



The Explanation of Humanism in Geographical Study

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ABSTRACT

This research paper seeks to highlight the meaning, explanation and historical development of the philosophy of humanism in geographical study in the world. It shows the importance of role of human being in various geographical studies. The humanistic geography is mainly developed due to the result of the revolution of quantification within the scope of geography. Humanists can see the demerits of positivistic and quantitative Geography, and thus they have rectified it with the help of humanistic geographical thinking and approaches. The human activities, his place and his ideas are important and basic things in humanism in geography. In fact humanism is very much associated with geographical study. According to the supporters of it the human ideas, values and skills are important while explaining various geographical phenomena on the earth.

Key words: Humanism, possibilistic geography, quantitative revolution, environment, territory

Discussion and explanation

Geography is very old and vast discipline which deals with the study of relationship between man and environment on the earth surface. Different geographers are concerned with various geographical phenomena with different approaches. Some of them have emphasized more on human aspects while others have given more emphasis on physical aspects. In the early period of the development of geography geographers were engaged in exploration of physical features of the earth and collection of commercial data from various parts of the world. However, with the change of time the subject matters and approaches of the subject have been changed and the scope and nature have also been changed. Dichotomies and dualism appeared within the field of geography with much logical and reasoning arguments among the geographers from time to time, it really helped the subject enriched. Many examples were collected from different parts of the earth in order to support their arguments, it increases the dimension of geographical study. As per the historical division of the discipline the ancient period is dominated by the contributions made by Greeks and Romans in connection with the dualism of human versus physical and determinism and possibilism, however the later dichotomy is more pronounced in the later period, particularly during the modern geographical period. Arab and Chinese geographers are well known during the medieval period in regard to their contributions of physical and human geography. They were mainly concerned with physical geographical aspects of the earth. They have written about the lifestyles of some tribal people they come across.

German and French geographers worked during the modern period of development of geography in order to enrich the wealth of the subject. Geographers of USA, Britain, Russia and Italy are also involved in shaping the nature and scope of geography mainly in the field of human geography. The debate between geographers who support the philosophy of determinism on the one hand and possibilism on the other hand became notable during this period. During the contemporary period different models in geography were come up all over the world. Humanism is one of the famous models in geographical study.

Yi-Fu-Tuan was the first person who argued for humanistic geography and the term humanism in geography was also used by him for the first time in 1976. Kirk was also one of the pioneers who attract a large audience with his advocacy of humanistic geography. In humanistic geography the main focus is targeted on people and their conditions. According to Tuan humanistic geography is a perspective which shows the complexity and ambiguity of relations between man and environment. The main role of humanism in geographical study is to explain well the human awareness and human agency, human consciousness and human creativity.

Humanistic geography tries to understand the meaning, value and the human significance of various events and activities of life. Humanists explain and interpret man and space relationship mainly with historical approach. Man is not considered as machines, instead he becomes the agent who gives value to both human life and environment. Humanism is a conviction that man and woman can best improve the circumstances of their lives by thinking and acting for themselves, especially by exercising their capacity for reason (Relph, 1981).

In fact humanism in Geography was a result of criticism against the philosophy of positivism and quantitative revolution which attacked the human values in explaining the man environment relation. The utmost important reason why humanists object and argued quantitative revolution in Geography is that the tools and assumptions used in it do not adequately explain human world and their issues, specially connected with social institutions, moral values, customs, traditions and aesthetics.

The philosophy of humanism in geography may be traced back to the Kantian philosophy who said the idea that history must be differed from geography only in respect of time. Time and space are the concerns of history and geography respectively. Geography and history fill up the entire circumference of our perception, geography is of space and history is of time. French geographers popularized humanistic geography, specially by Febver and Vidal de la Blache. The school of possibilism advocated the view that the physical environment gives us the range of possibilities that man may choose and use according to his ability. Nature is never more than an advisor to the possibilists. Hartshorne in 1939 pleaded the cause of humanistic geography in his book, the Nature of Geography. Geography and history are alike in a sense that they are integrating sciences with the world. Thus, there is a universal and mutual relation between them, even though their bases of integration are in a sense opposite, geography in terms of earth space and history in terms of periods of time according to Hartshorne, 1939.

