

The Paradox of Poverty: Socio-Economic Aspects of Population Growth.—
By T. Scarlett Epstein and Darrell Jackson. The Macmillan of India Limited
Delhi, 1975. pp.127.

To many social theoreticians, the population explosion, particularly in the developing nations presents a crippling threat to their developmental processes. Their argument's validity rests mainly on the assumption that expected economic progress is swallowed up by unbalanced rise of numbers in the population. The book being reviewed deals mainly with this subject matter and is divided into two parts, each containing three articles contributed by various researchers.

Part one, 'The Social context of Fertility Decision' is focused on analyzing the role of factors affecting fertility at the micro-level decision making process. The first article 'Fertility decision in rural India' by Vinod Jainath, examines the applicability to rural India of various models of the process of fertility decision making and finds most of these wanting with respect to the Indian social situation. While analyzing the fertility patterns of Rural India, he points out the positive need for larger families among the poor small farmers mainly due to labour supply considerations. The author argues that unemployment and under-employment actually motivate the poor to have more children as it better ensures their economic security in their old age. As the chances of gaining employment for their offspring diminish, they are induced to increase the total number of children in order that atleast one will be able to support them. Thus a vicious circle of poverty arises in large families because of each of the parents wanting to increase their children's chances of employment by ultimately reducing the overall employment opportunities even further and exacerbating their poverty.

The Second article, 'Cost/Benefit versus parental Immortality: Family size in Rural Kenya' by Joseph Sennyonga, analyzes the population pressure in rural Kenya in relation to the numerical strength of ethnic groups. Sennyonga concludes that due to political strength of the majority in the parliamentary democracy framework, a tribe or ethnic group is induced to increase their numerical strength in order to achieve a higher position in the local political hierarchy. The inability of an illiterate Kenyan couple to leave their mark on tribal history in the form of a written record or durable term (Professor Mbiti's concept of 'Parental Immortality') inspires them to immortalize themselves by producing more children. Moreover the author states that the keenness of a Kenyan to ensure that atleast one of his children gets higher education also induces him to procreate more children who will help finance the cost of education for the son chosen to be put through school. In general the paper has argued that fertility behaviour is not only determined by economic considerations but even more by a large number of socio-political considerations such as parental immortality and ethnicity.

George C. Mhanigi in his article "Land Tenure, Population Growth and Economic Differentation: The Ribe Tribe of Kenya" highlights the phenomenon of accelerated population growth in relation to socio-economic and political changes in his own tribe. He describes high fertility as an economically rational decision in tribal societies such as the Ribe of Kenya. The shortage of agricultural labour alongwith strong ambitions to raise economic standards by

extending the area under cultivation, both lead to a larger number of children. A balance of the number of sons and daughters is considered desirable (as the loss of a daughter's labour can be compensated by securing a wife for a son) and induces a man to go on procreating till he is satisfied with the sex composition of his children. Furthermore the Kenyan Government's policy of land titles registration also reinforces high fertility behaviour. To stake a claim to as much land as possible before registration regulations are rigidified, families need more children to help make more of their land cultivable. Any ideas favouring the limiting of family size cannot be considered economically rational under these conditions.

Part two of the book, "Population Growth and Socio-Political Change" treats population as a given factor and investigates the changes in political and social institutions which are likely to accompany changes in population composition. The rapid growth of population which make economic growth in developing countries increasingly difficult and thereby accentuates the problem of poverty has been given special emphasis in this section of the book.

Sammy N. Onwuazor in his article "Population Growth, Modernization and Social Status among the Igbo of Nigeria" first makes an analysis of population growth and modernization in Igboland in its historical context and proceeds to analyze the respective impact of these variables on the rigid, traditional and egalitarian social organization of the Igbo of Nigeria. The author concludes that the economic status of the Igbo is deteriorating on the whole. He highlights population growth and high population density as the factors reducing the man/land ratio to a level which in turn makes cultivation unprofitable. The population explosion which is causing this economic havoc is the outcome of high fertility which is caused by factors such as reduced infant mortality, early marriage, high rates of illiteracy and adherence to large family ideals. Furthermore the agricultural sector has been neglected in favour of the economic sector and labour has tried to shift from the former to the latter. Jobs were too scarce to absorb this flow of labour to the economic sector and there was a labour shortage in the agricultural sector. The supply of child labour has diminished due to the increase of educational participation which renders children more dependent on their parents.

The article "The Widening gap between Rich and Poor in Rural India" by Makul Dube analyzes the nature of social class patterns in rural India. He finds that the upper classes, because of their social and political superiority are more integrated as a class and have therefore consolidated or atleast maintained their exploitative grip by utilizing their strong bonds when necessary. The economically dependent nature of landless labourers and their restricted geographical mobility alongwith weak communicational links restrict their integration as a class. The feudal system still prevalent in rural India not only perpetuates inequality but also seems to divert revolutionary potentials into tension between class conscious rural proletariat and resident labouring clients of local agrarian patrons, rather than between land owners and landless labourers. This internal conflict and instability of the poor class helps to solidify the chances of widening the gap between rich and poor and worsening the incapability of the agrarian proletariat to reconstruct the society on revolutionary lines.

The article "On the class consciousness of agrarian proletariat in Sri Lanka" by Newton Gunasughe, focuses on the class consciousness among the agrarian proletariat of Sri Lanka. His analysis is in conflict with that of Karl Marx's contemptuous views of the peasantry. Discussing the invalidity of Marx's views, he points out the differences between the Sri Lanka social structure and its French counterpart during the last century (the latter being the basis of Marx's theoretical assumptions). In contrast to the French peasantry, most of whom were small land owners, in contemporary Sri Lanka extreme inequalities exist in land holdings. The commercialization of farming has brought non-agricultural professional elites into this business, which is turning landowners into landless labourers. The author argues that this process of land grabbing by the Sri Lanka elites which is causing havoc amongst the poor, is expected to give birth to a class conscious rural proletariat which will be strong enough to reshape Sri Lanka society on a egalitarian basis.

The book, on the whole, is a study of poverty and some of its correlates. The social anthropological approach used to undertake the micro-level studies furnishes detailed and lengthy grass-root findings which can be of use in the theoretical as well as applied field of studies such as (1) Population and Development and (2) Socio-economic and political correlates of fertility. This book, however, is vulnerable to criticism against its narrow approach of poverty analysis in Part Two. While analysing patterns of poverty in the developing nations, colonial rule could often be sighted as a significant factor or determinant of poverty. The conscious or unconscious avoidance of discussion about colonialism, while analyzing the patterns of poverty in developing nations, will incite criticism from objective readers.

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