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GOVERNANCE

Population populism: UP bill should empower, not control people

Solution to population problem lies in ensuring socio-economic development by addressing issues of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, child and maternal mortality, ageing

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By **Abhinav Mehrotra, Konina Mandal**
Published: Monday 30 August 2021

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A debate around forceful adherence to family planning norms in a highly diversified society like India's assumes significance as the Uttar Pradesh Law Commission [submitted](#) the recently drafted UP Population (Control, Stabilization and Welfare) Bill, 2021, to the state government. The Bill proposes to deny government jobs, promotions, subsidies and the right to contest local elections to those who have more than two children.

The issue of family planning has made space in the Union government's policies, but with an element of choice and not compulsion. The Emergency of 1975 is an example why coercion does not work with the general populace.

UP, a state of more than **220 million**, has fared poorly on indicators reflecting development. But the solution lies in ensuring comprehensive socio-economic development by addressing issues of adolescent sexual and reproductive health, child and maternal mortality and ageing.

It should not coerce citizens or infringe their dignity and personal liberty as protected under [Article 21](#) of the Constitution.

India was the first country to obtain family planning advice from the World Health Organization and has been advocating for family planning aid at various international forums, most of which could not go through due to opposition from Catholic and Communist countries. The move was, however, supported at the local level, albeit in a discriminatory fashion.

Even during the pre-independence times, women rights activist such as Annie Besant advocated for population control through contraception citing rampant poverty caused by famines.

Population control post-independence

The awareness regarding population control continued to make way through the post-independence period. The **1951 Census** found that the country's population had grown manifold, despite a decade of war, famine and sectarian strife.

Consequently, the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru called upon the Planning Commission to constitute a population committee that focused on sterilisation and contraception.

The **first Five-Year Plan** drafted by the Planning Commission stressed the need to control population to [promote health and welfare as well as development](#) of the economy. In 1975, however, when **Emergency** was imposed, forceful measures were taken by the then central government to control population.

Targets were set for officials that violated medical safety standards, the poor were coerced into accepting payments and punished on non-participation. The most heinous part was compulsory sterilisation.

Comparison with China

From a comparative aspect, even China's one-child policy devised by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 was [heavily criticised](#). It was implemented to curb China's then rapidly growing population that had begun to hinder its economic development.

Even after the one-child policy was [rescinded](#) in 2016, China's birth and fertility rates remained low, leaving the country with a rapidly aging population and a shrinking workforce.

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It was only 2016 onwards that the Chinese government finally allowed two children per couple — a policy change that did little to arrest the rapid fall in population growth. Currently, as China moves towards a newly envisioned three-child policy to undo the wrongs of the past, its 2020 census data shows [the country's rate of population growth fell rapidly](#) despite the 2016 relaxation.

The way forward

An improper implementation of [family planning programmes can produce instruments of coercion](#). They should instead foster development and shape reproductive behaviour.

There is a need to shift focus to how population policy may empower people, rather than control them, and whether women, in particular, have a stake in defending reproductive rights and health wherever they are threatened.

Ensuring development aspects like health, education of the people reeling under poverty is the way forward to ensure a change in reproductive behaviour.

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GOVERNANCE

Restoring a century-old building in Chandannagar helps raise awareness about heritage management

The Registry Building constructed in 1875 served as the register office as well as the first French courthouse

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By **Lina Bose**
Published: Thursday 26 August 2021



Chandannagar, a town in West Bengal's Hooghly district, was once a French settlement. Despite the fact that the French departed the town in 1950 and the West Bengal government took over management, a few colonial elements such as the gridiron arrangement, the Church as a landmark surrounding the centre, views and panoramas and major structures are still visible in the town.

Despite the fact that the town is constantly changing and modernising, a number of structures built between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries still exist along the Strand Road, waiting to be restored.

One of these is the Registry Building located on Strand Road, directly opposite of the Jora Ghat. It was built in 1875 and served as the register office as well as the first French courthouse.

This structure is an example of French colonial architecture from the nineteenth century. It was constructed with brick and lime, with a flat roof and decorative French windows on the first floor, as well as a huge veranda.

From outside, its deplorable state is difficult to comprehend. The entire structure is currently supported by banayan trees.

The Registry Building played a significant part in the life of Chandannagar residents during the French government, since it was where numerous lawsuits and weddings were filed.

West Bengal Heritage Commission (WBHC) in 2017 declared it as a heritage property. Due to its decrepit status, this structure was recognized as a moderately important building in need of urgent renovation.

Following the recognition of the building as a historical site, a Delhi-based architectural firm Aiswarya Tipnis Architects, in cooperation with the French Consulate in Kolkata, started a crowd-funding campaign to repair the historic structure.

The initiative was a part of the third edition of Bonjour India Project. After a year of work on the project, renowned artist Suvaprasanna, the chairperson of the WBHC and Alexander Zeigler, the French ambassador, unveiled the heritage plaque in 2019.

The French government had also committed to give money to repair the building. Experts estimate that repairing the Registry Building would be tough and will cost more than a couple of crores of rupees.

Carrying out the project with the help of crowd-funding will also pave the way for more restoration initiatives in the future, Tipnis said.

The planners and architects drew up a plan to create a boutique hall, a coffee shop and a library in the building after a thorough study on how to restore the structures and support its upkeep.

The French hired Raphael Gastebois, a former consultant to the Government of Punducherry, to work on repairing the Chandannagar Registry Building after a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Governments of Bengal and France in February, 2019.

Virginie Corteval (French Consul of Kolkata), Fabrice Plançon (Director of Alliance Francaise du Bengale), Alice Brunot (French cultural official) and Arijita Roychaudhury (a media person) were among the team members who collaborated to build and develop plans for restoring the town's historic structure.

The MoU was signed for 30 months but was renewed by Nandini Chakraborty (West Bengal Principal Secretary, Tourism) and Virginie Corteval (French Consul General) for another 12 months in July 2021 considering the gap during the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

But is it really possible to completely restore the framework, design and floors of the building that lie crumbled and damaged?

Moreover, the project failed to raise awareness and interest of the local communities to persuade them to take part in the restoration project. The crowd-funding project, thus, fell through the cracks, although the partnership with the state government was successful.

Lack of public engagement led to many people remaining unaware of the initiative to raise funds. When asked whether they would cover the costs, they said it is the government's responsibility.

This demonstrates that a majority of town residents are still uninformed and disinterested in the town's historical management system.

But the fresh endeavour has begun to strike a chord with the residents although the round of fund raising was unsuccessful. The city's age-old heritage buildings are slowly vanishing and the project offered a hopeful vision.

The local communities and those passionate about restoration of heritage structures are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to sip coffee at the Registry Building, read and lend books from the library and discover the city's secret history.

In addition to concentrating on short-term targets, the project should now focus on future courses of action, judiciously employing the project to restore the building.

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