

Book Review

K. Srinivasan. 2017. “Population Concerns in India: Shifting Trends, Policies, and Programs”, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, India

This scholarly book “Population Concerns in India” illustrates an academic, in-depth and objective understanding and critical evaluation of dynamics of population concerns in the Indian context. The author’s strategic involvement in various capacities in governmental and non-governmental institutions with formulation, implementation and evaluation of population policies and programs in India has facilitated such an in-depth, holistic and comprehensive review of the historical and contemporary population concerns in India. The visionary chapter on ‘The Way Forward’ is fascinating and extremely relevant to address India’s population and development concerns by policy formulators. This book consists of ten chapters detailing crucial population concerns, strengths and weaknesses of population policies and programs pursued so far, and policy recommendations to address serious population and development challenges still persisting in India.

Chapter 1 ‘Origins of Family Planning Program: Population Concerns in British India’ providing historicity of mixed views in early nineties over usage of artificial birth control methods. This chapter features detailed description of Gandhi’s dogmatic views on sex and its use for procreation and not recreation and strong views over no-use of the artificial methods towards population control expressed in 1925 in the Indian National Congress, which strongly influenced the use of artificial methods for birth-control policies till independence. Nevertheless, almost simultaneous initiation of Neo-Malthusian Leagues in 1929 in Madras and thereafter in Poona and Bombay advocating and propagating use of artificial methods for regulating/controlling population and women’s movements supported by Margaret Sanger and Howe Martyn who chiefly propagated use of artificial methods to protect the health and lives of women, the government of princely state of Mysore which officially sanctioned the opening of four family planning clinics in 1930 seemed to have swayed in favor of advocacy of artificial methods. However, the detailed featuring of the mixed views on birth-control strategies by the author makes the reading very informative and fascinating.

Chapter 2 “Population Policies and Programs since Independence until 1977: Birth of Official Birth-Control Program”, details family planning/welfare programs initiated since December 1952, globally being recognized as the first official family planning/welfare program, over a 25 year period until 1977, including the period of national emergency during 1975-77. The author provides a critical appraisal of development of population policies, paradigm shifts in program strategies and their weaknesses and strengths, and their effects on population over successive five year plans. Author views that stress on coercion during emergency to achieve family planning targets and contemporary experiences of authoritarianism during emergency reveals that in democratic Indian setting, compulsion in family planning is ruled out. Possibly, India had sacrificed in terms of delayed demographic transition, and possibly associated socioeconomic development because of the emergency.

Chapter 3 “Post-Emergency Recovery of the Program (1977-95): Recoil and Recovery”, details paradigm shift in family planning/welfare strategy from forceful sterilization during emergency to achievement of a long term goal of net reproduction rate of unity (NRR=1) by 1996 envisioned by the working group on population policy, of which the author was also a member. The shift from CBR to NRR strategy was out of realization that low birth rates have never been achieved without substantial reductions in death rates, especially infant and maternal mortality rates, which in turn have strong linkages with socioeconomic development. The author has aptly utilized graphs and tables to highlight the policy shifts in short and long run goals, changes in family planning expenditures, methods mix of usage of contraception and associated incentives for sterilization and IUD acceptors/women at different parities, in different five year plans viz. sixth, seventh and eighth spanned over 1980-85, 1986-91 & 1992-97, respectively. The author aptly features the noticeable development in early nineties of organized intensification and expansion of women’s movements

within and outside India, questioning the role of government towards women's reproductive and human rights, culminating into international Cairo Conference of 1994 on Population and Development.

Chapter 4 "Post-ICPD Phase (1996-2015): Ineffective Integration of Programs" details policy drifts, especially since 1994 Cairo conference until 2015. India being signatory to Cairo Conference Plan of Action in 1994 brought about the policy changes in the post Cairo-conference policy pronouncements. As per Cairo conference recommendations, post ICPD programs in India focused more on human rights, women's rights and women's reproductive health and population growth per se received little attention. Thus, RCH focus since 1995 and associated population policy pronouncements got reflected in the National Population Policy in 2000 and National Health Policy in 2002. Major policy changes with social welfare and gender equity and economic growth agenda dominated the population policy statements. The flagship program under National Rural Health Mission 2005 emphasized intersectoral convergence of all programs towards achievement of the RCH and Family welfare goals. The author elicited that the convergence at the field level had not taken place as expected and comparative analysis of Pre- and Post-1994 Performance in several RCH indicators did not illustrate the desired improvements. However, economic disparities widened, health of the people at large did not improve as expected, and the impact of public health programs was far less than anticipated and contraceptive use and fertility declines slowed down.

