

ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY:CONCEPT AND APPROACHES

[4T.ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY OF GENERIC ELECTIVE SUBJECTS]

CONCEPT: Environmental Geography is the interactions between humans and nature in space and time. Environmental geography is the branch of geography that describes the spatial aspects of interactions between humans and the natural world. It requires an understanding of the dynamics of climatology, hydrology, biogeography, geology and geomorphology, as well as the ways in which human societies conceptualize the environment.

‘Environment refers to the sum total of conditions which surrounded man at a given point in space and time.’[C.C.Park,1980]

Environmental studies is the interdisciplinary academic field which systematically studies human interaction with the environment in the interests of solving complex problems.It is a broad field of study that includes also the natural environment,built environment and the sets of relationship between them.There are different principles of Environmental Geography.....

- 1.Environmental System or ecosystem is the fundamental ecological unit for the study of the Environmental Geography.
- 2.The Biospheric ecosystem is governed by discernible processes.
- 3.There is continuous creation,maintenance,destruction and recreation of surface materials of the earth.
- 4.Physical and biological processes operate according to the law of uniformitarianism.
- 5.Natural environmental system is Governed by homeostatic mechanism.
- 6.There is reciprocal relationship between abiotic and biotic components of the natural environmental system.

7.The energy flow and circulates of nutrients in the biospheric ecosystem help in the sustenance of life on the planet earth.

DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY:

An approach is a way of getting closer.The study of relationships between man and environment has always been,in one way or another,a focal theme in Environmental Geography.But the facets of man -environment relationship change through time with the development of human society and the dimension of environment.

The man -environment relationships,thus,can be perceived and evaluated in a variety of ways and approaches.

1.ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISTIC APPROACH:

This approach is based on the basic tenet of 'earth made man'and pays more attention on the complex control of physical environment on man and his activities.In fact according to deterministic activities of man-environment relationships man is subordinate to natural environment in all aspects of human life viz ,physical,social,economic,political,ethical,aesthetic etc.not only depend but are dominantly controlled by physical environment.

Though this deterministic approach blossomed in the writings of E.C.Semple(1910)in the second decade of the 20th century but its seeds were already sown in the second half of the nineteenth century.In fact the publication of 'The Origin Of Species 'of Charles Darwin in 1859 laid the foundation stone of the concept of environmental influences on man and other organisms.

The concept of environmentalism culminated in 1910 when American Geographer E.C.Semple published her book 'Influences of Geographic Environment'wherein she opined that 'man is product of the earth's surface .This means nt merely that he is a child of the earth,dust of

her dust, but the earth has mothered him, fed him, set him tasks, directed the thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, given him problems of irrigation and navigation and at the same time whispered hints for their solutions.

2. POSSIBILISTIC APPROACH:

Possibilistic approach to the study of man-environment relationship emerged through the criticism of environmental determinism and overtone of teleological approach. Right from the inception of the school of environmental determinism there was a dissenting voice raised by those who believed that 'no doubt physical environment influences man and his activities but there is ample scope for man to change the environment so much so that it becomes suitable for man and his society.'

This concept of possibilism was founded by Febre who was remarked, 'man is a geographic agent and not the least. He everywhere contributes his share towards investing the physiognomy of the earth with those 'changing expressions' which are the special charge of Geography to study.'

Two French Geographers, Vidal de la Blache and Jean Bruhnes and American geographers Isiah Bowman and Carl Sauer founded the school of possibilism which is based on the philosophy of possibilism in nature at every stage in a given space and time as remarked by Febvre 'There are no necessities, but everywhere possibilities and man as a master of these possibilities is the judge of their use.'

ECONOMICAL DETERMINISTIC APPROACH:

This approach is based on the basic ideology of the man's mastery over environment and continued economic and industrial expansion through the application of modern technologies.

Economic Determinism is based on two fallacious assumptions of

1. positive correlation between population of a given region and level of economic development and activity in that region, and

2. The interactions of people, resources and society being governed by universal economic principles.

This approach believes in man's ability to solve environmental problems arising out of continued economic growth and industrial expansion. It may be pointed out that this concept led to rapacious exploitation of natural resources in the western developed countries and thus created most of the environmental and ecological problems of global dimensions.

GEOGRAPHICAL APPROACH:

The Geographic approach refers to using geographical science supported by GIS as a framework for understanding our world and applying geographical knowledge to solve problems and guiding human behavior. Understanding of world Geography is the science of our earth, describing the physical and cultural patterns and processes of our planet. This science provides humans with awareness of what's going on, predictions of what may happen, and systematic information for planning and decision making. Geography helps us better understand various spatial phenomena and their interrelationships, for example the relationship between land use change, flooding, biodiversity, etc. These understandings are helping society become more aware of the interrelatedness of our world and how our cumulative behavior is affecting the evolution of the planet.

ECOLOGICAL APPROACH:

Ecological approach to the study of man-environment relationships is based on the basic principles of ecology which is the study of mutual interactions between organisms and physical environment on the one hand and interactions among the organisms on the other hand in a given ecosystem. Thus, man is considered as an integral part of environment.

The school recognizes man, being most skilled and intelligent, as the leader of all biota of the earth. This approach further lays emphasis on wise and restrained use of natural resources, application of appropriate environmental management programmes, policies and strategies keeping in view the ecological principles so that already depleted natural resources are replenished, degraded environment is set right and ecological balance is maintained.