

Memorials

V. Subramaniaswamy (February 1934-January 1999)

The sad demise of Shri V. S. Swamy at the age of 65 years is a great loss to the Indian Demography in general, and sample survey in particular. Affectionately called Vital Statistics Swamy, he was the "Bhishma Pitamaha" of the Sample Registration System in India. He was self effacing and unassuming.

Shri Swamy was born on 26th Feb. 1934 at Ernakulam in Kerala. After his Master's degree in Mathematics from Maharaja College at Ernakulam, he studied at Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. He completed specialized course on 'Vital Statistics and Measurement of Population' at the National Center for Health Statistics, Washington and also obtained M.S. in Applied Statistics from the George Washington University, U.S.A.

Throughout his entire career Shri Swamy was associated with a number of sample surveys. He started his career at the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, in the sample survey unit. In September 1960 he joined the Office of the Registrar General India and contributed to the 1961 census. He planned and organized the 1961 Post Enumeration C under late Shri S. P. Jain. He also organized the one-percent sample census undertaken in 60's. In 1969 when the Sample Registration System was expanded at national level, it was Shri Swamy, as Senior Research Officer, instrumental in planning, designing and organizing it. The hard work in meticulous preparations of instructions, training to workers given under his leadership and his meticulous scrutiny of the returns received from the states were the important reasons for the emergence of SRS as a reliable source of demographic data in India. As a man steeped in Sample survey tradition, he would often say that it is better to concentrate on a few essential items rather than collect data on number of items of poor quality. He guided the Sample Registration System in various capacities as Senior Research Officer from 1969 to 1978, as Assistant Registrar General, from July 1978 to August 1983 and as Deputy Registrar General from August 1983 to February 1992. During the last month of his career he was the Executive Director, Computer Centre, Department of Statistics. He was also one of the Editors of the Journal, Demography India during 1982-83.

Mr. Swamy was a deeply religious person, who remained a bachelor. He was deeply interested in Astrology. This hobby attracted a large number of friends from outside his statistics circle.

I had the privilege of working with Mr. Swamy in the Office of the Registrar General India from 1969 onwards and had close interaction with him on many technical issues. He was always eager to help and guide. He was one of the few officers, who was loved and respected by one and all from chowkidars, peons to the Registrar General.

He breathed his last on 15th January, (Uttarayana Punyakalam) at Ernakulam after a brief illness. According to his close relatives, he had a premonition of his coming death in "uttarayanam".

In his death we have lost a man of few words and impeccable character.

May his soul rest in peace.

K. S. Natarajan

Asok Mitra (1917-1999)

Members of the Indian Association for the Study of Population (IASP) deeply mourn the passing away of the Founder-President of IASP—Asok Mitra on July 8, 1999. His magnificent contribution to the Census of India gives him a permanent place in the history of census taking anywhere in the world. He was an able administrator, a versatile scholar, a painstaking researcher, a perceptive art critic, a prolific writer and above all, an intensely human person who combined his values, grace and charm with ruthless efficiency, perfection and a total dedication to work.

Born in 1917 in Bengal, he was educated at Presidency College, Calcutta and Merton College, Oxford. He entered the Indian Civil Service (ICS) in 1939 and retired in 1975 as the Secretary to the President of India. He was the Superintendent of the Census of West Bengal in 1951 which paved the way for his appointment in 1958 as the Registrar General and Census Commissioner for the Census of India 1961, which by all counts was a landmark census. One of his first acts as the Census Commissioner was to involve the best scholars in universities and research institutions with census work. The doors of the Registrar General were always open for all concerned scholars, young and old, who wanted to interact with the highest census official. Asok Mitra played a leading role when the United Nations (ECAFE) organised the First Asian Population Conference in New Delhi in 1963. He ensured that Indian scholars were given the fullest opportunity to participate at this conference, though basically it was a governmental affair. Amartya Sen from the Delhi School of Economics, Ashish Bose and the late P. B. Desai from the Institute of Economic Growth and many other scholars were invited to this Conference. As for some other scholars who could not be invited on financial grounds, Asok Mitra brought out a volume containing contributions to Demography by Indian scholars on this occasion.

