

BOOK REVIEW

Title: The State of Geography Teaching and Research in Nepal: A Review and Reflection

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It is elsewhere reported that geography education as an academic discipline has over a half century long history in Nepal. It has several debates and dilemma concerning on its various aspects and expectations of society: curricular issues at vertical linkages of courses through school to university level; scientific research; teaching methods and materials. Besides, studies and reports regarding on the status, issues and challenges of geography teaching in Nepal, there are several anecdotal statements and personal reporting on geography teaching and researches. Usefulness of the discipline on the one hand and declining number of students in geography class-rooms and shadowing the importance of geography in this country, on the other, are the major issues where large geographical diversities on physical or natural, cultural, social, economic and environmental aspects exist. Unless having proper geographical analysis, many of such facts might mislead to the scientific reasoning and thereby hinder the development. On this vortex of debate a book on 'the state of geography teaching and research in Nepal: a review and reflection' authored by Prof. Dr. Bhim Prasad Subedi and published by Martin Chautari, Kathmandu, Nepal in 2014 is at hand. The preface of the book says that the book was one of the products of the 'stocktaking of the state of social science research in Nepal, which was directly connected with the proposed 'Social Science Research Council, funded by the Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF) managed by SNV Nepal and the publisher. It was also clarified that the mandate for the author/s was the review exercise linked to four disciplines of social science, in which one of them was geography. However, the book at hand, is not merely a review report as stated in the preface, it has in-depth analysis of the disciplinary philosophy as well as the contextual ground of geography teaching and research in Nepal along with the reflection of the author's empirical experiences, expertise and longtime association with the discipline.

This book is organized in sections and sub-sections separated by font, font size and spaces from its body text. It has five major sections:

introduction, the state of teaching, research in geography, methodological innovations and weaknesses and agenda for advancement. Pages of abbreviation and preface are followed by the main body text; acknowledgements, list of references and annex are at the end portion.

Introduction section of the book starts with the history of the geography teaching in the country, its ups and downs. By its length it is quite short in length but has a long list of citation which gives the history of geography in Nepal. This section is quite informative. Introduction section is followed by the data and methods. Being a review assignment, the data and method section is entirely based on secondary information. At the end of the section, the author has given the sub-section of setting the context of geography. He has started the section by quoting a statement: "No or person passes a day without? practicing geography. Geography is everywhere." This is what author feels the context of geography everywhere. Being a current Professor of geography and he himself is continuously trying to establish the importance of the subject within the recent jungle of academic disciplines this sub-section gives insight of the subject.

In the state of teaching author has tried to cover at school through University level as well as the Committees and Councils, professional organizations, and also the issues in geography in general. The author has explained the ups and down of the teaching geography at different levels. His version is clear that geography was well popular in the past and the curve is abruptly turning downward with the new development. He viewed "after 37 years of its tenure as an independent subject at the high school level, the New Education System Plan (NESP) of 1971 diminished its status as a subject of social studies." In the same way the status is declining at the undergraduate and graduate levels too. He wrote that with the emergence of 10+2 schools, the numbers of geography offering schools and university campuses are going down. Author has clearly pointed out some deficiencies of national education policy makers, subject committees, and organizational heads and also geography teachers themselves. Following the analysis of the state of teaching geography author has reviewed geography curriculum. He found the curriculum also needs to incorporate the contemporary market demand and challenges. To some extent, that has been tried, but it needs to update and modify accordingly.

Author has worked hard on the 'research in geography' section. He demarcated geographers into four categories. Based on those categories he tried to see the content and standard of geographical research in Nepal. He also puts his efforts on explaining the geographical research outlets, Doctoral and Master's theses outcomes and coverage. This section has covered quite extensive review and found mixed result between increasing numbers and standard of quality. In the resource section, the author has

tried to bring both human resource and financial resource. The country has a large pool of geographers who have at least a Master's degree in geography and many of them are in limited field. Author has also made clear review on sources of financial resources. He has summarized that for geographers neither there is an anchoring ministry or departments in the government nor any council that provides support for the geographers. Author found considerably poor links among research, publication and teaching. He has summarized some reasons for such weak links; however, he is optimistic for the correction.

Author reviewed some methodological innovations published by different sources and their weaknesses. His review was confined within the publications and research of the premises of the Central Department of Geography (CDG) at Kirtipur. Similarly, the author tried to highlight on the emerging themes of research and teaching which is also entirely explained from the evidences of authors own experiences along with CDG. But the significant part of the section appears at the weaknesses where author puts question on "is geography a languishing social science in Nepal?" the explanation is closely linked with the experiences of India because of similar geographical characteristics. At the end he has summarized the Nepalese scenario as "collectively geographers failed and geography has been sidelined in academic discourse at the school, college and university level." Moreover, he tried to emphasize the relevancy of the subject by saying, "in this country geographers are doing well but geography is not." There are several such issues and challenges of geography including major types of geography: geography of laymen, pedagogical geography, professional geography as well as scope, content, methodology, curriculum and so on. Those challenges demands to address by the geographers, institutions and government levels. If not addressed properly the future is blink.

Finally, the author has put the section of agenda for advancement. He discusses three major points such as reorientation of disciplinary focus, the role of academic institutions and the role of geographers. For the reorientation of the disciplinary focus he recommends to reorient the discipline according to the changing politico-economic and social landscape of the country and reinvent their commitment. After the reorientation, geographers must be able to meet market needs. There is a vital role of academic institutions for disciplinary advancement. The author has clearly suggested the Ministry of Education to reassess the contribution of geography and geographers for the nation's development. Nepalese geographers are working in collaboration with other social scientists; however, on the whole the social science discipline is in shadow of national interest. He expresses that after the restoration of

democracy in 1990 the progress of geography in the country is stagnant. Author's doubt for the stagnant development of the discipline is due to donor-supported programme and disciplinary attraction in the open market. Geographers are required to show their capability to fulfill the market demand by enhancing their disciplinary level.

On the whole author has tried to bring the reality of the situation of geography teaching and research in Nepal. His review is worth for the disciplinary readers in particular and overall social scientists in general. Accordingly he has tried to cover most of the issues and challenges of the discipline. Despite these valuable contributions some shortcomings are noticeable. Specifically, towards the collection of factual evidences, author is revolving close to his own territory. It is evident that over 20% of references are cited from his own works and over 60% references are cited from the contributions of the Central Department of Geography (CDG) and affiliated faculties. Good research contributions are available in several national and international publications which are least reviewed. Similarly, new evidences of research work and teaching methodology in geography out of CDG would be worth for the readers and new researchers, but are not highlighted. The difficulties on teaching content and pedagogy faced by geography teachers out of the Kathmandu Valley are not incorporated in the review process. In the same way, the book is not organized as a common pattern of book form and no clear chapter organizations as well. Despite some weaknesses, the book is a good reading material for the geographers, social scientist and education planner and students.

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