

THE POPULATION PROBLEM OF BIHAR
(with special reference to the post-war period)

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PREFACE

There is no dearth of books dealing with the Indian population problem. But regional studies are few. As far as my information goes, no detailed study of the population problem of the State of Bihar has yet been attempted. The present study is an effort to fill this gap. It has, however, been endeavoured to present a comparative picture of the demographic and economic situation prevailing in Bihar, the country (symbolising an average of the Indian Union), some important States of the Union, and, at places, some important foreign countries too, even at the cost, at least on some occasions, of blurring the distinctiveness of the features of this State. For a correct appraisal of the problem this appeared desirable.

The thesis opens with an introductory chapter succinctly surveying the important theories of population to show their relevance to our discussion. The second chapter is a brief survey of the growth of population in the State and its three geographical divisions extending over a period of about a century. It indicates how the growth of population was arrested during the decades prior to 1921 by the frequent recurrence of famines due to failure of harvests and lack of transport facilities, epidemics, floods and endemic diseases, despite all the potentialities of rapid growth. The recent decades have, however, witnessed precipitous decline in the death rate leaving the birth rate at almost the same high level. The result has been a rapid rate of increase in the number of an

already large, the second largest in the world, population. The third examines the behaviour pattern of the three proximate determinants of population increase, namely, migration, births and deaths. Migration has all along been negative, but so small in magnitude as not to have any perceptible effect in reducing the population pressure; and that too has all along been declining. The impact of economic growth is yet to be felt on fertility; rather betterment of economic and public health conditions aided by the youthful age composition of the population has induced a slight increase in the birth rate in recent years. Thus both the Malthusian theory of population and the theory of demographic transition are pertinent to the present discussion.

The fourth is concerned with the distribution and composition of population. Changes in the spatial distribution of the population indicate an increasing pressure on agricultural resources. The decline in the sex ratio (females per 1,000 males) from decade to decade points to an increasing paucity of females rendered more acute by the prevalence of caste barriers and the social ban on widow re-marriage, Universal and early marriages coupled with the youthful age composition of the population, rise in the expectation of life at birth and thus increasing the period of fertile union of married couples, and the gradual lifting of the social ban on widow re-marriage account for high fertility.

The fifth is an account of the economic progress made in the State and the country. It shows, if account is taken of the partial unreliability of the figures, stagnation or insignificant increases

in agricultural output and overwhelming preponderance of agriculture in the economy. Contrary to the national feature, productivity per worker in the agricultural sector has shown an increasing trend but a declining one in the non-agricultural sector. The per capita income is the lowest in the State.

Thus the one over-riding conclusion is that a low income agrarian economy is faced with the danger of population explosion tending not only to wipe out the recent gains in economic and demographic fields but to worsen the situation still further. The picture of the future, as emerging from our discussion, is not hopeful, for at least two decades to come, during which period a large addition will be made to our already large number. Hope lies in two directions, namely, wide-spread use of the methods of family limitation and accelerating economic progress. But these will entail heavy investment, tremendous sacrifice and hard work.

For the rest the thesis will speak for itself.

This piece of research work has been performed under the able and scholarly guidance of Dr.K.N.Prasad, Ph.D.(Cantab), University Professor of Economics, the Patna University, an eminent economist of the country and alumnus of the Cambridge University to whom most sincere thanks are due.

Thanks are also due to the authorities of the National Library, Calcutta, who were so kind to help me in my research work during my sojourn there covering a period of about three months (two summer holidays, 1963 and 1964), to those of the Directorate of Statistics

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