

INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HEALTH (IASSH)

Eighth Prof. John Caldwell Memorial Lecture

By
Prof. Purushottam M. Kulkarni
on
“Fertility Decline in India: From an Alarmingly High Level to A Worryingly Low Level.”

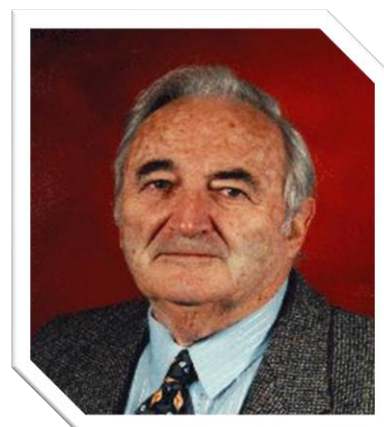
The Eighth Prof. John Caldwell Memorial Lecture was held at the **Biju Patnaik Auditorium** of **Sambalpur University** at **12:00 PM** on **March 5, 2025**, as part of the 20th annual conference of IASSH. The session was chaired by **Prof. C. P. Prakasam** (Former President of IASSH) and co-chaired by **Prof. K. N. M. Raju**. The session began with an introduction by **Prof. T. V. Sekher** about the life and works of Prof. John Caldwell, a renowned demographer who contributed significantly to the field of demography. The guest speaker was **Prof. P. M. Kulkarni** (Former Professor, JNU, New Delhi), who delivered the Eighth Prof. John Caldwell Memorial Lecture on the theme - **“Fertility Decline in India: From an Alarmingly High Level to a Worryingly Low Level.”** Prof. Kulkarni is a distinguished Indian demographer who has contributed to our understanding of population changes in this vast and diverse country through his meticulous analysis and research publications. He is a consultant to various national bodies and international organisations, and is a mentor to many Indian demographers.



In the Eighth Prof. John Caldwell Memorial Lecture, Prof. P. M. Kulkarni discussed India's fertility transition, highlighting its decline from alarmingly high levels in the 1950s (TFR of 5-6) to below-replacement levels (TFR ~2.0) by 2020. He emphasised that while fears of a population explosion have subsided, new concerns have emerged, including an ageing population, a shrinking workforce, and regional demographic imbalances. Prof. Kulkarni warned that persistent level of fertility could lead to long-term population decline, and stressed the need for balanced policies to support ageing populations, workforce sustainability, and family well-being. His lecture concluded with a call for rethinking India's demographic policies in light of future socio-economic challenges. At the conclusion of the lecture, **Prof. Arun Kumar Acharya**, Conference Convener from Sambalpur University, proposed the vote of thanks, expressing sincere appreciation to the guest speaker, chairpersons, and audience for their engagement and valuable contributions to the session. He acknowledged the insightful

discourse on India's fertility transition and its policy implications, emphasising how the lecture shed light on emerging demographic challenges and the need for strategic interventions. The session provided a comprehensive understanding of fertility trends, socio-economic influences, and future population concerns, making it a significant addition to the conference's academic discussions.

The Doyen of Demography, **Prof. John Charles (Jack) Caldwell**, died on 12th March 2016 at the age of 87 in Canberra. He was associated with the Department of Demography of the Australian National University (ANU) for many decades. Caldwell's seminal work included documentation of the role of mother's education in fertility limitation and child mortality decline and the role of circumcision in inhibiting the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa.



He is known for his “wealth flows” theory, which relates demographic transition theory to changes in intergenerational transfers within the family. He has encouraged and mentored many young scholars from India, and a good number of them received their Ph. Ds from ANU under his able guidance. His anthropological demographic work on South India, particularly on marriage, fertility and contraception, received much research attention. Prof. Caldwell was the President of IUSSP (1994-98). At Prof. K.N.M. Raju's initiative, Prof. Caldwell's former students, colleagues, and friends approached the Indian Association for Social Sciences and Health (IASSH) to institute a memorial lecture in his honour. Considering this request, the IASSH instituted the lecture series in memory of the most famous demographer of our times.



Participants at the memorial lecture at Biju Patnaik Auditorium