General Geography (Systematic Geography) Versus Regional Geography (Special Geography)

Regional (Special) Geography : Hartshorne defines it as the study of all the features of a given region, any two-dimensional area of interest. **The first objective** is to learn and record the facts of the world within the region, to describe the region's "contents", and therefore describe the region itself. **The second objective** is to understand the region as an independent entity, as well as a reality within a broader context. Regional geography has often sought an explanation of local idiosyncrasies (and while regional observations may be taken as examples of broader phenomena, this has become the systematic geography).

Regional geography in the traditional sense seeks to bring together in an aerial setting various matters and it is the study of the geography of regions. Special geography was primarily intended as a description of individual countries and world regions. It was difficult to establish laws in the special geography where human beings are involved, whose behaviour is always unpredictable. Special geography, nevertheless, helped in the formulation of hypothesis and structured ideas.

Systematic (General) Geography : It deals with processes that operate through space, in an attempt to understand and explain them. Most systematic geography is done through "case studies", which in geography are generally regional. But the point is to be studying a phenomenon that is presumed to be universal, to operate identically elsewhere (subject to conditions, of course); any results are meant to be generalizable. Systematic geography certainly makes use of the facts that belong to regional geography and produces its own descriptions. It was concerned with the formulation of general laws, principals and generic concepts. Systematic geography drew inspiration from the existing systematic sciences with a search for universal and generic concepts. In brief, general geography deals with the whole world as a unit. It was, however, mainly restricted to physical geography, which could be understood through natural laws.

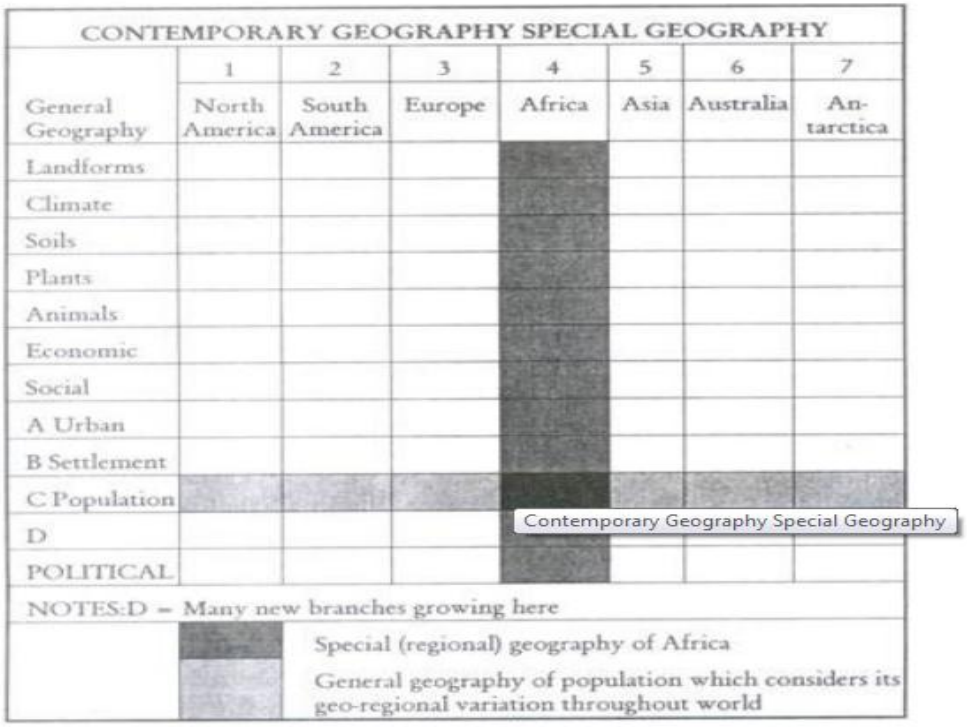
This dichotomy between 'general' and 'regional' was first raised by **Bernhard Varen** (also known as **Varenius)** in the 17th century. Varenius, who published Geographia Generalis in 1650, recognised general geography as a sub-discipline which formulates general laws, generic

laws and principles. In later periods, general geography came to be known as systematic geography as it derived knowledge from other systematic disciplines to formulate universal and generic ideas. General geography considers the whole world as a unit, whereas regional geography deals with the description of particular regions or countries.

Richthofen considered regional geography to be descriptive, where it would depict the salient features of a region. According to him, general geography studies the spatial distribution of geographical features. Before the advent of **Ratzel**, **systematic geography was founded by Humboldt**, while **Ritter founded regional geography**. After Ratzel, Hettner viewed geography as an idiographic (regional) rather than nomothetic (general) discipline. **Vidal de La blache** rejected Ratzel and argued in favor of specific studies (pays). Thus Vidal was in favour of regional geography. **Patrick Geddes** helped to create a strong local tradition of regional geography. **Carl Sauer** has been a recent practitioner and advocate of the regional geography.

For example, if we take the patterns of distribution of temperature, rainfall, vegetation, minerals, crops and population, and examine them at the world level or continent wise, it would be a case of systematic geography. In contrast to this, if we study landforms, climatic variables, soils, vegetation minerals, fauna and flora, and superimpose these physical factors on the cultural landscape or on any of the elements of socio-cultural aspect, this would be a case of regional or special geography.

To illustrate this point, Figure has been plotted. In this figure, the rows show the approach of study of systematic geography, and columns show the approach of study of regional geography, if we study the types of soils in various continents, it is an example of systematic geography, while if we take a particular continent or a region of it and superimpose all the physical and socio-economic variables, it would highlight the peculiarities of that region.



Owing to the creation of area studies programs and the Quantitative Revolution, regional geography becomes less popular element of the discipline Geography.