

## Geography and Geographers - sixty years of my co-wandering

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I wish to thank IIG for giving me this opportunity to commemorate one of my valued teachers and a much-regarded colleague at JNU for almost three decades, Prof. Aijazuddin Ahmad.

Professor Ahmad was someone I grew up with as a geographer. To celebrate him as my teacher, in fact with him, celebrate all my teachers, I will talk about my academic journey, and, about those teachers who were my co-wayfarers. Walking along with them I became who I am today.

Geography as a separate well-established discipline in India is a hundred years old and I have been fortunate to have shared almost sixty years of this journey. The discipline has a wide kaleidoscopic canvas and, in my talk, today I will try to remember the geographers who have painted this canvas for me. There is nothing in this script that is academically profound, or even useful, and I hope my students here will forgive me for this rambling. I only wish to acquaint you with some of the geographers who wrote the books that you may have read or the research papers that you may have consulted. I assure you it is useful to know them not only as your teachers but also as the exceptional human beings they were.

When you are reading a book you unconsciously develop an image of the personality of the author. When I started my research on colonial cities in the early 1970s the only book that addressed my intellectual curiosity was T.G. McGee's *The Urbanization Process in the Third World* (1971). It became my bible and McGee, my Messiah. For me, McGee was a ponderous, very serious, lost-in-thought person. In 1980 I had the great opportunity of spending a fortnight with him in a conference at the East West Centre, Hawaii. Over my stay, I discovered that this profound thinker was also a simple, unassuming, fun-loving man who while travelling in India had slept in *Dharamshalas* and had a heart full of warmth and empathy for the Third World. His books for me since then speak a different language.

I had sent a very nostalgic and autobiographical version of this paper to Sachidanand a few days ago when his sword was hanging on my head to submit something. I had to delete a major portion of it to be able to present it to you today.

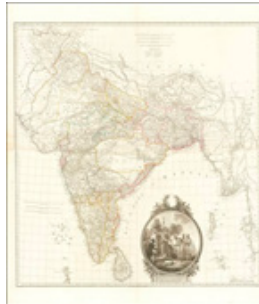
In this talk, I wish to share with you the times and circumstances that shaped students of Geography of my generation. When I say, my generation, I refer to the cohort which, after passing Class X, entered Intermediate

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Sir Dudley Stamp (1898 – 1966)



James Rennel (1742 - 1830)

or Degree colleges in and around 1960. I will focus mostly on the formative decades of geography, from the 1970s to the 1990s. In the subsequent decades, my students became my co-wanderers as heads of departments, consultants, professors, bureaucrats, and even a prime minister. I will talk about them some other day.

The early decades of geography in India were not ordinary times for the discipline as it was just beginning to find its feet in the country and spread out from a few well-established universities, mostly in North India, into newer universities. The discipline was also trying to come out of its British mould. The geography faculty was groping, tentatively, for the research areas to initiate in their departments, and at the same time struggling to shed the influence of their foreign mentors who were strong academics and personalities.

I begin by foregrounding my reminiscences with my school days in the mid-1950s. I got my education up to Class X in a small convent school in a then-small railway town called Gorakhpur, in eastern Uttar Pradesh. If you look back at your childhood, somewhere lurks a school teacher or two who determined

what subjects became your favourites. My favourite teacher was the Geography teacher Mrs. Luther. Geography was taught through Dudley Stamp's books. Only in higher classes, our teaching was done through books by Indian writers. I do not remember who wrote those Indian books in Geography but we depended on books called *kunjee* in Hindi, which meant keys to a subject. These were written by some enterprising young teachers and printed on cheap paper. These *kunjees* were our GOOGLE.

Dudley Stamp's, narration of Indian regions used to trigger my imagination about the then far-off places in South India from where my '*Madras*' friends came. In those days anyone coming from the deep south was called a *Madras*. Dudley Stamp introduced me to Burma, now Myanmar, a country I found exciting because my uncle had fought there in World War II for the British Army. Little did I know that one day I would have a changed opinion about Dudley Stamp and also about the innocent terms he was using such as "The Tropics" and "Tropical Geography," which symbolized colonial expansion, imperialism, racism and Euro-centrism. Dudley Stamp was a strong supporter of the Empire, one might even say, 'complicit in Empire' and had

greatly influenced the Royal Geographical Society (RGS), the IGU, and the teaching of Geography in India and Britain. He was knighted in 1965 and was much awarded by Associations of Geography the world over. Such were the times.

