

Controlling the population boom

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THE speed with which population is growing, and the pervasive consequences of this growth, pose a serious challenge to Bangladesh. The population explosion does not have the sharpness and visible urgency of a cyclone or a sudden onslaught by an enemy, but its effects are even more far-reaching. Intellectual awareness of the causes and effects of overpopulation as well as introduction of population slogans for motivating the donor agencies are not enough. The problem is to generate the emotional commitment necessary to take the matter out of the halls of intellectual speculation and into the area of organised action. Over the past four decades, concern with the problem of overpopulation has spread around the country but none of the family planning programmes have matched the proportions of the problem.

Family planning (FP) was introduced in Bangladesh in 1950s through the voluntary efforts of social and medical workers. The government adopted FP as a government-sector programme in 1965. The policy to reduce fertility rates has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the government of Bangladesh since independence in 1971. In 1976 the government declared the rapid growth of the population as the country's number one problem and adopted a broad-based, multi-sectoral FP programme along with an official population policy. All the governments, even many NGOs, adopted mass FP programmes but could not achieve the set target. Absence of

dedicated field workers and leadership as well as integration of health and FP programme are the main reasons for the failure of FP programme.

Young people (below 16 years) make up 42% of total population and reproductive women aged between 16 and 48 years number 38% of all women. As life expectancy is increasing the size of the elderly population is increasing, thereby increasing the dependency burden. The number of the school age population has decreased to 33.1 million as against 34.2 in 2001, while the working age population (15-62 yrs) increased to 132 million, and will increase to 178 million by 2017, aggravating further the strained labour market. It is apprehended that the population density will be 4,167 persons per square mile in 2021 as against the present density of 2,592 persons.

Rural-urban difference in fertility is quite substantial. Total Fertility Rate (TFR) for rural women is about 3, and that of urban woman is 2.4. It was 3.4-3.2 during 1991-2000 followed by sharp decline by 0.6 during this decade. Rural-urban population distribution is 73:27. In recent years, rural-urban migration has increased steadily. Almost 85% of the rural migrants are absorbed in four main cities. Death matters no less than birth, indeed more, to demographers. The decline in deaths, particularly among infants, means more babies will live to grow up. So a country's population becomes more youthful, as in the case now in Bangladesh.

Population growth momentum has started and various pressures have been generated. If Bangladesh

can achieve NRR = 1 by 2016 (which was planned to be achieved in 1998), population will stabilise by 2070 at around 230 million, followed by stationary population in next 12-15 years. The population, it is expected, will reach 230 million by 2044 if the present trend of growth continues. So NRR=1 by 2016 cannot be achieved.

FP programmes were geared to provide contraceptive methods among all eligible couples before

couples to accept IUD, sterilisation or other permanent methods. But the FP programme is now concentrated only on maternal and child health issues.

Women in Bangladesh are the main stakeholders in the population and FP programme/methods. They are shy to talk about it with their family members, and in most cases they do not know about contraceptive usage and its availability. FP programmes at the field level

ately to achieve NRR=1 by 2016.

Population momentum is coming from low-income families, who comprise 55% of the society. Infant mortality and maternal mortality rates are the highest among them. Their Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is higher than that of the upper, middle and high-income groups. They have very little access to education beyond primary level, health care services and other benefits. The objectives of the population policy are to reduce TFR and increase the use of FP methods among eligible couples by raising awareness about FP. Birth rate may decline through FP programme efforts reinforced by non-family planning measures like female education, skill training, use of media etc.

Managing population requires planned actions, including balanced distribution of rural-urban migrants, relocation of industries from the cities, and increasing people's mobility. Bangladesh has quite a number of programmes to reduce birth and death rates but none to influence migration. The government policy is to provide food, social security and shelter for the disadvantaged, including the elderly, destitute and physically and mentally retarded persons. It puts emphasis on regulating and reducing rural-to-urban migration, ensuring safe drinking water etc. Necessary steps need to be taken to achieve these objectives by attaching FP activities in all development programmes as part of the project.

Bangladesh suffers because of population density, poor land-man ratio (1:16 decimals), slow economic growth, massive unemployment and huge working age population relative to the size of job

market. Though the government and NGOs have identified overpopulation as the number one problem, there is no significant attempt to make them skilled or bring them in the mainstream development activities. Huge investments have been made in FP programmes, but we could not achieve the objective of those programmes till date. However, family planning and population issues must continue to be priorities. If we are serious about saving women's lives as well as achieving overall development, family planning must remain at the centre of the agenda.

