

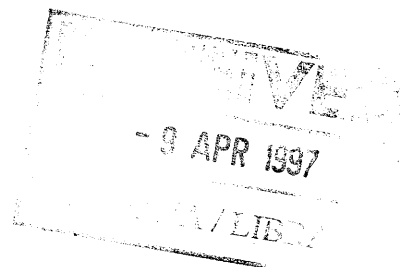


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ROLE OF WOMAN IN POPULATION PROBLEM

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ROLE OF WOMAN IN POPULATION PROBLEM

The population problem is considered nowadays one of the gravest problems facing the Arab nation and the world in whole. Its understanding and analysis calls for a demographic study of the world.

The study of population comprises the human groupings that occupy the surface of earth and distribute in its various regions with regard to sex and occupation structure, number and distribution into various categories of age in a given time, as well as their movement in whole, such as the development of number as to increase or decrease, and migration, whether local from one town to another or from country to town or vice versa, or from one region to another inside the country, or external by migration to and from another country.

Population are, therefore, that human bloc that regenerates itself by reproduction, advancing to the society new numbers of births who grow up and become the working force in the population. The grownups get old.. and the old people die .. Births and deaths are thus the most important components in the population movement.

Undoubtedly, births and deaths, and age brackets with regard to sex, are factors affected by a large number of other variable factors, each affecting one another.

For instance, the sex structure of population is affected by their civilisation norm, their outlook to woman and their anxiety to safeguard the life of the infant, whether male or female. It is also affected by the general political condition of population with regard to fear or security. Most of the war victims are young males. It is equally affected by whether the region is agricultural, industrial or pastoral and whether it is recent to or well established in civilisation.

Another important phenomenon is that women below 20 are less fertile than those between 20 and 30. Birth rate then drops in the 30 - 45 age bracket.

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Significantly, no economic development plan can be envisaged without taking into full cognisance the productive manpower of population, the extent of their change in the years of the plan and the number of consuming population and their relation with the general standard of living.

Population are one of the most important economic factors whether in densely or in sparsely populated areas. Moreover, the welfare of population and their higher cultural and health standard is the objective of any economic plan.

Population, with regard to sex, their medical fitness and their cultural and civilisation standard, are the main-stay of the nation and its hand working in the field, mine and factory, as well as its hand fighting in the battlefield. Therefore, the power of any nation cannot be estimated before knowing its population factor, the evidence being that politicians and generals are most interested in population, quantitatively and qualitatively.

Demography is affected by many other sciences. These are complicated interlocked sciences all centering on the number of population. Why and how this number changes? ... What is the result of such change and how it can be treated?

The Arab homeland has no population problem. A sizable part of its actually cultivated lands can be better exploited in agriculture or irrigation. However, industry is still in its cradle in many Arab countries and has not even started in other countries.

The main problem of the Arab homeland is the maldistribution of population, being dense in certain regions and sparse in others. This leads to a lower standard of living in both cases and to a definite economic backwardness in the regions that lack people. Furthermore, the population problems in the Arab homeland can only be solved on the basis of unity of this nation or at least by opening its borders before migration, capital and technical knowhow. Should this take place, the nation will

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get stronger with the execution of economic development programmes on the basis of the Arab national planning for doubling its existing population. Only then will be seen a population excess such as seen by Western Europe in the 19th Century or by certain Arab nations in this Century, such as Egypt.

In this connexion, we cannot forget the key role played by woman in development and in alleviating the said problems, since she is the other half of the society, sharing the same obligations towards the various crises facing the Arab homeland.

The Arab woman, specially the Syrian, has contributed in the social activity within the limits permitted by the general positions, economic, social and political, experienced by the country, and to the extent that her consciousness and culture qualified her. Her national consciousness opened a little before the First World War and started to go up since then. She took to fighting the inherited ignorance bedevilling the country for long decades and the isolation imposed on her that precluded her from making her way in public life. She had to fight man as father, brother and wife. She fought the customs and traditions that obdurate in time until they became a formidable impediment shattering her freedom and emancipation.

Perhaps it was our old heritage, the Western renaissance and her particular position that prompted her to break into public life and participate in social activity in the middle of this Century. During the last 50 years she strongly endeavoured to change this position and to create a more brilliant new one, prompted by the desire to get rid of oppression, backwardness, delimitation of freedom and shouldering with man in the field of progress. Significant has been her persistent desire to improve the conditions of her family and to increase her income, which gave rise to her feeling of self responsibility and dignity.

Development in Syria started with the diffusion of education and rise of schools. This gave the green light for woman to set out in the natural road of participating in life and society until she reached her

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present position. She entered society in all its fields. She contributed into education. She participated in the various fields of work as physician, engineer, lawyer and nurse. She also participated in the various posts of government, organisations, firms and factories. Recently she took part in the field of politics and social organisation. She played a positive role in crises and critical circumstances experienced by our country to confront the attacks of imperialism and colonialism.