I would like to digress here, and, as a backdrop give important milestones in the development of the discipline in India. One may well ask who the Father of Indian Geography is. By consensus, the answer is James Rennell. He is known as the father of Oceanography too. He was the surveyor and engineer in the East India Company (EIC) and was deputed to survey the Bengal River system and map it for exploring inland waterways for trade.

1760	Bengal Atlas
1783	Memoir of a Map of Hindoostan
1788	Atlas of India

Geography began to be taught in schools in India in the later part of the Nineteenth Century since it was considered beneficial for those who would like to join the army or were in the East India Company's services.

Formal geography departments in India started being opened in the late 1920s. The year of their establishment in the major universities and the geographers, mostly from the second generation, with whom I have had the privilege to interact is given in the Table 1.

It may be of interest to know that the Department of Geography at Rangoon University is four years older than any Indian Department. It was set up by Professor Dudley Stamp and his wife using the curriculum of

London University. In 1937 O.H.K. Spate also joined it for some years when he did not get a job in England. Although brilliant and original, he was considered too radical for a conventional academic career in England.

The geographical associations and societies founded during the colonial period played a vital role in disseminating geographical knowledge and promoting geographical research. Journals like *The Geographer* (1925, Aligarh) *Geographical Journal* (1926, Madras), the *Geographical Review of India* (1936, Calcutta), and the *Bulletins of National Geographical Society of India* (1946, B.H.U.) popularised Geography.

### **Geography at the Graduation Level in the 1960s**

My four years of Intermediate (Class XI and XII) and two years of Graduation were spent at Loreto Convent College at Lucknow. Those four years of Geography (1960-1964) were dull as the teachers kept changing and nothing exciting happened in the classes. The only redemption was that the college library, where I was a student helper, was quite well-equipped and I had free access to an *almirah* full of well-chosen textbooks. I learned Geography on my own. Urban Geography interested me the most. Self-teaching was an enjoyable experience but created a sort of distance from the subject.

When I look back nothing very exciting was happening in urban geography in other places of learning in India too. Most graduate students were being taught urban morphological models developed by the Chicago School by Mayer, Ullman and Harris, their work on functional classification

Table 1: Formal geography departments in India started in the late 1920s.

Year	Geography departments established	The flag bearer geographers I have interacted with
1928	Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) (Undergraduate Courses in 1924)	Muzaffar Ali., S. Shafi, M. Anas, Mehdi Raza, Monis Raza, A. Tonki, Aijaz Ahmad, S. Alvi, M. Mukhtar, S. Zaidi,
1928	Patna College later University ( Undergraduate)	P. Dayal, Enayat Ahmad
1941	Calcutta University	S. P. Chatterjee, Sunil Munsii, Satyesh Chakravarty,
1942	Osmania University	S. Manzoor Alam
1946	Banaras Hindu University	R. L. Singh, S. L., Kayastha, U. Singh, P. B. Singh,
1947	Agra University	
1947	Allahabad University	R. N. Dubey
1948	University of Madras	G. Kurien
1948	Gauhati University	B. K. Kar
1949	University of Kashmir	M. Alam
1950	Poona University	K. R. Dikshit
1957	Bombay University	C. D. Deshpande, A. Arunachalam, K.Sita
1959	Delhi School of Economics	George Kurian, V. L. Prakasa Rao
1960	Ranchi University	R. N. P. Sinha
1960	Panjab University	G. S. Gosal, S. Mehta, K. D. Sharma
1968	Jammu University	G. B. Singh, V. S. Manhas,
1969	Jawaharlal Nehru University	CSRD faculty
	Geographers affiliated with Research or government institutions	L. S. Bhatt, K. V. Sundaram, R. N. Misra V. L. Prakasa Rao, G. S. Gosal, R. P. Misra, Manzoor Alam, S. C. Chatterjee,

of towns and the work of German geographers Losch and Christaller. The first anthology of papers published on Urban Geography, Harold Mayer's *Readings in*

*Urban Geography* (1959) was our basic text. We were unaware of the radical change that was taking place in Geography in the early 1960s by Ullman and Garrison's students

at the University of Washington that came to be labelled as “Quantitative Geography”. The full ramifications of this change were, however, revealed at the University of Chicago by Brian Berry a few years little later. But for my generation in India, we had to wait to become aware of this until we reached our post-graduation, in the mid-1960s.

