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BOOK REVIEW

R. D. Dixit

Political Geography – A Contemporary Perspective, (Tata-McGraw-Hill), 1982, pp. 258 + Maps, diagrams, bibliography etc. (Paper back), Rs. 27

In his introduction Prof. Dixit claims that his book is a review of the development and content of political geography. The whole tenor of the work bears out this claim. In every chapter the author has not only brought together a mass of material on the nature of political geography, not found elsewhere in one work, but also critically reviewed the existing literature on the subject. Maps and diagrams clearly illustrate the themes, ideas and viewpoints in the text. The list of references too is impressive.

Prof. Dixit is not a novice in the field of political geography. Students of geography should be familiar with his treatise on Federalism and his many papers in the various research journals. The present volume displays the same insight and ease of expression as characterises his other works.

The first six chapters are conventional and deal with the development, content, nature, scope, etc. of political geography as elaborated by Pearcy, Fifield and Associates, Mahan, Mackinder, Spykman and others. The next four chapters are largely reproductions from Whittlesey, Cohen, Johnston and Dixit himself. The last chapter on electoral geography should be of help to those political compaigners, who under a particular political system, must seek the mandate of the people to establish their leadership.

Theories in geography are valuable only in terms of their applicability to specific areas. This in turn depends on the correct identification of the basic forces which determine a particular pattern. Where these forces are operating the theory is a means to the understanding of the pattern. But where the basic forces are not functioning the theory is of no use for geographical interpretation. The factors and combinations of phenomena which influence the patterns in area, be it political, economic, social, cultural or physical, are not only multifarious and complicated but also subject to change during the course of time and from place to place. More elusive is the fact that Man's response to similar environments is not the same in all places at all times. Human behaviour and reactions cannot be contained within the framework of theories. It is this unpredictability of the human element in geography that denies it the status of a purely systematic science.

Nor is geography a science of relationship between Man and his physical environment. It is unreal to deduce the human resultants from the physical causes. When a geographer speaks of the environment he dose not mean the physical environment, but the total environment, the physical, the economic, the cultural, social, political, and even the aesthetic and the spiritual environment

in so far as they have impressed themselves on area. The physical framework is in no way more important for geographic interpretation than the humanly developed environment in all places at all times. The analysis and synthesis of the changing relationship of phenomena and their combined impact on particular areas at a given time is the geographic method of understanding the earth or a part of it in all its entirety. Geography is a method of studying " Earth and Man " rather than a subject. The adjective " political " confines the geographer to the political aspects of Man just as the adjectives economic, historical, cultural, social, physical etc. confine him to those aspects of Man and earth. But the geographic technique of " seeing things together in area " remains the same whatever the geographer's field of specialisation.

However, the synthesis aimed at by the geographer depends on the analysis of the forces that produce a pattern. He must of necessity use the material of the systematic studies in his regional synthesis. It is like the compass to the mariner. Prof. Dixit must be commended on providing a systematic approach to political geography. It is for the student to select the relevant criteria to understand the political problems in the region of his choice.

One word about federalism. Federalism, according to the author, is the most geographically expressive of all governments, firstly because it is based on regional diversities and secondly because of its dual political organisation (sovereign Centre coupled with regional autonomy). It is these very characteristics inherent in federalism that stand in the way of the nation-building process. A federal government, based on the recommendations of the Simon Commission, was planned for India by the British in 1935. The partition of India was the result of the emphasis on the divisive forces. Even though a full fledged fedetal government did not come into force in independent India, thanks to the Constitution makers of 1947 and their commitments to a strongly united India, the autonomy of the states as recommended in the 1935 Act was recognised with certain reservations. With the political sanction given to the linguistic states, this autonomy, originally meant to stimulate a dynamic economic policy within regions of limited size, expressed itself in area as exclusive cultural regions whose boundaries have hardened with time. India is no more diverse than any other country of the same size and long history. But its diversities have been used to advantage to perpetuate the colonial rule. The author rightly says that regional boundaries should not be that exclusive as to prevent the emergence of a strongly united nation. In India language is a powerful divisive force because it is the " only cleavage forming federal factor." But, he says, if another cleavage factor such as caste were allowed to overlap the language boundaries its divisive influence will be neutralised. " If boundaries of regionally identifying diversities overlap, the cleavages have a tendency to be transformed into linkages and the fissiparous tendencies get cancelled " (p. 168). As an example of a successful federation based on this principle he cites Switzerland where language and religion have overlapping boundaries. But will the focus on caste cleavages, given the present environment " in India further the balkanisation of the country or will it act as a neutralising force ? Can two wrong moves add up to a right ? Both language and caste are deeply rooted in India simply because no other greater force has dislocated them. The history of a country is determined by the cultural diversities of an ancient past only when its people have not experienced an intellectual and industrial revolution forceful enough to wipe out old patterns in area. When such revolutions were changing the face of the Western world creating national

and supra-national states with new industrial and agricultural regions neutralising the old boundaries, India's archaic physico-cultural regions were perpetuated into the modern period. What would really neutralise the country's language cleavages is an overall economic development where industrial, commercial and agricultural regions overlap the cultural regions. This revolution has yet to be forceful enough to function as a neutralising factor to the present language cleavages. Secondly a meaningful education aimed at transforming the narrow regional attitudes of the people to a wider national outlook should prove a panacea for the divisive forces.

These are of course view points and do not in any way detract from the principles of political geography put forward by the author. The book is a valuable guide to university level students of political geography.

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