

A hundred years of geography education in India: Colonial legacies, institutional growth, paradigm shifts, and contemporary challenges

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Hon'ble Vice Chancellor NEHU, Chair to this session, Professor H.S Sharma, Chief Guest, Dean, School of Human and Environmental Sciences, Professor Sunil De, Convener of the 45th IIG, Professor Ravindra Jaybhaye, General Secretary IIG, Distinguished faculty members of NEHU and universities abroad and India, Members of the Local Organizing Committee, Dear students and Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honor to deliver the second consecutive presidential address at the 45th Annual Meet and International Conference of the Institute of Indian Geographers. I extend my sincere gratitude to the members of the IIG Governing Council and General Body for their confidence and support over the past two years. It is this collective encouragement that has enabled IIG to expand its academic activities, including panel discussions and online lectures on pressing contemporary themes.

I remain indebted to Professor K.R. Dikshit, founder and Patron of IIG, and Dr. Jutta Dikshit for their guidance and encouragement. The tireless commitment of Professor Debendra K. Nayak as Chief Editor has been instrumental in enhancing the reputation of our official journal, *Transactions*. I am pleased to share that *Transactions* is

now the first Indian geography journal to be indexed in Scopus. This achievement would not have been possible without the sustained efforts of the Managing Editor Dr. Avinash Kandekar, General Secretary Professor Ravindra Jaybhaye, and their dedicated team at the Department of Geography, Savitribai Phule Pune University. I am equally grateful to the editorial board and the large network of distinguished reviewers who have contributed to this success.

I am confident that IIG will continue to grow in strength, attracting young researchers and promoting innovation, curricular reform, and sustained progress in geographical scholarship.

This year's gathering is especially significant, as we mark one hundred years of geography education in India. I congratulate the Department of Geography, NEHU,

President's Address delivered at the 45th IIG Annual Meet and International Conference on the theme, *Mapping the Future: Geography for a Better World* (Celebrating 100 years of Geography in India), at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong on 19th December, 2024.

Shillong, for selecting the theme *Mapping the Future: Geography for a Better World*. I acknowledge with deep appreciation the leadership of Professor Sunil De and Professor Debendra K. Nayak in steering the academic deliberations of this conference. I also extend sincere thanks to the Vice Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department, faculty, and students of NEHU for their warm hospitality and outstanding organizational efforts.

My address offers a synoptic overview of the institutional growth, curricular development, and research trajectory of geography education in India over the past century.

The narrative is divided into three broad phases: the colonial period up to 1947, the post-independence years until the mid-1960s, and the subsequent decades until the present. I also reflect on contemporary concerns and the institutional reforms required to ensure progressive change.

Geography as a discipline occupies a unique intellectual space—straddling the natural and social sciences and engaging with the spatial patterns of human and physical phenomena. In India, geography has had a long but uneven academic journey, deeply shaped by colonial imperatives, nationalist reorientations, and post-independence developmental agendas. Over the past hundred years, the landscape of geography education in India has undergone significant transformation, marked by phases of institutional expansion, thematic and methodological shifts, and policy-driven restructuring.

I attempt to trace the evolution of geography education in India over the last century, critically examining its colonial

origins, the expansion of institutions and research paradigms, and the key individuals and institutions that catalyzed these changes. It also addresses the contemporary crises confronting the discipline—ranging from epistemic marginalization to policy neglect—and suggests directions for future renewal. The aim is to provide a historically grounded, critically informed, and pedagogically relevant account of the field's trajectory.

Colonial orientation and legacy

The teaching of geography in colonial India was introduced primarily as a tool of governance, surveillance, and imperial control. The early educational policies of the East India Company and later the British Raj focused on cultivating a class of educated intermediaries who could serve administrative functions. Geography was part of the colonial curriculum in elite institutions like Presidency College (Calcutta), Bombay University, and Madras University by the late 19th century.

Initially, geography was taught more as a descriptive, encyclopedic subject, heavily reliant on rote memorization of physical features, regions, and products. The goal was to produce a “map-literate” population loyal to the Empire. As Thomas Metcalf notes, geography served to legitimize imperial rule by presenting the colonies as spaces in need of order and development. “In Indian universities, geography was introduced more as a means to understand the imperial geography of power than to explore the lived geographies of India's own people.”

