indian border skirmishes in 1962. Of so much consequence was the Great Wall of China that played a crucial role in the course of history. This formidable boundary, besides protecting China from invasions and territorial encroachments, preserved its political integrity.

Population as Influenced

Geography has its well discernible influence on every aspect of population, viz., size, distribution, density, growth and migration. Higher population densities and economic development in several countries of Eurasia are largely due to fertile coastal regions with good access to regional and international trade as well as favourable climate, while unfavourable climate inhibits the population size in the lands of new settlement (Canada, Australia and New Zealand). So habituated are the deserts and mountains to the low density of population as in China. About the same time, higher physiological density (persons per a unit of agricultural land), tends to cause stress on food grains, eventually food famine. So much pitiable condition is the case with the larger agriculture-dependent population far in excess of the land carrying capacity that leads to rurban (rural to urban) migration in search of livelihood. Equally dismaying is the higher incidence of disease that has rendered the tropical regions less developed, as opposed to temperate regions. It is so gruesome that with an estimated incidence of between 200 and 500 million cases per year, malaria has almost become an endemic disease of the tropics.⁴² The declining Cambodian population on account of disease and death could not resist the invading Thais. The Annamites migrated all along the coast as far south as lower Mekong region for permanent settlement contravening the malarial-ridden central uplands of Vietnam. Climatic hostility took heavy toll of Portuguese troops within few days after their arrival at the Malacca port. More than 8.0 million people died in natural disasters since 1900;⁴³ and South Asia is one of the most natural disaster-prone regions of the world.

A study on geography and economic development⁴⁴ identified strong linkages between geography and migration. Bolivia, for example, has perhaps 15 - 20 per cent of the population living in neighbouring countries, especially Northern Argentina. It is estimated that around one third of Burkinabés are living in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and elsewhere. As per the survey of *World Atlas*, landlocked countries are typified by lower populations, except for Ethiopia with 112 million population.⁴⁵ For all its being the world's ninth largest country (2.72 million sq.km), as the same survey further noted, the world's largest landlocked country of Kazakhstan has very limited population (around 20 million), and hence the lowest population density in the world.

Epilogue

In line with the popular tradition of geography that it is strongly correlated with many other subjects, the impact of geography on the spatial phenomenon, viz, area, people, state, events and ideas is well articulated. Lying at the base of this relationship is the discernible influence of geography on various aspects on the surface of earth concerning the history, political and economic development, defence and foreign policy of a nation-state as well as the nature of international relations. Understandably, different facets of geography have their specific roles as to become conducive to the growth and development of the state or detrimental to the interests of the state; in other words, geography is reckoned as a boon or bane, with limited choice for the nation-states.

References/Notes

¹ Miller B (2000).. *Geography and Social Movements: Comparing Anti-nuclear Activism in the Boston area*, London: University of Minnesota Press, p.178.

² Singh, Harjeet (2009). *India's Strategic Culture: The Impact of Geography*, Manekshaw Paper # 10, New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt Ltd in association with Centre for Land Warfare Studies.

³ The factors / tangible elements of national power based on geography include area, configuration, location, population size and its characteristics, raw materials / natural resources, industrial and technological capacity, and military strength. So intimately connected to the national power are the intangible elements comprising ideology, national character, national morale, leadership, power over the public opinion, organisational efficiency and quality of diplomacy.

⁴ The limitations on national power incorporate: balance of power, international law, international morality, international organisations, disarmament and arms control. Collective security, and world public opinion.

⁵ Diamond, Jared (1999).. *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (Topeka, Kansas: Bt Bound, p. 498. Jared Diamond, Professor of Geography at the University of

California, Los Angeles (UCLA), is the awardee of research prizes and grants including Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, National Geographic Society.

