

Kerala's Demographic Transition: Determinants and Consequences. Edited by Zachariah, K C; Irudaya Rajan, S; & Premi, M K. New Delhi, Sage Publ., 1997. 367p. [Note: Reviewed by M K Premi in `The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, vol 41(3), July-Sept 1998, p.565-566.

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### **Kerala's Demographic Transition: Determinants and Consequences**

Over the past couple of decades, if not more, Kerala, a state in southern India, has drawn both international and national attention for its achievements in demographic transition with fertility reaching below replacement level and under 5 mortality comparing with most of the developed countries. In the social sector the literacy level (both male and female) has been the highest in the country and the state has made remarkable achievements in the field of health and family planning despite the absence of corresponding buoyancy in the economic sector. A suggestion has often been made that Kerala's model should be pursued in other states in India. It is in this context that a study of Kerala's demographic transition and what lessons can be learnt from the same becomes important.

The present work based on sixteen papers including an overview from eminent demographers and social scientists is divided into four sections. While Part A focuses on demographic transition in the state, Part B brings out the specific aspects of the determinants of demographic changes. Part C deals with the consequences of the transition in Kerala and Part D discusses certain aspects of internal and international migration which is an important aspect of demographic change.

In the chapter on 'Demographic Transition Since Independence' Mari Bhat and Irudaya Rajan trace the demographic trends in Kerala through a careful scrutiny of evidence presented by various data sources. The authors have also examined the various competing hypotheses that have been put forward to explain the decline in birth and death rates. They show that fertility decline in Kerala has occurred without significant changes in costs and benefits that child-bearing entails to their parents. Among the various factors, female literacy emerged as the single most important factor in explaining the demographic transition in Kerala.

In the following chapter Zachariah examines the demographic transition in the state in the context of government policies and programmes. He argues that fertility decline in Kerala was caused as much by historical developments as by recent policy

interventions. According to Zachariah the basic underlying factors were high population density and the peculiar population settlement pattern, the absence of rural-urban differences and a series of socio-economic changes in recent years which made it an economic necessity for the parents to improve the equality of their children in terms of health, nutrition and education.

Examining the nexus between education and fertility, D. Radhadevi compares the fertility differentials between Kerala and Madhya Pradesh. She raises a question as to why fertility is fairly high even among women graduates in Madhya Pradesh and fairly low even among illiterates of Kerala? She concludes that it is a myth that the spread of formal education among females will, by itself, bring about a drastic change in their reproductive behaviour irrespective of the social, cultural and economic milieu in which the women live.

Among the five chapters on 'consequences of demographic change, three focus on age at maternity, low birth weight babies and increase in the number of elderly persons. Sulaja and Sureshkumar analyse the work force in Kerala by constructing "working life tables" for males and females separately and thereby checking how much of the active life of the workers is fully utilised. They conclude that the prevailing unemployment situation along with a high expectation of life at birth has forced the people there to spend a major portion of their active life without any economic activity. This waste of human resources hinders the economic prosperity of the state as a whole.

Until 1941, Kerala was receiving migrants from other parts of the country, but it became an out-migration state since then - the net out-migration rates being 0.11 percent in 1941-51, 0.22 percent in 1971-81 and 0.31 percent in 1981-91. Emigration to Gulf countries from the state has been a comparatively recent phenomenon. In examining the economic consequences of Gulf migration Tbornas Isaac analyzes four sets of issues, viz., (1) the impact of outflow of migrant workers on the domestic employment situation; (2) the impact of remittance on consumption, savings, investments and state domestic production; (3) problems and prospects of return migration for the state's economy; and (4) the impact of migration on the distribution of assets and income. Through the approach of case studies of the women left behind, Leela Gulati observes that the decision regarding male member to migrate is a joint decision in which women are actively involved and the family plays an active part in both motivating and facilitating migration.

Looking at the future, Kerala is likely to achieve zero population growth within the next generation and its population could stabilise at around 35 million. The social and

economic consequences of these demographic changes are enormous. A considerable part of the resources which were earlier earmarked for the children would have to be diverted to take care of the elderly their housing, food and health needs. With the increase in the proportion of adult population the question of generating more and more employment would remain foremost.

Finally, one should examine the applicability of Kerala's experience in other states of India, particularly in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Kerala had the advantage of high literacy and better health facilities even at the time of independence which the above four states do not have even now. In contrast, the settlement pattern in Kerala, where 95 per cent of the inhabitants have been living in settlements of 5,000+ population, and where there is little rural-urban differentials, helped in the development of schools and medical facilities in practically every village which has not been possible in the above four states. Hence, fertility transition in the north Indian states may not follow the Kerala or Tamil Nadu path. There has to be a much larger role of the programme factors-mother's reproductive health family planning and child care-in creating demand for small families.

The book gives an insight regarding the demographic transition in Kerala which Tamil Nadu has also followed quite closely. It is a very useful publication not only to researchers but more for the policy makers and planners,