

***Social Development, Cultural Change and Fertility Decline: A Study of Fertility Change in Kerala***

by K. Mahadevan and M. Sumangala

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The subtitle of this book, "A Study of Fertility Change in Kerala", indicates a case study of a region which has experienced fertility decline which has not been preceded by a higher level of socio-economic development, industrialization, urbanization and greater investment in family planning. Along with fertility decline, the quality of population in Kerala has also improved in terms of health, hygiene, sanitation, occupational mobility, modernization, and emancipation of women. Investments in social education, in the fields of education and health is notably higher than other Indian states.

The authors have employed a useful research design taking as their focus a village in Kerala and, as a control group, a village in Andhra Pradesh. Using both qualitative and quantitative data, the authors have combined the anthropological and survey methods to convincingly demonstrate the importance of socio-cultural factors in rapid fertility decline in the state. This book confirms that a higher age of marriage, a decline in infant mortality, an extensive family planning infrastructure and the widespread use of contraceptive methods are important influences on fertility decline. In addition, the authors highlight several new factors. Using case studies as illustrations, the authors argue that the relatively low value attached to the sex of children, the revival of polyandry, the recognition of deep-rooted kinship obligations, the emancipation of women and modernization, all contribute significantly towards a decline in fertility. None of these influences, it appears, are important in the Andhra village.

The book is divided into nine chapters, which are 1) social development, cultural change and fertility decline: a theory, 2) nuptiality and fertility, 3) demographic profile and fertility, 4) economic and cultural values of children, 5) socio-economic status, 6) modernization, status of women and fertility decline, 7) communication and contraception, 8) primary health centres, 9) summary and implications.

The special contributions of this book are: 1) This study has made a pioneering attempt by using both the anthropologist and survey approaches to explore a maximum number of new variables which can explain fertility behavior, 2) The research design though focussing on Kerala, has also taken a village in Andhra Pradesh, as a control group. In the survey, both husband and wife constitute the respondents. 3) The various individual and interrelated factors which determine fertility decline in Kerala, and the corresponding situation in Andhra, have been taken together to provide a model applicable to other regions in India and the developing world. The model is based on the priority given to social development and cultural change which leads to declining fertility and, more importantly, an improvement in the quality of life. 3) This work is invaluable for students of the social sciences (particularly those interested in population studies and health and management sciences), as also for administrators and those involved in the implementation of socio-economic development programmes.

Based on the assumption of this book, that the model of social development and cultural change has accounted for fertility decline, one expects application to other regions of the developing world for further effective, policy formulation and programme implementation. However, one should also raise the question that cultural tradition, economic and social structures could vary from place to place and often not provide the same ingredients that form the basis for change.

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