CHAPTER I

CONCEPT OF FERTILITY AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

1.1 Fertility  
1.2 Social Structure
“There is no event in personal history more significant for the future than becoming a parent and there is no pattern of behaviour more essential for societal survival than adequate fertility....The individual and social importance of proper knowledge of this vital activity cannot be overstated. The network of familial relationships, the pattern of familial activities, and the structure of familial rights and responsibilities are transformed by the entrance of baby” (Bogue, 1969). “By marrying and raising children, parents participate in a system of gift exchange in which the gifts in question are human lives, and the parties to the exchange are the kinship group recognised in the society concerned” (Heady, 2007).

1.1 Fertility

Fertility, in spite of being strictly a familial and personal affair of the individuals concerned, is a great social event, having even greater bearing on society. In fact, no other aspect of human behaviour is more regulated by cultural prescriptions, more subject to idealization and more conditioned by the process of socialization. The demographers all over the world see fertility as the positive force in the vital process continuously replenishing the population to combat the attrition of mortality (Bogue, 1969). The entire demographic character of a population – its size, rate of increase, geographic distribution, age and sex structure, life expectation and family composition – works through one of the three demographic variables: fertility, mortality and migration. Of these, fertility is the major dynamic element. In most case it is the prime determinant of age structure, family composition and population growth rates. Rarely do developments in other two variables, mortality and migration, possess demographic significance comparable to that attaching to fertility. To understand fertility is, therefore, not only to understand only a major portion of all demographic behaviour, but a fundamental element in social structure and human condition, generally (Bogue, 1969).

Several explanations, regarding what fertility actually is given in literature. According to Roland Pressat (1985), in Dictionary of Demography, fertility is the child bearing performance of an individual, couples, groups, or population. It is contrasted with fecundity, the theoretical capacity to produce, which may or may not lead to fertility. Fertility refers to increment process by which living members of the
population produce live births, that is new living members in the population (Preston et al, 2001). Although, often associated with fertility, the term reproduction, in demographic parlance refers to the process in which new members of population replace outgoing members, a process that may comprise of mortality as well as fertility.

Fertility is a generic concept that encompasses a complex time dependent process covering events ranging from exposure to intercourse, and child bearing to the formation and dissolution of unions. It is basically a complex multivariate system representing a set of different reproduction strategies. Though reproduction is a biological phenomenon, levels in fertility can be influenced by socially controlled norms and practices. Fertility after all, is both social behaviour that attaches innumerable points to the socio – economic setting and biological behaviour with dim evolutionant antecedent and immediate physiological constraints (McNicoll, 1980). It is influenced by host of biological, sociological and economic factors. The impact of social and economic change on reproductive behaviour is mediated through the cultural setting (Bhasin and Bhasin, 2000).

Fertility is the occurrence of life births among a defined population, exceeds mortality in most part of the world and thus is the main determinant of population growth. At the same time fertility is more difficult to analyse than mortality and is subject to greater fluctuations. Whereas mortality is inevitable and involuntary, fertility can be controlled and is determined by a wide range of social, economic and political, as well as, physiological and psychological factors (Knowles and Warring, 2005).

It is quite apparent from the foregoing explanation of fertility, that among all the demographic aspects, fertility is of great significance. It is the most important or sometimes it is referred to as a problematic factor in population growth. Growth rates in most of the countries are little affected by international migration. It is the natural growth rate, which is the major determinant of population growth. Fertility rate assumes all the more importance in developing countries, where mortality rate has already stabilised itself at a much lower levels. In this regard, it is the fertility rate only, which is the focus of attention and most coveted area of research.
The fertility rate of a nation determines the age of a nation or the age structure of the population. A country experiencing a high fertility rate is a youthful one. Most of the developing nations, for this reason have high percentage of people in youthful stage. And for this reason only most of the developed nations are ageing as they have much low fertility as compared to the developing ones.

As already mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, fertility is the most socially conditioned behaviour. In fact, fertility behaviour is the outcome of host of social, cultural and economic factors (Unisa and Bhagat, 2000). The behaviour related to fertility is moulded by a person’s culture and involves some of his most compelling social relations (Mandelbaum, 1973). It has become quite evident, that process of fertility which in reality is a natural biological phenomenon, is actually very complex. This is due to the fact that giving birth is a multidimensional aspect and is affected by economic, social, psychological factors and fecundity itself.

The factors affecting fertility have been variously studied and classified by different scholars. One of the pioneer works in this regard has been done by Kinsley Davis and Judith Blake (1956). They presented a classification of intermediate variables, through which any social, economic, psychological and political factors operate. The process of reproduction involves three steps; intercourse, conception and gestation and parturition. The intermediate variables as such, are directly concerned with these steps.

