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BOOK REVIEW

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

This great volume is designed to be a Festschrift for Prof. Satya Narayan Ratha, Professor of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Sambalpur University, Orissa, India, who also studied child development in addition to Indian tribal cultures.

The volume is breath-taking in its scope, covering most major issues in the study of childhood both in complex modern and complex simple societies (under the latter label, I include Indian village society, and parts of tribal India). The introductory editorial essay, written by an unusual and yet successful duo (Georg Pfeffer, Professor of Ethnology at the Freie University of Berlin, and Deepak Kumar Behera, Reader in Anthropology at Sambalpur University, India) outlines the seminal problems in research and advocacy with children cross-culturally: the problems of definition of childhood as opposed to adulthood; the difficulties of modern constructions of childhood in different political environments; the issues of children's rights and the marginalization of children in diverse social contexts.

The volume itself is divided into twenty-two chapters, organized into eight sections. The sections cover such topics as Childhood Research; Children's Rights; Child Abuse; Street Children; Girl Child; Children with Special Problems; Preschool and School Children; and Children's Sexual Behaviour. On the one hand, some sections are under-represented, five sections incorporating only two chapters each; on the other hand, the book is weighty and could not really be expected to contain more material. Most of the articles are written from a general sociology perspective, although clearly other disciplines are also represented. Aware of the limitations of the volume and its constraints, the authors worry that the chapters "..do not provide our readers with the adequate information on various dimensions of childhood from a cross-cultural perspective," and express the hope that the volume will therefore inspire others to continue with the enterprise of documenting childhood.

Indeed, the issues at stake are complex and multiplex. As Milne writes so poignantly: "Childhood, whilst ever present, often remains unknown, almost invisible, and leaves those of us who are concerned with the study of society other than at its adult stage a great deal of work to catch up on." (Milne, pp. 32-33). He argues for the participation of children in research and action.

Some of the articles in the volume, like that of Cynthia Price Cohen on the international legal paradigm of children's rights, and that of R. Indira's on the pitiful situation of the girl child in India, are advocacy-oriented. Others amount to "statements" on childhood. A case in point is the Malaysian scholar, Heng-Keng Chiam's article, entitled "A Child and Yet Not a Child," which calls for a unique childhood experience for every child, without the abrupt "initiation" (this term is not used) into adults' worlds through sexual abuse, injustice and preversion.

The real interst in the volume, however, comes from original reports of research carried out in different continents. In an unusual and original article, Fatos Tarifa throws light on the situation of families and children being raised in conditions of economic crisis in the state of Albania, a country of which we normally know too little. The findings reported upon in the chapter are based upon a 1992 survey of 435 pre-adolescent school children in the city of Tirana. Tarifa shows that parents are worried by the rise in crime. Through case studies, Tarifia illustrates the widespread phenomenon of child labour and school dropout in the wake of harsh economic conditions.

In a different chapter, Gousgounis Nicos reports upon two wide-scale surveys of young adults in Athens, Greece, in which he studied whether parents influence in any way pre-marital sexual activity among their children. The conclusion was that parental influence was not crucial for the formation of specific sexual attitides towards contraception or abortion, or even premarital sex (except among daughters of very traditional parents), and that new values have been