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## A BRIEF SURVEY OF INDIAN GEOPOLITICS



**Kiran Bala**

Department of Geography, MKJK Girls College, Rohtak

**Abstract:** The contemporary 'state' of political geography in India is a mere reflection of a legacy, or a heritage that the founding fathers of modern Indian geography, trained in the western philosophy, methodology of geography, had laid down soon after their arrival in the country after obtaining higher professional degree in the discipline. There was no scope for political geography to be put into the curricula of geography that they prepared for their respective departments where they were posted.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, federal rivalry, ethnicity, communalism, electoral geography

### INTRODUCTION

Even after a little more than sixty years of research in various fields of human geography in India, little seems to have changed when it concerns political geography. Political geography in the 40s of the last century had remained a 'discredited' sub-branch of human geography in the Anglo-Saxon world because of the havoc 'Geopolitik' created during 1939-1945. Together with 'Geopolitik', political geography was, also bundled out from the undergraduate, and post-graduate curricula of the European and the American universities soon after the cessation of the World War II. In post World War British Geography, particularly, political geography had ceased to be a lively field of research, training and study. Incidentally, it was during this period that the Indian geographers had gone to various universities of Great Britain for doctoral research and higher studies, and underwent training under the contemporary pedagogy of British geography sans political geography. They had no other option but to study agricultural geography, land-use, industrial geography, economic geography etc. On returning to India, in late 40s and early 50s, these Indian geographers, who can be called, the founding fathers of modern Indian geography, laid the foundation of geography departments in various states, and framed the under-graduate and postgraduate curricula on geography, patterned on the British curricula. It is no accident that political geography did not find a place in the curricula. Ironically, politicians and bureaucrats, and political scientists of the period often talked about 'political geography' of the emerging Indian State, since it was the period of accession, integration, and consolidation of the new Indian State. Prof. N. Srinivasa in his 'Democratic Government of India', published in 1954 had remarked: "...after independence the political geography of India was rationalized by the merger or the consolidation and integration of the states.....India was unified as never before in her history.....". Contemporary Indian geographers however were silent on political geography of India. The subject suffered neglect from the very start as there was no

conscious effort to include it in the university curricula or to reveal its applied relevance in dealing with territorial problems confronted soon after independence. This is despite the fact that India has been a 'veritable' field, a laboratory, for politico-geographical research due to varied political problems directly linked to geographical backgrounds and territorial identification as well as external space-relation that necessarily concerned with federal weakness and federal rivalry, ethnicity, communalism, state-idea and the *raison d'etre* and conflictual relations with the neighboring States. But, unfortunately, these problems remained, largely unaddressed. In contrast, Israel has a rich heritage of political geography because people there, at the helm of geography teaching, research and training, had long realized the applied relevance of political geography to address political problems of geographical relevance, arising out of its creation in 1948, in the Palestine. Some of the problems indeed were quite identical for both India and Israel, particularly concerned with integration, consolidation, state-idea and the *raison d'etre* etc. Political geography also developed in Israel as it was made a part of the curriculum at the under-graduate and post-graduate levels. At doctoral and post-doctoral levels too there was an urge to work in the field of political geography.

Nevertheless, since the 90s of the last century at least some have come forward to show deep interest in political geography, and in the geography of political choice, i.e. electoral geography. Since, India is a participatory-democracy; electoral geography holds a special relevance in politico-geographical research. Development of electoral geography in India in the 80s and 90s merely reflected the tendency to incorporate the techniques of statistical procedures in the study of the geography of political choice. Application of such techniques, however, in most of the cases did not yield desired results. Most of the recent works in political geography in India, except those in the field of electoral geography, are 'idiographic' in nature, though they appear to have been sustained by systematic analysis. During

2004-2008, however, very few works have been done in the field of political geography in India, and indeed shows a disappointing trend. The works reviewed here, are of two kinds: traditional and regional, concerning with nation, nationalism, nation-state, unity and integrity, political stability and instability, geopolitical code, changes in federal boundaries, open boundaries and their relevance with neighbours, recent phenomena like insurgency, cross-border terrorism, and war and conflicts etc. and analytical and systematic, concerning electoral geography.

There are various spatial and geographical factors which have greatly influenced India's foreign policy. India's non-aligned geopolitical code (the operating code of a government's foreign policy that evaluates places beyond its boundaries) appears, according to the author, to have been destined by its geographical location on the threshold of the High Asia and the South Asia on the one hand, and at the cross-roads of the South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Contemporary political geography of India with emphasis on changing political map of India, the *raison d'être* and state-idea of the federation, a new approach to resolve the Kashmir conflict, and host of other aspects, concerning the politico-geographical realities of India is what constitutes the content of a book authored by Adhikari (2008).

Attempts should be made to distinguish between borderless region and liberalization of borders, in the light of the prevalent 'open Indo-Nepalese border', and studies the emerging politico-territorial problems in the terai region of border areas of both India and Nepal, particularly, that concern with human trafficking and illegal trade. The author emphasizes on making the Indo-Nepal boundary 'a restricted one'. In another significant contribution a geographer identifies major consequences of trans-border migration into the terai border areas along the Indo-Nepal boundary—an area subject to Muslim migration from India during the early 90s of the last century, into the Nepalese side which, according to the authors, experienced demographic transformation with the Muslims having grown into a majority community. Conversely, the Indian side of the terai, also, experienced Nepalese migration. The entire terai border area along the Indo-Nepal boundary has, thus, emerged into a potential hotspot of political instability and may have serious impact on the Indo-Nepalese bilateral relations. In yet another contribution he analyzed the geopolitical viability of the prevalent 'open Indo-Nepalese boundary' in the light of the emerging problems of terrorism, human trafficking and illegal trades across the boundary. The authors call for a review of the functionality of the open border in the light of the security and national interests of both India and Nepal despite people's opinion to the contrary.

