

Shorter Notices

Ben Rogaly, Barbara Harriss-White and Sugata Bose (eds). *Sonar Bangla? Agricultural Growth and Agrarian Change in West Bengal and Bangladesh.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 424 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 525.00.

After decades of stagnation, Bengali agricultural output finally began to grow faster than the population from the mid-1980s onwards. While this achievement has been widely heralded, there has been no effort to analyse in detail the reasons for and the consequences of agrarian change in the region. Providing a unique interdisciplinary synthesis, this volume—which draws chiefly upon micro studies of villages in West Bengal and Bangladesh—explores the complex causality between agricultural growth, government policy and local level practice, and agrarian social change.

The book is divided into three parts dealing respectively with agricultural growth, poverty and well-being; policies and practices; and changing agrarian structures. Among the issues discussed are:

- The extent to which the West Bengal government's agrarian reforms were responsible for rapid agricultural growth.
- The outcomes of this growth for poverty and well-being in the state.
- The liberalisation of agricultural input markets and growth trends in Bangladesh.
- The impact of the recent agricultural growth on structures of land and water ownership; on caste-based ideologies; on markets for produce; and on migrant wage-workers.

The book leavens official data with extended research in rural Bengal as well as detailed archival research. The contributions represent diverse ideological and disciplinary approaches, and even provide sharply contesting interpretations which reflect the debates currently raging around the themes covered in the volume.

S. Irudaya Rajan, U. S. Mishra and P. Sankara Sarma. *India's Elderly: Burden or Challenge?* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 356 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 475.00.

As a consequence of improved health care, declining mortality rates and the momentum of demographic transition, India's elderly population has been rising steadily and they now constitute a sizeable and growing proportion of the population. Despite this, there are as yet no thought-out policies and programmes directed towards them. The purpose of this book is to assist a better understanding of the socio-economic and demographic dynamics of India's elderly in order to design appropriate programmes and policies to cater to their needs.

The authors present a comprehensive account of the different dimensions of elderly life in India. A unique feature of this book is the demographic assessment (based on projections of the elderly in 25 states and 7 union territories) of the number of India's elderly up to the year 2021. Using data from the 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses, the National Sample Survey, and the Ageing Survey, the socio-economic characteristics of the elderly—such as level of literacy, work, sex ratio, marital and health status, household structure, rural-urban distribution and living arrangements—are discussed in detail. This is complemented by case studies of and group discussions with the elderly to assess their views about life and society. The authors conclude with policy prescriptions for enhancing the quality of life of India's senior citizens.

This book will be of considerable interest to all those in the fields of gerontology, demography, population studies, health studies, social work, sociology, psychology, and health, welfare and public economics.

Sangeeta R. Gupta (ed). *Emerging Voices: South Asian American Women Redefine Self, Family, and Community*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 259 pages. Paperbound. Indian Rs 225.00.

For centuries, South Asian women have lived within an image framework that limits the boundaries of their identity formation. In this volume, South Asian women living in the United States speak out as they redefine themselves, their families, and their communities in their search for a bicultural identity. Caught between two realities, these women are struggling to find a way of life that merges the world outside the home with the world within the home.

The various voices, spanning different generational, religious, and regional points of view, emerge in this collection to reflect their struggle. The stage is set by the editor's introduction which traces the history of South Asian immigration to the United States. This is followed by insightful articles on the second generation South Asian adolescent girls growing up in a Western country; the concept of gender roles among graduate students from India at an American university; the relevance of the cultural environment as they redefine issues of interpersonal relationships: dating, sexuality, marriage, and divorce; and the problems confronting working South Asian wives and mothers.

Filled with personal, intimate and moving accounts of and by women, this book provides the essential human touch which is so often missing in academic research. *Emerging Voices* will interest those in the fields of Asian-American studies, ethnic studies, immigrant studies, women's studies, history, anthropology, and sociology. This book will further open the dialogue within the diverse South Asian communities who may hear the echoes of their own voices within these pages. It will also provide a bridge for a Western audience who wishes to better understand the history and experiences of these immigrant populations.

