

Lecture 34: Population Policy Statement by Dr. Karan Singh

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INTRODUCTION

By looking at increasing rate of population growth after independence and failure of various experiments in family planning the planners became a bit panicky. In April 1976, Dr. Karan Singh, the then Minister of Health and Family Planning, announced the National Population Policy of India. This became a landmark in population policy. The full text of the policy is given below.

FIRST POLICY STATEMENT

The first population policy draft maintained that poverty is the real enemy of the country, and the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) aimed to remove the widespread abject poverty by including Minimum Needs Programme with an integrated package of health, family planning and nutrition as components. The complete text of the statement by Dr. Karan Singh, released on 16 April 1976 is as follows:

- (1) **With 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, India has about 15 per cent of the world's people. It is estimated that our population as on 1 January, 1976 has crossed the 600 million mark, and is now rising at the rate of well over one million per month. Since Independence 250 millions have been added, equivalent to the entire population of the Soviet Union with six times the land area of India.** The increase every year is now equal to the entire population of Australia which is 2½ times the size of our country. If the percent rate of increase continues unchecked our population at the tern of the century may well reach the staggering figure of one billion. Indisputably we are facing a population explosion of crisis dimensions which has largely diluted the fruits of the remarkable economic progress that we have made over the last two decades. If the future of the nation is to be secured, and the goal of removing poverty to be attained, the population problem will have to be treated as a top national priority and commitment.

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- (2) Our real enemy is poverty, and it is as a frontal assault on the citadels of poverty that the Fifth-Five-Year Plan has included the **Minimum Needs Programme**. One of its five items is integrated package of health, family planning and nutrition. Far reaching steps have been initiated to reorient the thrust of medical education so as to strengthen the community medicine and rural health aspects, and to restructure the health care delivery system on a three-tier basis going down to the most far-flung rural areas where the majority of our people reside and where child mortality and morbidity are the highest. Similarly, ignorance, illiteracy and superstition have got to be fought and eliminated. In the ultimate analysis it is only when the underlying causes of poverty and disease are eliminated that the nation will be able to move forward to its desired ideals.
- (3) Nonetheless it is clear that simply to wait for education and economic development to bring about a drop in fertility is not a practical solution. The very increase in population makes economic development slow and more difficult of achievement. The time factor is so pressing, and the population growth so formidable, that we have to get out of the vicious circle through a direct assault upon this problem as a national commitment. The President in his address to the Joint Session of Parliament this year reiterated the importance of stepping up family planning efforts, and the Prime Minister has on several occasions laid stress upon the crucial role that population control has to play in the movement towards economic independence and social transformation, specially in the light of the 20-Point Economic Programme.

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- (4) Considerable work has been done in our country in the field of family planning but clearly only the fringe of the problem has so far been touched. In this context, after a thorough and careful consideration of all the factors involved as well as the expression of a wide spectrum of public opinion. Government have decided on a series of fundamental measures detailed below which, it is hoped, will enable us to achieve the planned target of reducing the birth rate from an estimated 35 per thousand in the beginning of the Fifth Plan to 25 per thousand at the end of the Sixth. Allowing for the steady decline in the death rate that will continue due to the improvement in our medical and public health services and the living standards of our people, this is expected to bring down the growth rate of population in our country to 1.4 per cent by 1984.
- (5) **Raising the age of marriage** will not only have a demonstrable demographic impact, but will also lead to more responsible parenthood and help to safeguard the health of the mother and the child. It is well known that very early pregnancy leads to higher maternal and infant mortality. Also, if the women of our country are to play their rightful role in its economic, social and intellectual life, the practice of early marriage will have to be severely discouraged. The present law has not been effectively or uniformly enforced. It has, therefore, been decided that the minimum age of marriage should be raised to 18 for girls and 21 for boys, and suitable legislation to this effect will be passed. Offences under this law will be cognizable by an officer not below the rank of Sub-Divisional Magistrate. The question of making registration of marriages compulsory is under active consideration.

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- (6) It has been represented by some states that while on the one hand we are urging them to limit their population, those states which do well in this field face reduction of representation in Parliament while those with weak performance in family planning tend to get increasing representation. It is obviously necessary to remedy this situation. It has, therefore, been decided that the representation in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures will be frozen on the basis of the 1971 Census until the year 2001. This means in effect that the census counts of 1981 and 1991 will not be considered for purposes of adjustment of Lok Sabha Legislature Seats. Necessary constitutional amendment will be brought forward during the current year. Appropriate legislation for other elective bodies will also be undertaken.
- (7) In a federal system, the sharing of Central resources with the States is a matter of considerable importance. In all cases where population is a factor as in the allocation of Central assistance to State Plans, devolution of taxes and duties and grants-in-aid, the population figures of 1971 will continue to be followed till the year 2001. In the matter of Central assistance to State Plans, eight per cent will be specifically earmarked against performance in family planning. The detailed procedures in this regard will be worked out by the Planning Commission.
- (8) While there is a direct correlation between illiteracy and fertility, this is particularly marked in the case of girls' education. Wherever female literacy improves, it has been seen that fertility drops almost automatically. It is, therefore, necessary that special measures be taken to raise the levels of female education, particularly above the middle level for girls as well as non-formal education plans for young women especially in certain backward states where the family planning performance so far has been unimpressive. The same is true with regard to child nutrition programmes, as high infant mortality and morbidity have a direct bearing on fertility. The Ministry of Education is urging, upon the State governments the necessity to give these matters higher priority than has been accorded so far and fully earmarking adequate outlays both for **girls' education upto the middle level and child nutrition.**