The formal institutionalization of geography began with the appointment of geography lecturers and departments in major colonial universities. The first full-fledged

Table 1: Professional Societies in Geography#

Name	Year of Establishment	Place / Institution
The Indian Geographical Society (IGS)	1925-26	Chennai (Madras)
A.M.U. Geographical Society, Department of Geography, AMU	1926	Department of Geography, AMU
Geographical Society of India (formerly Calcutta Geographical Society)	1933/1936	Department of Geology, Presidency College initially; later office in Calcutta University
National Geographical Society of India (NGSI)	1946	Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi (Varanasi), Department of Geography, Institute of Science, BHU
National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI)	1978	Headquartered at the Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi
Association of Population Geographers of India (APGI)	1978	Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh
Institute of Indian Geographers (IIG)	1979	University of Pune, Pune
Indian Society of Geomatics (ISG)	1993	ISG's main office: Ahmedabad (associated with Space Applications Centre, ISRO), Gujarat

This list is not comprehensive and is indicative of the efforts made by professionals in the field of geography.

department of geography is often attributed to Aligarh Muslim University (1924), although other institutions like University of Calcutta, colleges located in Lahore (currently in Pakistan), and Saidapet, Chennai introduced geography courses around the same time. Geography’s development was closely tied to colonial cartographic and administrative needs—evident in the work of the Survey of India (1767 onwards) and later the Geological Survey (1851).

The curriculum was Eurocentric, modeled on British syllabi, with little emphasis on the Indian subcontinent. This laid the foundation for a long-lasting epistemic dependence, wherein geography was seen as an imported discipline rather than an indigenous mode of understanding space.¹

Post-Independence expansion

With the attainment of independence in 1947, there was a surge in nationalist efforts to reframe education—including geography—as a tool of development and self-reliance. Geography was seen as a critical discipline for regional planning, resource mapping, and agricultural development, and it gained importance in academic institutions and public policy. Several universities established or expanded their geography departments during the 1950s and 1960s.

The establishment of University Grants Commission (UGC) in 1956 facilitated the standardization and funding of geography programmes across India. UGC also supported field-based studies, cartographic labs, and

¹ Metcalf, Thomas (1995) *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge University Press

thematic research.² The National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation (NATMO) was established in 1956. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) (est. 1969) began funding geography research with a developmental focus. The professional societies and their official journals played a significant role in shaping the course of teaching and research (Table 1).

Paradigm shifts in teaching and research

The 1970s marked a significant shift in geography curriculum and teaching with the introduction of quantitative techniques, spatial analysis, and empirical rigor. This shift was inspired by global trends (such as the so-called quantitative revolution in Anglo-American geography) and internal critiques of descriptive geography and marked a significant departure from descriptive regional geographies that dominated the curricular structure in India. Jawaharlal Nehru University's Centre for the Study of Regional Development (CSRD), established in 1971, led this transformation. Advanced training in quantitative methods and modelling, regional development theory, emphasis on rural-urban dynamics, land use, and environmental degradation, and socio-cultural dimensions of development and disparities formed the bedrock of its postgraduate geography program and research: "CSRD changed the grammar of Indian geography by making it empirically grounded, policy-linked, and socially relevant."³ Themes of socio-spatial inequities with a special focus on

marginalized communities and women, justice and well-being imbued with strong theoretical and methodological perspectives further broadened the scope of geographical research spearheaded by CSRD⁴ that was gradually adopted by other university departments. The late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of GIS, Remote Sensing, and environmental management as subfields. Geography departments began offering applied specializations, supported by ISRO, NRSC, and other agencies.

South India — with its unique physiography (Deccan plateau, Western and Eastern Ghats, extensive coasts and riverine deltas), long histories of regional political economy, and a strong tradition of higher education — has made distinctive contributions to geography as a discipline in India. These contributions include institution building (departments and learned societies), methodological innovations (early remote sensing and later mathematical/computational approaches), applied regional and environmental research (Western Ghats, delta studies, coastal processes), and the training of generations of geographers who shaped teaching and policy. Evidence of these contributions is visible in archival journals, university histories, ISRO and scientific biographies, and awards to South-based scholars.

