

# **BIRTH CONTROL**

## **1 POVERTY AND BIRTH CONTROL**

**(By B.G.)**

The need for birth control especially in a country like India, is an accepted factor and what is wanted now is a vigorous propaganda among the masses on the healthier ways and means reducing of birth.

Of all the evils which oppress mankind, poverty is said to be the most appalling. Pestilences last their appointed season, and then leave us, but poverty the grim tyrant of our race, abides with us through all ages and in all circumstances. For every victim that war and pestilence have slain, poverty has slain millions and not slain alone, but first condemned them to drag through a life of bondage and degradation. An eminent western writer, writing on the conditions of Indian workers, says: the want of food and of leisure everywhere is plunging the great race in an abyss of misery and degradation. It is this universal prevalence and constant continuance of poverty, which have in a great measure accustomed men to its evils and prevented them from their sufficiently feeling or having any hope of even escaping them. Unacquainted with its causes, man thinks it an absolutely inevitable evil.”

Life of the working classes is worse than that of the beasts of burden. They toil unremittingly for ten or twelve hours a day at a laborious, monotonous and in many cases a deadly occupation and without any hope of advancement of personal interest in the success of the work they are engaged in. At night these jaded ponies are too tired to permit their enjoyment of the few leisure hours, and the morn wakens them to the same dreary day of ceaseless toil. Thus have the poor to toil on as long as their strength permits. At last some organ gives way, the legs, the eyes, or the hands and the unfortunate sufferer is thrown out of work, and sent to the hospital, while his wife and family are reduced to the brink of starvation. Often the man rendered desperate by his

hopeless position, plunges into drink and gives himself over to ruin. The cause for this state of affairs is said to be the constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.

Plants and animals, both of them are impelled by a powerful instinct to increase their species and this instinct is not interrupted by any difficulty in providing for their off springs. By the law of nature which makes food necessary for the life of man, it can never actually increase beyond the lowest nourishment capable of supporting him. Hence a strong check on population such as by celibacy, sterility, and premature death must be in operation. Checks on population are said to be of three kinds, viz “moral restraint, vice and misery” Moral restraint, that is sexual abstinence is the only remedy for poverty and their evil effects(Other remedies having been condemned as vices leading to misery). It is natural that every individual exercises his or her sexual functions during the period of sexual instinct. But abstinence and excess should both be avoided. Therefore it is the duty of every individual towards himself, society and the country, whatever be his or her station in life, to bring into the world only a very small number of children.

But here again the religion is responsible. The ordinance of Manu says, “By his son a man obtains victory over all people; by his son’s son he enjoys immortality and afterwards by the son of his grandson he reaches the solar abode.” Thus child birth in India being considered as a religious duty, preventive checks operate little. And the result is an overwhelming population over and above the supply of food materials, which consequently results in excessive poverty and the multiplication of beggars in millions. Efficient methods of birth control are the only means to save the situation. It will be a great service to the country if the so called patriots take this matter in all seriousness and include this in their national programme.

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## **2. BIRTH CONTROL**

**(Viswanath)**

It is all to the good that serious minded social reformers in India have begin of late to devote increasing attention to the authorities and the leaders of public opinion alike to think of ways and means for putting down some of the gravest evils that beset society in consequence of the unfettered production of congenital weaklings and incompetents in the land. These weaklings and incompetents are not only a drag on the race, they also represent an enormous amount of avoidable wastage of national wealth and virility. In fact to all social workers engaged in the task of removing poverty and disease from amongst the masses, the one thing that strikes as the easiest and the most practicable way out is the provision of adequate facilities for the education of the community at large in the methods of limiting families without imposing restraints of a too irksome or exacting character. As it is, both among the lower and the middle classes, there is an abnormal amount of child births taking place, leading up to appalling figures of infantile and maternal mortality. It is a truism to say that none but infants born at fairly long intervals of healthy parents can survive the stress and strain of the first days of existence; it is equally true that mothers with whom pregnancies and deliveries are annual events can never hope to be anything other than liabilities to fathers and society. Not only would the nerve, grit and ability so necessary for bringing up their children on right lines be wanting in them, they would themselves be unable to render any useful service to any cause worth the name. It is in the very best interest of the nation, therefore, that the people should be educated in ways which would enable them to exercise control in the matter of the number of children they desire to have. It is certainly not an advantage, even from the individual's point of view, to have children disproportionate to capacity and means for sustaining them and bringing them up in a fashion suited to the needs and circumstances of the times.

But it has been contended that all this could be achieved by judicious self restraint on the part of the sexes. This was the view propounded by the clergy in western countries when the freethinkers agitated years ago for state support to the cause of scientific birth control; and this we believe is the view of Mr. Gandhi and men of his way of thinking in this country. They contend that, if only men would put a curb on their passions and abstain from conjugal felicities except on occasions when they feel the yearning for a new bond