A separate ministry and budget should be introduced for launching meaningful FP activities, like door to door approach to educate the people about FP services, distributing contraceptives and motivating them to accepting permanent birth control programmes. The upazila and union parishads may be involved for intensive execution of programmes. An effective FP programme cannot achieve its goal through the FP personnel alone. A concerted effort by all -- political institutions, policy makers, technocrats, community leaders, related ministries etc -- should be ensured. The population explosion was not given due importance for the improvement of the programme as a whole. More emphasis, therefore, has to be given on achievement of demographic goals with the help of effective organisational structure along with efficient management system.

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1992, which was diverted to ensure maternal and child health care/services. This caused an increase in the population and unplanned families. Earlier, FP field officials went to door to door to give the message of family planning and its services, including distribution of pills and condoms to the couples directly, and motivated the

became inactive in 1992 due to integration. It may be mentioned that illiteracy, ignorance, shyness and poverty deprive the women of all sorts of facilities, including access to clinics or pharmacies to buy the contraceptives. They need to depend on their husbands. Door to door approach of FP services should be reintroduced immedi-

Killing of Damini in 'Shining India'

AUDITY FALGUNI

"My sister-Life's overflowing today, spring rain shattering itself like glass, ...the elders have their logic of course, certainly yours is foolish, no doubt." (Boris Pasternak).

WE are not sure if he was inspired by the Russian poet Boris Pasternak or not when Mahmudul Haque, the recently deceased word artist of Bangladesh, wrote his hugely acclaimed novel *Jibon Amar Bon* (Life is my Sister), where the male protagonist was not a hero; rather a coward, too timid even to protect his young sister in the horrific days of 1971.

Damini, a 23-year old medical student of Delhi, rode on a city bus at around 9:30 at night while returning home with her boy friend after a movie show. But what happened on the bus? She was mass raped for protesting obscene remarks from fellow passengers in the bus.

Despite the Indian government's utter failure in securing the safety and life of the ill fated Damini, it bore the expenses of her medical treatment. The apparently "tense" leaders of the ruling party attended the funeral rites of the deceased student. Meantime, the authorities in Delhi adopted numerous stringent measures to curb and control mass demonstration.

We have noted scores of discussions and stormy debates over last two weeks on issues like what women should wear to avoid rape or how long a woman should stay out at night, etc. Though women cannot avoid getting raped even wearing a burkha, still we won't go for that debate. But what we cannot escape is the question how "Shining" is "Shining India?"

Should we look upon this incident just as a rape only and demand stern punishment for the culprits? Or should we go for analysing and discussing the "sociology of crime" too? No doubt that the neo-liberal economic trend that India has been pursuing for last two decades, as prescribed by once World Bank economist Manmohan Singh, has generated a large, wealthy and consumerist middle class in India.

The Indian middle class is gradually becoming more western in dress code and use of language (English rather than Hindi and other Indian languages), but what is the adverse effect of this liberalisation on the poorer segments of the society? Are the poor becoming poorer? Before further elaboration upon this point we should not forget that all the alleged violators and killers of Damini in the bus are slum dwellers. Yes, they belong to the bottom rung of the society.

According to UNDP report of 2009, India had 3.95% growth rate in GDP in 1980-2005, which rose to 6.4% to 9.7%. But, on the other hand, India's position in Human Development Index (HDI) declined from 124th out of 177 countries in 2000 to 134th out of 182 countries in 2009. Around 836 millions Indians (77% of the population) still manage a day with less than 20 Indian rupees. The percentage of rural and urban poverty in India is 41.8% and 25.7%. The rate of rural poverty has risen up to 85% from 74.5% in 1993-94. Today India ranks as 65th out of 84 states in the Global Hunger Index (GHI).

Although we will raise our voices for hardest punishment of the criminals only tough implementation of laws cannot change the scenario on a permanent basis. The problem is deep rooted in the growing inequalities in distribution of wealth among the classes in the society.

is lagging behind Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Distressed farmers are committing suicides in hundreds each year. On the other hand, there are 52 billionaires amongst apex 100 richest men in India whose total wealth is about \$176 billion (Rs.13 lakh crores), which is just the one-fourth of total Indian GDP (Prayag Mitra: GDP Growth and Rising Inequality, Counter Currents, 27th April 2010).

Approximately 46% children less than three years are underweight and 50% children are victims of malnutrition. The 2007-08 Report of World Health Organization (WHO) ranks India as 171st out of 175 states in public health expenditure. The "largest democracy" in the world thus stands at 105th position out of 128 countries in the education sector. And this is the real image of "Shining India!"

