

# COMMON CAUSE

VOICE OF "COMMON CAUSE"

## CERTAIN IMPORTANT MATTERS

In this issue of our Periodical we are presenting three major subjects which have obvious importance in the context of problems of the people that need particular attention. One is that of Exploding Population, second is that of Rampant Illiteracy in the country and the third is of flaws in our Election System. On these three subjects the articles of Director, COMMON CAUSE have appeared in the Times of India during the recent weeks. Each one of these has brought forth a large number of letters from the readers. In these letters they have given their views and suggestions, mostly supporting the points highlighted in

them though on occasions expressing their dissent on some points; they have given concrete and pointed suggestions, strongly advocating that the concerned authorities should consider these for implementation.

- ★ Everybody is eligible to take membership of COMMON CAUSE. No form is required. Merely send your name and complete address, preferably written in CAPITAL LETTERS. Send it to our new address: COMMON CAUSE, Common Cause House, 5, Institutional Area, Nelson Mandela Road, Vasant Kunj, NEW DELHI 110070.
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- ★ Donations to COMMON CAUSE are eligible for exemption available under Section 80-G of the Income Tax Act. Your donations, and those of your friends, will be most welcome indeed.

We have reproduced in this periodical these letters. Some of these letters were long, often covering 5-6 pages typed and hand-written. Constraints of space have inevitably necessitated the abridgement of the long letters, bringing out the salient points contained in them. Almost all the writers lay the blame on the politicians of the country for the serious problems that have arisen in these important areas : Population, Illiteracy and Elections. They feel that it is primarily due to self-interest of the politicians, comprising mainly the limitation of their objective primarily to the requirements of their vote-banks that they have failed to initiate action on lines which are of paramount interest to the country.

The problem of Population Explosion is the most serious development for the country. Reports are to the effect that population in the country will reach 123 crore (1.23 billion) in another 15 years, with net annual growth of 1.4 percent. During the decade of 1980-90, the country added 16 crore to the numbers; equal to the aggregate of the population of U.K., France and Italy. In the next 40 years our population, at the present rate of expansion, will reach 200 crore. Even at present our population is 16 percent of the world's population, with area being only 2.4 per cent of the total area of the earth.

Population, Illiteracy and Poverty are interlinked; each leads to the other, and these combined present a bleak picture of the country. It is a matter of crying shame that even after 50 years of Independence half of our population is illiterate; we hold unenviable record of having the largest illiterate population in the

- POPULATION EXPLOSION
- RAMPANT ILLITERACY

- ELECTORAL REFORM
- CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

world. Women have been particularly kept far behind in this field. Attempts made in the field of reducing illiteracy have been half-hearted and poor; the problem of funds has always loomed high for this failure, but the fact remains that the real failure has been the absence of proper direction.

In the area of Electoral Reform, after reproducing TOI article, we have summarised views and suggestions which the readers have communicated. These cover a wide range, including problem of criminalisation of politics, comprising present available eligibility to stand for election even where the candidate has been charged with offence of heinous crime, difficulties arising from the present multi-parties systems, problem of defection from a political party, matter of expenses incurred by candidates on election, maintenance of accounts by political parties, power of Election Commission to deal with matters of discipline of officers placed at their disposal during elections, redemarcation of constituencies, and matters of such nature.

Another matter of importance that has been incorporated in this issue of the periodical relates to the problems in regard to the implementation of Consumer Protection Act. Importance of this statute is self-evident. Consciousness has spread far and wide among the consumers that they can seek redressal of their grievances in relation to defects in the products, and deficiencies in the services, which they pay for. However, general impression now prevails that cases in the consumer "courts" languish, sometime for years. Over five lakh cases are presently pending before the Consumer Forums and State Commissions. The long delays in decisions of these cases are causing exasperations. From COMMON CAUSE we have sent a detailed communication to the Ministry of Food and Consumer Affairs, suggesting the installation of a system of submission of Monthly Reports by the District Forums and State Commissions wherein they should indicate the number of cases pending for more than six months, one year, two years and three years, furnishing information also about any delays occurring in the filling up vacancies in the positions of Presidents and Non-judicial Members of the Consumer "courts". Transmission of such Monthly statements by them to the Ministry as well as the National Commission will enable to closer watch to be kept on the functioning of consumer "courts" and the problems of delays in the disposal of cases.

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A couple were having a heated discussion regarding the family's finances. Finally the wife exploded, "If it weren't for my money, this television set would not be here. If it weren't for my money, the easy chairs you're sitting on would not be here. If it weren't for my money, this house would not be here."

"Are you kidding," her husband shouted back. "If it weren't for your money, I would not be here!"

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Harold's new job had him working late. He decided to get his wife a watch dog. He goes to the pet shop and asks the guy for a Dobermann. The man says: "If it is a guard dog you want, I have just the dog for you," he walks to the back of the shop and comes back with a poodle.

Harold says: "This small thing, a watch dog? You are kidding, right?"

The man says: "No, this dog is special, he knows karate."

"Karate, I don't believe it," Harold says.

The man puts the dog on the floor, points to a sign advertising dog food and tells the dog: "Karate the sign." The dog runs up and tears the sign to shreds. Harold is amazed.

The man then points to a chair in the corner and tells the dog: "Karate the chair." The dog runs up and rips the chair to shreds. Harold is convinced.

When he brings the dog home, Harold's wife says: "This little thing, a watch dog? No way."

Harold says: "But this dog knows karate."

"Karate," she yells. "Karate my ass."

TOI ARTICLE

## POPULATION CONTROL IT MUST BE DONE. IT CAN BE DONE

Population explosion that is taking place is a matter of serious concern for future of the country. All sorts of problems and ailments, which are evident in the country, are attributable to the expansion of population. In certain parts of the country where population has got appropriately controlled, as in parts of South India, manifestation of ailments and problems is correspondingly less.

Unemployment, poverty and deprivation are inevitable concomitants of the expansion of population; these breed on each other. The poor feel that larger number of children are their assets; in fact, the large numbers become liabilities for the families and the community.

