

BOOK-REVIEW

DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION : THE THIRD WORLD SCENARIO

*Aijazuddin Ahmed, Deniel Noin, H.N. Sharma (eds), Rawat Publications, Jaipur /
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The term 'Demographic Transition' refers to a general model which describes the evolution of levels of fertility and mortality over time. The model was originally proposed on the basis of experiences of developed countries as they passed through industrialization and urbanization. The model which is oversimplified even in the context of developed world has to be cautiously applied to the Third World countries. Most of these countries collectively and individually have received only scant attention so far and have been awaiting focussed studies of their demographic transition. The present volume seeks to fill this gap.

The book spans over 24 chapters arranged into six parts each devoted to a central theme. Part-I titled Historical Antecedents includes three essays. Deniel Noin explores the patterns of demographic history of the developing countries in general and the diversity of these patterns in particular. He highlights the heterogeneity of experience of developing countries in terms of population growth. He identifies four main phases in their demographic history and probes into the cultural and economic factors influencing population growth in these countries. The readers stand duly cautioned against treating all the developing countries as one category because the demographic changes in these countries have followed strikingly diverse and varied courses. Malaker in his essay appears quite optimistic, unlike the

widespread warning signals, and further emphasises the different demographic behaviour of various regions of Asia. He takes due note of the slowing down of growth rates in East Asia during 1990-2025. Maudood Elahi, while dealing with the evolution of population in Bangladesh, adopts a spatio-temporal approach and covers a much longer period starting from the Buddhist times. From early Buddhist settlements Elahi refers to the decline of Buddhist culture as a consequence of Hindu revival (or who knows it was Hindu aggression?) The process of in-migration of Muslims as also conversions initiated a period of population expansion which continued through the British period in which the contemporary pattern of population growth evolved. Elahi discovers a demographic divide around mid-century. He, however, does not use the Demographic Transition model though he had adequate data base for its elucidation.

In the section on 'Regional Perspectives' there is an overexposure of India - both at macro and micro scales. Minati Ghosh has covered all the nine decades (1901 to 1991) for describing the growth dynamics of India's population. H.N. Sharma and Bimal K. Kar's paper concentrates on the northeast India covering Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. District level differentials in population growth in north India form the themes of a paper by Kamla Gupta. The four

north Indian states Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (also popularly acronymed as BIMARU - the sick) present a depressing scenario associated mainly with the slow pace of social and economic development. It is a penetrating study and expresses anxiety at the continuing outmigration from some of the north Indian States. The inter-ethnic differentials in population growth constitute the theme of Part-III. While Aijazuddin Ahmed raises some very important issues and questions relating to ethnicity and population growth in his introduction to the volume, these unfortunately have remained unaddressed in this section. All the three papers here are quite limited in their range and perspective.

Shrawan Kumar Acharya examines the process of marginalization of the indigenous Lepchas in Darjeeling and Sikkim. He compares the growth of Lepcha population with that of Nepalese without giving any details on the fertility and mortality as determinants of population growth. Instead, migration has been used as the dominant explanatory variable. The paper on the scheduled caste (SC) population of India and its recent demographic dynamism by R.P.S. Gosal only repeats the well-known, though not always valid, explanations of higher rates of growth among the scheduled caste population. An assumption which seems to run throughout the explanations (or descriptions) and which Gosal has stated in a note at the end is that the scheduled caste population has an inherent preference for large families so that they can have more earning hands. Now, such arguments apply equally to all the poor in our country whether they are scheduled caste and not. So, it is poverty and not caste which is the cause much less the result of high population growth. The third essay in this section deals with the distribution and growth of the Bhil population in India. It systematically describes the aspects of size,

sex ratio, age structure concentration etc. That the Bhils have recorded negative growth in all the areas of their concentration and some of them have even been pushed into areas like Dadra and Nagar Haveli is a fact which neither evokes any sympathy for the tribes nor any plea for schemes for their upliftment. Yes, the authors concede that Bhils have moved out of their traditional areas because of lack of opportunities. What happened to the crores invested in the Tribal Area Development Schemes there ? One is forced to pose this crucial question.

Section IV titled 'Consequences of Population Growth' includes as many as seven papers. The consequences highlighted are : demographic changes and environment in developing countries by Alina Potrykonska; urban population and urbanization in Bangladesh by Sabina Sultana; periurban development in Dhaka Metropolitan area by Manzur-ul-Hasan; urbanization in Nepal by Mangal Manandhar; urban infusion in South Africa by H.S. Geyer; old age groups in India by Daksha C. Barai; and micro level study of ageing in Trichur district of Kerala by P.S. Nair and S. Santhosh. Evidently most of the studies on consequences, just as those on causes of population growth suffer from conceptual flaws and biased visions. With the exception of ageing and consequent increase in the size and proportion of the elderly population which is directly linked to population growth, it is difficult to visualise how problems of environment and urbanization are direct fallout of population growth itself. Since we continue to organise our studies in very narrow, linear cause-effect frameworks, such studies fail to provide any new insights - the present book is no exception. Likewise, Part V where the theme of population - development nexus has been handled by three scholars in their own ways hardly enriches the readers' understanding. Sudesh Nangia uses the focus on our Five Year Plans and our

