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Issues in the Field of Population for the 1990s

THE Indian Association for the Study of Population organised a Workshop in February 1988 in New Delhi on "New Issues in Population Research for Planning and Policy Making" with a view to initiate a dialogue between individual scholars working in the field of population, policy-makers and planners dealing with population issues at the highest levels.

This workshop focused its attention mainly on:

- (a) new issues in population research,
- (b) utilisation of available demographic data,
- (c) teaching, training and research in demography,
- (d) demographic data base,
- (e) population projections, and
- (f) fertility and family planning.

The Workshop underlined the need for regular demographic data at the district and subdistrict levels and of developing relatively inexpensive and simple approach to generate such data. It was also pointed out that, despite numerous conferences, seminars, and workshops, population scientists still do not interact adequately with other social scientists and policy makers (Bose 1989:xvi). Further, need for research on the institution of family on the one hand, and on ecological and epidemiological issues on the other was strongly stressed. It was brought out that specific epidemiological processes which led to spectacular decline in the death rate in Kerala in a situation of widespread hunger and malnutrition, poor environmental sanitation, including poor access to protected water supply, and high rates of morbidity have escaped the attention of demographers and health administrators (Banerji 1989).

The Sample Registration System (SRS) data indicate clearly that the 2 per cent per annum growth rate barrier has not been broken even in the 1980s and to quote Mr. J. R. D. Tata "we

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have reached a threshold which is quite threatening now". Accordingly, the 1991 census may, in fact, show almost an identical population growth rate as was observed during the 1960s and the 1970s. Although there has been a monotonic decline in the death rate, stalling of fertility decline during 1976-1984 (The CBR hovered between 33 and 34 births per 1000 population), implied increase in natural growth rate in several states. Further, the data on age specific marital fertility rates for 15-24 age group for India and several states have shown substantial increases during the past decade or so (Table 1) which, in itself is a serious matter. The office of the Registrar General, India that generates SRS data has hardly made any attempt to trace the social-psychological or biological processes underlying this rise in marital fertility rates, the same is true of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Such explanations as reduction in the birth interval between marriage and first child, urge to complete the family size quickly, etc. are generally advanced. However, these do not seem to explain the rise in marital fertility in the 20-24 age group particularly in the rural areas. In this task social scientists and medical profession have an important role.

TABLE 1 : SRS ESTIMATES OF AGE-SPECIFIC MARITAL FERTILITY RATES IN RURAL AND URBAN INDIA: 1972-1987

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Rural</i>				<i>Urban</i>			
	<i>1972</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1972</i>	<i>1978</i>	<i>1986</i>	<i>1987</i>
15-19	212	181	248	248	221	192	296	299
20-24	313	288	316	318	313	283	314	325
25-29	303	256	246	240	284	214	201	209
30-34	249	178	163	157	201	142	102	103
35-39	170	124	97	95	124	76	49	54
40-44	94	60	49	40	52	28	20	21
45-49	32	31	22	22	16	9	6	6

SOURCE: Premi (1982), Office of the Registrar General India (1988,1989).

Many demographers, researchers and executives in the field of population and family welfare feel that the official programme of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has not made any significant dent and have emphasized the need for evolving alternative strategies for population stabilization.

The question of integrating the population and family welfare programme with the MCH programme including universal immunisation programme (UIP), and with educational programmes—both at formal school level and adult literacy—has been widely discussed over the past several years. It must be admitted that while at the grass root level some efforts have been made to integrate the MCH care with the family welfare programme, their success is suspect, one possible reason for this is the tendency of each department to give priority for its own work. Similarly, there is hardly any serious concern in the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, and the State Directorates of Education for improving the enrolment and retention of girls in the schools despite the

frequent assertions in regard to the positive effects of girls education on fertility during their reproductive ages. Prof. Ashish Bose suggests that energisation of concomitant factors is also essential to yield the desired results. Citing the case of Kerala, he points out to Kerala having the highest unemployment rate and the greatest pressure on rural land, besides strong trade union activity which disallows children to be used as labour. Consequently, Kerala people, acting rationally, regard production of more children as uneconomic (Bose 1990).

