

Book Review - 1

Paradigm Shift in Geography

M. H. Qureshi (ed. 2013)

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Not many geographers know that Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, has been publishing a series of geographical books, known as Jamia Millia Islamia Studies. The series contains at least half a dozen books on diverse themes. The volume under review is a part of that series.

The volume under review “Paradigm Shift in Geography” contains 13 papers, presented at a seminar, held on 26th and 28th Nov. 2011, under the auspices of the A. M. Khwaja Chair, presently held by Professor M. H. Qureshi, the editor of the volume. Not all the papers focus on the theme of the seminar: in fact, a majority takes up other themes, not less important, but not quite in consonance with the spirit of the seminar. The book opens with a foreword by the then Vice-Chancellor, Janab Najeeb Jung, followed by a preface by Professor M. H. Qureshi, that acquaints the readers with what one would expect in the book and gives a brief resume of the articles contained in the volume. The text starts with the keynote address of Madaswamy Moni of National Informatics Centre, New Delhi. Emphasizing the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable and inclusive growth, he talks of paradigm shift as seen in the emerging geo-spatial techniques.

Hanuman Singh Yadav’s paper “Global Finance and Capital driven Spaces: A Geographical Explanation” presents an analytical view of the role of capital in the organization of space, a fact often ignored in geographical study. Yadav’s paper offers compelling argument to support his view that “geography has gone through a paradigm shift, both in method and philosophy, in tune with the development of capitalism, as positivism, radicalism and lately postmodernism, but geographical analysis remained devoid of ideology”. This opens a new avenue of debate for evaluating the extent to which capital dictates the character of economic landscape.

B. S. Butola’s “Shifting Paradigm: Shifting Goalposts in Political Geography” runs into 63 pages, occupying almost a fifth of the book- length. Written in a terse, often a stifling style, the paper is insufferably long and chaotically organized. He sets out to explain, at great length, the concept of paradigm, and the divergent views of Thomas Kuhn and Karl Popper, observing that Kuhn himself used the concept of paradigm and paradigm shift in not less than 21 senses, which he enumerates (pp 78 &79 of the volume), crediting Haggett and Chorley, followed by David Harvey for popularizing the concept of paradigm. He gives credit to Friedrich Ratzel, as the originator of the idea of ‘Lebensraum’,

that morphed subsequently into geopolitik of Karl Haushofer. Surprisingly, he thinks that Ratzel was the first to bring humans in the ambit of geographical study, a view not widely shared. In his narrative of paradigm shift, Butola talks of the gradualism of Charles Lyell on one side and the evolution of Charles Darwin on the other. He doesn't stop here, and switches over to the mechanistic and Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm, followed by Copernicus-Galileo paradigm, rather in an inverse order, to arrive at the 'Continental and Plate Tectonics' paradigm. What the latter has to do with paradigm shift in political geography is not clear to this reviewer.

Reverting to Greco-roman idealistic paradigm, and then the views of some French philosophers, Butola compresses in a sentence the contribution of European philosophers, starting from Immanuel Kant, underscoring the names of eight philosophers, including some celebrated composers like Mozart and Bach, Butola drifts in his voyage of paradigm-discovery, encompassing everything that comes his way till he touches the anchoring ground of Michael Foucault before talking of bio-politics, on which he has contributed a paper in 'Human Geography' (see bibliography). He concludes-"Under bio-political regime, the organisms including the human beings and their life processes have become the subject of political power". Butola's narrative of geography, as a discipline, swings from one extreme to the other. He says 'geography as a discipline is different from many other disciplines, particularly from natural and social science

disciplines and humanities', (what remains to be included?). He, self-righteously, like Kabir, reviles both, the sciences on their pontification on metaphysical approach and experimental verification, and social sciences for constructing the narratives and discourses, combining them with borrowed techniques from science.

One should know that concepts and techniques don't descend from heaven, and don't fall in an exclusive domain of one science or the other. Science doesn't grow in isolation, it enriches itself by sharing, adoption, application and propagation. He accuses geographers of blindly importing concepts from various disciplines. Would he like to straitjacket geography in an inflexible frame protecting it from the evil influences of other sciences?