The position in which woman lives in our country represents to a certain extent the beginning of a complete uprise after she entered life through its various doors. This lead to a change in woman's attitude, particularly towards her family, and this notably applies to the working woman. This change manifests itself in woman's participation in the family income distribution on various ways. In other words, woman participates in planning expenditure by giving priority to certain expenditure aspects omitted by man, such as distribution of income among housing, clothing, food, sanitary maintenance, luxuries and saving.

It remains to be seen that the Syrian woman is no longer a consumer but participates in increasing production, and in developing and promoting economy in the civilian and rural sectors. Thus sprang into existence activities and capacities that were latent or unused to take part in pushing ahead development and prosperity and to fill the required population density.

These operating potentials distributed to the diverse fields of work. Now woman, particularly in Syria, operates in the following fields: education, health, agriculture, industry, clerical works, administration in all ministries, free works of art, and in certain production services. Women operating in agriculture account for 88 per cent of the total productive woman power. Woman entered the field of education to teach in government and private schools. She took upon herself to spread education and culture, realising the importance of her role in raising and educating the generation and in discovering its talents and inclinations. Not long ago she has been in university education. Her role was not only restricted

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to the Ministry of Education but also to the other ministries, such as the Ministries of Economy, Defence, Social Affairs and Labour, Culture and National Guidance, Communications, Planning, Industry and Health. She also entered various factories such as conserves, tobacco, sugar and defence.

We cannot forget the rural woman's contribution in production with zeal and interest by looking after, seeding and watering the land, gathering fruits and crops, and raising animals and poultry.

All this helped to increase production, specially when woman enters the factory and stands in front of the machine side by side with the man, thus improving the standard of production and raising national income. The government has realised this important role played by woman and has promulgated such laws and legislations as giving her all the rights accorded to man without any discrimination, such as weekly rest days, holidays, overtime pay and other rights including the permission to leave work for marriage or delivery. The laws have also been concerned with births and have required factories employing more than 100 woman workers to make available a baby garden. Woman has also been given the right to join syndicate organisations. Woman has taken up certain profession primarily because of financial need and because of the laxation of certain strict social customs. Hence; she is participating with man in all fields of works, continuously in increasing numbers, becoming conscious of the gross responsibility laid on her so that she may not remain consumer and on the margin of public life.

All this helps to increase production and to meet the growing need of population. Peasants and merchants are thereby encouraged to get married and set up families. It raises the standard of living and fills the public treasury with funds, thus enabling it to spend more money on health towards a lower rate of deaths.

The number of population is in continuous increase and the rate of increase is in constant rise to the point of danger. This is due to the progressive improvement in health services and control of epidemics,

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notably children diseases, as well as to the tremendous spread of sanitary consciousness. People are increasing having their children inoculated against smallpox, dighteria, whooping cough, and infantile paralysis. To this must be added the progressive rise in the standard of living. The corollary has been the response by population to increase production and double the crops, so that any increase by population is assimilated by the fields of work.

The increasing feeling of population pressure on land and national wealths should call for a new challenge and a rational socio-economic revolution by redistribution of land and wealth and by comprehensive industrialisation of the country. This necessitates the redistribution of national income and manpower on new aspects of activity embracing woman in all the above mentioned fields.

Realising that the agricultural land cannot contain them and that no surplus population can be sent abroad, the children of this generation have realised that they have to export commodities in order to buy food for the babies born each day. It is hopeful that the people will make an effort to lay down plans for national production in future on sound basis and will steer towards exploitation of mineral resources, if possible, generation of electric energies and construction of industry on a broad framework. On the other hand, there is a slight trend towards a slower or dropping natural increase of population. This is evidenced by the slightly lower fertility of woman at present. And this is quite natural, since social development itself takes the direction of a slighter increase in population. The reason is the spread of education and the necessity to teach girls, which has delayed the age of marriage. Moreover, woman has become conscious of her right to live and enjoy life instead of being a machine that only gives birth to children. She has broken into the fields of work, and the male husbands are looking towards a better life and higher standard of living.

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Syrian Woman and Politics

History records for the Syrian woman vivid pages in her struggle against Turkish colonialism and in spreading national consciousness among citizens. Should we revive this past fraught with events and calamities, we witness Damascus revolting for her right, pride and dignity against the despot rulers, its wrath followed by Aleppo and other Syrian towns and villages. Prominent in this field were pioneer women in the woman movement.

The Syrian woman went underground to fight the Turkisation operation in 1914. Damascus witnessed the first woman demonstration condemning colonialism, occupation and veil in 1919.