### **My Post Graduation at AMU- wondrous two years (1964-1966)**

After I graduated I was restless and confused because I wanted to have a career other than teaching. Teaching was the oft-beaten track for middle-class women of that time. I wanted to do something different. Fortunately, a timely chance meeting with a relative of a family friend decided on my career option to my satisfaction. He was freshly minted as an Urban and Regional Planner from IIT Kharagpur after obtaining an M.A. in geography from BHU. I shared my plight with him and he advised that I could consider following his career path and get a Master’s degree in Geography which would get me into the Architecture and Regional Planning Department at I.I.T. Kharagpur, or at the School of Planning and Architecture in Delhi.

I considered this option seriously and since Lucknow University did not have a Geography Department I decided to head for Aligarh Muslim University where I was told the Department was very good. The year was 1964.

I will now go into a little non-academic digression and talk to you about the department of geography at AMU, in which my and Professor Aijaz’s early academic world was chiseled.

Since Sohail Hashmi Saheb, the chair of this session, has spent his childhood in AMU this may resonate with him.

All my student life until I reached A.M.U. was spent in Convents. My school was run by Carmelite nuns from Kerala, and college by Irish nuns. They created for us cocooned caring worlds of rules and regulations. The freedoms allowed were limited to the two realms, the sports you chose to play and your stray ‘thoughts’ which they could not control. I found that AMU was somehow similar. It was still a university with many old traditions intact, and some old-world conservatism.

The Department did not have its building and nestled in a portion of the oldest boy’s hostel of the University facing the stadium grounds. The classes were held on the first floor and were accessed by a staircase inside the building. I was instructed by my senior women students not to use this inside staircase as it was meant for the faculty and male students, but to use the one at the rear of the building. This rear staircase was constructed in the early 1930s for Safia Kidwai, the first woman student of the department. She was still working in the university as Head of the Department of Geography in the Women’s College and was a legend. This restriction was the first alarm bell for me.

The second alarm bell rang for me later in the day. I had, from my school days, been allowed to use a bicycle because the roads used to be safe and distances easily negotiable. I had carried my bicycle to Aligarh. I had been a little intrigued when I noticed that there were only two other cycles in the corridors of my hostel. On the first day



A typical classroom with a separate space for girls until the 1940s in AMU

of my cycling journey to the department with two of my classmates on a rickshaw, I did see some surprised faces on the way. Once I reached the department, I looked around for a place to park. Found a cycle stand near the rear staircase which I had been told to use to reach my classroom and I parked there. Then took the staircase which landed me in a small room where some girls were sitting.

It was the waiting room for girls where we were supposed to stay and keep peeping into the classroom through the door to see if the boys had settled in their chairs and the teacher had arrived and taken the podium. We had to then walk into the classroom and sit on the front benches. The girls had to immediately leave the room after the teacher finished lecturing and had to go back to the small cloister and wait for the next class.

Our first class was taken by Professor Shafi, the Head of the department. In measured tones, he told us about the M.A. course requirements. He was going to teach us Physical geography and Geomorphology. The basic textbooks and the must-reads were going to be the classics in Physical Geography, Woolridge and Morgan, Strahler,

and Monkhouse. For each topic, there was also going to be a supplementary book. I wonder how many now read those classics which we were made to read from the contents to the last page.

Soon after the class, the second warning bell rang for me. My cycle episode had been narrated to Professor Shafi by the department's peon who was also his reporter. I was summoned, offered a chair, and then in the same measured tone in which he gave his lectures, he asked why I preferred a cycle to a cycle rickshaw. I fumbled something about convenience. After this 'unsatisfactory' answer from me, he asked me where I had parked my cycle. I replied at the only stand near the department that I could see. I was told that the cycle stand was for the boys and I should not use it. I should bring my bicycle inside the building and park it in the space the faculty uses for their cycles. Faculty members used to either walk or cycle to the department.

I was quite intimidated. But I was wrong. In a very conservative society, most rules for girls in AMU had been made for their safety and to safeguard the reputation of the institution. Many girls were first-generation admission seekers in a co-educational institution and their courageous initiative was not to be jeopardized.

