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RADICALISM IN GEOGRAPHY

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The radical approach in geography developed in 1970s as a reaction to ‘quantitative revolution’ and positivism which tried to make geography as a spatial science, with great emphasis on locational analysis. It began as a critique within the contemporary liberal capitalistic society but later coalesced around a belief in the power of Marxian analysis. According to radicalists, inequality is inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Redistribution of income through taxation policies will not solve the problems of poverty, according to Peet, alternative, environment designs, with removal of central bureaucracies and their replacement by anarchistic models of community control are needed, and geographers should work towards their creation.

The followers of radical approach in geography mainly concentrated on the issues of great social relevance like, inequality, racism, sexism, crime, delinquency, discrimination against blacks and non-whites, females, exploitation of juveniles and environment resources and the opposition of the Vietnam war in U.S.A. Events of the late 1960s, such as the burning of large cities in the western world, student-unrest, worker-uprising in Paris in 1968, massive anti-Vietnam war protest actions and radical cultural reformation exposed the social and political irrelevance of geography as a spatial science and proved the hollowness of locational analysis.

It was in this background that the radicalized students and junior faculty members challenged the traditional geography (geography as spatial science) and they started publishing articles with more ‘socially relevant’ geographic topics in the professional journals. In 1969, Antipode—a Radical Journal of Geography was founded at the Clark University in Worcester (Massachusetts), specifically to publish the research papers of the younger geographers with a revolutionary leaning.

The young radical geographers published papers in Antipode dealing with urban poverty, discrimination against women, coloured people and minority groups, unequal access to social amenities, crimes, deprivation, permissiveness and sexism. They also published articles on underdevelopment, poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment and resource misuse in the Third World countries. Thus, the radicalists took the side of the oppressed, advocating their causes and pressing for fundamental social change. In brief, the radical geography was a quest for social relevance of the discipline geography at a time of contradiction and crises in the capitalistic society of the west.

The origin of the radical geography movement can be traced to the in late 1960s, especially in the U.S.A. with three contemporary political issues:

- The Vietnam war,
- Civil rights (especially of the American blacks), and
- The pervasive poverty and inequality suffered by the residents of urban ghettos and deprived rural areas all of which were generating increased social unrest and tension.

In the words of Peet (1977), radical geography developed largely as a negative reaction to the established discipline (spatial science). The radical geographers introduced the study of topics such as poverty, hunger, health, and crime to human geographers, who had previously very largely ignored them.

The salient features and objectives of radical geography were:

- To expose the issues of inequality, deprivation, discrimination, health, exploitation, crime and environmental degradation in the capitalist countries.
- To highlight the weaknesses of the positivism and quantitative revolution in geography which emphasized on geography as a 'spatial science' with a thrust on locational analysis.
- To bring a cultural revolution to eradicate permissiveness, sexism and discrimination against females.
- To remove regional inequalities.
- Radicalists opposed political centralization and economic concentration. Contrary to multinationals, they favoured small- scale self sufficient social units, living in greater harmony with their natural surroundings.
- They were against imperialism, nationalism, national chauvinism and racism.
- They opposed the idea of the superiority of the white and the west.
- According to radicalists the man and environment relationship may be understood through history. In other words, the mode of production in any society determines the economic relation among its people.
- One of the objectives of the radicalists was to explain not only what is happening but also to prescribe revolutionary changes and solution to the social problems.
- 10.To develop a more just, equal, tension free, peaceful and enjoyable society.

Notwithstanding their political diversity or claims for openness and inclusion, radical or critical geographies constitute bounded political projects and, sometimes, even Utopian visions, albeit often ensconced in vague pronouncements. But critiques of existing social orders abound at the expense of propositions for an alternative, improved society. If radical or critical geographies are to have a wider social impact, then a set of political goals should be developed around which radical or critical geographers can rally and become

organized. A political project, touching on strategies and aims, is offered to promote a dialogue on the meaning and content of radical geographies.

