

## **Dr. Harka Gurung: An Illustrious Geographer and Development Practitioner**

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### **Introduction**

After getting over the first shock that had struck our minds with the most heart rending news of the sudden demise of our dear friend, Harka Gurung, as a result of the fateful helicopter accident that took place at Ghunsa. It was but natural that we should try to remember the details of our association with him and his multifarious activities. He was born at Taranche, a small village in Lamjung in Central Nepal on the left bank of the Marsyangdi river not very far from the renowned peaks of Manaslu and Himalchuli which loom large just twenty four kilometers north of the village, situated at an altitude of 1914 meters above sea level. Harka Gurung was a born trekker and he travelled through the length and breadth of Nepal, and undertook studies on various aspects of mountains. At last he met with that fatal accident near Ghunsa, situated at an altitude of more than 3400 meters above sea level close to the famous peak of Kanchanjunga, the third highest in the world in the far eastern district of Taplejung. Thus as Pravin Rana, one of his younger admirers has said: "The son of Nepal was claimed by the same mountains he loved". (Rana, 2007). It was his conviction, which he repeated on several occasions that "I love mountain, no matter how small, and I love a river, no matter how dirty". He can be said to have been a legend in his lifetime and his intimate love for the mountains and their conservation has eventually been virtually enshrined in the wilderness, which was recently declared as a Conservation Area, and he was on his way to participate in the formal ceremony commemorating the hand-over of its management to the people.

### **A Genius Geographer**

Harka Gurung is only too well known for his sense of patriotism and proficiency in the main area of his study, i.e. Geography. When he was asked to introduce himself all that he usually did was just to say, "I am a fellow who has some knowledge of Geography". Geographers feel proud of his loyalty to the subject but his other friends would not be satisfied with his short identification of his own self in so few words. They like to throw light upon so many other areas of his knowledge and more often some one else would introduce him by saying that "he is a genius among the intelligentsia of Nepal and he has served the nation and the world in various capacities". It was for this reason probably that *The*

*Geographer's Point*, a geographical journal published in Kathmandu, has called him “Genius Geographer” (Pande, 1992). They were correct in their own ways since they could tell the audience that some of the contributions of Harka Gurung could be enumerated as parts of his responsibilities in various capacities as those that are depicted below:

- Demonstrator, Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh ;
- Lecturer of Geography in the Post-graduate Classes in the Tribhuvan University College;
- Executive Secretary, Nepal Geographical Society (NGS);
- Honourable Member of National Planning Commission (NPC);
- Member, National Education Advisory Council;
- Member, Tribhuvan University Senate;
- Member, Family Planning & Maternal Child Health Board. Nepal;
- Member, National Education Committee;
- Member, Tribhuvan University Senate
- Honourable Vice-chairman, NPC;
- Honourable Member, National Panchayat (National Legislature)
- Member, Constitution Reform Commission;
- Minister of State, Education as well as Industry and Commerce;
- Minister of State, Tourism, Public Works and Transport;
- Vice-chairman, Nepal Tourism Promotion Committee (NTPC);
- Chairman, Mountain Naming Committee;
- Member, National Commission on Population (NCP);
- Chairman, Task Force on Migration;
- Visiting Fellow, Population Institute, East West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii
- Member, Center for Nepal & Asian Studies (CNAS) Advisory Board, Tribhuvan University;
- President, Nepal Geographical Society;
- Vice-chairman, Dharmodaya Sabha;
- Member, Board of Editors, Cultural Encyclopedia of Nepal;
- Member, Board of Governors, International Center for Mountain Development (ICIMOD);
- Member, Lumbini Development Trust;
- Member, National Committee on Cultural Policy;
- Member, National Development Council;
- Member, Tourism Council;
- Director, Asia and Pacific Development Center (APDC);
- Secretary General, Association of Development Research and Training Institutes of Asia and the Pacific (ADIPA);
- Member, Governing Board, International Institute of Educational Planning (UNESCO);

- Member, Main Committee, “Visit Nepal” Year;
- Member, Pokhara University Council;
- Eminent Panel, UNESCO/Nepal;
- Advisor, World Wildlife Fund / Nepal Program;
- Executive Member, Transparency International / Nepal.

Since the field of Geography bears a unique relationship between man and his surroundings a geographer will always remember two aspects of the subject: namely the antiquity of Geography as a subject of study – often termed as the mother of sciences and of all secular learning; and the universality of geographic phenomenology, which impinges on man’s global consciousness in all his world affairs.

