

Article Review of “Geography in India: A Languishing Social Science”

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Abstract: *Prof. Kapur has done a very commendable work towards the development of Geography Discipline. She has contributed not only through her researches but motivating other geographers too through her research work. This article is one of her great researches. I have tried to explore main points of her articles in this review.*

Keywords: Geography, languishing science, Anu Kapur, Social Science, Review

1. Introduction

The article “Geography in India: A Languishing Social Science” was written by eminent geographer Dr. Anu Kapur, Professor, in the Department of Geography, Delhi school of Economics, University of Delhi, published in Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 39, No. 37 (Sep. 11-17, 2004), pp. 4187-4195.

The article covers a very important topic on the status of geography in India. The title instantly pulls the attraction of a geographer towards it. Though it is primarily written for geographers, who could get informed with their actual status, it also focuses on other social scientists and authoritarians of social sciences. This paper posits a pertinent question before the heads of various departments of social science development authorities, that why they have ignored such an indispensable discipline among other social sciences. Dr. Anu Kapur, with her special style of writing wherein she provides ample data to support her arguments, posits a vulnerable situation of the discipline of geography. Here, in this article, she starts with three top, renowned institutions of social sciences, which have ignored geography during their broad research programs for the various disciplines of social sciences.

Dr. Kapur’s core idea behind writing this article is to provide some thought provoking write up, to provide a mirror to the geographers who could properly see the actual position of their discipline among other social sciences.

2. Importance of the Article

An eye-opener, an instigator and a motivator are the terms that characterize this article ‘Geography in India: A Languishing Social Science’ authored by Dr. Kapur. After secondary education students look up to various disciplines to opt. Some go for geography. Why should they opt for geography? What scope does this discipline provides and purpose does it solves? A reading of this article is a must to everyone. All the geographers whether they are old or young must carefully read this article and analyse it for positive outcome. If they have grown old in developing this subject, then this article presents before them a form of bio-data. What were their efforts and how fruitful were their steps in evolving this subject. Most importantly, they could see what went wrong. Geography developed and evolved with other disciplines of social sciences but what made it lagging behind to them? After introspection, they could find the

shortfalls and positively share them with the younger generation of geographers. The experience of these older prominent Indian geographers is precious for the younger one. Navigating with the help of those experiences this new army of younger geographers could take the discipline at the top. The slumber and stagnancy can be broken and this article serves as prime motivator.

Secondly, the younger generation of geographers is well equipped with all new technology and science. They can work hard in right direction and transform the languishing discipline into a developed one. The amount of focus that is required can be applied by this new breed of geographers with the help of experiences and exposure of older geographers. This article is equally important for the authorities of social sciences. When the discipline of Geography has been added under social science it became a responsibility for the people on the top of authorities to look after every discipline and provide greater assistance to languishing disciplines. Dr. Kapur has provided proofs that show neglecting approach applied towards geography. The impetus required from outside of the discipline is nil. Even supporting this argument Singh S. (2009) said that the articles written on the status of geography are being published in non-geographical publications like EPW. This article reminds these authoritarians of their responsibilities that they have yet to fulfill. This article is especially useful for the people of other discipline who could find their place among other social sciences. The article could not achieve its purpose in some other formulation. Dr. Kapur has done extensive research in evaluating the discipline of geography and the attempts made towards its development since its institutional establishment in India when first department of geography was established in 1924 in India.

This article works as a mirror for the geographer of India. They can see their position through this article among other disciplines of social sciences. This article fills up a broad gap that was much needed. Until & unless we can watch our progress and mistakes, how’ll we direct our focus? The tables provide detailed and complete picture of the arguments and very beautifully substantiate the arguments stated by the author. Before reading this article, I too, like other geographers, used to think that geography is a great subject and has good respect in India. But this article is an eye-opener that is in contrast to earlier world of geography among masses. The article adopts a chronological descriptive approach in producing its arguments. This article, a benchmark in itself, has created debate required in the arena of

Indian geography. Through this article she tried to aware the practitioners of the discipline to the dismal state of geography as a social science of India. Quantitatively, Dr. Kapur has done a commendable Job. Her core research in terms of data collection & producing them purposefully is unmatched and that was the reason, she was quoted by every geographer, who wrote on this topic after 2004.

3. Comparative analysis

A lot has been written on the topic of status of geography in India, and the problem attached with the discipline. Dr. Kapur's article provides somehow a trademark in the field geographical debate. It was the impact of her article that it was followed by two back to back publications one was "geography in India: marginal space by Sheela Prasad in January 1, 2005 and second was "Geography as a marginal social science" by Kuntala Lahiri Dutt in February 12, 2005. These both article quoted Dr. Kapur and expressed their appreciation for such a deep ingrained research in field. As Lahiri-Dutta(2005) says, "the two (Anu 2004, Prasad 2005) welcome and timely pieces in EPW encouraged me to neglect upon many fluid thoughts that have intensely bothered me during my teaching career."