The most damaging and contemptuous remarks that show low esteem for the discipline are in the pen-ultimate paragraph. These read as follows."Geography as a discipline was subjected to two equally dangerous pathologies: implosion due to mindless borrowing from other disciplines, and explosion due to low capacity to digest the imported stuff, resulting into throwing up indigested knowledge articulated into numerous sub-branches of the discipline". Geographers! Beware, you stand the risk of chewing the secondary, thrown-up stuff.

Sarfraz Alam's essay - 'Main Ideological Currents in Indian Geography', well written and sequentially organized, is likely to be a reference material for those who would like to know about ideologically guided research in India. Though, as the author observes in his essay, ideological

debate in geography appeared late on the scene, there is no reason why its late arrival or even its neglect among Indian geographers be lamented. Does ideology really have a place in an objective analysis of a situation? It could have as much of a vitiating impact as an enlightening one. Alam divides the ideological evolution of Indian geography into four phases, viz. period of empirical and regional geography, period of positive and systematic geography, period of relevant geography and period of ideological diversity. Differentiating between conservative, liberal and radical ideologies, Sarfaraz quotes from the writings of Indian geographers, ranging from Rana P. B. Singh to Moonis Raza, Aijazuddin Ahmed and M. H. Qureshi, on the one hand, to A. P. Misra, Swapna Banerjee-Guha and B. K. Choudhary on the other. In conclusion, the author finds that no one ideology pervades in teaching or research in Indian geography, and concludes that research should be conducted by adhering to standard scientific ideals and integrities, and that it should be critical in approach not only to question the existing geographical knowledge but also to expose the hidden agenda of geographical knowledge production. What appears from the essay is that Alam seems to believe in taking up an ideological position for which he seeks support from D. Gregory by quoting his statement - 'Our adoption of one position rather than another is much more convincing if the choice is a conscious one, deriving from a careful appraisal of the alternatives'. One can take a position post-facto following rigorous research analysis, but a pre-conceived ideological position is the mind of a lunatic. The reality, whatever

it implies, does not lie in ideology, it has to be discovered through scientific methods.

Misra and Raju have proceeded with the intention, as the title suggests, of discussing "Colonial Influence on Geographical Studies in India: A Brief Perspective". They think that the leading geography departments of India (Calcutta, Banaras and Aligarh) "which flourished under the colonial regime carried on with the colonial legacy and decided on the nature and trend of geographical studies in India. As these three early departments produced students who spread far and wide in the country and perpetuated the same legacy. This is exactly the reason why Indian geographers have always been seeking or waiting for something to come from the west. This is the singular reason why most of the studies and works done by Indian geographers during the period 1950-90 have revealed the same trend and tendency", a very simplistic explanation indeed. The authors seem to think, as the reviewer understands, that the studies of themes like communal divide, ethnic conflicts and religious and environmental studies, advocated by the western scholars were meant to promote the interest of the capitalist western world. In a large and diverse country like India, one can discover an array of themes and problems, and no one prevents Indian geographers from moving away from the comfort of their armchair research and grapple with problems in the field. But, would they?

Ali Raza Moosvi's "Paradigm Shifts and Expansion of Knowledge: A Preliminary Study of Geography" is a precise and well written review of geography as a university discipline, with a historical perspective. In

his review, Ali has justifiably inserted the contribution of Middle East geographers such as al-Idrisi and Ibn Battuta, though one may question the inclusion of the latter in the rank of geographers. His mention of al-Biruni evokes admiration of this great scientific thinker whose *Kitabu'l Hind* is a masterpiece of geographical understanding. While tracing briefly the evolution of geography through the centuries, and that of modern geography with Humboldt's 'Kosmos' and Thomas Huxley's 'Physiography', through the phase of determinism to the emergence of modern technology, Ali laments that "the present geographical paradigms of empiricism and spatial representation have a deep connection with the market with which they transact on a daily need-basis. More and more technological applications are being introduced in geography only in so far as the application of technology to space is concerned. But synthesizing this information in a spatial context needs a theory, and it is here that geography seems to be lacking". Then comes the most significant statement – "The study of basic theory, already in need of urgent redress, would collapse and the subject itself would be anchorless to move in whichever direction as the winds of change and opportunity blow" unless we infuse the discipline with basic theory and understanding.