In the one-day seminar on "Family Planning in the Nineties: Search for New Approaches" held in New Delhi on 11 July, 1990, Mr. Tata said "Judging from the kind of thinking on population growth the government has adopted, it would seem impossible to succeed. A pertinent issue relates to choice of strategy Overcentralisation negates independence of thinking and action in the States. Today one notices some thinking which favours extensive decentralisation. There is some hope. However, I feel the change should be brought urgently" (Tata 1990). He further said "Mass mobilisation for population stabilisation has not happened. There is still room for purposeful action to motivate the people and to devise methods of making the people think about the population problem" (Tata 1990).

Unfortunately so far very little use of electronic media has been made by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to constantly impress upon the people that family welfare is their own programme. Today 'Krishi-Darshan' has half-an-hour slot at prime time almost every day but not for health, family welfare, child education, etc. This is true also of the 'Vividh Bharati' programme. If Delhi Police, for instance, can think of broadcasting its messages on Vividh Bharati, why not the Department of Family Welfare!

There is also little involvement of private medical practitioners in the government health and family welfare programme for various reasons. Indeed, the government and the Indian Medical Association can work together to evolve an appropriate strategy for this purpose.

To give a practical shape to a composite human development programme including health, family welfare, and education, it is understood that the previous Central Government had a Planning Commission proposal to establish a National Population Commission under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. This proposal should be pursued in right earnest so that many of the problems of coordination of activities of different sectors are overcome.

II

Environmental management, that is, environmental planning, protection, monitoring, assessment, research, education, conservation and sustainable use of resources, is now accepted as a major guiding factor for national development in India. There has been, in recent years, a progressive strengthening of official involvement in environmental management with increased scientific, technical, administrative and legislative back up by the Central and State Governments (Planning Commission 1985 : 385). Environmental problems in India are also the outcome of conditions of poverty and underdevelopment, as also of the negative effects of certain development programmes, badly planned and badly executed. The damage being done to the environment because of the large size of population and its current growth rate necessitates urgent remedial measures. To provide for the basic human needs and to meet the rising aspirations (especially of the poor), a more rapid development is crucial. It may also be pointed out that many environmental problems are

the unintended side effects of development. For example, increased water-logging in canal irrigated areas, increase in waste-lands due to heavy application of chemical fertilizers, rapid deforestation, increased discharge of toxic chemicals and other effluents leading to air and water pollution, etc. are some such consequences (Planning Commission 1985:385).

It is often asserted that the recent pace of urbanisation is responsible for the destruction of the environment, deforestation, air and water pollution, growth of slums, and the like, and needs to be checked. Some, however, put the blame on the tribals and the villagers who destroy forests to meet their demands for firewood, house construction, and the like. Clearly these are not adequate explanations of the situation. If there is any wasteful use of wood in the rural areas, urban areas can not be spared of the blame as in urban areas we indulge in wood-panelling of not only our small offices but the auditoriums, Conference halls, Seminar rooms and the like which could be easily avoided.

It is noteworthy that India's population may not stabilise before it numbers anywhere near 1860 million and urban proportion is likely to go well above 50 per cent of the total in the next eighty years or so. One has to work out viable macro environmental strategies.

At the micro level environmental questions relating to water supply and sanitation are directly linked with public health engineering. Although a national water supply programme was launched in the country in 1954 and progressively larger allocations were made for water supply and sanitation, the progress made in the provision of safe drinking water supply and basic sanitation has not been entirely satisfactory. By March 1980, about 2 lakh villages in the country with a population of around 160 million were yet to be provided with potable water. In hundreds of small and medium towns, water supply and sanitation arrangements were far from adequate. Besides hardship and inconvenience to the poor, especially women and children, in areas where water supply is scarce, inadequate or polluted, there has been colossal wastage of human resources because of morbidity caused by water-borne and water-related diseases which constitute nearly 80 per cent of the public health problem of our country.

