THE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY IN INDIAN UNIVERSITIES: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION:

The subject of Geography completes 76 years in India at the university level of education and learning. Both India and Indian Universities have had an illustrious past and a promising future. But there is one thing that needs to be checked – the status of the subject of Geography. Here the word ‘Status’ is to be used as the word – situation, the state of affairs, the scene, the stage etc. On plain terms, one can say that, it is the study of the situation or the status of the subject of Geography in Indian universities.

RATIONALE:

The rationale for this study is:

1. Such a study was not reported from any Indian Geographer, keeping the viewpoint of a student of Geography.

2. Though certain studies by the UGC, ICSSR or Projects by eminent Geographers did focus on certain aspects of this problem, these studies were conducted way back in the past and have not been updated.

3. On preliminary observations, though Geography subject seems to be progressing, the question of its status of existence at the highest level of learning in India is left unanswered.
4. There appears no definite effort to find out the perceptions about the status of the subject at various levels of Geographers.

5. There appears to be a need to have a look at the direction in which the subject is moving at the highest level of learning.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To attempt to put forward a student's viewpoint about the subject.
2. To study the latest status of the subject of Geography.
3. To answer the vital question of the status of existence of the subject at the highest level of learning.
4. To understand the complexities of the real situation, by an on-the-spot investigation.
5. To find out the perceptions of various levels of Geographers regarding the status of Geography as a subject.
6. To find out the temporal change in the status of the subject of Geography.
7. To investigate the direction in which the subject of Geography is moving at the highest level of learning in India.

ASSUMPTIONS:

This study is both exploratory and remedial in nature. It was based on the following simple basic assumptions:

1. Study regarding the status of the subject of Geography at the university level has been totally neglected in India.
2. Geography as a subject is facing a major identity crisis due to its dual placement simultaneously in the Arts and Science streams.
3. In the opinion of the general public, students, teachers, Heads of the Departments and even the employers, there is a conspicuous discrimination in Geography between Science and Arts.

4. Geography as a subject is not doing well in the present setup and times.

5. The future of Geography students in the present day circumstances is extremely gloomy on all fronts.

6. There is no agenda for the future of Geography subject in India.

7. The subject of Geography is facing a crisis of survival in India.

THE STUDY AREA:

The study area covers the entire Republic of India (08°04'N - 37°06'N & 68°07'E - 97°25'E) According to the University Handbook, December 1997 (Association of Indian Universities) the number of recognised universities in India totalled upto 237, out of which in 98 universities the subject of Geography is being taught and studied (41.35%).

THE STUDY SAMPLE:

25 (25.51% of the National total 98) University departments of Geography provided the sample which was selected and studied during this research work. The reason behind the selection of only the university departments for study lies in the fact that in India, the policy making body regarding the syllabus, conducting of examination, research and other developmental policies for all the departments of Geography within the jurisdiction of a university, is the University department of Geography.
THE METHODOLOGY:

This involved stages like:

1. The study universe – The selection of the 25 University departments of Geography on the basis of areal coverage, age of the University department of Geography and the reputation and contribution of the University department of Geography towards the development of the subject. These 25 University departments represent almost all the geographical segments of the country, with their uniqueness and their reflection on the development of the subject of Geography at their locations.

2. Collection of data from primary and secondary sources – The primary data were collected through a questionnaire survey for obtaining the views of Early Geographers, Present Heads of Departments, Teachers, Research Scholars and the Students, as well as through personal observations and photography. Published Papers, List of M. Phil & Ph.D topics undertaken, Research project reports, books, M. Phil dissertations, Ph. D theses, Syllabuses, Annual reports etc. formed the secondary sources.

3. The data were mostly collected from the University departments of Geography, while some information was also obtained from institutions like the UGC, ICSSR, AIU etc.

4. The data processing included the analysis of the syllabus, research trends, opinion survey along with the use of statistical methods of representation, maps and photography. Most of the aspects of this study were analysed for the national scenario, while others were analysed on local, zonal and then the national level.
THE CHAPTERISATION:

This study is organised into 05 chapters.

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the topic of research, its rationale and the objectives of study, the study area, methodology, organisation of the thesis, review of literature and the place of Geography in ancient India.

Chapter 2 gives the setting of Geography in the Indian higher education system, deals with the concepts and types of universities, the national education policy of India and the setting of Geography at different universities.

Chapter 3 deals with Geography in Indian Universities: Past, Present and Future. It gives an historical account of the development of early departments of Geography in the past, a national analysis of the university syllabus of Geography, a local, zonal and national level analysis of the trends and thrust areas of research by students, with a cursory overview of the trends of research projects by teachers and the national level analysis of the views of the Geographers at various levels.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the future of Geography in India. It explains the existing scenario of Geography in Indian universities with observations and derived conclusions along with suggestions and recommendations for the future.

Chapter 5 provides the epilogue, dealing with various problems faced during this research and the future research prospects opened up by this research.
MAJOR OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:

1. The research was found to be of the utmost need of the hour. It was taken up on a countrywide basis so as to plan for the future on a national scale.

2. Indian Geographers seem to have missed out an important aspect of study when considering the university status of Geography, viz., the need to keep the students as the centre of investigation. This is important since the students will carry the torch of the subject to the future.

3. The subject of Geography and geographical awareness were very well developed in ancient India. But somewhere along the way, the subject of Geography has been pushed to the background.

4. There is no future agenda for the subject of Geography in India.

5. There is no agenda to increase the applicability and employment opportunities for the students of Geography in India.

6. The university setup of the subject is confusing, discriminatory, directionless and at a dead end.

7. The dual placement of Geography into Science and Arts, at the same time is the main cause of the setback for the complete development of the subject in India.

8. Employment in the teaching sector of Geography is hard to find.

9. Examinations in Geography concentrate on how much is learnt, rather than why and how a thing is learnt and used.

10. The subject of Geography is mostly opted for by the 'leftovers.' Very few take up the subject for study out of interest. Lack of proper employment opportunities is the main deterrent.
11. Geography cuts a sorry figure at the allocation of grants by the research funding agencies.

12. The syllabus of the subject of Geography has tried its best to keep pace with the changing scenario of the world of Geography, but quantity is no substitute for quality.

13. Research at the students' level has not at all contributed to the development of the subject of Geography in India.

14. Physical Geography has been nearly wiped out from research options.

15. The subject of Geography has problems on all fronts, right from its placement in the educational setup, administration by two streams, shortage of staff, unbalanced and fluctuating intake of students, lack of infrastructure and funds to develop with modernisation, stagnation on all fronts of teaching and research, inability to influence the policy makers to develop the subject to no secure future in the employment market for its students.

16. The subject of Geography is facing a crisis of survival in India, including the Indian universities.