Epistemic marginalization

Despite its strategic relevance, geography is often underrepresented in national educational

² Sopher, D.E. (1980). *Geography and Development in India*. Concept Publishing. Also see Bagchi-Sen, S. and Smith, H.L. (2006). "The Changing Landscape of Geography in India." *Environment and Planning A*, 38(10).

³ Mehrotra, S.R. (1961). "Development of Geography in Indian Universities." *Indian Geographical Journal*, 36(2)

⁴ Sharma, H.S. (2004). "Geography in India: From Colonial Legacy to Contemporary Challenges." *Geographical Review of India*, 66(1)

policy. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 fails to recognize geography as a core discipline in school curricula, threatening its future pipeline. There is a stark disparity in the quality of geography education across universities and colleges. Many state universities and colleges lack laboratory facilities, fieldwork support and qualified teachers. School-level geography is often taught by non-specialists. Geography syllabi are often outdated and lack integration of current issues (climate change, gender, digital spatial analysis). There is limited use of digital tools, interactive platforms, or interdisciplinary teaching.

Despite changes, remnants of colonial geography persist—in textbooks, mapping priorities, and epistemic silos. Scholars have pointed to the continued reproduction of colonial binaries in spatial education.⁵

Over the last hundred years, geography education in India has transitioned from a colonial, descriptive discipline to one increasingly concerned with spatial justice, regional development, and environmental sustainability. Institutions like JNU-CSRD, and bodies like NATMO and ICSSR have played central roles in this transformation.

Yet, the challenges remain formidable: declining enrolments, policy neglect, curriculum inertia, and technological gaps. If geography is to reclaim its relevance, it must become more interdisciplinary, inclusive, and critically engaged with India's socio-ecological realities. Greater support for school-level geography, renewed investment

in geospatial education, and decolonial curriculum reform are necessary to meet the needs of a changing India.

Contemporary concerns

Rising global conflicts: A multiplex landscape

Recent years have seen a marked escalation in the number and intensity of global conflict zones. Report indicates that over the past three years (2022-25), conflict zones have increased by approximately 65%, affecting 4.6% of the global landmass—nearly twice the size of India. This surge is notably concentrated in Ukraine, Myanmar, the Middle East, Israel and Palestine, and the African Sahel, with significant consequences for economic stability, food security, human security, and supply chains globally.

Moreover, the global security environment is becoming more volatile due to multiple overlapping trends: the shift to a multipolar world, waning confidence in traditional institutions, technological transformation in warfare, and the rise of new conflict domains. In 2024, for instance, China's aggressive posture—with blockade drills, missile tests, and island militarization in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea—disrupted one-third of global shipping and 40% of petroleum traffic, threatening geopolitical and economic stability.

David Miliband, CEO of the International Rescue Committee, emphasizes that this surge in conflict is fed by a complex interplay of factors including resource stress, political polarization, the impact of social media, climate change, and protracted crisis

⁵ Thakur, B. (2007). *Paradigms in Geography: Changing Dimensions*. Rawat Publications; also see Qureshi, M.H. (2013), *Paradigm Shifts in Geography*, Manak Publications.

fatigue—all demanding more cohesive global humanitarian cooperation.

Finally, the burgeoning Sino-Russian axis and the strategic competition across the Eurasian landmass underscore the geopolitical stakes of current conflicts. Recent literature warns of an emerging autocratic alliance leveraging geography and strategic partnerships to challenge existing global order.

Geographic distribution of resources remains foundational to global strategy. Regions rich in hydrocarbons, minerals, or agricultural capacity—like the Middle East, Russia, or the Caspian zone—are perennial centers of competition.

Access to strategic minerals such as lithium and rare earths plays an increasingly vital role, especially for defense and high-tech industries, driving both cooperation and contention among states.

Food security—tied directly to geography—also exerts a powerful influence on geopolitical stability. Disruptions in agricultural production and trade, especially in vulnerable regions, can quickly cascade into broader international crises. For example, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has already triggered structural shifts in global wheat markets, with ensuing ripple effects on international food networks.

Climate-induced changes—drought, rising temperatures, extreme weather—are widening resource competition and displacement, especially where stability and governance are weak. Climate-driven environmental stress may account for 3–20%

of armed conflict globally; a temperature rises of 2°C may more than double conflict risk, and 4°C might amplify it fivefold, reaching 26%.