Families move out of rural areas for migration to the cities in search of employment. Scarcity of food and potable water become primary manifestations of the migration. In the urban centres the crowds jostle for space; development of housing cannot keep pace with the rate of influx. Access to sanitation, water, drainage and other basic necessities in these areas does not exist, with the result that this leads to diseases and occasional spread of epidemics. These conditions have inevitably resulted in expansion of crime, evidenced by frequent reports of thefts, robberies, murders, kidnappings, abductions, extortions and rape, amidst the poverty and illiteracy that prevail in all these areas.

Fifty years ago, at the time of partition of the country, total population of this entire sub-continent was about 33 crores. Now, India alone has multiplied the population to nearly 100 crores. The world always looked at China as the most populated country, with its vast area, nearly three times the geographical size of India, with the population of about 100 crores. Now we are likely to attain the dubious distinction of being the most populated country in the world, exceeding the population of China. In fifty more years population of India is estimated to cross the figure of 150 crores, leaving China far behind.

Everybody knows what disastrous consequences have emerged from the present unmanaged expansion of population and what further worsening is likely in the coming decades. But, nobody, no political leader, no political party, no government department, no organisation, is prepared to raise the voice loudly against this serious development. Everybody continues to evade the question. Government of India has a Ministry in charge of the matter relating to population, but it has throughout avoided calling spade a spade and proclaiming that it will take positive measures for controlling the population. It has continued to use the euphemistic terminology of "family planning" or "family welfare", never daring to take hold of the problem by the horns and to declare that population must and will be controlled. At no stage has any programme of positive incentives and disincentives been evolved to tackle the problem of uncontrolled population.

Politicians have been shying away from tackling this problem. Never has the Government, either of the Centre or of the States, dared to come forth with a positive declaration that, for instance, rations from the government ration shops will henceforth be restricted only to the families with not more than two children, excepting those which already have large number, that any benefit of education, or any other privilege accorded through a government agency, will also be limited accordingly to the small families. It is only recently that in certain States norms have been proclaimed that a person with family of more than two children will not be allowed to stand for elections to Panchayat of the village. It has not yet been possible to conceive that this type of disincentive will be made applicable to elections to the legislatures, either of the States or of the Centre. If an edict could be promulgated that nobody with family of more than two children will be allowed to stand for elections to these legislatures, the message will effectively go down the line, and if the decision is announced that rations from a government shop will be restricted



accordingly, it will carry conviction that Government means business and that politicians are prepared to face the reality.

There are certain unfortunate factors which stand in the way of the politicians or laws proclaiming positively in favour of control of population and towards adoption of specific incentives and disincentives towards attainment of this objective. One major factor is related to what happened when during the Emergency, Sanjay Gandhi, the young politician emerging under the wings of Indira Gandhi, brought about forcible sterilisation of some women. That caused a furore. It would not be wrong to say that since then no politician has ever dared to come forth positively in favour of population control, for fear of incurring wrath of the people. They prefer to avoid the subject.

There are also other factors, some of these related to socio-religious ethos prevailing among certain communities, particularly Muslims, who claim that it is against their religion to adopt family planning measures. It is singularly unfortunate that on account of these various factors this problem of paramount importance continues to languish, and has in fact stood in the way as the single most important requirement for enabling us to face the serious problems that have arisen in the country.

Food and water scarcity are really catastrophes that face the country by further expansion of population. With cut-backs in aquifers and depletion of water resources there will be severe problems relating to irrigation of land and reliable access to safe drinking water. Food and water supplies will inevitably fall below the survival levels. There are other serious developments in store if population continues expanding, with the addition of another fifty crores in three decades. Non-availability of water will disable access to sanitation, with ill-health, diseases and epidemics capturing the entire land, simultaneously bringing about breakdown of the entire social system.

There is yet no National Population Policy. None has emerged yet though it has been talked about often. It is difficult to imagine in the present circumstances that our leadership, of the various shades and hues, will get together on this major issue, face realities, resolve to initiate, propagate, and promote programmes specially aiming at control of population. They need to be shocked into realisation of gravity of the problem, and the need of their collectively pursuing it as a primary national objective. First and foremost requirement is of generating a climate, and an atmosphere highlighting the need of awakening the masses, carrying the message to every nook and corner of the country, into every town, village, and street, and to every home, that the programme of family planning has been launched and those who fail to participate in it will render themselves open to adverse action and specific disincentives, which will need to be spelt out in detail. There should then be strict implementation and enforcement of the programme.

Priority in the programme will need to be of educating the women about the requirements of family planning, providing to them the contraceptives and inculcating in them the conviction and resolve of limiting the family. Education of women is of paramount importance for progress of the country. Example of Kerala speaks for itself. Where women remain illiterate, the pace of decline of population is the slowest as has been the case in the four large Northern States of U.P., Bihar, Rajasthan and M.P. These States account for forty percent of country's population. Men will also need to be pressurised to use contraceptives which will need to be made widely available in rural and urban areas of the country.

Resources are needed for launching and implementing the programme of family planning and for attainment of general objective of raising the level of literacy in the country, and of women in particular. These have to be found, and if the nation resolves to achieve this objective the resource can surely be marshalled. Among the various important requirements of this country, for lifting it out of a morass, the programme of family planning and restricting the size of family to not more than two children is of the greatest importance. The nation and its leadership has to resolve. It must be done. It can be done.

**LETTERS RECEIVED FROM READERS OF TOI ARTICLE ON  
"POPULATION CONTROL: IT MUST BE DONE; IT CAN BE DONE".**

"The major problem as I see, is the lack of will amongst the political leaders of all hues to formulate a population control policy. When some time back there was a proposal mooted to debar people with more than two children from contesting Legislative Assembly election, all kinds of politicians pooh-poohed and the move died an embryonic death.

There is same lack of will on the part of our leaders in the cause of tackling the problem of socio-religious opposition or apathy. Whereas Muslims oppose the efforts of family planning, citing their religious scriptures, Hindus, the majority, are afflicted with the religio-traditional belief of having a son to continue the family lineage and achieve mukti. What will you say to those who do not allow women to accompany their dead spouse on his last journey to the cremation ground, not to talk of allowing them to lit the pier? In their efforts to beget a son, they go on adding to their family and ignore the well-being of daughters.