The United Nations declared 1980s as the "International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade". During the Seventh Five Year Plan the aim was to provide adequate drinking water facilities for the total population and to provide sanitation facilities to 80 per cent of the urban and, at least, 25 per cent of the rural population.

At the beginning of the Sixth Plan, 2.3 lakh villages were identified as problem villages. Of those, 1.9 lakh villages were provided with at least one source of drinking water during that Plan. Due to recurring drought in several states and failure of tube-wells owing to the lowering of water level etc. the number of problem villages, however, increased from the balance of 39 thousand at the beginning of the Seventh Plan to 2.3 lakh during that Plan itself. By end of 1987, 1.3 lakh villages were covered by potable water supply, leaving balance of a little over one lakh villages without potable water (Premi: 1990 a).

With a view to tackle the drinking water supply problem in rural areas, a Technology Mission on "Drinking Water in Villages and Related Water Management" was set up by the Government of India in August 1986 with the specific objective to cover all residual problem villages by 1990 and to take conservation measures for sustained drinking water supply. To achieve the above objectives, 5 Sub-Missions on (i) eradication of guineaworms, (ii) control of fluorosis, (iii) removal of iron from drinking water, (iv) desalination of water, and (v)

conservation of water and recharging of ground water aquifers, were established along with 50 Mini-Missions. The Eighth Plan hopes to ensure that no village is left without a protected source of drinking water.

As of 31 March, 1985, 57 lakh of rural people (merely one per cent) could claim to have sanitation; in urban areas one-third of the population was covered. A UNDP assisted survey of 210 towns in 22 states and 3 union territories in the early 1980s revealed that 27 per cent of the population had flush latrines, 40 per cent used dry latrines, and 33 per cent made use of open areas in congested urban localities. According to UNDP calculations, even if the Government concentrated exclusively on converting dry latrines into 'pour flush' systems, it would take more than 100 years to achieve the target.

Rural sanitation programme was added to the Minimum Needs Programme from 1987-88 onward and in the 20 point Programme as a component of "Health for All". The Seventh Plan envisaged to provide sanitation facilities to at least 25 per cent of the rural population to improve the quality of life. The programme can gather momentum only with people's participation and through self-help schemes organised by the village community and large scale mobilisation of voluntary efforts.

In respect of sanitation, besides provision of proper latrines, the major problem relates to the drainage system. Most of the water-borne diseases in both rural and urban areas are caused by stagnant water pools and open drainage systems. Much attention has not been paid to this aspect of public health engineering which is as serious as potable water supply and flush or 'pour flush' latrines. Unless the Eighth and the Ninth Plans give priority to the improvement of drainage system in both rural and urban areas, we shall be doing only a lip service to environment protection.

Population-environment interface, although very substantial and significant, has so far received little attention in India. Sadly, the demographers have not paid enough attention to the population-ecosystem-environment issues. For example, there is very significant and substantial impact of multi-purpose river valley projects on the population. The pre-construction phase involves ousting of people from areas that are going to be submerged and their rehabilitation at other places; the construction phase brings a large army of skilled construction workers, the local people are at best employed as unskilled workers at hardly subsistence wages; and in the post construction phase the canal irrigated areas are taken over by migrant agriculturists because the local people hardly have any expertise in assured irrigation cultivation. Thus, a large multi-purpose river valley project has the potential of making tremendous impact on local population. Besides some project reports, we do not have systematic studies by demographers. This is a grey area and has potential not only from the viewpoint of migration impact but the process also affects fertility, morbidity and mortality patterns. Often large areas come under water-logging in these projects. This leads to certain diseases and affects adversely the health of the people living in these areas.