The meaning of radical geography is typically taken for granted and hardly ever discussed explicitly. **A recent exception has emerged in the debate over the status and trajectory of the journal Antipode.** In that exchange, it became clear that clarifying the term “radical” is crucial to being able even to discuss the issue. The problem seems similar to understanding what “the left” means as a political perspective and practice. The recent preference for critical over radical geography reflect political developments outside academic contexts, as well as the process of institutionalization of radical geographers in universities. In any case, there is, just as in the case of socialism or the left, hardly any agreement over the substance of radicality, or, now, criticality. This is due to the historically diverse approaches and social movements that gave rise to radical perspectives, including within radical geography (e.g., Peet, 1977). Any sort of homogeneity or even convergence among these approaches might be illusory, but there are substantive commonalities founded on concerns for social justice, whose meaning is also debated.

There may therefore be advantages to avoiding any programmatic formulation of an approach, but assuming that people already know what one means by radical geography or the left or social justice creates unhelpful ambiguities, especially for those who are not familiar with historical backgrounds and evolving theoretical frameworks

Yet empowering sexists, neo-nazis, and businesses is not usually regarded as the sort of project that should be given priority. There clearly are boundaries to radical geography, however shifting and despite a diverse array of political commitments and social theories. This is highly appropriate, if the aims are to contribute to social justice or improve the quality of life for all (neutrality is a fig leaf for supporting the status quo). But such boundaries also imply political ends, which largely remain tacit and underdeveloped. Seldom are geographers clear about what exactly they want to accomplish when employing a radical approach. Instead, writings are interspersed with vague allusions to activism, emancipation, empowerment, political engagement, progress, relevance, resistance, social change, among other such prescriptions. This curious ambiguity about aims is not reflected in the much more clearly defined boundaries, however implicit, of scope and subjects of study.

Not surprisingly, there continues to be dissatisfaction with conceptualizations and practices of radical geography (Blomley, 1994; Wakefield, 2007). Devoting much effort to produce studies that promote at best a vague political project is not exactly an inspiring endeavour and it hardly helps to connect academic

practices to social struggles. It is difficult to place one's research in context and carry out a project if the political ends remain undefined. In other words, the social value of academic interventions cannot be evaluated, appropriate assessment criteria cannot be formulated, and dialogue about evaluative criteria cannot be established on the basis of notions such as "progress" or "emancipation", since the end point of progress or the oppressive process (or oppressor) are left to the imagination.

Meanings of radical geography

This leaves the issue of meaning unresolved, but there are descriptions and prescriptions about radical geography, however insufficient, dispersed in the writings of many of those who promote a radical geography (see, for instance, Harvey, 2000). Radical geography can be regarded as a general approach that seeks to analyze root causes of social phenomena (rather than physical ones), question the status quo, and contribute to "social change" (Mitchell, 2004: 29), whose content tends to be undefined and even though societies change constantly anyway. Rarely, some even suggest socialism as the aim, but then what constitutes socialism is not discussed. The issue is then easily monopolized, by default, by the not very critical geographers studying what transpired in the Soviet bloc.

According to Don Mitchell, a radical geography also requires commitment to a context-specific truth, which I think weakens his argument for what I rather think in terms of taking empirical evidence seriously, just as in the physical sciences. Fuller and Kitchin, who do not share Mitchell's enthusiasm for truth and Tightness and who confuse praxis with practice, describe "critical" geography as a group of approaches that shares "a commitment to: expose the socio-spatial processes that (re)produce inequalities between people and places; challenge and change [sic?] those inequalities; and bridge the divide between theorization and praxis .

Smith outlines a more concrete description of the aims of critical geography: "Critical geography" provides a broad group identity for scholars and activists committed to a radical restructuring of the societies we live in: capitalism, heteronormativity, patriarchy, imperialism, racism and many other forms of oppression represent the interlaced targets of this geographical critique.

However, the desired outcome of critical geography remains ambiguous because it is based on opposition to existing social arrangements, rather than on propositions for a different social system. There is, additionally, no attempt to link geographical critique with actions or strategies that contribute to the radical restructuring of the societies in which we live. Kathryn Mitchell (2006) provides us with some clues about such linkage, in terms of becoming public intellectuals, but this does little to overcome the problem of ambiguities in

political aims and unformulated ideas about the sort of social system, or even aspects thereof, for which one might want to struggle.