Humanism in Geography should conserve the human potential for creativity which involved the everyday experiences and activities of man on real world. According to humanism Geography can be defined as the study of the earth as a home of man and from this we can ascertain that Geography is not an earth science, instead it has a close relationship with humanities and social sciences as it shares a hope for providing an accurate picture of the real human world. Humanistic Geography obtained an understanding of the real human world by studying people's relationships with nature, their geographical behaviour as well as their feelings and ideas in connection with space and place. Humanists strongly opposed the reduction of space and place to mere geometrical concepts of surface and point as perceived by and preached by the positivists by using the methods and methodologies of quantitative techniques.

Place which means landscape and region is a key concept in humanistic geography. From the angle of humanism the meaning of a place is inseparable from the consciousness of those who inhabit it. The scope of place as a concept varies according to the extension of the thoughts, feelings and experiences that make the consciousness of inhabitants. A self-conscious drive to connect with that special body of knowledge, reflection and substances about human experience and human expression, literary criticism, aesthetics and art history based on hermeneutics, recovery of place, iconography of landscape, participant observation, discussion, logical inference, to disclose the world as it shows before scientific inquiry are some important methods of humanistic geography.

Humanistic geography tries to understand how geographical phenomena and activities show the quality of human awareness. In humanistic geographical approach human being is not considered as an economic man. There are five themes of general interest to geographers according to Tuan. They are geographical knowledge or personal geographies, territory and place, crowding and privacy, livelihood and economics and religion. Man has special capacity of thought, knowledge and reflection. Therefore the primary task of humanistic geographers is to study the articulated ideas of geographical phenomena. Broadly conceived knowledge of geography is necessary for biological survival. For instance the migratory birds have a mental map. The people who are not trained in geography have a broad range of ideas regarding space, location, place and resources.

Territory and place are important animal instincts. For example honeybee, tiger and lion etc. defend their living space against intruders. This is due to the fact that they think some space where they occupied belong to them. Human attachment to territory and to place bear a clear resemblance to those of other animals. All animals including human beings occupy and use space. A song-bird perched high on a tree can survey its own operational area and those animal living close to the ground can not do like this instead they have their own area through path and place network. Much more than animals, man develops emotional attachment to place as he satisfies his biological needs such as drinks, eat and rest. Man can remember and think of for future, thus he remembers his birth place and death place his relatives and friends. This makes a strong attachment with the place and human geographers needs to study how space becomes an intensely human place.

Physical and mental stress become common in crowded places and it breaks the normal behaviour of animals including man. However, culture, social institution and infrastructures helps in reducing such stress. For instance, people in crowded Hong Kong are no more prone to crime than the people of spacious land of America, Europe etc. Privacy and solitude also affect the behaviour of man in connection with space. Solitude makes the private world of a man. All human beings need their privacies, though at different degrees. Crowded environment makes it difficult to escape the human gaze and thereby developed sense of self. In solitude man creates his own world, safe from another's gaze, and therefore he seems to sustain the existence of all what he sees.

People survive themselves by doing various economic and socio-cultural activities. All activities of man are mostly economic and functional under a system and it supports the human society, within this society man lives in. While working for his livelihood, man differentiates between life-supporting and life-destroying activities. All people and professional planners plan their economic activities according to their knowledge and technology. To what extent do planners make use of economic theory and facts in reaching the decision? How good are the results? Such questions need to be asked by the humanistic geographers.

From the viewpoint of religion too human beings are clearly distinguished from other animals on the earth. Religion means to bind again, i.e., to bind oneself strongly to a set of ethic. A religious person is one who seeks coherence and meaning in his own world. In other words, if religion is broadly defined as the impulse for coherence and meaning, then all human beings are religious. The strength of the impulse differed greatly from culture to culture and from person to person. A humanistic approach to religion must require that we should be aware of differences in the human desire for coherence and not how these are manifested in the organization of space and time in the tune of natural environment.

Conclusion

In the perspective of humanistic geography man is important agent that cause and modify many geographical phenomena in the world. The supporters of humanism in geography strongly condemned and opposed positivistic and quantitative approaches as they can not touch the human minds and ideas that played a very important role in shaping the cultural and natural landscapes on the earth. Geography is a subject in which the man and the environment relationship is studied, in this regards the role of man is considered more important than the that of the nature. Nature offers a range of possibilities so that man may take the advantages and utility of it. Geographers should not minimize the real place to a mere geometrical space while they study the geographical phenomena on the earth surface.

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