

S.P CHATTERJEE MEMORIAL LECTURE

DEVELOPMENT OF THEMATIC CARTOGRAPHY IN INDIA

-Dr Prithvish Nag

The name of Professor Shiv Prasad Chatterjee is synonymous with thematic cartography in India. Independence of the country in 1947 brought new dimensions and meaning to cartography. It was felt that maps prepared for the purpose of security, defense and offence, do not exactly meet the requirements of development, reconstruction and planning of the newly born nation. This was the time when Prof Chatterjee, the doyen of Indian geography and thematic cartography, brought out the famous book entitled, Bengal in Maps. This atlas like publication concerning undivided Bengal now covered present day West Bengal and Bangladesh. Several themes were included which were related to the administrative setup, basic geographical features like topography, drainage, soils, agriculture, population, industries and the like. Theme specific maps were new to India; and this was the origin of thematic cartography in the country. Meanwhile, Prof. Chatterjee made following contributions :

- Le Plateau de Meghalaya, Paris, 1936
- Bengal in Maps, Calcutta, 1949
- Physiography in Gazetteer of India
- World Atlas of Agriculture, Novara, 1973
- Economic Geography of Asia, Kolkata, 1986
- Bharatiya Rashtriya Atlas, 1957
- National Atlas of India, 1982
- Irrigation Atlas of India, 1972
- Atlas of the Damodar Valley Region, 1969

The above publications were the basis on which geography inspired cartography was developed. Nevertheless, there were several issues when he was finally asked to prepare the National Atlas of India – the true beginning of thematic cartography in India. These challenges were :

- Find a uniform background map series (IMW 1:1M)
- Generalize and map the topical information collected in a uniform way to serve as working document
- Produce uniform overviews maps 1:6 million for optimal communication for national trends
- Overcome organisational challenges of massive data-collection and processing in a pre-computer age

Prof Chatterjee considered models of several countries in order to develop the National Atlas Organisation in particular, and thematic cartography in general in India. Some of these were : (a) French National Atlas model of bringing out a national atlas of the country for the first time with German map calligraphy (Royal German Hand Atlas); and (b) On the lines of the institutes of the then socialist countries to establish an Institute of Geography. In the latter case, the Institutes of Geography in Socialist Block were not entrusted with the preparation of National Atlases. Further, the Institutes of Geography were established under the aegis of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and Polish Academy of Sciences. Professor Chatterjee chose to integrate both the approaches, *i.e.* to have an Institute of Geography entrusted with the preparation of the National Atlas of India. In fact, NAO was tilted towards the east European model of the Institutes of Geography where the cartographic exercise was driven by geographical researches. Prof Chatterjee's target was to develop an institute with either of following names :

- National Institute of Geography
- Research Institute of Geography
- Institute of Earth Sciences

As these digital atlas products will be increasingly used in an isolated viewing and earning situation, now, more than ever, we should atlas user by providing map commentaries such as have been developed and extended by Professor S.P. Chatterjee. To learn to use atlases is more than learning to handle the buttons or the interface, it is also learning to look with 'geographer's eyes'. In this connection, a new project named Golden Map Service was launched in NATMO using all sorts of modern geoinformatic technology and its integration with IT, ICT and web technologies. The whole *objective* is to shift focus from small scale to large scale thematic cartography and to provide services based on such soft infrastructure. The project can also be a basic for implementing national project on Digital India.

About Dr.Prithvish Nag



Dr.Prithvish Nag is the Vice-Chancellor of Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi. Dr. P. Nag holds a PhD degree from Banaras Hindu University. He has also done Post Doctoral Research from School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1982-83).He has occupied the coveted posts of the Director-National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation and Surveyor General of India, Survey of India in his illustrious career spanning nearly 40 years. He is the President of Professor S.P Chatterjee Memorial Foundation.