Some of the ingredients necessary to conceiving of future alternatives and aligning academic practices with wider social struggles already exist and have even been considered by a minority of human geographers and other social scientists (e.g., Blomley, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 1996). Seeking, describing, and highlighting existing alternative practices will certainly aid in the identification of what sort of society we wish to fight for, but these studies have yet to be brought into a discussion of the aims of radical geography, as will attentiveness to really existing democracies in non-European and extra-statal contexts and the copious works and practices of anarchist scholars and activists, who are summarily ignored by most radical geographers or even excluded from “the left” or “socialism”.

So far, the “real radical geography” that Heynen (2006) advocates is to me the most constructive approach to delineating the substance of radical geography, not only in terms of methods, but also of political ends. It comes closest to outlining a viable connection with social movements by basing radical geography on the issue of human survival in the midst of material inequality. In this manner, the main object of geographers’ interventions is the removal of obstacles to meeting basic material needs.

Fundamental inadequacies of radical geography

Given the above and despite Heynen’s promising contribution, there remain several fundamental problems with radical geography. There are virtually no discussions of political aims regarding, for instance, what kind of society radical geographers want to promote. There is hardly a frank and explicit engagement about the appropriateness of theoretical frameworks used, which is quite a contrast to earlier writings from the 1970s in the journal *Antipode*, for instance.

- Clearly, not all theoretical approaches are radical or critical in the sense that is implicitly meant by most radical or critical geographers. But without addressing this issue, there is difficulty even in establishing the criteria that constitute a radical approach. Consequently, the relationship between theory and practice is woefully underdeveloped. Lack of clarity and discussion (which can contribute to clarity) about political projects and boundaries undermine the prospects for understanding what kinds of perspectives or explanatory frameworks are suitable for what political aims. They also prevent the refinement of what political aims are plausible given existing social conditions, as explained through the theoretical frameworks employed to understand social reality. Opaqueness about such issues muddles priorities and strategies for political engagement (both inside and outside academic settings).

- Analyzing the root causes of or processes behind social phenomena without equally addressing the root causes of or processes behind physical phenomena is akin to pretending that we can explain reality on the basis of the experiences of a single species. As Heynen states, “The material boundaries between life and death do not care how we think about these processes, or even if we believe they exist”. This is precisely why physical geography must be radicalized and integrated into a struggle for social justice and a social system (the general political aims) that needs to be clarified. The subjects of analysis must be expanded and a unified approach must be a priority for a radical geography; otherwise, technocrats will continue to monopolize the content of physical geography and cartography. Arguments for the unification of geographical fields are far from new (Goudie, 1986; Hanson, 1999; Johnston, 1983; Massey, 1999), but, with few exceptions, they have avoided discussing the political aims and ramifications of such a project.
- Some integration is currently being achieved in people-environment geographies (e.g., political ecology, animal geographies), but, as in the case critical and radical geography generally, there is little explicit argumentation over the kind and aims of political engagement (e.g., propositions of alternative futures), even when the issue is raised .
- Regrettably, most research on people-environment relations fails to address physical processes directly, privileging the analysis of social relations (Robbins, 2004). The universe is populated by many more entities than us, and they act on the world independently of and in mutually influencing ways with us. So, being mindful of how ideologies shape our understanding of the rest of the universe, we should also study the rest of the universe and formulate approaches to such a study that enable the integration of our political aims with everyday realities of physical processes.

A dialectical materialism informed by an egalitarian sensitivity could be useful toward developing a unified geography, if not contribute directly to creating a radical physical geography. The latter was resuscitated through the rediscovery of Kropotkin and Reclus, along with Marx’s general writings and fragmentary remarks on nature. Promising steps were being made in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Union of Socialist Geographers, 1983), but little of this kind of work has become widely known or put to practice in academic geography.