At the very outset of our global analysis of reality three primary factors of earth-man relationships are recognized such as: a) earth is not simply the home of man but it is the dominion of man bringing about the significant distinction in distinguishing man from animal as well as emphasizing the fact that geography is not a static, stereotyped science but a dynamic field of study in which we must explore and re-explore, each day, the geographic patterns of human occupation; b) earth has a distinct form, element-wise and space-wise, and functions as a unit following what we call natural laws – physical and biological; and c) man, by virtue of his superior order of existence, due to intellect, skills, attitude, spirit etc., has been endowed with the distinctive capacity to evaluate and appropriate the naturally differentiated earth and integrate his own variegated culture patterns with those of the natural earth to form the world of reality, as we know it.

The content and context of global landscapes thus may be said to represent in part the terrestrial base and in part the ideological concepts of man in carrying out his various activities on earth or in some of its spatially distinct parts. A Geographer, therefore, deals with the nature and meaning of human occupation forms as arranged in space and varied in time. In this connection it is very important that a geographer must make an attempt to recognize the place that the subject occupies in relation to all other disciplines, which make their own distinctive academic contribution to the study of man and reality. However, Geography, unlike the typical systematic science, is not identified by the kind of earth phenomena it treats but rather by the manner in which it selects and analyzes in terms of space interrelationship the various physical, biotic and societal features with which it concerns itself either regionally or systematically. In this sense, geography is not the study of climate, landforms, soils, minerals, plant and animal life or even man himself. In the same sense, geography is not just a study of the cultural establishment by man *per se*, such as settlement, houses, farms, transportation, communication and the like. And so it may be said that the patterns and processes which inhere in settlement – extractive economies of hunting and fishing, lumbering and mining, clearing land and planting and harvesting of crops, technological procedures of manufacturing, engineering projects of construction and transportation – and in the founding of nation states, etc., indispensable though they are for regional analysis, are of themselves no more the distinctive province of geography than they are the domain

of history, economics, sociology, political science, or any other field. This leads to the understanding that a Geographer is a geographer whether he may deal with planning, economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, wild life conservation and several other fields. However, he may be known as Economic Geographer, but not as an Economist, a Social Geographer, but not as a Sociologist, and so on.

### **An Applied Geographer**

The contribution of Dr. Harka Gurung to development is indeed innumerable, but all of them have some geographical bases and he is never away from the solid earth even he may be talking about population, graduates' migration or even about physics or chemistry. He has exemplified in more than one way that he has been aware of the fact that geography is known to have passed through various phases of development and as new problems are revealed and more appropriate methods are formulated for analysis geographers have to deal with a wide range of problems and cautious steps are taken in advancing new ideas in the area. (Stamp, 1960) Starting from classical times man has been regarded as a product of the environment, and this idea remained almost unquestioned until the works of Charles Darwin who confirmed in a scientific manner the position of man as a creature adapted to his environment and not just a passive creature blindly following its dictation. On the other hand, work in the physical sciences showed remarkable development of knowledge regarding elements and matter and work on Social sciences revealed remarkable regularity in human behavior. It was very justifiably concluded that although man had to follow certain natural and economic and behavioral laws in performing his tasks the earlier almost passive nature of man gradually lost its acceptance with the technological advancement. Other schools of thought stressed the fact that "man is free to make his own choice" although within the limits set by nature. Such limits are, however, wide enough to provide a scope to man in his choice based upon his cultural background and technological advancement. (Malla, 2002)

In any discipline, philosophy plays a very important role and within it the methodology. Similarly, geographers develop logic of explanation with rigorous arguments, reasonable inferences and internally coherent methods. The trend of geographical inquiry at any point of time is the manifestation of interaction between and among prevailing philosophical viewpoints and methodological approaches. Because of the extreme diversity of viewpoints in philosophy from the purely objective to the idealistic, it can be said that geography tends to take the best of the various "-isms" without any camouflage of noble sentiments and moral overtones. Thus geography maintains its multidisciplinary nature and yet does not forget its main domain of spatial realm of geographical discipline. A partial or unisectoral view cannot help development, which implies the process of economic, social and political change. Geography, by its very nature, is multidisciplinary and a geographer is expected to cultivate the capacity to visualize everything in a holistic manner. All relevant factors – land, climate, vegetation, soil, population, products etc. – are visualized in totality. The holistic

vision of a geographer can provide insight and capacity for coordination, which is absolutely necessary for all round development. It provides the technique of getting essential aspects of the “whole”. Planning based on such perspective is more realistic and “earth-bound”. So geographers can avoid building castles in the air and make a meaningful contribution to bring about a balanced development.

In 1967, Harka Gurung published an article on “Geography and Planning in Nepalese Context” in the local magazine *Vasudha* before he was nominated the member of the National Planning Commission. He advocated the need of looking the problem of underdevelopment by linking it with the distribution of resources and the degree of their utilization or exploitation. He also pointed out to the need for adopting a “holistic approach” to tackle with the problem of mis-match between the distribution of resources and their utilization. (Gurung, 1967) After joining the National Planning Commission he got the opportunity of further developing his perception as a competent Applied Geographer about planning and formulated a Regional Development Policy which was published by National Planning Commission as a monograph under the title – “Regional Development Planning for Nepal” in 1969 (Gurung, 1969).

