

Ramkrishna Mukerjee

## Family Planning in Social and Economic Development : some points for discussion

Since I am neither an economist nor a demographer, who have the fundamental right to speak on family planning in social and economic development, I will place the views of a layman with the immodest expectation that they may locate the null points from which discussion on the topic may be organised. Of all the postulates involved in such a discussion, the following three appear to me to strike the common man at once:

- (1) The current rate of population growth affects adversely the present rate of economic growth (as measured by, say, GNP per capita) and it thus does not lead to economic development.
- (2) The rapid increase in population creates difficulties in providing adequate education, health facilities, social and cultural amenities, etc., in order to bring our people on par with those in the "developed" countries, and it thus affects the course of social development.
- (3) Since the people are "value oriented" towards having "large families" and lack the "felt-need" to form small and modern families, family planning is itself an aspect of social and economic development as it will be a step towards the establishment of an "achieving society".

The first two postulates refer to the concept of family planning as the remover of obstacles to economic and social development; the last one to the family planning movement which is to be regarded as economic and social development per se. We may not doubt the relevance of these postulates since they are evolved out of observation and experience of the reality we face in our country; the question is about the nature and degree of relevance of the postulates.

Without a precise appreciation of the nature and degree of relevance of the above and allied postulates, any piece of "social engineering" may be self-defeating. In a vast country like India which locates a wide variety of societal profiles, virtually any postulate will have some relevance since the facets of reality reflected in the maze of these profiles must be organically related; otherwise the society would not have been held together as it is. We should discuss, therefore, the frame of reference under which these and allied postulates are relevant, and the manner and extent to which they are relevant within that frame.

Obviously, the first postulate refers to: (1) our concept(s) of economic development against which family planning may or may not appear to be a necessity; (2) the current state, potentiality, and feasibility of a course of economic development, at a particular stage of which family planning may or may not be a serious necessity; (3) the adopted measure of economic development (e.g., GNP per capita) which may or may not be regarded as an appropriate indicator and, if not, a proper distribution of GNP per capita rather than the reduction of the couple-children ratio may be the programme for social engineering; and so on. These and similar issues are within the purview of the economists and economic demographers from whom we shall learn about the nature and degree of relevance of the first postulate.

The second postulate also calls for a critical examination of the extent to which population growth puts obstacles to the planning and execution of any course of social development and the extent to which other factors such as bureaucratic inefficiency or mismanagement, the devious manoeuvres of the 'interest groups', etc., are responsible for the lag in bringing our people at par with those in the "developed" countries. These issues can be clarified by sociologists, social workers, educationists, planners, administrators, etc. And it is necessary to enquire into this issues in order that the role of family planning in economic and social development can be posed precisely and in the proper perspective.

While the null points regarding the first two postulates may thus be located, we may agree, for the present, that family planning is necessary for the economic and social development of India although the extent to which it is a necessary is not quite definitely known to us. On that assumption, our discussion would be directed to the third postulate which refers to the basic considerations in the family planning movement. I may briefly touch upon them under the following heads:

- (1) The fallacy of assuming a valid "value orientation" of the people in favour of or against family planning to be effective *ipso facto* in society.
- (2) The validity of an inference, drawn from the commonly employed schema of observation-analysis-deduction, to ascertain differential fertility by the socio-economic strata which are assumed to be correlated with differences in "value orientation".
- (3) The interpretation of valid inference, drawn on the idea or action of the people regarding family planning, as relevant to the action and propaganda in family planning movement *per se*.
- (4) The investigation of soft spots in the social organism, in reference to the modal characteristics of the desire and production of children by the couples, through which the family planning programmes may be effective at the moment and in the future.

The **mill point** from which discussions on the third postulate should be organized may thus be located.

It is well known that Indians, in general, wish to see their son's son (and, if possible, also their son's son's son) before they die. But, if we look into the actual possibility, very few of them can attain the desire because of: 1) the age of *effective marriage* of the Indian men and women (i.e., when the girls begin to live with their husbands), whether or not they were actually married in infancy; 2) their reproductive pattern; and 3) their life expectancy, even though infant mortality and maternal mortality at child birth have sharply declined since 1950 and the longevity of the people has increased. This I had once worked out from the Indian population census data (corrected for age distribution) from 1901 to 1961 and the corresponding National Sample Survey (NSS) data collected in 1961-62 from an all-India random sample of nearly 1 lakh of evermarried men and 1 lakh of evermarried women (Mukherjee 1969: 16-23). The salient points of my findings were as follows:

