

Geography as a Practice: An Exploration  
Through Literary Sources

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### **Geography as a Practice: An Exploration Through Literary Sources**

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#### **Abstract**

*Geography is a practice that examines spatial relationships and the interaction between humans and their environments. Its importance lies in providing critical perspectives for understanding contemporary global issues. Geography has evolved from ancient civilizations to a formal academic discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, influenced by figures like Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter. The 20<sup>th</sup> century introduced quantitative and critical geography, reshaping geographical inquiry.*

*Literature reflects geographical practices by using settings to enhance narratives. Works like John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series illustrate how geography informs character and plot. Geographical imaginaries shape our understanding of places through cultural narratives. Case studies, such as Steinbeck's and Rowling's works, highlight how these imaginaries influence identity and experience. Place significantly impacts identity formation. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* demonstrates the complexities of identity-related to cultural heritage and geography.*

*Literature often explores the relationship between humans and nature. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* serves as a critique of environmental neglect, emphasizing the need for a sustainable relationship with the natural world. Urban literature captures the complexities of city life. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* critiques the American Dream through its urban settings, illustrating social disparities.*

*Culture shapes geographical understanding. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* explores the impact of colonialism on indigenous cultures and landscapes. Geographical research employs various methodologies that can inform literary analysis, revealing how geographical elements shape narratives.*

*Globalisation reconfigures spatial relationships, as seen in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which explores the tensions between global and local identities.*

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*Maps enhance storytelling, as demonstrated in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, where intricate maps guide readers through a richly imagined world. Geopolitical themes are prevalent in literature, with Ian McEwan's Atonement addressing the impact of World War II on personal and collective identities.*

*Geography as a practice enriches our understanding of identity, environment, and social dynamics through literature. This interplay underscores the significance of geography in addressing contemporary challenges. (Words 324)*

**Keywords:** Place and Identity, Geographical imagination, Nature and Environment, Urban and Cultural Geography, Geographical methods, Cartography, Geopolitics

## **Introduction to Geography**

Geography as a practice encompasses the study of spatial relationships, the organisation of human activity, and the interaction between people and their environments. It is not merely a field of academic inquiry but a lens through which we can understand the world. Geography provides critical perspectives on how cultural, political, and environmental factors shape human experiences and societal structures (Harvey, 2001).

Understanding geography as a practice is essential in today's globalised world, where *local actions have global repercussions*. Geographical perspectives are important because they can inform policy-making, urban planning, and environmental management, making geography a vital discipline for addressing contemporary issues such as climate change, migration, and social justice (Massey, 2005).

## **Historical Context**

### ***Overview of Geography's Evolution***

The evolution of geography as a discipline can be traced back to ancient civilisations, where early geographers like Eratosthenes and Ptolemy laid the groundwork for *spatial thinking*. During the Renaissance, geographical understanding expanded with the advent of exploration and cartography, leading to a more nuanced comprehension of the world (Barnes, 2010; 2013).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, geography began to emerge as a formal academic discipline, influenced by the works of figures such as Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter, who emphasised the interconnectedness of natural and human systems (Schmidt, 2011). The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of quantitative geography, which applied statistical methods to geographical research, and later, critical geography, which questioned the objectivity of geographical knowledge (Harvey, 2001).

## **Evolution of Geography**

Geography, as a discipline, has undergone significant transformations since its inception. The evolution of geography (Claval, 2013) can be broadly categorized into several phases:

### **Ancient Period (500 BCE - 500 CE)**

Early geographical concepts: Philosophers like Eratosthenes, Aristotle, and Strabo developed early geographical concepts, including the idea of a spherical Earth.

Exploration and mapping: Ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans explored and mapped their surroundings.

### **Medieval Period (500 - 1500 CE)**

Geography in the Middle Ages: During this period, geography was largely focused on descriptive accounts of places and regions.

Influence of Islamic scholars: Islamic scholars like Al-Idrisi and Ibn Battuta made significant contributions to geography, including the development of new mapping techniques.

### **Age of Exploration (1500 - 1800 CE)**

European exploration: European explorers like Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Magellan discovered new lands and established trade routes.

Development of cartography: Cartographers like Mercator and Ortelius developed new mapping techniques, including the use of latitude and longitude.