Despite technological advances, geography remains a critical stage-setter. In the South China Sea, China leverages geographic features—artificial islands and surveillance infrastructure—to assert dominance, aligning with theories like those of Robert Kaplan regarding the “revenge of geography”.⁶

The extractive industries, poverty and disenfranchisement

Extractive industries—oil, gas, coal, and mineral mining—have long underpinned industrial growth, energy security, and state revenues. Yet their operations are deeply entangled with ecological degradation, pollution, climate change, and the displacement of communities, especially Indigenous peoples. This article explores the contradictions of extraction through global and Indian case studies, situates these within broader debates on the “resource curse,” and proposes pathways toward more sustainable and equitable governance of natural resources.

The global economy is built upon the foundations of extractive industries. From coal and oil that fueled the industrial revolution to rare earths powering today’s digital and renewable technologies, extraction has been synonymous with progress. However, this extractive paradigm has also generated multiple crises: toxic pollution, biodiversity loss, poverty entrenchment, violent conflicts, land dispossession, and worsening climate risks.

⁶ Sinha, V. (2023). “How Are Textbooks Reproducing the Coloniality of Knowledge?” *E-International Relations*; also see Mukherjee, S. (2015). “Decolonizing Geography in India.” *EPW*, Vol. 50(41).

The paradox of extraction—where resource-rich regions often record some of the lowest human development indicators—has been widely documented. Scholars call this the “resource curse” or “paradox of plenty”, highlighting how the very resources that should generate wealth instead perpetuate underdevelopment, inequality, and corruption.

It is important for the geographers to dwell deep into five interlinked dimensions of extractive industries: environmental degradation, pollution, poverty, land grab, and climate change. Global case studies from Nigeria, the Amazon Basin, Indonesia, and the Arctic are complemented with a detailed study of India.

Mining and fossil fuel industries are some of the most environmentally damaging human activities. Large-scale deforestation, biodiversity loss, and contamination of air, water, and soil have been widely reported. For instance, acid mine drainage—where sulfide minerals interact with water and air to produce sulfuric acid—renders rivers biologically dead for decades.

Oil spills remain catastrophic in regions like the Niger Delta, where more than 3,000 spills have occurred since 2006, destroying fisheries, mangroves, and farmland. Communities are left to drink contaminated water, with elevated cancer and birth defect risks. In Jharia (Jharkhand, India), coal seam fires have been burning for over a century, releasing toxic fumes and displacing thousands.

Global reports also link extractive pollution to “sacrifice zones”, areas where local populations bear disproportionate environmental and health costs for the benefit of distant urban and industrial centers.

Despite generating billions in revenue, many resource-rich regions remain deeply impoverished. This contradiction is evident in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia. In Nigeria, oil accounts for about 90% of export earnings, yet the Niger Delta remains one of the country’s poorest regions.⁷ Similarly, in India, states such as Jharkhand and Odisha—rich in coal, iron ore, and bauxite—rank low in health, education, and nutrition outcomes. This paradox reflects not just mismanagement but also elite capture, rent-seeking, and displacement. Local communities lose land and livelihoods while national and global corporations extract profits.

Land acquisition for extractive projects often triggers dispossession. Mining licenses frequently overlap with Indigenous territories or protected forests. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has repeatedly warned of “land grabs” tied to mining, oil, and large-scale agriculture.⁸

The landmark case of the Dongria Kondh tribe in Odisha, India, illustrates the tension between corporate interests and Indigenous rights. In 2013, India’s Supreme Court upheld the community’s right to reject bauxite mining in the Niyamgiri Hills under the Forest Rights

⁷ World Bank & UNDP. (2019). *Extractive Industries and Sustainable Development*. Washington, D.C. Also see UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights & Environment. (2022). *Toxic pollution and human rights: “Sacrifice zones.”* United Nations.

⁸ United Nations Human Rights Council. (2021). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples*.

Act (2006), making global headlines as a rare victory for grassroots resistance.

Fossil fuel combustion remains the largest driver of global greenhouse gas emissions. Coal, oil, and natural gas together account for nearly three-quarters of global CO₂ emissions. Methane leakage—especially from oil and gas extraction—is a potent climate risk, with 80 times the warming potential of CO₂ over a 20-year period. The International Energy Agency (IEA) warns that unabated fossil fuel development is incompatible with the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C target. Paradoxically, the green transition itself is driving a new wave of extraction. Minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel—essential for batteries and renewable technologies—are concentrated in ecologically fragile regions, raising the risk of repeating the same destructive patterns under a “green extractivism” model.