achievements thereof to communicate and clarify the nexus between population and development. As if holding a brief for all our development plans she almost eulogises the concerns expressed in the related official documents. She has rightly highlighted the need for fuller appreciation of the importance of education, health, drinking water, poverty alleviation etc. It is a common feeling in India that development here has suffered because of increasing population and decreasing resources. Are there no flaws in our development policies and priorities? Are we not addicted to simple sloganeering without any genuine commitment to development and social justice however defined? Are not inequities in the distribution of resources: land, energy, forests etc. also responsible for slowing down the pace of development process? These and many more relevant questions have simply been by passed by Nangia and others who have presented clinched arguments on population, environment and currently the hot favourite item on the international agenda i.e. sustainable development. In an exhaustive statistical and cartographic exercise which is quite refreshing in this section is on the status of women in India by Naresh Kumar. Methodologically and conceptually this is perhaps the most outstanding contribution in this volume presenting the linkages between regional variations in the status of women and variations in the levels of development.

While methodological and policy issues are extremely important for examining any social phenomena, these find a place in the concluding section of the present book. Emphasising the importance of qualitative indicators in comparison to purely quantitative ones for the study of multiregional demographic change in developing countries Abraham Akkerman et. al. point out various methods and practical

shortcomings of the latter. In their view demographic assessment for the developing countries with generally insufficient data may be based on "fuzzy indicators" such as population households, mean age and average household size. The authors have meticulously worked out the details of the methodology and its application for small geographical areas. Equally interesting and extremely useful for researchers in population studies is the methodology proposed by Zhang Shullin which he calls "analysis by synthesis". He stresses the importance of continuous feedback in the research process in terms of raising of new questions. The last paper in this methodological section is by S.L. Kayastha. One wonders how this paper on population growth and impact on environment and development in India has been appended in this section. Logically it should have gone to Part IV or V. Based largely on World Development Report (1992) and Human Development Report (1993) the paper broadly and loudly repeats arguments which by now are too familiar. Kayastha however, forcefully and rightly emphasises the need for looking at population, development and environment in a "dynamic complementarity" rather than in isolation from each other.

As one reads through the volume and reaches the closing chapter by Mahendra K. Premi one gets the feeling that as chapters follow one another the theme of Demographic Transition gets increasingly obscure. Premi traces the contours of demographic profile of India as it developed over the last ninety years and not once we are informed how India's population in its various regions passed through different stages of the demographic cycle. Major states of India are classified on the basis of birth and death rates in rural and urban areas and it is left to the readers to visualise for themselves the stages of demographic transition. However,

Premi's exercise is valuable for its detailed tables. He has chronologically traced the evolution of family planning programmes launched from time to time. The net outcome of these programmes is known to all and requires no elaboration.

Volumes like the present one which are based on symposia contributions are bound to contain a mix of outstanding, average

and mediocre collections. Tremendous credit goes to the editors who have painstakingly put the disparate essays together and given them a readable form. The introduction to the volume by Aijazuddin Ahmad is superb both in style and substance.

The books is priced rather high and this may make it inaccessible to individuals.

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SUSTAINABLE REGENERATION OF DEGRADED LANDS

Edited by - Jyoti K. Parikh and B. Sudhakara Reddy

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Land is the most tangible of all natural resources. It is upon land that man has left the imprints of all his cultures and civilisational remains, sufferings and happiness, achievements and failures. It is for land that many a battle has been fought, civilisations rose and perished. And yet, land remains the most contentious of all human affairs. While land as private property emerged with the development of the agrarian civilisation some ten thousand years ago, considerable amount of land remained as a common resource for the community on which the community has use and occasionally, occupancy rights. This is often common to developing societies where various social groups and communities at different evolutionary phases of their social history, may co-exist. In such societies, rights on Common Property Land Resources (CPLR) are generally accepted concepts of the community vis-a-vis the state and also, the

individual holder of ownership rights. Even the developed nations do recognise the use rights of citizens over certain forms of environmental or infrastructural resources. This phenomenon is quite common among forest dwellers, quasi-nomads and village communities of India. However, in recent times, the traditional use rights of various communities under various circumstances, over common land resources, have come under severe strain both through the restrictions imposed by an all pervading, sovereign state and the greed of the individual encroachers over common land resources. This has resulted in severe erosion of the livelihood-system of many communities, who traditionally survived on their use rights on the common land resources.

In this light, the contributions of various scholars in a national seminar at IGIDR, Mumbai in November, 1996 and encapsulated in the current volume is a refreshing deparature