

CRITICAL STUDY ON RELATION BETWEEN MAN AND ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT :

Society and environment are closely related, and environment is the Chief determining factor of sociocultural transformation. Social -ecological study is essential to understand cultural disequilibrium and environmental threat as well as to implement any community development project. Social evolution takes place in a particular environment. So, without ecological analysis, formulation of community development project is impossible.

KEYWORDS : society , environment , dynamic , necessary , ecological

RELATION BETWEEN MAN AND ENVIRONMENT:

The role of environment as well as ecological background is very significant in understanding human society and culture from all possible angles. Every community adapts differently in response to its unique ecological background. Man is the only species, who can survive in any region of the world because of his biological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. It is fact that social transformation takes place in any particular environment. Society evolves under the impetus of increased technological control over nature. Social evolution has taken place from the beginning of prehistoric culture and it is still continuing. It has also taken place from primitive society to rural society to urban society to industrial society to post-industrial society.

There is relation between man and environment and in this aspect it is necessary to give importance on 'homeostasis'. 'Homeostasis' is a dynamic balance that keeps us alive, and people must maintain social equilibrium by maintaining dynamic working balance in any environment. Environmental changes take place and people must maintain balance from bio-social or bio-cultural point of views.

Homeostasis also indicates balanced man-environment relation. Rappaport's (1968) form of cultural ecology is the depiction of man environment relation as being in a state of balance, maintained by ritual cycles that rectifies imbalances in the system (Homeostasis).

Rappaport (1968) demonstrates that this ritual cycle of the 'Tsembaga' of New guinea plays a role in regulating their relationship with their natural environment. This is of course mutual and symbolic relationship between man and environment.

Environment is our habitation. Our pattern of subsistence is completely depending upon the environment. Variation of environmental background means variation of habits, subsistence pattern and our ways of living. Every society has access to natural resources – land, water, forest, plants, animals, minerals and at the same time, all societies have customs, specifying how people gain access to natural resources.

Bookchin (1964) has pointed out that it is impossible to achieve a harmonization of man and nature without creating a human community that lives in a lasting balance with its natural environment. It is fact that human economic activities, food habit, dress pattern, material culture, customs, tradition, religious beliefs, and disease pattern are influenced by the environment as well as ecological background.

The environment provides our home – where we live, work, play, travel and spend our lives. In most of the general case, the planet earth provides the home for our species. The bio-physical environment serves many essential functions for human populations, as it does for all other species (Daily, 1997).

Man has got success in exploiting the nature. Early men have experienced a nomadic life. It was a compulsion to them. Their open habitats were usually located at broad river valleys – in terraces where plenty of natural resources (plants and animals) and raw materials for making tools were available. About 10,000 years ago all groups of human beings used to lead their life-style by hunting and gathering. The Omnivore people adjusted in all environments by eating everything that was edible. So, it is fact that environmental factors play dominant role to maintain and to control human society and culture.

Ecological analysis is essential in understanding human behaviour as a whole. In this perspective, the functional role of the environment must be considered. Environmental resources are necessary for life, ranging from air to water, food to materials needed for shelter, transportation and the vast range of economic goods, we produce. It is also true that human produce variety of waste products and the environment must serve as a 'sink' or 'Waste repository' for these wastes, either absorbing or recycling them into useful or at least harmless substances (as when trees absorb CO₂ and return O₂ to the air). It is well known that environment is to provide 'living space' or habitat for human populations.

Hunting gathering life is the oldest and most basic type of human adaptation. Here environment and natural resources play the role to form several elements of human social organization, say for example, sexual division of labour, food-Sharing, camp as the centre of daily activity and the place where food-sharing takes place. So, in every step of life, environment has strong influence. It is interesting to study pastoral mode of adaptation. Pastoralism is usually an adaptation to heavy grasslands, mountains, deserts, or other regions. Pastoral societies are seasonally nomadic, moving with their herds over large territories in response to the annual weather cycle. F. Barth (1960) has studied that the Basseri's pastoral way of life is based on a regular, migratory exploitation of the grazing lands within their territory, which measures about 15000 square miles in all. These are clearly indicating environmental determination of socio-cultural lifestyle.