Radical geography as Social Welfare

Economists defined social welfare as a sum total of cardinally measurable utilities of different members of the society. An optimum allocation of resources was one which maximized the social welfare in this sense

Pareto was the first to part with this traditional approach to social welfare in two important respects.

First, he rejected notion of cardinal utility and its additive nature and, second, he detached welfare economics from the inter-personal comparisons of utilities.

Pareto's concept of maximum social welfare which is based upon ordinal utility and is also free from value judgments occupies a significant place in modern welfare economics.

Pareto optimum may not be sufficient condition" for attaining maximum social welfare but it is a necessary condition for it. To repeat, Pareto optimum (often called Economic Efficiency) is a position from which it is impos-sible to make anyone better off without making someone worse off by any reallocation of resources or distribution of outputs. Thus, in the Pareto opti-mum position the welfare of any individual of the society cannot be increased without decreasing the welfare of another member. Before explaining the conditions of achieving Pareto optimality, we shall explain Pareto criterion of evaluating changes in social welfare because the concept of Pareto optimality or maximum social welfare is based upon Pareto criterion of welfare.

Pareto Criterion of Social Welfare:

The concept of Pareto optimum or economic efficiency stated above is based on a welfare criterion put forward by V. Pareto. Pareto criterion states that if any reorganization of economic resources does not harm anybody and makes someone better off, it indicates an increase in social welfare. If any reorganization or change makes everybody in a society better off, it will, according to Pareto, undoubtedly mean increase in social welfare.

Pareto criterion can also be explained with the help of Samuelson's utility possibility curve. Utility possibility curve is the locus of the various combinations of utilities obtained by two persons from the consumption of a particular bundle of goods.

Marginal Conditions of Pareto Optimality:

Pareto concluded from his criterion that competition leads the society to an optimum position but he had not given any mathematical proof of it, nor he derived the marginal conditions to be fulfilled for achievement of the optimum position.

These marginal conditions are based on the following important assumptions:

- Each individual has his own ordinal utility function and possesses definite amount of each product and factor.
- Production function of every firm and the state of technology is given and remains constant.
- Goods are perfectly divisible.
- A producer tries to produce a given output with the least-cost combination of factors.
- Every individual wants to maximize his satisfaction.
- Every individual purchases some quantity of all goods.
- All factors of production are perfectly mobile.

Given the above assumptions various marginal conditions (first-order conditions) required for the achievement of Pareto optimum or maximum social welfare are explained below:

The Optimum Distribution of Products among the Consumers: Efficiency in Exchange:

The first condition relates to the optimum distribution of the goods among the different consumers composing a society at a particular point of time. The condition says: “The marginal rate of substitution between any two goods must be the same for every individual who consumes them both.”

The marginal rate of substitution of one good for another so as is the amount of one good necessary to compensate for the loss of a marginal unit of another so as to maintain a constant level of satisfaction. So long as the marginal rate of substitution (MRS) between two goods is not equal for any two consumers, they will enter into an exchange which would increase the satisfaction of both or of one without decreasing the satisfaction of the other.

The Optimum Allocation of Factors: Pareto Efficiency in Production:

The second condition for Pareto optimum requires that the available factors of production should be utilized in the production of products in such a manner that it is impossible to increase the output of open firm without a decrease in the output of another or to increase the output of both the goods by any reallocation of factors of production. This situation would be achieved if the marginal technical rate of substitution between any pair of factors must be the same for any two firms producing two different products and using both the factors to produce the products. But it is worth mentioning that there are several points on the contract curve and each of them represents the optimum allocation of labour and capital as between the two firms. But which one of them is best cannot be said on the basis of Pareto criterion because movement along the contract curve in either direction represents such factor reallocation which increases the output of one and reduces the output of another firm.

Optimum Direction of Production: Efficiency in Product Mix:

This condition relates to the pattern of production. The fulfillment of this condition determines the optimum quantities of different commodities to be produced with the given factor endowments. This condition states that “the marginal rate of substitution between any pair of products for any person consuming both must be the same as the marginal rate of transformation (for the community) between them.” According to this condition, for the attainment of maximum social welfare goods should be produced in accordance with consumer’s preferences.