I feel that yearning to have a son in the family stems basically from the sense of insecurity in old age. There are still those traditionalists who do not take even a glass of water at a married daughter's home. Getting sustenance of financial support from daughter in old age is a far cry for them. Government has to tackle the problem of old age insecurity, before it can effectively impress upon such families to accept the concept of one or two child family irrespective of the sex of the child.

Mahatma Gandhi once said that educating a man is educating a person and educating a woman amounts to educating an entire family. How right was our that great visionary, who has simply been reduced to the status of a ceremonial deity and his teachings have been placed in the archives for safe keeping.

It is right that the families with large numbers of children should be excluded from the benefits of subsidised supply of essential commodities. But it is also in the interest of popularising the concept of small family that those maintaining small families are given incentives for their contribution to this national cause.

Priority in the programme to tackle the problem of population should be educating the population, particularly the women. The emphasis should also be placed on the easy availability of contraceptives and inculcating the much needed conviction and resolve to limiting the family. This can be best achieved at the Panchayat level. Let us start it at those Panchayats which are controlled by women. Ask such Panchayats to fix targets of yearly increase in population and then prioritise the rights of young women to have children. The older women with more than two children should be made to sacrifice their right to keep with the target fixed.

In this connection we can also learn from China, where they have produced, I am told, stamp like soluble contraceptive "pills" which are easy to handle and readily available".

S.M. JOSHI, DELHI

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"Some concrete steps must be suggested to the government and hound them to implement them : (1) A joint statement by all political parties that population control is now a primary national goal (no particular party will lose/gain mileage) and the time for stern measures has come; (2) Declare that India is a Secular State and that religion will not be used as an excuse to raise private hockey teams; (3) Get Doordarshan to make 10-15 second clips informing the people about the problems, present and future, that population explosion is producing and about contraceptives; (4) Announce immediately applicable disincentives for those with more than 2 children e.g. cannot stand for elections, cannot get government job, ration for only 2 children etc.; (5) Make contraceptives available, but also teach the Gandhian method; (6) Make the girl-child acceptable by dealing very sternly with dowry mongers; and (7) Get the view of the people through an opinion poll - this will help the government to realise that the people are with them in this crusade".

DR. GOPAL AGARWAL, DEHRADUN

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"So far our government's population policy has been that of incentives and motivation. Now, taking lessons from China, we should have a policy of disincentives, punishment and accountability. No excuse on account of human rights.

As incharge of family planning programme evaluation in one of our largest States, my experience is that our administrators - both doctors as well as bureaucrats - are responsible for our present-day problems. They are more interested in cooking statistics - than doing the real works of controlling the population . Cooking statistics serve the

purpose of all - from the lowest para-medical Asstt. To the high level Secretary and Minister in position. It brings money also so they don't want to see the rubbish reality. Hence, there is an urgent need of administering strict punishment for every failure in any programme to culminate a sense of honesty in the policy executives. This should start from the Secretary to the Government of India - the person responsible to create such a feeling. In fact these people are playing with the country".

S.K. AGARWAL, NEW DELHI

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"I give below some practical suggestions:

- (i) There should be an independent Ministry in the name of Family Welfare but it should lay more stress and time on measures for population control. The Head of this Ministry should be a Muslim and preferably a lady because she will be able to win the confidence of Muslim community. (ii) Today there are many progressive Muslim ladies Associations whose help in the matter of both population control and Muslim women rights can be availed. (iii) Similarly such Mullahs (Muslim priests) who have liberal views should be taken into confidence and through them the message can be sent to members of Muslim community. They should be well paid from Wakf Funds. (iv) There are some Muslims highly educated and respected who can interpret the Quran to show that birth control is not prohibited. Their views and quotations from the Quran should be widely distributed amongst Muslims. (v) Again, those Urdu newspapers which are prepared to do such propaganda should be enlisted and they should be given liberal advertisements as reward. (vi) Schools (Government) should be opened for free education of girls in places where there is substantial Muslim population. The teachers in such schools should be ladies who should be carefully selected and are pro-population control. (vii) Most important is that PM should personally discuss the matter with Chief Ministers of each State separately and promise them hefty financial incentives directly related to the results achieved in respect of decrease in birth rate in their States. (viii) I agree that in future election to Panchayats and rations from Ration shops should be related to the number of children the persons concerned have. (ix) All public and limited companies should be given Income Tax rebate which are directly related to the operation done on their workers. Such Companies may adopt some villages near their factories for the purpose. (x) Child labour should be banned and parents should be punished if their children are not sent to Schools, but are used for earning money. (xi) As in No. IX above Panchayats should also be given incentives which can show positive results in this direction."

S.S. HITKARI, NEW DELHI

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"It is true that population control must be done and can be done. But for that we need to be visionaries and should demolish our own psychological barriers for the task ahead.

Firstly, it is unfair to hold a political leader, a political party, government department or an organisation responsible for raising the question of population control. We, as a people, seem to always expect others to formulate rules and when the rules formulated are too firm, we label them as authoritarian and the person formulating rules as a dictator; example Mr. Sanjay Gandhi. Why can't we as the citizens of this great country, take the initiative and raise the question of population control ourselves? After all, it is we who elect a political leader, a political party; work in government departments and organisations.

As regards incentives and disincentives for population control, disincentives create undue hardships and difficult situations for the poor while the rich sail through. And the brunt of such hardships are borne by the women. For example, a widow with four children working in a semi-government organisation is refused medical aid for her third child suffering from epilepsy. Does the widow refuse to get her third child treated or does she starve the other three to pay for the medical bills of the sick child? What about the working lady, pregnant for the third time - does she abort the foetus as the government refuses her maternity leave or should she deliver her baby and return to work the next day? The ground realities of disincentives are harsh and cannot even begin to be contemplated by policy makers. In spite of this, we have Chief Ministers and political leaders with multiple children as icons. Should we not consciously refuse to elect political leaders with many children? If an "advanced" country like U.S.A. can be moralistic and narrow-minded about the life styles of their political leaders, why are we (a "conservative" country) so broad-minded and forgiving of our political leaders?