Many New Guinea tribes organize 'Pig festival'. They raise pigs and eat pigs. The pigs are also sacrificed to ancestor spirits and their flesh is ritually consumed by those people, involved in the crisis. These pig festivals function to keep pig populations from becoming so large as to put a strain on agricultural land, and ensure that everyone gets some high-quality animal protein to eat from time to time (Haviland, 1970). Here, a balance between man and land as well as animals and rituals are perfectly maintained.

It is true that the egalitarian band was a basic form of human social life for most of our history. Environment determined this type of subsistence pattern. According to Cohen's typology, the three adaptive strategies in nonindustrial societies, based on food production are 'horticulture', 'agriculture' and 'pastoralism'. Horticulture is cultivation that makes intensive use of none of the factors of production: land, labour, capital and machinery. Horticulturalists use simple tools such as hoes, and digging sticks to grow their crops (Cohen, 1974).

Agriculture is an important adaptive strategy to earn livelihood to survive. It requires much more labour, and it uses land continuously. Terrace cultivation is another technique of agriculture. The Ifugao of Philippines practise terrace cultivation and they are famous for their irrigated and terraced fields. Their homeland has small valleys, separated by steep hillsides. Due to dense population, people need to farm the hills. If they simply plant on the steep hill sides, fertile soil and crops will be washed away during the rainy season. To prevent this, the Ifugao cut into the hillside and build stage after stage of terraced fields rising above the valley floor. Springs located above the terraces supply their irrigation waters. The labour necessary to build and maintain a system of terraces is great (Kattak, 2009). Here economic and sociocultural activities are closely related to environment, and the Ifugao's have their own adapting skill to earn livelihood.

Pastoralism is another environment based socioeconomic lifestyle and it is also known as 'herding'. In this adaptive strategy, 'nomadism' and 'transhumance' are involved. Pastoralists may be nomadic or transhumant, but they do not typically live off their herds alone. They either trade or cultivate (Kottak, 2009). The relationship between man and environment is the central concept of social ecological analysis. Here adaptation plays the key roles. In every aspect, people must adjust with their environment. The hunter- gatherers hunt and collect food.

from the forest. The pastoralists must take care their animals to get milk, meat and so on. The cultivators must cultivate to produce crop. The fishermen must catch fish for them livelihood. So, environment regulates the economy and ecology, and economy are very close to each other. We observe ecological impact on every aspect

of human beings, which includes food-habit, economy, settlement-pattern, customs, rituals, disease pattern, fertility, mortality and so on. Actually, there is a close relation between ecology, economy and demography.

Kimbal Young (1946) has pointed out that environment may be of two types, 'Geographical environment' and 'socio-cultural environment'. In social ecological analysis, both environments must be considered. 'Geographical environment' is also known as 'natural environment' or 'physical environment', which includes surface of the earth, land, water, mountain, natural resources, plants, animals and other climatic factors. On the other hand, man has created 'socio-cultural environment' and it is also known as manmade environment. Both natural environment and socio-cultural environment interact with each other, and this type of interaction always influences human society and culture. That is why, social-ecological style is essential for overall understanding of any community. We know that a society may be tribal or rural or urban or industrial or post-industrial, but in every case, people must adjust with their environment to survive.

CONCLUSION :

Man – environmental relationship is closely related to human adaptive skill or adaptive strategies. These strategies vary because of the variation of environmental factors. We observe a variety of human adaptive strategies, associated with environmental factors and socioeconomic system, varies from hunting gathering to herding to farming. Yehudi Cohen (1974) used the term adaptive strategy to describe the relation between society and economic production. According to Cohen, the most important reason for similarities between two or more unrelated societies are their similar adaptive strategy. Cohen (1974) has introduced a typology of societies, based on correlations between their economic activities and social features. His typology consists of five (5) adaptive strategies, namely foraging (hunting gathering), pastoralism, horticulture, agriculture and industrialism. The Jarawa and the Sentinalese of the Andaman islands still practise hunting gathering to earn their livelihood.

Some of the best-known recent foragers are the Australian aborigines and they live on their island continent for more than 50,000 years without developing food production. The Sentinalese and some other tribes of Andaman islands do not know food production or cultivation. The Eskimos or Inuit of Alaska and Canada are the famous hunters, and now they use modern technology, including rifles and snowmobiles in their subsistence activities (Pelto, 1973).

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