Obituary

Professor P. Dayal
(1920 - 2015)

The sad demise of Professor P. Dayal on December 31, 2015 in Patna brought to a close the distinguished career of a great national and international geographer. He served as chairman of the Department of Geography, Patna University for more than three decades (1951-1982) and was Vice-Chancellor of Magadh University, Bodhgaya between 1975 to 1977. He was also an Emeritus Professor with Patna University. His special interest at first was agriculture, industries and minerals; later he added an interest in economic development of India, a field in which he made outstanding contributions. By establishing his credentials in economic geography and regional development, Professor Dayal placed the Department of Geography as one of the excellent centres of learning in the country. His influence was broader than economic geography as he published fascinating textbooks in Hindi and English, primarily for the use of college and university students. Professor Dayal belonged to the second generation of geographers in India along with Professors C.D. Deshpande, George Kurian, V.L.S. Prakasa Rao, Muzaffar Ali, R.L. Singh and M. Shafi.

Parameshwar Dayal was born on August 15, 1920 in Bind village in Nalanda district of Bihar. His father, Late Shri Gokulchand and mother Late Smt. Panna Devi took special care of young Parameshwar by providing good education in Patna. He was married to Smt. Sumitra Devi at the age of 21 in 1941 and has five sons and three daughters. All of them are married, talented, promising and well-settled. He earned his B.A. (Hons.) degree with English in 1939 from Patna College, Patna University, which happened to be the centre of excellence in Northern India; and M.A. in Geography
in 1941 with distinction from the Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. In 1942, he took up the assignment of Lecturer at H.D. Jain College, Arrah. Later in 1945, he moved to England on leave for higher studies in geography. He obtained Ph.D. degree in geography in 1947 from London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, under the joint supervision of world-renowned geographers, Sir L. Dudley Stamp and Professor O.H.K. Spate with a dissertation on “The Agricultural Geography of Bihar”. In course of his academic journey to three important centres of learning, Dr. Dayal was influenced by Professors S.C. Chatterji, S. Zahir Assan and S.A. Majid at Patna; Kazi, S. Ahmad, S. Muzaffar Ali and S.M. Tahir Rizvi at Aligarh; and Sir L. Dudley Stamp and O.H.K. Spate at London School of Economics and Political Science. These notable personalities in geography, Dr. Dayal commented, provided a congenial and friendly atmosphere for study and instilled in him a love for the subject and gave him the necessary geographical insight and training. As a doctoral student, he had learnt to discipline his mind and work habits, two qualities that marked his work throughout his life. From Sir L. Dudley Stamp and Professor O.H.K. Spate, he developed a sense of professional integrity and dedication to his field. Upon his return to India, Dr. Dayal resumed his duty as a lecturer in geography in H.D. Jain College, Arrah (1947-48). In July 1948, Dr Dayal again left for Colombo (Sri Lanka) to join as a lecturer in geography where he stayed for just one year (1948-49). Dr. Dayal left for Banaras Hindu University in December 1949 to accept the position of Assistant Professor of Geography under the chairmanship of a senior geologist-cum-geographer Late Professor H.L. Chibber. During the year 1949 and 1950, inspite of his high mobility, Dr. Dayal took off heavy teaching load to contribute to Geographical Review of India and Indian Geographical Journal. He decided again to leave Varanasi in favour of Osmania University, Hyderabad, where he worked as Reader in Geography for a year (1950-51). By holding different teaching posts in Arrah, Colombo, Varanasi and Hyderabad before coming to Patna, he collected academic knowledge and administrative experience, which have helped him to tower above his peers in both fields. Thus, his early career indicated high mobility. In his own words, “he has been a rolling stone, but he has gathered some moss”.

In 1951, Dr. Dayal joined as Professor and Head of the Department of Geography at Patna University. In the words of Late Professor Enayat Ahmad, himself a geographer of great repute, Professor Dayal is not only the pioneer geographer of the country but is rightly known as the father of geography in Bihar. Professor Dayal remained Head for a span of 32 years from 1951 to 1982 with short intermissions. His 32 year time period provides strong evidence of professional commitment and sound scholarship. He was an excellent and conscientious teacher, gifted writer, impeccable speaker and a true gentleman. His main interests were in Economic Geography including agriculture, resource and industrial with regional interests on India and Japan. He regularly taught Economic Geography, Geography of India and Geography of Japan. His illustrated lectures were model of interest and succinctness. His classes used to be very popular and scholarly. His lectures were a pleasure to listen because they were lucid and communicative. He had clarity
of expression, simplicity of presentation and depth of knowledge. He was equally at ease with Hindi language and books written by him in Hindi were in clear and lucid languages.