This brings us to the third point : Why is it necessary for women to be held responsible for the fallacies of men, since women bear the brunt anyway? Since independence, we have always talked of educating women. How about educating men for a start? Kerala is always upheld as a model State as regards the high rate of female literacy but it is also necessary to consider that Kerala has had a matriarchal society. In such societies, women have also controlled the purse strings. Therefore, not just literacy but also a certain degree of economical independence empowers the women of Kerala. Unfortunately, in the patriarchal societies of U.P., Bihar, Rajasthan and M.P., a woman is a second class citizen - always dependent on her male relatives.

Therefore, it makes more practical sense for Indian men to be educated and the responsibility of population control being thrust on them! After all, it is easier for the men to adopt family planning measures than for the women.

Finally, although, population control must be done; can be done, there are no easy solutions. Let each one of us, teach one and hope that we can do it voluntarily rather than have a dictator doing it for us."

DR. GAURI MANKEKAR, MUMBAI

"I am also in favour of an effective national population policy but it would require a strong political will. It's surprising, not a single national party is talking about population control openly (politics).

I consider illiteracy the main cause of population explosion irrespective of caste and religion. If we could provide atleast primary education (daunting task, indeed) to especially females, it would help a great deal. Thanks to Prof. Amartya Sen for bringing education on priority chart of Government, atleast it is point of discussion now. There are other real problems for population explosion but they are all related to education i.e. awareness:

In rural areas especially male member is considered as an asset. People, especially in rural areas don't have easy access to population control methods/techniques and in many cases they are not even aware about them. Primary Health Centres in rural areas don't work effectively. It is high time we recognise this as a major problem. Our educational system especially in rural areas need to be made effective. This issue needs to be debated on national level. Parties should give priority to this in their manifestos.

SANJAY KUMAR GUPTA, NEW DELHI

"Our population explosion is not due to an increase in the birth rate but due to a steady decrease in the death rate. In fact mortality has been coming down, fatal diseases are getting controlled and life expectancy has been going up. Admittedly, this decrease in the death rate has to be countered by an equivalent decrease in the birth rate. Else, the population increase will be in geometric progression, like compound interest, which is what Malthus also told us long ago.

Census data shows that there is no religious bias in the size of the family, the correlation being with socio-economic stratum. The problem has to be tackled at the grass root level. In population density, which is what really matters, we are far ahead of even china and they have been worried for many years whereas we have been blissfully negligent. The primary health centres should be the focal points of action. These should be activated with proper staff and facilities for this task. Education, advice in contraceptive methods, distribution of contraceptives etc. are the areas which they should tackle, with direction and help from the next higher level. Raising the age of marriage (actual, not merely on papers) would pay rich dividends. We have to concentrate on the vast Hindi belt which is our 'area of darkness'. Where illiteracy is high, tracts and pamphlets do not help but we have to rely on personal contact messages. Radio and TV can also be used as effective media. The point is that the method of attack has to be area - specific and policies in this regard have to be evolved and implemented bottom-up. What works in one area may not work in another.

Having said this, I must admit that I do not entertain much hope in our achieving anything in the Hindi belt to which I would now add Gujarat and Maharashtra. We are becoming a lumpenised society and no sustained value-based activity can take place in such a society".

GP. CAPT. T.K. VARGHESE (RETD.), NEW DELHI

"Population control is the major problem with our country. It is not easy to tackle it unless we involve women to check the population growth. I would like to suggest few methods which can be adopted to motivate women for this enormous task. The methods are discussed in succeeding paras for urban and rural areas.

**Urban Areas :** By and large women in urban areas are educated. Every colony or Slum has Mahila Samities. They take active part in development works. Mahila Samities can persuade women to adopt the small family norms. The following incentives can be initiated by the Union and State Governments to motivate women:

- (a) *Pension Scheme :* Give Rs. 100/- per month as pension to a woman who gets sterilised after the birth of first child and Rs. 50/- per month if she gets sterilised after the birth of second child.
- (b) *Post Office Deposit Scheme :* Launch Post Office Deposit Schemes in which money can be doubled in 3/4 years for the women who get themselves sterilised after the birth of first or second child.
- (c) *Rations from Fair Price Shops :* Give rations from Fair Price Shops for families having two children only.
- (d) *Development Grants :* Give development grants to the Mahila Samitis which achieve laid down targets in sterilisation and zero population growth rate.
- (e) *Media Coverage :* Involve media and NGOs extensively to achieve the targets in urban areas.
- (f) *Education and Mass Awareness :* Hold Seminars on regular basis and invite maximum number of women to attend these. Also hold Seminars and Discussions in Girls Schools and Colleges.
- (g) *Equal Rights to Women :* Make laws to give equal rights to women in property, jobs, governance and education. Give special facilities and incentives for educating the girls.

**Rural Areas :** Women in rural areas are uneducated. There is need to launch Mass Contact Programmes to educate them. In addition to introduction of Pension Scheme, Post Office Deposit Scheme, Rations from Fair Price Shops schemes and those suggested for Urban areas, following additional incentives are suggested for rural areas:-

- (a) *Issue of Yellow Cards :* Issue Yellow Cards to women through the Head of the Department (Chief Medical Officer) for sterilisation. On Yellow Cards, give soft loans for farming, dairy farming, poultry, higher education or for any other small business from the local Banks.
- (b) *Development Work Grants :* Give grants for development works in the villages for achieving the laid down target of sterilisation and zero growth population.

Involvement of women in this noble task can check the population effectively in our country. Initiate these schemes without making an issue of it in Parliament or any Forum of discussion".

COL. C.J. PAL (RETD.), PANCHKULA, HARYANA

"This is one problem where "successive Governments" have miserably failed and hence we are in great trouble - how to solve this problem? In fact, it is not the Government or NGOs etc. but it is the Man-and the woman who must understand the gravity of the PROBLEM and come forward to fight out the menace collectively.

In fact today ever-growing population has created a number of problems, our many National Development programmes have come to standstill. The fact cannot be denied that even though the Government has taken number of measures from "Time and again, but, all proved in vain. Why? It is because of 90% Illiteracy in our country, blind belief and wrong concept and Teaching : Religious Orthodoxy prevent many to adopt 'Family Planning': These Factors become a stumbling Block in our social structure, wrong ideas and failure to understand the real Complications, which detract us from going ahead: Naturally we must give highest priority to "Literacy" and social awareness has to be created in the minds of illiterate people. These "Two Factors" can easily be achieved only through persuasion, persistent efforts and compulsory Family Planning Education to all concerned. However, the fact cannot be denied, that we always look forward, expect, and depend 'Too-much' on the Government. But, I am of the opinion that it is not only the Government, but people themselves must come forward in bulk if they want to fight out the over-growing population".

