

OBITUARY

PROFESSOR KHANDERAO PRALHAD KSHIRSAGAR

(1926-96)



One of the early teachers of Geography in Maharashtra, who initiated the teaching of Geography at the college and University level in the State, Prof. Kshirsagar died on 15th May 1996 at Pune after

a short illness of about a week. His death is attributed to the agony he could not bear following the deteriorating condition of his terminally ill younger son, a brilliant physicist, who died a week later true to the Hindu tradition, the father departed before the son. Prof. Kshirsagar is survived by his wife, his elder son a professor at M.I.T. Pune, & other members of the family.

Prof. Kshirsagar was born on 4th Feb. 1926 at Nasik in a Brahmin family, from where he moved with the family, when he was only seven, to Gwalior where his father had taken an assignment as a tutor in some princely family. Highly inspired by the family tradition, Prof. Kshirsagar pursued his studies seriously and obtained the B. Sc. degree with physics, Chemistry and Maths from Agra University at the age of nineteen. After that he joined immediately the Central Technical Institute at Gwalior as a lecturer and its Vice-Principal. After a gap of five years, while still working, he obtained his master's degree in Geography in 1951.

This was the beginning and the foundation of a long and successful career in geography teaching and research. In the same year as he got his master's degree, Prof. Kshirsagar joined the reputed S. P. College at Pune, as a lecturer in geography laying the foundation of geography teaching at the collegiate level in the University of Pune. This was the time when geography did not form part of the graduate courses of the Universities in Western India, and geographers were rare. Young and enthusiastic Prof. Kshirsagar not only made the subject popular at the degree level but even convinced to the University, the importance of the discipline as a science of space organization. After the establishment of the post graduate department in the University of Pune, he joined the University in 1953 as a lecturer and continued working in the same department with unwavering loyalty to the discipline till he retired from the service of the University as a Reader in Feb. 1986.

At the University of Pune, he worked with dedication, and with Prof. V. S. Ganaganathan, who was then the Head of the department, contributed greatly to the teaching of geography and the growth of the discipline at the university level. The geography department of the University of Pune was the only university department in Western India in the early fifties. With his power of persuasion and genial temperament, Prof. Kshirsagar was able to induce many colleges in Western India

to introduce geography at the-degree level and can be credited with the foundation of geography teaching in Western India. He was a key person in the core-group that developed the courses of studies at the degree and post-graduate level in geography at the University of Pune.

Prof. Kshirsagar taught physical geography but the main area of his interest was climatology. He successfully guided a number of Ph. D. and M. Phil students in Climatology, particularly its applied aspects. A novel feature of his climatological research, related to the prediction of the monsoons or weather conditions, was his division of the year into 'Nakshatras', known to Indian astronomers for over 2500 years, instead of using the Gregorian calendar months and the widely used division of the year into pentads. This was an effort to make the results of climatological research understandable to the farming community in India who are familiar with the concept of 'Nakshatras' for centuries. One may say with justification that he with another of his colleagues Prof. K. Ramamurthy-though both worked independently - pioneered research in geographical climatology in Western India. He was, undoubtedly, the spirit behind introducing specialization in climatology in the University of Pune and has left behind a tradition of climatological research which his students are continuing.

Another area where Professor Kshirsagar's contribution is well known is the field of 'Geography-education'. He was associated with the NCERT and developed, in association with some other geographers, a model syllabus for

high schools, besides the methods of geography teaching. At the state level, he was associated with the SSC Board as a chief moderator in geography. Besides teaching and research, Prof. Kshirsagar took interest in promoting geography through organizational media. He was the founder President of the Pune Geography Teacher's Association and the founder Vice-President of the Institute of Indian Geographers and promoted these two academic bodies with his active participation in their activities.

He was an excellent teacher and had a good rapport with his students endearing himself by his sincere advice, genuine encouragement and a fatherly attitude. The doctoral students working with him were treated like his family members and enjoyed the warm hospitality of Ms Kshirsagar at their residence on the University campus. His students were always welcome at his home from where they always returned wiser and happier.

Having worked for an uninterrupted period of over three decades in the department of geography of Pune University, Prof. Kshirsagar has carved a niche for himself in the history of the department and its growth. His contribution to the discipline and the institution he worked in, will be ever remembered by the successive generations of students and teachers.

The Institute of Indian Geographers, of which he was the founder Vice-President, deeply mourns his death.

-K. R. Dikshit