Shorter Notices[*]

Govind Kelkar, Dev Nathan, and Pierre Walter (eds.). *Gender Relations in Forest Societies in Asia: Patriarchy at Odds*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 325 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 550.00.

There are thousands of studies on forest management in Asia. Among them, only a tiny proportion mentions the role of women or pays attention to gender relations. Even projects are largely designed in terms of households or communities where men are the decision-makers and the owners or managers of forests. This volume views gender relations as a crucial factor in the management of land and forests and maintains that the continuing invisibility of women in these areas only exaggerates poverty, shortages, and the increased workloads of forest-based women.

This volume covers a broad range of forest societies in Asia (China, India, Thailand, and Malaysia). The contributors, according to their field experience, address relevant issues of history and myth, as well as contemporary developments. They provide a broader understanding of contemporary changes in the economy and society of indigenous peoples. There has been a marked deterioration in the position of women in these indigenous communities.

The contributors to the volume look at changes in gender relations in forest societies in four situations: where there has been an imposition of colonial and state rule over forest communities; where historical and contemporary revolts of forest-dwellers have taken place to re-establish community control over forests; where states have responded in these autonomy movements by resorting to devolution; and where women's inclusion in local forest management is increasingly becoming a policy norm.

The contributors have linked this deterioration in the position of women to privatisation (that accompanies the market) and to state policies, both of which have been largely based on the predominant, if not exclusive, role of men in most sectors of society. Providing important insights into the lives of forest-dwellers, this book is interesting to read.

Kenneth Keniston and Deepak Kumar (eds.). *IT Experience in India: Bridging the Digital Divide*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004. 194 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 250.00.

The last few decades have seen a technology-driven revolution, leading towards what is commonly known as 'the Information Age'. Forced by the extraordinary increase of computers and information devices, closely linked to an explosion of processing and access speeds, ever-lowering costs of memory and other critical components, convergence of images, sounds, and writing in one digital medium, and propagated by a worldwide network of satellites and broadband fibre optic cables, this Information Age is now a reality to millions in countries all over the world.

A workshop was held in Bangalore, India, on "Equity, Diversity, and Information Technology" to explore how, if at all, new technologies of information and communication could increase social equity and strengthen cultural diversity. This book is based on the papers and different experiences shared in that workshop.

The volume investigates how, if at all, modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) can fulfil the promise of democracy, prosperity, and well-being for the people of developing nations who comprise 80 percent of the world population. For this purpose, the volume draws lessons from the Indian experience—a country where information technology (IT) has made giant leaps, but which suffers from what have been described as multiple "digital divides".

"Digital divide" is widely regarded as a unitary phenomenon, distinguishing in general between the rich and powerful who are part of the information age and the poor and powerless who are not. However, viewed analytically, there are three digital divides, and even a fourth one now emerging in many nations. The contributors to this volume explore these four closely inter-related divides.

The first divide is the one which exists within every nation, industrialised or developing (where only the baseline differs), between those who are rich, educated, and powerful and those who are not. A second digital divide, less often noted, is linguistic and cultural. This gap is largely between English and other languages, or more generally, between "Anglo-Saxon culture" and other world cultures. The third digital divide, which follows certainly from the first two, is the growing digital gap between the rich and the poor nations. That is, disparities in access to IT between the rich and the poor nations. From these three digital gaps has emerged another intra-national phenomenon of *digerati*. *Digerati* are the rich élite who possess the appropriate skills for information-based industries and technologies.

While exploring these divides, the contributors argue that ICTs are not goods in themselves as such. If they are useful, they can be so only as instruments in meeting other human, social, cultural, economic or political objectives. They suggest various ways in which ICTs could be used to promote these goals and to increase equity while promoting diversity. They are of the view that this can be accomplished only if we apply the same intelligence and imagination that has gone into creating the technologies themselves. ICTs should be deployed in education if and only if they are the most effective way of extending quality education to larger segments of

children and adults. They argue that at present, this digital divide is aggravating existing inequities. But ICTs can be of use in reducing the digital divides if we commit to that goal our best resources of intelligence and imagination.

