

BOOK REVIEWS

Dikshit, R. D. (1997) : Geographical Thought : Contextual History of Ideas, Prentice Hall of India Private Limited, New Delhi, pp.300, Rs.175/-

This book is the outgrowth of Professor R.D. Dikshit's teaching a course on the history of geography as a professional field, with special emphasis on its conceptual evolution, for over 25 year in various universities in India. For an in-depth understanding and effective discussion on each issue relating to geographic thought, as included in this Volume, the author has made meticulous use of an impressive list of relevant and standard professional works published in English in North America, Britain, India and elsewhere. In most cases, he has tried to reach the latest work on the subject. It surely is a measure of his commitment to the discipline, as also to this area of special interest. It is, indeed, highly commendable. However, discussion on each issue in the book is very largely based on and profusely quoted from important books and articles published in professional journals, but with only occasional comments from his own critical thinking. It leaves the reader with an impression of the book being more of a compilation of others' works and their reviews, and much less of the author's own contribution to the themes under discussion. Inevitably, there is repetition as also some avoidable confusion in parts of the book. Discussion becomes involved wherever there is excessive dependence on others' view points in handling a problem. Paragraphs after paragraphs are quoted in original. It does not mean by any stretch of imagination that other important works should not be consulted and made use of in such an enterprise, but it is

the over-emphasis on their dove-tailing as such that makes it incoherent and less cohesive. Ideally, it should have been Professor R.D. Dikshit as the author predominantly reflected in the discourse. This observation notwithstanding, the book is a rich treasure of ideas and valuable material relating to geography as a professional field, as also the contexts in which different ideas originated and spread through time and space.

Although the focus of the book is on modern geography, earlier periods have not been neglected.

The book comprises fifteen chapters, the last chapter providing an overview of the developments which took place during the period sine World War II to about 1995. The first chapter which is focused on developments in geography form about 7th century B.C. upto 18th century A.D. finds inadequate space in the book, even though many of the basic ideas relating to the progress of the discipline are rooted in this period. These should have been discussed elaborately. Among other things, contributions of the Nile Valley and the Mesopotamian civilizations to the development of several basic geographic concepts and methodologies should have found due place in the scheme of this important book. Apart form individuals contributions, the nature of geography as developed in the ancient and medieval periods was also expected to have been appropriately discussed.

The view that Plato is regarded as the first scholar who gave the concept of a spherical earth is debatable. Pythagoras, who lived in the 6th century B.C., was thought to be the earliest philosopher to hold the view of a spherical earth based on aesthetic grounds. Since a sphere is the most perfect mathematical form, the earth must of course have that shape, according to him. Plato, who derived many of his teachings from Pythagoras, was the one who gave this idea to his disciples and other scholars of the time who came in contact with him.

Any mention of Indian and Chinese Contributions to geography or ideas geographic is conspicuous by its absence in this chapter.

Chapters 2 to 7 have been organized well, and the contexts in which different ideas originated during the modern period have been duly explained and the developments well documented. Chapter 7 which deals with "The Call for Social Relevance in Research: Re-orientation to Political Economy" is done exceedingly well, with the various sub-sections of the chapter satisfactorily inter-related. But in both Chapters 6 and 7, the author remains tied up with other scholars' works, without making an effort to give his own assessment of the situation. In "Geography and Social Justice" (in Chapter 7), for example, it is David Smith who remains the main guide and whose writings are the main basis of the sub-section. There is nothing wrong in consulting and using others' contributions or ideas with proper references, but the presentation should be in the author's own words and as part of his own organization of the materials, rather than quotes after quotes (or rather paragraphs after paragraphs) from other scholars' publications as such. Quite often these paragraphs/quotes stand put separately, creating incoherence in the text.

In Chapter 8 entitled: "The Regional Concept and Regional Geography", there is no contextualisation of the theme, even though concern for the 'region' is so old in geography. The discussion in the chapter remains mainly confined to 18th to 20th centuries, that also not in a proper sequence, nor in a cohesive way. The chapter ends with a paragraph quoted from J.H. Bird (1989), and not with a concluding statement of the author on such an important issue in the subject. Regional Geography which has been of vital interest throughout the history of geography has not been given critical consideration proportionate to its importance.

Likewise, "The Historical Explanation in Geography" in Chapter 9 has not been traced from its early concerns, so eloquently expressed by Herodotus during the 5th century B.C. and subsequently by other scholars. The discussion as presented in the chapter is not very happily organized. In fact, it is somewhat haphazard. If properly structured, the whole thing could have been given succinctly, coherently and meaningfully by the author.

Chapters 10 to 13, like the preceding chapters 8 and 9, are devoted to specific issues, not placed in any time sequence. Despite their importance, they have not been given the attention they deserved. They stand out separately without having been linked up with the contemporary progress of the discipline. As in earlier chapters, the author remains bogged down with what others have said about these problems, instead of giving his own considered opinion about them in detail.

Chapter 14 relating to "Modern versus Post-Modern Geographies" is marked by the author's clarity of understanding and comprehension of the issue, even though his dependence on others' viewpoints continues unabated. Among several scholars of this

themes, the author has drawn substantially from Giddens and Gregory and has quoted from their publications far more frequently than necessary.