India provides an especially illustrative case because of its dual challenge: dependence on coal for energy security and the devastating socio-ecological impacts of extraction.

Mining-induced displacement disproportionately affects Adivasi communities. Though only 8% of India’s population, they constitute over 40% of those displaced by development projects.⁹ The Niyamgiri case remains a rare example where community rights under the Forest Rights Act were upheld.

Despite mineral wealth, Jharkhand and Odisha remain among India’s least developed states. The Planning Commission’s Human Development Report (2011) noted poor performance in literacy, nutrition, and health indicators compared to non-mining states.

The persistence of extractive dependence demands urgent policy reforms:

1. Revenue Management

- Sovereign wealth funds (Norway’s model) can stabilize resource revenues.
- Local development funds should earmark royalties for health, education, and infrastructure.

2. Transparency and Accountability

- Countries should join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).
- Public disclosure of contracts, environmental audits, and benefit-sharing agreements must be mandatory.

3. Environmental Safeguards

- Independent monitoring of emissions and spills with real-time data publication.
- Companies must deposit reclamation bonds to ensure post-mining rehabilitation.

4. Community and Indigenous Rights

- Legal recognition of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC).
- Accessible grievance mechanisms for affected communities.

5. Climate Transition

- Phasedown of new coal and fossil fuel exploration.
- Investment in “climate-smart mining” for critical minerals, balancing environmental and development needs.

⁹ Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2014). *Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India*.

The extractive industries embody the paradox of development: while fueling industrial growth, they perpetuate environmental collapse, poverty, and climate crises. Case studies from Nigeria, the Amazon, Indonesia, the Arctic, and India reveal recurring patterns—pollution, displacement, inequality—despite diverse contexts.

For India, the challenge is particularly acute. Coal remains indispensable for energy, yet its ecological and social costs are unsustainable. Without structural reforms, including strict enforcement of community rights, transparent governance, and a just transition away from coal, the extractive model will continue to deepen inequalities and ecological collapse.

Moving forward, the global community must recognize that the real cost of extraction extends far beyond economic metrics. It is measured in poisoned rivers, vanishing forests, uprooted communities, and an unstable climate. A truly sustainable future will require moving beyond extractivism toward models of equitable resource governance and low-carbon development.

Widening socio-economic inequalities: Global trends and India's particular challenge

Inequality is back at the center of policy debates worldwide. After decades when many countries saw falling extreme poverty, the last thirty years have witnessed growing concentration of income and wealth at the top, persistent gaps between regions and cities, and new fault lines created by technology, labour market change and uneven public policy. These dynamics matter because high and rising inequality undermines social cohesion, reduces intergenerational mobility and can blunt broad-based economic growth.

Recent syntheses from the World Inequality Lab and OECD show a clear pattern: the top 1% and top 10% have captured a disproportionate share of income and wealth gains in many countries, while wages for large sections of the population have stagnated in real terms. Wealth inequality is especially pronounced — the richest households hold an outsized share of national wealth — and regional disparities (between richer urban cores and lagging peripheries) remain large across advanced and developing economies.

Policy choices — tax design, labour protections, public investment in health and education — play a decisive role. The OECD highlights how differences in taxation and public transfers explain much cross-country variation in disposable income inequality, while the World Bank documents how shocks (pandemics, commodity price swings) and slow job creation amplify inequality in vulnerable regions.

Several structural forces underlie the widening gaps:

- Technological change and skill-biased automation, raising returns to high-skill labour and capital.
- Globalization and capital mobility, enabling returns to capital to grow faster than wages in some sectors.
- Financialization and asset price inflation, which disproportionately benefit asset owners.
- Weak or regressive fiscal systems in many countries that fail to redistribute effectively. These drivers interact with demographic transitions and urbanization to produce uneven outcomes.

