

Prof. Kashi Nath Singh : *Obituary*



Born : 1 January 1932

Died : 18 July 2013

Professor Kashi Nath Singh, the luminous figure of Indian Geography, passed away due to massive heart attack on Thursday 18 July 2013 at 01.50AM (*Ashadha Shukla 10th Samvata 2070*). He had received his M.A. (1956), and Ph.D. (1963) under the supervision of Prof. R.L. Singh (1917-2001), the *dean* and *doyen* of Indian Geography, both from the Banaras Hindu University.

Professor K.N. Singh was specialised in the studies of Rural settlements, Historical geography and planning, Economic geography, and Social geography, and was well known as leading personality and symbol of Indian geography through publications, lectures, supervision of doctoral dissertations (total 16), and special lectures in International and National Conferences in India and abroad. **His**

publications include 7 books, 13 co-edited books, and about 65 research papers. For such academic pursuits he paid visits as scholar, fellow and speaker in several countries in East Africa, Anglo-America, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Bali. He was acclaimed for his research in the field of historical settlement geography (*historischseidlungsgeographie*).

On 29 September 1957 Prof. K.N. Singh had joined Department of Geography, Banaras Hindu University as Lecturer, and promoted to Reader in 1968. During 1977-78 he had been professor and head, department of geography at Patna University (Bihar), but in followed up year 1978 he had return back as Professor of Integrated Area Development in the department of

geography at Banaras Hindu University, which he cherished till 1993. He has been Head, Department of Geography, Banaras Hindu University for the two terms: 1-4-1981 to 31-3-1983 and 1-4-1984 to 31-3-1986. During 1983-1984 he was honoured to be the National Lecturer (University Grants Commission) and under this he gave lectures in many Indian universities. Under his leadership the University Grants Commission supported this Department through the Department Research Support (DRS) programme during 1981-86 and under the Special Assistance Programme (SAP) during 1987-92 when he served as Coordinator to this programme. He was retired on 31 December 1993, and soon had been honoured to be Emeritus Professor (UGC), however could not join, just to avoid the last painful days he experienced in his own *alma mater*. During 1991-93 (two terms), he had served as member of the Board of Directors, U.S. Educational Foundation in India (U.S.E.F.I.), New Delhi. He was also an Executive Member of the Commonwealth Geographical Bureau, London (1976-84); Asst. Secretary, NGSI, and was Life Member of national bodies like NGSI, NAGI, NEGS, IIG, CIG, and UBBP. During November 1993 - June 2011, he had been Professor of Geography in the College of Social Sciences, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. After returning from Ethiopia, he was living in Varanasi, in his own house, and sometimes was passing his holidays with his doctor son and his family in the campus of Banaras Hindu University.

During 1964-66 he was on leave to USA as Fulbright Scholar at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey; and in 1965-66 summer he served as Associate Professor at East Stroudsburg State College/

University, East Stroudsburg PA. In this period he studied and collaborated with Prof. John E. Brush (1919-2007), who was already influenced by the researches of Prof. Singh, and quoted some of his observations about the morphology of twin township of Dehri-Dalmianagar (NGJI, 3 (3-4), 1957: pp. 169-179) in his classical paper, "The Morphology of Indian Cities", in, India's Urban Future (ed.) Roy Turner (University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962, p. 64).

During his stay in USA he studied different dimensions of geographical researches through discourses and classes directed by Guido G. Weigend (1920-2012), who was close friend of Chicago circle of geographers like Edward Ullman, Chauncy D. Harris, Harold Mayer, and wrote his classical paper entitled "Some Elements in the Study of Port Geography" (*Geographical Review*, 48, no. 2 (1958): pp. 185-200) taught him intricacies of land and water interfaces and the role of man in transformation and counter changes; by Artur Getis, he learned the sense of cartographic representation and viability of sketches; by John E. Brush (1919-2007), who taught his critiques and empirical testing of Central Place Theory and service centre hierarch that helped him to further investigate the historical processes and associated simulative model of settling phases, later illustrated in his study of Basti district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, and also Joseph E. Spencer (1907-1984), who as specialised of Asian culture taught him cross-cultural understanding and study of cultural landscapes that he further incorporated in his the most cited and pioneering paper on "Territorial basis of Town and village settlement in Eastern U.P., India", published in *Annals, Association*

of *American Geographers* (vol. 58, no. 2, 1968: pp.).

The editor of the *AAAG*, Prof. Spenser wrote about this paper “Your paper is very good, interesting and significant one. Both editorially and personally like what you have done with your subject, and it will illustrate to the geographers of the world what can be done by penetration in depth and by the use of materials from non-geographical sources of Indian topics, arid by an Indian geographer. Therefore, I would like to make your paper the lead article in the June, 1968 issue”; this issue was released on the occasion of 23rd International Geography Congress, New Delhi: December 1968, held for the first time in Asia, and was attended by his teachers and inspirers from USA, i.e. John Brush, Guido G. Weigend, Joseph Spenser, and Arthur Getis.

