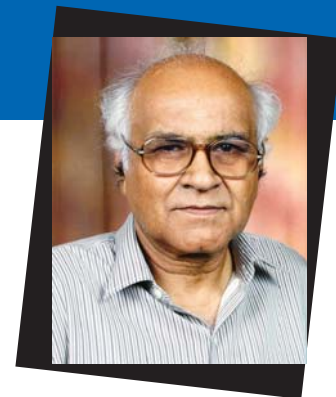


11 Maps and Politics

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Human beings have always attempted to orient themselves with the help of coordinates which are actually their mental constructs. When a disoriented stranger seeks the help of another person perceived to be knowledgeable to orient her/him, the help is rendered sometimes by drawing lines on the paper, and otherwise on the ground itself with the help of the cardinal points/directions. One is not supposed to be a cartographer by training to do such an exercise. Thus, it can safely be assumed that maps are there in our minds whether we are conscious about them or not. The early human beings were also curious about knowing places and people beyond their horizons. What lies beyond the horizons always whipped up curiosity. The knowledge about the distant places travelled through stories, accounts of travelers or mere imagination of individuals. The stories which usually began with the expression that - "Once upon a time, there was a king" usually were detailed descriptions of that imaginary kingdom unfolded; the readers always constructed a mental map which became the part of their psyche.



If we look at the historical evolution of map making, the cartographers tried to depict their perception of the reality. The reality is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional; hence it is difficult to capture it in two dimensions.



Even the earliest descriptions of the earth were more based on philosophical logic rather than on hard scientific facts. The philosophers used their imagination to develop philosophical constructs and the scientists attempted to prove or disprove such constructs. Once the scientist proves, it becomes a scientific fact. If the scientists rejected a construct, the philosophers tried re-adjusting their facts to reconstruct their theory. The early Greek philosophers believed that earth is round but not as sphere but as a tablet surrounded by water of a circular sea. This view was held, perhaps, till the time of Plato who was the first to come out with the idea that earth is 'sphere'. He never provided any evidence for

his views and never tried to prove it. His logic was not rooted in cartography but in theology. He believed that human beings are the best creation of God and human body is symmetrical, God should have made the earth as the abode for His best creation which should, logically, have a symmetrical shape. Since the sphere is a perfect symmetrical geometric shape, the earth should be a spheroid. He propounded a geocentric view of the universe in which he put the earth in the center and thought that all other celestial bodies revolved around the earth. The geocentric view of the earth survived for a long period of time and religious institutions propagated it through their edicts. Plato never tried to provide proof of his contention but his disciple, Aristotle, did try to provide evidence for the earth being a sphere. The problem of converting the sphere into a two dimensional map, thus, became a constant concern for the cartographers.

The geographers and cartographers attempted to conceptualize and define a map. In textbooks, usually a map is defined as "a two dimensional, conventional representation of the earth or the part thereof, drawn to a scale, as seen from above." The expression of two dimensional representation of the earth indicates that there is territoriality attached to the meaning of a map. Territory has always attracted not only the human beings but also the animals. While human beings colonized the territory initially for their survival and exploited the resources at the later stages of their socio economic development, the animals carved out territories to sustain and to dominate the weaker creatures. The lion's territory is no less important than the kingdoms of individual kings and that is how lion is remembered as the king of the forest. Human beings delimit their territories by making maps while the animals have very subtle method of marking their territories. Not only the lions but even dogs have their territorial entities and any transgression is violently resisted. Literatures, all around the world, are full of emotional outbursts when the territorial integrity of the country was violated.

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cartographers tried to depict their perception of the reality. The reality is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional; hence it is difficult to capture it in two dimensions. In one of the early maps, prepared by the Christian cartographers, the earth was depicted round as a tablet, surrounded by water of a circular sea, with Mediterranean Sea separating Europe and Africa and Tethys separating Asia from Europe and Africa. Jerusalem being the birth place of Lord Christ and Lord Christ being the light of the world was located in the Center of the map so that the light reached each corner equally. Orient (east) was shown at the top of the map with heaven shown in the extreme corner of the orient. The occident was marked at the bottom of the map. This “T” in “O” map (as it was known) was the product, more of imagination rather than based on the reality. The conjectural understanding of the territories of the world was slowly replaced by satisfying the curiosity by seeing. The explorations, thus, were ushered in different parts of the world.