During the planning holiday of 1961-62, the government had set up a committee in 1961 for undertaking an exercise of dividing the country into zones and development districts in order to establish a spatial framework for socio-economic development of the country. After a hurried but serious exercise the sub-committee that was established to make an attempt to divide the country into zones and development districts and prepare the maps showing their boundaries respectively had come up with certain propositions which were, however, drastically modified in line with the King’s speech on the New Year’s Day, which had declared, among other things, that the Kingdom would be divided into 14 *anchals* (zones) and 75 *vikas jillas* (development districts) (ZDDC, 1961). One of the proposals that were submitted by the sub-committee was for dividing the country into 7 *anchals* and 45 *vikas jillas*. The earlier proposed zones crossed the country North-to-South and each one of them was supposed to share its borders with China in the North and India in the south. Naturally the planners while formulating the Second Plan (1962-1965) which was a three-year plan, had this convenient spatial framework in mind and proposed a “Regional Balance Policy” for

1. Providing various facilities such as education, health, information centers etc; and
2. Establishing 3,474 village panchayats, 75 district panchayats and 14 zones for ensuring a balanced development of the nation.

The major plan objectives of the Plan were:

1. Achieving economic development and improving the living standard of the people at large;
2. Bringing about economic stability and adequate management of social services as well as equitable distribution of income

3. Creating employment opportunity; and
4. Establishing necessary foundation for implementation of the proposed future countrywide development programs.

### **Gurung on Regional Planning and Balanced Development**

Obviously in the Second Plan, the planners had not been fully able to bring out a definite link between the so-called spatial framework and the sectoral policies and programs in a systematic way. The term, Regional Balance, was mentioned but the process of achieving the objective pointed out by the policy was far from being stated in an appropriately expedient manner. Similarly in the Third Plan (1965-1970), it was mentioned that Regional Development Policy would get priority but once again the program formulation did not show any reasonable and adequate link with the policy at all. It was towards the middle of the plan period that Harka Gurung was brought into the picture. However, during the formulation stage of the Fourth Plan (1970-1975), it was realized more clearly that “development is a monumental task especially in a country like ours, the topography, tradition and tranquility of which constitute a major challenge to any development program” and that “in this context development through regional planning becomes even more of a challenge to the Nepalese intellectuals” Gurung, 1969).

It was also understood that in view of the two policy decisions regarding

- a) The division of the country into four development regions with headquarters at Dhankuta, Kathmandu, Pokhara and Surkhet as well as the reiteration of the emphasis on the general policy of requiring the northern region to concentrate on the development of livestock, the middle hilly regions on horticulture and the southern plains on food and commercial crops; and
- b) The realization of the fact that in the formulation of any development plan the real aspirations of the people should be amply reflected in it and similarly by providing technical support to the development projects to be undertaken by local panchayats, a new expectation and enthusiasm toward the development should be generated among the people.

These two policy decisions were believed to have formed the nucleus of regional development at that time. The goals of the regional development centers were identified as outlined below:

- a) To diminish the disparity between the Hill and Terai people and implement plans which will bring about a more equal distribution of incremental incomes;
- b) To make the best utilization of the local resources (man, land and forest) and work out the economic structure of good corresponding linkages between the Hills and Terai;

- c) To increase the employment opportunities within the regions;
- d) To increase the exchange of goods within and among the regions;
- e) To control migration from the Hills to the Terai and to implement the scientific resettlement plans keeping in view the productivity, forest preservation, use of incoming labor force, etc. in the area;
- f) To increase the scope of private investment within the regions since the impact of the regional centers depends on how much these hidden resources are mobilized and utilized in a meaningful way;
- g) To increase the people's participation in the development activities of the region;
- h) To monitor the development projects within the regions;
- i) To provide social services such as education, health, family planning, drinking water, transportation and so on;
- j) Finally to increase national integration through social economical and political interdependence and the Hill people and Terai people and among interregional people.

It has been acknowledged that the above goals had been clearly summed up as the objectives of regional planning in the Fourth Plan and it was accepted that these objectives provided the sound guidelines of regional planning and development. (Pradhan, 1973).

