

ANNOTATIONS

THE POPULATION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN

WITH Kingsley Davis' *THE POPULATION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN*,¹ the Office of Population Research adds another item to its growing list of major contributions in the field of demographic analysis. A book on the population of the Indian subcontinent is indeed a timely addition to this list. Interest in the subject is keen these days and much of what is being published belongs to the half-baked, or pot-boiler, school. Davis brings to his task a sociological point of view, a good knowledge of the population field and a superior array of demographic skills. The meticulous citation of sources in footnotes and the lengthy bibliography attest to a tremendous amount of reading and searching of the literature on India. Whatever the faults of the work may be, they are not those of going off half-cocked.

The materials are presented under six major headings, each embracing several chapters. The first part, "The Overall Picture," gives a general review of the quality and availability of demographic data, sketches in the geographic and climatic setting, speculates on the history of population growth before 1871 (the year of the first census) and presents the evidence of accelerating growth as derived from the eight censuses made during the following 70 years.

The next three parts, "The Fight against Death," "Human Fertility in India," and "The Net Balance: Natural Increase," contain the real demographic meat of the book. In these chapters, Davis brings together the available census data and vital statistics, copes with their deficiencies and inconsistencies, and

¹ Davis, Kingsley: *THE POPULATION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1951, viii + 263 pages, \$7.50.

finally draws from them a logical and convincing account of mortality and fertility levels and trends in the region. He then makes a brief excursion into the hazardous field of population projection. His computations yield a minimum of 560 million and a maximum of 790 million for the year 2000, as compared with 389 million enumerated in 1941. Since he states all the proper reservations concerning his underlying assumptions and since his figures permit such a wide range of possibilities for the demographic future of India and Pakistan, these reviewers are in no position to quarrel with them.

Part v, "Migration: Its Direction and Extent," indicates that immigration and emigration have been relatively unimportant, numerically speaking, and that before partition, population movement within the subcontinent was, as in most predominantly rural cultures, of a somewhat minor character.

The final part, "Social Structure and Social Change," concerns itself with the growth and characteristics of cities, the rate and degree of urbanization; with literacy and its variations by sex, age, religion, and urban or rural residence; with considerations of language, caste, and religion; with the causes and effects of partition, including the probable characteristics and prospects of the two new countries. One is struck with the lagging pace of industrialization and urbanization in a region which apparently has a great industrial potential in terms of both natural and manpower resources. India's colonial status comes in for a good share of the blame for this state of affairs, though other factors are mentioned as well.

The last three chapters deal with the economic situation and come to grips with the problem of population and resources development as they relate to the crucial question of how to raise the level of living of the people and how to raise it quickly. Davis' position can be briefly stated as follows: (1) Industrialization with its attendant urbanization has been slow in India; (2) levels of living may have risen slightly in the past few decades but population increase has prevented significant gains; (3) the backing-up of population on agricultural holdings, operated for the most part under antiquated and wasteful forms of land tenure, has built up a surplus of many millions who are not needed for agricultural production but who cannot

at once be turned to industrial production; (4) with the handicaps of domination until recently by a foreign power, the dislocations resulting from partition, the persistence of cultural impediments associated with caste and religion, the dedication of much of the national budget to military uses, the absence of accumulated capital, and the necessity of turning economic energy toward supplying consumer goods for immediate use rather than toward building up heavy industry whose effects on consumption can be felt only in the future—with these handicaps, the outlook for speedy industrial development is dubious; (5) there is certainly no shortage of human resources on the Indian subcontinent—in fact, the plethora of people appears to be a hindrance rather than a help to rapid industrialization; (6) the population policy that seems most reasonable, in view of these considerations, is one directed toward a deliberately reduced rate of growth while the countries struggle with ways and means of building up their industrial potentials and increasing the efficiency of productivity of their agriculture. Davis also mentions planned emigration as a possible element of population policy but does not appear to feel that the two governments would take kindly to the idea, let alone that other governments would readily throw open their gates to Indian or Pakistani immigrants.