The last chapter of the book entitled: "Progress Since World War II: Continuity, Change, Rapprochement and Convergence" was meant, as per statement of the author, to provide an overview of the changing contexts of progress in geography during the 50 years period since World War II, more particularly during about 25 years from the beginning of the relevance debate. The reviewer was expecting a full summary of conclusions and an overview of the progress in geography in the author's own free style which has always been known for effectiveness, clarity and depth. But even here, he (the author) has chosen to go back to the issues and scholars associated with them again, quoting statements/ paragraphs from their works till the end of the chapter.

Any reader would expect a clear and comprehensive statement or a good summing up in such a concluding chapter, and not an "involved" presentation of what others have said about the developments. No going back to the issues as thought of by different scholars, but only a summary of conclusions along with some suggestions for the future in the words of the learned author was what was desired.

Two serious omissions. The author has dealt with several facets of human geography in different contexts in various chapters, but no attempt has been made to give corresponding justice to physical geography, its basal importance to the discipline notwithstanding. Scholars have been interested in the origin and distribution of a wide variety of elements of the physical environment, and their significance to man from early times. The emergence of genetic and empirical approaches to the study of landforms, among several other

issues, should have been contextualised and discussed. The issue of man-environment relationship has been engaging close attention of the scholars from the very beginning of the history of geography. Many ancient philosophers, like Plato, Aristotle and several others, formulated theories regarding this relationship. This issue has, in fact, been the subject of discussion throughout the centuries. Chapter 11 entitled: "Geography and Environmentalism" covers only about the past two hundred years in discussing the relationship between man and environment, and that too rather scantily.

In addition, despite the emergence of severe environmental problems in most parts of the world from time to time, especially during recent times, nothing much has been said about the progress in the study of physical geography (in its full range) over the centuries, in terms of its contents, methodology and importance.

In fact, in recent times physical geography has faced problems in relation to its place in the total geographic spectrum, at time going to the extent of its gross neglect. For a balanced understanding of the earth as the home of man, there is a need to develop physical geography and human geography simultaneously, both in their all important dimensions, including the inter-relations between the two. Irrespective of all ideologies and paradigms, physical environment will continue receiving attention even in the times to come, necessitating comprehensive study of physical geography in its totality, with special emphasis on concepts, contents and methodology. The absence of such a chapter in the book stares one in the face.

Second, Field work has been an integral part of geographic study from the very inception of the discipline, and its methodology has

been changing consistent with the nature and scale of geographic studies over the centuries. With advances in science and revolutionary developments in technology during the 20th century, particularly since World War II, methods of geographic research have been changing accordingly. The methodology and mode of fieldwork have also been undergoing corresponding changes. It would have been in the fitness of things to provide a comprehensive chapter in this book on the progress in fieldwork methodology in geography in all its various aspects from early times to date.

The above observations notwithstanding, the book is a rich contribution of Professor

R.D.Dikshit to the history of geographic thought. He has tried to reach all relevant publications (in English) and bringing the discussion to the last word on the subject. In that sense, it is the first major contribution of an Indian author to the discipline. Post-graduate students as well as teachers of the course will surely find it a very valuable asset. Its modest price (Rs. 175/-) makes it easily affordable to most.

— G. S. GOSAL

Former Professor of Geography,
Punjab University,
Chandigarh.

Pune-Queen of the Deccan : (Jaymala Diddee and Samita Gupta; Published by Elephant Design Pvt. Ltd., 23 A, Pragati Complex, 17/1B, Kothrud, Pune -411029, 2000; pp.304, Preface, Acknowledgements, Introduction, Bibliography, Photocredits, Glossary, Index, Price Rs 1500/-US\$ 60/-)

The book according to authors is 'a simple biography of Pune' (p.11). Urban biography is an established form of study of individual urban places in a diachronic framework. Pune-Queen of the Deccan is a substantial departure from the established framework of urban biographies in that its concern is more with what happened in the city rather than in its history. The book is divided into six chapters. The sequence of chapters follows the broad historical alignments. The first two chapters deal with the development of the city from the earliest times to its emergence as the capital of the Maratha Empire, the third chapter deals with the events of the defeat of Marathas at the hands of the British at Kirkee and the beginning of the British rule. The next two chapters focus on the development of the Cantonment area and the emergence of Pune as a colonial city. The last chapter details the impact of

post-Independence developments in making Pune one of the Metropolitan cities of the country.

Thematically, each of the chapters describes the development of either a particular part of the city (Chapter 1: the Core; Chapter 4: the Cantonment) or the structure of the city during two significant periods of its history, namely the Peshwa (Chapter 2: The Peshwai City of Peths) and the British (Chapter 5: The Colonial City) or the effects and events of the two politico-spatial transitions (i) from the Maratha to the British (Chapter 3: The Battle for the City) and (ii) the post-Independence developments (Chapter 6: Towards a Metropolis).

Although the titles of chapters seem to adhere to the almost standard format of any book dealing with the growth of an individual city,