The adoption of the regional development strategy was very timely since it presented a critical assessment of regional imbalances in agricultural, industrial, infra-structural and social services development programmes and projected a clear vision of implementation and administration of overall integrated regional development programmes at the grass-root level through the medium of economic and political institutions and increasing the growth subsequently in the future development plan periods particularly when people were watching the performances of development exercise in Nepal and commenting upon them and suggesting their own prescriptions. (Wildavsky, 1972)

### **Gurung on Implementation of the Regional Development Policy**

At the implementation level, however, it appears that the need of concentrating upon Regional Development could not be properly translated into meaningful actions. Even within the policy making circles people seemed to be quite unaware of the essence of the regional development approach in spite of the fact that Harka did not leave any stone unturned in

trying to explain the regional development strategy from all points of view including the operational aspects referring to the economic, social, physical and administrative factors. So much so that in one of the interviews, one responsible person had gone so far as to say that the regional concept in Nepal was “a geographer’s conspiracy”. Unfortunately, although the spatial dimension of development decision-making is considered by many to be intrinsic, this does not mean that self-conscious promotion of certain strategy has been an inherent aspect of most national development planning. It is of course, true that unless properly put to orientation through rigorous exercises in certain workshop the conventional planners could not feel comfortable to accept the new path which Nepal was trying to launch with respect to national and regional development planning. The government happens to be usually poor in having a proper machinery for cross referencing and reconciling the disparate decisions being taken up by various ministries and agencies, which actually would be translated on solid ground since “economic growth does not take place on the head of a pin”. (Rana, 1973). It is lamented by many development practitioners that most national planners have chosen as their basic plotting surfaces not maps but national income accounts. It is a wrong notion prevalent in most countries that the spatial dimension need not be perceived to be nearly key a dimension of development design as has been industry investment allocations or net domestic savings and investment or the foreign exchange projections. It appears that conventional planning exercises are undertaken with a notion that if the afore mentioned things are gotten correct the spatial outcomes will take care of themselves. “But we know by now – sadder but wiser are we – that spatial outcomes do not take care of themselves”. (Johnson, 1968) However, it must be considered a matter of partial satisfaction that Gurung’s pioneer practical strategy of regional development, was successful in bringing out the concept of regional development to public notice and could at least arrest the attention of the policy makers and planners of investment. (Pradhan, 1973).

As a result, the national planners continued mentioning the subject of regional development as an important part of the strategy and/or objective in the subsequent plans. It was in the immediately following Fifth Plan (1975-1980) that “Regional Development” as well as the promotion of integration was clearly mentioned as the most important objective of the plan and accordingly specific policy measures were also stated for ensuring and maintaining balanced regional development. But when during the same plan period the development strategy was changed from regional development to rural development and that also through the introduction of the Small Area Development Program (SADP), though declared as a part of the regional development strategy, the foundation stone of the distortion of the crystal clear concept of Harka Gurung on Regional Development was laid. The very philosophy behind the concept was misunderstood or totally ignored. Under these conditions Harka must have been very unhappy and in one of the interviews he has not hesitated to blame his own fellow-geographers for not blazing the trail of regional development in Nepal after he left National Planning Commission as he was given the responsibility of the Minister of Education as well as the Industry and Commerce and later assigned to the Ministry of



Tourism, as well as the Ministry of Public Works and Transport before he resigned from the Ministry as well as from the Membership of the *Rastriya Panchayat*, the National Legislature. In the interview the question that was put to him was – “What would you say about the recent change of the National Planning Commission, the Commission of the nation of geographical diversities without geographer?” He concluded his answer by saying that “it is unfortunate no geographer has been included in the new team” and hurriedly added that “the reason seems obvious: those inducted in the past failed to clarify regional strategy in development plans.” He was not probably aware that the National Planning Commission had come up with an elaborate regional development strategy (NPC, 1989) and had included it in the Basic Principles of the Eighth Plan (1992-1997) but, although it was endorsed by the National Development Council, the apex planning body of Nepal, it was not incorporated in the plan. So it was not the fault of any geographer(s) who followed him. It is not easy to blame the economists either because although the gentleman who had called the concept of regional development “the geographer’s conspiracy” happened to be an economist, other renowned economists like Badri P. Shrestha had appreciated the concept and had elaborated it in their books and articles (Shrestha and Jain, 1978). The problem lied probably in the national culture itself which unfortunately believed in change, just change, and also the lack of a really far sighted vision and patience and perseverance as well as lack of continuity of any solid program that has been adopted as a good project of some value, may be with slight modification on the basis of new findings and experiences gained.

### **Gurung’s Perception of Growth and Development**

Harka Gurung was directly involved in development in Nepal for a period of more than a decade (1968-78), first as a planner (Member and Vice-chairman of National Planning Commission) and later as the Implementer (Minister). Even when he was no longer in the government in recognition of his contribution he was also nominated the Member of National Commission on Population (1982-84). Later he was appointed the Director of Asian and Pacific Development Center (1993-97). So naturally he had a rich practical experience of Development and no wonder that he had his own view on “what” and “how” of development. He has on various occasions very clearly expressed his views on such aspects, to name a few, as decentralization, poverty eradication, foreign aids (grants and loans), privatization, development of the *janajatis* (ethnic and tribal people), education, environmental degradation, development of tourism, role of non-government organizations (NGOs), responsibilities of the intellectuals, and so on.

