
INFLUENCE OF CULTURE PATTERN ON POPULATION GROWTH

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A close study of population trends in the world reveals some curious features in the context of economic development. Even a casual look at the demographic figures of both advanced and under-developed countries explains the role of population in the economy. Although population has emerged as a problem of the entire world, yet its impact is most felt in under-developed countries where numbers have been increasing at alarming rates. In order to achieve a fair rate of development, population should increase just to maintain the labour supply necessary for production. But the under-developed countries have shown a tendency of progressive increase in population due to decline in mortality and constant birth rates, in an effort to understand the extent of this problem, a comparison between the fertility rates of various countries reveals that under-developed countries have not been showing the progressive growth entirely due to economic reasons. There are countries among the under-developed nations which have resources equal to or, in some cases, even more than the advanced countries yet the fertility rates have been very high. A comparison of Japan and Indo-Pakistan sub-continent is a case in point. It is a recognized fact by now that development has a lot to do with population growth. Although development does not exclusively depend upon the national resources of the country, yet they are the basis of economic progress. If resources of various countries are similar, the difference in the degree of their development and the difference in population growth can only be explained by factors other than economic.

Culture pattern has been described as one of the non-economic factors affecting economic development, mainly through population.¹ The impact of culture pattern is on the population structure through traditions and customs prevalent in a society. A culture is evolved by a progressive process in the course of centuries. It is rather difficult to explain the evolution of culture and analyze it. An impact of religion, traditions and customs of different lands brought together during the war-times, however, can be explained as the source of culture.

Culture has played a very important role in forming the social code of Modern society. Still there is definitely a difference in culture of various regions of the

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world.² This dissimilarity between the cultures of nations has accordingly effected the rate of progress as some cultures are antagonistic to change, some lay more stress on materialism while others are inclined towards the spiritual side. Difference between the economic development of Japan and un-divided India bear an evidence to it.

Most of the living cultures derive their roots from religion and attractive as it is, it has changed the pattern of social life within the effected areas. Countries, most under the religious-influence, are ancient according to the age of their belief. Religious teachings, mysticism and taboos connected therewith are a stubborn obstruction for any new idea to come in. This stubbornness inherent in all religious societies has been one of the main obstacles in the way of understanding the implications of population growth. Allied to it are the teachings of religions themselves which, with the exception of a few, either encourage population growth or create indirectly the conditions favourable to it. We need not go into the details of population control to understand the passages from scriptures which encourage population growth. Just an evidence of opposition to population check is sufficient to confirm our contention.³ Religion with all its vigour and influence in backward countries has corroborated with local traditions in gathering a strong opposition to birth control which is the most effective solution of the population problem.

Under-developed countries have been mostly under the foreign domination for a considerably long period of time. Foreign rule, on the one hand, has wrought a revolution in the minds of a small portion of population by the demonstration effect, but, on the other, it has also created stubbornness among the general public. Customs with age-old traditions could not be possibly broken with a shock of invasion or authority of a Government. Western nations mostly adopted the policy of ruling with co-operation of the local people, their basic object of occupation being trade and not the political power. This policy was widely practised by the foreign rulers in the beginning but as they established themselves on firmer footing religious missionaries started pouring in. Christian missions from the West, with moral support of the Western Governments, became quite popular with the lower castes in society. This endangered the local religions throughout the depressed countries, a general resentment for Christianity and the West being the natural consequence. Social uplift and standard of living were closely related to Western ideology. So all the various steps taken by the Governments of under-developed countries towards raising the standard of living were boycotted by the local population. Population control and family planning, being the ideas belonging to the West, were also unacceptable on the same grounds even to the

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most literate portion of population. In spite of best efforts of the Governments, achievement in the field of socio-economic welfare was little, general hatred being the major cause.

It will not be absolutely incorrect to say that general structure of population, among the non-economic factors, is affected by religion alone. There are other conditions as well which though not entirely religious yet have gradually associated themselves with this respectable institution. Marriage laws are the first in this respect. Marriage laws or conventions can directly influence population growth by practices like child marriage, marriages within family and supremacy of the elders.

Child marriage is a custom in many countries of the East. Though the conditions are not so grave, yet the practice is still strong enough to create an atmosphere unfavourable for economic development and sound population structure. In India and Pakistan the number of married persons between the age of 15 and 19, according to 1931 census, was 44.5 per cent, among the males and 83.9 per cent among the females as compared 0.6 and 3.8 per cent respectively in Portugal.⁴ (Portugal has been cited, because the economic conditions of Portugal are somewhat similar to the sub-continent of India and Pakistan.) Marriage at an age, when the couple is not aware of the obligations of a parent is an open sanction for increase in population. Not only that, they do not understand their responsibilities as parents but also they do not know how to avoid having a child. They realize the necessity of controlling the birth when it is too late. Not only that, even the fertility among women is higher in the early years of puberty as compared to women in thirties or late twenties.⁵ This also helps in raising birth figures because even the few sincere efforts at birth control are foiled at this age. Lastly the child produced by a couple, who have not yet started their career will not get proper education and care to grow into a useful citizen. The possibility of the child being in poor state of health is still another danger.