K.D. KEKRE, MUMBAI

"Woman holds a pivotal point in population control. But education about the technique of family planning is as important for man as to woman. For women, apart from the said education, technical training and academic education



is as important. This makes her to be independent economically. Woman bows to the lust of her husband and can't say 'no' because she knows he is provider of food, clothes and shelter to her and if annoyed can show her the door out. If she is capable of supporting herself, she is bold, courageous and not helpless. This applies to the women of lower middle class mostly. The women there, are more cosy, shy and inhibited. In the low and lowest strata of society women are more independent, sometimes earning more than menfolk. It is here that the education about family planning is more important to man. He needs to be pressurised to use the techniques of course along with women.

It is unfortunate that Muslims say that it is against their religion to adopt Family Planning measures. If restricting the size of family means destroying foetus, I think no religion sanctions that. But as far using the techniques and adopting restrained behaviour is concerned, what is the hassle?"

MRS. RAKSHA BALVIR, NEW DELHI

"Explosion of population and mass illiteracy in our country are two main banes of our society. There has been lack of political will to effectively tackle these problems. There was some attempt to control population during the Emergency" mainly because of late Shri Sanjay Gandhi's will. Ever since the electoral defeat of Mrs. Indira Gandhi immediately after the "Emergency", the Governments in power have been scared to call any programme as population control. On the contrary 'Family Welfare' is the new ideology rather than population control. The reasons are obvious. Main being "Vote". Almost all parties have their vote banks and would like them to swell rather than control. Positive and strong deterrent measures are urgently called for. I would suggest the following:

- (i) Limit the number of children to maximum two if not one.
- (ii) The third child and subsequent children will not enjoy voting right, right to free education, medical attention, reservation in services etc. In short, benefits extended or reserved to weaker sections of the Society will not be available for third and subsequent children.
- (iii) Measures to provide identify cards upto second child only be effectively taken. If there is only one child, he or she should be eligible for incentives like in job, education etc. Third and subsequent children should not be entitled to hold or contest for any public post or office whatsoever.
- (iv) Education to weaker sections of society can be an effective antidote to population explosion. Television is a powerful media and has strong impact on the viewers. Programmes conveying the message and urgent need of controlling population/family size should be compulsorily televised on as large number of channels as practicable. In fact, it should be made compulsory for all channels to apportion a portion of their time for population control. Even Press media (newspapers, magazines etc.) should extend their help.

Education should be targeted on girls primarily and the weaker sections particularly. Advantages of small families and disadvantages of large families should be highlighted without reference to sex or reproductive process. Once the idea or virtues of small family suites in the mind, ways and means to achieve it will automatically be found at appropriate time. Education leads to enlightenment and all round improvement. Greater emphasis has to be laid on education formal/informal.

Population control is extremely urgent and no effort should be spared to achieve this".

D.P. GARG, GHAZIABAD (U.P.)

"In India, there is an utter lack of civic sense, which has got to be seen to be believed. If one feels that merely by educating the masses, people's mindset will change, then forget it. It is not merely education which is important, but one's family background and upbringing, values and culture which hold the key to the problem. Changing society and

A MAN was driving home late one afternoon and he was driving above the speed limit. A police car suddenly emerged in the rear view mirror, sirens blaring. The man thought he would outpace it, so he pushed the accelerator to the floor and raced on. The two cars raced for some time, 60, 70, 80, 90 then the man said, what the heck, and pulled over, ready to receive a speeding.

The police officer got out, leaned over the man and said: "Listen, Mister, I have had a really lousy day, and I just want to go home. Give me a good excuse and I'll let you go."

The man thought for a moment and said: "Three weeks ago, my wife ran off with a police officer. When I saw your car in my mirror, I thought you were the officer and you were trying to give her back to me."

The officer let him go.

the basic mentality of the people is extremely difficult. That is exactly why social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Ray and Dr. Ambedkar are remembered with great respect till today.

It is really unfortunate that even many educated people don't seem to take the matter seriously. Either they don't consider it to be their problem or they are not in a position to understand the consequences. The problem, unfortunately, lies in the roots of a large section of society. The solution, according to me, is that the people should be made aware of the problems of over-population. They should be made to believe that by producing more children, they are doing disservice to the country. People should be more patriotic and sensitive to the problems facing the nation. They should get their basic right, think from the nation's point of view and not only about their own selfish interests.

In short, we need a sort of 'SOCIAL REVOLUTION' and unless that takes place, no politician, no policy, not even Education can save this Nation from disaster".

MISS MOLLY DUTTA GUPTA, NASIK, MAHARASHTRA

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"In India three P's breed on each other. Population growth poverty and politicians. Politicians have no genuine desire to discuss this issue because it is their bread and butter. As the family size increases it continues to hand over illiteracy, malnutrition and dismal conditions down the generations. (As observed in poor rural India). These inheritors live in a state of subjugation, search for escape points. Politicians in India project themselves as Messiahs for such down trodden masses. They offer relief but only in the temporary form because no politician ever wishes the true liberation of such oppressed people, because it will signify the death of his role and the murder of his corrupt practices. We have completed fifty years of Independence but those below the poverty line have only multiplied. There has been no improvement in the socio-economic status of those trapped at the bottom of the society. Many villages in India (especially Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, North-Eastern States) witness to difference to their state of retardedness. Rurals are still confronted with problems of necessities of life like potable water, electricity, fuel, sanitation technology, medical facilities. Besides problems of social injustice like untouchability and political mafioso.

It is true that most Indian parents consider their children as their assets but this is because circumstances force them to do so. Producing many children is the solution, expecting a few to survive the harsh cruelties of impoverished environment. Later these matured children are considered as assets is because there has been no technological development in rural India. Agricultural jobs have to be done by manual labour. As the parents age they can no longer toil in the fields because poor health does not permit them to do so, therefore the next younger generation is expected to take over the job and serve as the source of income.

