

paper on 'Genetic components in man and environment' by Prof. Prem Narain shows how environment reacts with genetic entities to make intra-individual variance a fundamental source of variation. Section II includes two papers by Prof. David Seckler which elaborate on the concept of 'small but healthy' and explain the implications of the auto-regulatory mechanism for body growth and work output. It also includes a paper by Dr Ashok Desai on the wage efficiency mechanism and nutrition theory. Dr Desai does not find any evidence that relationship between food intake and work output plays a major part in the determination of agricultural wages in the country.

Section III includes two papers by Prof. Lincoln Chen. These provide altogether new dimensions to the self-regulatory mechanism in terms of ecology. In particular, Chen's papers show that it makes little difference whether body weight is lighter or heavier than the American median standard down to about 35%, so far, as susceptibility to the childhood diseases is concerned, and that in consequence, the Gomez classification of mild and moderate malnutrition appears to have little meaning. Section IV includes contributions from Prof. Deodhar and Dr Antia and shows how nutrition is medicalised by undue emphasis on vitamins, iron and food processing to the neglect of hygiene, sanitation and water supply. To provide the latter is not costly, provided we work within the framework of traditional culture to avoid contaminating water by fencing the village well and inculcating among school children, the habit of personal hygiene and use of community latrines which may be connected to gobar gas plants.

Section V includes two papers by Prof. Soman

dealing with the Kerala experience. Kerala, as is well known, has the lowest infant mortality in India and the longest expectation of life. The death rate is lower than in several developed countries. The paper shows how with the intake as low as 1300 to 1400 calories, women in Kerala have a level of health and activity on par with other women eating much more and illustrates how food is used with greater efficiency at the lower end of the homeostatic range. The second paper on the evaluation of nutrition programs shows how school meal program in operation all over the state, in over 8000 schools has utterly failed to bring any increase in the weight and height of children.

Section VI includes a paper on the 'Philosophy of Indira Community Kitchen' which shows that poor can help themselves to be self-reliant and altruistic at the same time and shows the way of combating poverty. This paper was specially prepared for the workshop organized for senior administrators of north-eastern states at the instance of the Planning Commission which has recommended in its Sixth Five Year Plan, the model of the Indira Community Kitchen for adoption by the states. The community kitchen at Pune serves around 15,000 meals a day at half the market price.

This book is worth its place in any library in India or abroad.

S. VENKAT RAO

Biochemistry and Applied Nutrition,
Central Food Technological
Research Institute,
Mysore 570 013

NEWS

FIREPROOF PLASTIC FOR AIRPLANES AND POLICE ?

'Airline passengers and riot police may feel a little safer if the plastics industry takes to a new polymer called POP, its maker, Bayer, says the material is 'virtually non-combustible'. POP, or polyphosphate, is chemically related to polycarbonate. It will burn only in gas mixtures that contain more than 70% oxygen, Bayer says. Air contains 21% oxygen. The

mass-produced polymer will be clear enough to make windscreens, riot shields and goggles. The manufacturer is looking to the aircraft industry for bulk sales. So far, the polymer is available only in experimental quantities, in a brown colour. Firms can process POP in much the same way as polycarbonates'. (*New Scientist*, 100 (1383), 419, November '83).