DETERMINISM IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

Introduction

In the history of geographical thinking, human – nature dialogue has been studied and analyzed from a number of different perspectives and views. The first amongst these approaches to deliberate on the human-nature relationship was determinism. In the words of Platt (1948) determinism, refers to the idea that everything in human life is caused inevitably by previous events or conditions. The primary initial source of determinists for an explanation was the physical environment, and the theoretical order was centered on the belief that the human activity was controlled by the parameters of the environment which was their habitat. Determinism is one of the most important philosophies, which continued in one form or other till World War II. In the context of this paradigm, it is believed that due to the difference in the natural environment, the variations in human behaviour in different parts of the world can be described. The spirit of deterministic ideology is that the level of development of history, culture, lifestyle and social group or nation is solely governed by the physical components of the environment at any scale.

Determinists generally consider humans as a passive agent on whom physical factors are working continuously and thus determine their approach and decision-making process. In short, the determinists believe that most human activities can be explained as a response to the natural environment.

The Path of Determinism in Geography

In the discipline of geography, the paradigm of environmentalism had stirred considerable debate in the emerging field of geography. In this discipline, the terms 'environmentalism' and 'determinism' have often been used as synonyms with the simple definition that the natural environment is responsible for all human actions. Here we are not going into the debate that Environmentalism and determinism are not identical rather we will emphasize on the fact that this paradigm holds a special place in geographical thinking. In the words of Beck (1985) *environmental determinism was at the center of one of the longest debates in the istory of the social science of geography*. Moreover, it provided geography the definition that it is the study of man-environment relationships. In spite of years of debate over the issue, there has yet to be any

clearly defined disposition of the matter. Rather, it was an idea that stirred, eventually dispatched by the majority that felt it unworthy of further discourse. In spite of that ruling, the theory has reemerged periodically to bother scholars and the public alike. The fact that it continues to be revived among various writers, scholars, and others is cause for consideration. Rather a considerable work has been done in recent years on this perennial theme of man and the environment and it leaves little doubt that though some have pronounced environmentalism as dead as the dodo, it may prove to be, as Spate in his article *Quantity and Quality in Geography* published in the Annals of the American Geographers in 1960, has affirmed, an "*Immortal bird, not born for death*."

Environmental determinism was geography's entry into modern science (Peet, 1985). The biological roots of geography enabled it to serve as a highly significant component of legitimation theory in the naturalism fashionable in the post-Darwin period when science rather than religion legitimated social actions. Fulfilling this ideological function together with providing associated practical skills (like exploration, inventory, mapping, and boundary drawing) made geography a modern, mass reproduced, science. Determinism as an approach attempted to explain the imperial events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century capitalism in a scientific way; thus solidifying geography's position in sciences as an analytical science. To understand determinism and why it became an ideological pariah in human geography, it is imperative to consider its historical context.

In the context of the effect of natural conditions, the first attempt was made by Greek and Roman scholars explaining the physical characteristics and character traits of different people and their culture. At that time this effort was not contained only among geographers rather included scholars from different fields like the doctor **Hippocrates**, philosopher **Aristotle**, and Historians **Thucydides, Polybius,** and **Herodotus**. In the Greco-Roman era, regional studies were closely tied with the study of history; Thucydides and Polybius saw Athens's natural conditions and geographical position as factors for its greatness. For example, **Aristotle** explained the difference between Northern Europe and Asian people in the context of climate causes, while explaining the greatness and greatness of Rome, while mentioning similar incidents of **Strabo**. Strabo argued that the cold weather in Europe was the reason for their bravery. Aristotle thought that people living in hot weather in Asia were wise but there was a

lack of soul and therefore time to time subjected to slavery. Because humans often consider their home as the best place, it is not surprising that Aristotle believed that the best combination of all possible worlds was in the centre of space, Greece (Glacon, 1967). Aristotle strongly advocated the progress of some countries is the result of their favorable environmental conditions.

In the Middle Ages, **Montesquieu** explained that in cold weather people are less physically strong, more courageous, clear, less susceptible and less cunning than those in hot weather. He quotes that people in hot weather are terrible, weak in body, dull and inactive. Deterministic approach dominated the writings of Arab scholars. They divided the world into seven terrestrial zones on the basis of climate and highlighted the physical and cultural characteristics of the castes and castes of these regions. **Al-Baruni, Al-Masudi, Ibn- Hawkal**, **Al-Idrisi** and **Ibn Khaldun** attempted to correlate the environment with human activities and living conditions within the conceptual domain of determinism.