This volume raises issues relevant not only to India but also to all developing countries. It is good reading for students and scholars of information technology, economics, development studies, and management.

Vijay Padaki and Manjulika Vaz. *Institutional Development in Social Interventions: Towards Inter-organisational Effectiveness*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 238 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs 295.00.

The task of developing institutions is different from one of developing a single organisation, i.e., organisational development (OD). It involves dealing with the reality of 'interactivity' in trans-organisational processes. Just as the task of developing individuals separately does not necessarily make an effective team, and developing groups separately does not necessarily make an effective organisation, similarly the task of developing organisations separately cannot be expected to result in effective inter-organisational processes. In the absence of these processes, no real development process can get underway.

This book is the presentation of a work in progress. The ideas behind the implementation of the project were to document case studies and develop a conceptual framework in the area of Institutional Development (ID). The book presents not only relevant parts of the material prepared for the project but also attempts to put together observations and insights from several exploratory excursions into the field of ID.

The book is designed to assist ID in development interventions, beginning with the admission that it is an important but little understood process. The authors observe that successful development interventions require sustainability, which, in turn, requires local social institutions. A social institution can be regarded as an organisation of organisations. The authors are of the view that most development initiatives focus on the obvious and immediate tasks of achieving operational targets and rarely take care of appropriate social institutions. However, some initiatives have actually gone beyond programme operations to promote inter-group collaboration.

The book is divided in three parts. The five chapters in the first section reflect on the theoretical perspectives of institutional development. The highly multi-disciplinary nature of the subject is established, including concepts as varied as social ecology and neo-institutional economics. Section Two presents case studies in institutional development. The cases are chosen for their inter-group and inter-organisational processes developed, without the approach being actually called Institutional Development. These studies have attempted to capture a wide variety of experiences across different fields and different sectors. Eight cases and six case

leads are presented. In the last section, the authors have drawn lessons from the case studies and show how they can be applied in various settings while reflecting on the methodology, which, in turn, requires developing methods, tools techniques, and operating skills on some theoretical perspectives.

Institutional Development is a relatively new area, with limited literature and limited research. With its blend of theory and practice in the framework of sustainability, this book is an important addition to the development literature.

Ranvinder Singh Sandhu (ed.). *Urbanisation in India: Sociological Contributions*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003. 258 pages. Paperback. Indian Rs. 330.00.

The present volume is one in a series of volumes on various themes based on articles published so far in the *Sociological Bulletin*. It includes articles illuminating some of the significant features of urbanisation in India. Many scholars have defined urbanisation according to their orientation and understanding. But there is a general agreement that urbanisation is a complex socio-economic process closely connected with the scientific-technological revolution, and that it exercises a growing influence on all aspects of life affecting the nature of economic development as well as the demographic, ethnic, and other social processes.

This volume contains thirteen papers which explore various aspects of urbanisation and its influence on urban communities in India. They have been organised in four thematic sections.

The first theme, "Urbanisation: Some Perspectives", brings together four papers that reflect on various perspectives through which urbanisation can be understood in a more comprehensive way. The second theme highlighted in the volume is "Social Stratification: Caste and Class". It explains what happens to the caste and class systems and how the caste system adjusts itself under the new conditions created by the complex process of urbanisation. Under this theme, there are three papers which elaborate on different issues with respect to the change in urban communities.

In the third section, three papers deal with "Neighbourhood and Family". The first two papers explain neighbourhood relations in two metropolises, Ahmedabad and Delhi, respectively, while the third paper examines the state of the joint family in Bombay.

The last section of the book deals with "Slum Dwellers/Migrants in Urban Settings". There are three studies in this section explaining different aspects like stabilisation of immigrants in Indian towns; migration and labour characteristics of slum dwellers in Bombay; and the process of adaptation of lower caste Tamil migrants residing in a resettlement colony situated on the outskirts of Delhi.

The issues discussed in the volume are not only important for India but also the whole developing world, because of the increasing level of urbanisation, exploding urban population with ever-increasing density, heterogeneity, and complexity of social organisation. In a way, the volume opens avenues for further comprehensive sociological studies to comprehend urban society in its totality and to find solutions for the development of sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world.