Explorers set out to unknown areas of distant lands, either out of their own curiosity to unravel the reality or they were sponsored by the kings and rulers of different countries to go to distant places and know the reality of the territory and learn about the people and their cultures. The Asians were, perhaps, the pioneers. The Indians reached out to the remote corners of East and South East Asia with the message of Lord Buddha under the patronage of King Asoka. The Arab travelers were first to cross the equator in Africa and enter the Southern hemisphere which was never a part of the habitable world imagined by Greeks. The habitable world in Africa, according to Greek scholars, was confined only up to 12.5 degrees north latitude in Africa. The Arab traveler, Ibne- Haukal disproved this idea and travelled up to 20 degrees south of the Equator and found people living along the Eastern coast of Africa. Chinese travelers started exploring the territories around through the land and sea routes. One of the notable Chinese travelers was Huen Tsang, who could reach India in the seventh century A.D. through land route crossing the desolate plateau of Tibet. Another Chinese traveler I-Ching was able to reach India through the sea route in 671 crossing the islands of Southeast Asia. By the fifteenth century A.D., the Asian travelers ceased their voyages. Ibne- Batuta was, perhaps, the last Arab traveler. Cheng Ho, a Chinese admiral was the last to return after his expedition in 1433 and the story of Chinese explorations also ceased.

By the fifteenth century A.D. large parts of the old world were known; hence this century witnessed the efforts of European travelers particularly in Portugal and Spain under the sponsorship and protection of the kings of these countries. The Portuguese were able to take initiative for explorations beyond the Mediterranean Sea. The victory of Prince Henry on the southern side of Gibraltar in Africa 1415 was the first victory of a European power outside Europe. The process of European’s colonization of Africa, Asia and later of the new world was, perhaps, initiated at that particular juncture. Prince Henry established the first Geographic Research Institute at Sagre in 1418. The institute was assigned the task of training navigators, preparing instruments and maps which could help in further explorations. Maps became essential tools to mark the safe and the shortest routes to reach the destinations rich in resources. Human beings have always been motivated by the principle of the least effort and always sought the shortest routes which became possible on the maps constructed on Mercator’s projection. While cartographic work was in progress at Sagre, new ships were being prepared at Lagos under the instructions of Prince Henry. The seeds of the colonial era were sown and started sprouting. The rivalry first started amongst Spaniards and Portuguese and later other European powers also joined the race for discovering new colonies. The records of the treaty of Tordissellas tell the story of the intervention by the Pope to settle the disputes between Portuguese and Spaniards. The three powers; the British, French and Portuguese fought with each other to have dominance over Indian subcontinent. The French, Dutch and the British were face to face in Southeast Asia i.e. Malaysia, Indonesia and the Peninsula of Indo China. New maps started emerging with the expansion of the colonial process.

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Maps as Creations of Politics

Political decisions are responsible for carving out and creating new maps. The contemporary politics of British in India led to the partitioning of the Indian sub continent; it was responsible for creating new maps of India, Pakistan, at the first instance, and Bangladesh later. The British protected a number of small states on the borders of India as buffer states to keep erstwhile USSR and China away from the British India. They never wanted to enter into conflict with these neighbors. Buffer states are usually created to act as goats standing between two lions and remain safe. The continuity of these countries was ensured by their status of being buffer states. The politics of the Second World War got Germany divided, with two maps of the same nation. The Czech and Slovaks were joined to one country with one map and Soviets obliterated the whole of Central Asia by annexing and amalgamating separate nations into one entity. The British, by taking a political decision through Belfour declaration, created Israel as homeland for Jews. The Jews had left Israel in the hoary past and the area was settled by the Arabs. After the map of Israel became a reality in the region, the Arabs described it as a dagger in the Arab heart. The hearts of all the countries in the whole region have been bleeding for too long.

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Colonization created a new world map. The sun never used to set on the map of the British Empire. The competition between the European powers, in the new world, was intense from the very beginning. One can find the areas of French influence and the areas of British influence on the map of Canada. The British transplanted all their place names on the map of North Eastern states of USA, may be, due to emotional reasons. England was present in the form

of New England, Hampshire as New Hampshire and York as New York. It provided mental satisfaction to the immigrants and reduced the pangs caused by rootlessness.

