

BOOK REVIEW

New Frontiers in Indian Geography

Prof. R. N. Dubey Commemoration Volume, edited by L. R. Singh; Published jointly by Prof. R. N. Dubey Foundation and Geography Department, Allahabad University, Allahabad 1996, pp XXX & 253, price Rs. 400/-

The volume 'New Frontiers in Indian Geography', a fitting tribute to the memory of the Late prof. R.N. Dubey, the Founder Head of Geography Department of Allahabad University, was published on the eve of his birth centenary, that coincided with the golden jubilee of the department. The celebrations witnessed a two day seminar besides the institution of Prof. Dubey Memorial Lecture, and the publication of the volume under review, thanks to the initiative taken by Geography Department of Allahabad University under the leadership of Prof Savindra Singh and Prof, R. C. Tiwari and supported by Prof. R.N. Dubey Foundation.

Besides the papers that follow, the volume is rightfully prefaced with tributes paid to the memory of the Late Prof. Dubey by his students and family members, some of them being presently on the faculty of the University.

The volume has two parts without formally dividing it: The first part carries a biographical sketch of Prof. Dubey written by Prof. L. R. Singh, followed by the tributes paid by his students and family members, and the second consisting of eleven papers written by the alumni of Geography Department of the University, including the editor of the volume who had the benefit of guidance for his doctoral work from Prof. Dubey.

Among the tributes, the one paid by the son (Vinod Dubey) to his father in what is titled as 'Some Memories' is deeply moving, steeped in human emotions and warmth. This reviewer, after reading the son's tributes, regrets his not ever meeting Prof. Dubey. The small sketch he has drawn of his father is very eloquent and speaks not only of Prof. Dubey's scholarship and dedication to geography, but also his compassion for the poor, love of humanity and the world of nature. It also throws light on how geography and geographers were treated in the first quarter of this century and the way the discipline had to struggle for space in the array of better established departments. Prof. Shafi's 'My Days In Allahabad' makes an interesting reading. He has honestly narrated the atmosphere in Allahabad University in the early forties, bringing in the celebrated Hindi Poet Harbans Rai Bachan and Sahitya Academy awardee late Prof. Raghupati Sahay "Firaq". What is inspiring is the convergence of literary genius and style in those days Bachchan and Firaq were teachers of English, yet one wrote splendid Hindi poetry and the other produced superb Urdu couplets. One would heartily endorse Prof. Shafi when he writes, while talking about Geography Department in Allahabad University..." the crowning feature of the department Dr. Dubey was an... ocean of knowledge,... a legend in his life time... He was a first rate teacher and

commanded great respect from his students and his colleagues in the university" Prof. R. L. Dwivedi in his 'Reminiscences of Late Prof. R. N. Dubey', talked of his long association with this distinguished teacher, and reveals Prof. Dubey's non-involvement in the University politics, which had a negative influence on the university as it has now. One of the students, Dr. T. B. Dubey, affirms that 'as a teacher of geography he was superb', and he steered the Geography Department of Allahbad University when the study of geography was still in its infancy. Among the tributes paid to him, two are written in Hindi, it would have been a worthy exercise to juxtapose a translation of these pieces, one from his colleague, Prof. Chaturvedi, a professor of Hindi in the University and the other from his student Reghunanadan Singh. Professor Chaturvedi who was junior to Prof. Dubey was inspired by the latter and wrote in his tribute "...he was a role model of a university professor... He was the living example of the dignity of Allahabad University... On a personal level he was humble but equally conscious of his self respect. Sympathetic to students, he was disciplined and true to his words. His field of knowledge was broad and he had a liberal outlook in life." Shri Raghunandan Shigh talks highly of Professor Dubey as a living image of morality and human values. He was a firm believer in the 'deals of humanity and justice.

Of the eleven papers, two discuss the development of geography in India. 'Hundred Years of Indian Geography' by the editor L.R. Singh, is to quote the editor, a profile of progress of Indian Geography discussed under four stages; the formative stage, the pre-1950's, the informative stage 1950's, the conformational stage 1960, and the reformational stage since 1971. The discussion runs into 28 pages of text and 29 pages of references incorporating