On similar lines, as above, John Bongaarts (1978) put forward the concept proximate determinants of fertility. These are the biological and behavioural factors through which economic, social, environmental etc variables affect fertility. According to him the primary characteristics of an intermediate variable is its direct effect on fertility. He gave a simple diagram to summarize the relationship among the determinants of fertility as follows:

![Diagram showing the relationship among the determinants of fertility]

**INDIRECT DETERMINANTS**

- SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES

**DIRECT DETERMINANTS**

- INTERMEDIATE FERTILITY VARIABLES

**FERTILITY**
Thus we can now group the determinants of fertility into two broad categories – direct and indirect. Direct factors that affect fertility are sexual behaviour, physiological factors, use of contraception etc, while the indirect factors include wider social, economic and other phenomena.

Direct factors are of personal nature and information regarding them is not easily forthcoming from an individual. Also the influence of the direct factors on fertility cannot be quantified easily and thus the researches in this area are limited. It is the indirect factors which is the major area of concern in all research related to fertility in recent years. The indirect factors related with social structure of an area or a wider social phenomena, are known to have influenced fertility to a considerable extent. Also it can be said, owing to complex nature of fertility in itself, both the direct and indirect factors affect each other in a cause and effect relationship.

Therefore the spectrum for defining fertility is significantly wide and the range may vary from the basic biological factors of race to such social constraints as political ideology. Chandana (2007) has classified these factors into four broad categories of biological, demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors.

Biologically, race, fecundity, physical and mental health have been considered as important determinants. In demographic factors, age composition, degree of urbanisation, duration of marriage and working and non-working status of female, are assumed to be most important. In this doctoral work, the main thrust is on the social determinants of fertility; hence they would be explained in details. The desire to have a child is a social necessity. It is in this context the social determinants of human fertility become very significant. The religious background of a person seems to play a prominent role in governing his mental attitude the size of his family. Although all religions are opposed to deliberate control on human fertility, yet the degree of control may vary from religion to religion.

An inverse correlation has often been observed between the level of education and the fertility index (Arokiasamy et al, 2004; Hoem et al, 2006; Kravdal, 2002). It is one of the important variables which have drawn considerable attention of researchers engaged in the study of fertility differential. It is an achieved status of an individual which does not change over time, like some other variables and is expected
to give individual an alternative source of new normative orientation as opposed to traditional ones (Islam, 2001). The importance of education operates in a number of ways, including the improvement of earning capacity and all that goes with it, the bestowal of status and the social mobility and the known and available to the individuals, wider ranges of alternatives for the manner in which they arrange their lives.

Female education has become an essential component of fertility analysis. At the micro level, educated women are usually portrayed as “forerunners” of fertility transition i.e. pioneers of small families (Martin and Juarez, 1995). There are many possible reasons why the length of female education is inversely related to fertility, which would be discussed in details in forthcoming chapters. There are several studies which confirm the strong negative relationship between the educated parents and their fertility (Akmam, 2002; Hindin, 2000, Breierova and Duflo, 2002).

The age of marriage is another basic social determinant of human fertility. The societies that are characterized by a low age at marriage exhibit high fertility rate, implying an inverse correlation between birth rate and age at marriage. The factor of age at marriage also operates through the duration of marriage. In many societies, the desire to have at least one son is also one of the major determinants of fertility.

Under economic determinants, income of the family is the most prominent. Although a negative correlation is found but it is not a norm. Hence the income-fertility relationship is often termed as an ambiguous relationship. Numerous studies have been undertaken, which have shown the existence of both positive and negative association between income and fertility (Freedman and Thorton, 1982). In the lower income group, where the children are considered as the potential source of augmenting the family income, the restriction on the family size is minimal. In the higher income group, where the supporting capacity of the family is unlimited, the family is kept low but not the lowest (Chandana, 2007).

Several theories have been advanced to explain the absence of a positive income-fertility relationship in cross sectional data. Becker (1960), in an early study, attributed this finding to the variation in contraceptive use across age groups, with the greater ability of high income couples to plan effectively accounting for their lower
fertility. Also, the price of children, especially the opportunity cost associated with the time devoted to child-care, could obscure the income fertility relationship. Since, child care is usually done by the mother, is very time-intensive, the child care rises with the mothers'/wives' earning capacity (Freedman and Thorton, 1982). Hence it is evident from the opportunity cost theory, that participation of the females in the labour force is negatively related to fertility. Female employment outside home is related to forming small families; working women tend to have fewer children than those who do not work because employment entails alternative satisfaction to children (El-Ghannam, 2005).

Under economic determinants, apart from individual economic success or level, the economic structure of the society or a nation of which the individuals are part of is equally important. It is well known that industrialized societies exhibit lower fertility than less developed societies. Similarly, within industrialized and less developed societies, the urban areas have low age specific rates. One of the most potent structural factors affecting desired family size is the type of economy within which the population functions. If the economy is of household unit type where family itself is the exclusive unit of production, the compulsion to have large family is strong. Since the household units’ major source of labour power is the family, its strength as a productive unit varies by size. As the society moves from the household unit type to the commercial-industrial type that characterizes urban areas of developed societies, the household becomes relatively unimportant as a producing unit and economic significance of children declines appreciably. Moreover, in the urban-industrial environment where primary education is required, the minimum age labour laws are enforced, large number of children become economic liability for the family (Kasarda, 1971).

