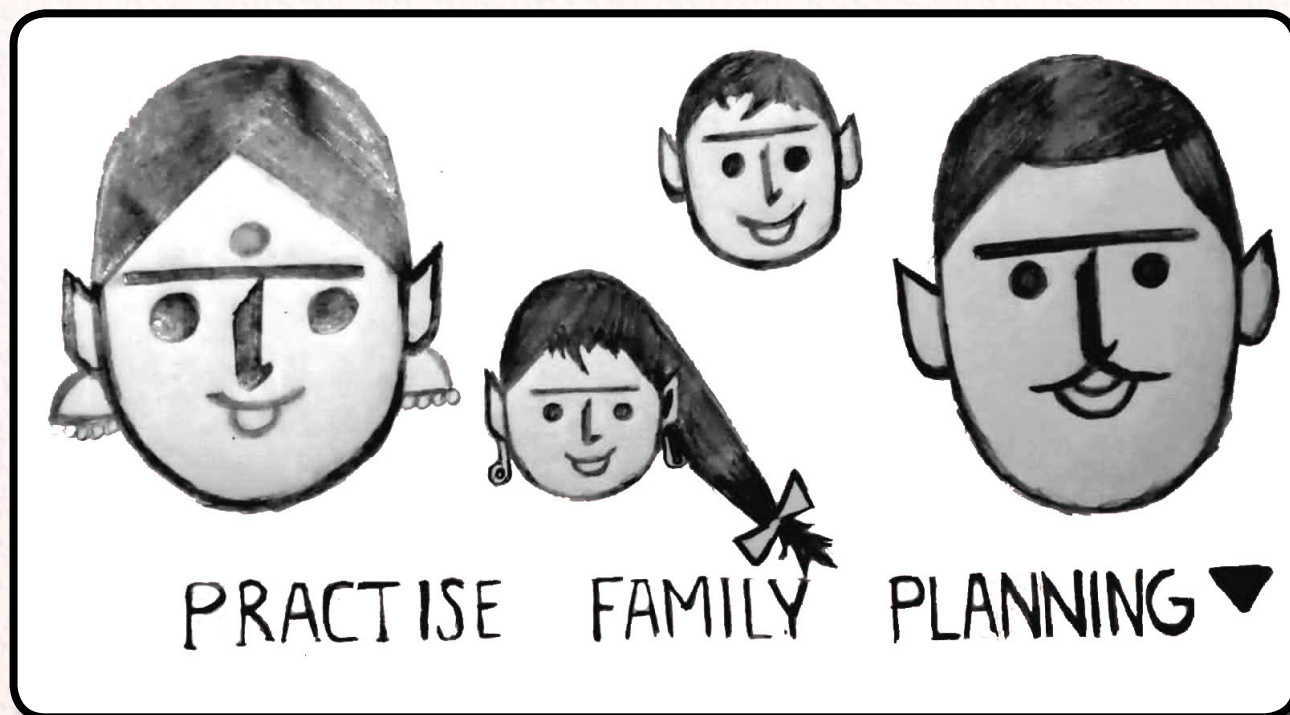


Is Two-Child Policy A Way to Future In India?

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India, the second-most populous country in the world, is home to 17.7% of the world population with an annual growth rate of 0.99% as per 2020 estimates [1]. Though the growth rate has declined over the years [2], if the population continues to grow at this rate, India might overtake top-ranking China by 2030 or may be earlier [3]. With the ever-increasing population; poverty, pressure on social as well as economic infrastructure, unemployment, labour migration, environmental issues, and inflation are also rising, giving way to a development trap. This trap is not new; the challenge of population growth has always haunted the government of India. To tackle this, the Indian government launched the first official family planning program in 1952. It was one of the earliest national government-sponsored efforts in the developing world [4]. Then under the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78), population-related problems became part of the school curriculum [5]. A gruesome campaign to sterilize the poor men started in 1976 wherein allegedly the police cordoned off villages and dragged men to surgery [6].



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Then in the 1980s, 'Hum Do Hamare Do', a Hindi slogan that emphasized the two-child plan was promoted and generalized through mass campaigning to reinforce the message of family planning thereby aiding population control [7]. But, despite the implementation of different types of policies the population of India continued to grow rapidly.

In 1980, China launched its most iconic one-child policy, replaced by a two-child policy in 2016 and now allowing upto three children as a major policy shift in 2021 [8]. While there is no national two-child policy in India as of now (at the time of writing this article), however, some states of India inclusive of Assam, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh have some ways of implementation of the same. Penalties to people for having more than two children, denial of rights and facilities to children born after the second child and their parents such as not allowing them to contest elections or apply for government jobs, are a few of these ways [1] which are not always easy to incorporate in the policy framework. Instead giving incentives and providing financial support to families having only one or two children by the government might help in execution of the program.

The two-child policy will help the nation to curb population growth and also have a better sex ratio. In India, as a large mass of people have a rigid preference for a boy child, this policy will transform the status of women in society [2]. It will create a less competitive environment and more job opportunities. It will lead to economic growth and financial progress of our country along with the cultural and social development.

India is grappling with population control for decades. It is a country with a growing technological industry, one that relies more on young people. The two-child policy might lead to a shortage of educated youth who can lead India's technological revolution just like Japan and Western countries [9]. This might disturb the overall balance of people belonging to different generations and also create problems for old aged people to sustain themselves. This policy might result in increase in undocumented children especially the girl child and the abortion rate or infanticide of female child. Some critics claim that this policy is a way to discriminate against Muslims, as they are more likely to be barred from government jobs. Additionally, women in India especially in rural areas are not much educated and not aware of different government policies. So, there are chances that men can give divorce to their wives to avail various benefits such as to contest elections [10].

Even without the implementation of the two-child policy, fertility rate has declined tremendously as compared to the recent past. It has resulted in curbing the population growth with the total fertility rate (TFR) of 3.6 births per woman in 1994 to 2.3

births in 2014 [11]. The preference of having a boy child in India is well documented, therefore a legal restriction of two children might force the couples to go for sex-selective abortions, and women especially from a poor background may go for unsafe abortions because of inaccessibility to good medical treatment and low income. So, the union government and the state governments with a higher TFR should focus on socio-economic development which includes good health care facilities, better literacy rate and economic growth [12]. Literacy rate and population growth are inversely related, i.e., an increase in literacy rate leads to a decrease in population growth rate and this would lead to a better share of resources among people [13]. However, the two-child policy will help to address the varied problems of a growing population. So, if the government doesn't want to strictly implement this policy considering its negative impacts then alternatively some other steps must be taken to control the population.

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