FOUNDERS OF MODERN GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT :

CARL RITTER

COMPILED BY

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Carl Ritter, (born Aug. 7, 1779) German geographer, one of the contemporaries of alexander von humboldt and a scholar of diversified interests. He is also known as one of the founders of modern geographical thought. He was a dedicated Fieldworker and believed in emperical research. Moreover, Ritter was teleologist and had a strong belief in God and was not an agnostic like Humboldt.

Viewing geography as an empirical science, he maintained that its methodology required proceeding from one observation to the next, not from opinion or hypothesis to observation. Though he was convinced that there were laws of geography, he appeared to attach no particular importance to establishing them clearly. He stressed, instead, the importance of utilizing all the sciences to delineate the nature of geography, which was, in his view, unique.

Ritter had a vision of an ordered and harmonious universe. As a teacher, he made it clear to his pupils how God's plan was revealed in the harmony of man and nature.

After getting his early education in a school at Schnepfenthal near Gotha through non-formal methods, he was taught by G. Salzamann and Guts Muths. At the university level, he opted for greek and latin and read history and geography widely.. He reached Switzerland and Italy to make on the modern spot study of their physical and cultural landscapes. It was in 1807 that ritter met humboldt for the first time. He founded the Berlin Geographical Society. He served the department of geography of berlin university for 39 years. In 1859, he breathed his last – the year in which humboldtalso expired and Darwin published his *origin of species*.

Ritter, in his class lectures, emphasized the point that geography is not a dry Gazetteer of names of places, rivers, mountains and trade routes. It is a subject of great importance which deals with man – nature

interrelationship. He also developed the concept of ‘ unity in diversity’. Ritter was chiefly concerned with studies of human geography.

Ritter declared geography to be ‘Erdkunde' or an earth science, which deals with local conditions and embraces the attributes of place with respect to topical, formal and material characteristics. The first attribute was topographical which deals with natural divisions of the earth surface. The second included the distribution and movement of water, sea atmosphere and the base of human life. The material conditions were described as the geographical aspect of natural history.

As stated above, the scientific stance of Ritter was teleological (greek teleos meaning purpose). Teleology seeks to understand events in relation to their underlying purposes. Teleological explanations are therefore often regarded as the opposite of mechanical explanations, where the phenomena and observations are understood as outcomes of prime causes such as the ‘ laws of nature'. In his first volume of kosmos, humboldt speaks of 'Ritter's great and inspired work'. He wrote of his Erdkunde, 'is to procced from observation to observation, not from hypothesis to observation'. Ritter regarded the earth as a whole as an organism and the continents as individuals or as organs. Ritter, a teleologist, was the first who made a major effort in modern times to divide the earth surface on universal consideration. Though his teleological approach was rejected as it was not scientific.

Principle of unity in diversity

The fundamental principle evolved by Ritter was ‘unity in diversity’. According to him, there is a fundamental unity in the biotic and abiotic components of habitat in which man sculptures his cultural environment. In such an approach, all the physical and cultural components of environment are taken into consideration and their interrelationship is established in understanding the geography of an areal unit. This is a regional approach. Unity in diversity means that every naturally bounded area is a unity in respect of climate, production, culture, population and history. Ritter makes few deterministic observations; he seldom does more than repeat what humboldt had already written and gives the same synthetical accounts of continents.

Ritter's method is said to be deductive because it deduces new conclusions from fundamental assumptions or from truths established by other methods. So far there is little to distinguish Ritter’s ideas from Humboldt’s and in the spatial arrangements of terrestrial phenomena, there is marked similarity between the two colleagues.

Ritter introduced many stimulating ideas. He stressed the idea of land and water hemispheres, the distinction between the rates of heating and cooling of land and water, the difference between the northern and southern Hemispheres in their proportion of land and water. He averred that there were differences between the continents. Africa had relatively short and the most regular of all coastlines and its interior had least contact with the sea, whereas Asia was better provided with sea inlets, but the interior had little marine contact and Europe was the most varied of all, with an ease of approach along its shoreline of comparatively great length. He identified each continents with a different race, having different colour. This overgeneralization created much obscurity in the world of geography. About the universal and regional laws in geography his opinion was that ‘the earth itself must be asked for its laws'. In brief, Ritter’s theme was that the physical environment was capable of determining the course of human development. His ideas were strengthened by the publication of Darwin’s *origin of species* in 1859 with its emphasis on the close relationships of organism and their habitat.

Ritter emphasized repeatedly that he was teaching a new scientific geography, in contrast to the traditional ‘lifeless summary of facts about countries and cities, mingled with all sorts of scientific incongruities'. Ritter saw all of his studies of ‘the earthband man as revealing more and more of God’splan.

Erdkunde

Ritter’s monumental work is entitled as Erdkunde. Erdkunde is a comprehensive german word which stands for scuence of the earth in relation to nature and history. Ritter remarks that the earth and its inhabitants stand in the closest reciprocal relations and one cannot be truly presented in all its relationships without the other. Hence, history and

geography must always remain inseparable. Land influences the inhabitants and in turn the inhabitants transform the landscape.

The first two volumes of the erdkunde were intended to be followed by a study of history. Between 1817 and 1859 , he completed 19 volumes of Erdkunde but these volumes cover only Africa and parts of Asia.

The most logical development of Ritter's work is to be found in the writings of the geographers who studied the interaction of the various phenomena- relief, climate, vegetation and man in a particular area.

The major geographical concepts of Ritter may be summed up as follows:

1. Ritter conceived geography as an empirical science rather than one based on deduction from rational principles.
2. There is a coherence in the spatial arrangements of terrestrial phenomena. Areal phenomena are so interrelated as to give rise to the uniqueness of the areas as individual units.
3. Boundary lines, whether wet or dry, were instruments for understanding the real purpose of geography which is understanding the content of areas.
4. According to Ritter, geography was concerned with objects on the earth as they exist together in an area.
5. He believed that the earth was an organism made, even in its smallest details, which divine intent, to fit the needs of man to perfection.

REFERENCE

Majid Hussain, Evolution of Geographical Thought.

Sudeepta adhikari, Fundamentals of Geographical Thought.