- (1) An "effective" couple is formed when the husband is in the age-group of 20-24 years, his wife in that of 15-19.
- (2) The couple produce two children, usually a boy and a girl, when the husband-father is 25-29, the wife-mother 20-24. They produce another set of two children, as a general trend, when the man is 30-34 and the woman 25-29.
- (3) Following this trend, which appears to have been fairly consistent over the period of 60 years from 1901 to 1961, the couple sees their first daughter's first set of children when the man is 45-49 and the woman 40-44. Correspondingly, they see their first son's first son (and daughter) when the man is 50-54 and the woman 45-49. To date, not many people (especially the men) live up to that age.
- (4) Sequentially, if the man and woman under reference survive the ages of 50-54 and 45-49, respectively, they will see their first son's first son's first son (and daughter) when the man is 75-79 years old and the woman 70-74 years old. This is a remote possibility for either sex in India today.

Thus, on an average, the "value orientation" of the people to have a "large family" does not become effective *longitudinally*. Also the *latitude* of their having a "large family" is seen to be restricted. The NSS data record that the average number of children born per couple after 10-15, 16-20, 21-30, and longer years of effective marriage are 3.61, 4.41, 4.86, 4.76 and 4.37, respectively (Mukherjee 1969: 19). In the light of the average reproductive pattern of the Indian man and woman, which I have previously outlined, this information suggests that generally within the 10-15 years of their effective married life a couple produces four children, of whom - due to binomial probability - two are usually sons and the other two daughters. Afterwards, an increasingly smaller and ever dwindling number of couples continue with the task producing children, so that the average number of children per couple does not increase much above 4.00 in relation to the extension of their married life beyond 15 years and only 26 percent of all children are seen to have been born beyond their 4th birth-order: 9 per cent for the 5th birth-order, 7 per cent for the 6th, 4 per cent for the 7th, and a total of 6 per cent for the 8th and higher birth orders (NSS 1970: 62, 140).

Evidently, whatever the overall "value orientation" of the people may be, some control (social and/or biological) exists in society to limit their family size. This, although it is only a single illustration in this brief paper, suggests that we should be on our guard against assuming a valid "value orientation" of the people in favour or against family planning to be automatically effective in society. It will, no doubt, reduce the efficiency of any course of family planning movement.

### III

Several questions, however, follow from the above finding because the couples whose energy to produce children is not diminished after having four children may account for a small share of the total couples in the society but their number in a country of teeming millions may not be so small as to be dismissed in the context of a family planning movement. The questions may be formulated as follows:

- (1) What would be the effect on India's population growth if the fertility of these couples beyond the aforementioned general trend is controlled?
- (2) Is it "traditionalism" or other considerations which spur these couples on to have large families?
- (3) Are these the couples who are mainly found to be "active" supporters or resisters of the family planning movement, as appraised from the success and failure of the movement in different parts of India?
- (4) What are the social profiles of these and other couples from which a causal (or, at any rate, a concomitant) relation may be inferred regarding the attitude and behaviour of the people towards the success of the family planning movement and the scope and limitation in the social organism?

The first three questions may be answered by the simple process of observation, analysis and deduction. We will depend on the demographers to answer the first question, and on those engaged in family planning action-research to answer the second and the third. The difficulty arises when we attempt to answer the fourth question because of a fallacious link frequently drawn between deduction and inference in reference to the attributes of social profiles, like, income or expenditure of the household to which a couple belongs at the time of the survey, its family structure, occupation, rural or urban habitation, etc., at the point of time. Intrinsically, these attributes may represent the social profiles and are likely to be useful, but the manner in which they are usually employed leads to faulty inferences. Let me illustrate the issue in terms of any relation drawn between variation in family structure and differential fertility.

It has been asserted that a "high development of parental impulses ...has been institutionalized in the authority of the joint family" (Mukherjee, Radhakamal 1938: SA5). This assertion has been repeatedly stressed in reference to what has been labelled the "cultural barriers to family planning in underdeveloped countries" (Chandrasekhar 1946: 21ff; 1955: 67-68; 1961: 110-111), while investigations carried out in this context have tended to indicate that it is the nuclear family (comprising only the parents and children) which registers the higher fertility rate (ISI 1960; Datta 1961: 78-81; Bebart 1966: 633-634).