to bind the home more firmly to their hearts, there would be no call for the aid of the apostles of birth-control. It is their opinion further that all talk of birth - control is immoral and ungodly, and that danger and sinfulness alone would result from its widespread preaching and practice. For ourselves we fail to see the soundness of any of these contentions. In the first place, human nature being what it is, the plea for abstinence is, to say the least of it impracticable, it will not appeal to the average man of healthy appetites and among the appetites, it should be remembered there is none more compelling in its urge and insistent in its craving than the one relating to the sex. Nor is it advisable from the point of view of health and morality that abstinence for prolonged periods should be adopted by adults. Starvation of any of the instincts such as of hunger, thirst or sex must necessarily produce unpleasant and adverse reactions on health and enforced abstinence in the case of married people whatever be the motive will inevitably lead to estrangement and unhappiness. If it is the essence of marriage, therefore that the couple should live in amity, concord, and mutual happiness the compulsion of abstinence upon them could only have the disastrous effect of destroying it for ever. It may be that there are some people in the world with whom sex appetite is at a low ebb at all times, but it is not to them that the helpful suggestions of the advocates of birth-control are addressed. These people whom we may, without meaning any offence, include in the category of the 'sexless' generally remain celibates for life and the world is none the worse for it. But average men with normal instincts and cravings cannot be expected to desist from indulgence on all but occasions when they desire children, and to them the means and measures suggested by the students of birth-control must be made known and the sooner the better.

It is equally incorrect to say that morality would be jeopardized if the devices of birth control are placed within the reach of one and all. It is an old exploded doctrine that right conduct could be brought about among the people only by exciting their fears and playing upon their ignorance and credulity. We have in fact fully outlived the era when humanity could be persuaded to right and rational conduct only by painting in horrid colours the picture of the consequences otherwise. Reason and judgment have come to be the sole basis of action and activity, and it is futile to hope that a morality of the right type could

be evolved and maintained in an atmosphere of ignorance and superstition. Education represents light, not in a figurative but in a literal sense as well and its diffusion can only lead to the elimination of darkness, and not to its intensification. Moralists would do well, therefore, to alter their conceptions of the world, and not bank upon ignorance as the prop of their philosophy and the pillar of their faith. The particular fear expressed in this connection namely, that the doctrines of the birth control advocates would tend to promote promiscuous relations has been well answered by that sincere and earnest exponent of birth control, Dr. Marie Stopes and the passage is well worth quoting "Some who would otherwise welcomes the spread of knowledge on this important subject: says she, "fear an increase of promiscuous relations as the result. It appears, however that the type of person who desires to lead an irregular life has long had access to sufficient information to satisfy such requirements, while the virtuous mother has been helpless in her ignorance of how to control her motherhood in the interests of her children. Daily experience in the birth control clinics bears this out in a convincing manner. Hundreds of worn out and wretched overburdened mothers have applied for the help given by knowledge, but not a couple of flighty young people. The latter can get crude information from their companions". These words are as true of conditions in India as in England, and we do not think we need labour the point any further. In this connection it is worth while remembering that a shrewd observer and patriot of the type of Rabindranath Tagore has already lent his weight to the propaganda of the birth- control advocates; and we may be sure that, though for the moment the latter are not making much headway as was evidenced by the defeat of a resolution moved in the Bombay Corporation the other day recommending the provision of adequate facilities for instruction and advice in regard to this subject in the City of Bombay - the question will become a live issue before long, clamouring for a solution on exactly the same lines as have been adopted by several advanced countries in the West.

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### **3. THE ORIENT AND BIRTH CONTROL**

If there is any one thing that the Orient teaches more plainly than another, it is that birth control is essential to human progress and happiness. India and China are today not *arguments* in favour of this rational principle, they are the *living answer* to it. One must be blind indeed who can visit these countries and not become a convert to birth control if he is not already one. Here is plainly seen an over production in human flesh that is appalling to behold. Roughly, half the population of the earth is represented in these two countries, a flood of humanity so far in excess of the resources of the land, as to force there humans down to the living level of their beasts.

These vast populations are absolutely and inevitably lost to human progress. The advancement of civilization cannot touch them. Mr. Gandhi is right when he says that modern implements of civilization should be kept out of his country. The introduction and use of modern labor saving machinery in a civilization living in biblical times would mean starvation to countless numbers of persons. Caste, that deplorable social system that keeps a man all his life what he was born, is the inevitable result of lack of birth control. You must be what you are and no more. To do more than your allotted portion of work, *all your life* would mean that another or others would starve to death for lack of employment. Caste to the majority of unfortunates living under this social systems, means slavery; half the world enslaved largely because of its neglect of a simple principle and yet in the face of this unanswerable example the Christian church is bitterly opposed to birth control! It would see its own civilization go the way of these, rather than acknowledge a right and lend aid in support of a principle that is contrary to the teachings of their holy book. It would squander its men and money in a vain attempt to place its own imaginary God in the heads of these unfortunates in place of their own rather than lend aid to starving millions.

Birth control the church says, is non-Christian in spirit and principle and therefore is wrong. It places man as master of his own reproduction instead of a biblical god. For this

reason it is a sin. Preventive measures would lead to promiscuous intercourse, therefore this is commercial. All of which is drowned in a cry of misery arising from the too many that have been born and must live their lives to the bitter end, that the many might suffer in place of a lesser number that could have shared in the blessings of this earth. Yet birth control for *increasing* as well as *lessening* the number born, is a national problem and a state problem and a family problem. And the nation and the state and the family that face this problem squarely in a materialistic manner, as it should be faced, will be happier in the end.

A.F.Clark

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*(These articles were selected from the weekly 'Revolt' and compiled by Prof.S.V.Rajadurai, Head, Centre for Periyar Studies, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli-600 0024, Tamil Nadu)*