In the eighteenth century, historian **George Tatham**, also explained the differences among the people, in relation to the differences between the countries in which they lived. **Kant** was also a determinant who had said that people of New-Holland (East Indies) kept half-closed eyes and till they did not touch their back, they would not see their head at any distance without bending. **Thomas Malthus** was a scientific determinant (1766-1834) he not only emphasized the effect of different environments but also emphasized the boundaries that were imposed on social milieu because of these different environments.

Deterministic reasoning continued in the 19th century when geography itself was related to other sciences. **Carl Ritter**, a German geographer adopted an anti-human approach and laid the philosophical base of determinism in geography. Ritter tried to make a difference in the physical constitution of the body, body, and health of men living in the different physical environment. Many of his students considered geography as "*a study of the relationship between people's density and the nature of their land*". Many geographers of their school had declared that their main task was to identify the influence of physical cultural geographical conditions and the political fortunes of residents of any area in both East and present. **Alexander von Humboldt**, one of the founders of 'Modern Geography' and a contemporary of Ritter, also said that the life of the residents of a hill country is different from those in the plains.

In the latter part of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century, the scientific environment was dominated by the views of **Darwin** and the acceptance of Newton's cause and effect relations. The origins of scientific determinism are in the work of Charles Darwin, whose original book *The Origin of Species* (1859) influenced many geographers. The influence of evolutionary biology on the development of modern geographic thought is now widely accepted. Stoddart (1966) argues that Darwin's biology played the crucial role in establishing the human's place in nature, making possible the very development of geography as a science. The organismic analogy overcame the methodological problems inherent in the study of human-environment relations, the dualism between natural and human phenomena (Stoddart 1967).

At the end of the 20th century, in American geography, the prevalent view that wellfitted into the intellectual environment was the doctrine of determinism. Most of these were influenced by Darwin's ideas which were further developed by **William Morris Davis** during the cycle of erosion model. The primary concern was with documenting the control or influence of the environment on human society.

Friedrich Ratzel, the founder of 'new' determinism, supplemented the 'classical' geographical determinism with the elements of 'Social Darwinism' and developed the state's theory as an organism. He believed in the existence of a qualification and saw the 'man' as the end product of development - a development which was natural selection of type according to the ability to adjust itself to the physical environment of the environment. He along with his disciple **Ellen Churchill Semple** became the most vocal expression of the deterministic approach in geography. Semple in her book *Influences of Geographical Environment (1911)* writes**:** *Man is a product of the surface of the Earth*; this book had a widespread, long-lasting use in geographic education (Wright 1966). She dominated the environmentalist period of the discipline in the early twentieth century (Hartshorne 1939) and "trained a large proportion of those who became leaders of the profession during the period between the two World Wars" (James, Bladen and Karan 1983). Her essential scientific position was as follows: '*in every problem of history, there are two main factors, variously stated as heredity and environment, man and his geographic conditions, the internal forces of race and the external forces of habitat. Now the geographic element in the long history of human development has been operating strongly and operating persistently. Herein lies it's importance. It is a stable force. It never sleeps. This natural environment, this physical basis of history, is for all intents and purposes*

immutable in comparison with the other factor in the problem-shifting, plastic, progressive, retrogressive man' (Semple 1911).

Her methodological statement cannot be questioned as at one time she points out that the influence of climate on man both as a direct and indirect effect cannot be questioned. She further elaborates that man was a passive subject who bears direct environmental influence at early stages of development. As they became more active, the indirect influences that mold's his mind and character through the medium of his economic and social life became more important. Through her writings, she explained national superiority in the new terms of natural "science," by providing an environmental version of "scientific racism" (Peet, 1985).

The doctrine was further established by **Ellsworth Huntington** and **Griffith Taylor.** Huntington in his book *'The Principles of Human Geography'* (1945) and articles on climate and civilization demonstrated man's preference for ethnic-type structures and environmentalist explanations. However, he repeatedly repeated the importance of a genetic constitution and threw his weight behind various genetic enterprises (Spate, 1968). He took the most decisive step since the time of Hippocrates and decided to make some results in the thinking of environmental causes.

Taylor (1880-1963) was more cautious in relating man and environment. He believed that the environment has set the limits of human development. Their determinism was compared to the traffic control system, which set the rate, but did not give the direction of progress, which came to be known as *Neo-determinism* or *Stop and Go Determinism*. He states that man is able to speed, slow or stop the speed of any country's (regional) development. But he should not be, if he is intelligent, departing from the instructions according to the natural environment. He (man) is like a traffic controller in a big city, which changes the rate but does not give the direction of progress.