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- (9) My Ministry is also in close touch with the Education Ministry with regard to the introduction of population values in the educational system, and the NCERT has already made a beginning in bringing out some textbooks on these lines. It is essential that the younger generations should grow up with an adequate awareness of the population problem and a realization of their national responsibility in this regard. Indeed, if I may venture to say so, exhortations to plan families are more important for the younger generations than for those who have already made their contribution to our demographic profile.
- (10) The adoption of a small family norm is too important a matter to be considered the responsibility of only one Ministry. It is essential that all Ministries and Departments of the Government of India as well as the states should take up as an integral part of their normal programme and budgets the motivation of citizens to adopt responsible reproductive behaviour both in their own as well as the national interest. A directive to this effect is being issued by the Prime Minister to all Ministries of the Government of India, and a letter will also be addressed by her to all Chief Ministers. The performance of family planning in the states will be more carefully and intensively monitored than in the past, and the Union Cabinet will review the situation in depth at least once a year.
- (11) Experience over the last 20 years has shown that monetary compensation does have a significant impact upon the acceptance of family planning, particularly among the poorer sections of society. In view of the desirability of limiting the family size to two or three it has been decided that monetary compensation for sterilization (both male and female) will be raised to Rs.150 if performed with two living children or less, Rs. 100 if performed with three living children and Rs. 70 if performed with four or more children. This amount will include the money payable to individual acceptors as well as other charges such as drugs and dressings, etc, and will take effect from 1 may 1976. Facilities for sterilization and MTP are being increasingly extended to cover rural areas.

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- (12) In addition to individual compensation, government is of the view that group incentives should now be introduced in a bold and imaginative manner so as to make family planning a mass movement with greater community involvement. It has, therefore, been decided that suitable group incentives will be introduced for the medical profession, for Zila and Panchayat Samitis, for teachers at various levels, for cooperative societies and for labour in the organized sector through their respective representative national organizations. Details of these group incentives are being worked out in consultation with the concerned organizations.
- (13) Despite governmental efforts at Union, State and Municipal level, family planning cannot succeed unless voluntary organizations are drawn into its promotion in an increasing measure, particularly youth and women's organizations. There is already a scheme for aiding voluntary organizations, and it has been decided that this will be expanded. Also, full rebate will be allowed in the income tax assessment for amounts given as donations for family planning purposes to government, local bodies or any registered voluntary organization approved for this purpose by the Union ministry of Health.
- (14) Research in reproductive biology and contraception is underway in several of our scientific institutions, and there are some very promising developments which, we hope, will lead to a major breakthrough before too long. This is a great challenge to our scientists, and efforts in this direction will receive special attention so that necessary research inputs are ensured on a long range and continuing basis.

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- (15) The question of **compulsory sterilization** has been the subject of lively public debate over the last few months. It is clear that public opinion is now ready to accept much more stringent measures for family planning than before. However, the administrative and medical infrastructure in many parts of the country is still not adequate to cope with the vast implications of nation-wide compulsory sterilization. We do not, therefore, intend to bring in Central legislation for this purpose, at least for the time being. Some States feel that the facilities available with them are adequate to meet the requirements of compulsory sterilization. We are of the view that where a State legislature, in the exercise of its own powers, decides that the time is ripe and it is necessary to pass legislation, for compulsory sterilization, it may do so. Our advice to the States in such cases will be to bring in the limitation after three children, and to make it uniformly applicable to all Indian citizens resident in that State without distinction of caste, creed or community.
- (16) Some States have also introduced a series of measures directed towards their employees and other citizens in the matter of preferential allotment of houses, loans, etc. for those who have accepted family planning. In this sphere also we have decided to leave it to each individual state to introduce such measures as they consider necessary and desirable. Employees of the Union Government will be expected to adopt the small family norm and necessary changes will be made in their service/conduct rules to ensure this.

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- (17) In order to spread the message of family planning throughout the nation, a new **multi-media motivational strategy** is being evolved which will utilize all the available media channels including the radio, television (specially programmes aimed directly at rural audiences), the press, films, visual displays and also include traditional folk media such as the jatra, puppet show, folk songs and folk dances. The attempt is to move from the somewhat urban-elitist approaches of the past into a much more imaginative and vigorous rural-oriented approach. In this context my Ministry is working in close coordination with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and is also trying to draw the best media talent available in the country into the structuring of the new programme.
- (18) This package of measures will succeed in its objective only if it receives the full and active cooperation of the people at large. It is my sincere hope that the entire nation will strongly endorse the new population policy which, as part of a multi decided strategy for economic development and social emancipation, is directed towards building a strong and prosperous India in the years and decades to come.

The above statement shows that raising age of marriage and women's education were part of family planning policy since the beginning. However, too much stress on sterilization and targets proved to be counterproductive. There was no need to be panicky. Family planning programme would have been much more successful if the first policy statement did not stress on sterilization with involvement of all government departments (which include even the police department).