We soon found out that until our previous batch, girls were not allowed to use the Department's library after classes were over and were not allowed on the yearly *Bharat darshan* (All India) Geographical tour. Not being allowed to use the best geography library in India suffocated me. One day I



Aziz Tonki, M. S. Shafi, Hans Boesch,  
Atiya Aziz, Monis Raza

mustered up the courage to speak to Professor Shafi about this. He asked me to give him time to think and he also had to consult the faculty. After two days we were called from our little room and were told that we could stay in the library until 4:00 pm. Classes used to be over by 1:00 pm. This gave us three hours of library time. From the day this permission was given, Professor Shafi stopped going home for lunch and stayed in the department as long as we were there in the library. To our surprise, we were also allowed to accompany the class for the *Bharat darshan*. Two battles were won, and two new traditions were set, peacefully, and quietly. We, however, obediently continued to use our own separate staircase because it was historic and legendary.

I gradually realized that in this, almost surrealistic world, created not by any brand of fundamentalism but by ingrained traditions and a culture all on its own, there were freedoms allowed that would help a student to fully explore his or her academic potential. The department was like a big family and the teachers kept a protective eye on both men



M Anas (First from Right)

and women students. Dissent was tolerated if expressed within the limits of propriety. Debate was encouraged. Girls were not only led but could lead.

The faculty in the department was exceptional in many ways, academically accomplished, affectionate, and very friendly. A few of them were quite radical, all others progressive and liberal. Professor Aijaz was the youngest member of the faculty inducted two years ago in 1962. Professor Moonis Raza was no longer a part of the faculty when I joined the department. He had left the university for other assignments. Fortunately, he continued to visit the department for a seminar or a lecture and that gave us occasion to meet him. He kept track of me as an external examiner for some of my papers.

Among the senior faculty Professor Shafi, Professor Anas, and Professor Raza had been batch mates in their M.A. course. For Doctoral work, Professor Shafi had proceeded to the London School of Economics and was mentored by Dudley Stamp. Professor Anas Saheb went to the Australian National

University to work with O. H. K. Spate. Professor Raza never submitted himself to a mentor! After his post-graduation, he found what he considered a more meaningful occupation for him. He spent most of his time staying underground in Kanpur to organize factory labour. He lost one of his lungs to tuberculosis in this period.

Professor Muzaffar Ali, one of the very senior geographers of the country and their teacher, had taught all three of them. His reported observation about them was that - Shafi is diligent, Anas is intelligent and Moonis is sharp. All three proved themselves completely worthy of the observation of their teacher.

I will here only talk about two geographers at AMU who laid the foundation of my understanding of cities and regions, the two geographical entities that became my concern when I pursued my career in Urban and Regional Planning.

Urban Geography was taught by Dr. Aziz Tonki Saheb. He was a light-hearted storyteller about cities and their growth processes. He introduced us to some interesting readings before plunging us into Christaller, Zipf, Ullman, and Harris. We began with Lewis Mumford's *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (1961). That book treats the city as the actor in a narrative written in an ornate 'organic' style. It leads you to critical thinking about how cities historically grew as three-dimensional spatial units with all the beauty and all the ugliness man could create through them. As the course proceeded, my decision to pursue Urban Planning as a career was reinforced.

Fortunately, during my post-graduation Urban Geography was being shaken out of its monotony by Brian Berry who was publishing feverishly at the University of Chicago. He had begun by refining the central place theory and had introduced the analysis of urban systems which eventually laid the foundation of analytic urban geography. Our library gave us easy access to all that Brian Berry was writing.

Professor Dr. Anas introduced us to regions in Geography. He was a very treasured student of O.H.K. Spate, the regional geographer *par excellence*. Spate, we were told, treated him like his son and there was a great bond between them because once swimming together Anas Saheb had saved Spate from drowning. Professor Anas could make regions come alive in a bewildering interplay of myriad regional processes created by nature and shaped by man. In his class, regions transcended their physicality, be it the Nile Valley, the primitive Papua New Guinea, or the diverse monsoon-washed South Asia.

Dr. Aijaz had recently completed his doctoral work on the Indian desert and had joined the faculty. He was assigned to design a course based on his thesis. It was the first time in the department that such recognition was given to a doctoral thesis. We were the second batch he taught. He looked stern and serious all the time. Our first class with him began with the usual protocol. We generally avoided looking at the teachers. But out of curiosity, I stared at him. A very young face with a small build, unimposing, someone who could easily go unnoticed. Once he started to speak the class was initially startled and then mesmerized. He gradually unfolded before us



R. L. Singh (BHU) with M. Shafi (AMU) (1964)



Dr. Gananathan (Poona) and Indrapal Singh (Jaipur) 1964

vista upon vista of the Great Indian Desert. It was Regional Geography at its best. He had imbibed the spirit of teaching from Professor Anas, his mentor, and to it, he added a much-grounded understanding of how to teach regional geography of special regions. He rendered his wisdom in lucid prose with shades of poetry, the hallmark of his lectures.