Therefore, if the politicians, parties, government desire to control the growing number of 900 crore the government should provide good medical facilities, make food available so that parents will feel confident of producing a limited number of children who will grow up to become healthy citizens. Newer facilities technology have to be introduced in villages so that one does not have to rely only on manual labour. Schemes offering pensions/allowances need to be initiated for the aged citizens so that they are able to lead a decent old age life.

Finally the people of India should realise that by making use of family planning methods they can limit their family size. This action will enable them to educate their children, improve their chances of employment and finally liberate them from an oppressive life".

SHEETAL PHADKE, MUMBAI

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"One couple, one child should be the ideal slogan for all. Advantages for smaller units of families and disadvantages for larger families should be perceptibly made clear socially and legally. Need not to say that shortages, crime, corruption, unemployment and pollution would witness manifold increase if the present trend of population growth goes on unabated. All Voluntary, social organisations and institutions getting government financial assistance should be given the accountable and obligatory task to reach the poor and illiterate people in rural and remote areas with a message of small family norm and motivate the eligible couples for family planning.

Civil emergency on this grave problem seems to be an answer at this juncture. All political parties should sit together at the earliest to chalk out a strategy in the light of latest situation created by the sea-of-people".

President & Members Executive Committee,  
"SAVE EARTH SAVE HUMANITY MOVEMENT",  
HISSAR (HARYANA).

"The statement that all our major ailments are related to the problem of population growth is an over simplification of the evils pervading our society. It is stated that population growth compounds the problems of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. It is population which leads to scarcity of food and water. And it is population expansion which causes migration from rural to urban areas leading to problems of housing and slums. Again, it is population which is the cause of poor sanitation, lack of water, problem of drainage and other basic necessities causing out break of epidemics and disease. Last but not in the least the incidence of crime and violence in urban areas have been reported due to this factor. Some such views have been carried for too many years to create a dangerous trend of considering population growth as a scapegoat for all our economic problems.

In fact, the whole issue of population growth has to be viewed not in isolation but in the larger context of Welfare economy - the question of social justice and the large inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth in our society. The root cause of rural-urban migration, for eg. has to be sought in the lack of educational and job opportunities, lack of infrastructure to generate employment in the rural areas. We can learn many things from the example of London, an affluent city, once congested to the extreme and troubled by spreading of slums with consequent sanitation problems has decongested itself by excellent development work in sub-urban areas. The people who live in the fringes of our cities in sub human condition of poverty can be transformed into nation's vital work force in a similar way.

Controlling population to the extent of limiting the size of the family to 'one-child' 'two-child' is against nature, it is impracticable and, above all, undesirable. For example, in China 'one child' norm has bred many complex problems of psychological stress of a lonely child very often deprived of the joys of sharing. The adverse sex ratio results in the dilemma of the single man not finding suitable partners and those widowers who turn into lonely males in single unit families. Failing to cope with the stress, many of them slip into immoral liaisons, loosening the fabric of society. Even Kerala, which has achieved low birth and low infant mortality resulting in a steep decline in population growth is faced with other problems on the social front - loneliness and the increase in suicide rate.

What is of utmost importance now in society is to give a new thrust to the whole issue of population by viewing people not as hungry millions but as wonderful assets, each endowed with the faculty to work, to think and to decide important matters of life in a reasonable way. Given the chance to develop their faculties, they can prove their capability in the task of nation building. Indians are in great demand in many parts of the world as excellent working people. Why can not we channelise the potential of our own people for the progress of our country?"

Ms. LINAROY & Ms. SUMAN JAIN, DELHI

"Population explosion is such a serious malady afflicting our country that most of the problems faced today are directly or indirectly linked to it. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of sanitation, malnutrition, deforestation, pollution of environment and corruption follow from this unchecked growth of population. The irony is that we have a deptt. of family planning at the Central level and in the States since nineteen fifties, whose name was changed to family welfare after the reaction to Sanjay Gandhi's handling of the programme during the Emergency, there is no let up in the rate of growth of population. The population clock shows increase year after year. The birth rate in 1983 was 43 per minute and now it is more than 50 per minute.

Illiteracy is one of the main causes of failure of our earlier family planning programmes. It is really unfortunate that after 50 years of independence the percentage of literacy hovers around fifty and in the case of girls (which is more relevant in the context of family planning, it is as low as 20 to 30% in many regions of the country. For achieving quick results in population control adult education is equally important, so priority has to be accorded to primary education and adult education. This has to be tackled at war footing.

In my opinion positive incentives and disincentives may also be necessary for checking the uncontrolled growth of population. There is still vast population in the villages and towns which believes that more children are an asset to the family. There is positive lack of awareness amongst the masses for a need to limit the size of family. To my mind it is not at all undemocratic to enforce incentives and disincentives for controlling population. However, incentives and disincentives have to be carefully chosen and political consensus arrived at before enforcing them".

DR. S.P. SRIVASTAVA, LUCKNOW

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"It is necessary to understand that Governments after Governments have not implemented Programmes for controlling the increasing population with commitment and political will, sincerely and honestly. The Governments have played with the so-called Family Planning and Family Welfare Programmes, just to appease the people to get their votes in the elections. Prescribing the limits of an individual's family on paper by the Government does not lead to its practice. It is necessary to do more than that in concrete terms by way of actual action. This has not been done. Days of persuasion, promotion and propoganda are over. Now something more forceful requires to be done so that real results in terms of reduced birth-rate are visible, leading to better living conditions for the majority of our people, particularly in the rural areas.

People are in habit of finding out some minor faults in the Chinese Population Programme. But all said and done, it is generally admitted that China has been able to control its growing population, given a better standard of living to a majority of its population & succeeded in becoming a major power in the world. Therefore, there is nothing wrong in adopting useful measures of their population programme, suitable to our conditions. Why make a loud noise about democratic ways & means, when more than 40% of our people are still living below the line of poverty, even after 50 years of independence". -

SURESH SURATWALA, MUMBAI.

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"Looking back, not in anger but certainly anguish, I believe there were two serious errors of omission and one major error of understanding - understanding the complex nature of democratic processes.

