

answering three main questions: the nature of the public-private mix in the pensions regime; what pension levels can hypothetical ‘risk biographies’ on incomes below the average but above the poverty line expect, and what is the contribution of the public and private sector to their pension incomes; and how do policymakers responsible for reform aim to address the main shortcomings of their regimes for ‘risk biographies’ considering that a strengthening of the public sector is not a viable option? (p. 6)

In the final chapter, the authors reveal their prognosis for the six countries. Given that four of the six (Britain, Germany, Italy and Poland) have a voluntarist framework for non-state provision, they conclude that it is unlikely that pension regimes will develop in the newcomers that are as inclusive or homogeneous as those in The Netherlands or Switzerland, with their non-means-tested, inclusive public pillar providing a sound base especially for those citizens most at risk of falling below the poverty line. To achieve a more inclusive system, the authors suggest that the public pillar needs to be complemented by second pillar schemes, which can only really be ensured through state compulsion or social partner enforcement or both, as seen in The Netherlands and Switzerland. The book is well presented and informative and will be of interest to both students and academics who wish to further their understanding of pension systems and the impact of policies in the cited European countries. Although the book does not reveal anything new or challenging to the research community, its methodology will be of interest, particularly on the reading list of undergraduate students or as a teaching text on a specific module. It has an important message for policy makers and legislators by providing an insight into what the current trends of pension provision mean for the adequacy of citizens’ pensions – whether public-private regimes can sufficiently protect the majority of citizens from social exclusion.

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Suhita Chopra Chatterjee, Priyadarshi Patnaik and Vijayaraghavan M. Chariar (eds), *Discourses on Aging and Dying*, Sage, New Delhi, 2008, 272 pp., pbk \$9, ISBN 13: 978 0 7619 3644 2.

This volume has all the characteristics of a collection of conference papers, in this case the *National Conference on Aging and Dying: Relevance of Indic Perspectives to End-of-life Care*, held in Kharagpur, West Bengal, in 2005. That is not to say there is anything wrong with the papers – some are fascinating – but they do not form a coherent whole, and the writing is patchy, whilst the division of the book into three sections is not completely effective. The volume is redeemed by a superb introduction, however, which brilliantly draws together the threads of what each author says, and more. For instance, the assertion that the entire philosophy (within the Indic conceptualisation of ageing and dying) is ‘death-embracing rather than death-denying’ stops the reader in his or her tracks. It is clearly true to say that ‘there is a greater realism in accepting the transience of existence, the

aging and withering of the body, and the place of the elderly in the social system' (p. 19), but how that sits with some Muslim thought in India is not fully explored, given that Muslims are astonishingly life-affirming on the whole, and convinced that one should do all one can to preserve human life in all circumstances. Indeed, the chapter on Islam, by Manisha Sen and Shafi Shaikh, is curiously unforthcoming on all this, preferring instead to dwell on the inevitability of death, personal accountability before Allah, and the immortality of the soul. The extent to which Islam as practised in India is influenced by the 'death-embracing' wider culture is not explored.

That is a quibble. There is discussion about the ways in which contemplation of one's mortality is essential for spiritual growth, whilst the emphasis on the design of the traditional staging of life, with *Vanaprasthasrama* representing the third stage of life when the individual moves away from the family to a secluded place and 'engages in the pursuit of higher knowledge and spiritual advancement' provides a reality for what might otherwise seem purely theoretical. So too does the emphasis on how the Indic approach prepares for the decaying body, at least in part because the 'prioritisation of the body is almost absent in Indian philosophy' (p. 20). The soul continues its existence. It may be reborn in another shape or being. In this thinking, 'death does not mean destruction', and the result is a wholly different view from that in the west.

