

Population Stabilisation and Empowerment of Women.

M.N. smriti

Research scholar,

P.G.Dept. of geography

B.R.A. Bihar University,

Muzaffarpur

Their nature and capabilities make women eminently suitable for playing an effective role, than anyone else in population stabilisation and family welfare women by their position, biological and other wise, occupy a center stage in this context. After much study and analysis we have come to realise that sustained economic development in an given situation cannot be achieved without stability in the rate of growth of population. Demography of the rich countries in the West shows a decline in population growth, while the developing countries in Asia and Africa are showing a spurt in population due mainly to fall in mortality increase in birth rates. This trend, if unchecked, will present a potentially insurmountable obstacle to socio-economic progress of the developing areas and will actually eat away the fruit of their development efforts. This calls for a multi-pronged global strategy to check population growth.

India's fertility rate and infant mortality rate have remained at very high levels primarily due to abject poverty, widespread illiteracy, especially among females. Total fertility rate (TFR), or average number of children per mother, is still at 3.4 levels (1993), which is far greater than the ideal number at replacement level (2.1 children). Rural Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is still 3.7 children which is 36 per cent higher than urban TF R of 2.7. IMR is also still very high. It was 78.5 deaths of infants per 1000 live born infants; and under-five mortality in 109.3 deaths per 1000 children born during 5 years preceding the survey (1993). In India, Infant mortality and. total fertility are intimately connected; so we need first ' to reduce IMR much before TFR level can be expected to decline.

The impact of the growing population on our economy is very serious. Samastipur district at the time of independence had a population of approximately 18.9 lakh and today we have crossed 42.5 lakh with 2.5 % per annum growth rate overpopulation, infact, leads to increasing pressure on land and over exploitation of our scarce and depleting resources. This causes migration of people to overcrowded urban slums overstretching social service, schools, health centres, family planning clinics, water and sanitation services etc. Side by side, there would be increasing unemployment, low wages and a wider gulf between the rich and the poor leading to social tensions and other fissiparous pressures.

After independence, we have attained some successes in various fields. However, we have failed to attain a rapid diminution in the birth rate and this, coupled with low death rate, has caused an explosive growth of population, putting corers of our people in the midst of ignorance, malnutrition and poverty. The growth of population in India, therefore, needs to be checked urgently to keep it within such a limit as will be bearable to our economy and resources. It is here, that direct role of woman in Indian economic development is urgently called for.

Progress of a nation can be measured by the progress of its woman folk. All through the ages, women have contributed immensely to the enrichment of culture and progress of civilization without getting due recognition for their contribution. It is only in the last couple of decades that there is a growing awareness that human development is likely to make a quantum leap only if substantial investment is made in improving the status and role of women. Human progress will be sustainable only if the mutually reinforcing effects of the status of women on population "growth, .poverty and environment deterioration is fully appreciated and consciously attended to.

It has been found that there is a definite relationship between the size of a population and the level of its development on the one hand and between women and the population control on the other. In other words,

population of a country has to be within the bearable limits of its economy and resources and if it is not, it has to be stabilized at a particular level, lest the larger section of the people should remain deprived of even the basic necessities of life. There in comes the role of women in population control.

Women by their position, biological and otherwise, occupy a centre stage in this context. Their nature and capabilities make them eminently suitable for playing an effective role, than anyone else, in population stabilisation and family welfare.

Various thinkers have broadly emphasized the relationship between population and development process. It has also been established that population growth and status of women in a society are interdependent. The latter is determined mainly by economic, social and cultural factors. Population growth also the status of women are directly related, among other things, to the fertility behaviour and use of contraception among women.

Two probable reasons behind the explosive growth of population in India have been: (a) the norm of small family has not yet reached too many, and (b) the high fertility rate of women, especially in rural areas. One possible reason behind the non-acceptance of the norm of small family by many in our country is the prevalence of the high infant mortality rate which means the probability that an infant will die within the first year of its life per thousand of persons. Child mortality affects fertility behaviour which depends upon a number of complex and inter-related set of biological, demographic, social, economic and cultural factors. We shall, however, try to explore that the level of education of mothers help reduce the child mortality and fertility in our country.

The relationships between education on the one hand and fertility and use of contraception on the other have been brought out. Educational status, in fact, influences their socio-economic development as it accelerates social status attainment, provides exposure to ideas of wider choices of economic and social concern and off-familial commitment and proving thus to be the conditioning factors which limit family size. To be precise, educational development works as a triggering mechanism to delay marriage, natural corollary of which is to limit the number of children. In between the education and limiting the number of children, the issues like participation in labour force, acceptance of family planning methods and rationality behind the choice of the number of children are the key factors which centre on the concept of development and status of women.

In Samastipur district, education has been found to be one of the most powerful indicators of fertility decline. Kerala is distinct from the other states in literacy among females (over 15 years of age) who would influence the rate of population growth through their fertility and contraceptive behaviour. The greater decline of fertility in Kerala compared to any other state in India, has been attributed to the cumulative effect of specific programmes launched by the Kerala government in providing equitable educational and health services to women besides the reduction of inequalities in their income and wealth.

Women's education and employment thus have been found to be the determining factors of the fertility behaviour and the choice of family size in the long run. Women's education, the creation of job opportunities for them and increasing their wage-income have a definite impact on family size, as the direct methods of curbing fertility can come handy by increasing interval and hence, the fertility realization is postponed only when they are preceded by proper education and employment opportunities for women.

