Book Reviews

Other People's Family Planning

The Khanna Study. Population Problems in the Rural Punjab. JOHN B. WYON and JOHN E. GORDON. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1971. xxvi, 438 pp., illus. $14.

The Myth of Population Control. Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Village. MAHMOOD MAMDANI. Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973. 174 pp. $7.95.

"Solving the population problem in India is not really all that difficult. One simply needs to distribute the pill to the women, packaged in long strips and containing the requisite number of placebos, with instructions to take them daily. They could be delivered to the villages in lorries. Eventually the women's menstrual cycles would be governed by the pills. Apart from the rather mind-boggling notion of all the women in India menstruating at the same time, it should work very well." This remark, made by a physician at a family planning conference in London which I attended several years ago, illustrates the technological view of birth control. A contrasting view might be called the motivational. It would stress the social, economic, political, religious, and psychological reasons why *individuals* might be motivated to practice birth control. *The Khanna Study* comes perilously close to the first view at least in its early phases. *The Myth of Population Control,* in a swingeing attack on the Khanna study, plumps heavily for the second.

At least at its inception, the Khanna study (named for a market town in the Punjab) was an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of the introduction of contraceptives in a rural Indian population. There was a test population, and two control populations to which contraceptives were not given, altogether comprising 11 villages and some 8000 people. The study lasted for eight years (from 1953 to 1960), and there was a follow-up study ten years later (in 1969). It cost, according to Mamdani, approximately 1 million dollars. If looked at in terms of the effectiveness of birth control alone, it was, as Mamdani repeatedly tells us, a failure. If looked at in somewhat wider perspective, as a meticulously carried-out long-term study of demographic variables, it has some value. The pity is that not enough social data were included. Great care was taken in the selection of samples, the working out of interview schedules, and the keeping of records and registers (samples of which usefully appear in 50 pages of appendices of this report), but the emphasis was almost entirely on reproductive histories and not on social and economic variables which might affect those histories.

One has the impression that the aims of the study changed somewhat during its long history. In a reflective chapter on the implications of the findings Wyon and Gordon lay more stress on population dynamics and the many influences that account for fluctuations in population than they do on the effectiveness of contraception. I speculate that the apparatus of the study was so massive that it could not easily shift its aims. There were the myriad funding agencies, the Indian government bureaucracy, the direction from the United States, the large field staff, and of course the 8000 villagers. In such structures there is a tendency to pay more attention to the bureaucracy of the enterprise than to the nature of the inquiry. This may also account for a striking lack of curiosity in this report of the study. For example, it is noted that mortality is much higher in female than in male children, yet there is no attempt to explain or investigate why this should be so. Surely even on a narrow demographic basis this is important for population control.

The point at which Mamdani attacks the Khanna study is that the investigators paid practically no attention to the motivations of the villagers to practice or not to practice birth control. They blandly assumed that the need for population control was self-evident. They began to measure "acceptance" of contraceptives, though it is never very clear what acceptance means. Mamdani, who visited the test area in 1970 and interviewed the villagers, gives us some idea (pp. 32–33):

> Gradually my eyes got used to the faint light, and I saw small rectangular boxes and bottles, one piled on top of the other, all arranged as a tiny sculpture in a corner of the room. . . . This man had made a sculpture of birth control devices. Asa Singh said: "Most of us threw the tablets away. But my brother here, he makes use of everything."

According to Mamdani the villagers consistently lied to the Khanna study investigators. Most villagers were not convinced of the need for birth control. Some looked for ulterior motives in the investigators, such as the wish to persuade villagers to support America against Russia. Others merely wanted to be polite and gave answers they thought investigators would like. By the same token, the question arises whether the villagers were only giving Mamdani the answers *he* wanted to hear. The effects of the investigators on the villagers are not treated in either book.

Mamdani stresses that from an economic point of view it would have been disastrous for most villagers to practice birth control. In an agricultural peasant economy children, especially sons, are a major asset. Without them a family faces starvation. With them there is at least a chance for prosperity. The point has often been made before, but Mamdani makes it forcefully and tellingly with respect to the Khanna study. As he says, people are not poor because they have large families; they have large families because they are poor (p. 14). Economic data are virtually absent from the Khanna study, and Mamdani thinks this is evidence of a class bias in the investigation. There is certainly ethnocentrism involved, as the authors of the report admit, but the bias is as much a matter of professional orientation as of class. *The Khanna Study* is a population planners' book. Its authors are convinced that the ills suffered by villagers are due to overpopulation and if villagers think otherwise it is because of their ignorance. To the Khanna study authors it is self-evident that pressure on land must make people desire fewer children. On the contrary, as Mamdani shows, having more children means that more land can be worked. If not owned, it can be rented from those unfortunate enough to have few or no sons. The additional income earned from working rented land can be used to purchase land

from those made destitute by childlessness or other causes. Incidentally, this point has been frequently made in anthropological studies of Indian villages, a literature of which the authors of this report seem unaware. *The Khanna Study* gives no attention to the dynamics of villagers' economic and social situation over time.