The Syrian woman had her role to play in each and every battle fought by our people to dispel the French colonialists and to realise freedom and independence. Her heroism highlighted during the revolution of 1925. The Damascus orchards (Ghouta) provided the Syrian women with shelter against the treachery of enemies. They accompanied Hasan Kharrat in his revolt against the enemies. The Syrian woman had honourable stands at Jabal-el-Arab, Homs, Hama and Iskandaroun District and in the 60-day Strike. She joined the popular resistance. The woman student was trained on arms. After a lengthy effort, the Syrian woman was given suffrage conditional on the Certificate of Primary Education. This was the beginning of her road to get her political rights. In 1953 she was accorded the right to pose as candidate to parliament. During the Syrian-Egyptian unity she could contest the elections of the National Union and won the confidence of citizens. She was also elected to the National Assembly in 1960. Still, in 1965 she won the membership of the National Council of Revolution. After the Corrective Movement, the People's Council was set up to represent all the progressive national sectors and groups including women which had four seats in it.

The Syrian woman was also given the right to participate in the plebiscite for election of the President of the Republic.

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However, the major role of woman manifested itself best during the colonialist-Zionist aggression on the Arab people on 5 June 1967. Woman then took up arms as a fighter in the popular army and rushed to hospitals and dispensaries to assist in giving first aid to the injured and to secure their needs and look after them day and night.

She proceeded to the sites of the evacuees, affording them aid and assistance, looking after their comfort, helping them in their disaster and caring for their children and sick. She was also sympathetic with the families of martyrs who spared no sacrifice for the Arab land.

Unforgettable is the role of woman in guidance and economic consciousness during war time. It has been a key role for applying the policy of rationing and war economy. She was considerably concerned with war economy by organisation of the family budget which is a part of the society's budget.

General woman federation and its role in population problem

The day for the Federation started with the treacherous aggression on the Arab homeland on 5 June 1967. Its first task was to address calls and appeals through various information media to all members of the woman sector, urging them to join the courses of civil defence and training on arms. Masses of volunteers came. On the following day, multitudes of volunteers took to the hospitals for giving first aid to the injured, especially those by napalm, and to look after them and afford them the necessary services.

Caravans of evacuees flogged from Kuneitra and frontier villages to Damascus. The Federation set up a committee for refugees and massed a large number of volunteers for service. Each morning about 200 volunteers set out from the Committee's office for distributing the refugees on schools and houses and for providing them with food and clothings.

In recognition of this struggle, Legislative Decree No. 121 of 24.8.1968 was promulgated to set up a people's organisation in the name of the General Woman Federation in the Syrian Arab Republic, whose duty is

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to realise the following objectives:

1. Organisation of woman's energies and coordination of her efforts within the framework of collective organised work.
2. Intensification of national consciousness.
3. Raising the cultural and social standard of woman.
4. Supply of services that ensure security to the working woman.
5. Contribution in social, cultural and health activities.
6. Liberation of Arab woman.

During a short period not exceeding one year, the Federation was able to realize a lot. It held several courses for training on civil defence and arms. It also started to fight illiteracy in the ranks of woman workers and housewives. It opened free classes for old and young illiterate women. Successive classes were held to enable them join primary and preparatory schools.

The Federation also coped up with the problem of children who preclude their mothers from working. For these, baby gardens and kindergartens were opened in consideration of a petty remuneration commensurate with the mother's income in rural areas, popular quarters and cities.

The Federation's activities were clearly manifested in the first organizational congress held from 2/4/1968 to 5/4/1968, in which the agenda was approved in all fields.

The Federation realizes its objectives through the following committees: Vocational Training Committee - Studies Committee - Foreign Relations Committee - Kindergartens Committee - Information Committee - Anti-Illiteracy Committee - Civil Defence Committee - Commando Support Committee - Organization Committee.

The following has been the Federation role in the population problem: To hold an organizational congress; to hold syndicate courses for training woman leaders; to hold anti-illiteracy courses; to open typewriting classes; to open free classes for the free woman students towards the certificates of preparatory and secondary education; to set up workshops for dress-making, embroidery, wool and carpet making; to open summer schools and
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clubs; to open courses for teaching English and French.

The Federation has sought to apply the slogan of armed struggle and to consolidate the determination of steadfastness in the ranks of our people. It also adopted the slogan of popular liberation war. The Federation is seeking to demand the application of obligatory military service that creates a new generation of women able to protect the nation and contribute toward the liberation of land.

All these facts prove that woman is able to contribute towards developing her society, whatever may be the circumstances and complications. She truthfully constitutes 50 per cent of the society and meritoriously and deservedly shoulders 50 per cent of its energies. She is a vivid example of steadfastness and patience under the enemy's bombing. Her determination has not relented and her power has not collapsed. She has not taken off her body the dress of the heroic soldier. She ploughs, cultivates, fights, and dresses wounds - so that her nation may triumph and so that justice may overcome oppression.

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