The Indian youth who rebelled against all the prevailing social inequities and discriminations in the 1971 Naxshalbari Maoist movement have been suppressed. The young workers of India are now being motivated to seek personal solutions to structurally or systemically generated problems in the economy and at the workplace.

Now how can one keep women's condition in society "secured" and "protected," apart from the rest of the society? A desk report in *Prothom Alo* (December 31, 2012) quoted BBC as saying that the percentage of rape in India had increased 9.2% in 2011-2012. There

was 19.4% rise in kidnapping and abduction of women, 2.7% increase in dowry deaths, 5.4% increase in violence, 5.8% increase in various sorts of sexual harassment, and an unbelievable 122% rise in women's trafficking in the last one year. I just shivered reading that around 100,000 Indian women each year die because of dowry-related reasons!

Two years ago we came to know about the child marriage incident where a 5-year old baby girl was carried on her uncle's shoulder to her wedding venue. When asked, the child's uncle replied that they were too poor to feed any "extra" person. It proves the overall condition of average Indian's material and intellectual condition. Every Indian woman should be as "pure" and "chaste" like Sita, the heroine of Ramayana, to average Indian sentiment.

Thus, when millions of starving, jobless, poor young men hit the mega cities for work, their slum-dwelling, wretched lives present a striking contrast with the westernised middle class female co-passengers in buses or trains. It may cause deep-rooted "class hatred" in them. And their social frustration and anguish may be escalated in form of perpetrating in a number of crimes including harassing or violating a woman from upper socio-economic background. Scenes of rape and eve teasing, item songs and others in Indian mega-entertainment industry promote the "sex object" and "derogated" condition of women further to these young men devoid of any education.

Although we will raise our voices for hardest punishment of the criminals only tough implementation of laws cannot change the scenario on a permanent basis. The problem is deep rooted in the growing inequalities in distribution of wealth among the classes in the society.

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How to write a screenplay



WHAT'S the secret of writing a good screenplay? I'm on my third, but I haven't really submitted them to anyone except my friends. How do I know how good they are? Also, how long should they be.

Those are tough questions to answer in a short, packagable form. So let me answer the easy one first. How long should they be? Most movies are between 90 minutes and 120 minutes long. The rule of thumb is one page per minute, so your screenplay text, if formatted more or less in a standard way, would be between 90 and 120 pages. As for "what makes a good screenplay good," that's a little more complicated.

As a rule of thumb, I find that they should be fun to read. Sitting down and reading it should be as enjoyable as reading a good novel. The story should move at a steady pace, and there should never be dead spots, where the exposition is showing. You need exposition (delivery of the factual information that makes the action work) in any story of reasonable depth and complexity, but the exposition should not show. It should hide beneath the surface, like the whalebone stays in a corset.

But a lot of amateur writers avoid this by piling on the action, adding lots of sex and violence to keep the drama level high. This is a mistake. Movies are moving in the direction of novels. They are no longer purely plot-driven, but instead are character-driven.

In the old days, you might try to sell a story idea to a publisher or movie house by emphasising the sex and violence aspects -- "this guy is in love with this girl who is the daughter of a triad and the triad gets revenge by seducing the sister and killing the parents etc etc etc."

That doesn't work any more. Today, you give people character-driven material. You say: "My story is about a factory worker who has a bad relationship with her dad. At the end of the movie, she grows as a human being and fixes the relationship." That sort of plot is actually far more attractive today than the sex and violence plot. People are getting more subtle.

Some movie commentators, such as Karl Iglesias, like to try to discover the main emotional reactions that make moviegoers enjoy films.

1. There's the Voyeuristic response. You are a fly on the wall watching a person go through a series of life experiences. There are certain signs in the story that something interesting and dramatic will happen to the person and you are gripped by a fascination which keeps you watching until it is all resolved.

2. There's the Vicarious response. As you get to know the person or people in the movie, you start to share their emotions (if the movie is well written, that is). You empathise with them. You start to weep their tears and feel joy at their happiness. You become them, to some extent.

3. Then there's the Visceral response. This is the response of the gut, of the heart. Something dramatic happens on screen and you react -- you are shocked, or amazed, or delighted, or disturbed. You are caught up by the drama of the events. Think of Luke Skywalker on his final run through the pit to destroy the Death Star. Or, on a more subtle level, think of the discussions between family members in *Proof*. This is the edge-of-the-seat stuff that leaves you breathless.

See if your three screenplays fulfil these aims, Sunmu, and then you will have some way of gauging whether they work. I hope this is helpful.

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