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### Women and Indian Population

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A saying in search of attribution is 'Everyone complains about Indian population but no one does anything about it' which ofcourse ignores the analysis, investigations, statistics and projections made by well-meaning but ineffective foundations and world bodies. An element of solace can be found in the fact that such studies are possible and permitted.

A charge of lack of involvement, not to mention superficiality, can be (MANDANI) made about the proliferating literature. Mahmood Madani's 'The Myth of population control' created perhaps under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation is replete with information about Hindu mores and traditions and can only be compared to a study by a Jewish professor of the prevalence of say, slavery in Arabia. Studies of the problem are made in ignorance of the national proclivity for amiable anticipation (meaning an eagerness to be in readiness in advance with the reply expected to please) which was well-sensed and exploited by British administrators. When Chou En Lai and Brezhnev were welcomed with the same fervour as President Eisenhower and Queen Elizabeth, the programmed response irritated the NATO Countries. A similar schooled response ~~reveal how~~ little truth there is, ~~when~~ the words ~~are~~ "One more mouth no doubt, but look two hands' in despite of even common sense about the relative uselessness of the second hand. No woman, even uneducated and tradition-bound can forget the agony of child-bearing (though she will) though she will refer to the frailty of vows of continence made during labour. That apart, children are sweated, underpaid and illtreated at work and what the child brings home can hardly meet the upkeep.

The reluctance of Indian women to adopt family planning can be exaggerated. Infanticide (especially of female children) was common in India and may not have been completely eradicated. According even to the <sup>recent</sup> studies illegal abortions terminate nearly 20% of the pregnancies (and cause in addition a sizeable reduction in the number of women of child-bearing age) and economists and sociologists have not ceased to harp on the continued prevalence of the belief that prolonged lactation prevents conception.

Unfortunately the investigations rely on the field experiences of Indian social workers, who generally belong to affluent strata and are based on cities and towns and who do not care to live for any length of time in the villages with the poor. (even without the obligation of identification with the poor which disappeared with Ghandhiji's assassination as did continence and other virtues) No effort is apparent at amelioration of the condition of the poor who continue to live in wretched, inadequate hovels without any protected water-supply or even toilet-privacy. They are at the mercy of the money-lender and the shoddy merchant who force credit and meretricious goods on them and impose an economic slavery, no less cruel for being insidious. The woman at work has yet to adopt the suitable mode of dress that will make it easy for her to go about her business. She fights shy of even using a bicycle, let alone taking to other labour saving aids and devices.

Yet, the resistance of the Indian woman to advice on birth-control continues to amaze the world! A measure of culpability can be sustained if the

methods recommended are not offensive to feminine sensitivity. Even the publicity about the safe period had not reached the helpless in the villages, fanfare in cities notwithstanding.

That leads to an aspect of evaluation, which needs attention. Appropriation of funds and statements of expenditure are not exactly identical with achievements, <sup>as</sup> the U.S. learned to its dismay in Indochina. The money earmarked for population control is meagre in comparison with what is available for masquerading <sup>es</sup> of keeping <sup>un</sup> with the Joneses. <sup>But</sup> The result is the same. Money is frittered away in unwanted jobs, imported equipment foreign jaunts and external publicity.

The purported ~~excuse~~ <sup>her</sup> of the Indian woman that the man is opposed to any curtailment of his prerogative deserves investigation. The London Times sometime ago carried a picture of a Gowda family, the patriarch posing with numerous members of his family ( a few adopted ad hoc no doubt), convincing itself and its readers of the intractable nature of the problem. About the same time, the announcement of the death of a political leader was made and the fact that 32 sons and daughters ~~survived~~ <sup>survived</sup> him hardly caused a ripple of surprise. The ~~handing-over~~ <sup>handing-over</sup> of the Government to demonstrate its bonafides of secularism to Muslims, by allowing them non-secular latitude and to continue polygamy, zenana (with its inevitable horrors of concubinage and slavery) provides non-muslims with an argument about being crowded out which is not answered by the feeble 'population makes everyone poor in the country.' Besides there is no evidence that the studies in Indian population include statistics of utilisation of gynecological <sup>and lying-in facilities</sup> even in Government hospitals which will be relevant. Such misgivings are not dismissed out of hand when they relate to Cypress or Ulster. Besides, the prophet encouraged polygamy, etc., in a region endemic with homosexuality and might have had second thoughts about their adoption in non-Arabic countries where the problem was different.

Vital statistics themselves are suspect if the base year is taken to be 1947. Practically all Hindus migrated into India from Pakistan and the refugees from Bangladesh of the 71-73<sup>3</sup> war are yet to return to Bangladesh. Besides, infiltration into Assam continues unabated. Thanks to the sanctity of purdah, statistics are often hypothetical and tendentious. In the circumstances even the Government of India could not be persuaded that the Bihari Muslim in Bangladesh are Biharis and deserve welcome into India. /

<sup>14/p</sup> Linking the problem of population with the standard of living is escapist; the illogicality of post hoc ergo propter hoc will be obvious. Improvement of the standard of living has not even mitigated inequalities between the sexes in oil-rich countries. A more likely <sup>Con-</sup> <sup>a</sup> sequence is evasion of responsibility and search of pleasure and the ~~subsequent~~ <sup>subsequent</sup> anxiety to limit the family size. Abandoning active measures for population control and insisting on raising the standards of living ( by the unilateral demand for equitable distributing resources ) is a tacit acceptance of a defeat X. More effective will be a change in sexual mores, not at all inappropriate in the land of Vatsyana.

Billions are earmarked for recondite research, which confirms the

anthropological surmise about master-y by naming but cuts are made in the meagre allotment for population control work. An obsession with the need to prove that that the Indian Doctor is as good as any, <sup>who</sup> has done away with an intermediate grade of medical personnel would have been of invaluable help for population control whereas money is wasted in promoting systems of medicine which do not submit themselves to statistical discipline and are not easily distinguished from quackery. Facile proposals are made about raising the legal age of marriage without any examination whether the existing ban on marriage of children has found general acceptance. Even disincentives like disqualifying a woman employee from maternal leave after the second child denying free gynecological and lying-in facilities for the third and successive children, Changing the employment rules to ensure that employees will remain single upto a certain age in Government and Government assisted enterprises, and even abolishing fare concession in Railways etc., for the young, are considered harsh and inhuman though <sup>increase of population</sup> ~~such consideration~~ <sup>Even</sup> might lead to harsher living conditions. The propaganda about 'one mouth two helping hands' <sup>can be made to</sup> ~~will~~ collapse if child-labour and compulsory education laws are enforced.

feeble but explosive

The potentialities for disaster are obviously great but the greater the magnitude of the trouble the more compelling the challenge. I suggest that the idea of a frontal onslaught be abandoned and that a pilot project which can limit its scope to a distinct region and preferable to an identifiable community be taken up. After a period results can be evaluated and a shift of emphasis be made. <sup>if called for.</sup> The advantage of selecting a tradition-bound community needs no explanation and the advantage of concentrating resources may not be given up. Opportunities are available in well demarcated regions in the Southern part of the sub-continent. A band of women workers from countries without axes to grind may yet ~~may~~ by their endeavour demonstrate that what is practicable is not negligible. The example is bound to transform the 'beggar my neighbour' complacency which passes for policy.

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