### **Modern Period (1800 - 1950 CE)**

Development of academic geography: Geography emerged as a distinct academic discipline, with the establishment of geography departments and journals (Livingstone, 1992).

Regional geography: Regional geography, which focused on the study of specific regions, became a dominant approach.

### **Contemporary Period (1950 CE - present)**

Quantitative revolution: The quantitative revolution in geography, led by scholars like David Harvey, introduced statistical and mathematical techniques to the discipline.

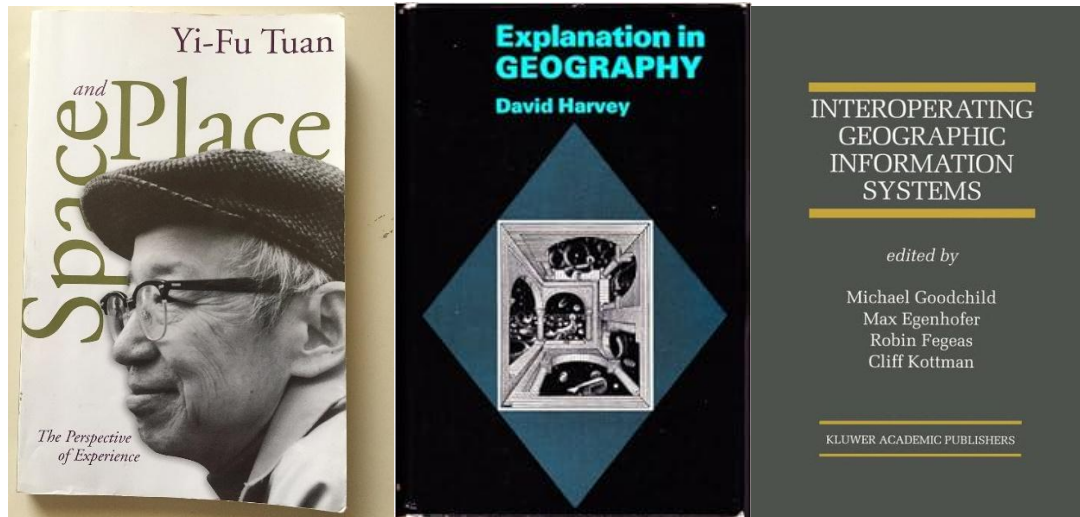
Critical geography: Critical geography, which emphasizes the social and political context of geographical phenomena, has become a major approach.

Geographical information systems (GIS): GIS technology has revolutionized the field of geography, enabling the analysis and visualization of spatial data.

### ***Key Historical Figures in Geography***

Key historical figures have shaped the field of geography. Alexander von Humboldt is often credited with establishing the concept of *environmental determinism*, which posits that *human behaviour is shaped by the physical environment* (Humboldt, 1864). Carl Ritter, a contemporary of Humboldt, focused on the relationship between geography and human culture, emphasising the importance of *place in shaping identity* (Ritter, 1859).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, David Harvey's work on *social justice* and *spatial theory* challenged traditional geographical paradigms and introduced a critical lens to the discipline (Harvey, 1973). Similarly, Yi-Fu Tuan's writings on humanistic geography highlighted the *emotional and experiential dimensions of place*, emphasising the subjective nature of geographical knowledge (Tuan, 1977).



## Geography and Literature

### *How Literature Reflects Geographical Practices*

Literature serves as a powerful medium through which geographical practices are reflected and explored. Authors often use settings to create a *sense of place*, drawing on geographical elements to enhance narrative depth. Literary works can reveal how individuals and communities interact with their environments, providing insights into cultural and social dynamics (Relph, 1976).

### *Examples of Literary Works that Incorporate Geography*

Numerous literary works incorporate geography as a central theme. For instance, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* vividly depicts the *Dust Bowl era*, illustrating the profound impact of environmental factors on human migration and social upheaval (Steinbeck, 1939). Similarly, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter series* employs a richly imagined geography that reflects British landscapes and cultural heritage, influencing characters' *identities and experiences* (Rowling, 1997-2007).

## Geographical Imaginaries

### *Concept of Geographical Imaginaries in Literature*

Geographical imaginaries refer to *the mental constructs and representations of places that shape our understanding of the world*. These imaginaries are often informed by *cultural narratives* and can influence perceptions of *identity, belonging, and power* (Massey, 2005).