- ⁶ Kaplan, Robert D (2010). *South Asia's Geography of Conflict*, Washington: Center for a New American Security, p.10.
- ⁷ Aziz, Muhammad Suliman & Abbas, Brduman Waisi (2021). "Geography and Politics in a World Divided," *International journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research*, vol.5, Issue 1, pp. 12-18.
- ⁸ The study of geography for enriching the knowledge of spatial dimension concerning the historical events has thus become part of the world history courses in many American Universities.
- ⁹ Chapman, Bert (2011). *Geopolitics: A Guide to the Issues*, INDIGO Meeting, Bloomington: Indiana University, May 20.
- ¹⁰ Kaplan, Robert D. (2009). "The Revenge of Geography," *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2009.
- ¹¹ Meinig, Donald (1987). *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of American History*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- ¹² Kaplan, Robert D., (2010), *South Asia's Geography of Conflict*, Washington DC: Centre for a New American Security, p.10.
- ¹³ World Ocean as an all-pervasive spatial phenomenon amounts to 360 million sq. km of area accounting for about 70 % of the planet's surface (510 million sq. km)ⁱ and contains more than 95 % of the water.ⁱⁱ Alongside about 60 % of the world population living within 60 km of the coast, Ocean could well impact the lives of three quarters of the world's population.ⁱⁱⁱ [Sources: ⁱ Eric Cheng, "The Physics Factbook: An Encyclopedia of Scientific Essays," *Area of Earth's Oceans*, (Chicago: 1997). <https://hypertextbook.com/facts/1997/EricCheng.shtml> (Accessed June 5, 2019). ⁱⁱ Ruben Zondervan and others, "Ocean Governance in the Anthropocene," *The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) Global Change Magazine*, No. 81, October 2013. www.igbp.net/news/features/features/ocean_governanceintheanthropocene.5.64c294101429ba9184d483.html (Accessed May 18, 2019). ⁱⁱⁱ UNESCO, "A Sea of Troubles," Press Release No. 2001-129. <http://www.unesco.org/bpi/eng/unescopress/2001/01-129e.shtml> (Accessed May 26, 2019)].
- ¹⁴ If maritime geography is the study of human interaction with sea, maritime history focuses on the narratives of human activity at sea; and their collaborative approach is all about the maritime trade that embarks on exploring and establishing contacts with new lands.
- ¹⁵ Gottmann, Jean (2011)., *Geography and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, July 18, 2011. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/article/abs/geography-and-international-relations/1EF901B3AD0C77CC7966C2AE8DA7C513> (Accessed April 23, 2024).
- ¹⁶ Nicholas J. Spykman, an American political scientist and one of the founders of the classical realist school in American foreign policy, offered the US to develop a grand strategy for both war and peace based on the implications of its geographic location in the world. See Nicholas J. Spykman. *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942).
- ¹⁷ Important among them are: *Geography and Foreign Policy* (1938), *Geographic Objectives in Foreign Policy* (1939) and *The Geography of the Peace* (1944).
- ¹⁸ Bert Chapman, *op. cit.*

-
- ¹⁹ Gordon East W. (1967). *The Geography Behind History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, p.182.
- ²⁰ Robert D. Kaplan, 2009.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947), besides being a geography professor, was the vice-president of Royal Geographical Society, Director of London School of Economics, member of British Parliament and British High Commissioner. Regardless of the contempt of the Allied Powers for war-guilty Germany at the Treaty of Versailles, Mackinder (1919) put forward a three-line strategic formula, 'Democratic Ideals and Reality,' cozily known as Heartland theory. At the close of Second World War, Mackinder (1943) had once again justified his geopolitical views in yet another piece of writing, 'Round the Table and Winning the Peace.'
- ²³ Toth, Colonel James E., USMC (Ret.) (1995). "Military Strategy Note: Strategic Geography," Washington D C: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, p.1.
- ²⁴ Cohen, Saul Bernard (2014), *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 3rd Edition..
- ²⁵ Robert D. Kaplan, 2010, p.10.
- ²⁶ Pattanaik, Devdutt, (2024). *Ahimsa: 100 Reflections on the Harappan Civilization*, (New Delhi: Harper Collins India, p. 272.
- ²⁷ Anonymous, "How Does Geography Affect Civilization? Exploring the Impact on Settlement Patterns," *Spatial Post*, June 18, 2023. <https://www.spatialpost.com/how-does-geography-affect-civilization/> (Accessed October 23, 2024).
- ²⁸ Szczepanski, Kallie (Apr 2023). "The Yellow River's Role in China's History," *ThoughtCo*, April 5, 2023. [https:// www. thoughtco.com/yellow-river-in-chinas-history-195222](https://www.thoughtco.com/yellow-river-in-chinas-history-195222) (Accessed June 12, 2023).
- ²⁹ Lehr, Franz Peter (2005). "Prospects for Multilateral Security Cooperation in the Indian Ocean: A Skeptical View," *Indian Ocean Survey*, vol.1, No.1, pp. 1-15.
- ³⁰ Mahan, Alfred Thayer (1890). *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1783*, (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1890; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1987), p. 138.
- ³¹ The unique pattern of monsoon winds: (i) South East Monsoons which originate from northwestern Australia in April-May would become (ii) South West Monsoon winds upon crossing the equator (June-September). During the October-December period they would become Retreating Monsoons which are known as (iii) North East Monsoons (north of equator) and (iv) North West Monsoons (south of the equator). See Y. Yagama Reddy, "China's Upstream Projects – Threat in the Offing to the Downstream Riparian States in South and Southeast Asia," *Journal of Polity and Society*, vol.6, Issue 2, July- December 2014, pp. 61-74.
- ³² The extensive mountain ranges are the north-south trending ones all along the eastern coast of Africa, west coast of Indian peninsula and the mountain chains running parallel to the west and east coasts of Bay of Bengal and Annamite cordillera as well as the east-west trending mountain chains in the insular Indonesia, in addition to the plateau region in Western Australia.