Katar Singh. *Rural Development: Principles, Policies and Management.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 353 pages. Paperbound. Indian Rs 245.00.

This, the second edition of Professor Katar Singh's very successful text, deals systematically with the vast subject of rural development—its basic concepts, elements, objectives, paradigms, determinants, policies and programmes, and management.

Stressing the fact that with more than 70 percent of its population living in rural areas, any strategy for socio-economic development in India must focus on rural development, Professor Katar Singh emphasises the pivotal role of human resources as both a means and an end to development. Rural development is viewed as a multidimensional process involving the reorganising and reorienting of entire economic and social systems and interactions among various biological, technological, economic, institutional and organisational factors. This thoroughly revised edition includes an integrated treatment of the principles, policies and management of rural development; new research and statistical data; illustrations and examples from current situations; the latest measures of rural development; and a new methodology for project monitoring and evaluation.

This well-documented and comprehensive new edition will serve as a textbook for graduate and postgraduate students of rural development, agricultural development, agricultural policy and planning, and rural management. It will also interest policy-makers and planners, and those managing both governmental and non-governmental organisations engaged in rural development.

Sakuntala Narasimhan. *Empowering Women: An Alternative Strategy from Rural India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 236 pages. Paperbound. Indian Rs 195.00.

Conventional approaches to women's empowerment are based on the twin assumptions that alleviation of poverty will automatically lead to their empowerment and that the major constraint on programmes for upliftment is monetary. The result of five decades of planning, however, has shown that economic assistance by itself

does not necessarily improve the status of women. The author argues that the more vital inhibiting factors leading to the disadvantaged position of women are their ignorance, powerlessness and vulnerability. This book emphasises the need for bringing about an attitudinal change among women as the most important step towards empowerment.

She focuses specifically on rural Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women, who, are triply disadvantaged as women, as members of the rural section of the populace and because of their low-caste status. The book compares the effectiveness of state initiatives with the motivation-and-conscientisation strategy advocated by AWARE (Action for Welfare and Awakening in Rural Environment), a non-governmental development organisation working in 6,000 villages spread over seven states in India. It analyses the success of AWARE's work among women through various case studies and concludes that, besides monetary resources, it is the mindset of the policy-makers, bureaucrats and particularly the women concerned that must change in order to assist the empowerment of women.

This pioneering book provides a refreshing perspective on an issue that has long been a topic of discussion among theorists of development as well as activists. It will be of interest to policy-makers, bureaucrats, non-governmental organisations, social workers and those in the fields of development studies, gender studies and sociology.

Eric Gonsalves and Nancy Jetly (eds). *The Dynamics of South Asia: Regional Cooperation and SAARC*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 277 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 375.00.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) came into existence in 1987. Having entered its second decade on the eve of the 21st century, it is faced with a new international system groping for a durable structure which has little concern for South Asia. At the same time, the balance within the region is gradually shifting from the tensions, apprehensions and mistrust which have so far characterised inter-state relations, to the more fruitful agenda of regional cooperation.

This volume of insightful and original essays by a representative group of distinguished policy-makers, diplomats and scholars, both from within the region and beyond, advocates the need for enhancing dialogue between the countries of South Asia in order to find a common ground. Tackling issues of considerable importance both at the regional and the global level, the volume is an extended exercise in mapping out inter-state relations in the areas of political relations, security concerns, technological and commercial issues, intellectual and cultural commonalities, and the impact of foreign aid. The contributors stress the importance of economic and cultural linkages and the need for South Asia to re-invent its regional agenda on the basis of cooperation and mutual understanding.

Providing a multi-dimensional and analytical overview of South Asian regional cooperation and of the future of SAARC, this volume will attract the attention of policy-makers and political scientists, and all those engaged in South Asian studies, international relations, trade and regional development.

Roger Jeffery and Nandini Sundar (eds). *A New Moral Economy for India's Forests?* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 304 pages. Paperbound. Indian Rs 265.00.