Reading several seminal works produced by geographers, it can be said that Dr. Kapur's work stands apart and presents a new, refreshing and more sharpen attack on geographers. Though, she has been critiqued for it by some geographers. Lahiri-Dutta (2005) said in a disguised manner, "that geography is indeed a 'legitimate' social science, was a 'given' in Kapur's article, although she justified the statement by citing a large body of research. Many of these authors wrote at least a decade or two ago, so consequently they do not really justify why geography as it stands today in India, is not considered as a social science. Further she said" both Kapur and Prasad raised very pertinent issue without really being able to pinpoint the problem". Dutta's this remark seems superficial as she could not realize Kapur's whole argument was about pinpointing the problems. However, she has been altogether applauded for this work when Sheela Prasad (2005) starts her article quoting Kapur, "the recent article by Anu Kapur (Geography in India: A languishing social science; EPW Sep. 11, 2004), raises pertinent questions about the present status and future of geography..... The small community of scholars who trained in geography will find this piece by Kapur a welcome clarion call to take stock of what is happening in our discipline and how we need to interrogate and understand these trends".

Some others like (Dikshit 2006) were not found to be impressed with the idea of 'questioning' regarding nature of discipline and disciplinary boundaries of the discipline of geography. However, it is more or less true that geography's disciplinary boundary and nature has been a subject of contention within geographers. Instead of sticking to one approach of geography it is pertinent to argue the concept at present and try to evolve the definition of geography based on emerging nature of resources all around in other disciplines of social science (Raju 2004, Singh 2009).

4. Arguments in the article

Dr. Kapur has focused on inherent core theme of geography i.e. space. She discussed development of this core characteristic of geography and its growth with the discipline. She explains with proper references that geography is united with other disciplines and tries to explore spatiality, as she mentioned, "*the fundamental order which geography seeks and finds among the objects it investigates is spatial..... Geography attempts to reproduce for us visible order that exists in a space*" (Park and Burges 1970). Dr. Kapur has meaningfully structured the article that provides a flow of ideas and thus availing good understanding to its readers.

Initiating with some prominent institutes attention towards the discipline, she presents her arguments logically with relevant subheadings. First, she tries to make the reader understand the presence of geography as a discipline among other social science under subheading of, "geography is social science". Through heading it is assumed that writer supports geography as a social science but does this assumption is supported by other disciplines or within the discipline by eminent scholars is an unresolved question. She has focused upon relationship of geography with other disciplines. Subsequently brings the reader's attention towards presence of geography discipline in India. Reader could now understand nature of geography and how it is being treated by geographers and other social scientists. Within India how fair does geography fare? Dr. Kapur explained it under the subheading of "geography in academics" she performed a temporal quantitative analysis of geography in Indian academic among other social sciences. Here in, she tries to find out the reason behind lagging and languishing geography, while other disciplines are way ahead. She further looks into higher education institutes of social science. Here, she unfolds the unfortunate absence of geography in social science research institutes that provide theoretical base for the survival of any discipline. In the subsequent subheadings she has provided some reasons behind such rattled situation geography in India. The prime reason that she puts behind is lack of fruitful, useful, practical, solutions to the problems in India. A sense of inferiority complex that has existed among the disciplinarians of geography made geography to languish. She said, "*a hesitant alliance exists between geography and public policy in India*" (Kapur 1998). Focusing on qualitatively and quantitatively substandard work produced by Indian geographers that caused this discipline to be a neglected science, Dr. Kapur said that a "geographer in a department barely write one article in three year". Finally under the final subheading of 'hope and scope' she has provide some solutions and hoped for the positive development of geography. Here, she tried to say "let bygones be bygones". The new breed of younger and enthusiastic geographers is the future of this discipline. They can work legacy of eminent geographers and take the discipline out of its slumbering state. She said in the last paragraph, "*surprising as it may seem, never will geographer in India have any greater opportunity to participate actively in arenas of social science than at present*". In the last line of the article she has proactively, exuberantly said, "Geography has the inherent potential for

not just attracting recognition but being a leader in the social science”.

5. Conclusion

This article had a watermark effect on all further studies in the discipline of geography. Dr. Kapur, sticking to her typical style of writing, which is lucid, fluent, easy to understand, point to point and sharp, created an excellent piece of research. Other writings could not stick to their core idea from the beginning to the end as does this article remains. Unlike other articles on this theme, Dr. Kapur balanced it in a proper way wherein each paragraph seems to come out from the previous one, connected to each other in a logical and meaningful manner. Providing a complete picture of the status of geography in India from temporal-spatial perspective, this article makes the reader well connected and satisfied. Language is lucid and clear and way of presenting the arguments makes it an interesting reading. The illustrations and data tables are the backbone of article whereupon writer has built her strong thought provoking arguments.

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