

Family Planning in India

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Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister, has given free hand to the Indian ruling classes in their campaign against the Indian babies. Under the unofficial, yet distinctly recognizable, leadership of Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau, wife of India's prominent banker and diplomat, the male and female representatives of wealth and high society gather around the banner of 'The Family Planning Association'. With official blessings they hold meetings and distribute their propaganda with the avowed purpose of pressing for more drastic measures against over-population.

Progress has been made during the last ten years; from moderate beginnings with the advocacy of the 'safe period', the Association and the Health Ministry went on to endorse artificial contraceptives and sterilization, so that today there is a growing demand for legalized abortion. No Tibetan crisis or Chinese threat is capable of turning these people's minds from their single goal—the decimation of future Indian generations.

Justification is provided by the humanitarian and patriotic motives that inspire their relentless struggles against the natural expansion of the race. Arguments are invoked about world peace, which is to be promoted by their efforts; others claim that population limitation is vindicated on religious grounds because it prevents millions of souls 'cascading into perdition'.

For many it has already become a way of life, and an end in itself that no longer requires any theoretical or practical justification. As one of the ladies at a recent meeting of the Family Planning Association summed it up: 'We are on the lookout for children everywhere. Where there are children there must be parents. Where there are parents there is a need for family planning'. This policy, which in its stark simplicity is birth restriction, or contraception, has been called 'The New Revolution'.

Other countries respond in various ways to the ideas and recommendations of birth control. While in Russia, for example, Mr Kruschew constantly makes his plea for large families, communist intellectuals in India wholeheartedly embrace the cause of family

planning. Working with the Family Planning Association and its capitalistic American and Indian sponsors, they go out of their way to promote sterilization. This was especially notable during their tenure of office in Kerala, which seems to point to the fact that leading Communists in India share the fears of the westernized upper classes in the face of a real or imaginary threat on the part of the 'teeming millions' in rural India. In other words they are opportunists with a basically reactionary outlook.

Recently I accompanied a group belonging to the Planning Association to a village near Delhi where representatives met the village *panchayat* with a view of passing on to the sons of the soil the benefit of their urban erudition. Even a limited knowledge of Hindi was sufficient to understand when an attractive socialite in an elegant sari expounded to the village councillors her concise philosophy: 'With less children around, you have more food and more work'.

'Less children—more food and work'. This is the simplified economics-in-a-nutshell for the use of society ladies, so current in India today. Anyone who has worked on the fields under a blazing Indian sun, as I did not long ago in a voluntary work camp in Rajasthan, must realize that in such conditions a large family, far from being a liability, is actually a valuable asset. It enables the farmer to share the strenuous work on his land with the members of his household. Indeed, in the long run the increase of his family forces the farmer to intensify and extend the area of his production. With more mouths to feed at home he will need also more manufactured goods in exchange for his own agricultural produce.

In this way the growth of village population increases the food supply for the entire community and provides additional employment in commerce and industry. Incidentally, according to figures computed by an Indian economic journalist, India, far from suffering on account of an absolute food shortage, had a surplus of 23.3 million tons of food grains during the years from 1950 to 1958.¹

What then is likely to happen to the Indian economy in general, and to village life in particular, once the adherents of the 'New Revolution' have their way? One of the arguments in favour of family limitation is that it allows parents to give their two or three children a better education. The Indian Government has indeed taken commendable measures to extend educational facilities to the most remote villages. But the teachers are products of Indian city life who instil, perhaps unwittingly, in their pupils ideas stemming from their urban nostalgia.

¹'Yama' in *Hindusthan Standard*, 10 January 1960.

The less numerous but better educated village children of tomorrow will therefore find the toil on family farms far too arduous because they will no longer have several brothers to share the work. On leaving school they will seek high school education, then try to find jobs as 'office babus' in distant cities. Thus the probable result of family planning is a reduction in the *per capita* foodstuff produced in the country and an aggravation—not an alleviation—of overcrowding and unemployment in the cities.

What then are the facts and figures that induce the masters of independent India to resort to such desperate and dangerous measures? Do Indians truly 'breed like rats', as it is alleged from time to time? Between 1931 and 1941 India's increase of population was 14.3 per cent. Between 1941 and 1951 the rate dropped to 13.4 per cent.² The rise during recent years was not due to the increase in birth rate but to a decrease in the death rate owing to a successful fight against disease.

The estimated population of India at present is 415 millions. According to the calculations by the Central Planning Board the optimum population of the country would be 600 million, a figure that for obvious reasons has not been widely circulated by India's birth control-minded ruling élite. Even the most pessimistic forecasts do not expect India to reach this figure before 1976,³ and sixteen years may bring many important new developments affecting food and population problem in this age of unending surprises.

Although India's 'new class' boasts of being the pioneer of state-sponsored population limitation, approving references are often made to the post-war example in Japan, where the natural fertility of the people has been reduced by half during the past years. But little attention is paid to the indication that the arrested growth of that country's population has failed to bring about the expected millenium, or that legalized abortion, and the consequent decline in the respect for human life, may have led to the considerable rise in the number of murders committed in Japan since the end of the war.

Again, the reduction in the number of children, leading to a sharp increase in the percentage of people in the working age-groups at the expense of the non-working consumers, has already cast the spell of a looming economic unbalance and the threat of a new type of unemployment.

²*Family Planning*: Dr T. C. Dewan, New India Press, New Delhi, 1957.

³*Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-income Countries*. Ansley J. Coale & Edgar M. Hoover, Princeton University Press, 1958.

After having examined the pros and cons of birth control, a Japanese population expert ended a long article with the following conclusion: 'The undeniable fact is that we have experienced neither economic development nor social progress at a time when population growth comes to a halt.'⁴

Will it be any different in India? It would certainly seem that, for all the justifiable doubts regarding its ends and means, no other socio-political measure has evoked such an eager interest among westernized Indians and their foreign associates as has birth control.

There are several reasons for this. Family planning dangles in front of its advocates a short cut to individual and national welfare and happiness. It puts a premium on selfishness, and sanctions pleasure without responsibility; it confers the exhilarating sense of power over existence and non-existence. In other words, it panders to the human greed for divine might that manifested itself by the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and by the building of the Tower of Babel.

⁴See 'Population Growth Factors in Economic Developments', by Ryozauro Minami, Professor of Chuo University in *Asian Affairs*, the English language publication of the Japanese *Asia Kyokai*; October 1959.

A Policy for Economic Growth

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The discussion of the Government's incomes policy has overshadowed discussion of the setting up of the National Economic Development Council. This is hardly surprising. Every individual is not only very concerned with what goes into his pay packet, he is also fully aware of what is happening to it. Economic growth, inflation and a host of other factors, may have just as great a bearing on his standard of living as the amount of cash he actually takes home, but, for all that, it is a less obvious bearing. Nevertheless, the question of economic growth is a vital one for each individual, and for the community as a whole. Moreover, it is a question that is intimately connected with the subject of incomes policy. In the present article, economic growth will be considered under