CHAPTER VIII

POPULATION POLICY AND POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAMME (IN INDIA)

The acceleration in the rate of population growth in successive decades since 1901 and the potential of a rapid decline in mortality created a great concern about population problems. Because population growth has both eroded the impact of growth on per capita income and obstructed the growth process itself, the problem is clearly that of too large an increase of population. The aim of the policy should therefore be a reduction in the growth rate of population. In the previous decades of sixties, seventies and eighties the growth has been around 2.2 percent annually. The aim should be to lower it from the present rate. To concretise the objective, one may refer to the goals of the plans. There have, by and large, veered around the goals of less than 2 percent rise in population. The target for the year 2000 AD has been set at a growth rate of nearly 1.2 percent.

The family planning programme became a national effort to contain the rate of population growth and was taken as an integral part of the development plan programme. This was the first national programme in the works and the first aimed explicitly at slowing population growth.

Even until the first three plans, there was no proper appreciation of the population problems by the government. As against Rs. 65 lakhs allocated in 1st plan, Rs. 5 crores in the 2nd plan and Rs. 25 crores in the third plan, though it started small in scale and exploratory in nature, it developed into a very comprehensive programme with more and more component added over the years. During the eight-five year plan the likely expenditure on family planning is estimated around Rs. 6500 crores.

The fifth five year plan has been unique in the History of the country and hence unique in the evolution of the family planning programme of the country. The national policy statement
of April 1976 was the most articulate enunciation of the official policy. The following were its main features:

(I) Increase in the legal minimum age at marriage from 15 to 18 for females and 18-21 years for males.
(ii) Freezing the population base at the 1971 level for determining representation in parliament and the state legislatures up to 2000 AD.
(iii) 1971 population was considered as the base for allocation of central assistance to the state plans.
(iv) Eight percent of central assistance to the state was to be linked with family planning programme performance, and
(v) The allotment of houses and loans were to be linked to family size.

Besides, two other features set the tone of 1976 policy statement. Permission was given to the state to pass legislation introducing compulsory sterilization and change civil service regulations to ensure that the employees adopted small family norm. This was also to be done for the employees of the central government. Though these statements of national policy never got approved by the parliament, but it had set the tone for future policy measures with voluntary nature of acceptance of the programme service.
Sixth plan (1980-85) laid down the long term demographic goal of reducing the net reproduction rate (NRR) to one by 1996 for the country as a whole and by 2001 in all the states. The task of reaching the NRR unity by the year 2001 is a formidable one, but the government is fully conscious of these and therefore the main approach accepted is to make the programme a "people movement". Responsible and planned parenthood is being promoted through a well defined and sound approach, involving imaginative use of all information, education, communication channel, provision of service and supply close to the door step to the people as possible and inclusion of non-governmental agencies as a partner in the implementation of the family welfare programme.

Population control has been accorded the highest priority in the eight five year plan document which have been approved by the NDC. In fact, for the first time population issues were discussed as a separate item of a-genda by the NDC in its meeting held on 23rd-24th December 1991, where the paper of the Departmental Family Welfare, "population control challenges and strategies", calling for a holistic approach to population control was endorsed unanimously. The Departmental of Family welfare has very greatly increased its interaction with the state government and union Territories Administration for improving the quantity of family welfare programme and in close consultation with them, a new action plan has been envolved to give the requisite thrust and dynamism to the programme. This is a pragmatic and result oriented Action plan, which lays great emphasis on consolidation of the existing infrastructure and optimisation of its functioning. The main features of the Action plan are as follows:

1. Improving the quantity and outreach of family welfare services in the field.
2. A new package of compensation/incentive funds to be propagating family welfare activities.
3. Initiating innovative programmes in urban slums for propagating family welfare activities.
(iv) Improving the quantity of existing contraceptives and introduction of new contraceptives.

(v) Improving the distribution of contraceptives through expansion of the scope of social marketing scheme.

The new activities taken by the government now hold out the hope that the energies of the nation could be constructively mobilised to tackle the population problem in a pragmatic manner. Of course, there are still miles to go and tremendous amount of additional efforts to be put in to achieve the full results of the new initiatives.

If even, on the basis of the new strategies and Action plan we are not able to stabilise the population growth, the problem may go out of hand and it would be very difficult for the country to sustain an unmanageably large population with its resources, whatever new successes we may have on the technological front.

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