535 references from different sources. Subsequently, the progress of the discipline is discussed thematically. The paper provides significant bibliographic information. 'Development of Geomorphology in India' by Savindra Singh and S. S. Ojha has not only reviewed the progress of geomorphology but discussed even different branches of geomorphology. The authors, being themselves geomorphologists, have tried to incorporate much that is being done in India as geomorphic research. The paper also carries over 250 references, mentioned in the text and appended at the end of the paper. 'Rural Geography in India' by R. C. Tiwari and Kumkum Roy and 'Development of Transport Geography in India' by D. N. Singh are other papers which evaluate the development of specific branches of geography in India. The former on rural settlements gives a good introduction and reviews the work done by different geographers. The authors seem to believe in applied aspects of the subjects as they say "there is a need to promote such researches which have socio-economic relevance, serve the cause of the rural poor and down trodden, promote sustainable development ..." This reflects the anxiety syndrome of a group of geographers, in India trying to prove their usefulness through immediate socio economic application. Like the paper on 'Rural Settlements' Singh has reviewed the work on transport geography in India. He also outlines four areas of research viz (a) structure of the rural transportation system, (b) transport requirements and problems of various hierarchies of towns, (c) problems and prospects of revitalisation of inland navigation at different levels, and (d) the role of modern air transport as an interregional force of economic development.

This is really a very acceptable suggestion and those working in the area of transport geography may take note of it.

A very substantial paper in the volume that merits attention is 'Human Induced Desertification and Rehabilitation of Eco-systems of Rajasthan'. A scientist, oriented to field and laboratory work, Dr. Surendra Singh, has put in a nut shell the eco-system of Rajasthan in a systemic frame, examined the causes of desertification, and suggested ways for the rehabilitation of the degraded eco-system. The three maps- Eco- systems in Rajasthan, Desertification status of the entire state, and one of Ajmer-Sambhar -Jaipur-Tonk region, are a little too compressed in scale, but their value remains intact to the extent that he has plotted the cases of eco-degradation in different areas of the state. Though reproduced from his previous work, these maps as well as the accompanying text would be a good basic material for doing more comprehensive work in any specific area. Being a geomorphologist, Singh has outlined the eco-systems only in geomorphic frame, something that may not find much favour with the bio-scientists. Yet the paper is undeniably very valuable for acquainting one with ecological problems of Rajasthan.

'Explanation in Regional Planning' by S. K. Saha is more of a collation of views on explanation in science. He defines a region as an "interface or a zone of contact between complex systems of social activities and spatial arrangements"... and the "operational aspects of regional planning, therefore, must involve an adequate appreciation of the interface relationship..." According to him the paper seeks to argue that the process of relationship in regional planning would need to be posited within the interface relationship between the nature of social processes and the distribution

pattern in the territorial space. After this, the author seems to forget regional planning altogether and concentrates on 'the nature of scientific explanation' quoting extensively from different sources (Harvey, Margenau, Nagel, Schutz, besides Weber, Myrdal, Haggis, Hempel, Sauer and many others). He even digs out J. S. Mill's idea of unity of science through Macintyre. An impressive array of authorities indeed - all to elucidate the process of theory formation, explanation and distinction between social and spatial structures.

Scientific explanation, a theme with frequent displayed quotations, occupies much of the space of the essay and the need for 'explanation in regional planning' is confined to a couple of paragraphs in the introduction. The discussion meanders along a circuitous route with pauses approaching such headings as 'Geography - An Instrumentalist Bridge between Natural and Human Sciences', and 'Social Structure vis-a-vis the Spatial Structure'.

The ultimate paragraph of the essay is devoted to 'Regional Planning and the Marxist-non-Marxist Debate'. Referring to the grand Marxist theory he says 'the problem of translation of the grand theory mega-constructs into operational and programmatic language of planning is immense, and without this translation, there is a real danger of the scientific discourse ending up in an ideological debate'.

The content of introduction is repeated in conclusion - 'the explanation in regional planning needs to be situated within the interface relationship between social processes and spatial structure'. Then a broadside that the regional planning does not need 'to remain encumbered with geography's fetishism of areas'; as if regional planning is operating

without areas. His idea that 'regional planning could begin where geography left off' states perhaps the position of some regional planners. But it could be pointed out that if area is not the consideration, the art of regional planning would have the same relation with geography as with any other science.

After reading the text, the reviewer, being a geographer, would like to observe that geography as a discipline has been legitimately occupying a place in the academic world for millennia whereas 'regional planning' is a strategy for development that grew over the last few decades. Let the regional planners decide whether they like to shed their dependence for planning strategy on the character of an area, keep at bay the geographical theories - derived or otherwise - and thus save themselves from being encumbered with geographical view of socio-economic organisation of the space, as suggested by the author. What the reviewer would like to observe is that the conundrum of philosophical validity, theoretical structure or explanation is not what is regional planning all about. The paper, an effort to present regional planning in a theoretical mould requiring explanation, simply by quoting views of social scientists, over emphasising the fact that the character of regional planning develops out of social processes, is neither readable nor a convincing presentation of what he intends to convey.