B. K. Choudhary's exhaustive paper – "Paradigmatic Shift in Geography - Journey from Human Ecology to Political Ecology" is based on an important assumption, i.e., the human ecology has yielded place to political ecology. One is tempted to remind the author that the very concept of ecology

having its origin in the biological sciences, and attributed to German scientist Ernst Haeckel, the adoption of the term either as human, political, economic, as a qualifying prefix, adds one more perspective to the range of relationships and human-nature interactions. None of the two substitutes – human and political ecology – is contentious and none of them offers a holistic definition of the discipline. Never in its history, human ecology was considered a substitute for, or an adequate definition of, Geography. Both, human ecology as well as political ecology could represent two important perspectives. Choudhary's demonstration of the importance of political power, and political ecology, with examples from the use of environmental resources, related to land use, ground water extraction and mineral resources, in different parts of the country is convincing, but it is not the whole truth; many more factors are involved. As he himself observes – "The nature of the complexities of the scenario is much more intricate than the human-environment relation in the classical sense. It is these intricacies that geography has to address today, if it has to survive and it intends to make itself socially relevant". While one couldn't agree more with Choudhary, one is tempted to add that geography was never limited to making of an inventory, nor did it shy away from what the author calls intricate relationship. A satisfactory explanation could be simple or full of complexities, depending on the nature of problems. The potential of political ecology, as seen by the author, to analyse the 'triad of Resource-Development-Peace' using multiple social frame works, is an optimistic assessment.

Anindita Datta's review of gender geographies in India is metaphorically titled - "Wild Flowers on the Margins of the Field: On the Geographies of Gender in India". Is Gender Geography in India like wild flowers on the margins of cultivars? Indian geography is not unfamiliar with gender problem: to bring it centre stage and to accord an appropriate place in the array of sub-disciplines is what is aimed in this review paper of Datta. During the recent decades, there has been steady progress and there is clear encouragement to the introduction of this sub-discipline even at the under-graduate level. As noted by the author 'the UGC did propose an undergraduate programme of gender-study in 2001' Yet, 'there exists a clear lag between research trends in the local and global contexts'. The most common effort in this direction has been to make the disparities in education, health-care and employment of women vis-à-vis man, visible. 'However, an overt questioning of patriarchy and the unequal balance of power between men and women that result in these patterns has not really occurred'. Regrettably, in the opinion of this reviewer, 'seeking a balance of power' as if men and women are competitors or rivals' is a proposition not shared universally.

The review-paper is indeed interesting and the 'wild flowers - the gender geography' on the margin of the cultivated field should be tended to blossom, but to supplement and not to destroy the existing luxuriance, as the weeds do.

Rajeshwari's paper- "Methodological Developments in Medical Health Care Geography", a very systematically

organized and informative paper with a select bibliography and a couple of end notes, is a good read for all those interested in medical geography; and the reviewer would not hesitate in recommending it as an important reading material for graduate students. The opening paragraph of the paper, defining different approaches to geography, often missed in research papers, is followed by a review, in brief, of global researches in medical geography and the situation in India. And, finally, the author talks of future directions and the issues at hand. It is a concise, precise and systematically organized paper that is smooth in style and enlightening in content. The paper, however, may not suggest a paradigm shift, but a shift in focus and emphasis.

"Preparing Crop Inventory and detecting Land Use Changes. Shift in Methodological Paradigm" is a paper presented by three professors of the department of Geography, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Unlike a substantive paper, the authors have presented a methodological shift in collecting crop statistics. Tracing the history and importance of crop statistics from the days of Kautilya's Arthashastra right through the Moghul period, exemplified by Ain-e-Akbari, the celebrated work of Akbar's general Abul Fazal, that suggests devices for the compilation of crop statistics, the authors comment on the elaborate and time consuming method of collection through ground survey, sampling reporting of statistics. They advocate the adoption of 'Remote Sensing Techniques - Visual and Digital' by enumerating its advantages over traditional methods. There is a methodology for every aspect

of estimation, area, productivity etc, and, as they suggest is being applied by state agencies through ^CAPE (Crop Acreage and Production Estimation) and LACIE (Large Area Inventory Experiment). Outlining the procedure through various charts, the authors conclude that the remote sensing technology has enormous potential, what they have delineated is just indicative, and many studies can be conducted on various themes on agriculture, taking high-resolution data.