### *Case Studies: Works by Authors like John Steinbeck and J.K. Rowling*

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck constructs a geographical image that highlights the struggles of displaced farmers during the Great Depression, emphasizing themes of *resilience and community* (Steinbeck, 1939). Conversely, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series creates a fantastical geography that intertwines *magic with real-world locations*, inviting readers to explore a world where *the ordinary and extraordinary coexist* (Rowling, 1997-2007).

## Place and Identity

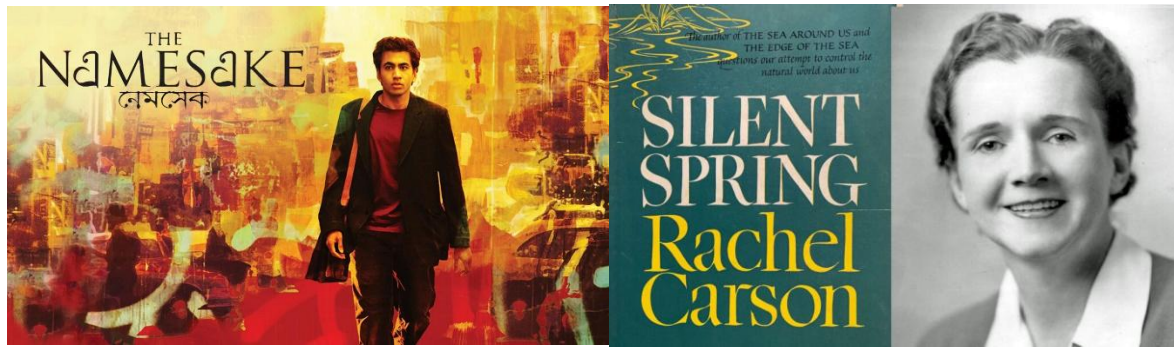
### *The Relationship Between Place and Identity*

Place plays a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identities. The concept of place encompasses not only *physical locations but also the meanings and emotions* associated with them (Relph, 1976).

### *Literary Examples: The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri*

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* explores the complexities of identity formation concerning place. The protagonist, Gogol Ganguli, navigates his cultural heritage and the immigrant experience in America, illustrating how *a place can influence personal identity and belonging* (Lahiri, 2003).





## Nature and Environment

### *Representation of Nature in Literature*

Literature often serves as a reflection of humanity's relationship with nature. Authors utilise natural settings to convey themes of beauty, conflict, and environmental degradation (Cronon, 1996).

### *Discussion of Environmental Geography Through Texts*

Environmental geography examines the interactions between humans and their environment, and literature can provide a narrative framework for understanding these dynamics. For example, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* highlights the consequences of *environmental neglect*, urging readers to reconsider their relationship with the natural world (Carson, 1962).



## Urban Geography

### *Exploration of Urban Spaces in Literary Works*

Urban geography focuses on the spatial dynamics of cities and their influence on human behaviour. Literature often captures the complexities of urban life, revealing the intersections of *culture, economy, and social relationships* (Simmel, 1903).

### *Examples: The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald*

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* serves as a critique of the American Dream, using the urban landscape of 1920s New York to explore themes of *wealth, class, and*

*disillusionment* (Fitzgerald, 2004). The novel's settings, from the opulent mansions of West Egg to the desolate Valley of Ashes, illustrate the stark contrasts within urban environments.

