

# Essay on Population Stabilization

*INDIA possesses 2.4 per cent of the total land area of the world but it has to support about 16 per cent of the total world population. With a fast-expanding population, education acquires a vastly different role. Leaders have talked about the perils of population explosion. But there has never been any real effort at changing the nature of education in India to cope with the threatening dangers that we are swimming in. The decennial increase in population from 1991-2001 is 18.1 crores, equivalent to the total population of Canada, France and Germany. We can't afford such an increase in population.*

The Indian population can roughly be divided into three broad categories. Firstly, there are the largely ignorant masses of illiterate and semi-literate people who remain unconscious of the alarming consequences of their multiplications and additions. They are even not aware of various modes of family planning. Some of them not seen or heard about the condom and how it is used. Secondly, there are the educated but communally inclined who may be able to think, but their thought may never go beyond their personal, religiously or socially fashioned ideas of what the ideal size of a family ought to be: the male child is a vital necessity to continue the lineage of the family or clan. For them, using any mode of family planning is unreligious, unethical and immoral.

Then there is the third category: the urbane class with the elite class at its apex. This category is well conscious of the necessity of family planning, and they keep their family within limits.

In the early 1950s in India, women gave birth to an average of six children. The country faced a demographic time bomb and India was the

first country to attempt to control population growth.

Half a century later, the birth rate has been halved, but the massive population is still the number one problem facing India. With the population still increasing by a figure equal to the entire population of Australia every year, it is accepted India's attempts to stabilise it have already failed.

Aasthah is nearly three and a half. She lives in the suburbs of Delhi with her parents and grandparents and she is very famous. When she was born in the year 2000, she became the official one-billionth Indian.

Despite government attempts to check India's population growth, since Aasthah was born, it has continued its inexorable climb to about bn today. This has happened most rapidly in areas like the so-called Hindi Belt – the central, predominantly Hindi-speaking States. In the small town of Dadri in Uttar Pradesh, down an alleyway off the main street and behind some shops, is the home of Mohammed Omar and his wife, Aasiyah Begum. This couple has not taken the population control message to heart. They have 24 children. Aasiyah Begum has given birth to 29 children she thinks, but five have died.

She says, "Birth control is against her religion – Islam" and adds, "It's a sill to have an operation. No prayers would be said at my grave when I die. Only people with serious health problems can have operations."

Population expert Usha Rai says, "India still lacks a coherent approach to holding back the population explosion and knowledge about basic birth control techniques is woeful." She says: "There are lots of people who haven't heard of the condom. I know of a person in Meghalaya who said he'd never heard of condoms, he didn't know how

they were used; he didn't know where to get them from. This is a major problem in India."

Our policymakers should first and foremost be conscious that the needs of our education are different from the needs of the more technologically advanced nations if for no other reason than the fact that the latter are not baffled by the hazards of over-population. Whereas they need literacy and education in the general sense of the terms, we need to cope with the mess we have procreated. Our education must be tailored to help our people learn to think independently and prepare for the particular kind of plight they have been born into.

A variety of quick-fix Western 'scientific' techno-managerial solutions have been devised to control the fertility of the proliferating masses of the world. This highly coercive strategy is being operated through the health departments of the developing countries against the 'eligible' female. This is strongly promoted by international agencies with massive funding for such programs through the national governments. This has nevertheless failed to achieve the targets.

In the absence of a concomitant desire to promote social and economic development and welfare, the poor realize that it is children who provide them the only source of love and economic security in an increasingly hostile world. The increasing population, despite such single-minded coercive programs for control of their fertility, shows how a program designed by the 'haves' to serve their own interests cannot inveigle the poor who devise their own methods for evading what they know goes against their overall welfare.

Forceful implementation, especially against the male during the emergency, even led to the overthrowing of a government. This has

resulted in more benign-sounding strategies and programs like IUD, immunization, MTP, Maternal and Child Health, laparoscopic tubectomy, 'nonscalpel vasectomy, Norplant injectable contraceptives, and vaccines, combined with crude incentives and disincentives for their acceptance. The change of name of these basically medical solutions for what is essentially a social problem into heavily externally funded 'Family Planning' and 'Family Welfare' programs has not only failed to entice the poor to control their fertility but has also affected the Primary Health Care program through which it is carried out. In the process, it has also disrupted the medical and health services which serve the needs of the poor.

No amount of mere changing the names of the programmes or of the projects/ activities can convince them that there is a change of heart. This can be achieved only by visible improvement in the fields like education, health and rural development. The close association between poverty, family size, and the population is observed not only in underdeveloped and developing countries at present but was also observed in countries like the UK during the early days of the industrial revolution. Over-production is nature's method for ensuring the survival of the species. This is also demonstrated in our northern states as compared to those of the South. It is also seen within each state between the reproduction rate of the rich and poor, which is concealed by aggregate statistics.

The intimate connection between the education of the female and family size can be achieved at an economic level that is within the reach of most countries of the world. Education of the female is desirable not only for population control but even more so for its own sake as it initiates a cascade of other social and economic changes. The care of much of the health and medical functions including family size lies within her capacity and can be achieved more cost-effectively in an accessible and humane manner. Health and

medical care can serve only as a vehicle for reaching technology to those who desire to voluntarily limit the size of their family.

The regulation of family size cannot be imposed as a national programme by political fiat. Their role is to create the climate and opportunity for demand and utilization of reproductive technology. Overall, social and economic development is the prerequisite for the control of the population. This is feasible well within our existing resources if these are distributed in a reasonably equitable manner. The prime requirement for this is the political will, which is unfortunately dominated by a selected few.

In Feb. 2000, the Union Cabinet approved the national policy on population, in order to promote the stabilisation of the country's population. The merits of this policy are that it is more broad-based than the earlier policies. It stressed the need for the empowerment of the poor to check population growth. The policy document of 2000, asserts that since 33% of the elected Panchayat seats are reserved for women, so representative committees of Panchayat headed by elected woman representative should be formed to promote a gender-sensitive, multi-sectorial agenda for population stabilization, that will think, plan and act locally, and support nationally.

Two days "Colloquium on Population Policy Development and Human Rights" held in New Delhi in January 2003, adopted a declaration, which called for population policies to be a part of the overall sustainable development goals. The declaration noted with deep concern that the policies of certain State governments reflect a coercive approach through the use of incentives and disincentives. It emphasised that in a situation where the status of women was low and preference for a son was prevalent, coercive measures further undermine the status of women and resulted in harmful practice such as female infanticide or female foeticide.

It is necessary that people should realize the importance of population control vis-a-vis the development of the country. They must understand the simple logic, that the limited resources of a family are ideally shared when there are only two children.

We should breed in our children the fear of overcrowding by coining new maxims like “two is a crowd” instead of “two for joy”. We can say “one for joy”. A phrase like “crowded, cabined, cribbed and confined” would also help. Similarly, a nursery rhyme like “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe, she had so many children, she didn’t know what to do,” should be more useful than an ordinary one like “Where are you going to my pretty maid ?”

The more the number of children, the greater the strain on the family budget. So every person, every family needs to participate in the Population Stabilisation movement. Every citizen must share the concern that all our precious gains earned become losses if there are more mouths to feed. It is an imperative duty of every citizen to interact with those in their villages or slum or surroundings, that everyone stands to reduce it to smaller families, norms are adopted, accepted, voluntarily, willingly, happily.