

Losing Dr. Harka Gurung

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Nepal lost Harka Gurung at a time when he was needed most. The loss is truly irreparable. Harka was the foremost geographer and regional planner with interest in decentralized governance and regionally-balanced development. He would have been a great asset when the people of Nepal start working on the formation of the Constituent Assembly and the substance of the constitution itself. Now we only have his memory to inspire us in that direction. Harka was a great development strategist, too. I knew him first, when he was appointed member of the National Planning Commission. King Birendra's conceptual division of the country in five development regions was Harka's idea. This idea reflected his belief and commitment to rights and justice for all and equitable development of all parts and peoples of the country. When neglected for all these decades and years, the complex issue of equitable development got transformed into a more complex and potentially divisive issue about, among other things, the rights of ethnic "minorities" and indigenous groups and other excluded people.

As Harka voiced his emotions and ideas in this area, he became more vocal in his criticism of dominant ethnic and caste groups who he held responsible for the intolerable condition and lack of progress in the country. He was a true nationalist and a scholar of great merit, yet he was, at times, misunderstood by many of us. By attacking certain groups of people who have enjoyed the power and privilege of belonging to the ruling classes for centuries at the cost of the others, Harka was only expressing, in my view, his commitment to the advancement of the social and cultural and economic rights of the groups of people who were dominated for too long. Harka's real mission was the identity, pride, justice, fairness and equitable development for all the Nepalis. He was too much of a nationalist to wish to do or think anything that would come in the way of Nepal's integrated nationhood.