Customs regarding inter-caste marriages change from culture to culture. Marriage customs in India and Pakistan can be cited in this connection, Hindus are religiously opposed to marriage within the sub-caste while Muslims dominantly marry within the family. Both these customs are extremes of an unjustifiable convention. Family marriages give rise to joint family system which discourages internal migration, a necessary condition for industrialization. Even according to laws of eugenics family marriages give rise to concentration of blood leading to communicable defects in children.⁶ In such closely-knit families, family planning becomes very difficult due to the wrong precedents set by the elders.

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An unplanned addition of children by elder members of the family influences the young couples who otherwise might have controlled the number of their children. On the other extreme, the Hindu woman is supposed to practically part with her parents after her marriage. Once married she virtually becomes a slave to the man which chance may have provided for her.⁷ Marriage of slave with her lord shifts the onus to the man who pay produce any number of children according to his will or remain altogether indifferent. The family structure of this type leads to high birth rate. The figures related to Hindu population of India are an evidence in this respect.

Family structure, as a whole, has a great influence on the pace of development. Cultures of Western origin do not attach godly importance to elders in the family, all the members being free to do whatever they like. Oriental cultures, on the contrary, follow patriarchal traditions more rigidly with the consequence that family, from a group of individuals, reduces to a flock of dumb sheep. The elder formulates and dictates the policy by virtue of his age. This directly discourages the new generation from accepting any new idea because it cannot penetrate into the thick skin of the old man. The younger members by customary respect and reverence dare not express their desire for a change. Even if a revolutionary comes forward, he is discouraged because resentment of the elders might go to the extent of his being disinherited from the rights of property. Such a rigid orthodox family system with inherent defects not only affects economic development by obstructing migration but also discourages mobility of labour between various hereditary occupations. Dictatorship of the elders also leads to wrong marriages which are entirely arranged by the elders without least consideration of the partners. These combinations do not always result in happy marriages. They may result in family discord and frustration leading to unplanned childbearing, defective education of children or may break at the rock of differences. This tendency has contributed a good deal in increasing the number of dependents in the under-developed countries.

In order to have an effective control on population, planning is a fundamental step and is being widely practised in the advanced countries. Family planning determines the number of children to be born within the life time with proper intervals according to the expected increase in financial resources of the couple. Further, it not only controls population but also assures proper care and education for the coming generation. Family planning, however, is not possible without co-operation among the two partners for which a certain degree of literacy and intelligence is necessary. The countries where the culture patterns provide for

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female education and equal status for women have very low birth rates even if they are economically not very much advanced. A restriction on women that they cannot come out of their homes and must limit their activities to cookery, washings and childcare can spoil the whole character of the nation, according to some advocates of female education.⁸ Even if this view is too extremist to be scientific, population statistics show higher birth figures for countries having low literacy ratio among the females than those with higher female literacy, degree of economic development being the same. It is not the birth rate alone that is effected by female education but the death rate is also directly connected through infant mortality.

Recreation has by now been universally recognized as an effective check on population. It has been successfully employed in labour colonies of under-developed countries to depress birth rates. Type and mode of recreation has been undergoing a constant change with the taste and occupation of the people. Modern society has very little time for pleasure. But with increased strain and stress of life need for recreation has increased considerably. In order to meet these requirements, the modern recreation facilities have been evolved which give the maximum pleasure in the minimum time. Some of the rigid religious cultures do not allow these recreations to fill the gap created by the disappearance of old forms of recreation. Indirectly, this rigidity and prejudice towards the modern sources of pleasure is affecting the birth rate among the lower classes of society. People in lower income groups, after their days' work, cannot afford to indulge in old games and pleasures which require lot of time. Lack of recreational facilities is aggravated by false social dignities and taboos created by the elders who also do not allow birth control by contraception. Both these factors combine to cause a fair increase in population growth.

Last of all, as a part of culture, there comes the question of education. Education does not entirely depend on culture pattern but is also dependent on economic conditions of the country. An economy which is in the process of industrialization stimulates education while industrialized nations already have high literacy ratios. But agricultural countries have low literacy ratio because education does not contribute much to the traditional methods of cultivation. Low literacy ratio in turn affects both population growth and economic development owing to ignorance with the ways of modern world. High literacy ratio in itself is responsible for undermining the ancient culture as culture is responsible for determining the extent of education.

Towards the end, it might be said that culture pattern is not an independent factor to influence population growth: rather it is closely connected with economic

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development. A progress in the economic field does mould the culture pattern but there is a time-lag involved in this process. Population growth is directly connected with economic development; rate of net increase gradually declines with a rise in the standard of living. Culture pattern, therefore, has effects both on population and economic development but its impact on economic development is mainly through population and that is where this study becomes important.

REFERENCES

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Kill not your children !
For fear of want; we shall
Provide sustenance for them
As well as for you,
Verily the killing of them
Is a great Sin.
This verse has been misinterpreted by religious leaders. Actually it does not refer to birth control but is concerned with infanticide.
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