-
- ³³ Reddy, Y. Yagama (Dec 2012). "Geographical Pivot of Indian Ocean and the Scope for both Regional Cooperation and Geopolitical Context," *Journal of Indian Ocean Studies*, vol.20, No.3, December 2012, pp. 387-405.
- ³⁴ Curzon, George N (1909). *The Place of India in the Empire*, London: John Murray.
- ³⁵ Romeo, Nick (May 2015). "How Geography shaped American History, Law and Politics," *National Geographic*, May 3, 2015. <https://www.Nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/150503-geography-america-law-politics-ngbooktalk> (Accessed October 23, 2024).
- ³⁶ Miller, Aaron David (Apr 2023). "The Link between Geography and U.S. Foreign Policy has grown more Complex," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 10, 2023. <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/04/the-link-between-geography-and-us-foreign-policy-has-grown-more-complex?lang=en> (Accessed October 23, 2024).
- ³⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan who served as the US naval officer was also a historian and the author of *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*.
- ³⁸ Aziz, Muhammad Suliman and Abbas, Brduman Waisi, *op. cit.*
- ³⁹ The disadvantages of landlocked countries include: dependence on their neighbours for gaining access to global markets, reliance on neighbouring states entailing greater transport costs and higher transit times, cost-intensive infrastructure development, limited or lack of access to natural resources, higher vulnerability to land disputes, limited options for tourism development, limited maritime-related job opportunities and less attractive for foreign direct investment.
- ⁴⁰ The parallel mountain series of Himalayas had begun to form between 40-50 million years ago, through folding and uplift of the crust of the Thethys sea as a result of convergence and collision of the Eurasian and Indian and Plates, the geological process known as geosyncline theory. The east-west mountain ranges extending for about 2400 km have trended southward near Nanga Prabat (in the west) and at Namcha Barwa of Arunachal Pradesh (in the east). These southward bends, termed as syntaxial bends, have made Indus River and Brahmaputra River to change their directions abruptly from their east-west tendency to the south.
- ⁴¹ Reddy, Y. Yagama (2004). "Geographical Causation in Southeast Asian History," *Journal of Contemporary Asia and Europe*, Vol.1, No.2, July-December 2004, pp.81-97.
- ⁴² WHO, "World Malaria Situation in 1994, Part I," *WHO Weekly Epidemiological Record*, 1997, 36, pp. 269-274.
- ⁴³ Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Apr 2018). "Natural disasters since 1900: Over 8 million deaths, 7 trillion US dollars," *ScienceDaily*, April 18, 2016. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/04/160418092043.htm (Accessed August 9, 2024). The death toll in natural disasters (over 62 million people world-wide since 1900) was approximately the same number as all those killed in both World Wars.
- ⁴⁴ Gallup, John Luke, Sachs, Jeffrey D. & Mellinger, Andrew D. (1999). *Geography and Economic Development*, Center for International Development at Harvard University, Working Paper no. 1, March 1999.
- ⁴⁵ Landlocked Countries of the World, *WorldAtlas*. <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/landlocked-countries-of-the-world.html> (December 22, 2022).