Little did we know that Professor Aijaz had a rare sense of wit and charitable sarcasm until he demonstrated it in a remark he noted on the tutorial submitted by one of our batch

mates. We had been asked to elaborate on some environmental issues highlighted in his thesis. This classmate, in very neat handwriting, copied verbatim from the thesis thinking that Aijaz Saheb would not look at his sessional minutely enough to identify his own words. The sessional was returned by Professor Aijaz with a noting on each page “Attested True Copy”. He had also signed on the margins of each page, as is done in an Affidavit!

I consider it my great privilege that I was introduced to the multi-dimensionality



Dr. Gananthan (Poona)



Dr. C. D. Deshpande (Bombay)

### Stalwarts in Geography- 1960s and 1970s



Aijaz Saheb standing in the back row.

of regions by two extraordinary geographers. They taught me how to become one with the region's society, its culture, and the joys and sorrows of its inhabitants. This helped me immensely when I had to understand regions as a planner.

### **Our interaction with other Geography Departments:**

Since the geography Departments were few in India, we knew most of their senior faculty because they were invited to conferences, lectures, or practical examinations. The most frequent were visits by faculty from BHU,

Allahabad, Sagar, Jaipur, and Jamia because of their proximity. Our interaction with BHU was special as Professor R.L. Singh and Professor Shafi had both been students of Dudley Stamp and Professor Kayastha, a revered senior teacher at BHU, had been a student of AMU.

I particularly remember two professors whom we found very amusing, Professors Gananathan and C.D. Deshpande, both from Poona University. In conferences, Professor Gananathan, would sit in a corner of the room, with no sign of any concentration on his face, his imperious cigar hanging from his mouth and then suddenly he would, sort of wake up during the discussions and ask the trickiest question. Professor Deshpande, on the other hand, would absorb as much as his patience allowed in a seminar session and then would take out his newspaper to solve crossword Puzzles. We once caught him on camera.

Professor Ahmad continued to enliven the geography classes at Aligarh while I left the department in 1966 for IIT Kharagpur to pursue a degree in Regional Planning. However, the charisma of the AMU Geography Department was such that it always remained my second home. I visited the Department as often as I could. Professor Aijaz would now meet me on a different plane and gradually my fear of him waned. I was now part of his inner circle during conferences where he regaled us during his parody sessions held secretly in the evenings. The stalwarts of Geography were observed keenly during the day and then parodies were written about them by him. I wish I had preserved those parodies.



Dr. C.R. Pathak and Dr. G.B.K. Rao

### **The next leap into the future - Urban and Regional Planning at I.I.T Kharagpur**

My obsession to study something different had left only one avenue for me after my M.A. - Urban and Regional planning. In 1966 there were only two institutions in India that offered professional courses in the field. My natural choice was the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), Delhi, but it had no hostel for girls. So I looked up I.I.T Kharagpur and applied there.

Since there were only 35 women in the entire I.I.T., the Director was always keen to admit women candidates. I was admitted along with another girl from BHU, the only two women candidates to have applied. The Director later told me that I was the first Muslim girl who was seeking admission to an I.I.T. The Director was Professor V.N. Prasad, an architect-planner trained in London, who had prepared the first Regional Plan for the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC). He had also started the first professional degree-level training course in Regional Planning at I.I.T and had established the Institute of Planners which later shifted to Delhi.

There was only one geographer teacher in the Department, Dr. C.R. Pathak who initially worked on the DVC Plan and was later absorbed into the faculty. We were the first batch of Regional Planners admitted for a degree course (1966-1968). The faculty was borrowed from other departments and was a mixed bag of architects, civil engineers, and an economist. The lack of appropriate faculty was made up by the visiting faculty. The geographers who visited us most frequently were Dr. L.S. Bhatt and Dr. K.V. Sundaram, and an eminent urban economist was Dr. A.N. Bose. We would occasionally also get academically inclined bureaucrats to lecture us, exceptional among them was Badal Sarkar, the Chief Planner of the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization. He was also a radical playwright, who had scripted acclaimed plays like *Evam Indrajit* and *Pagla Ghoda*. His lectures were a treat.