The reversal of the political process created new type of maps. The end of colonialism witnessed the emergence of a new world with new maps of independent countries. Maps of Asia and Africa got modified. The British Empire lost its hold on the old and the new world alike. The newly independent countries started searching and re-establishing their old historical roots and values. The new symbols emerged in the form of national flags, national anthems and newly carved out maps. The process of remodeling and reshaping of the world map which started with the collapse of colonialism has not yet stopped. The world of 1990s witnessed another type of political upheaval with the collapse of erstwhile Soviet Union and new maps started emerging. The republics' of Soviet Union in Europe and Central Asia became independent countries, having separate maps. The European countries also responded to this political process. The two Germanys got united. There was velvet separation between Czechs and Slovaks. Tito's Yugoslavia witnessed bloody fragmentation. Everywhere new maps emerged due to the political decisions at various levels.

The boundaries of the country as demarcated in the maps are sacrosanct to the citizens of the country because these are symbols of the integrity and sovereignty of the nation and citizens lay their lives to defend their sovereignty. Many a conflict in the world have flared up as boundary disputes. Political geographers define the border as a zone and boundary as a line. The boundaries are well defined, delimited and demarcated entities and are protected with great effort. Even if some territory is annexed by a more powerful neighbor, the defeated country shows the original boundary on her maps and the ceded territory is taken as unredeemed territory. These maps are confined to the archives and remind and instigate the new generations to recapture the unredeemed territories.

Maps as Parts of Human Psyche

Maps are also treated as national symbols. Symbols provide identity. This identity expressed through the national symbols becomes the part of human psyche. This leads to manipulation in map making so that the sentiments attached to the symbols (maps) get satisfied. Since the two dimensional maps can be hanged on the wall, people have

erroneously developed the idea that there is the top of the map and the bottom of the map. Though on the surface of the earth, there is no top and there is no bottom but it is the part of human feeling and cannot be corrected unless the person knows the implications of the map. Mention of the early map known as T in O map has already been made. Orient was shown on the top of that map. The European cartographers reoriented the maps and north was shown on the top which placed Europe on the top of the world. Europe's map on Mercator's Projection made the Europeans feel very big in size in spite of the fact that neither the shape nor the area is correct on Mercator's projection. It is only the direction which is correct in the maps prepared on Mercator's projection. But for a long time, it bloated the personality of Europe's map. The Arab cartographers also had the idea that south should be shown on the top of the world map and that placed the Arab world at the position of sitting over all other countries. However that idea could not prevail.

The countries are fatherlands and motherlands for their citizens. Closest relationship exists between the children and the mother/father. In the Indian ethos mother occupies the first place in the relationship which is expressed in one word i.e. "Ma". It is said that, "*Mata poorva roopam, Pita uttar roopam, premo sandhah, Prajanam sandhnam*". (Mother is the first form, father is the second form, their love joins them and the children become the cementing material and do not allow them to separate.) The image of the map of India as Bharat Mata is deeply embedded in the minds of our people. Artists have depicted this image in their paintings and other art forms. *Saare Jahan se Achha Hindostaan hamara* (Urdu Poet Iqbal) and *Sujalam, suflam, malayaj sheetlam, Mataram, Bande Mataram*, (in *Anand Math* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee) the same emotion of dedication to

the motherland. The feeling of patriotism and nationalism becomes a cohesive force and strengthens the coefficient of belongingness. The mind of Indian citizen does not accept the partition and talks about Akhand Bharat with strong emotions inspite of the fact that all of us know that reality cannot be changed. Such emotions caused by the symbols of identity can be seen at micro level also. Each village in India has a *raison d'être* due to the identity provided by its *gram devata* (village deity) which generally belongs to the little tradition rather than the larger tradition. People identify themselves with these place names because their roots lie there. In south India the first names, in large number of cases, are the names of their villages. In India, we have these micro, meso and macro level prides operating in our psyche. We often talk about the Tamil pride, Maratha pride, Bangali pride, Gujarat's gaurav etc. converging in the Indian pride. Sometimes the local and regional prides become so intense that they become so parochial and destructive that they have to be reined in. The concept of nation state which flourished in Europe was responsible for the balkanization of the continent resulting in some very small countries. Some of these countries are smaller than a few districts of India but the intense nationalism has sustained them. The German concept of racial superiority and pride produced personalities who snuffed the whole world into strife and damaged themselves simultaneously.

In all the countries of the world since the time immemorial maps have constituted an important part of our existence. Whether we conceptualize it as a two dimensional representation of the earth, a mental construct, a political tool manipulated to meet vested interest, or the symbolization of a nation state; maps will continue being a vital tool for representing the multi faceted reality of human society.

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