A short paper 'Indian Contribution to Regional Development and Planning' by H. S. Gupta, divides the contributions in two categories viz. regional planning approaches and others supporting the regional planning process. These contributions, according to the author, come from three academic sources, planning per se, geography and economics. Approaches to regional planning are discussed under

resource based regional planning, metropolitan regional planning, balanced regional approach, growth centre approach and area development approach. Contributions are grouped into regional survey, planning atlas, delineation of planning regions and regional analysis. He concludes on a rather pessimistic note, quoting reasons like declining interest in regional planning, lack of government patronage and discontinuance of regional planning courses in some academic institutions.

The paper honestly portrays the situation of regional planning studies, practices and their adoption by the Government in its development plans.

'Cultural Patterns of India' by A. K. Dutt et al. is the case of fatal error of crowding too many images, though related yet kept apart, on a narrow canvas, losing continuity and making hardly any impact on the reader. A variety of aspects of culture each of which could be a theme for a comprehensive thesis, has been discussed, as if the authors are talking to an undergraduate class of students. After a brief mention of sources of ancient geography of India and what the authors call literary geography, discussion centres around language and religion; but then erupts suddenly spatial characteristics of crime which no doubt reveal the cultural pattern of India (!). The concluding remarks follow the summation of crime pattern and include a definition of cultural geography and the need for a great deal of research. All thoroughly disappointing. Let us look a little more closely.

The discussion on 'Geography in Ancient India' starts with a statement - 'as the geography discipline is a modern creation, the ancient geography of any region must be discerned through historical records'.

This statement besides being redundant casts doubts on the scholars perception of geography as a discipline, though no one can deny the importance of historical records. While discussing the sources of ancient geography, they have completely ignored not only the stone-age sites and their interpretations but even the well documented Indus valley civilisation without even a marginal reference to Chalcolithic culture of Mohen-jo-daro and Harappa, or the recent finds of Kalibangan, Lothal and Dholavira, all representing a very important phase in the pre-history of India. While talking of the literary tradition, the authors talk of Vedas and Sutras and then the epics, Mahabharat and Ramayan, and finally the Puranas. One is tempted to point out that the Vedic period has a whole range of literature not only confined to samhitas but also include Brahmans, Aranyakas, Upanishads and, ofcourse, Sutres and Smritis. The territorial notion of the Aryan occupation of the land does not strat with Manu but with Brahmanas, particulary the Gopath, Satpath and Aittareya Brahmanas, where terms such as Prachya, Udichya, Neechya and Madhyadesa, the last one indentified with Kuru-panchala territory, are employed. The authors have ignored the writings of Greek and the Chinese travellers and don't seem to be acquainted with the Sangam literature. There is hardly any reference to medieval litreature in Indian languages, let alone the ancient Sanskrit texts particulary the plays and poems of poets like Kalidas. When it comes to recent writings, Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Foster, Dominique la pierre and V.S. Naipul find a mention with a short narration of the theme of Foster's novel 'A passages to India'. The authors either don't consider travel accounts as literary or had no time to look at many travel accounts of foregin travellers visiting India during the late nineteenth and

early twentieth century. Sarat Chandra justifiably occupies a few paragraphs in illustrating the importance of what the authors call 'literary geography'. The writings of Al Berrune, Amir khusrau and Firishta and abve all Aine-Akbari of Abul Fazal, the latter being the main source material for the preparation of the first map of 'Hindoostan' in English by R. James, don't figure even in passing.

The linguistic pattern starting with the language families, gives the distribution map of Hindi and Urdu. Surely the authors are familiar with other Indo-Aryan languages and the space constraint may have come in their way. What is intriguing is a discussion of the 'Dravidian family' (p 64) of languages, which turns out to be a hackneyed and a very subjective interpretation of Aryan-Dravidian interaction, including the defeat of the Dravidians by the Aryans, a fact and an explanation that is based on surmise.

In geography of religions, the authors start commenting on hinduism and state "...the basic contents of Hinduism(as contained in the Rig Veda) were brought to India by the Aryans around 1500 B.C., the religion is still considered to be indigenous because all later development of this religion took place in the Indian subcontinent". Do the authors really think that the Rigveda was brought by the Aryans to India when they migrated here? The mention of different rivers of Punjab including the famous 'Sarawati' in the Rigvedic hymans leave no doubt that the 'Samhitas' were composed and organised in India. In fact an entire idyll of verses titled 'Nadistut' occurs in the Xth. mandal of Rigveda. The Hindu thought did not evolve only at the Bank of the indus, but all over the country in a sequence. The Greeks and the Persians gave the name 'Indika' or Indoo (Hindu) for the land beyond

the Indus (Sindhu), perpetuated by the successive immigrants, and that is how the land became Hindoostan or India. It has nothings to do with Rigveda and the word 'Hindu' does not appear either in the Rig-Veda, or the entire Vedic literature and was adopted by the Muslim immigrants in India who addressed its inhabitants as Hindus.