The teaching at the IIT was different from what I was used to at the university. Our class consisted of architects, civil engineers and geographers. The teachers would come to class, give a physical planning-related problem, drop some hints, and then leave it to us to complete the work within a strict deadline. Both Regional and Urban Planning taught in those days were drawing board-based and design-oriented. There were few formal lectures by the faculty.

Regional Planning was just evolving and there were no textbooks written yet. Fortunately, in 1967, my final year, John Friedmann and William Alonso's edited book *Regional Development and Planning: A Reader* was published. It became our saviour. Though it was an edited anthology of

published papers, it at least made these papers available to us. We were also handicapped as we had only two core faculty members for the course, Dr. C.R. Pathak, the only geographer, and Dr. G.B.K. Rao, a civil engineer with some expertise in planning legislation.

The one important thing we imbibed from this multi-disciplinarity was that we learned how to think coherently in many directions and then how to web this diverse knowledge into a meaningful planning solution. We also learned the art of visual presentation of our ideas.

Some notable developments were taking place in our department in which I got involved. In 1967 Walter Isard at the University of Pennsylvania had been looking for institutional affiliation for the Regional Science Association International (RSAI). He approached our Institute and Professor Prasad as Director, readily agreed. The onus of starting the India chapter of the Regional Science Association was put on Dr Pathak and through him on his students. I and my batch mate R.N. Chattopadhyay did all the initial leg work of the Association.

After the first year, the course required us to do an internship in a Government Planning Department for three months. After those three months of 'official planning' I knew that was NOT what I wanted to do, i.e., make Master Plans for cities where people were just a number and all one did was to calculate the hectares of land needed for roads, houses, hospitals, schools, etc.

By the time I reached the penultimate dissertation stage, I was very disillusioned by the design-oriented data-based planning. The

final review of our performance was done by the Chief Town Planner, Government of India. He offered me a job at TCPO, Delhi and Professor Prasad- the Director offered three faculty positions to our class. R.N. Chattopadhyay and I were selected for two of them. I accepted the position. Teaching had finally allured me.

Dr. Pathak and R. N. Chattopadhyay were my colleagues now. Together we tried to give a new direction to the regional planning course work. We undertook studies on regional disparities. We launched the Indian Journal of Regional Science in 1968 and organized an International Regional Science Conference at the Gokhale Institute in Pune in 1969. This conference was attended by many economists who became luminaries later on. Walter Isard was the chief guest.

These early years of my teaching between 1969 and 1971 were politically disturbed, nationally and internationally. The Vietnam War had peaked and anti-war protests had spread all over the world. In the USA many university professors were asking the US government fundamental and hard questions. The student movement for educational reforms was in full force in Europe. Mao Tse Tung's China was questioning the "Four Olds" in ideas, culture, customs, and habits. Closer home, Indira Gandhi was in power after some turmoil. The Bangladesh War had been won. The refugees were all over West Bengal. The Naxalite movement was spreading and was being policed. The beating and cries of Naxals could be heard in the campus Police station which was next to my residence. It was unnerving.



Professor Monis Raza

Many academic and non-academic questions had started bothering me as a teacher. It was an intellectually restless period for many of us. Some chance happenings led me to leave Kharagpur in June 1971 for JNU. Bengal had grown on me in those five years, and I loved it. It was emotionally not an easy decision. But leave I must.

### **The call from JNU!**

In 1970, while at Kharagpur, I was selected to go to Poland for a year to associate with a leading advocate of socialistic spatial planning, Piotr Zaremba. I came to Delhi for my travel formalities and met Professor Moonis because I wanted to share with them my excitement about my first trip to a foreign land with him. He was now a Professor of Geography and the Think Tank for a new university being established. This was the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), housed in the Annex of Vigyan Bhavan. He took me to meet the Vice Chancellor, Mr. G. Parthasarathy. GP, as he was called. GP's charisma captivated me. In a very pleasant and brief conversation, he had unearthed my C.V.



Discussions on the syllabus (1970s)



After a couple of months, I was contacted by Professor Raza's brother, Dr. Mehdi Saheb, my teacher at AMU. The newly formed Centre for the Study of Regional Development (CSRSD) at JNU had advertised for some posts and I was asked to apply. I discussed this with Dr. Pathak. He had seen the advertisement and was keen on one of the senior posts and suggested that we could give JNU a try. The play of subsequent events landed me and Dr Pathak in JNU. Poland had to be shelved at GP's behest. JNU for me was a big leap into uncertainty.