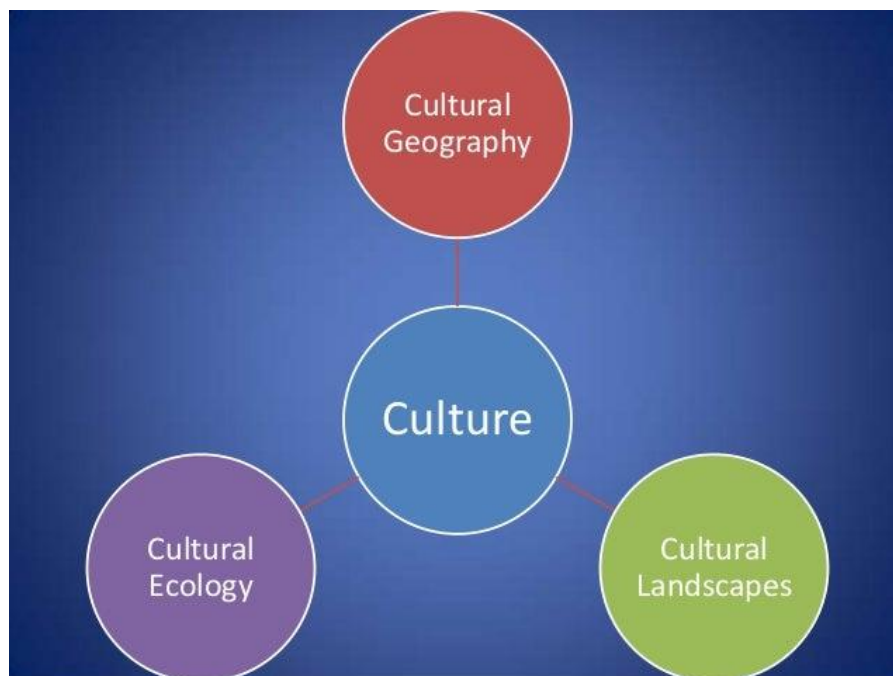
## Cultural Geography

### *How Culture Shapes Geographical Understanding*

Cultural geography examines the ways in which culture influences *spatial practices and perceptions*. It emphasises the role of cultural narratives in shaping geographical knowledge and identity (Jackson, 1989).

### *Literary References: Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe*

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* explores the *impact of colonialism* on indigenous cultures and landscapes in Nigeria. The novel highlights the interplay between culture and geography, illustrating *how cultural practices are embedded within specific places* (Achebe, 1994).



## Geographical Methods

### *Overview of Methodologies in Geographical Research*

Geographical research employs a variety of methodologies, ranging from *qualitative approaches to quantitative analyses*. These methods enable researchers to explore *spatial relationships, patterns, and processes* (Cloke et al., 2004).

### *Connection to Literary Analysis*

The methodologies used in geographical research can also inform *literary analysis*, allowing scholars to examine how *geographical elements shape narrative structures and character development*. By employing *spatial analysis*, literary critics can uncover *how place influences storytelling* (Brett, 2010).

## **Globalisation and Geography**

### ***Impact of Globalization on Geographical Practices***

Globalisation has transformed geographical practices, leading to increased interconnectedness and the reconfiguration of spatial relationships. This phenomenon has implications for *cultural exchange, economic development, and environmental sustainability* (Harvey, 1990).

### ***Literary Reflections: The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid***

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* reflects the complexities of *globalisation* and its *impact on identity*. The novel explores the protagonist's experiences in America and his return to Pakistan, highlighting the tensions between *global and local identities* (Hamid, 2007).

## **Cartography in Literature**

### ***The Role of Maps and Cartography in Storytelling***

Maps play a significant role in literature, serving as tools for navigation and representation. They can enhance the reader's understanding of geographical contexts and contribute to *world-building* (Baker, 2008).

### ***Examples from The Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien***

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* features intricate maps that illustrate the *fictional world of Middle-earth*. These maps not only guide readers through the narrative but also enrich the thematic exploration of journey and adventure (Tolkien, 1954-1955).

## **Geopolitics and Literature**

### ***Exploration of Geopolitical Themes in Literary Texts***

Geopolitics examines the influence of geography on *international relations and power dynamics*. Literature often reflects these themes, providing insights into the complexities of political landscapes (Agnew, 2003).

### ***Discussion of Atonement by Ian McEwan***

Ian McEwan's *Atonement* explores the *impact of World War II on personal and collective identities*. The novel addresses *memory, trauma, and moral responsibility*, highlighting how geopolitical events shape individual lives (McEwan, 2003).





## Conclusion

In conclusion, geography as a practice offers valuable insights into how *space*, *place*, and *culture* intersect. By examining literary sources, we can better understand how geographical practices inform narratives and shape human experiences. The interplay between geography and literature enriches our comprehension of identity, environment, and social dynamics, underscoring the significance of geography in addressing contemporary challenges.

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This discussion paper is structured according to an outline and includes a comprehensive exploration of geography as a practice through literary sources and relevant geographical research.

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