The Second-Order and Total Conditions of Pareto Optimality:

The marginal or the first order conditions explained above are ‘necessary’ but not sufficient for the attainment of maximum social welfare because the marginal Conditions by themselves do not guarantee maximum welfare.

The marginal conditions can be fulfilled even at the level of minimum welfare. To attain the maximum social welfare position second-order conditions together with the marginal conditions must be satisfied. The second order conditions require that all indifference curves must be convex to the origin and all transformation curves concave to it in the neighbourhood of any portion where marginal conditions are satisfied.

But even the satisfaction of both (first and second order conditions) does not ensure the largest maximum welfare because even when marginal conditions (first and second order) are fulfilled, it may still be possible to move to a position where social welfare is greater. To attain the maximum social welfare, another set of conditions which are called by J.R. Hicks as the ‘total conditions’ must also be satisfied.

The total conditions state, “That if welfare is to be a maximum, it must be impossible to increase welfare by producing a product not otherwise produced or by using a factor not otherwise used.” If it is possible to increase welfare by such activities the optimum position is not determined by marginal conditions alone.

Therefore, welfare will be really maximum if the marginal as well as total conditions are satisfied. But such a social optimum too is not a unique one. It is one of a large number of optima. The whole analysis of conditions of Pareto optimality assumes a given distribution of income.

With a change in the distribution of income Pareto optimality will be achieved with different output-mix of various products and different allocation of various factors among products. Thus, a new optimum will emerge due to redistribution of income and there are no criteria to judge whether the new optimum is better

or worse than the previous social optimum. This can be known only with the help of some value judgments regarding income distribution which has been ruled out by the Pareto criterion.

Perfectly Competitive Equilibrium and Pareto Optimality:

In our above analysis we have explained the various marginal conditions of attaining Pareto optimality or, in other words, optimum allocation of resources. It has been claimed by several economists that perfect competition is an ideal market form which ensures the attainment of Pareto optimality or maximum social welfare as it fulfills all the marginal conditions required for the purpose.

Perfect Competition and Optimal Distribution of Goods or Efficiency in Exchange:

Under perfect competition prices of all goods are given and same for every consumer. It is also assumed that consumers try to maximize their satisfaction subject to their budget constraint.

Perfect Competition and Optimal Allocation of Factors:

The second marginal condition for Pareto optimality relates to the optimal allocation of factors in the production of various goods. This condition requires that for the optimal allocation of factors marginal rate of technical substitution (MRTS) between any two factors, say labour and capital, must be the same in the production of any pair of products.

This condition is also satisfied by perfect competition. For a producer working under perfect competition prices of factors he employs are given and constant and he is in equilibrium (that is, minimizes his cost for a given level of output) at the combination of factors where the given isoquant is tangent to an iso-cost line.

Perfect Competition and Optimum Direction (i.e. Composition) of Production: Allocative Economic Efficiency:

The most important condition for the attainment of Pareto optimum is one which refers to the optimum direction or composition of production. In other words, this condition requires how much amounts of different goods should be produced and resources allocated accordingly.

This refers to the general condition for optimum allocation of resources which has also been called the condition for General Economic Efficiency and General Pareto Optimum. This condition states that marginal rate of substitution between any two commodities for any consumer should be the same as the marginal rate of transformation for the community between these two commodities.

Fundamental Theorem of Welfare Economics and Its Critique:

It has been shown above that perfectly competitive equilibrium is Pareto optimal. This is called fundamental theorem of welfare economics. This is also called the invisible hand theorem. The belief that

competitive market economy provides an efficient means of allocating scarce resources goes back to Adam Smith who argued in his famous book “Wealth of Nations” that individuals who pursue their self-interest, they operating through market promote the welfare of others and welfare of the society as a whole. Thus individual consumers seek to maximize their own satisfaction and producers pursue to maximize their own profits. Even though promoting the interests of the society as a whole is not a part of their intention but they are led by the invisible forces of market system to promote the interest of the society as a whole.