Chapter 5 "Culture and Natural Fertility" highlights various historical sociocultural practices impacting fertility patterns over the period and across sections of the Indian society. The author opined that while assessing the impact of organized family planning programs in India, the effects of sociocultural factors on natural fertility i.e. fertility prevailing in the absence of any deliberate birth control, need to be accounted for. The author draws empirical support for increased natural fertility levels in India during 1951 to 1975 and concludes that analysis of statewide fertility differentials of family planning program impacts on fertility should consider variations in natural fertility levels and patterns among states at different modernization levels. However, in the absence of quality data on regional natural fertility differentials, such exercise seems to be complex.

Chapter 6 "Nuptiality and Stability of Marriage" provides detailed discussion on marriage-norms in India, prevalence of child marriage despite legal provisions against it, breakdown of the institutions of marriage in the West because of modernization, rise of individualism, increasing costs of marriage and family formation, consumerism, etc. Possible fertility impact of such factors in historical perspective in the west has also been highlighted. The short run negative impacts on marriage and thus on fertility in India may not be major issue but in the long run the impacts may not be ruled out as India also seems to be moving in the direction of West.

Chapter 7 "Demographic Levels, Trends, Differentials and Challenges" delves with broad trends and regional differentials in India on selected demographic parameters viz. size, growth, age structure, sex ratios, fertility, mortality, health and infrastructural facilities. The author primarily flags challenges to be addressed based on discussions on these technical parameters. Cross country comparisons in population growth processes depicts India in precarious condition because of limited natural resources, including geographical area. Regional differentials in population growth process always have been of concern on Political Representation from Indian states and which was obviated through freezing of seats as of voter population in 1971, but for how long is a serious concern. The author by using path model elicits causal linkages among proxy indicators for governance, technology, and development and illustrates that technology could bring about sweeping changes in governance, income and development of the population as a whole.

Chapter 8 "India in Comparison" details India's ranking compared to seven other countries and improvements over time based on elicited composite indices like Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII) by United Nations, and World Governance Index (WGI) based on 310 indicators for 212 countries by the World Governance Institute commissioned by World Bank. Detailed discussions on cross country rankings based on the alternate composite indices reveal that India's rank is depicted to be relatively higher among developing countries but poorly compared to developed countries. Nevertheless, marginal improvements in India's ranking in human

development, gender inequalities and governance especially control of corruption, government effectiveness, and regulatory mechanism, are noteworthy over the recent past.

Chapter 9 “Wobbling International and Academic Concerns on Population” details review of debate on population issues, particularly by Western scholars, till date starting with Malthus’s Essays on the Principles of Population in 1796 to Prof Ehrlich’s book “The Population Bomb” in 1968 to Meadow’s edited book “The Limits to Growth” by Club of Rome in 1972, to demographic dividend issue by national and international scholars over the recent past. A detailed review of population concerns emanating from strategic structural linkages between population growth, socioeconomic development, natural resources, and environmental impacts raised in international conferences has been provided in this chapter. The author aptly viewed that earth’s interlocking of resources and global interdependence probably cannot sustain present rates of economic and population growth much beyond the year 2100.

Chapter 10 “The Way Forward”, the author after reiterating ten fundamental population concerns with detailed discussions in earlier chapters proposed policy recommendations like state-level population policies and programs and constitution of public health and medical corporations for effective implementation of the programs, introduction of modern technology for toning up of systems’ governance at center, state, and district levels, widening accessibility to quality contraception services, permanent freezing of seats for political representation in the state assemblies and in the Parliament to obviate state level gains or losses in population because of differentials in population growth processes.

Another chapter on strategic linkages between crucial population parameters, sustainable and comprehensive development, environmental degradation and gender empowerment at regional and national levels would have been ideal. The book is a commendable effort to highlight India’s overriding population and development concerns and challenges ahead. The author deserves appreciation for bringing together various thoughts over long pending debate over linkages between population and development. Author’s feasible policy recommendations to address India’s population, health and development challenges deserve special appreciation. This book would help not only scholars but also India’s planners and policy makers in their endeavor to ensure achievement of long run sustainable development goals.

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