

## Commentary

### Memoriam: “R.B. Singh - Father of Modern Indian Geography”

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The Legend of Professor Ram Babu Singh, widely known as R.B. Singh, the father of modern Indian Geography, the iconic Indian Geographer, a teacher, mentor, guide, and father figure for the current generation of Indian Geographers left for the heavenly abode on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021 after about four decades of a professional career in academic, research and development, and administrative spheres.

Born on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1955 in Majhanpura village in Saran/Chapra district of Bihar, India, he completed his basic school education in the home district. He completed his higher education, including bachelor's and master's degrees with a major in Geography in 1975 and 1977, respectively from the then most prestigious university in India, the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Uttar Pradesh. Further, he received a diploma in statistical methods (1979) and a doctorate in Geography (1981) under the supervision of Great “Professor S.L. Kayastha” from the same university. He had the privilege of being a student of some of the great Indian Geographers of modern India, such as Professor R.L Singh, the legacy of whom he carried successfully throughout his life.

He started his professional scientific career as a Council of Scientific and Industrial Research pool officer in 1983 at the BHU, India. In 1985, he joined as a lecturer at the Department of Geography, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, Delhi. Further, in 1988 and 1996, he joined as University Grants Commission Research Scientist-B and C at the same. Meanwhile, he obtained training in Geographical Information System in the field of the environment from the prestigious EPFL-Laussane



and GRID-Geneva from October 1988 to April 1989 supported by United Nations Environment Program-United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) fellowship. Further, he served as a professor of Geography from 2002 until February 2020 (retirement) at the University of Delhi.

His contributions to scientific research related to pressing and contemporary questions in Geography and allied disciplines are immense. His scientific thoughts and contribution are published in journals of national and international repute (Roy 2021). In his early career, he immensely contributed to Rural Geography, Regional Geography, Environmental Studies, Pollution, and Urban Studies. In the later years, he was, however, more focused on mountains, disasters, and urban studies using the latest remote

sensing and GIS tools. He had a special love for the Himalayas and was a supporter of the theory of Himalayan environmental degradation and low-high land interactions. He was part of establishing a special center for Himalayan Studies in 2021 with the help of the University of Delhi. Overall he published 16 authored books, 40 edited volumes, and 260 research papers in various journals and books, published by Indian and international publishers, which were well-accepted by the scientific community (Singh 2021). He was the founding editor of two edited book series, i) *Advances in Geographical and Environmental Sciences* and, ii) *Sustainable Development Goals*, published by Springer. His fame as a teacher is well reflected from the fact that he supervised 39 doctoral and 81 M. Phil. students (Singh 2021). He, successfully, completed many national and international collaborative research projects with important institutions and organizations, such as the University of Turku, Finland; the University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg, Canada, to name a few.

He made countless contributions to the administrations of various institutes and organizations in India and abroad, some of the most important are briefly mentioned here. One of his first administrative assignments was as the secretary of the hydrology Section, Asia-Oceania Geoscience Society (AOGS), Singapore for the period between 2004 and 2007. He was also a nominated member of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics (IUGG)-International Geographical Union (IGU) national committee, Indian National Science Academy (INSA) from 2008 to 2021. He was also elected as the president of the Earth System Science Section of the Indian National Science Congress Association for the period from 2019 to 2020. He was also invited/nominated as a member of the Niti Aayog, Government of India in 2020.

He served as co- and vice chair of many IGU Commissions, including Biogeography and Biodiversity (2008-2012). He was elected as Vice President of IGU twice (2012 and 2016) and later as Secretary General, IGU in 2018, respectively. He also contributed as head of the Geography Department, at the Delhi School of Economics from 2013 to 2016 and from 2019 to 2020. Under his leadership, the Department of Geography attained greater heights

and ranked top in India. He was the chairman of many colleges affiliated with the University of Delhi, Delhi.

Prof. Singh made great contributions to Indian Geography. His contribution to the National Association of Geographers (NAGI) is noteworthy, where he served as joint and lead secretary between 2001 and 2010. He served as the managing editor of the *Annals-NAGI* as well from 2010 to 2013. His major contribution to the NAGI was its promotion to not just to remote Indian Universities but also abroad. He successfully attracted geographers from India and abroad to NAGI. Under his able leadership, NAGI grew to its highest fame.

His most notable contribution remained unprecedented support and promotion of young Indian students and early career academicians, scientists, and Geographers at International forums, with a special focus on students from economically and socially backward sections and from rural India. He participated in nearly all the IGCs since 1984 and most of the regional congresses (Singh 2021). He led the Indian delegation to IGC-Cologne, Germany in 2012 and was elected as the vice-president of IGU, which encouraged the young Indian Geographers in the later IGCs. R.B. Singh led the largest Indian delegation (100+) to IGC, Beijing, China in 2016. The participation of Indian Geographers in various regional and main IGU scientific meetings increased manifolds under his leadership from 2012 onwards. Presently, some of his students are serving as chairs, co-chairs, and members of various IGU Commissions and as Assistant Secretary-General-IGU.

Besides being an outstanding mentor and a teacher in a true sense, he remained a lifelong advisor to his students, peers, and colleagues (Schickhoff et al. 2021). The success of Prof. Singh, as a teacher, can be well understood from the success of his students, who are serving as academicians, and scientists in India and abroad e.g., in the United States of America, Germany, etc. Currently, three-four generations of his students are serving in various universities in India and abroad. A large number of his students also chose a career in various state and national administrative services in India. In addition, different sectors, including planning, research and innovation, private and public sector and non-governmental organizations have attracted his students, where they

are performing exceptionally well.

Prof. Singh was active as a teacher, a mentor, and a scientist, even during his last days in the Hospital, directing his students to take Indian Geography to greater heights in general and Himalayan mountain studies in particular. To most of us, he was a hero and will remain so. His life is a highlight for anyone. His sudden departure from the earth leaves a great void in our heart and Geography community. However, his contributions to Geography will remain forever and we, his descendants, will try our best to carry his legacy forever.

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