Very often he used to say that we have not been able to distinguish between “growth” and “development”. In a very simple language he opined that “growth” denoted some additions to what was there earlier. For example, if at a certain point of time, we had generated 1000 Kw. of electricity, and after some time, we generated 10,000 Kw. more, so it became 11,000 Kw.; we say that we have constructed 13,000 km. of roads. This is “growth”. We

think this is development. It is wrong. The mileage of Road has increased, more electricity is generated, more telephone lines have been distributed, agricultural production has increased, more and more industrial and commercial firms have been established. Thus there may be several things that have been added to what we had before. But this is only “growth”, not “development”. Real “development” takes place only when there has been a change in the style of working or when there has been a transformation in economic system. Development is determined only by successful transformation in process. Several schools were established; there has been an increase in the number of literates. We have to ask ourselves, “What is the proportion of the people who can be called really awakened as the ratio of the increasing population as a result of the increase in the number of schools and educational facilities in the schools?” That is development. Increase in the number of literates is “growth” but if they have also gained awakening that is development. So in Nepal we have achieved some growth, no doubt, not without some ups and downs; but development is still far away.

Talking about the difference between the understanding of development during the Panchayat period and the present system, he believed that it was mainly so due to the difference in the variation in the then and present administrative systems; since the present system follows the multiparty principles and the past adhered to the partyless ones, the process of administration has been totally different. Unfortunately, however, it appeared to Harka Gurung that “the understanding of development has been more distorted at present.” Formerly while considering the development of the poor countries, the western nations, our benevolent donors, had a concept that the pace of development in the poor countries would be very much slow if there would be much discussion regarding the ways and means of attaining development; so they advocated that these countries should be immediately given the opportunity to act without wasting much of their time in discussions. They cited the example of the success of development practices in Taiwan, and Singapore. South Korea, Malaysia as compared to the situation in the South Asian countries. According to them, these differences existed here because of the time that was lost in too many discussions. Now that communism has now gradually lost the hold in different parts of the world, the Western donors have started saying that there would be no development without having adequate discussion. They therefore are of the opinion that western type of democracy is what is needed for the development of any nation. If formerly they used to support the development of the states which were against communism no matter what sort of governance they had adopted; even the dictatorial or autocratic types of governments were assisted. They were guided more by the fact that they had branded themselves as the steward for protecting the “Free World”. So in the past their main objective was to maintain the “freedom” whereas now following the decline of Communism their concern has been shifted from the ideological leadership to the commercial or economic concern and the perpetuation of their wider and wider market, particularly at a time when China is aggressively coming forward in the scene of global market. Now, therefore they have started saying that without proper

discussion leading to participation of the stakeholders, there cannot be any development at all. So in Nepal we had a feeling that there was no democracy for the 30 years of Panchayat system so there was no development; now we lament over the fact that development has not been materialized although it was hoped that development would be ushered in following the great change that had occurred in 1990. Malaysia and Singapore have the system of governance, which is not very different from what we had in the past. They economic opulence but individual freedom is controlled. A system similar to the Panchayat system has already shown good results and we have been reiterating over and over again that we have to develop following their footsteps. Now it has been already too old a stream. It appears that for 30 years we curtailed political freedom and we did not bring about development. Now even if we repeat the pledge again no one will have faith in such a statement. Mahathir and Lee Kwan Yu brought about economic relief to the people through rigid administration under the catch word of “Asian Standard or Value”; but at present we do not have the option to re-introduce the same slogan in Nepal.

It appeared to Gurung that the main drawback lied in the fact that the concept of development that we adopted was not only borrowed but also virtually forced upon us from outside; we have been literally subjugated by the malady of what may be called the “chronic dependency syndrome”. In a democratic set up the development policy should determine the direction that our development should take along with the strategy that should be adopted to reach the planned goal / target. It appears that all knows the direction since it is to get riddance from the malady of poverty, but the confusion prevails in how to go about it. The Nepali Congress, which used to preach democratic socialism appears at present to have adopted the rightist philosophy. The Nepal Communist Party (UML), which was known to be “progressive” in the recent past, has now, after their sojourn in the government for a period of nine months, turned towards the “middle path”. Thus they seem to have lost their original path and in this confused situation the problems of development have been more and more confounded. The malady has already become so complicated that a single medicine will not cure it but it requires a complete check up and overall revision of the entire principles and strategy of the development and this action, in turn, will be influenced by the ideological conflict that seems to be pervading the Nepalese society in general today.

