

Tuesday, Sep 14, 2021

Outlook



MY SUBSCRIPTION | SIGN OUT

BUSINESS MONEY TRAVEL SPORTS VIDEOS ENTERTAINMENT PHOTOS MAGAZINE OTHERS

Books / A Story Of Many People

A Story Of Many People



Tribhuvan Tiwari

Ashish Bose considers population issues, and has equal time for both prominent and humble—a true demographer



M.S. Gill

26 July 2010

Trending

Ride The Bullish Run Of
Cryptocurrency

Once A Jewel In India's
Football Crown, Why Poor
Organisation Has Tarnished
Durand Cup's Image

Arunachal Women's Dilemma:
Marry 'Outsider', Lose
Property Rights

Data Jihad? It's Not Just
Weaponry That Has Fallen
Into Taliban Hands

Separatist Call For A
'Sovereign Kamatapur' Rises In
North Bengal

While still in college, I read Nirad C. Chaudhuri's

Autobiography of an Unknown Indian. The social history of Bengal portrayed in it left a powerful impression on me. Now, I have come across another memoir by a Bengali intellectual, Ashish Bose. A distinguished scholar, Bose spent a life-time at the Institute of Economic Growth, where he headed the Population Research Centre. The book is a set of discursive essays on men and matters. It is not an autobiography. Bose is simply scanning the canvas of his academic life, and penning memories as they flit by. His personality comes across vividly. It is undoubtedly the well-lived life of another unknown Indian: scholarly, focused on India and its problems, a humane personality, able to sup easily with kings and commoners. Such men are the salt of India, and encourage optimism when depressive facts stare one in the face. I also like to think that such men are generally found in Bengal. The soil produces argumentative Indians by the dozen, fond of good coffee, and worthwhile debate. Not interested in money.

A well-trained demographer, Bose spent a life-time on India's population problem. He coined the now famous BIMARU acronym for the problem states of Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, and UP. He discusses with knowledge and candour the ups and downs of government policy over the decades on the population question. He writes without hesitation on the family planning disaster of 1975-76. It is interesting to read about his conversations with J.R.D. Tata, who showed remarkable support for his efforts. JRD asked Bose who would solve this problem when bureaucrats, politicians, and donor agencies have had limited success. Bose replied: "The people themselves". It is difficult to agree with this. After six decades of freedom, the galloping population growth in the BIMARU states continues to fuel social problems. Only literacy can reduce population growth, and these states have poor literacy, particularly among women. Iran, after the Shah's overthrow, quickly pushed literacy and brought down the birth rate. Education, above all rural education, has been a failure in our six decades of endeavour. If, by now, we had at least 80 per cent literacy, our social and political problems would have been greatly reduced. While Kerala and the north-eastern states show high literacy, the core of India continues to languish.

Bose Is Critical About The NREGA, The Rural Health Scheme, And Asks If They'll Have A Positive Impact On The Demographic Problem.

Bose is critical about the government's social programmes such as NREGA and the Rural Health Scheme and questions whether they will have a positive impact on the demographic problem. Bose's little essays on a range of people, from his malishwala to Prof V.K.R.V. Rao and JRD, are all fun to read. He makes no distinction between men of rank and his drivers over a lifetime. Each staff car driver has a charming portrait to himself. Political figures from Gulzarilal Nanda to Vajpayee and Raj Narain—all get a scan from the observant professor. He even had a run-in with Imelda Marcos, the lady with a thousand shoes. He has little portraits of godmen he has come across and of the sadhus at the Kumbh Mela. He himself, of course, remains sceptical, indifferent to his wife's pious beliefs.

It is nice to read of V.K.R.V. Rao's great work in setting up the Delhi School of Economics, the Institute of Economic Growth and the Population Research Centre. The Delhi School has offered a great many distinguished Indians for public service, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh being the latest and most famous. I remember Prof Sukhamoy Chakravarty and many others in the Planning Commission, and in the higher echelons of economic management. The Allahabad University, one of India's great institutions in the early days of Independence, is also vividly sketched. Sadly, it has slipped badly due to political interference. Visiting it some years ago, I was sorry to see the shabby state of the Oxford-like varsity buildings. The Centre has had to step in now to try and revive it but it might never get back to its old glory. A porcelain vase, once broken, can at best be only stuck together.

Prof Bose has lived life within the lakshman rekha of high integrity and focused on serving the country to the best of his ability. Such men are rare, and his panorama across a life well lived is worth reading.

[« PREVIOUS STORY](#)



Tere Bin Laden

[NEXT STORY »](#)

Cascade Of Silk



OUTLOOK NEWSLETTERS



Ent. AR

Tired of the unceasing, ungainly internet entertainment updates? Walk dazzling lanes and by lanes with Outlook.



Tech in style

The right tech that defines you. Your aspirations. Your styles. Right in time.



The Smart Surfer

Stay on top of the market moves. Analysis and information for you to take smart decisions.



Ambit

Know what's behind the apparent and what doesn't show. Your journey into the myriad shades of truth with Outlook.



The Coffey

Money market essentials, analysis and data delivered to your mailbox with precision timing.

MORE FROM BOOKS