

BOOK REVIEW

Georg Pfeffer and D. K. Behera (eds.), 1996.
*Contemporary Society : Childhood and
Complex Order*. New Delhi: Manak
Publications Pvt. Ltd. pp. ix +452 . Rs.700/-
US \$ 40/-

The book under review is one of a series on contemporary society published as Festschrift to honour Prof. S. N.Ratha who spent his lifetime for dedicated teaching and research in Social Anthropology in the Eastern part of India. Prof Ratha's penchant for quality in research is reflected well by the editors in the choice of papers to this volume. This is a fitting tribute to a scholar of his standing.

The editors Prof.Georg Pfeffer and Dr. D. K.Behera have crossed the traditional and customary boundaries of the discipline of their own and invited scholars from heterogenous backgrounds - from Social Anthropology to Social Work, Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology - and crossed oceans - from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean - who have a special concern for the children of the world to contribute to the volume. This itself is a welcome change as a real wholistic view of contemporary social reality can never be understood within the walls of a single discipline. This is a refreshing phenomenon to social science research in India and a model to be emulated by all social scientists.

The book contains 22 papers divided into eight sections organised in a logical order starting with the positive aspects of introducing the field and then on to legal dimensions of children's rights. Then comes the deviant dimensions like child abuse, street children, problem of the girl child in developing societies; special problems dealing with emotions and behaviour problems arising out of ethnicity in school, and sexual problems. Papers presented by Jens Qvortrup, Brian Milne, Heinz Sunker, Lucia Rabello de Castro, Ferran Casas, and Georg Pfeffer, deal with issues of 'child hood' as a concept; muting of children's expression; marginalisation of child's position; non-participation of children in "child research"; politics of child hood; indeterminacy and misery of reducing

human possibilities of children's range of values and norms; the need for a new children's paradigm for understanding their problems and the binary dimensions of generation - sets and so on.

Each one of these papers are thought provoking and opens into an unexplored area of sociology of children. This awakening among social scientists, particularly among sociologists has resulted in the creation of a working group - 03 Sociology of Childhood of the International Sociological Association. Many of the contributors to this volume belong to this working group and they have presented their case in a scholarly way, though many of their arguments and concepts reflect their own experiences of the highly individualised, consumerist, western societies.

The contributions on India from Pfeffer, D.K.Behera and Jayashree Mishra, and Indira are quite interesting and provoke us into sceptical thinking on current views of the problems addressed. Pfeffer's concepts like 'Age-sets', 'Generation - sets', and his explanation of the binary character of the rules concerned with married adults and those applied to unmarried youths are new and refreshing *vis-a-vis* the views of Verrier Elwins of yester years.

Behera and Mishra talk about Indian childhood in terms of the traditional cultural constructs and the cultural stereotypes sanctioned by religion. They deal with the varried dimensions of the life of girl child in India like female infanticide, cultural prescriptions and proscriptions, child marriage, the practices of *sati*, widowhood, health and nutrition, child labour, education of girls and child prostitution. They give empirical evidences from secondary sources to support their view points.

Indira's focus too is on girl child. She brings her findings in numerical values to support her arguments on the neglect of girl children in India from the womb to tomb. She argues infavour of change of laws, increasing female literacy through special programmes, educating the general society to consider girls and women as equals to men and so on. She feels that these

efforts will make their situation better.

The experience from Latin America, Europe and North America are equally thought provoking and scholarly. The data are drawn through empirical research from the larger society and from clinical situations of institutions.

On the whole reading this book is a stimulating exercise, as the papers are written in lucid readable English taking us to the reality of childhood, as a phenomenon for serious study

and research.

The book is neatly brought out confirming to international standards by the publishers and I am sure the book will receive scholarly respect from the peer groups in social sciences as well as peers in the related disciplines.

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BOOK REVIEW

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3. What is the quality of author's research and resources ?
4. How is the organizational part of the book ?
5. Where does it fit in its field in social sciences ?

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