### **Gurung’s Contribution on Decentralization and Local Self-governance**

Another important drawback obstructing the path of speedy development has been the lip service that is being provided by the concerned personnel / administrators in the government to the principles of decentralization. We have been talking about decentralization since 1963 to streamline the development administration and it was after a lapse of about 20 years that a law was enacted after the concerned bill got through the *Rastriya Panchayat*, the national legislature of the time, in 1982. But again it remained only on paper. Even the

required regulations were not prepared and brought to the public notice for at least two years following the enactment and before the concept of decentralization could be properly developed and crystallized to facilitate its implementation at various levels GON has brought into force yet another act - the Local Self-governance Act, (LSGA) 1999 as well as the related Regulations (LSGR), published one year later.

Taking recognition of the sovereign status of people in keeping with the constitutional spirit, the LSGA has aimed at institutionalizing the local government institutions through the devolution of responsibilities and authority for planning and implementation at the local level. If the new regulation will be followed honestly, the goal of the government in institutionalizing the local development process with the participation of people from all segments of society will be virtually fulfilled especially in the areas of mobilization of resources, allocation of such resources and distribution of the fruits of development. At the same time the LSGA has aimed at the required improvement in development administration for enabling the local government institutions to make decisions in the areas related to the life and daily needs of the people through developing local leadership. Thus it has attempted to bring about some distinct improvement in the areas of planning, implementation and monitoring/evaluation. A greater stress has been laid upon the participatory approach in the planning at local level. Similarly, it has suggested that the concerned people and personnel should be putting more focus on the needs of the poor and backward communities in the decentralized planning process, At the same time it was declared mandatory to produce a resource map for planning purpose. The central level ministries were empowered for classifying the local development projects mainly as district, village and municipal level projects to bring about a substantial improvement in the area of planning. In the area of implementation it was envisaged that the local government institutions should be authorized to hire consultants and technical as well as administrative staff on contract basis as per the need of the project implementation and they should be able to create positions as per the requirement of specific projects. In the case of monitoring/evaluation process radical improvements are expected through comprehensive arrangements which, among others, include (a) the need of reviewing the status of project implementation in the regular meetings of the District Development Committee with the participation of the representatives of private sector, NGOs and donor agencies; (b) undertaking the two types of studies on impact assessment of project implementation by identifying the types of beneficiaries, the kind of outputs, the scale in increase of productivity and employment opportunities and impact on environment and assessment of the operation of completed projects; (c) preparing bi-annual progress report on the status of implementation of projects which is to be submitted to the parliament as well as to the district council (DC); (d) submitting the report of the review meeting to the DC and implementing agencies; (e) developing an information and documentation center ; and (f) constituting Monitoring and Supervision committee under the chairmanship of a Member of the Parliament (MP) of the district with the DDC President, a member of DDC nominated by him and the concerned officials as members.

Harka Gurung was, however, not very sure how far the concerned people were really aware of the correct interpretation of “decentralization” and “local self-governance”. He actually suspected that some people were probably of the notion that they were synonymous terms. Time and again he had to explain his understanding that the term “decentralization” indicated “delegation of power to some extent to the lower level from the upper level of administration” whereas “local self-governance” denoted the authority granted to the lower/local level, which cannot be revoked. He had been advocating the need of a tier in between the district headquarter and the central secretariat of Singh Durbar. After the restoration of the multi party system in 1990 they removed the administrative tier of the “zone or anchor”. Actually they failed to visualize the role of the tier of “zone”. Their decision was biased against the tier on the basis of the treatment that the zonal commissioner rendered to the political workers. But the concept of the Regional Development still persists and there are a few ministries, which have their zonal offices, which however are not properly utilized. In the context of this hurried decision the best possible solution out of the worst situation can be the utilization of the concept of regional development and regional development center. A development center can be used as the medium for disseminating the central decisions and coordinating the activities in the districts. Likewise, the districts could use the regional development centers for mutual contact and discussions regarding the development of their respective districts and *ilakas*. So he had brought forward a scheme for establishing a regional development council, which will be discussing the matters of regional development to be brought to the center after thorough deliberations at the regional level. Thus the difficult task of implementation, monitoring and evaluation will be easily accomplished.

A proper delegation of power, however, will be accomplished only when the local bodies could be strengthened from financial point of view. Unfortunately, in the context of Nepal the districts, municipalities and village development committees are too many in number to be practically viable for any task of meaningful development. Their geographical extent is so very much limited that they are too small in size to show any possibility of mobilization of the resources of their own to any desirable extent. When they cannot depend on their own resources naturally they will have to depend on the external sources. The so called “development districts” which were demarcated in 1961 were virtually turned into the “administrative districts” later towards the end of the decade. In comparison to the status of development then, there has been such a lot of changes now particularly in the area of transport - both surface and air - and communication that the districts will be accessible to each other much more easily now than earlier. So even if the present number of districts would be reduced to 37 or near about, their administrative cost can be drastically reduced, thereby increasing the resource base of the districts. Similarly, the Village Development Committees also can be reorganized and reduced to a convenient number, say 2000, thereby making the districts more viable in size and possession of resources that can be mobilized for development purposes. Similarly most of the municipalities, which were declared so after 1991, do not look like urban centers and do not possess the characteristics of cities.