Since 1951, the Department has attracted at least thirty two hundred undergraduate and postgraduate students. Evidence from our survey indicates that our students do very well elsewhere especially Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, when they leave Patna University. Between 1951 and 1982, the Department graduated thousands of students and more than 40 Ph.D. students.

During his tenure as the Head of the Department, Professor Dayal held important administrative posts by virtue of his merit, capacity and ability. He was the Principal of Patna College for two terms during 1965-66 and 1971-73 and held these two posts with great distinction and honour. He has also served as Dean, Faculty of Arts (1964-65), Dean, Faculty of Commerce (1965-66 and 1972-73) and Director, IAS Coaching Centre, Patna University (1965-75). He kept on serving actively for the continuous improvement and academic enrichment of the university in various capacities as members of the Senate, the Syndicate, the Finance Committee, the Academic Council and also as Treasurer. He was appointed the first Chairman of the Bihar Secondary Education Board during 1974-75 by the Government of Bihar.

Professor Dayal made numerous improvements in the structure and functioning of the Department. The Department was given the Centre for Development Studies in 1981 which was financially assisted by UGC. It was the sole effort of Professor Dayal. A major accomplishment spearheaded by him was acquiring 9000 sq ft of space. In 1977, a 250 seat auditorium was constructed. Professor Dayal is credited with facilitating a building a large library which contains approximately 20,000 books, reports and journals of national and international association and publishing companies. Map library is well equipped containing all categories of maps including local, regional, state, national and global levels.

Major attention was devoted to helping teachers and students learn modern geography through conferences, seminars, summer schools, symposia and orientation course offered on campus and other universities in the country. For example, under his leadership, the Department of Geography organized an UGC supported All-India Summer School in Economic Geography in 1967; and Summer Institute for the Geography teachers of Eastern India under the auspicious of the NCERT, New Delhi in 1968. Professor Dayal organized International Symposium on Industrialization in Developing Countries in the Department. He also organized a symposium on “Geography of Resources”, sponsored by the Bihar Hindi Granth Academy in 1971. He was also closely associated with Association of Geographers of Bihar and Jharkhand which was formed in 1999.

During the early years of his career in 1956, Professor Dayal was awarded the coveted and prestigious Simon Research Fellowship to work on Coal resources of India at the University of Manchester, UK which upheld his academic status. His research and publications in geography led to his serving as Editor of the Journal, Transactions of the Indian Council of Geographers (1964-1968) and President
of the Association of Indian Council of Geographers (1965). He was unanimously elected President of the Geology and Geography Section (Now Earth System Sciences) of the Indian Science Congress (1976-77). His Presidential Address was on “The Energy Resources of India”, which was delivered in 1977 at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. Professor Dayal was unanimously elected the 17th President of NAGI in 1994. His Presidential Address was delivered at NRSA, Hyderabad on “An Agenda for Indian Geography”. He was conferred with Bhugol Vachaspati Award by NAGI at Allahabad in 2008 and NAGI Fellow at Patna in 2012. After one year of his retirement, during 1983-86, he was a Visiting Professor of Geography to North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong on the special invitation of Dr. B.D. Sharma, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University.

As a research supervisor, he never imposed dissertation topic on students, rather he used to ask his students to bring five alternative topics for one to be chosen after discussion. He always emphasized quality in research. He has successfully guided sixteen doctoral dissertations ranging from land use and agriculture to industrial geography and transport, from urban geography and planning to population geography and regional development.


Professor Dayal’s relatives, friends and students are spread all over India and abroad and pay homage to him. The teachers and students of the Department of Geography, Patna University are particularly grateful to him and salute the soul for his wisdom, erudition, scholarship and dedication in making the Department an excellent centre of learning. Further, we pray the Almighty that his soul rests in peace.

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