Module by module, GP and Professor Raza had conceptualized the 'idea' of a post-graduate university for a country like India – unified yet diverse, inclusive, egalitarian

and academically innovative. The academic programme was designed differently. Instead of compartmentalized Departments, "Centers of Studies" were carved based on core social science disciplines but in each Center, allied disciplines converged, interacted, and amalgamated.

Professor Raza vigorously tested this multidisciplinary approach at the Centre for the Study of Regional Development (CSRSD), his own Centre. He was leading a diverse flock of social scientists in the Centre consisting of geographers, economists, demographers, and geomorphologists but with a Geographer's perspective. He himself was essentially a philosopher; part visionary, part dreamer, part poet, and in totality an intellectual "bindas".

He had been an ardent student of Philosophy, both as it was enshrined in books, and as it played out in life and was taught to him by his struggles while fighting injustices of all kinds.

We admitted the first batch of M.Phil. students in 1971 and of M.A. in 1972. Our Chair today belongs to this M.A. batch. Professor Aijaz joined this CSRD experiment in 1972. He brought his brand of thinking and teaching to the Centre.

### **Geography at CSRD**

Professor Raza first worked on the mindset of the faculty. The curriculum had to be 'modern' but the teachers 'traditional'. In the curriculum, we had to do away with whatever was obsolete, but as teachers, we had to respect the 'old traditions' of learning and teaching, in the true '*guru-shishya parampara*'. It was the duty of the faculty to make the students feel like family and then strive to keep this family together. We were reminded often that each student has utility and hence a right to reach his or her maximum potential.

He would, time and again tell us that a good teacher is not the one who takes a horse and teaches it to run faster, but the one who takes a mule and teaches it to run like a horse. One thing was declared an unforgivable sacrilege- that was a teacher missing a class.

Geography as a discipline was taking a turn in this decade. It was an opportune time to reinvent it. I was asked to formulate a course in Urban Geography and another in Regional Development. This was exciting. Urban Geography was shifting from the idiographic to the nomothetic approach

and was acquiring the apparatus of modern science, viz., quantification and testing of laws, models, and theories. This resonated with the then-current buzzword, 'social-science'. Brian Berry at the University of Chicago was riding on the cusp of the Quantitative Revolution in Geography and was converting traditional Urban Geography to 'analytic urban geography' which was contemporary, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive in perspective. The Journal of Urban Geography was started in 1980 and Urban Geography had forty speciality groups in the AAG.

The first signs of reaction to this brand of Urban Geography had also come from David Harvey. He was scraping the veneer of quantification from geography and was trying to root it in Marxist theory. He had little interest in cities as material creations. For him they reflected societal and political processes and were a concentration of economic wealth and political power. He refuted theory based on empirical research methods and the policy recommendations based on social scientific research in geography.

The Chicago paradigm which had gained in the 1960s and the 1970s was lost in the 1980s.

In the field of regional development, John Friedman in 1971 finally came up with a tentative 'Theory of Regional Development', based on his work in Venezuela. Economic history, economic growth, and trade theories were being unabashedly borrowed and justified in the study of regional development. This led to a proliferation of reference material and helped me in developing a theoretical course in Regional Development.

After I had become a little comfortable with my teaching responsibilities, I started looking for a topic for my Doctoral research. Professor Raza was my mentor. He often dropped me a hint that Indian Geography was like a dinosaur with a huge body and a very tiny head. The tiny head represented theory and the large body, the accumulation of case studies. He wanted the Centre to rectify the situation.

During this period of probing for a thesis topic, my friends in the History department prompted me to see Dr. Chris Bailey's interpretation of colonial urbanization in India. He was a Professor of Imperial and Indian History at the Cambridge University. His writings were being vehemently refuted by Indian Marxist scholars. This exchange of conflicting ideas came to be referred to as the de-urbanization and de-industrialization debate in Indian History. I read some of this literature and it interested me. I, however, felt that something was missing in the arguments and that was the lack of evidence based on hard data and the regional manifestations of the processes. I wished to fill some of these lacunae in my thesis.

David Harvey's work was gripping our attention around this period. I assiduously read his *Social Justice and the City* (1973). It's not an easy text to navigate but a slow careful reading does give theoretical insights. I got clues from it to deduce a theory of colonial urbanization. It gave me an understanding of the global form of economic imperialism based on the production of surplus value. This became the pivotal point for some of the theoretical formulations in my thesis, both about colonial urbanization and about the

tertiarization of the colonial urban economy which was a proxy for de-industrialization. I supported this with data from the British Census from 1872 -1921 for the eastern half of British India. The examiner was Professor Goldsmith, a senior Marxist Geographer and a revered scholar at Cornell University and David Harvey's senior. I treasure his report on my work.