If these local bodies will be granted the advantage of participating in the bigger geographical area, their tendency of depending upon the mercy of the Central Administrative Bodies will be at least minimized, if not completely removed.

### **Gurung as a Prolific Writer**

Harka Gurung is also well known as a prolific writer and he has written several articles, hundreds of them, in various journals on various occasions and on various topics. In his book, “Nature and Culture : Random Reflections” (published in 1989), which is a compilation of his works, he has said in the Preface:

“The sub-title “Random Reflections” does not pertain to the diversity of agenda but rather the long period , nearly three decades, during which the thoughts found expression. These span my career transitions from a research student (1960-64) to teacher (1964-68), from planner (1968-75) to politician (1975-78) and a free-lance consultant/writer over the last decade” (Gurung, 1989).

The collection has been grouped in four broad areas. The first on “The Himalayas” has wide regional canvas beyond Nepal. The second, “Landscape”, is basically geography with an interdisciplinary approach. The third, “Society” relates to culture with focus on Nepal. The fourth is on “Political Culture”, which covers an area of history and politics in spatial terms. All those articles, book reviews and seminar presentations excepting a few were published in different journals, such as *The Geographical Journal*, London; *Chirigaku Hyoron*, (Geographical Review of Japan) and *Minzokugaku-Kenkyu* (Japanese Journal of Ethnology), Tokyo; *The Himalayan Journal*, Calcutta and Oxford; *The Himalayan Review* (Geographical Journal of Nepal Geographical Society), *The Motherland*, *Nepal Himal Journal*, *Nepal Vision*, *Philately*, *The Rising Nepal*, *Tribhuvan University Journal* and *Vasudha*, Kathmandu.

### **Gurung’s Contribution on Maps and Diagrams: the Geographers’ Tools**

Last, but not the least, one cannot close the account of his contribution without mentioning his works on Cartography, particularly for its use in understanding the distribution of resources and subsequent assessment of their utilization for the socio-economic development of the country and increasing the standard of living of the people. It was due to his influence that various ministries and the implementing agencies started the practice of using graphical charts to illustrate the progress of the various projects implemented in the specific period of the year during the review meetings chaired by the concerned Minister and attended by the Member of the National Planning Commission. The consciousness of map reading among

the administrators was also inculcated by his repeated emphasis on the maps in addition to their verbal expressions. It is believed that he was a pioneer also in producing handy maps for trekking. He has the trekking maps of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri, which were published in 1968 to his credit. So is the Trekking map for North of Kathmandu, which was published in 1969. Patan city map and Bhaktapur city map were published in 1980. During the preparation of the “Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley” which was later published in 1969 by Government of Nepal, Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Communication, Department of Housing and Physical Planning, his contribution was immensely valuable as it consisted of not only a substantial as well as appropriate advice but also an active participation in producing several maps. They were mostly thematic ones and covered various aspects of the Valley as well as the country as a whole. These maps were utilized to the maximum in assessment of the situation of the Kathmandu Valley and beyond. Until 1960s the only maps that were available for Nepal were the topographical sheets prepared by the Survey of India. Later abstractions of these topographical sheets on various scales and coverage were made available, such as the ones published as the afore-mentioned trekking maps. Harka Gurung’s contribution to the above book on Physical Development Plan was the excellent perspective diagram of the Kathmandu Valley. Being a talented artist it was not a difficult task for him to produce such a wonderful perspective diagram. As a matter of fact, he had once disclosed that as a child his ambition was to become a painter, an artist. Probably he had expressed this desire to his father, and he had requested the Lamas of Manang who usually migrated to Chitwan during winter to teach him drawing pictures and he had become a good artist often winning merit and prizes in the educational institutions during his school and college days. In 1956, in a nation wide competition two of his paintings were declared the best. Two of his works of art had been selected for the postal stamps of Nepal – one depicted the *danphe* (Impeyan Pheasant - *Lophophorus impejanus*) and the other showed *monal* (Satyr Tragopan – *Tragopan satyra*). He had shown the excellent workmanship already in 1964 when he had drawn a similar a perspective diagram for Pokhara Valley to be inserted in his thesis submitted in 1965 to the University of Edinburgh.