Similarly, opening of new railway lines, construction of new roads, particularly in the border areas, and setting up of large scale industries in the hitherto backward areas, etc. have substantial short term and long term impact on the population and economy of areas covered by such projects. These are important population-environment issues, and need in-depth studies by population scientists.

III

Labour force has two components — workers and the unemployed, that is, those who are currently not working but are seeking work or, at least, are available for work. To have a reliable and valid estimate of the labour force, it is necessary to estimate these components correctly. In India we have, however, continued experimenting with various definitions of work and unemployment even after 12 decades of census taking and four decades of conducting National Sample Surveys wherein employment and unemployment surveys have been dominant.

In the earlier rounds the NSS experimented with various concepts and definitions of work. In the 27th round (1972-73) the NSS collected data on labour time disposition of each individual, which helped concretize the work concept. The NSS has, however, been using 'usual status' concept as well as 'current status' concept (with one week as reference period) to measure the total size of the work force. The two concepts give somewhat different estimates of workers.

The 1961 population census replaced the earlier 'income approach' of defining a person as worker by the 'work approach'. A person was considered a worker in activities such as cultivation, dairying and household industry, if he/she had some regular work of more than one hour a day throughout the greater part of the working season. In the case of regular employment in any trade, profession, service or business, the basis of work was satisfied if a person was employed during any of the 15 days preceding the day on which the household was enumerated. Any woman who, in addition to her household work, engaged herself in work for sale or wages, or in domestic service for wages was treated as a worker (Srivastava 1983:280-81).

The 1971 Census divided all persons into two broad streams—workers and non-workers—according to the main activity of a person. A person was defined as a worker who mainly participated in any economically productive work for pay or profit by his/her physical or mental input and also included effective supervision and direction of work. In the case of regular work like trade, business, profession or service, the basis of work was satisfied if the person had worked on any day during the preceding week (Srivastava 1983: 278-79). The impact of this change in definition of a worker between 1961 and 1971 was that while the population of the country increased from 439 million in 1961 to 548 million in 1971, the absolute size of the work force declined from 188 million in 1961 to 180 million in 1971.

In the 1981 Census, the total population was classified into three broad categories — main workers, marginal workers, and non-workers. A question was asked of every person if he or she had worked for pay or profit at any time during the one year preceding the census. A further question was asked if the person had worked for more than six months or less for him/her to be classified as main or marginal worker. While adopting this scheme in the 1981 Census, it was thought that the estimate of main workers in that census would be comparable with that of the 1971 Census, and the estimate of the total workers (main plus marginal) would be comparable with that of the 1961 Census.

Data in regard to the crude work participation rates (WPRs) by sex and rural urban residence for 1961, 1971 and 1981 show that the increase in rural female WPR in 1981 when the marginal workers were added was very substantial (45 per cent) indicating a very large proportion of them worked in peak agricultural seasons (Premi 1990 b: 106) (see also Table 2).

A comparison of the main workers of 1971 and 1981 also indicated a slight decline in male WPR while the female WPR increased substantially during the same period. The increase in female WPR was proportionately greater in rural areas than in urban areas.

TABLE 2: WORK PARTICIPATION RATES OF INDIA'S POPULATION BY SEX AND RURAL/URBAN RESIDENCE, 1961-1981

Year	Rural		Urban		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1961	58.2	31.4	52.4	11.1	57.1	26.0
1971	53.5	13.1	48.8	6.6	52.5	11.9
1981 (a)	52.6	16.0	48.5	7.3	51.6	14.0
1981 (b)	53.8	23.2	49.1	8.3	52.7	19.8

Notes: 1. The 1981 figures exclude Assam where no census could be conducted due to disturbed conditions. 2. The WPRs for 1981 marked (a) relate to main activity only, while those marked (b) cover both main and marginal workers.

SOURCE: Premi (1990 b: 107).

The WPRs of both males and females for 1981, based on main and marginal workers together, were substantially lower than those of 1961. The decline was more in rural areas. As the 1981 definition of workers was probably more liberal than that of 1961, the decline in WPR can be attributed to a structural change in society, which partly involved greater enrolment of children and young adults in schools, and partly reduced demand of women and children in the work force.