Professor Raza's style of mentoring as a thesis supervisor meant 'no interference and minimal help'. When I faced a mental block, say for instance while conceptualizing rural-urban migration in the context of a colonial primate city he would ask me to read old *Birhas*, folk songs of separation, from Bihar or eastern Uttar Pradesh. I wondered why. This suggestion made no sense to me. But when I did read some *birha geet*, in one of them, I found that the village women called the railway trains passing by their village, *sautan*, i.e., the second wife who snatches away their husbands and takes them to Calcutta. How better can a supervisor lead you to explain the agony of hundreds of rural families who faced poverty-ridden migration to colonial urban ghettos?

I would sometimes share my woes about Moonis Saheb's way of mentoring with Professor Aijaz Saheb. He would only give me a half-cynical, half-amused smile in return. He knew the ways of the Master.

I am tempted to narrate an incident about Professor Raza's handling of difficult students. Imagine a classroom with Sohail Hashmi, incidentally our Chair of the session, then a student of M.A. first semester. He was a compulsive smoker. Professor Raza's first

lecture to the class and Sohail feels the urge to smoke and decides his strategy. To overcome your opponent, make the first move. He takes out his cigarette pack from his pocket and puts it determinedly on his desk. Then comes out of the matchbox and is kept next to the pack, all this while eyeing the Prof and the Prof eyeing him. Then in one brave attempt, a cigarette is taken out and lit. The Prof quietly asks, “akele akele?” (smoking alone ?). A second cigarette is then lit by the student and handed over to the Prof to be accepted cheerfully by him. The class laughs and is won over.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the coming of age of the older Departments in the country led by some very dynamic geographers. These departments also tended to specialize in certain branches of geography and developed their identities. The International Geographical Union’s (IGU) Congress in India, held in 1968 introduced our geography departments, their faculty, and their areas of strength to foreign universities. That led to an increased international interaction that has continued with the financial support from the UGC and the ICSSR. CSRD also expanded and diversified. Some very eminent economists and demographers joined the faculty and enlarged its frontiers.

Research interests have a ratchet effect. My research-based interaction with Indian geographers somehow waned during the 1980s because of my involvement with urban history after my doctoral work. A group of senior historians had established the Urban History Association of India in 1980 and I was made one of the founder members. I got pulled into their activities and most

of my research thereafter has been done with them. My work in Geography during this and subsequent decade also got linked with French Universities where I had an opportunity to teach. The French geographers form “circles of affinity” that largely cut across disciplinary boundaries. It has been a pleasure to work with them on esoteric subjects ranging from historical territorial identities to the use of big data in maritime trade studies. During the last decade, I found myself writing on everything but geography. This capability of multidisciplinary thinking is the power Geography gives us.

Urban Geography in the 1990s experienced increasing fragmentation, specialization and insularity. There have been competing versions and philosophical explorations. Los Angeles was created as a new exemplar of contemporary urban processes and postmodernism. The material central city has been abandoned. Attention is now diverted from the metropolitan to the global, to the suburb, silicon cities, edge cities, financial capitals, global urban networks and the new urbanism.

Urban Geography in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a cockpit of competing schools of thought. To make this diversity invigorating debates have to be robust and healthy and not confrontational which sometimes is happening. I am glad I have opted out of the system.

When my journey as a teacher came to an end after three years at I.I.T. Kharagpur, almost forty-five years at J.N.U, and five years at S.P.A. Delhi, I looked back on these decades with some awe and some remorse.

Awe at my teachers who shaped me with the brilliance of their scholarship and the firmness of their convictions; awe at my colleagues for giving me endless hours of intellectual stimulation, humour, and poetry; awe at my students for their achievements and for the care and warmth they give me.

Remorse is only one. I could have done more.

I would end by paying my homage to Professor Aijaz, a man I was privileged to know as an esteemed teacher and a valued colleague. He was a person with substance, style and sensitivity. His sensitivity made him a profound analyst of the social reality of India. We owe much to him.

I express my gratitude to I.I.G., to Professor Sachidanand Sinha, to Sohail for being here and to all those who have endeavoured to institute this Memorial Lecture series for my esteemed teacher and colleague who deserves every honour for the scholarship he has left for generations of students and for nurturing Geography which he so loved.

Thank You

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