The most popular systematic and regional geography of *India and Pakistan* by O.H.K. Spate and A.T.A. Learmonth (Methuen & Co., London, 1967, p. 631), refers that “For an usually vigorous commentary on the urban, land use maps, see, Kashi N. Singh 1957. Morphology of the twin township of Dehri-Dalmianagar (*The National Geographical Journal of India*, 3 (3-4), Sept.-Dec: 169–179)”. Some of his papers were prescribed in the graduate courses in Hiroshima University, and are highlighted by famous Japanese scholar Prof. Hiroshi Ishida in his book, *A Cultural Geography of the Great Plains of India* (Univ. of Hiroshima Press, 1972).

David E. Sopher in his famous critical essay, “Towards a Rediscovery of India: Thoughts on some neglected geography”, in, Marvin W. Mikesell, ed. *Geographers Abroad* (University of Chicago, Chicago,

1973: pp. 110-133) appraised Prof. Singh’s contribution (p. 123): “The interest of the Varanasi school in rural settlement and urban morphology is expressed in a consistent documentation with maps of the arrangement of villages on the land, of crops on village lands, of caste groups and institutional structures in village residential areas. Systematic relations of the kind suggested by Mukerjee may, however, be left unexamined, although there are notable exceptions, such as the reconstruction of the historical pattern of caste-differentiated settlement in northeastern Uttar Pradesh, which owes much to the work of K.N. Singh. Some of the more perfunctory treatments of the topic may have been a disappointment to the editor, whose other work suggests an appreciation of land and place, and a feeling of being at home with his area. These are encouraging signs, as are indications of interest in the popular history of Indian localities”.

Famous American anthropologist Richard G. Fox, in his book, *Urban India: Society, Space and Image* (1970, Duke University) wrote about his classical paper (*AAAG*, 58, no. 2, 1968): “Dr. Singh’s stimulating paper in many ways parallels the present one. It is gratifying that so many of our conclusions are similar, although our work was done independently. Our papers have different emphases and in several places in the text some criticism is made of K.N. Singh’s interpretation. However, these differing viewpoints and interpretations in no way remove my intellectual debt to Dr. Singh, riot only for the paper cited above, but for his original paper on the subject which whetted my own scholarly appetite: R.L. Singh and K.N. Singh “Evolution of the medieval towns in the Saryupar plain of the Middle Gang Valley: a case study”

(*NGJ*, 9, 1963: pp. 1-11). K.N. Singh was often quoted in the above work so profusely for comparison, similarities and validation of his own explanations. Richard Fox, again in the next classical book, *Kin, Clan, Raja, and Rule* (UCP, Berkeley, & OUP Delhi, 1971), writes: “Recent work by Bernard Cohn, K.N. Singh, M.C. Pradhan, etc. has indicated the important role played by unilineal kin groups of locally dominant Kshatriya “Castes” in the lower level political organisation of traditional North India. K.N. Singh provides (greater detail about the organisation of these kin bodies, although he seems to disagree with Cohn about terms. Singh speaks of regionally dominant Rajput lineages providing corporate political authority throughout eastern Uttar Pradesh. Their internal kinships create administrative and economic linkage extending from the administrative division equivalent to a culture through the Tappa (administrative Division of a Pargana) and into the Gaon or individual village (K.N. Singh, 1969, *op. cit.*)”.

Those anthropologists and historians of north India who profusely cited quotations from the early writings of Kashi Nath Singh on settlement history and diffusion of clan settlement that further resulted to different layers of territorial formations, included are Tom J. Kessinger (*Vilayatpur, 1948-1968, Social and Economic Change in a North Indian Village* (UCP Berkeley, 1974, cf. p. 19), and Brenda E.F. Beck (*Peasants Society in Konku, A Study of Right and Left Castes in South Asia*. UBC Press Vancouver, 1972, cf. pp. 32, 35).

The accompany of the three professors, Prof. Kashi Nath Singh together with Prof. Aizazuddin Ahmad (1932-2006) of J.N.U. and Prof. Anath Bandhu Mukerji (1929-2011) of Punjab University, were known

as “*trinity*” of Indian Geography. Now the great “triangle” and “trinity” has no more physical existence. In a simple way, I express my deeper sense of grief and suffering to convey that both of my masters (Prof. R.L. Singh and Prof. Kashi N. Singh) now no more in this mortal world, but their message, insights and visions are always with us and will further radiate the light of deeper understanding and path of research, what they said “*yoga of place*”.

On the sad demise of Prof. Kashi Nath Singh, we all express our feelings that “this was a personal loss to all his students, friends and admirers, and above all the country has lost a very distinguished geographer, and Indian geography is certainly poorer today than it was yesterday. The absence of Prof. Singh will be always felt by Indian geography, and we will miss him for many years to come”. We all his students, friends, fellows and followers, and companions convey our homage to the departed soul and pray to the Almighty for granting peace to the soul.

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