

*The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Village* by Mahmood Mamdani, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972, 173pp.

While over the last couple of decades the Indian Government has invested a substantial part of the resources earmarked for social welfare for the family planning program, one has genuine doubts whether any tangible benefit has emerged from such huge expenditure. The Fourth Plan also admits that over the first three Plans there was no fall in the crude birth rate which remained at 41 per thousand (4.1 per cent annual). There, however, has occurred a modest improvement since then, the crude birth rate is at present around 39 per thousand.

But simultaneously a question arises and this is also the central theme of the book under review, how far the recent fall in the crude birth rate could be ascribed to the family planning program of the government? Mamdani has his reservations. On the basis of empirical information that was available to him from the India-Harvard-Ludhiana family planning study (which lasted for over sixteen years from 1953 to 1969 and was generously financed by the Rockefeller Foundation), and also of his intensive survey of one of the village of India-Harvard study, he concludes that despite the best efforts of family planning specialists (including foreigners) the program was an utter failure.

But why did it fail? Mamdani goes over this issue carefully in this lucid, seven-chapter study. In his opinion the family planning program failed not because the people were irrational but because this program did not offer any concrete solution to their economic problem. Rather small families would have made them economically worse off. This goes counter to the government's entire propaganda machinery where family planning is extolled as a big virtue and a heavy budget of the nation goes into this propaganda. But unfortunately the facts are on the other side, at least this is what is the outcome of the Khanna study.

With the help of three core chapters—Chapter 3, Technology and Social Structure; Chapter 4, The "Population Problem" and the Agricultural Classes; Chapter 5, The "Population Problem" and the Traditional Service Sector—Mamdani systematically explodes some of the accepted myths of family planning. For instance, in Chapter 3, he explodes the common belief that technological change would bring about a change in the population size. He finds that while Manupur—one of the villages selected for the Harvard study—has been exposed to hectic technological shake-up (like switching on to new farm machinery, extensive use of water pump sets, fertilizers, institutional credit facilities, and the like), this has not changed the attitude of farmers towards the family size. Rather, as Chapter 4 supports, while farmers become affluent they tend to depend on bigger families (more children) both for the maintenance of such affluence as well as for enhancing it still further. The farmers further argue that small families would mean more dependence on hired laborers, more dependence on (town) mechanics for the repair of their farm machinery, more dependence on other farmers (generously endowed with children) for the hiring out of their farms. Thus by raising large families they would be more or less self-reliant and depend least on the outside help which is not only undependable but more importantly is becoming terribly expensive. Further, children are a source of extra income for the family (through taking independent employment or making an optimal use of farm equipment and other inputs) and thus help their families to clear off debts borrowed from co-operatives or banks (for the purchase of farm machinery and new inputs).

One should have thought that nonagriculturists should have been far more responsive to family planning as they do not have to face problems that are faced by farmers. But even here, as the above study corroborates, the picture is in no way different. Non-agriculturists like *lohars* ("ironsmiths") or *nais* ("barbers"), notwithstanding a steady fall in their business (because of the introduction of new technology), favor large families because they are confident that only through more children they would be able to improve their economic status. This as much amounts to stating that they are poor not because they have large families but because they have small ones. So small families mean economic disaster for them.

Well, Mamdani might have exaggerated while drawing his conclusions based on the Khanna study and his own observations and interviews with people in a single village of Manupur, but by and large he has presented a fascinating study which should become an eye opener for the Ministry of Family Planning and all those organizations which are engaged in the work of family planning. People have the right to ask whether the huge budget that goes into family planning, maintenance of some odd 37 thousand family planning clinics (by end March 31, 1971) and a large number of specialists, is well utilized. Looking to the fact that affluent state like Punjab, which has been far more exposed to modern farm technology than any other state in India, has not been affected by family planning during the fifties and sixties, one has doubts whether the program would have made any significant impact in other states. The program should, therefore, be put to rigorous cost benefit analysis. This would help in formulating a rational approach to the family planning programs in future.

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