Jalan (2006) investigated the changing voters' hues in the north-eastern part of Rajasthan with respect to the Indian National Congress party for the period between 1991 and 1998. On the basis of electoral performance of the party for the two successive Lok Sabha and assembly elections, the study identifies spatial patterns of electoral support and delineates areas of significant contrast at the two levels of election. The study reveals that the socio-economic base of the Indian National Congress is more clearly defined during the Lok Sabha election rather than in the assembly ones. In

another study of similar content, Jalan (2006), with an areal-ecological approach examined differential electoral behavior in Lok Sabha vis-à-vis Assembly elections with respect to the Bharatiya Janata Party in the same region. The study revealed lower and more unevenly distributed support base for the party in the region during the Assembly elections rather than the Lok Sabha elections. The Party commanded a fairly identifiable socio-economic base in the region. The influence of the ecological context was found to be higher in the Lok Sabha elections as compared to the assembly elections.

Measuring consistency in the electoral patterns of the Congress and The Bharatiya Janata Party in Himachal Pradesh with the help of Principal Component Analysis, Sharma (2004) found that six elections held during the study period generated two components with Eigen values higher than 1 for the Congress and one component for the Bharatiya Janata Party. However, the performances of these parties during 1977 to 1998 have not shown reversal in spatial patterns of support. In another study Sharma (2005) interpreted the 'mismatch' in per cent votes polled and per cent seats won by political parties in the Assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh by attributing the mismatch to 'electoral bias'- malapportionment and gerrymandering- typically geographical in nature.

However, the study identified unintentional gerrymandering as the major cause. Using factor analysis to compress a number of socio-economic variables into four broad 'contexts' Sharma (2005) made an ecological analysis of the Bharatiya Janata Party's electoral performance over five elections held during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The study revealed that the party received higher support in relatively urbanized and developed areas. Using identical method of analysis Sharma (2006) also assessed similarities and differences in spatial patterns of support for the Congress and the Akali Dal in the Assembly elections held during 1977 to 2002. The study revealed that major political events cast their shadows on electoral politics of Punjab to which the spatial patterns of support for both the parties underwent changes. The support pattern of the Akali Dal was found to be more stable over time than that of Congress. Human development plays a very significant role, according to a study by Mohammad (2005) in maintaining peace and prosperity in the world. Development with social justice is desirable and its absence will result in various levels of social and political chaos to the extent as to threaten the peace at different geopolitical scales: international, national, regional and local. Insurgency and cross-border terrorism that the Indian State is awfully confronted with constituted the theme of analysis by Mookherjee (2005). Insurgency in peripheral areas of the country in general and in the north-eastern region in particular has intensified since independence. According to the author, various terrorist activities in the border regions of the north-west and the north-east are endemic as the breaking-up of the subcontinent, and subsequent partition of India along the communal lines created 'hardened' cleavages among the multi-religious communities to the extent as to make them mutually exclusive, forever. In yet another study Mookherjee (2007) holds sub-nationalism in the distant

peripheral areas, ethno-religious, ethno-cultural, ethno-tribal, and ethno-linguistic identities with territorial specification and dynamism responsible for the contemporary spatial patterns of disintegrating forces that necessarily sustain insurgency in the northeast India on the one hand, and cross-border terrorism in Kashmir and Punjab. These forces of disintegrating tendencies largely restrict the expansion of the 'effective national territory' across the length and breadth of India, weakening the historical forces of integrating tendencies.

In a descriptive study Sharma (2007) discussed of the need for a negotiable demarcation of the territorial water and exclusive economic zone. Gradual exhaustion of continental resources, and the unchecked growth of population in peripheries of the world-systems have drawn the attention of both the developed and the depressed nations towards the marine resources, and a fierce competition for the control of marine resources, between the nations, could not be ruled out, and, that may, in the near future, convert the oceans, and seas into potential zones of war and conflict with horrendous implications for the world peace.

Singh (2005) observed that much of the contemporary political crises and conflicts- international, national, regional or local- are due to consistent increase in population, because more and more living-space (Ratzellean heritage of 'lebensraum') is required and needed to accommodate the growing population, and for that nations are fighting among themselves. Increasing population notes the author, appears to be a threat to world peace and prosperity.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Chronological study of the changing map of India since independence analyzed various processes over years that have led to territorial changes in the federal boundaries of the constituent units of the Union of India, and, at the same time, made an attempt to measure the impact of the territorial changes on the economic and political landscapes of the Union. Challenges thrown by the processes of globalization before the Indian State in the context of internal political stability by looking at the spatially differential impacts of various reforms and policies. According to him, the recent upsurge in democratic participation of the dalits and backward castes, growing demand for new states on the basis regional identities, tension in urban-rural economic interest, language and ethnic divide and the crisis of governance in the periphery are the symptoms of growing instability, being the reflections and/or manifestation of negative impacts of globalization, causing concern to the geography of political stability of India.

In an overall assessment, political geography in India is yet to be developed to the extent the other sub-branches of human geography have done over the years since independence. Quantitatively, the research output in Indian political geography, during 2004-2008, is meager by any standard but is quite encouraging in terms of quality. There is an urgent need for conscious efforts to promote research and training India's political geography with the object of making the application of its applied principles relevant to study practical political problems with geographical and/or spatial

background.

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