The errors of omission were (i) failure to control the population with every means at our disposal commensurate with humane, practical considerations and (ii) failure to wipe out illiteracy, esp. female illiteracy.

In regard to population control a major obstacle was Pandit Nehru's sentimental, largely ill-founded, conviction that a large, virtually limitless, population was an asset. Right from the First Five Year Plan we openly, or covertly, refused to recognise the dangers of unrestrained population growth. The average targeted economic growth in the first decades was only 3%. So the architects of the plans must have known that a 2.5% or 2% population growth was going to dissipate most of the intended rise in per capita income.

There is some truth in the argument that as long as infant mortality remains high women would aim for larger families (4 to 5 children) and would, therefore, oppose externally imposed population control. By all means let us do our best to reduce infant mortality.

In regard to abolition of illiteracy (which has vital linkages with population growth) there can be no theoretical opposition as such but we have not been able to tackle the problem with sufficient vigour and tenacity. This would have been much easier if we had opted for linking literacy with electoral rights. In its absence many politicians in the making, perhaps secretly, welcome illiteracy (because it makes a voter more pliable) in precisely the same way as electoral candidates secretly welcome (and would probably like to perpetuate) masses of poor voters clustered in inhuman, insanitary, unsocial colonies in and around metropolitan areas where it is easier to get at them".

S.D. DESHMUKH, PUNE

"Population explosion continues to be the major factor responsible for all problems the country has been facing. Growth of population must be brought under control within a short time frame. This may be possible through a crash programme only.

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PEOPLE who live in glass houses have faded sofas.

...

OH, WHAT a tangled web do parents weave when they think that their children are naive.

First step necessary is to organise a national level forum comprising of some eminent non-political personalities. After some initial preparations, the members of this forum may make joint national appeals in their names seeking participation of local elites at state, district, subdivision, block and upto panchayat level; for them to constitute similar local forums for propagation of the objectives. I am confident that such an appeal shall receive welcome response everywhere and a network of active voluntary forums shall emerge within a short time and volunteers in thousands will rally around at their call for such a great national cause. Many local level NGOs are also expected to join. Such a movement taking shape at voluntary level all over the country will force political wills to accept the responsibility.

In Bangladesh, over 80% of the population is Muslim and there the government of the country has been vigorously propagating about the needs for population control and about ways and means for the same and have obtained good results. Obviously they are not finding the family planning measures to be against their religion. Such information need be widely publicised in India for frustrating the political motives of a section of Muslim leadership whose purposes are to protect their own vote banks isolating the Muslim masses from the main stream of national life.

Resources necessary for funding this programme of highest national priority has to be found any how even if this may require some curtailment of investments in comparatively other less priority areas. The nation may not consider unjustified even if there is a special taxation for gainful engagement for some period, after short training, lakhs of surplus manpower with particularly the sick public sector undertakings, who are getting their salaries in any case. Expenditure on population control programme is fundamentally a capital investment for long term economic gains for the nation which can be measured in terms of immediate and cumulative impacts of each prevented birth on the volumes of national demands for food, shelter, health and education".

DILIP CHOUDHURY, DELHI

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"The fastest growing population in the world is India's whose land area is 2.4% of the world's earth while its population is 16% of the world's population. There is no sign of abatement. Upper strata of society has succeeded, to a large extent, in bringing its population to the replacement level but almost 85% of the people of India are non-chalant towards the high growth rate of population. The result is that our country is being populated by people consisting of B.C, E.B.C, S.C,S.T, Muslims etc who are increasing by leaps and bounds and it is these people who will manifest India's culture, strength and recognition in the world polity.

#### **SUGGESTIONS :**

- i. To begin with, every couple of child bearing age having three children must be compulsorily sterilised by means of tubectomy or vasectomy. All social pressures and religious dogmatism should be ruthlessly resisted caring little for the fall of government. N.G.O.s cooperation and every patriots help may be earnestly solicited in this regard. There is no dearth of right thinking people in the interest of nation to mobilise public opinion in favour of family planning.
- ii. The couples who are in child bearing age and have produced two children should be educated not to produce third child. Contraceptive devices should be weekly and freely made available to them at their door steps by lady social health visitors who will administer doses of counselling every week on the benefits of small family.
- iii. Free clinics for compulsory abortion to those having more than two children and for those having health problem be provided in all P.H. centres and civil surgeons should be entrusted to complete the target of family planning viz abortion and sterilisation. Such targets may be earmarked for each civil surgeon on the basis of statistics of child bearing couples within the jurisdiction of a civil surgeon. Such civil surgeons should be awarded on competitive basis and be held as true patriots.
- iv. Literacy, particularly among women, be spread fast with particular emphasis on family planning for which literature in the form of pictures for illiterates be distributed among them".

SURESH NANDAN SINHA, PATNA

"It is high time that the people at the helm of affairs, controlling the destiny of millions, and many more yet to come, decide once for all to control the run-away population. In these fifty years we have been paying little attention towards it. Though we are the first to start the National Family Planning Programme in 1951, but as compared to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and China, who started late on this programme, have achieved less.

The socio-economic picture that emerges from the 1991 Census is very frustrating. During the decade 1981-91 we have added 160.7 million to our population, which is equal to UK. France and Italy combined. The picture is different when we look separately at figures of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa, where the growth rate is low. Alarming is the picture of Hindi speaking States of Bihar, MP., Up and Rajasthan. These States together constitute almost 40% of India's population.

Let there be unison decision that no one with more than two children be allowed to contest any election, be it Gram panchayat, civic body, the state or the Union legislature. It comes to electoral reforms. We have to set example for others to follow. If peoples' representatives with many children go to the people and talk of two-child norm no body would listen to them. In the final analysis we come to the conclusion that there is lack of political-will. If such electoral reform is brought then our representatives would prove to be good models.

Those in jobs in public and private sectors too should be under incentive and dis-incentive regulations. Those who follow one-child norm should be given extra increments, or be considered for purchase of plots, house allotment etc., on subsidised basis. There should be no consideration of religion, caste or faith in this respect. The incentives given for girl child under Gujral Govt. be strictly restricted if the girl-child is third in order then no incentive be given.

The whole population control programme depends upon the political will. Unless it is taken on war-footing the run away population can not be controlled".