As all able-bodied males above a certain age must work to eke out a living for them and their dependents, it is the inclusion or exclusion of women and children that accounts for major variations in WPR. If one considers population in the 15-59 age group the rural female WPR (based on main plus marginal workers) in 1981 varied from 10.9 per cent in Punjab to 73 per cent in Nagaland. The Indo-Gangetic plains covering the states of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal had low female WPR. In contrast, the southern and western states (except Kerala) formed another group of comparatively high female WPRs. The rural female WPRs in the age-group 15-59 years in Manipur, Meghalaya and Nagaland in 1981 were above 70 per cent which reflected the importance of females in those cultures.

A close scrutiny of the estimates of unemployment also presents the same difficulties as faced in measuring work force. For example, the estimate of unemployment for population aged 5 and above as of March 1985 on the basis of NSS 32nd round was 13.9 million but on the basis of 38th round again following the same usual status approach was only 9.2 million (Planning Commission 1985:113). Obviously the change in the concept of unemployment is largely responsible for this difference. Further, a small exercise carried on Annexure 5.2 of the *Seventh Five Year Plan* giving the stock of educated manpower and those economically active among them indicates that the proportion of economically active population among the educated people was expected to remain almost the same (64.6 per cent in 1985) and (64.4 per cent in 1990) over the Plan period whereas one should expect a rise in the educated employment with expansion of employment opportunities.

The labour markets in the rural and urban areas are directly related with the structure of employment. Recently researchers, politicians and others have suggested development of industries in the rural areas. The Village and Khadi Industries Commission has, over the years, made serious efforts to bring more and more traditional and modern industries into the rural areas. Under the backward area development programme and the programme of "Rural Industrial Estates" efforts have been made for changing the structure of rural employment

It was expected that these and similar efforts would reduce the dependence on agriculture. As is well known, there has, however, been no change in this regard. Ever since 1900,

TABLE 3 : INDUSTRIAL CLASSIFICATION OF WORKERS IN RURAL INDIA BY SEX, 1951-1981

Industrial category	Percentage distribution									
	Male					Female				
	1951	1961	1971	1981(a)	1981(b)	1951	1961	1971	1981(a)	1981(b)
Cultivators	62.3	61.1	56.0	55.2	55.0	49.5	58.9	32.6	37.1	40.8
Agricultural Labourer	17.7	15.8	25.2	24.0	24.2	33.6	24.8	54.4	50.2	47.8
Livestock, Forestry, Hunting Plantation, Orchards, and Allied Activities	2.9	3.2	2.5	2.5	2.6	4.0	1.9	2.6	1.8	1.8
Mining and Quarrying	-	-	0.4	0.5	0.5	-	-	0.3	0.3	0.2
Household Industry	-	5.7	3.1	2.9	2.9	-	7.0	3.6	3.8	3.6
Manufacturing in other than HH Industry	6.0	1.9	2.5	3.8	3.8	4.9	0.7	1.6	2.1	2.0
Construction	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.2	1.2	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.6	0.5
Trade and Commerce	3.0	2.6	2.8	3.3	3.3	1.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0
Transport, Storage & Communications	0.8	0.8	1.0	1.4	1.4	0.2	n	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other Services	6.6	8.0	5.7	5.3	5.2	5.5	5.1	3.4	2.9	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Notes: (a) Distribution of main workers, (b) distribution of main plus marginal workers. Figures for 1981 for India exclude Assam.

n = negligible (Less than 0.05).