The inference drawn is, however, fallacious, as it would have been if the contrary viewpoint was supported by an investigation which followed the same procedure as adopted by the ones referred to above. For, these studies do not usually take into account the possible consequences of differences in the units of sampling and the units of observation, and they do not standardize the joint consideration of the two pieces of information, viz. (a) the characteristics of the family structure under which a couple lived when a child was born and (b) the total number of children thus born to a couple.

- (1) A sample is drawn from the universe of family-units (as forming co-resident and commensal kin-groups); and, thereafter, these family-units are categorized as nuclear or extended according to their kinship composition at the time of investigation.
- (2) The number of constituent couples of these family-units as well as the total number of children born to these couples are, then, enumerated respectively for the nuclear and the extended category.
- (3) According to whether the ratio thus obtained for the nuclear category is found to be greater or less than that for the extended category, which is a matter of deduction, the inference is drawn that the nuclear family organization promotes or retards higher fertility than the extended family organization.

Now, under this procedure, the unit of sampling is a family and the unit of observation is a couple. Whereas, in order to draw the inference correctly that the couples belonging to the nuclear family organization register higher, equal, or lower fertility than the couples belonging to the extended family organization, the unit of sampling as well as the unit of observation should have been couple. That is, a sample of couples should have been drawn from the universe of couples instead of a sample of family-units from the universe of family-units (or households), as noted under 1, above. Also, for a correct appraisal of differential fertility by variation in the family organization as nuclear or extended, the information should refer to the children born to each couple at the time it was living under the nuclear or the extended family organization; that is, irrespective of the family organization the couples were found to live in at the time of investigation, as noted under 2 and 3, above.

The nature and the extent of error regarding differential fertility rates by types of family organization, which the investigations under reference would, accordingly, have to take into account, have been estimated by my colleague Suraj Bandopadhyay (Mukherjee 1968: 48-49). We need not go into this for the present. The point to note is that since the production of children by a couple has a reference period over time, the attributes to denote the social profile of the couple will have to be considered over the corresponding time period (and not at a point of time). Obviously, the same argument holds good for the other attributes of social profiles, like, income, expenditure, occupation, rural or urban habitation, etc., because the first two and the analogous ones must vary over time and the last two or their analogues may vary similarly.

Thus, an unequivocal answer to the fourth question demands a methodological rigour which is usually lacking from the family planning researches but without which we may not be able to

draw any valid and useful inference on this very important consideration on the family planning movement.

#### IV

In other situations, an inference drawn in the above manner may be valid but the data-based inference may not be relevant to the family planning movement *per se*. For example, the NSS data collected in 1960-61 from an all-India urban sample of 16,289 couples showed that the number of children born alive to a couple declines as the educational standard of the husband and/or the wife increases by stages from "illiterate" to "intermediate and above" (NSS 1967:20). A valid inference seems to be obvious that the education of the people has a deterring effect on high fertility because of some control exercised by the educated couples. We, however, find concurrently that the number of children surviving after birth is about the same for all stages of education of the husband and/or the wife (NSS 1967: 21.23). Therefore, any interpretation of the inference made for purposes of organizing the family planning movement would be irrelevant unless and until we are in a position to successfully control the differential mortality by socio-economic strata. For, it is known from other sets of data that the education of the people is highly correlated with socio-economic strata, and the above data also show that the difference between the number of children born alive per couple and the number of children surviving per couple is the highest for the "illiterate" group and virtually negligible for the group at the educational stage of "intermediate and above".

This does not mean, of course, that the above inference has no relevance to family planning in economic and social development. It means, however, that the ball is within the court of the first and second postulate formulated at the beginning of this paper; it does not belong to that of the third. Because the issues which emerge from the inference refer to the health and educational facilities obtained by the people at large as a measure of social development and the extent to which these facilities can be extended further along with the course of economic development.

The inference, however, may still be regarded to give us a clue to the diagnosis of the social profiles of the people with reference to which the family planning movement may be successfully designed. For, it is noticed that education is not only correlated to the reproductive action of the people but also to their idea of how many children they should have. Thus, when in the aforementioned survey the couples were asked to state the "ideal" number of children they should have, those in the husband's educational stage of "intermediate and above" gave the average figure of 2.98 as against 3.31 given by the "illiterate" ones, with those having an educational standard upto "matriculation" giving a figure between the above two (NSS 1967: 34). But this interpretation of the valid inference would be fallacious because when these couples were asked a supplementary question to state the "ideal" number of male children they should have, the average figure was 2.08 for couples in the "intermediate and above" category and 2.31 for the "illiterate" ones (NSS 1967: 34).

