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Family Planning Programme of India- Need for its Reorientation

THE importance of the study of population in the context of developing countries like ours is well-known. Population scientists and researchers have published important works on this critical area. Unfortunately, one feels, their works have not been duly reflected in the decision of the policy-makers. Consequently, the size and the level of quality of human resources available in the country are proving more disturbing than encouraging in the context of developmental planning.

The quality and quantity of population, strictly speaking, are not inversely related. But, unfortunately for us in India, it has turned out to be the case. The reasons are not far to seek. The norm of small family hardly appeals to the rural masses and even to the weaker and uneducated sections of the rural/urban population. The assumptions which favour raising large family are fallacious both in terms of ethics and economics. But unless the people themselves are not reasonably educated and farsighted, the said fallaciousness is not realised by them. Many people maintain that, given high child mortality rate and equality of ratio between male and female children, they must have reasonable number of male adult and surviving offsprings for purely working, earning or economic considerations. It is not clear to them that intersubstitutivity of labour unit and capital unit does not hold good beyond a point and in the absence of some necessary infrastructural conditions. Also not clear to them are the facts—

- (a) ,, that some adult male offsprings may migrate to other places, preferably towns,
- (b) that they may opt for jobs other than the ones desired by the head of the family,
and
- (c) that due to the large size of the family and the resulting malnutrition in the childhood they may not attain full working capacity, physically or psychologically.

To realise the implications of these and allied contingencies requires a level of education and motivation which can hardly be provided today by the State and voluntary agencies.

* Based on inaugural speech delivered by Honourable Dr. D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Governor of Rajasthan, at the 14th Conference of the Indian Association for the Study of Population.

The didactic method, official propagation of dos and don'ts, yields poor result in the context of birth control, ideal family norm and welfare. Abstract and notional target-setting and trying to realise the same by resorting to coercive method also often prove abortive, if not counter-productive.

It is mainly through education and other supportive measures that the people of reproductive age group have to be motivated, i.e. made effectively conscious of the implications of having small number of children and rightly spaced. Large family means that the younger children, male or female, are likely to receive less attention in terms of affection, education and financial support. In the lower income groups children born of old parents, all things being equal, are likely to live and grow without one of the parents, at times even both the parents. Obligated to live and depend, financially and emotionally, on undependable relations, their attitude towards life and ability to work are not likely to be positive or productive. In their most formative years all children, irrespective of their economic group-affiliation, can receive best out of their home and the parents if the latter are in their most sound and creative age- group, say, 30 to 45.

To look at the picture from the end of the aged parents, without sufficient means to support themselves, is not very cheerful either. Having spent whatever little they had in bringing up the children and marrying away the daughters, they become unloved dependents on the children or grand children at the old age. With the breakdown of the joint family system and weakening of familial bonds the life of the old people proves often very pathetic. The institutions and measures available for old age care in India are totally inadequate in relation to the needs of the time.

Among other things, our manpower planning must address itself to decelerate the growth rate of dysfunctional and quasi-dysfunctional groups of population like the unemployed, underemployed and unemployable ones. Unless the market forces are interfered with, at least partially, determination of the groups who are unemployed, underemployed and unemployable cannot be fairly decided. Deliberate discrimination in terms of religion, caste, and sex, though constitutionally prohibited, is being systematically resorted to. Many sided discrimination with their multiplier effects on the growing population creates social frustration and tension, compounded by political use and misuse of the same. Short-term opportunistic response to this problem may lie in politics and administration but its long-term and strategic response has to be found in the equitable access of the diversely affected weaker sections of the population to the sorts of education and information necessary for their best utilisation in the national interest, taken as a whole.

Unmitigated poverty and unavailable education give rise to not only high rate of population growth but also prove a booster to the multiplication of malfunctioning groups, physically ill or disabled, psychologically diseased or deviant. Uneven economic growth of different parts of the country, in general, and that between the rural and the urban areas, in particular, largely account for large migration of the population to the city areas, raising the percentage of slum-dwelling population of the country to a dangerously high level. This process is accelerated by lack of education and information. Many poor, unemployed and underemployed people, lured by the vague hope of job in the urban areas, leave behind their rural homes only to be landed in unhygienic, and often crime-prone city slums. Uprooted from the village, flotsam and jetsam in the town, many of them prove vulnerable to

anti-social forms of exploitation by the moneyed people. Social mobility, though otherwise welcome in a developing economy and for upcoming industrial culture, turns out to be unproductive, if not harmful, unless elementary education or vocational training is made available to the concerned persons.

The gravity of India's demographic situation may be gathered from the difference between some basic indicators like per *capita* calorie intake, per *capita* cloth consumption, and per *capita* available habitable space as obtained in 1964-65 and the same as they are obtained now in 1989-90, at the end of the Seventh Five Year Plan. In spite of green revolution and much higher GNP, the difference in the indicators shows that in the last quarter of this century the average Indian has less to eat, less to wear, and less space to live in. The green revolution has started greying. Our macro pictures, e.g., aggregative figures of national income and production, and some non-basic indicators of the nation's economic health provide often prove to be misleading. We are advised to look closely into the distributive side of the scenario and the actual economic state of affairs of the intended beneficiaries of the otherwise welcome programmes of rural development and employment generation.

Health of economy and polity are directly related to the quality of manpower available in the country. What we can do or achieve depends much upon what we are, "what we are" basically in terms of nutrition, immunisation, health, education and information.

The quality of life of the people is also shaped by the justice-delivery system of the concerned society and the concerned polity. When less than half of the total electorate remains uneducated, it cannot give rise to and sustain a stable democratic polity. A poorly informed population can hardly sustain either a market economy or a welfare economy. The people, in general, and the weaker ones, in particular, *qua* consumers are bound to be exploited under the growing high- pressured publicity blast. The unorganised sectors *qua* producers are bound to be paid much less than what market can fairly bear. Better organised middlemen and bureaucracy reap more than their due harvest.

In education lies the key to tackle the main problems of manpower planning. Education is to be taken in an extended sense, comprising all its main streams, formal, non-formal and informal. Education is not to be taken as a job voucher to be encashed in the job market. Vocational education and training are undoubtedly important. But in the name of vocationalisation such aspects of human excellence as artistic and ethical must not be underestimated. A just society needs not only a healthy but also a creative population. Creativity depends mainly on the quality of life. Life evolves out of Nature and Mind out of Life. Without preserving Nature we cannot hope to improve the quality either of life or of mind. Vitality and mentality are directly related to Nature, to ecosystem. To understand properly demographic issues we would be well advised to follow the system-theoretic approach which favours to view man and mind as sustained by the quality of life and that of Nature. Nature/culture dichotomy needs no modification but rejection both in thought and action.