To this reviewer's delight, he finds Mahabir Singh Jaglan talking of the "Place and Significance of Field-work in Geographical Teaching and Research in India". It can hardly be denied that as the years and decades pass by, geography in Indian universities is bracing to don the mantle of an armchair discipline, reflecting, philosophizing, trying to find a niche for geography in the changing philosophical base of social science disciplines. What the author of the paper is emphasizing is the indispensability of fieldwork in a geography course designed for university level studies. Quoting Fuller (2006), the author enumerates the objectives and the advantages of fieldwork and demonstrates with the help of data, extracted from five national journals, the pathetic state of fieldwork content in university courses. Part of the explanation, the reviewer thinks, lies in the state of decline in physical geography, at the post-graduate level in the universities. The application of Remote sensing techniques cannot be a substitute for fieldwork and actual contact with physical or socio-economic landscape not stimulates

thinking but also provides a basic framework of understanding..

The pen-ultimate paper of the volume is one by R. B. Bhagat who is arguing for a "Decentralised Food Security Policy" within the larger framework of "Population, Hunger and Food Security in India", the title of his paper. Taking stock of the food security situation over the last half a century, Bhagat shows how the food availability has improved despite an increase in population and has lingered around 440 gm per capita per day following Green Revolution, though a decline in an overall availability of pulses is a cause for concern. Seen against a norm of 2,400 kcal per person per day in rural and 1900 kcal in urban areas, Bhagat, quoting other authorities, makes out a case of under-nourishment to the tune of 79.8 in rural and 75.8% in urban areas. Mere availability of food doesn't guarantee access to food, and this establishes a close link between poverty and food security. This affects even children and causes infant mortality. Intervention by the Central Government has taken the form of Food Security Act, guaranteeing food to poorer sections of the society at affordable price. The author points out several deficient features in the National Food Security act, rooting for a decentralised system operated by the states through the village Panchayats.

Dinesh Pratap in a spatial study of "Forest Policies, Management Rules and Local Community in Uttarakhand" evaluates the impact of changing forest policies and their impact on the forests of Uttarakhand. With the primary objective of ensuring environmental stability, ecological

balance and biodiversity conservation together with improving the productivity of the forests, a policy of joint management of the forests involving forest departments and the village communities was initiated. The policy, it appears, gave additional powers to the forest department. The author has discussed at length the implementation of the Joint Management Policy and the Forest Rights Act, 2006 as seen in Uttarakhand. He finds tardy implementation of the Forest Rights Act, procedural delays and conservative interpretation of rules resulting in the denial of community rights. And, despite various objections and suggestions of the community and recommendations of committees, the ideal forest policy for effective community management of the forests remains elusive, defeating the purpose of various policy initiatives and the introduction of new acts.

Of the thirteen papers contained in the volume, none, strictly speaking, talks of a paradigm shift. Some talk of an additional perspective, some represent the geographical dimensions of national problems, some talk of new methodologies and their problem solving potential, and some others talk of the neglect of certain methods and approaches. The only paradigm shift appears to be keeping a safe distance from the landscape approach, greater indulgence in philosophical and methodological discussions and some neglect of substantive studies.

Notwithstanding the above comments, the volume is rich in content. It has some well-organised review papers, a few presentations of the problems encountered in policy implementation, and above

all some assertive discussions with a philosophical overtone. Though the nature of the seminar was such that one can find enough justification to include all that exists in the book, yet one wonders if Indian geographers are not tending to write more 'on geography' than 'geography'.

Professor Qureshi deserves our appreciation for initiating this series and bringing out several volumes including the present one. The book is well-edited, and the printing is error-free. Let us hope the seminars and the present series of publication continue.

K. R. Dikshit
Pune

