

Obituary - 1



Dr. Dibya Kishor Singh
(1934 - 2017)

Prof D. K. Singh, an eminent geographer, an adorable teacher, an intense researcher, a protagonist of cartography and quantitative geography, an ardent theosopher, an Odia writer, a social worker, a philanthropic, a noble character and a highly respected and above all a noble human being left this mortal world and bereaved the geographers' fraternity to move to his divine abode on 8th June 2017. He was fondly called by his peer and friends at Utkal University, Bhubaneswar as *Raja* of Hindol. Born in a royal family of Hindol (a formerly princely state of Odisha) on 20th October, 1934 Prof Singh joined Ravenshaw College after his school and completed B.A with geography honours in 1957 followed by a diploma in Statistics in 1958 and Masters in Geography in 1959 from Benaras Hindu University,

Varanasi. He got his Ph. D. in 1972 from Gauhati University under the legendary Prof. H. P. Das with specialisation in urban geography. All through his career he was a bright student. He was privileged to be one of the most favourite students of the great Indian geographers of his time Prof. S. L. Kayastha, Prof, K. N. Singh and Prof. R. L. Singh.

Career, Teaching, Research and contribution

He started his teaching career in geography in 1960 as a lecturer at Dr. Hari Singh Gour University, Saugar, Madhya Pradesh. After a brief stint at Saugar, he moved to Gauhati University as a young faculty where he left an indelible impact on his peer, students

and society at large. Within a few years of teaching at Gauhati University, he published profusely including books in Assamese. Prof. Singh was a founding member of the North East India Geographical Society (NEIGS), Gauhati University and the founding editor of the *North Eastern Geographer*, a journal of the NEIGS. After a few years at Gauhati University Prof. Singh joined Utkal University as a Reader in geography and subsequently was promoted to the post of Professor and served the Department till his retirement in 1996. He was not only the most acclaimed architect of the geography department at Utkal University but also was a visionary for spreading geography education in Odisha. He taught subjects as diverse as geographical thought, geomorphology, advanced cartography, surveying and map projections, quantitative geography, models and systems approach in geography to the post graduate and M.Phil students of Utkal University. He was simply outstanding with his unique approach to teaching and explaining geographic principles and phenomena using write up cards as used in western universities of those times. He was one such teacher who could inspire even the most uninterested. He was always full of enthusiasm and inspiration to be larger than life.

He had the rare ability to blend physical with human geography in his teaching and research. His association with some of the internationally reputed geographers like Prof. Hagget, Stodart, Strahler, Isard and some of the best geography departments of U.K and USA during his Fulbright and Commonwealth Fellow programs

had enabled him to acquire the best in geography teaching and research. He was quite unconventional and was brimming with fresh and modern approaches to geography teaching and research which he ungrudgingly shared with his students and colleagues in his inimitable style and with dedication and conviction. His home was a *Gurukul* for his students. As a researcher, he was quite apart from other geographers of his times with the application of quantitative geography in most of his research work. He was one of the founding pillars of quantitative geography in India. His geographical outlook was carrying the flavour of the Banaras School. His association with great scholars like Prof. SM Ali of Sagar University, Prof. R. L. Singh, Prof S. L. Kayastha, Prof. K. N. Singh of BHU, Prof. V. K. Srivastava of Gorakhpur, Prof. H. P. Das of Gauhati University, Prof. Mantosh Bannerjee, Prof Bireswar Bannerjee and Prof H. R. Betal of Calcutta University, Prof A. Ramesh of Madras University, Prof R. P. Mishra of Allahabad University and Prof. N.B.K. Reddy of Tirupati University, Prof. Vaidyanathan of Andhra University reveals his richness of interactions and involvement in the subject of geography. He made strenuous efforts to put the Geography Department of Utkal University in the national and international map.

Prof. Singh supervised some 20 M.Phil and 17 Ph.D theses besides one D.Sc scholar in geography. He published approximately 100 research papers, articles in peer-reviewed reputed Indian journals and edited several books and research monographs. He had served as an Editor of the *Eastern*

Geographer, the journal of the Eastern Geographical Society in addition to serving as editor to other research publications. Besides, Prof. Singh served as an Executive Member of many professional and cultural organisations. He was a life member of more than 20 geographical societies and professional bodies including Fellow of Royal Geographical Society, London; Member of American Association of Geographers and a life member of the National Association of Geographers, India of which he also served as a Vice-President. His contributions to the pedagogy of geography in Odisha and bringing qualitative changes in the post graduate geography curriculum of the Utkal University and later in India through University Grants Commission (UGC) are noteworthy. From 1991 to 1997, Prof. Singh served as a member of the National Committee in Geography Panel of INSA for two consecutive terms. He was also a member of the Geography Panel of UGC during 1997 to 2002. In 1993, he served the editorial board of the *Encyclopaedia of World Geography* published by Andromeda Publishers, Oxfordshire, U.K as an advisor. In addition, he authored Geography Textbooks in English, Odia and Assamese which have been used as text books in geography. Prof Singh authored the oft cited book titled "Shelter, Environment and Settlement: Planning in Rural Orissa."