The distribution of population in terms of religious persuasions is short yet well written, and gives a fairly good idea of the distribution of religion in the country. This is followed by distribution pattern of cities and the religious diversity contained in them. Then comes the inter-district pattern of crime. The distribution of crimes, particularly the violence related ones, is explained by historical antecedents and the non-violence rooted culture of the South Indian Dravidians and the great martial tendencies of the Aryans of North India. This is a very simplistic interpretation and unfair to both groups of people. Historical factors do matter, yet contemporary situation resulting from man-resource ratio, educational levels, regional development and accessibility of the region, societal organisation and above all the perception of people of their environment and neighbourhood could be equally significant, and the authors could have looked into these causes.

The concluding remarks are most disappointing and one starts wondering which is the target group that is being addressed in emphasising the place and the definition of cultural geography and the need for research.

This long paper under the title 'Cultural Pattern of India' is neither cultural history nor cultural geography, and distribution of crimes, and religious and linguistic groups don't make for the articulation of a cultural landscape that takes into reckoning many 'non-material

aspects' like tradition, belief-systems, perceptions, philosophy, technology and its impact, innovation and change, interaction between population groups, besides the distribution of religion and crime. The whole piece is a hurriedly assembled and incoherent patchwork of facts, lifted from the earlier works of the authors. The result is a peculiar melange, that shows neither scholarship nor the skill of organisation.

'The Changing Map of India' written by R. P. Srivastava is a simple yet systematically written, readable paper, discussing essentially the changes effected in the map of India after the arrival of the British. The earlier periods are not covered in the paper. Starting with the East India Company and the Battle of Plassey, he examines the process of expansion of the British territory. There are glimpses of the British strategy in the sequence of occupation, that they followed in occupying various parts of the Indian territory and their relations with the princes, and the accession and integration of Indian states. The reorganisation of states after the British left and India achieved freedom as well as the post-organisation changes are discussed lucidly. The difficulties experienced in and after the implementation of the recommendations of the States Reorganisation Commission are also discussed.

The Post-Reorganisational phase is marked 'by tendency towards more and more fragmentation by dividing bigger units on one pretext or the other'. The territorial changes and boundary disputes often create socio-economic problems, a fact that is well brought out by the author, and he ends up the essay by referring to the valuable recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission. He seems to be in favour of greater blending

and integration and thinks that effort should be aimed at establishing centripetal forces that will bind India together.

What one misses in the paper are the maps that could eloquently illustrate the changes. A series of maps from the beginning of the 17th century to the present could have immensely enhanced the value of the paper. This is an inexcusable lapse and all readers will feel it. The author, a geographer, while presenting this excellent synthesis could have made the paper better illustrated, particularly for the benefit of non-geographers and non-Indian readers.

'On the Nature of Geopolitics' by R.D. Dikshit discusses the origin of the term and concept of geopolitics, evaluating in the process the contribution of Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolf Kjellen. He specially dwells at length Ratzel's theory of political geography where state is a kind of organism. The role of Karl Haushofer in establishing the Institute of Geopolitik and the launching of the journal 'Zeitschrift fur Geopolitik' as evaluated by E.A. Walsh and K Kost is mentioned. The post world war II situation is discussed, restoring some respectability to geopolitics., supported by a quotation from Cohen that the essence of geopolitical analysis is the relation of

international political power to the geographical setting. The author concludes the essay by saying that 'a geopolitical perspective in the study of international relations and foreign policies of states involves looking upon the world order through three interrelated geographical scales-local, national and global- in which the role of the nation state is viewed essentially as that of the mediator between the domestic and global influences and demands'.

This smooth flowing introduction is a good introduction to those who are not quite familiar with the distinction between political geography and geopolitics.

Prof. R.N. Dubey Foundations has done an admirable work in bringing out this volume. The preface and the life and work of prof. Dubey by the editor make a good opening, followed by reminiscences and papers. The quality of paper and printing is good and the price reasonable. The book provides a clear view of not only the life and work of Late Prof. Dubey but also an insight into the problems of development of geography and Geography Department of Allahabad which was an important milestone in the development of geography in this country.

- K. R. Dikshit