The involvement of Gurung in the laborious preparation of the thematic maps for “The Physical Development Plan for the Kathmandu Valley” had encouraged him to produce an atlas, which would be useful for assessing the socio-economic development of the country. It was felt long overdue since he was very much impressed by the publication of an Atlas in India under the able guidance of Dr. S. P. Chatterjea, who was also the Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the International Geographical Congress held in New Delhi in 1968. As a Member of the National Planning Commission and later as the Vice-chairman of the same he wanted to prepare a similar atlas for Nepal. Later his dream came true in 1980 under the guidance of late Dr. Ram Krishna Shrestha, Reader, Geography Instruction Committee, Tribhuvan University, who was nominated the Chief of the National Economic Atlas Project which was sponsored by His Majesty’s Government, National Council for

Science and Technology, Mapping Sub-committee. The national atlas was the first publication of its kind on Nepal and the credit goes mainly to Dr. Ratna Shamsheer J.B. Rana, the then Chairman of the National Council for Science and Technology and Vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission. Shrestha has rightly expressed his grateful thanks to Dr. Rana who had been “a continuous source of inspiration and advice” during the preparation of the atlas. At the same time he has also mentioned “acknowledgements are due to Dr. Harka Bahadur Gurung, former Vice-chairman, National Planning Commission, and Mr. Basudev Pyakurel, Secretary, Ministry of Land Reform, HMG for their suggestions, advice and help.” The atlas was a “reflection of the country’s physical, demographic, economic and social status. Its thematic maps have served as an indicator or guide to its development aspirations and policies”. (Shrestha, 1980)

## **To Conclude**

It was not an easy task to say anything about Harka Gurung who was born and brought up in the midst of the mountains and had been showing from the very beginning as a child a tremendous promise of turning himself into a great personality. Although born at a distant village of Lamjung he had a great desire to see beyond his surroundings, expose himself to the various circumstances, challenges and opportunities that come on the way. He is reckoned as one of the few hard working intellectuals of Nepal. As enumerated earlier he has not only served his country in different capacities but also impressed the people of other parts of the world with his sincere activities and selfless services. He has expressed his views on various subjects and topics such as Open Air Policy, National Frontier problems, Diplomatic relations with countries far and wide, Migration of people, Decline in social values and norms, Politics for progress and socio-economic development, Education for all in order to raise the standard of the people in general, Foreign policy of ‘live and let live’, Election for better political life, Privatization for better productivity and trade, Decentralization, Local self-governance, Economic development, Foreign employment, Secularism for better living, Control of corruption, Social equality, Administrative reform, Plight of the Conflict-torn Country, Communal Harmony, Environmental Conservation and so on. In short, although he talked about the community, religion, ethnic groups, political parties, language, regions, etc., his personality was never confined to the narrow sectarianism but had been able to keep himself aloof from the parochial viewpoint of any “isms” as such and could keep himself aloof from all those undesirable dogmas that most of the great people cannot always avoid. He was a true son of Nepal but at times he has been misunderstood by some people who could not fathom his holistic vision and a cherished desire to see Nepal strengthened by the unity among the various groups of people each of whom had some original contribution to make on the basis of their culture and beliefs. In his own words: “All ethnic groups should be given equal rights to survive as nationalities. In a democratic setup, the policy-makers have to see how it is worked out. Nepalese population is a combination of three social groups – caste people including *Tagadhari (Chhetris, Brahmins)* and *Dalits*, hilly



*Matwalis* (tribal) and the third *Madhise*, that is not socially but geographically distinguished. This triangular set up is a reality of Nepal and how these will be maneuvered politically will determine the essence of tomorrow's Nepal”.

Talking about the conflict in the country, he lamented over the consequences of the Maoist insurgency that troubled Nepal and the Nepalese for such a long time. He was of the opinion that this insurgency was the most important event of the decade. The year that the Maoists started the agitation was the last year of the Eighth Plan (1990-2000). At that time the growth rate of Nepal was nearly 6 per cent. In other words, the country was passing through a fairly prosperous path of progress whereas at the end of the insurgency, the growth rate had been dwindling between 1 and 2 per cent. It indicated that the greatest impact fell upon the economic development of the nation to a very undesirable extent. However, he nurtured a hope that the remedy for solving the problem created by the conflict “is the Constituent Assembly”, the flickering light beckoning the people to get united and move along the path of a brighter future (Gurung, 2006).

His love for the motherland, especially for the mountains, has been known to all and it is well reflected in the choice of her children's names: Himalchuli, Sagarmatha and Manaslu. The fourth one was named Vikash, his last dream to see his motherland at least to be put on track to a speedy development, i. e. *Vikash* in Nepali. To conclude, I would like to quote his worthy and beloved children who have very devotedly created a website ([http://. www/harkagurung.org](http://www/harkagurung.org)) with the hope of sharing his life with everyone who loved him, respected him and his teachings:

*He was buried in home village, where he was born 71 years ago. This was his wish too. He once told us, “Anytime you read a biography of a person the place when he or she is born and the place he or she is buried is always mentioned and thus immortalized. In this way I can introduce my beloved village to others who have not visited Taranche, Lamjung.”*

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