



### **Prof. Baleshwar Thakur**

(16<sup>th</sup> July 1943 – 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023)

Professor Baleshwar Thakur, an eminent geographer, dedicated researcher, and a passionate teacher died on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2023 at home in Sacramento, California, USA (6:02 pm Pacific Standard Time). He was 80 years old. Prof Thakur was a professor and head of the Department of Geography at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, and was also the Vice-Chancellor of LN Mithila University, Darbhanga (Bihar).

Coming from a humble rural background, Professor Thakur achieved a stature in the field of Geography by sheer dint of hard labour and perseverance. He was born in a non-descript Sarabe Village of Madhubani district of Bihar, famous for its unique style of paintings where he received his school education in the serene agricultural fields all around. He was the eldest of the two brothers born to his parents. He then pursued Geography honours (1962) and M.A. (1964) from Patna University- a

prestigious university well known for its academic excellence. He did not stop there. His quest for knowledge took him to the University of Waterloo, Canada where he obtained a second M.A. in Geography as a Commonwealth Scholar. There he worked with Professor Lorne H. Russwurm on “The Changing Functional Makeup of Central Place Hierarchies in Southwestern Ontario: 1871-1971”, in 1970-72. He returned to India to complete his doctoral degree from Patna University in 1978 on “Urban Settlements in Eastern India: Entropy Changes and Pattern Analysis”, under the guidance of Professor P. Dayal, former Vice-Chancellor of Magadh University.

In his early career, his research focused on the long-run processes of urbanization in its regional context in developing economics, especially in India, but in later years his major contributions were far more diverse cutting

across narrow confines of the discipline to include such inter-disciplinary topics as Natural Resource Management, Natural Hazards Management, Political Economy and Ecology of Resource Depletion, Sustainable Development, Urban Development Issues, and Indian Geography.

Prof. Thakur retired as Professor of Geography from Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, where he had been Head of the Department during 1996-99. He was also the Vice-Chancellor of L.N. Mithila University, Darbhanga (Bihar) during 2001-03. Before joining the University of Delhi as a Reader in 1980, he taught at the Universities of Ranchi (1964-65) and Patna (1965-80). He was a Visiting Fulbright Scholar at the University of Akron in the USA (1992) and again a visiting professor of Geography and planning at the same University in 2000, during which he had the privilege of working with an eminent urban Geographer Professor Ashok K. Dutt to work on Urban Structure and Processes in India. Professor Thakur held 45 years of teaching and research experience at the universities of Ranchi, Patna, Delhi, Waterloo, York (Canada), Akron, and North Dakota (USA). In 2005, for his seminal research contributions to resource and urban development in the context of developing countries, the Regional Development and Planning Speciality Group of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) rewarded him with the Distinguished Scholar Award. He was the author/editor of more than 14 books and over 100 research papers. Professor Thakur served as an advisor to 20 Ph.D., 34 M. Phil., and 62 M.A. students who worked on resource management and urban development issues.

Professor Thakur was actively associated with and devoted to the cause of Earth

System Sciences of the Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) for over three decades and served as the sectional committee's recorder (1990-92) and as local secretary (1997) in the ISCA held at Delhi. His name was familiar in India and abroad among Geographers and Geologists due to his decade-long association with the National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI) as the Joint Secretary (1990-95), and Secretary General (1996-2002). Besides, he has been associated as Treasurer (1984-88), Editor (1988-94), and President (1994-98) of the Association For Geographical Studies, University of Delhi; President of Earth System Sciences Section, 88<sup>th</sup> India Science Congress Association (2000-01); National Association of Geographers, India (NAGI) (2003-04), Institute of Indian Geographers (IIG) (2012-13), Vice Presidents of Indian Council of Geographers (1990-94), Institute of Indian Geographers (1995-97), Indian Regional Science Association (1997-98) and Indian Institute of Geomorphologists (1998-2000) and as Chairman of the Commission on Natural Hazards and Resource Management, NAGI (1993-98).

Mentor, guide, and true teacher are what Professor Thakur professed. From examinations to appointments, class lectures to presidential and keynote addresses, seminars to workshops, and occasional writings to scholarly books, Professor Thakur performed multiple roles incumbent upon a committed academician. In the Department of Geography, paradigm shift and resource management were his favourite concepts. Delivering a lecture, with a loud and clear voice impressed the students who nicknamed him as a moving 'bibliography', because of his rare habit of effortlessly suggesting many references on any topic. He was an

admirer of 'Explanation in Geography', and always suggested students to read this book. He used to encourage, inspire, and promote writing habits among the students to write at least one book on the regional geography of their native place. Despite his retirement (in 2008) from active service, he continuously contributed to enriching geography through writing books and papers.

Before his departure from the mortal earth, he was actively engaged in editing two volumes of the book "Environment, Development, and Culture in South and East Asia: Local, Regional and International Perspectives" and "Local Economy and Sustainable Development: Praxis and Prospect". A 13-volume book on Perspectives in Resource Management in Developing Countries that Prof. Thakur had begun working on but could not be completed due to his untimely death. Further, he was very much interested in authoring books on Statistical Methods in Geography, Geographical Thought, and Urban Geography. Alas, death snatched him away before he could complete this task he had set before himself.

The extent and amount of the work completed by Prof Thakur and that remains unfinished is monumental. His amiable,

unassuming friendly behaviour and child-like inquisitiveness distinguished him as a person that drew him many admirers within and outside the discipline and in and outside of the country. His difficult academic journey and his spectacular academic and organisational achievement have few parallels. His commitment to the subject, dedication, and contribution to the field of geographical knowledge is amazing, to say the least. His love for the students as a teacher and a mentor is unforgettable. He will remain an inspiration to all the geographers of the present time as well as of the future.

Prof. Thakur is survived by his wife, Shrimati Chanda, and sons Sudhir and Rajiv. His children are all happily married and well-settled. In his death, the discipline of Geography has lost a distinguished academician and a great human being. The void created by his demise will be difficult to fill.

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