

Population trends in India

Synopsis: Rapid rise in population is a major problem being faced by India. It negates all our growth and developments. Effective family planning and population stability are urgently beaded. The present fertility rate is quite high and must be brought down drastically. Illiteracy and poverty are two great hindrances in family planning. The States with low literacy have the highest birth rates. Literate women make good use of family planning and birth-control devices. Two0children family norm should be enforced strictly. There should be more incentives and dis-incentives to oblige people to take up family planning on a large scale to reverse the prevailing and alarming population trends in the country.

The prevailing population trends in India are quite disturbing as they show how fast the country is hurtling towards

Demographic disaster which in its turn is bound to generate other crisis. The problems of population explosion is one of the major problems being faced by the country. At the rate of 31 new babies every minute we are adding 45,000 persons daily to our population. Thus, every year we have nearly 16 million more people to feed, educate, shelter and find jobs for. Obviously, the population bombs in ticking away and we are doing nothing serious and effective in the matter. It negates all our economical growth and development because sustained progress and development are impossible without stability in the rate of population growth. Today's growth rate in population is about 2 per cent which will take India's population to 7,000 million mark soon.

There has been decline n India's population growth rate of 2.32 per cent of 1961-71 to 2.23 per cent per acumen in 1981-91. But this decline is not enough and demands some urgent and effective if not drastic measures in respect of family planning and population stability. The country's present total fertility rate (TFR) is 3.5 which is quite high and it was targeted to be brought down to 2.1 by the end of the century but according to recent report of the Registrar General of India it would remain around 2.5 per cent even by the year 2016. This reflects how miserably we have failed in family planning programmes and population-control. China has considerably brought down its FTR and population growth rate but India has been left far behind. China is today the most populous country but in coming year it would be replaced by India at the present rate of growth of 2 per cent per annum or average of 3 children per woman. The

fertility rate is even higher in U.P., Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Punjab. The total fertility rate is the highest in UP at 5.5 per cent.

Today India's estimated population is over 953 million. According to the decadal 1991 census it was 846.3 million. It makes India the second largest populous country in the world. Sixteen per cent of the world's populations lives in India with only 2.42 per cent of the total world area. Population-wise Uttar Pradesh is the largest State with 16.44 per cent population followed by Bihar with 10.21 per cent and Maharashtra with 9.33 per cent. Bombay is the most populated city with 12.60 million population followed by Calcutta and Delhi with 11.02 and 8.42 million population respectively. These facts and figures underline the failure of our strategy to stabilize and limit the population to manageable limits.

Literacy is one of the major factors that help in stabilizing the growth rate of population. It has been opined that a 40 per cent literacy rate is the minimum threshold level for an economic take off in a country. Illiteracy and lack of education is a great hindrance in family planning and welfare. Over 25 per cent of India women do not have any idea of family planning and methods of birth-control. The literacy rate is highest in Kerala and lowest in Bihar. Rajasthan ranks second from the bottom and Uttar Pradesh fifth. The States with low literacy have the high fertility and birth rate. Educated women tend to marry later than illiterate and uneducated women. The former make good use of family planning and birth control devices. Literate and educated couples of rural areas show keen interest in family planning measures and willingly adopt them if made conveniently available. Employment of women also helps in stabilizing the population and education is the essential pre-requisite of employment. Literacy in the country means completing of the primary education. The more educated a woman is the better awareness she has about family planning, birth-control and family-welfare.

Literacy also reduces gender inequality and some become conscious of their conjugal rights and privileges. They can better resist their exploitation in matter of marriage, maternity, child-care and family planning. IN our male dominated society it is very essential that women are made educated and literate so that they too can have some say in deciding the size of family. It has been observed that where women are educated and empowered they often adopt a small family norm. The decline in population growth rate in Kerala can be sighted as an example. It came down to 1.78 per cent in 1971-81 from 1.37per cent of 1961-71 because of increased literacy among women there.

Poverty, backwardness, casteism and religious fundamentalism are other major factors of population explosion in India. For example, the Muslim population in Kerala grew at the rate of 25.49 per cent during 1981-91 which was double of the Hindu growth rate of 12.62 per cent in the State. The son-fixation and desire to have no daughter is also very unfortunate. Daughters are regarded as great liabilities and the sons the great assets and boons. This preference to sons over daughters is one of the major reasons of high fertility and birth rate. About 40 per cent of India population has been living under poverty line. They find it difficult to keep their bodies and should together. They do not have even the minimum and basic amenities of life. They have been struggling to survive somehow or other. They have children as often as nature allows them to have. It is too much to expect them to think about and adopt modern family planning methods. They work hard as landless farmer, daily labourers or as marginal farmers. As such, the more hands there are, the better. Therefore, the poor India villagers think in terms of a large family so that there are sufficient hands to earth out a living.

The population trends in India are certainly alarming. There is much pressure on our land and water resources. The urban population is increasing by leaps and bounds and vast new slums are being created in the cities. The increase in urban population has further compounded the problem. It is high time that our government takes some concrete and hard decisions to turn the rate of population growth. There would be nothing undemocratic or coercive if 2 children family norm is strictly enforced. There should be incentives and disincentives to adhere to 2 children family norm. China is the most populous country but now has achieved the low fertility rate of 1.8 children per woman by using incentives and disincentive schemes. A certain discipline is a must to achieve family planning and population targets and the carrot and stick approach should not be ruled out. The International Conference on Population and Development, held in 1994 at Cairo, endorsed the voluntary approach and rejected the idea of nudging population towards specified family norms through sociality-sponsored incentives, disincentives programmes. But in a country like India where there is rampant poverty, low literacy rate and other problems only voluntary approach cannot be depended upon. There should be a strong dose of disincentives who opt for more than 2 children. Sometimes stick is as essential as the carrot, however, carrot should be used more frequently. The very future of our country is at stake and so there should be no hesitation in taking some harsh and strict measures of family planning.