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GEOGRAPHY OF HUMAN ECOLOGY

Introduction:--Geography has always been 'vibrant science' which makes it inevitable that there would be diverging opinions about the nature and scope of geography. In the words of Hartshorne (1939) geography seeks to acquire a complete knowledge of the areal differentiation of the world. Geography as a discipline is concerned with the ways in which men occupy the surface of the earth organize themselves spatially and utilize the world's resources in spite of being unevenly distributed (Ginsburg, 1954). This viewpoint is typically geographical in nature; if considered from the point of view of ecologists human geography emphasizes on the physical environment and man's reciprocal relationship with the environment (Theodorson, 1959).

Many ecologists have elaborated the relation between geography and ecology. These two disciplines do have some common aspects but still have their differences. Geography has its main interest to study the correlation between habitat and social factors that is the so called direct relationship between man and his environment; while ecology focuses on human communities and concentrates upon man and his habitat. That means for geography place as a central concept is important but for ecology process in time holds central position. The concept of region also varies in two disciplines. For ecologist region is a unity in physical environment while for a geographer region is a product of contact and division of labour.

The Nature of Human Ecology:

Human ecology is a relatively current development; the first use of the term in the literature was in 1921. The concept of human ecology was put forward by the American geographers who had belief in Social Darwinism. It was H.H. Barrows, who in his presidential address to the Association of American Geographers in 1923, declared that "Human Geography is Human Ecology". On the other hand, The first book with title as ecology appeared in 1935 and interestingly was the work of a botanist. In this brief span of time, the discipline of ecology has evolved quite rapidly. When concerned with human ecology one can relate to Mackenzie's (1931) definition which states that "*Human ecology deals with the spatial aspects of the symbiotic relations of human beings and human institutions*".

Human ecology, in so far as it is concerned with a social order that is based on competition rather than consensus, is identical, in principle at least, with plant and animal ecology. Society, as ecologists have conceived it, is a population settled and

limited to its habitat. The ties that unite its individual units are those of a free and natural economy, based on a natural division of labour. Such a society is territorially organized and the ties which hold it together are physical and vital rather than customary and moral, Human ecology has, however, to reckon with the fact that in human society competition is limited by custom and culture. The cultural super structure imposes itself as an instrument of direction and control upon the biotic substructure. Reduced to its elements the human community, so conceived, may be said to consist of a population and a culture, including in the term culture is that-

(i) a body of customs and beliefs and

(2) a corresponding body of artifacts and technological devices.

Elements and factors of Human Ecology :--Human ecology is the interaction of mainly four factors or elements like-

(1) population,

(2) artifacts (technological culture),

(3) custom and beliefs (non-material culture), and

(4) the natural resources.

All are maintainance at once the biotic balance and the social equilibrium, when and where they exist. The changes in which ecology is interested are the movements of population and of artifacts (commodities) and changes in location and occupation-any sort of change, in fact, which affects an existing division of labor or the relation of the population to the soil.

Subject matter-- Human ecology is, fundamentally, an attempt to investigate the processes by which the biotic balance and the social equilibrium (1) are maintained once they are achieved and (2) the processes by which, when the biotic balance and the social equilibrium are disturbed, the transition is made from one relatively stable order to another.

A number of human geographers accept the definition of human ecology as the study of mutual relations between men and environment, but in practice they have limited its application to a specialized field of geographic study. Some geographers-for example, Barrows, Renner, and White make human ecology synonymous with human geography. Barrows, the first geographer to publish this point of view, has written as follows:"the *center of gravity within the geographic field has shifted steadily from the extreme physical side toward the human side until geographers in increasing numbers define their subject as dealing solely with the mutual relations between man and his environment*". White and Renner, whose volume is entitled ***Geography, an Introduction to Human Ecology***, limit this field to a study of the direct relations between men or groups

and their environments.

Critical Facts:-- This specialized field of study investigates problems of man's relation to his environment, both individually and in groups, such as (1) the effects of climate upon human health and energy; (2) the influences of resources and topography upon human occupations, homes, institutions, and inventions; (3) influences of natural routes and barriers upon social isolation and contact; and (4) possible effects of natural surroundings upon customs, attitudes, and beliefs. Thus these human geographers, who define human ecology as a specialized field of science, obviously disagree with Bews who regards it as an inclusive synthesis. Human ecology, like other specialized sciences may be defined and delimited in terms of the basic abstractions it makes.

Abstracts of Human ecology-- In particular, human ecology abstracts has two types- (i) a distinctive type of ecological inter- action and (ii) a distinctive aspect of community or regional structure that arises out of this interaction.

To sum up human ecology may now be defined tentatively as a specialized field of analysis which investigates---

- (I) those impersonal sub-social aspects of communal structure- both spatial and functional- which arise and change as the result of interaction between men through the medium of limited supplies of the environment, and
- (ii) the nature and forms of the processes by which this sub-social structure arises and changes. The value of human ecology depends upon the validity and significance of its own specialized abstractions and not upon its service in supplying indexes of social life.

Conclusions:

Geography as human ecology has confined the scope of geography as it totally ignores the social and cultural environment as well as man's relation with this environment. It only centers on the components of physical environment and man's relation with it. Kirk (1963) that if this approach encompasses both ecological and social sciences than may be it would initiate a discussion which can be relevant in understanding man and environment relationship from their point of view.