

BOOK-REVIEWS

Urban Functions in Rural Development

BY DR. B. L. SINHA

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The title of Sinha's book at first sight appears rather bewildering. An enigma of sorts, especially when the reader finds that the entire work is devoted mainly to the study of central places. It is only in the last chapter that the mystery of the title unravels itself viz. the role of urban functions in rural development (UFRD). The trend of employing exotic sounding, abstract titles, with little relevance to the main theme researched, is on the increase lately, and repeatedly one comes across inappropriate titles in a number of Ph.D. theses published in geography. Could the blame for this be placed on the publisher who uses this strategy to promote sales or does the author himself indulge in subterfuge to obliterate any telltale signs of patterned research, cast in the stereotyped mould. Whatever the reason, Sinha's work cannot be assigned to this category, though he generally follows the beaten track, using traditional methods of analysis found in a large number of studies on central places.

In the introduction, an exhaustive conceptual background sets the stage for the ensuing discussion. Sinha has carefully examined most of the contemporary literature on central places, including the classical Christallerian and Loschian models. The theories of Perroux, Boudville and

Myrdal have been laid bare in the light of their suitability to the study area: Sinha offers his comments throughout in the form of an opinion review.

The rest of the book follows the usual sequence; beginning with the geographical profile of the area, after which Sinha traces the temporal pattern of evolution of the 165 central places in the Mithila plain — a part of the larger Ganga plain. A keen awareness of the socio-historical processes operating in the area are visible in the analysis. Here, even without questioning the logic of the method employed, the twin criteria for identifying central places appear somewhat arbitrary, and one is tempted to ask Sinha how he has arrived at the magical figure of 40 permanent establishments, for a settlement to qualify for central place status. To verify whether an hierarchy of central places exists in the area or are they simply distributed along a continuum, the standard procedure of rank — size rule has been adhered to. Similarly, to derive centrality, the oft-repeated location — quotient method used by Davis is employed, with minor modifications. For deriving the pattern of distribution and functional classification of central places, the standard (popular) technique of nearest-neighbour analysis, and a slight variant of the Nelson's method have

been adopted. Strangely, after expressing such serious apprehensions about the authenticity of census data, Sinha still uses this stereotyped information of doubtful validity, instead of opting for the functional data he has so painstakingly collected from field work, to arrive at the functional classification.

In the final chapter, while making a case for developing urban function to initiate rural development, Sinha could have probed a little beyond providing a suitable inventory of functions which he suggests ought to be located at the three

hierarchical levels; development centres, development nodes and development points. Here, one looks for some insight into the different kinds of constraints (institutional, economic, physical or otherwise) which operate as stumbling blocks in the development of these urban functions in the area.

Finally, though Sinha veers little from tradition, his contribution should prove a valuable starting point for those embarking on research on central places.

— Jaymala Diddee

Nature and Structure of Rural Habitations

BY S. K. CHANDHOKE

Concept Publishing Co. New Delhi,, 1990, pp XXXIV + 352 index, price Rs. 300/-

The book is a case study of the village Chhatera, a village 40 km north of Delhi, in Sonapat district, wrapped under a title which clearly suggests a theoretical text. Mark the word 'habitations'. A subtitle would have proved more illuminating.

Divided into 4 parts and 12 chapters, with a forward by Professor Rappoport, an introduction by Prof. Roy Burman, a note of presentation by Prof. Dias Souza and finally a preface by Chandhoke himself, the book carries more padding than pith. The first chapter acquaints the reader with the work on habitations done by architects, sociologists and other social scientists, perhaps to provide a theoretical background to his village case study that follows. It is a jumble of quotes from all possible sources. An account, often a mere mention, of human habitations in Sanskrit literature appears to this reviewer neither contextually relevant nor informative. The reader has to contend with quotations ranging from

Acharya, Vedas, Buddhist literature, Puranas, and what have you, a profusion without much significance.

The subsequent eight chapters discuss at length the origin, structure, social space and organization, followed by an elaboration of the patterns of inhabitations at the macro and micro level. The locational history of the village, its social structure, castes and their groups down to the level of **Kunba** give an idea of the village social organization and changes over the decades. The physical aspects of the extent determined by social groups and hierarchy and emerging into what are locally known as **Khap**, **Bakhal** and **Bagors** present a refreshing relief from the disjointed and bumpy blocks of quotations, though as one leafs through the pages, one soon realizes that Chandhoke's excessive fondness for quotations never leaves him. Economic aspects of the village are briefly described. The 'ghar', particularly 'Chaukband ghar' a type-house of a well-to-do Jat family