

Book Review

“Select Essays of Gopal Krishan: Geography, Development and Public Policy”

Surya Kant & Nina Singh (eds-2015)

- pp xv+395, maps, bibliography, price Rs 3,000/- RK Books, New Delhi

The book under review is a collection of select research papers, authored by Professor Gopal Krishan, presently an Emeritus Professor, University of Punjab, and also a National Fellow of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, in a span of over three decades and published in reputed research periodicals, and some as chapters in edited books, on a variety of themes, related or close to his areas of research – Geography, Development and Public Policy. The volume was presented to Professor Gopal Krishan by his students, on the eve of his 75th anniversary.

Organized meticulously by the two of his distinguished students, also distinguished professors in their own right, the editors have undertaken this painstaking job of organizing, sequencing the papers, grouping them in parts and providing an introductory editorial note to each part. The editors, the reviewer is certain, have succeeded in achieving their objective of making, at least partially, the researches of Professor Gopal Krishan ‘*available and accessible to students and readers under one jacket*’

The book contains five parts each containing 5 to 8 chapters. The parts are titled as **1. Geography Issues and Challenges; 2. Development: Salient Features; 3. Development: Population**

Aspects; 4. Development: Urban Dynamics; 5. Administration and Public Policy. Every chapter is preceded by an editorial introduction, and a chapter-wise list of references mentioned in the text, ending with an index.

The volume opens, and justifiably so, with a Prologue, which is not so much about the introduction to, or, contents of the book, as one might imagine, as about the illustrious career of Professor Gopal Krishan, sketched under sub-titles, like ‘GK - An Extraordinaire Academic Journey’; ‘Evolution of the Mind’ and ‘GK’, the Person’, followed by a short, indeed very short, summary of the book and a very relevant comment on the Professor’s approach in writing research papers. The trust and affection of the editors can be read in the concluding paragraph of the prologue where they say referring to professor Gopal’s unflinching quest for raising questions – ‘It is a ‘geographical indication’ of GK. To us, he symbolizes/personifies ‘A Speaking Tree’- the last phrase, perhaps borrowed from the Times column of the same title.

The editorial introductions are as much the life-blood of the book as the core content. These put the research papers that follow, in perspective.

This collection presents four major themes: Population, Urbanization,

Development and Public Policy, with a strong focus on the concept of development. A characteristic of Gopal's thinking is that he has not restricted himself to a geographical perspective, seeking explanation from any source that is plausible. Equally important is his holistic view of India with the constituent units, and the use of indices to establish the facts and their causal relations. He has demonstrated an effective application of Census data through his writings, Glance through –“Demographic Variables as Indicators of Social, Economic and Political Reality”- Ch. 5 and “Minorities in India: Demographic Growth and Spatial Dispersal since Independence”- Ch. 13 or “Patterns of Internal Migration in India” Ch.16. In some of his researches demanding much greater rigour Prof. Gopal Krishan has kept away from the core issue, inherited from history, and, instead, depended on clichés and citations from distinguished scholars. To quote one example “How India Stayed Integrated?” Ch. 6, a theme demanding an in-depth historical review. When was it that a geographically integrated India, as we know it today, existed in history? “The British policy of ‘Divide and Rule’ made the people more conscious of their differences than similarities” writes the author, as if the British were out to tear India apart. The role of the priestly class in holding, if not welding the castes together, as suggested by Learmonth and Spate, is ridiculous. Explanation could be found in literary and religious history of this land that held India together, at least emotionally, despite the disruptions of all kinds that divided the country into Hindoostan and Karnataka, Kamrupa and Kalinga.

“Trends of Regional Disparities in India” Ch. 10, “Minorities in India: Demographic Growth and Spatial Dispersal”, Ch. 13, “Sikh Spatial Dispersal, 1881-2001”, Ch.15, “Patterns of Internal Migration in India”, Ch. 16 and “Spurts in India's Population Growth during the Twentieth Century: A Spatial View”, Ch. 17- all present a pan- India view of demographic attributes of its population in a regional frame. These studies, based on hard data, collating evidences from various sources, make interesting and instructive readings; and the readers would benefit from the holistic picture of India drawn in these papers. “The Political Economy of Indian Urbanization”, Ch. 21, written with a co-author, Professor Nina Singh, one the editors of the volume, attempts to relate, rather unsuccessfully, the growth of urbanization with economic growth. The former, it appears, grows to a certain level, regardless of the level of urbanization, and only at a later stage, urbanization grows corresponding to the growth and increasing contribution of manufacturing and services in the GDP.

Development (of India and its people) has been the main-focus of Professor Gopal Krishan's thinking of geography in the service of the society. Somewhere, hidden in all his writings, is the relevance of geographic research in national/human welfare through development. In fact, “one third of his research output bears the stamp of development and administrative studies” clearly showing his concern for the relevance of our discipline and its role in development which he has tried to demonstrate through a series of researches, some of which are presented in this volume.

The book presents some selected yet important pieces of research by a serious, dedicated and distinguished scholar in Professor Gopal Krishan. Wish him many more years of brilliant work. The editors deserve not only congratulations but also a special praise. It is a rare specimen of a painstakingly edited and brilliantly executed book. The formatting, design and printing on a fairly high substance-weight paper reflect the concern of the editors as well as the publishers. The printing is error free, illustrations clear and the book readable.

Those interested in the study of population, urbanization and development, especially related to India, will find this book enlightening and a great help in understanding the reality of India's demography, process and characteristics of urbanization, and the profile of its development. The book is replete with challenging questions that need further research, and to that extent it is a readymade source that outlines theme of research for students

Recommended.

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