Since the introduction of the concept in the late 1980s, Joint Forest Management (JFM) has come to be regarded as virtually essential for the conservation and regeneration of forest resources in India. However, the existing literature on the subject has been largely celebratory and perhaps inadequately critical, while efforts to introduce new institutional arrangements have been poorly studied. This volume serves as an important and necessary corrective by drawing attention to the various conceptual and empirical problems associated with the approaches to JFM currently prevalent in the country.

The book begins with a comprehensive introduction by the editors which focuses on the concept of 'community participation' in forest conservation. They argue that a 'new moral economy' is in the process of being evolved. In recognising the legitimacy of 'local' involvement, JFM policies and strategies tend to impose new, limited rights and understand customary claims selectively due to distorted notions of who constitutes a 'community' and why, and what constitutes 'participation' in natural resource management.

The essays that follow take up a variety of important topics such as examining the discourse on community participation in forest management in a historical and conceptual framework; discussing the nature of the 'community' which is expected to participate; evaluating the possible forms of participation; exploring the discourses that have developed around questions of gender and class; understanding the respective roles of the community, NGOs and the forest department in JFM; and assessing the problems involved in 'going to scale' and developing full-fledged projects. Overall, the contributors highlight the need for greater attention to regional networks of power and resource use. Community participation, they argue, must allow the local populace to choose their own methods of conservation and not degenerate into merely another way of co-opting villagers into the agenda of the state.

Comprising original essays which report recent research and field experiences from all over India, this thought-provoking volume will interest those in the fields of environment studies, forestry, economics, management, politics, human geography, sociology, social anthropology and development studies as well as policy-makers, bureaucrats and non-governmental organisations.

G. K. Lieten and Ravi Srivastava. *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 297 pages. Hardbound. Indian Rs 395.00.

This book takes the contemporary discussion on devolution of power to the local level (the panchayats) as the point of entry for a discussion of various aspects of village life in Uttar Pradesh.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, villages in the region are experiencing the dual impact of feudal dominance and modernisation. The latter have entered village life through such institutions as markets, government programmes, legal changes, communication channels and local government. It is the recent impact of these institutions that the authors study through intensive fieldwork.

A vast array of field data, collected in an interdisciplinary manner by the authors help explain the forces at work behind the uneven change and political turbulence characteristic of the state in recent years. Detailed information on land ownership, access to education, migration, income and employment opportunities not only confirms the caste-congruent nature of class domination and dependence, but also brings to light the various elements which have allowed a semblance of resistance and empowerment. The authors conclude that panchayats, because of their quasi non-functioning status, are not yet an arena where the empowerment of the poor and poverty alleviation programmes are decided. Yet, they are considered by the poor as potentially democratic institutions and as appropriate facilitators of development.

This in-depth view from below is an enriching insight into the resilience and dynamism of social life in the villages of north India. It will interest those involved in village studies, and in the fields of political science, economics, rural development, public administration and sociology.

Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah (eds). *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999. 288 pages. Paperbound. Indian Rs 295.00.

The widespread use of participatory approaches by governments, NGOs, community-based organisations, and academic institutions across the development sector has created a need to assess more critically if the work being undertaken benefits women and men equally. It is increasingly being found that participatory approaches tend to simplify community differences, do not properly understand power relationships, and avoid or ignore conflicts. The losers from this participatory naivety are often women. *The Myth of Community* provides many insights into how women can be involved more equitably and appropriately in participatory processes, and how gender issues can be tackled more meaningfully.

The contributors discuss the crucial role that can be played by conceptual clarity, appropriate methods and methodologies, and supportive organisations and institutional structures. After an overview of issues and lessons, the ensuing three sections comprise:

- theoretical reflections on participation and gender;
- practical experiences from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean;
and
- examples of how organisations are attempting to integrate gender-sensitive work in participatory processes.

Overall, this book provides a critical discussion from a wide range of perspectives on the global popularity of participatory approaches to development. The strengths and limitations of the many concrete examples provided by those who are closely involved in participatory development will provide stimulating reading for all those keen to improve the quality of their participatory work.