He was awarded Fulbright Fellowship in 1966-67 and visited Indiana university of USA. He was also conferred Commonwealth Foundation–Royal Geographical Society Bursary Award in 1980 to visit Bristol University, U.K. He participated in teaching

and research in the Human Settlement Division of Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand in 1992 and in the Spring Centrum of Dortmund University, Germany in 1993 as a Visiting Fellow. He was conferred the rare award of the Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society of London. He was highly acknowledged by the great geographers of all time like Peter Hagget and Stodart for his commitment to geography. His involvement in literary and religious activities was equally well known particularly in his post retirement life.

Literary Creativity beyond Geography

After his retirement from active service, new dimension of his life in religious, spiritual, literary and philanthropic activities began which had remained hidden since his student days. Prof. Singh served as the Secretary of the Utkal Theosophical Federation for two terms from 1999 to 2005. He was instrumental in bringing out publication of spiritual books in Odia for the organisation and served as the President of Saraswati Shishoo Vidya Mandir, Bhubaneshwar from 1998 to 2005. He earned wide recognition for writing short stories, poems, travelogues and spiritual essays in Odia while serving as the president of "Chalapath"-an all Odisha writers' conclave. His literary creations like *Sweta Sanketa*, *Biplaba*, *Smruti-Lipi* and *Asha-Shrotaswimi* in Odia literature are popular among the readers. The Odia short story books *Pooja-Phul* was selected by Orissa Sahitya Academy for the Raja Ram Mohan Library. Prof Singh was also a brilliant translator. The short-story books titled *Pallavi* by J. K. Mahant describing the

Chief Minister of West Bengal, Ms Mamata Banerjee in Bengali and *Duranir Rang* (Odia title *Dura Durantara Abha*) in Assamese by Junu Mahanta have been translated into Odia by Prof. Singh. Over a hundred Bengali poems have been translated by him into Odia and published as a book entitled *Nishabda Prahari*. Two short story books namely *Akinchit Anubhav* and *Purushottam Kshetra O Shree Jagannath* authored by him were released in 2007 and 2008 respectively. An Assamese short story book titled *Abagahan* was translated to Odia by Prof. Singh.

Prof. Singh served the Chinmaya Mission, Bhubaneswar as its President. He was the Secretary of Spiritual Regeneration Movement Capital Project, Odisha of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and a dedicated worker for the foundation of the Maharishi College of Natural Law, Bhubaneswar. He was an Executive Member of the Mahabodhi Society and worked for the development of Buddha Vihar of Bhubaneswar. He was one of the founders of Janata College at Satmile near his native place Hindol and worked as the Secretary for its all round development. He also worked as a Vice-President of the Odisha Section of the All-India Madan Mohan Malaviya Mission and a Member of the Rotary Club, Bhubaneswar Metro.

Personal Life, Family and Friends

Prof. Singh married to Dr. Vijayalaxmi Singh of Varanasi, one of his class mates whom he met at B.H.U. Dr. Vijay Laxmi Singh was a

geographer who served the Department of Geography as a Reader. He has been blessed with one son and one daughter. His son Kamakhya Prasad Singh after completing B. Tech in mechanical Engineering moved to USA for M. Tech and settled there. His daughter Mita married to a bank officer is residing in Mumbai. His wife passed away much before him in 2000 which brought a lot of loneliness to him. He had a tremendous zeal for travelling to distant tourist places of geographical and religious importance. He visited Manasarovar in 2005, Parsurama Kunda on Brahmaputra in 2006. His house was a monastery for anybody and everybody who wanted to meet him.

Prof. Singh was one of those rare people of distinction whose involvement with theosophical institutions, literary and cultural organisation in the city brought him many admirers besides as a geographer. An excellent teacher, friend and philosopher and the archetypical nice personality to scores of people both in and outside the campus, he will be missed by everyone whose lives he touched in so many different ways. His sudden demise is indeed a great loss for the Geographers community.

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