

IN MEMORIAM

Professor SHIVA PRASAD CHATTERJEE (1903-1989)

The man occupying the apex of Indian geography, and the one who pioneered the growth of geography in the country, the one who guided the destiny of the Calcutta School of Geography for several decades, the man who established the social relevance of geography and cartography by founding the National Atlas organisation — presently the National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation — and producing the first National Atlas of the country, and the man who inspired generations of Indian geographers by his researches, writings, speeches, and organisational skill, all focussed towards the promotion of geography in India, is no more with us. Professor S. P. Chatterjee passed away in the midst of his family, friends, students and admirers on the 27th of February 1989. In his death we have witnessed the demise of the last of the most talked of Trio of the mid-twentieth century Indian geography, consisting of Chatterjee, Kuriyan and Ali. Dr. S. M. Ali was the first to depart from the scene in the mid-sixties; he died at New Delhi of a massive heart attack while working as a member of the panel appointed to prepare geography text books for the NCERT and Professor Kuriyan died in 1983 at Madras in retirement. This was the trio that moulded and gave direction to Indian geography in its early years. The contemporary Indian geography is in the hands of their students who talk reminiscently and seek inspiration from the devotion, sincerity of purpose and the spirit of scholarship displayed by these leaders.

I had an occasion to meet Professor Chatterjee and spend a couple of days in his association in 1964 at Paris while he

was on his way to London to participate in the International Geographical Congress. What struck me most was his openness which he displayed with an effusive charm in talking to us (my friend M. Zaman Mian, presently Professor and Dean at Dacca, and me) first exhorting us to go to London for the conference and then discussing contemporary geography and the innovations we should think of introducing after our return home. We shared a few rare moments of joy and excitement with him, may it be dining in a small corner restaurant on Boulevard St. Michel or discussing animatedly his maps (some of which he had brought along) to be displayed at London. He appeared all spirits while talking of the invitation extended to the IGU for holding the next International Conference at Delhi in 1968, which he not only hosted successfully on behalf of the Government of India but even presided over it as the elected president of the IGU, a rare honour conferred on Professor Chatterjee, the only Indian ever to have received it. Way back in the seventies, when I approached him for permission to include his seminal paper on 'Sea Level Changes on the Indian Coast' (Z. f. Geom), he responded promptly by sending a copy of the reprint of the paper with the permission to include in the intended volume, appreciating at the same time this venture and writing a complimentary remark — 'Right man in the right place', a compliment that moved me and boosted my morale as a teacher.

Professor Chatterjee had his early training at Varanasi, having obtained his master's degree in geology from Banaras

Hindu University. Subsequently he obtained a D. Litt. from the Sorbonne, having written a thesis on the 'geomorphology of Meghalaya' under Professor Emmanuel de Martonne at the Institut de Gêographie, Paris, and a doctorate from the University of London. This gave him a depth and a range — a Master in geology, a D. Litt. in geomorphology and a Ph.D. in education, all from different schools. Having worked for a while in Rangoon as a geography teacher, Professor Chatterjee moved to Calcutta, where he came to occupy the geography chair in the newly founded Department of Geography of Calcutta University, and which remained his 'Kharmabhumi' during the rest of his life.

Professor Chatterjee was a scholar par excellence, and to pay a tribute to him by only enumerating his achievements, may it be the presidentship of IGU, the Murchison grant of the Royal Geographical Society or the Padma Bhushan conferred by the President of India, is to miss the loftier elements of his personality. The impact his ideas, interest, devotion and work have made on Indian geography will be felt for generations, and the institutions he founded like the Calcutta School of Geography and National Atlas

organisation (now NATMO) will always be seen as a living monument to the memory of Professor Chatterjee. And, to nurture a spirit of excellence in these institutions will be the fittest tribute to him.

The greatness of Professor Chatterjee is reflected not so much in the national/international awards he won, the laurels he gained or the distinctions he achieved — these were numerous — but in his sober nature, upright yet gentle approach and paternal attitude to his students, many of whom grew into distinguished scholars, like Professors R. L. Singh, V. L. S. Prakasarao, K. G. Bagchi, Sitanshu Mookerjee, Satyesh Chakraborty Bireshwar Banerjee, and A. K. Dutt, to mention a few.

Professor Chatterjee was a born geographer with his deep interest in space, landscape and culture. His unflinching commitment to geography and devotion to the subject are an inspiration to contemporary geographers of India, and his achievements an object of emulation. The Institute of Indian Geographers and all its members deeply mourn the death of Professor Chatterjee and pay a loving tribute to him.

Editor