Women's education along with an increased age at marriage and their work participation has the strongest relationship to the adoption of family planning. It has been found that the total fertility rate of literate women is lower than that of the illiterate women in rural and as well as in urban areas. Among the women educated up to matriculation, the reduction in total fertility rate is lower in rural areas and higher in urban areas. A WHO study has shown that not only the participation in workforce shows the decline in fertility, but also the kind of workforce in which they are involved has a definite impact. A study by the Council for Social Development on family planning in the three state of Haryana, Tamil Nadu and Meghalaya can be cited for the variations in the dimensions of the status of women which include educational level, proportion employed and participation in community life and their impact on the role in decision-making by women in the adeption of family planning.

Therefore, the investment in education of women, in fact, is an investment in the success of the family planning programme, leading to a reduction in fertility in general. Women's education by its variation in the levels of schooling and associated with the rural urban background has a definite contributory role in reducing fertility.

There are also certain other articulated findings in terms of education of a woman as a wife, and the education of husband and their parents and also their children, which appear to have a significant effect on the desired and actual number of children the couples have. The educational attainment of women is said to be enhancing the women's earning capabilities, development of taste for modern consumption standards and augmenting the family's income and having a significant effect on the reproductive career of women, that is, an important bearing on fertility and contraceptive behaviour. The family planning programmes, therefore, have necessarily to be women-oriented, supported by certain socio-economic inputs, the political power, income generating opportunities for women and also women's independent thinking on the issues in which they play a significant role, population control being the one.

It is beyond doubt that, the society's general level of development has a role in fertility decline. Thus the conceptual issue in this regard is that the development programme specifically geared for women and that too particularly for the specific age groups of women in the reproductive span should become a policy thrust for population control programmes. It may be said otherwise that all the development programmes like education and employment services in all the planning programmes need to have specific goals of reaching women. Development of women being a catalytic factor in achieving the goals of population control programmes in Samastipur district, their development through education and employment, therefore, requires serious consideration.

It is, therefore, necessary to consider the antenatalistic measures of educational policy from a long-term perspective as the population problem is not a short-term phenomenon. The educational policies in Samastipur district, as far as fertility reduction is concerned and perhaps for other aspects of development as well, should give higher priorities towards increase in female primary, education. Educational policies can reduce fertility and this effect can be enhanced by allocating disproportionately higher resources for primary education of women, emphasizing on the reduction of currently prevalent high drop-out rates from primary school.

Another significant issue relating to women which hinders her active participation in population control is poverty. Women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and independence, lack of access to economic resources including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision making process. Poverty also forces women into the situations in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. A substantial change in women's economic condition, therefore, can be brought about by increasing the productive capacity of women through access to capital, resources, credit, land, technology, information, technical assistance and training.

Women have the right to attain the highest possible standard of physical and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well being and their ability to participate in all areas of life. Women, however, do not have an equal access to basic health resources and opportunities for protection and maintenance of their health. This situation adversely affects the health of girls and women. The position of women places disproportionate responsibilities on them as they have to perform multiple roles within the family as well as in the community. Besides, they do not receive the necessary social, psychological and economic support. Discrimination against girls coupled with inaccessibility to nutrition and health-care services, endangers their health and well being. To the extent that improvement in socioeconomic sectors influences fertility behaviour, the need for integrating these critical factors of education, income and health into family welfare programmes is urgently called for.

An examination of the effect of some indicators of status of women on fertility and contraception has thus revealed that the educational status of women followed by age at marriage, economic participation, health status etc. are the important factors determining the variations in fertility, use of contraception, etc. and 'therefore, population control.

The problems affecting women's status in this district, it is evident, are vast and complex. Women are at present bound in a network of social limitations affecting their whole lives, further complicated by their own vulnerability and poverty. The gains of economic development would be null and void, reduction in fertility slow and no improvement in the standard of living would be possible if women's status is low. Hence, there is an urgent need to help women particularly rural women towards gaining social and economic emancipation and thus, higher status.

Conclusion

Noted below are some suggestions / proposals given for improving status of women in Samastipur district.

Women in General

- (a) There is a need to ensure educational opportunities of similar quality and content for both sexes and provide special incentives such as reduced fees, for increased enrolment of girls and women in schools and other training programmes.
- (b) The effects of cultural and economic bias against the education and training of girls and women now require extra measures in order to compensate for past neglect and to enhance the productive capacities of the women. We must establish special recruitment, training and extension programmes of development agencies at all levels, including professional fields from which women have been traditionally excluded.
- (c) Boys as well as girls, if they are to be responsible partners in marriage, should study child-care, Nutrition, consumer education and home management. For both sexes, family life and population education are essential and should begin at the primary level. We must promote understanding of men's responsibilities to share household duties.
- (d) We must establish and strengthen non-formal educational opportunities for women, including leadership training, instruction in agricultural as well as non-farm activities, health care, upbringing of children, family planning and nutrition. Promote understanding of men's responsibilities to share household duties
- (e) We must ensure full membership and equal voting rights for women in people's organisations such as tenants associations, labour unions, cooperatives, credit unions etc.
- (f) Some amount of positive dissemination is needed for the women in certain areas for some time in order to enable them to compete with others in society.
- (g) Family life education is to be(given for understanding the implications of family size and spacing for the health of mother and child.

Reference:

1. Goel Priti Prabha (2009): Indian women towards progress, Rajasthani Granthagar, page-104-105.
2. Tripathi Renu and Tripathi aparn(2011): Actual position of working women khuri publication, New delhi.
3. Ibid pp-46-47.
4. Ibid p-95.
5. Ibid p-64.