

## **Book Review**

*Demographic Transition in Kerala in the 1980's* by K. C. Zachariah, S. Irudaya Rajan, P. S. Sarma, K. Navaneetham, P. S. Gopinathan Nair and U. S. Mishra, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram Monograph Series, 1994, xi + 290 pp., Rs. 260.00.

attracts the attention of several scholars as well as informed public for its unique demographic features. To name some of them: sex-ratio favourable to females with increasing numerical excess of females with each census, very high female and male literacy rates now reaching universal literacy and earning distinction as a first state in India achieving universal or total literacy, higher age at marriage for males and females, very high life expectancy which is almost at par with many developed countries with higher expectation of life at birth for females—72.3 years as against 66.8 years for males in 1986-90, very low infant mortality rate which is still declining, very low and declining birth and total fertility rates reaching replacement level fertility in 1990 and thus achieving the goal set up for the country more than 20 years earlier, its proportionately very high share among emigrants to Gulf countries, and its old but now defunct matriarchal system. Several of us have been very impressed by these achievements and have wondered why Kerala is a vanguard in achieving demographic transition and why other states are laggards?

Although several research scholars have tried to describe the unique demographic and social situation in Kerala, the most recent book "Demographic Transition in Kerala in the 1980's" by K. C. Zachariah and others stands out in the crowd for its thoroughness in describing demographic changes in Kerala and in evaluating their determinants. It was expected that with Zachariah—the ace demographer and researcher—at the helm and a team with considerable talent, knowledge and experience the analysis of demographic transition and its determinants would also be unique. One is happy to state that the book does not belie the expectations.

The book spanning 290 pages has in all 10 substantive chapters besides an overview and summary and conclusions preceding the chapters. The write-up on summary and conclusions succinctly tells about the results of the study conducted in 1991 along with the analysis of the determinants of demographic transition in Kerala and ends up with the discussion on one very important topic regarding the relevance of the Kerala experience

for other states in India. At the end of each chapter a brief summary and conclusions are provided which are very helpful for the reader. In overview another important issue has been brought out regarding the role of government in the implementation of family planning programme in Kerala now that the family planning practices are widespread.

The book "Demographic Transition in Kerala in the 1980's" is based on the results of the sample survey conducted in three districts of Kerala namely Ernakulum, Palakkad and Malappuram during 1991. The project (data collection, analysis and preparation of first draft) was completed within a short period of 12 months. What is remarkable and unusual is the discussion of first draft in two seminars with the final version in the book form based on the comments received in two seminars.

Earlier the senior author K. C. Zachariah in 1980 was associated with a survey on fertility and mortality in three districts of the state conducted by the Department of Economics and Statistics, Kerala with financial aid from the World Bank and the UNFPA. The present study covering two of the three districts covered in 1980 survey namely Ernakulum and Palakkad and an addition of the district Malappuram is a follow-up of the 1980 study. If the major interest of the 1980 study was to explain the observed changes in fertility, the study of 1991 attempts to undertake in-depth analysis of the relationship between two of the principal developmental factors—education and health and mortality and fertility. Side goal of the present 1991 study was to verify the validity of the fertility and mortality rates available from the Registrar General's Sample Registration System and that of the Couple Protection Rate (CPR) of the Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Kerala.

Chapter II, perhaps the most interesting and informative chapter furnishes information on geographical location, a short but up-to-date history of socio-economic development dealing with health, education, political awareness, land reform and other redistribution policies, immunization and total literacy programmes, contribution of World Bank Population Project toward improvement of health conditions and lowering of fertility in 3 backward districts of Kerala, and Gulf migration; and demographic background.

Historically, Kerala had made considerable progress in the fields of education, health and land reforms due to efforts of Christian missionaries and great support from progressive rulers of erstwhile States of Travancore and Cochin. It is surprising to note that by the end of the nineteenth century each village in Travancore and Cochin States had primary school—something not achieved in Uttar Pradesh where only 66 percent of the villages have a primary school within a village nearing the end of twentieth century (National Family Health Survey 1992-93, Uttar-Pradesh). The State has claimed 100 percent literacy by the end of 1990. Similarly people in Kerala have easy access to medical services due to nearness of medical facility and good transport facilities, the relatively low cost of medical services and due to the fact that the people demand for the medical services—a result of high level politicization.

Kerala has achieved a demographic goal of replacement level fertility in 1990 with birth rate of 19.6, total fertility rate of 1.9, death rate of 6 and infant mortality rate

of 17 per 1000 live births and is steadily marching on the path of below replacement level fertility. There are no urban-rural differences in fertility and mortality indicators in Kerala. The pace of demographic transition in the state which has started since 1970, is accelerated during 1980-90. The proximate determinants for the decline in fertility are the increase in age at marriage and the increased use of family planning more specifically sterilization. "The basic underlying factors in the reduction of fertility and mortality were a series of socioeconomic changes which made it an economic necessity for the parents to improve the quality of their children—quality in terms of health, nutrition and education." According to authors the additional factors in bringing out the unexpected acceleration in the speed of demographic transition during 1980-90 are: accelerated emigration to Gulf countries, the Universal Immunization Programme introduced in 1985, the World Bank Project executed during 1985-90 and the Total Literacy Programme initiated in Ernakulum in 1989.