As soon as the 1961 census results started coming out, Asok Mitra invited dozens of Indian scholars to analyse 1961 census data in the area of their interest and prepare census monographs which were published by the Office of the Registrar General. The Government provided for the expenses incurred by these scholars for research and analysis of data. Asok Mitra not only inspired non-official experts and academic scholars to get involved with the census but also inspired each and every employee of the vast census organisation throughout the country to put in their best in a true spirit of team work. His doors were open to foreign scholars also.

His interactions with Soviet geographers (like Galina Sadasyuk) and a young American geographer (Joseph Schwartzberg) was particularly helpful to him when he established a Map Division in the Office of the Registrar General and launched an ambitious programme of bringing out numerous Census Atlases, a project which was successfully completed. The Russian geographers acknowledged his contribution by awarding him the degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) of the Academy of Sciences. USSR.

Asok Mitra was also responsible for initiating the Sample Registration System (SRS) in the Vital Statistics Division of RGs Office, to generate data on vital events on a yearly basis.

Asok Mitra flew India's flag high through his own contribution to Demography and that of Indian scholars at the World Population Conference (Belgrade, 1965) and the Second Asian and Pacific Population Conference (Tokyo, 1972).

As an active member of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), Asok Mitra interacted with Indian demographers working abroad. During the London conference of IUSSP in 1969, at an informal meeting of Indian demographers, it was decided to form an Association of Indian demographers (including those working abroad) to promote population studies, research, training and allied activities on the lines of the IUSSP. With the co-operation of his successor to the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner for the 1971 census (A. Chandra Sekhar) and scholars from the Institute of Economic Growth, the Indian Association for the Study of Population (IASP) was registered in Delhi in 1971 with Asok Mitra as the first President. Subsequently, IASP, elections were held every two years and Asok Mitra served as an active and inspiring President during 1972 to 1977.

After retirement from Government in 1975, Asok Mitra was invited to join Jawaharlal Nehru University as a Professor in the School of Social Sciences. The next five years saw his transition from an able administrator who conducted the second largest census in the world, to a truly academic scholar giving lectures on the intricacies of census data and dynamics of population and guiding M Phil and Ph.D. students. He was also Incharge of a big research project funded by the Family Planning Foundation of India (now called, Population Foundation of India) which resulted in a two-volume publication: *India's Population: Aspects of Quality and Control* (1978).

Asok Mitra showed keen interest in gender issues at a time when hardly any attention was paid to such issues. His analysis of census data on the declining sex ratio and the overall concern for status of women resulted in his playing a key role in establishing the Centre for Women's Development Studies which today is the leading research centre in India dealing with gender issues.

In spite of his lifelong involvement with massive data, Asok Mitra retained his inborn talent for the artistic side of life. He wrote on the history of art, both in English and Bengali. During his tenure as Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,

he gave enlightened support to the Indian documentary movement and also promoted contemporary cinema.

Asok Mitra travelled all over the world on numerous occasions to participate at various conferences and meetings and endeared himself to everybody with his scholarship and humility. He represented India at the United Nations Population Commission from 1963 to 1968. He was a member of the Protein Calorie Advisory Group of the UN system during 1973-77. a member of the UN Preparatory Committee for the Third Population Conference (Bucharest, 1974) and Honorary Member of the Geographical Society of the USSR. He was also associated with numerous population activities of ECAFE (later ESCAP). UN Population Division, UNFPA. FAO and WHO.

Asok Mitra wrote several volumes of his autobiography both in English and Bengali (starting with the first volume; *Three Scores and Ten*) and was till recently contributing articles regularly in *The Statesman*.

He leaves behind his wife (Ava) and daughter (Jayati Mitra Datta) who works at the World Bank, Washington.

Ashish Bose