Apart from all these factors of birth rate – natural, environmental, biological makeup and traditional customs and taboos, there is another fundamental one, which is the human will. It is this which permits the individual to escape from the elemental laws of instinct and families to adjust the number of children to their circumstances or their desires. However, this action itself is determined by several external circumstances which may act in different ways. “Thus one passes as what may be
termed as a ‘natural birth’ to another form, less spontaneous, the voluntary or controlled birth rate” (Garnier, 1983).

In the last 50 years or so, the population problem has been added to the world’s agenda not simply as the subject of scientific study or public discussion but also impinging on policy intervention. National Government of both developed and developing countries have set up various commissions on the subject and beyond that have adopted policies and organized programmes to influence demographic trends (Berelson and Leiberson, 1979). The family planning programmes have become one of the central policies for regulating fertility by the Government of a country. It is an organized programme which aims at providing information, supplies and services of modern means of fertility control to those interested.

1.2 Social Structure

“Society, an organisation, liberates and limits the activities of men, set up standards for them to follow and maintain: whatever the imperfection and tyrannies it has exhibited in human history, it is necessary condition of every fulfilment of life” (MacIver and Page, 1950). The concept of social structure has a relatively long history, although the use of the term started only after 1945. The word structure in its original meaning referred to building construction, but by the 16th century, it was also used to refer to the inter-relations between the component parts of a whole (Leach, 1968). In fact, it was widely used in this sense in anatomical studies. Its extension from anatomy to sociology, though delayed for several centuries was a logical corollary of the very general use of organic analogies by political philosophies. The anatomical image of social structure was also reflected in the lectures given by Radcliffe Brown in 1910. The ‘social structure’ then accordingly refers to the mesh of social positions and inter relations in terms of which the interdependence of the component parts may be described; the function of any part is the way it operates so as to maintain the total system in good health (Engels, 1940). The concept of social structure has in its long source of use, since the period of Renaissance, till date, has undergone a series of refinements and specific well developed meaning has been attached to the concept by various trend setters in sociology and anthropology.
According to Morris Ginsberg (1956), social structure is concerned with the principal forms of social organisations, i.e. types of groups, associations and institutions and the complex of those which constitute societies. MacIver and Page (1962), the veteran sociologists, put forward a more rational and empirical view of social structure. They contended that the analysis of social structure reveals the role of the diverse attitudes and interests of social well being. Group structure represents the kind of reality into which we are born and within which we find work and recreation, rewards and penalties and struggle and aid...All the models of grouping together comprise the complex pattern of social structure. Bottomore (1962) defines social structure as the complex combination of major institutions and groups that constitute the society.

‘All men live with other men and these entities are composed of human relationship structure. This is to say that each society has a pattern of organisation composed of the structures resulting from the association of men with each other’ (Anderson and Parker, 1964). Social structure is thus a holistic concept: the central organising idea in terms of which everything else in the life of a community so far as proves possible is seen (Redfield, 1955). The notion of social structure, thus, is a patterned set of social relationships and level of interaction between various segments of population or in terms of relationship between various social classes formed on the basis of their economic, the amount of power they have, the authority they exercise in relation to others and privileges they enjoy by virtue of their respective position in the social hierarchy of the society (Sharma and Niranjana, 2001). In the most general way social structure may be defined as those features of a social entity (a society or group within society) that have certain permanence over time, are interrelated, and is a determined condition. As may be inferred from this definition, several ideas are implicit in the notion of social structure. The concept expresses the idea that human beings form social relations which are not arbitrary or coincidental, but exhibit some regularity and persistence. The concept also refers to the observation that social life is not amorphous, but is differentiated into groups, positions and institutions that are inter dependent or functionally interrelated (McHenry, 1993). Social structure thus is not too general a phenomenon. It is quite complex as constituted by large number of elements, it also has both the time and space dimensions. It is a systematic interaction between various parts of the whole which give rise to structure. It, therefore, implies
that in understanding social structure detailed analysis of various constitutional elements especially that of which are highly relevant, is inevitable (Sharma and Niranjana, 2001).

The analysis of constituent elements of social structure in itself is a gigantic task. Anything, anywhere, which makes up a society, comes under the umbrella concept of social structure. Social structure is nothing but different strata of society, since prehistoric times, have evolved into. Hence the social structure constitutes those elements that make up this stratification in the society. These elements are perceived in different categories of social structure. Among the constituent categories of social structure, social status and social role are most important dimensions. As distinct categories, role and status, social role and status are complimentary to each other and form a part of super structure. In other words these are determined by multiplicity of factors. However at the same time, both are critical in the determination of life chances and styles of the individual and the groups. Apart from these two important categories of social structure, there are other categories as social institution and social groups. In fact all these categories are complementary to each other and often overlapping. This prevents any category of social structure to be placed in water tight compartments. A simple diagrammatic sketch is drawn to show the elements of social structure as follows:
Thus notion of social structure thus is a relationship between different groups or entities which is relatively stable. It emphasises that society is grouped into structurally related groups which have different functions, characteristics or purpose. Social structure thus is a composite of social systems which includes economic system, political system, cultural system, etc. Family, religion, class are all social structures.
References


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