A Critical Evaluation of Pareto Criterion and Pareto Optimality:

Pareto criterion and the concept of Pareto optimality and maximum social welfare based on it occupy a significant place in welfare economics. To judge the efficiency of an economic system, the notion of Pareto optimality has been used.

It has also been used to bring out the gains of trading or exchange of goods between individuals. But even Pareto criterion which rules out comparing those changes in policies which make some worse off has been a subject of controversy and has been criticized on several grounds.

First, it has been alleged that Pareto criterion is not completely free from value judgements. The supporters of Pareto criterion claim that it provides us with an ‘objective’ criterion of efficiency. However, this has been contested.

Against Pareto criterion it has been said that to say that a policy change which makes some better off without others being worse off increases social welfare is itself a value judgement. This is because we recommend such changes which pass Pareto criterion.

- The implication of this assertion will become obvious when the persons who gain as a result of policy change are the rich and those who remain where they were before are poor. Therefore, to say on the basis of Pareto criterion that whenever any policy change which, without harming anyone, benefits some people regardless of whoever they may be, increases social welfare is a value judgement which may not be accepted by all.
- Second, an important limitation of Pareto criterion is that it cannot be applied to judge the social desirability of those policy proposals which benefit some and harm others. Such policy changes are quite rare which do not harm at least some individuals in the society.

- Thus, Pareto criterion is of limited applicability as it cannot be used to pronounce judgements on a majority of policy proposals which involve a conflict of preferences of two individuals.

To evaluate social desirability of those policy changes which benefit some and harm others, we need to make interpersonal comparison of utility which Pareto criterion refuses to do. Thus, “Pareto criterion works by sidestepping the crucial issue of inter-personal comparison and income distribution, that is, by dealing only with cases where no one is harmed so that the problem does not arise”.

The indeterminacy is the consequence of considering an increase in welfare to be unambiguously defined only if an improvement in one individual’s position is not accompanied by a deterioration of the position of another. The indeterminacy can only be removed by further value judgments.”

Above all, a chief drawback of Pareto-optimality analysis is that it accepts the prevailing income distribution and no attempt is made to find an optimal distribution of income, since it is thought that there does not exist any objective, value-free and scientific way of finding optimal distribution of income.

Thus, Pareto optimality analysis remains either silent or biased in favour of status quo on the issue of income distribution. Further, Pareto optimality analysis may lead to recommend the prevailing income distribution where a majority of the population lives on the subsistence level or below the poverty line while a few live a life of affluence. Thus, “Ultimately, the Paretian approach can be considered the welfare economists’ instrument par excellence for the circumvention of the issue of income distribution.”

Further, criticizing Pareto criterion Prof. Amartya Sen has pointed out that the success that the criterion of Pareto optimality has achieved in judging the desirability of a social state or a policy change is very limited. So, according to him, this is not a good and adequate criterion for judging social welfare.

Further, Prof. Sen has criticized Pareto optimality on the basis that it identifies well-being with utility and captures the efficiency aspects only of utility-based accounting. It may be noted that utility is interpreted in two ways, Firstly, it is said to mean ‘happiness’. Secondly, it is interpreted in the sense of ‘desire-fulfillment’. He is of the view that utility does not always reflect well-being. He is of the view that people living a life of great misfortune with little hope and opportunities may get more utility or happiness even from small gains. But that should not be interpreted that there is a significant improvement in their well-being.

The measure of utility in the sense of happiness may not reveal the true picture about the state of his deprivation. He thus writes The hopeless beggar, precarious landless labourers, the dominated housewife, the hardened unemployed or the over-exhausted coolie may all take pleasure in small mercies, and manage

to suppress intense suffering for the necessity of continued survival, but it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach correspondingly small value to the loss of their well-being because of their survival strategy. For an adequate measure of well-being these variables cannot be ignored. “In comparing different economic systems or comparing different ways of organizing a given economy, the possibility that some of these variables might be affected cannot be ignored. Thus, a reorganization that gives everyone more income and leisure might not improve the welfare of the community if at the same time it limits individual freedoms or requires the abandonment of cherished cultural traditions.”

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