The decomposition of fertility decline revealed that sterilization has played a very significant role. More than two-thirds of decline in Ernakulum district was due to sterilization and in Palakkad and Malappuram districts 90 and 85 percent of the decline in fertility was due to sterilization. Ernakulum district has been transformed into a completely contraceptive society and other two districts are following the suit.

It is interesting to note that even in Kerala the female sterilization dominated among total sterilization (83 percent of all sterilizations in Ernakulum, 89 percent in Palakkad and 90 percent in Malappuram, were female sterilizations). However, this important aspect is not discussed as a gender issue. Given the very high level of female literacy and female autonomy, it is surprising to note the dominance of female sterilization in Kerala. It is not known whether the women opted for them or the government programme as in other states promoted them.

Again lower use of spacing methods and heavy stress on sterilization more specifically female sterilization in Kerala as in many other states in India, such as Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, may invite criticism from the point of reproductive health approach which emphasises, contraceptive 'method mix' with full range of family planning services according to the needs of the clientele and quality of care. Whether such criticism is relevant for Kerala where literacy level and age at marriage are very high, where women who had accepted sterilization do not repent, the decision to undergo sterilization was made by the couple etc. is a debatable issue.

The chapter on Family Planning is the longest chapter in the book where several aspects of family planning acceptance find in-depth analysis. The authors accord ample credit to the efforts of family planning programme in Kerala. According to them official family planning programme apart from providing services was also responsible for creating small family size norms and strengthening demand for family planning. In conclusion, one important issue regarding the relevance of governmental intervention in family planning is raised. Although this important issue is not addressed adequately, the suggestion of handing over the responsibility of the distribution of temporary methods to the non-Governmental Organization merits trial.

The analysis of the dynamics of infant mortality is also very thorough taking several aspects influencing the levels of infant and neonatal mortality.

The results of the survey regarding the antenatal care in terms of registration with Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), distribution of iron and folic acid tablets and tetanus injections, during pregnancy show that the percentages on all the above aspects of antenatal care are very low compared with the results of the National Family Health Survey conducted during 1992-93 only one and half years after the present survey. For example only 25 percent of pregnant women in Ernakulum, 7 percent in Palakkad and 24 percent in Malappuram districts received iron and folic acid tablets during pregnancy as against 91 percent according to the NFHS in Kerala. Same wide differences have been noticed with respect to registration for antenatal check-up and tetanus toxoid injections during pregnancy. Granting that the present survey was conducted in only three districts of Kerala and as such its findings may not be comparable with the NFHS in Kerala, the difference in two surveys is too large to be accepted. The present survey has collected information from all ever-married women with at least one birth, about the pregnancy care they received when they were pregnant with last live birth. This is not correct as the year of last live birth could have a wide range and as such women are exposed to varying programme efforts for antenatal care. It is customary to restrict collection of information on antenatal, natal and child care from mothers who had at least one live birth during past 4 or 5 years period.

One more important feature of the book is the evaluation of interdistrict variation observed between Ernakulum, Palakkad and Malappuram with respect to various demographic parameters. The lag in demographic transition in Palakkad and Malappuram is attributed to historical lag in the development process of these two districts. The book has mentioned about 'District Factor'. Woman's district of birth is a very significant factor affecting her fertility and use of family planning methods.

It seems that there is a confusion among authors regarding designating the backward districts in Kerala as "BIMARU". At one place it is stated, "it is wrong to compare it (Malappuram) with BIMARU states in North India." At other place the book says, "there are BIMARU districts in the state, just as there are BIMARU States in the country". "The family planning has become universal in Ernakulum and even the BIMARU districts are catching."

One very important question regarding the relevance of Kerala experience for other States in India, has been addressed quite adequately in the Book. Since Kerala's fertility and mortality declines were due to historical as well as due to recent policy interventions, Kerala's experience, unfortunately, cannot be replicated in other States of India. Kerala experience has demonstrated that a government sponsored family planning programme can yield effective results among all the strata in the State. The same level of family planning services as in other states has more effects in Kerala because of its higher socioeconomic levels, lower infant and child mortality and higher female education. Thus the health and education of the women are the most important factors which have been responsible for the fertility decline. Again agrarian reform including some factors such

as minimum wages, better working conditions and land ceiling could have helped to create small family size norm and demand for family planning in Kerala. To implement such policies require tremendous political will which other States lack. Another important factor in Kerala's fertility decline is higher female age at marriage. This is the aspect which several states find it difficult to manipulate.

The book throws sufficient light on the determinants of demographic transition in Kerala, is very informative and interesting, it touches upon various aspects besides core topics such as fertility and mortality including son preference, maternal and child health care and interdistrict variations and factors affecting them, which influence fertility and infant and child mortality. It is a book which any one concerned with the population dynamics should read.

Tara Kanitkar