

BOOK REVIEWS

The Elderly in India

By Kumudini Dandekar
229 pp., Tables, References,
Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. (1996)
Rs 295/- (Cloth)

As we enter the twenty-first century, population ageing' is going to be major demographic issue in the world. The issue will remain important for both developed and developing countries. For the most developed countries, the proportion of elderly (65+) is constantly increasing. In developing countries, though the proportion of elderly is still low but has increased considerably. This increase in elderly absolute number will post a formidable problem for planners. In India, elderly persons are generally defined as 60 years and over. The all-India figure for elderly in 1981 was 6.3 per cent. Punjab had the highest proportion of elderly (7.7 per cent) followed by Kerala (7.5 per cent).

The living arrangements of the elderly in the developed countries are in sharp contrast to the developing countries. For example, the percentage of elderly persons (65+) living alone, is as high as 40 in Sweden while in China, it is only 3.4 (for the age group 60+). The role of family in taking care of elderly persons is in sharp contrast in both the situations.

Of late, the Government of India as well as other organisations are taking interest in the problem of elderly. Even though the difficulties being faced by the elderly are now a matter of urgent social concern it remains a poorly researched and little understood area. 'The Elderly in India' by Kumudini Dandekar, describes the conditions of the elderly in India. Professor Dandekar has used National Sample Survey (NSS) data relating to 50,000 households, along with first-hand portraits of the inmates of old-age homes in the state of Maharashtra. Based on this large sample, author has tried to analyze the regional variations and the differences between the rural and urban old in terms of health problems, financial constraints and both the geographical spread and functioning of the old-age

homes.

The main objective of the present study is to examine the conditions of the old in Maharashtra. The book comprises of seven chapters. In chapter 1 author has described various theories regarding old age. Chapter 2 provides the socio-demographic profile of the old in general and in India in particular. This includes their age distribution, population growth rates, sex ratio and marital status, health standards, attitudes to children as old-age security, work participation rates, life-cycle in India as compared to that in industrially advanced countries, economic independence or otherwise, leisure activities and the general level of satisfaction experienced or the problems faced in old-age. Chapter 3 describes interstate variations in the old. Chapter 4 provides data for 19 old-age homes in Maharashtra and interviews of 541 inmates of these homes. Chapter 5 is devoted to old living in their homes in villages, with 601 interviews of the old villagers. Chapter 6 deals with the Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojana - the old age pension scheme in Maharashtra. Author evaluates the efficacy of old-age pension schemes and suggests new institutional arrangements needed for the aged. Chapter 7 provides 30 case-studies of old to reflect the diversity in the old in the present study.

According to Professor Dandekar old-age homes may offer a viable solution to the problems afflicting the urban old, particularly, poverty, housing shortage, and conflict between the generations. However, in rural areas, where about three-fourths of the India's elderly live, problem of poverty is more serious than aging. Professor Dandekar suggests that the thrust of government programmes and policies should be directed at providing old age pensions. This is not only because the rural old are both well-integrated with their social milieu and not favourably disposed towards living in old-age homes, but also because pension schemes alternative.

This book will be of use to gerontologists, sociologists, social workers, demographers and policy makers because ageing of the population

is a comparatively new trend.

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India's Population Policy - Changing Paradigm

By Ashish Bose and Mohan Singh Bist
assisted by Anita Halder
XX+415 pp., Annexures, Index
B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi (1996)
Rs. 450/- (Cloth)

This volume by Prof. Bose appears to be a guide book to the complex world of the committees and conferences. This book contains the full text of the National Population Policy drafted by Swaminathan Committee (1994), the full text of the Programme of Action adopted by the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), and Excerpts from the Report of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).

This book is divided into two parts. One part is devoted to the Swaminathan Committee Report and the conferences in Cairo and Beijing

and the second part is a collection of articles written by the author for various newspaper and magazines.

This book adds to a rapidly growing literature on the Indian Population Crisis. Dr. Bose had the privilege of serving as a member of 'Working Group of Population Policy in 1978' headed by Dr. V.A. Pai Panandikar and afterwards in another working group "Population Stabilisation and Maternal and Child Care". He has served under different working Groups on Population Policy from 1978 onwards. The central thesis of the book as profounded by the author is that unless there is a change in the way population policy is being dealt with in India, population stabilization is going to remain a 'distant dream'. He feels that Indian bureaucracy is not taking action-oriented steps though it should feel responsible because India is the second most populous country in the world.

This volume should be of great value for scholars, policymakers, planners and administrators concerned with population and development. Reproduction of author's articles in a single volume makes work easier for scholars, yet Prof. Bose with all his experience and knowledge could have given us something new.

M. B. Mukhija
Delhi

INFORMATION

IX International Conference of the Society for Human Ecology
October 15 -18, 1997; Bar Harbor, Maine USA

Conference Theme : "Local and Global Communities : Complexity and Responsibility". SHE conferences emphasize interdisciplinary approaches to education, research, and applied problem-solving. The meeting is co-sponsored by a variety of international associations. The SHE-IX Conference will be held in conjunction with the 25th year Silver Anniversary of the College of the Atlantic, an institution fully dedicated to the study of human ecology.

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