At best this can mean old people being treated superbly well, wherever they might be, home or care home. Indeed, the volume contains a study of a care home in Varanasi (Banaras or Kashi) by Umesh K. Singh, 'Culture-specific and culture-sensitive end-of-life care: a case study based in Kashi Labh Mukti Bhawan, Banaras'. The home looks after old and terminally ill people in accordance with Hindu teaching. Banaras has a large number of care homes, with this one catering to the relatively poor who are thought to gain hugely in terms of spiritual richness by being able to die in Kashi. Families bring their terminally ill and very aged relatives there to wait for them to die, staying with them and supporting them. The majority of the people interviewed made it clear that it was the strong wish of the dying person themselves to die in Kashi, which led to the effort being made to bring them.

It could not be more different from a western-style hospice, and yet both are based on a holistic view of death and both have a strong sense of the need for a spiritual journey. Though that journey may be described differently, the idea that people have to make an effort, or go through some kind of transformation, is jointly held. And it is this kind of insight that makes this volume remarkable. For the editors have put together a short essay on different conceptions of ageing and death that stands in its own right, and it is that essay which stands out amongst the other papers, interesting though some of them are. The essay that looks at the Kashi Labh Mukti Bhawan makes it clear that death in the Hindu belief system is a culturally-constructed idea. For 'it is neither the fear of death nor the negation of earthly existence that is important; instead, it is the migration from one life to another that is intermediated by the mor(t)al death. An individual accepts the inevitability of death and, despite all the trauma and pain preceding death, gets ready for a newer existence/life' (p. 261). For that essay, and those insights, it is worth students and academics alike reading this volume,

even if some of the papers can be scanned briefly, since they may well leave the reader cold.

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Mariano Sánchez, Donna M. Butts, Alan Hatton-Yeo, Nancy A. Henkin, Shannon E. Jarrott, Matthew S. Kaplan, Antonio Martinez, Sally Newman, Sacramento Pinazo, Juan Sáez and Aaron P.C. Weintraub, *Intergenerational Programmes: Towards a Society for All Ages*, Social Studies Collection 23, Fundacion La Caixa, Barcelona, Spain, 2007, 232 pp., free. Available online at http://obrasocial.lacaixa.es/estudiossociales/vol23_es.html [Accessed 2 November 2008].

This book combines practice-oriented discussions with conceptual, policy statements and research-based data on inter-generational solidarity and social cohesion. The authors have compiled an impressive book which probes these topics while acknowledging that they cannot provide final conclusions because of the shortage of work in this field. The book has been authored by a group of scholars primarily from Spain and the United States under the leadership of Mariano Sánchez. Some of the names might be familiar to *Ageing & Society* readers. With its international perspective and spotlight on Spain, the book outlines the benefits from inter-generational programmes for all members of society. The focus is on the importance of inter-generational solidarity on the micro-, mezzo- and macro-levels in order to answer elders' needs and the role that inter-generational programmes can play. The goal is to explicate what such programmes are, to identify components of the best programmes and define their benefits within the framework of the United Nations social policies to create 'a society for all ages'. Four themes that provide the conceptual framework are identified: inter-generational solidarity relating to both multi-generational and inter-generational aspects; changing dynamics in societal acknowledgement and support for old age as a period of the life span; the need for social inclusion thus creating 'a society for all ages'; and fostering inter-generational policies.

There are nine chapters, an introduction and conclusion. Mariano Sánchez introduces the volume by setting out the development of the concept of a 'society for all'. It was formulated by the United Nations in 1995, and later expanded to 'a society for all ages' in the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging* in 2002, which elaborated on the multi-generational and inter-generational aspects included in the Plan of Action. The second chapter by Sally Newman and Mariano Sánchez presents and discusses the concept, history, components and models of inter-generational programmes which serve as appropriate instruments for strengthening inter-generational solidarity (between generations). The chapter finishes with an example from such programmes in Spain and an elaborate evaluation of those programmes. It presents the conceptual framework for the development of inter-generational programmes, discussing generations and the relations between them, but should have included earlier the major paradigm of inter-generational solidarity developed by Bengtson and others. The third