

"POPULATION GROWTH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES" *—A REVIEW

V. M. DANDEKAR

THOUGH the writers have used a rather general title and have added a small part towards the end which may justify it, it is obvious that the study by Coale and Hoover is essentially what its sub-title indicates, namely, 'A Case Study of India's Prospects.' It is a serious study and bears the mark of careful and painstaking work throughout, and is an important addition to the literature on problems of Indian economic development. Moreover, it focusses attention on an aspect of the problem which has begun to receive serious attention only recently, namely, the population problem, and presents a dimensional picture of the magnitudes involved.

The starting point of the enquiry is the observation that substantial economic development may be a sufficient condition for a decline in mortality, but because of the innovations in the field of public health it is not today a necessary condition. India is no exception. There is enough evidence to suggest that a rapid decline in Indian mortality has already begun and that it will continue for some years to come. Coale and Hoover estimate that the crude death rate in India has already declined from a level of about 31 per thousand in 1951 to about 25½ per thousand in 1956, and they expect that it will reach a level as low as 15 per thousand by about 1975. In support, they have put forward much cogent evidence both from India and from other comparable regions, and it seems that they are as right as one can be in the matter of projecting vital rates over a period of 25 or 30 years. Whether or not their particular estimates come about precisely true, it is obvious that such reduction in mortality is feasible and that therefore it will be kept as a desirable goal of policy and programme in the field of public health. Further, as such a programme is bound to receive a high priority, as it should, the success or failure in attaining such a goal will be practically independent of the pace of overall economic development, and therefore, rapid decline in mortality may be attained far in advance of substantial economic improvement. Hence it becomes necessary to regard such an eventuality and to examine its consequences. The moral of the situation is clear. As the authors point out: "If economic development does not precede the decline in mortality, it must still occur eventually if the decline is to be maintained." India is making great efforts at rapid development. The authors show generous

* *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-Income Countries — A Case Study of India's Prospects*, by Ansley J. Coale and Edgar M. Hoover, Princeton University Press, 1958.