In castigating the Khanna study for ignoring economic factors, Mamdani is led rather far along the path of a monocausal economic determinism. He neglects other factors operating to increase family size. For example the status system gives high prestige to the parents of large families. The religions of India place a high value on the production of children. Kinship values stress the need for an heir. Children provide security, both in economic and in social terms, for the old and the ill in a country where old-age pensions, sickness benefits, and unemployment insurance are inadequate or nonexistent. The effects of the wider political structure on villagers are almost totally ignored, but that is what enables education and migration, and can bring development projects to the village, as indeed happened in the study area. Finally there are the pleasures of having children. Over all this hangs a still high infant mortality rate and the expectation of the death of infants and children which Indians have experienced over the centuries. All these factors militate against birth control. Whether or not people use birth control depends not on the availability of contraceptives but on the availability of incentives to have fewer children. After all, coitus interruptus and abortion were the major population control methods in Europe until very recent times; yet family size was limited when other elements in the social structure enabled people to see improvement in their own life chances from having fewer children (for example, upward economic and social mobility correlated with industrialization and urbanization).

In fact the villagers of the Punjab were controlling their population—by migrating to the towns. Wyon and Gordon dismiss this as merely transferring the population problem from one area to another. This again illustrates their bias. They are looking at population problems in global or at least all-India terms, not through the eyes of a villager. Taken together these two books show that birth control depends on many more factors than the availability of easily used contraceptives (the technological view). Birth control succeeds or fails insofar as people see their own individual life chances in terms of more or fewer children (the motivational view). These estimates depend not only on the intimate relations between men and women but on the political, economic, and social relations within the whole community. They vary between groups and individuals and can change for a given individual over the course of his life.

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Communes in Israel

Family and Community in the Kibbutz. YONINA TALMON. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1972. xviii, 266 pp., illus. $12.

If the social sciences are concerned with a single, central problem it is that of the interrelations between ideology, norms, value-attitudes, and social action. This is the late Yonina Talmon's phrasing. Others might phrase it as culture, norms, and social action. But whatever the form, and the form reflects theoretical differences of more or less importance, this is the central problem of the social sciences and the central theoretical problem of this book.

In 1955 Talmon, an Israeli sociologist, undertook a major study of the kibbutzim. She worked on it until her death in 1966. This volume collects her published papers on this study (by no means all the papers she published). Some appeared in English in American journals, but many were published in Hebrew in Israeli journals and are translated into English especially for this volume. The book is therefore in a sense her final report on that major study of the kibbutz.

An appendix contains a clear, brief statement not only of the objectives of the study, but of its methodology as well. Most notable is the way in which sociological as well as anthropological field techniques are synchronized into an extraordinarily sharp instrument of research, guided always by the central theoretical problem of the research.

The basic features of the kibbutz are common ownership of property, except for a few personal belongings, and communal organization of production and consumption. The kibbutz starts in what Talmon calls a "bund" stage, where there is dedication to an all-pervasive "revolutionary" mission, intensive collective identification, spontaneous and direct primary relations among all members, informal social controls, and social homogeneity, that is, no formal social differentiation. The kibbutzim are started by young, unattached individuals who share a comparatively long period of social, ideological, and vocational training. In the bund stage there is almost no functional differentiation. But the process which brings about the emergence of the next, the "commune," stage is the development of functional differentiation and the attenuation and accommodation or adjustment of the revolutionary ideology to the changing facts of life, a decline in the intensity of collective identification, and a standardization of norms of behavior and formalization of social controls.

There are two central elements in the ideology at both the bund and the commune stages. The first is the primacy of the community over other values; this is of course part and parcel of the whole "revolutionary ideology" in that the kibbutz is seen both as a pioneering enterprise in a new way of life and as performing a vital function in the building of the new nation of Israel. The second element, equally important in the definition of the kibbutz as a revolutionary organization, is its commitment to an egalitarian set of principles, whether with regard to individual prestige or to sex roles.

Given this definition of the ideological situation, two particular elements are defined as antithetical to the commune. The first is the family, the second the individual. In the bund stage the family is seen as an institution that tends to usurp the individual's commitment to communal aims and goals, and the situation is defined in almost classical economic terms: any degree to which the individual holds to family goals diminishes by just that degree his loyalty and commitment to the commune. And by the same token, any degree to which the individual takes himself, his own needs, interests, or concerns into account by precisely that degree compromises his total commitment to the commune and the community (and ultimately the nation). Hence the virtual elimination of the family, the development of the communal facilities for child care and child