Of the two methods by which the rate of growth could be reduced, increased mortality and lowered fertility, the author naturally favours the latter but was, at the time of writing, pardonably doubtful as to whether such a policy would be adopted officially and of how effective it might turn out to be if adopted. Since then, the Government of India has given some signs of interest in studying the feasibility of encouraging the practice of family limitation through birth control. The possibility exists that we may be able, for the first time, to witness the effects of a national policy directed at curbing the rate of population increase.

From the point of view of demographic techniques, Davis' work is an interesting demonstration of the application of mechanical ingenuity, guided by judicious inference, to a mass of data that unquestionably has a tale to tell, but that required processing, manipulation, even juggling, before the story could

be rendered intelligible. Most of the manipulation is adequately described in the ten appendices presented at the end of the volume, but in a few cases only a brief verbal description is given in the text. Of particular value are the methodological notes on the development of estimates of birth and death rates for the period 1881 to 1948. By playing off the data from various sources against one another, a series of approximations (albeit involving a certain amount of circular reasoning) are made to yield a set of consistent and reasonable results. Davis' estimates may not be correct but we are willing to warrant they are the best ones that have yet been produced. Certainly they form a useful yardstick against which to appraise the validity of past and current recorded or "official" rates.

Another valuable addition to demographic paraphernalia is an Indian life table for the decade 1911–1921 and one for the decade 1931–1941. The first is important because it furnishes a measure of the terrific impact of the influenza epidemic of 1918–1919 upon the population of India. (Davis estimates the staggering total of about 20 million lives lost.) The 1931–1941 table, though applicable to only a part of prepartition India, gives us the first inkling of trends in age-specific mortality and expectation of life since 1931.

Except for one summary volume which consists mostly of data on the geographic distribution of the population, the Census of 1941 is available only in an incomplete set of provincial volumes. Davis has, at some pains, assembled the available materials and extracted a considerable amount of information which is useful though unhappily only partial. Apparently this is about as far as we shall get with 1941 census data, many of the records having been destroyed or lost during the war period.

It is unfortunate that the results of the 1951 censuses of India and Pakistan were not at hand during the preparation of this volume. Such profound alterations in the political and economic life of the area have occurred in the last decade that the current demographic situation is difficult to assess. It is to be hoped that Davis will publish a postscript of some sort when the new data appear. In passing, it is interesting to note that his estimate of the 1950 population of India (357 million) is

amazingly close to the official estimate (358 million) based on the 1951 census count.

Naturally, it was not possible for a book of this type to be completely exhaustive. The selection of subjects for investigation or emphasis is necessarily in part a matter of individual taste and judgment. One might have liked to see, for instance, a more searching analysis of the relation between health and fertility and of the curious persistence of high sex ratios that is repeatedly observed in the data for India as well as in those for many other countries in that part of the world. No doubt such explorations would meet with formidable obstacles and yield inconclusive results, but an attempt to understand the relationships and phenomena involved would be worth while. Some such study might perhaps have been more fruitful than the rather extended treatment of caste and religion which not only runs through the entire discussion as relevant to any real understanding of demographic characteristics, but is also given two whole chapters for a separate and somewhat repetitive exposition. Because caste and religion are rather closely interwoven in the culture of the region and because there is doubt, in some quarters at any rate, that their influence is currently so overwhelming as it may once have been, the repetition that occurs and the emphasis that emerges seem a trifle excessive.

THE POPULATION OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN is an easy book to read. Davis has a direct vigorous style, with occasional flashes of "non-objectivity" that add to one's enjoyment without seriously jeopardizing the scientific validity of his findings. It should not be too difficult for the non-technical reader to follow the development; if so, there is a summary at the end of each chapter and a liberal supply of maps, charts, and tables that transmit the content in compressed and palatable form.

Since the book was written at a crucial moment in Indian history, and perforce leaves us dangling at a point where future directions cannot be safely predicted, its chief value is in furnishing a sound and comprehensive background against which to observe and appraise future demographic and social developments in two new nations that constitute an important element in a restless East—indeed, in a nervous and changing world.

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