Obviously, even the educated couples cannot have two sons without having, on an average, two daughters in the process. So that, the general trend we have noticed before of the couples to have four children each, on an average, is substantiated again; and the likely interpretation of the inference drawn from the above figures may be that the educated couples are more aware than the others of the propaganda of not exceeding the three children limit. However, they were also tripped by the supplementary query on "male" children, which tends to

indicate that the desire to have at least two sons is a common phenomenon for all couples irrespective of any variation by their social profiles.

This phenomenal concern of the Indian people is substantiated by several facts, such as:

(1) The Hindus, Muslims, and Christians of urban India consider the "ideal" number of children they should have as, on an average, 3.19, 3.44, and 3.50, respectively, but the corresponding figures they give for the "ideal" number of male children are 2.10, 2.38, and 2.30 (NSS 1967: 34).

(2) While, in general, in urban India, the husband's desire to have more children falls sharply when there are 4-5 surviving children, the fall is more sharply marked when there are at least two males among the surviving children (NSS 1967: 56, 67).

(3) In both rural and urban India, an intensive analysis of the fertility performance of a random sample of 32,271 couples showed "the common desire of having a male child and the prevalence of some form of family limitation practices among couples with one, or more, male child" (Halder and Bhattacharya 1970: 406).

We are thus faced with the conclusion that an inference on the idea and action of the people regarding family planning may be valid but its interpretation to evolve any general policy or an overall propaganda for the family planning movement may be ineffective or useless.

## V

It follows from the above that the null point regarding the third postulate we have stated at the beginning of this paper refers to the common desire of the Indian couples to have at least two sons. Two questions come up, sequentially, from this basic hypothesis:

- 1) What would be its effect on population growth if family planning action and propaganda were successfully directed towards those who have two sons already?
- 2) Why is this desire of the people to have at least two sons common?

A precise answer to the first question, which can be elicited from the demographers, will provide the base-line to organize an efficient family planning movement in the immediate perspective. An unequivocal answer to the second question should provide us with the knowledge to plan in a manner that the common desire may be reduced to one son (or two children) and thus, in the future perspective, the problem of rapid population growth may be successfully resolved. Leaving the demographers to their task, we may, therefore, examine the second question.

Regrettably, we do not possess sufficient data to answer this question with even a semblance of unambiguity, possibly because the null point of the family planning movement is not usually posed in the above manner. If we, therefore, proceed with the null hypothesis that at least two sons is the *sine qua non* to the Indian couples, we may accumulate useful information by formulating alternate hypotheses in two ways: 1) to explain the generalized preference for sons in contradistinction to daughters and why at least two of them, and 2) to ascertain variations from the generalized preference, both in number and in kind. The formulation of

these hypotheses in the light of our current knowledge, their testing, and the more precise formulation of the hypotheses in the successive and sequential stages of the knowledge accumulated in the process, should enable us, eventually, to diagnose those soft spots in the social organism through which the family planning programme may make a successful and sustained breakthrough. I will conclude this paper, therefore, by suggesting a few alternate hypotheses.

Part of the question appears easy to answer, viz. why at least two sons and not merely one. For, even if one can serve the purpose for which "son" is desired, at least one more should be in reserve as insurance against calamities like untimely death, etc. Also, there cannot be too many children, mainly because of the financial burden. which 70 per cent of the couples in even urban India declared to be the reason why they do not desire additional children (NSS 1957 : 77). Several alternate hypotheses should, however, be formulated in this context to ascertain the social profiles of those who are content with one son and who have more than two, and why.

But the brunt of the question remains : why the preference for "sons" ? There is some evidence from urban India to indicate that the "survival of the family" is the main reason why people desire children, which is particularly marked when there is no surviving male child or there is only one (NSS 1957 : 75). This appears to fit in with the general belief applicable to both rural and urban India because : 1) the structure of the family in India is predominantly patrilineal-patrivirilocal, and 2) the importance of sons to offer oblation to the manes is very well stressed among the Hindus who constitute the main bulk of the Indian population. But, is it only or mainly this "traditional" need which is expressed in the desire of the people to have male children particularly ? Here, again, several alternate hypotheses are indicated.

