

Value Clarification In Population Education

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THE new dimension, magnitude and adverse effect of unplanned population growth in developing countries transcends the population stability threshold. The world income distribution is alarming — 77 per cent of the world's population earn only 15 per cent of its income. There are approximately 1.2 billion poor people in the developing countries and the largest number, 500 million, is concentrated in Asia. It is an irony that considerable environmental degradation is the result of affluence in the north and poverty in the south. Economic progress, indispensable for human development, has been slow in the South mainly due to rapid population growth. The average annual economic growth rate between 1960 and 1988 was a little over 3 per cent. GNP per capita continues to remain low, especially in Nepal (\$180) and Bangladesh (\$170). Asia remains one of the poorest regions of the world (Human Development Report, 1991).

The unequal distribution of wealth, and concentration of population in the least developed countries are inevitable concomitants of utter poverty, illiteracy, ecological imbalance and degeneration in the quality of life. Poverty and rapid population growth are inextricably linked with each other and is one of the major problems, of the developing countries of this region. No era by itself is complete — it is both a continuum and beginning. This is equally true in our personal lives. Each phase of our activity is influenced by the experience of past pursuits even as it moulds the character of our future endeavours. Thus population explosion is not an abstract demographic phenomenon. Each one of us are population actors making population related decisions throughout our lives, all of us have an inherent right to be aware of facts concerning population education. Consequently the value clarification of population education is imperative. It presupposes an understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of population changes and trends that are taking place today. Value clarification is an effort to show that rational and logical decision will result in an enhanced quality of life not only for us but also for our future generations. The future is the result of our action today and to our

response to the problems that already exist.

Ethical Issues

In value clarification ethical issues play a vital role. One general issue concerns the basic human right of man. The UN declaration on population states that the opportunity to decide on the number and spacing of children is a basic human right. However, freedom to have children has to be reviewed in terms of freedom and opportunity to provide the basic requirements and acceptable quality of life for them. There are about 900 million adults in the developing world who are unable to read or write; 1.5 billion people without basic health care services, 1.75 billion people without access to safe water, about 100 million people who are homeless and approximately 800 million people who still go hungry every day and more than a billion who survive in absolute poverty. Some 40 million new born are still not immunized, 14 million children under the age of 5 die every day and 150 million are undernourished.

The greatest number of poor people live in Asia — three quarters of a billion. Poverty is most acute in Bangladesh (where over 80 per cent are poor), Nepal, India and Laos People's Democratic Republic. In the 1980's income decreased among the poorest group in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Poverty has a decided gender bias. Women constitute the poorest of the poor consequently; due to lack of income opportunities, illiteracy and socio-cultural taboos most women are not the decision making agents in their families. The human development index (HDI) (1) longevity, (2) access to knowledge, (3) decent living standards of female is less than two-thirds that of male HDI in most developing countries. In South Asia the rate of female literacy is only half those of males and the situation is even worse in Nepal and Afghanistan. It is a risk element in the world. Each minute, nearly 100 children are born, while giving birth to 100,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa and 400 per 100,000 in South Asia.

Family Planning For Whom?

Another fundamental question to be reckoned with is who should practise birth control. It appears that the disadvantaged group, unable to provide basic human requirements for their children, are the main target group. This is the group that can be most easily swayed by rewards and penalties of various kinds. Options are open for this group in the form of financial or maternal benefits for not producing children. If this group is the target group then there is a fundamental ethical dilemma. In this context population control for all comes into conflict with the aspirations of certain social groups who feel economic solvency gives them the right to avoid family planning. The argument that is most tenable is that this is too basic a right to be limited to a specific group in society who are economically solvent. It is only fair that every person has a right to at least a certain minimal number of children. It is only just that all make a little sacrifice and take rational decision for the common welfare of all the society.

Social Factors : In Socio-economic and cultural traditions of South Asia male infants are considered assets while female children are considered liabilities. It is expected that a male child will help in the agricultural work in the rural areas and look after their parents in old age. Thus bias exists in favour of a male child. This often leads to couples producing children as long as a woman does not produce at least one male infant. This subsequently results in families with too many children even though the parents cannot afford to look them. The findings of a national survey carried in India showed that there was a close association between levels of fertility and the number and sex of surviving children. Parents with one or more surviving sons were much more likely to use contraception than parents who had only daughters. Parents in rural areas with three or more surviving sons were twice as likely to use family planning

compared to parents with only one son and three times as willing as parents with three or more daughters. In tradition-bound prejudiced societies acceptance of family planning requires attitudinal change through education.

At present 45 per cent of the world's women use contraception and to achieve the projected drop in fertility the number of women using family planning must rise to 58 per cent by the year 2000 and 71 per cent by the year 2025.

The UNFPA low population projection clearly indicates the beneficial effort of declining birth rate. On this projection the population in the year 2023 would be only 7.590 billion. This is 2.7 billion people less than the medium projection. To achieve this projection women in developing countries would have to reduce the number of children they produce to only 2.7 for the period 2000-2005 and 1.9 for 2020-25. The low projection would reduce the environment. The status and the nature of options provided to women will be crucial in determining future population growth rate. The extent to which women are free to make their own decision concerning their life will determine the future. "As mothers, as producers or suppliers of food, fuel and water; traders and manufacturers, political and community leaders women are at the centre of the process of change" (UNFPA 1989).

New Values : Making people aware of the benefits of living with nature and not on nature to be in harmony with the environment, to assist in preventing ecological imbalance to improve the quality of life, to address economic problems, to plan their family to assist in development, to choose rationally from options, to de-emphasize material consumption—all this involves extremely critical issues. It entails in providing opportunities for the learners to explore and adopt new sets of values. This is not only a very sensitive proposition but also relates to new dimensions and a new sets of ethical issues.

Population education is value laden. It involves basic choices in the lives of individuals. Value re-education and reorientation can lead to manipulation. So great care must be taken in enabling learners to re-orient values by free choice.