



Professor Raj Kumar Rai

(1940-2021)

An eminent geographer who contributed enormously to the growth and development of Indian Geography in the 20th century passed away on 10th May 2021 as yet another victim to Covid 19. The more tragic moment for the family was losing their youngest son on the same day with Prof. Rai. Born on 27 August 1940, Prof. R. K. Rai, attained the status of one of the most distinguished geographers in the country by his single-minded focus on excellent teaching and research. He served as a lecturer in the Department of Geography, H.S. Gaur Sagar University for 14 years (1964-1978), and as a Reader and Professor in the Department of Geography, North-Eastern Hill University for a period of 25 years (1978-2003) before superannuating from this university. During this period, he was appointed the Head of the Department of Geography for three terms and served as the Dean, School of Environmental Sciences.

Prof. Rai also had a short stint of being a visiting professor at Bundelkhand University, Jhansi, and the University of Manipur. He has also been a UGC Emeritus Fellow in recognition of his research work. In an illustrious career spanning over 39 years, Prof. Rai has worked extensively in diverse branches of geography, including but not limited to Geomorphology, Population Geography, Urban Geography, and Environmental Management. Geomorphology however was his first love. He has the distinction of supervising 17 Ph.D. and 20 M.Phil dissertations in different branches of geography.

Prof. Rai completed as many as 9 major research projects funded by different agencies. He was deeply concerned about the environment of Meghalaya particularly with respect to coal mining operations. Most of his Projects and publications were related to such important issues confronting the people of Meghalaya. He is well known for his seminal

publication of a book on the Geomorphology of Sonar Bearma Basin. He has to his credit publication of more than 80 papers in different books and reputed journals besides authoring 11 books on various themes of geography. He supervised as many as 17 Ph.D. scholars including two of his colleagues Prof. H. J. Syiemlieh and Dr. L. Cajee.

Prof. Rai loved travelling both in the country and overseas. He travelled widely across the planet earth and participated in academic deliberations in UK, Australia, The Netherlands, France, USA, Canada, Thailand, Korea to name only the notable ones.

He was one of the founder members of the Geographical Society of the North Eastern Hill Region and served as its first President- a post he held for more than two decades (1982-2003). He was also the President of the National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI)-an apex body of the Indian Geographers at the national level. In recognition of his seminal contributions and distinguished services in promoting the cause of Geography in India, the National Association of Geographers, India honored Prof. R. K. Rai with the prestigious Bhoogol Vachaspati award on December 28, 2019, in its 41st Indian Geography Congress held at Dr. Hari Singh Gaur Central University, Sagar.

The renowned geomorphologist geographer Prof Rai contributed immensely to the growing discipline of geography in myriad ways difficult to enumerate. He worked tirelessly for the development of not only the young department of Geography at NEHU he joined as one of the first few faculty members but also to the development of Geography in India and abroad. It is his quality of research that firmly provided the young department of geography in NEHU a national footprint and set a model for the other faculty and students of the department to emulate. The wide range of publications of

books and articles on the subject by Professor Rai bears testimony to his contribution and dedication.

Not only a teacher par excellence, but Prof. Rai was also an excellent academic leader too. Despite serious constraints of infrastructure and lack of experienced faculty in its early years of existence as a department at NEHU, Professor Rai took the challenge of hosting several National and International seminars/conferences with great success. The most notable among them was hosting the NAGI conference in 1996 that attracted a record 350 delegates. Later the Department of Geography, NEHU, under his leadership also organized the 24th IIG in the year 2003 with even greater participation. He successfully organized as many as 9 other seminars and conferences in the department.

A simple and uncomplicated person, Prof Rai was always friendly with all the faculty and university fraternity. He was the epitome of humbleness, simplicity, generosity, kind-heartedness, and generosity. He mostly lived alone in Shillong leaving behind his children in Sagar, M.P. with his wife who left for the heavenly abode only a few years after his return to Sagar following his superannuation. He was mostly busy attending the number of conferences and seminars, and assignments, which proved his single-minded commitment to the discipline of geography, especially geomorphology.

In the passing away of Prof. Rai, India has not only lost a renowned geomorphologist geographer, but also a man of great human values and integrity. He will be eternally missed by his colleagues, friends, and students who came in contact with him. He will also be missed by those who knew him through his works.

Prof. B. S. Mipun
Department of Geography,
Nehu, Shillong