India's inequality story is complex and highly sensitive to the measurement

chosen. Consumption-based measures (often used in national household surveys) show a substantial decline in extreme poverty and, by some accounts, an improvement in consumption-Gini between 2011–12 and 2022–23. Official data and some World Bank commentary have highlighted big reductions in extreme poverty and improvements in certain indicators of human development.¹⁰

Yet income- and wealth-based analyses tell a different story. Recent work from the World Inequality Lab finds that top-end income and wealth shares in India have risen sharply over the past three decades; by 2022–23 the top 1% accounted for a much larger share of income and an especially large share of wealth than at mid-20th century levels. These findings suggest rising concentration at the top even as aggregate poverty falls. Several commentators have therefore stressed that headline improvements in consumption or poverty statistics do not eliminate large underlying inequalities in income, wealth and access to services.

Labour markets add another layer of concern: job creation—particularly of decent formal employment—has not kept pace with demographic expansion. The Financial Times and World Bank have warned that without stronger, quality job growth (including higher female labour force participation), India risks leaving a large youth cohort under-employed, which would entrench inequality across generations.¹¹

Inequality in India is also spatial and intersectional. Urban–rural divides, state-level variations, and disparities tied to caste, gender and ethnicity persist. Richer states

and metropolitan regions disproportionately attract high-value services and manufacturing jobs, while many rural and tribal areas lag in basic services, schooling and health outcomes. This geography of inequality complicates policy solutions because place-based disadvantages require different instruments (connectivity, local public investment, land and labour reforms) than national redistribution alone.

Evidence suggests a combination of policies is needed to curb inequality meaningfully: progressive taxation (including more effective taxation of capital and high incomes), strengthened social protection and universal basic services (health, education), active labour-market policies to generate formal employment, and targeted place-based investments to reduce regional divergence. Transparency and data improvements (especially on income and wealth) are also critical to design and evaluate reforms. International institutions stress that without these measures, economic growth alone is unlikely to produce equitable outcomes.

Globally and in India, the last few decades have produced a mixed record: notable gains in poverty reduction coexist with rising concentration of income and wealth at the top and persistent spatial and social inequalities. For India, the challenge is to combine continued growth with policies that generate quality jobs, strengthen public services, and ensure that the gains of development are broadly shared — while improving measurement so that policy targets the right problems. The political stakes are high: unchecked inequality risks undermining

¹⁰ World Inequality Lab. *Income and wealth inequality in India, 1922–2023* (Working Paper). 2024.

¹¹ Financial Times. “India risks ‘squandering’ demographic dividend, says World Bank.”

social cohesion and slowing long-term human development.

Conclusion

The history of geography education in India over the last century reveals a complex interplay of colonial legacies, postcolonial expansion, paradigm shifts, and ongoing struggles for epistemic autonomy. Introduced under colonial rule as a tool of governance and imperial control, geography was initially molded to serve the state rather than society. Post-independence, it became an instrument of development planning, resource management, and regional analysis, reflecting the aspirations of a nation seeking to overcome poverty and underdevelopment.

Over time, Indian geography embraced global paradigm shifts—first quantitative methods, then critical perspectives, and later technological tools such as GIS and remote sensing. These transformations expanded its scope but also reinforced divides between physical and human geography, as well as between elite and regional institutions. The persistence of epistemic marginalization demonstrates that the project of decolonizing geography remains incomplete, with local knowledge systems and vernacular intellectual traditions still struggling for recognition.

In the present, geography must confront some of the most urgent challenges of our times. Geopolitical conflicts, extractive economies, environmental crises, and widening inequalities demand geographical approaches that are both critical and integrative. The discipline is uniquely positioned to trace the connections between global and local processes, from the displacement of tribal communities by mining projects in Odisha to

the restructuring of global wealth chains that perpetuate inequality across continents.

For India, the task is twofold: to cultivate a geography that is globally engaged yet locally rooted, and to harness the discipline's analytical tools in addressing pressing developmental and environmental concerns. This will call for invoking principles of federalism and empowering federal institutions. Geography can no longer remain descriptive or derivative; it must become transformative, offering frameworks for justice, sustainability, and equity.

As the discipline enters its second century in India, its challenge lies in moving beyond the colonial imprint and technocratic fixation, towards a socially engaged, critical, and inclusive geography. In doing so, it can reaffirm its relevance not only to academic debates but also to the struggles of ordinary people navigating landscapes of inequality, conflict, and environmental change. Geography, in this sense, is not merely the study of the earth's surface—it is a practice of imagining and building more just and sustainable futures.

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