SOURCE : *Census of India 1961, 1962; Census of India 1971, 1974:4-7; Census of India 1981, 1987 (a): 238-241; Census of India 1981, 1987 (b): 376-79.*

about 68 per cent of the work force has been engaged in primary activities, particularly in agriculture, about 9 to 10 per cent in manufacturing and about 15-18 per cent in services (Krishnamurty 1982: 222). In rural areas, the dependence on agriculture has remained above 80 per cent and has continued to be so right up to 1981. Although the data from 1951 to 1981 are not strictly comparable, but assuming that the definitional changes did not affect the proportionate distribution of workers into broad industrial categories, one finds that the dependence on agriculture in rural India actually increased during this period. Unlike in agriculture there was a sharp decline in proportion of both male and female workers in other services between 1961 and 1981 (Table 3); probably a large proportion of white collar workers commute from the cities and nearby towns to rural areas for work. Similarly, the proportion of workers engaged in manufacturing industries, particularly in household manufacturing declined sharply between 1961 and 1981. There was some increase in manufacturing other than at household level, but this increase could not compensate the decline in proportion of workers engaged in household industry.

As regards 'right to work' the first question is "from which age this right should start and at what age should it end"? Selection of the cutting points would mean inclusion or exclusion of several millions of people having 'right to work'. Several sources, namely, (a) the National Sample Survey, (b) Employment Exchanges, and (c) the population census provide data of different types on unemployment. In this regard, the information on the age structure of the job seekers, their educational attainment and the identification of areas of high unemployment is very crucial from the viewpoint of creating new employment opportunities in different regions of the country.

The basic purpose of a welfare state in stressing on 'right to work' is to get each and every household above the 'poverty line'. There are lakhs of destitute families in the country, many of whom are women-headed households or where children below 15 are household heads. As demographers we should quantify this information at least at the state level, if not at the district and lower levels. On the part of the State, the first responsibility is to guarantee their welfare which could probably be achieved by providing employment to at least one (preferably two) person in such households for 300 or more days in a year.

IV

Recently, the National Commission on Urbanisation made very comprehensive recommendations considering the current urban demographic scene and the urban future. The Commission noted that, by the year 2001, the urban population would increase by 140 to 150 million over that of 1981, and of this growth, at least 60 million will accrue to the existing towns by way of natural increase. Accordingly, the capacity of the present urban settlements to absorb the natural growth has to be built on a high priority basis.

The Commission identified 329 cities all over the country as "Generators of Economic Momentum" (GEM), of which 77 were called as "National Priority Cities" and the rest (252) as "State Priority Cities". The Commission also identified 49 "Spatial Priority Urbanisation Regions" (SPURs) to indicate the specific regions which need a thrust on priority basis. It

was believed that the development of state capitals and other administrative centres, especially those in backward areas, would diversify employment into industry, trade and commerce, and other services. The Commission was against the policy of locating new industries in backward areas so as not to forcibly induce investment which lack infrastructure and where concessions are likely to be misused but to develop the identified GEM cities and towns further. It may be necessary to work out a consistent, logical and systematic policy of urban development which can be sustained over time.

The Commission has said that the main cities in the country have been the generators of national wealth but their social and physical infrastructure has been totally inadequate to serve the needs of a burgeoning population. The Commission assigned topmost national priority to not only saving the national cities but also to help them revive their economies. The Commission recommended to increase the share of urban development in the plan outlays from about 4 per cent to 8 per cent, with half coming from the central sector.

The issues in the field of urbanisation and migration begin from the question as to how the additional urban population will be housed, jobs made available to them and necessary, even minimum, infrastructure generated to save the major cities from crumbling down? How the distress migration to metropolitan cities could be checked and diverted to nearby towns and cities?

The future urbanisation strategy would have to ensure adequate investment in selected growth centres and selected regions which would provide for self-sustaining economic growth and offer employment avenues to the surplus population. A major factor in this growth, particularly of industrial growth, will be availability of electric power, for example, its easy supply position in Bangalore attracted several large scale industries.

I have tried to touch on some of the major concerns of the population scientists for the current decade. The agenda is clearly not exhaustive, my plea to fellow professionals is only an attempt towards diversifying their concern in regard to population issues.

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