

Book Reviews

Victor S. D'Souza. *Economic Development, Social Structure and Population Growth*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd. 1985. 138 pp.

Analytical efforts to understand the factors which influence population growth and the variables which affect fertility behaviour have become the concern of most social scientists. Studies done to look at the interrelationship between population growth and economic development have mostly used the viewpoints of economics and demography. The economists belonging to different schools of thought have treated the population question differently: while some of them have treated population growth as an exogenous variable, others have considered it to be endogenous. The economist's decision-making model of fertility behaviour, which considered children as an economic good, was developed as an extension of the conceptual framework of the micro-economic model of a consumer's decision-making process in allocating a restricted budget to alternative uses. The validity of the application of an economic theoretical framework to household fertility behaviour has, however, been questioned by many social scientists.

The author of the book under review points out that within the perspective of the theory of demographic transition the understanding of interrelationships between population growth and economic development, in a Third World country like India, should not be limited to the analytical framework based on economic decision-making model, which rests on the unrealistic and inadequate concept of children as durable consumer goods. He notes that recent studies which followed this approach failed to establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the correlated variables and also did not account for the roles of other relevant variables that are of direct relevance to the formulation of a policy relating to population and development. He has given two major limitations of these studies. One, these studies overlooked the role of social structure, which, in a country like India, is of significant importance. Two, the studies, based as they were on aggregated observations, did not bring out the influences on the behaviour pattern at the individual level and at the group level to bring about changes in fertility and economic status, thus overlooking the relative importance of group norms and individual attitudes. The author has therefore emphasized the importance of bringing into the analytical purview sociological variables, in addition to demographic and economic variables.

In his own study, based on micro-level data from three large villages of the North Indian states of Punjab and Haryana, the author has attempted to do a sociological analysis of the relationship between economic development and population growth by using inter-generational occupational mobility as a key socio-economic variable influencing demographic behaviour.

The study is divided into eight chapters dealing with (i) understanding relationship between economic development and population growth; (ii) description of socio-economic infrastructure of the study villages; (iii) socio-economic background and living conditions of the people in the three villages; (iv) differentials in population growth rates and their correlates; (v) economic transformation, mobility and social structure, economic change; (vi) social structure and family size; (vii) social mobility, family planning and family size; and (viii) a summary of the study.

The study data were collected from a sample of about 700 households which formed about one-third of the total households in the three villages. The results of the study showed that the social structure characterized by the caste system was an important factor in modifying the effects of economic development in the three villages, the important aspects of which were the sectoral transformation of the economy and the inter-generational occupational mobility. The study showed that different sections of the caste-bound people are influenced differently by economic development; persons belonging to the higher castes benefit more than those belonging to the lower castes. Also, there is a high degree of correlation between the occupational prestiges of fathers and their sons. Thus, inequalities in the society have continued to exist and the relative occupational prestige positions of the various castes in the villages have largely remained constant over generations.

The results of the study do not show any significant relationship between economic variables (income and occupational prestige) and family size, which, according to the author, only implies that the former variables do not reflect the actual change experienced by individuals, and disconfirms the negative-correlation hypothesis derived from the economic decision-making model. However, the different approach adopted in the study is that the sectoral transformation of the economy, as indicated by intergenerational occupational mobility, has been assumed to have important behavioural consequences for the members belonging to different sections of the community whose social structure is characterized by caste system.

The findings of the study that (i) the household heads born in larger families are more likely to experience downward mobility than those born in smaller families, and (ii) the immobile persons belonging to relatively larger families as compared with those who are upwardly mobile, suggest that family size does influence intergenerational mobility but the adverse impact was less pronounced in castes which took advantage of the opportunities provided by a developing economy.

An important conclusion reached by the author is that the relationship between economic development and population growth in societies in which given

structures self-perpetuate, parents' adjustments in fertility behaviour in response to economic development are influenced by the future interests of not only parents themselves but also those of their offsprings. This phenomenon is also indicated by the intergenerational stability of occupational prestige as clearly manifested by the social structure of rural communities in India. Thus, parents tend to limit their family size if they consider that a large size of the family would jeopardize the maintenance of their children's status. Such a consideration was more common when the parents themselves had experienced downward mobility because of a large family. The parents placed low at the social ladder and are not likely to be affected by economic changes and have little motivation for limiting the size of their family. Similarly, those who, by virtue of their higher social position, not only expect themselves to gain from economic changes but also expect their children to benefit similarly, would not feel the need to lower the size of their family. On the other hand, those social groups who feel that they would loose economically if they have large families would try to control their family size. The author feels that the results of his own study like those of earlier studies by others bring out the importance of the role of social structure in explaining interrelationships between economic development and demographic behaviour.

The author considers that his explanatory model provides a more satisfactory understanding of the reasons why the poor have larger families and why, in some cases, even affluent people also have large families. Such persons as are born in large families and fear a greater likelihood of adverse economic adjustment have smaller families in the next generation. In other words, the feeling of economic security or insecurity is an important factor which ultimately influences the growth rate of population. The process of economic development, through its influence on occupational mobility, generates, though in a varied way, an awareness of the need to bring about changes in fertility behaviour in different segments of the society.

The study is very interesting, but many of its findings are not unexpected since the role of intermediate variables which influence the fertility behaviour has already been well established empirically in many studies. The author's assertion that the sociological point of view has been virtually un-utilized in dealing with the issue of population and development is not justified, since many sociologists and other social scientists who are concerned with this area of investigation have been taking into consideration the variables representing group behaviour, especially in the studies done at the micro-level. The role of the age-old caste system as an important factor influencing the behavioural patterns of persons belonging to different socio-economic strata of the Indian society has been analysed and highlighted in this study. The explanation of demographic behaviour over time, in terms of fertility adjustments by persons belonging to different groups and occupying different positions, in response to economic changes in the society, is very interesting. An important aspect

of the findings of the study is the explanation by the author that within the framework of social structure built on caste system which perpetuates relative socio-economic positions of individuals and groups from one generation to next, parents' fertility behaviour in response to economic change is influenced by the concern of not only their own interest but also of their children's interest.

The book provides important insights into the social dimensions of the population and development phenomena in a country like India. However, the study is not only based on a rather small sample but, in carrying out the analysis, has also not gone beyond the interpretation of simple tabular presentations. An appropriate use of regression techniques on the available micro-level data could have added to the statistical strength of the analysis. In spite of these limitations, the book can be considered to be an interesting and thought-provoking piece of research relating to the population and development issues in the Third World.

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