Thanks to the dominant fashion in the current phase of social research, we are prone to regard the commodity "traditional" as a bag of irrational ideas, beliefs and practices which are anachronistic to "modernity", and so we do not search for the accent to a "transitional" need. It is neither the time nor the place to go into a discussion on the fallacy of the concept of "tradition to modernity" and illustrate it in reference to the Indian situation (Mukherjee 1970 : 1168-1169). It will be sufficient to state that even if on this supposition we go to the first and second postulate we have stated at the beginning of this paper, the gain is likely to be minimal. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the so-called "traditional" behaviour does not change *ipso facto* with the "modern" occupations or education (e.g., Mitra 1968 : 13). We have to unravel, therefore, the underlying rationality of the persistence of the aforementioned "traditional" needs and decide how the course of that rationale can be altered. This may be a fruitful course for family planning action-research to undertake.

There is another aspect to the professed desire of the Indian couples to have children for the survival of the family on which also fruitful researches may be conducted on the basis of alternate hypotheses as for the one just mentioned. The basic question in this context is : does the desire for the survival of the family emanate from the concern of the people with their after-life or with their survival in the current life ? The data on urban India recorded that a small but an appreciable and consistent number of couples specifically noted the reason for desiring children as that they "can depend in old age", while the remaining ones stated their reason to be the "preference for male children" until they already had at least two surviving sons (NSS 1967 : 75). Now, in the present context, the reason given as "preference for male children" is value free, while that as "survival of the family" is a vague value indicator since the



purpose for the survival of the family is not indicated. Useful hypotheses, therefore, may be formulated in reference to the desire of the people to have "sons" in order to be provided for in old age. There is also supporting evidence to suggest the formulation of such hypotheses.

For example, I have been able to show from an analysis of the available but not quite adequate all-India data (Mukherjee 1966) and also from a sample of 26,735 family-units in West Bengal (which refer to the period 1946 to 1967 and contain all the requisite information) that the patrilineal-patrivirilocal joint family structure in India is not disintegrating into nuclear structures but passing through a cyclical process of its growth and decay. In general : 1) a person is born in "father's" joint or nuclear family, 2) forms a nuclear family after marriage or, if he is a "son", transforms the parental nuclear family into joint (or continues with the paternal joint) family or, if she is a "daughter", follows the corresponding process in her husband's family, but 3) in later life he or she belongs to the family of a son. Now, does one end one's life in the son's family because of parental impulses duly reciprocated by the filial piety of at least one son or because this is the only way left to him or her to end the last days as personal investments and savings would be meagre for the vast multitude of old age people in India and there is no provision like social security in old age ?

If the alternate hypotheses formulated to elicit the "security" factor in the desire of the Indian couples to have male children prove to be valid, then several other hypotheses may be usefully formulated. Such as : 1) Are those couples which are content with one son (or two children) also have the economic viability to maintain themselves in old age ? 2) Are these couples also of a certain educational standard because of which they could attain the economic viability ? And so on.

To conclude, then, the family planning movement, in action and propaganda, should proceed from the null point that the Indian people, in general, desire at least two sons and in the process they obtain one or two daughters. And, in research, the family planning movement may be well rewarded by undertaking intensive and intricate diagnostic and causal studies as suggested and illustrated above.

#### References cited :

Bebarta, P. C.

- 1966 "Family type and fertility: A study in six Delhi Villages", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay) 1 (15): 633-634.

Chandrasekhar, S.

- 1946 *Population and planned parenthood in India*. London, George Allen and Unwin.

- 1955 "Cultural barriers to family planning in under-developed countries", *Report of the Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Planned Parenthood*. London, International Planned Parenthood Federation.

- 1961 *ibid.* (1946 revised and enlarged edition).

Datta, S.

- 1961 "Differential fertility in West Bengal in 1956", *Artha Vijnana* (Poona) 3 (1) : 67-82.

Halder, A.K.; Bhattacharya, N.

- 1970 "Fertility and sex-sequence of children of Indian couples", *Researches Economiques de Louvain* (Belgium) 4: 405-415.

ISI [Indian Statistical Institute]

- 1960 *A study of existing information on population to developing planning in India*. Calcutta, Indian Statistical Institute (mimeo).

Mitra, Asok

- 1968 "Illiteracy and social change", *Seminar on Planning for Social Change*. Council for Social Development, India International Centre, New Delhi.

Mukherjee, Radhakamal

- 1938 "The sociological analysis and forecast of population increase", Presidential Address, in: *Proceedings of the Second All-India Population and First Family Hygiene Conference*. Bombay, Karnatak Publishing House.