Dr. H.S. BAIS, SAGAR (M.P.)

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"With reference to the statement that among the issues to be tackled are those related to the socio-religious ethos prevailing among certain communities, particularly Muslims, that it is against the religion to adopt family planning measure. Kindly look at the latest anthropological survey of India :

1. It is given that in India (cutting across caste, community families) that on either side of the economic spectrum proliferate; the rich because of their obsession with heirs and their ability to support offspring and the poor because then there are more hands bringing in scraps of money that keeps their home fires burning. If the middle class is circumspect, it is also because of economic need and wisdom acquired with literacy that, unfortunately, both the rich and the poor in the country so sorely lack.
2. It is the tragedy of India and partition that Muslim middle class disappeared into the maw of Pakistan. For long, it had been convenient for the Congress to keep the Muslims, most of them poor illiterate since it was easier to manipulate their votes enmasse this way.
3. If you read the Koran or about the prophet's life you would know that contrary to popular perception, the Muslim women had been empowered to chose abortion in the early weeks of pregnancy - which is also humane (you will agree).

I am saddened that an otherwise well-etched article should display such a gross bias. Prejudices take root from subtle references such as these, creating myths about a community which for long has been its own (rather than that of the Hindus) enemy".

SHAMEEM AKHTAR, MUMBAI

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"Mere education to the masses and incentive and disincentive programme will not address to the problem totally. Though education makes a man perfect but we are not talking of that height of education and given the infrastructure that will be a day dream. Along with education this sense must be inflicted on every citizen that they have a great role to play in nation building whatever be their position. If every citizen realises his importance for the nation he must be responsible and a responsible man will do his level best as well as insist others around him to remove any problem facing the country. The task will be much easier then.

Regarding Muslims who have not come forward to the 'family planning programme' due to their orthodoxy needs some explanation of their religion fitting to the age and in this effort their religious teachers are the fittest person. They are venerated and most obeyed in the Muslim Society. The Government should sit with them and discuss the matter with sincerity citing the examples of our neighbouring Muslim countries. Combined efforts of the government; these teachers and our Muslim leaders will certainly evolve a pertinent solution.

Moreover 'family planning programme' which was applied as a divine missile to control population has not reached up to its expectations because of the lack of sincerity of a certain percentage among the persons involved. Those associated with it must be sincere and committed to their duty".

S. SAMANTA, DELHI

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"Although we were the first to adopt family planning in 1956 as a national policy we have made no headway in controlling population. The obvious reasons are insufficient motivation and insincere implementation of the programme by successive Governments.

Adult education plays a very important role in planning families as we have seen from the example of Kerala. Higher the level of education lower the birth rate. Our Government if obsessed with developing agriculture and industry and has paid scant attention to health and education. We must go all out to educate our population. Not only will they have better opportunities for employment, they will also have less children.

Involving religious heads in implementing the programme is also worthwhile as is being done in Iran. Although a Muslim country, Kazis in Iran openly support family planning and their advice is often sought before marriage.

If there are going to be any disincentives it must involve all strata of society. We do not want ministers with more than two children neither we want peons who have large families. It is a mistake to elect MP's & MLA's according to the size of population and larger representations in Lok Sabha. Does that not amount to rewarding erring states? Representation must be structured on number of districts and tehsils (geographically) and not number of electorate.

Lastly no programme of population control can succeed unless infiltration is checked across our borders. With large number of Bangladeshis and Nepalis entering our country legally and illegally the question of over population and over crowding will remain.

If the Government is serious about lowering population figures, all political parties must sign a pledge that they will support family planning, irrespective of their ideologies. May be the election commission can help by insisting on this clause."

PRITHVI MADHOK, MUMBAI

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"I am a social worker who has been involved in family planning for the past 50 years. I went with Margaret Sanger and my father, Dr. Clarence Gamble, one of her medical advisors, to the International Planned Parenthood Federation's meeting in Bombay in 1952. How I wish India had adopted a rigorous family planning program then!

I have been involved, since going to Vietnam in 1994 to study their program of quinacrine sterilizations for women, in promoting this safe, sure, inexpensive and non-surgical choice for women who want no more pregnancies. I am including some articles. I was distressed when India's courts decided to make this needed procedure illegal. I have met and talked with several of the Indian doctors who have added this humanitarian option to their obstetrician/gynaecological practices. I can assure you they know the science has already proved that quinine which has been used for many other treatments, is safe and non toxic. Over 100,000 women in 19 countries in the world during the last 20 years have had this procedure without a single death or serious complication. I think it is outrageous for the courts to tell doctors that using quinine for this much needed purpose is illegal.

I would be willing to write further about the history and use of quinacrine sterilizations for women as one of the best methods I know to help women stop pregnancies when they have the number of children they want. If a government program would urge a two child family, this would be an excellent choice for the women who agrees to the plan. It is one they could afford to pay, and one that midwives and paramedics as well as doctors could offer."

SARAH GIEPSTEIN, WASHINGTON, D.C

"My suggestion to check population growth are :

1. It should be made mandatory for both Central Govt./State Govts., P.S.U.s and Private Undertakings' employers that" If a third child is born to the employees, their yearly increment should be stopped for FIVE years, and no promotion if a fourth child is born.
2. In case of female employees, the privilege of Maternity Leave should either be withdrawn or treated as "Leave without pay", for the third child. Male sterilization must be given highest preference.
3. All privileges like 'Privilege leave, Free/Concessional Passes, (in case of Airline/Railway employee), medical benefits etc. should be reduced by half in case of third child and after fourth child totally withdrawn.
4. All SC,ST and OBC employees should be treated at par with other employees, for the purpose of concessions after the birth of a third child, and all other conditions described in 1,2 & 3 above made applicable.
5. Couples having only one child, should be given incentives like additional increment, out of turn promotion allotment of Govt. Quarters, Gas connection, telephone connection, allotment of vehicles etc.
6. Abortion should be made legal and MUST be carried out by professionals free of charge. In case of those living in villages and who know nothing about Family Planning, necessary operations should be performed on individuals without any fuss and propaganda about it.
7. No Religion, Religious Faiths/Groups, Caste, Creed or Community be exempted and No exceptions made. Constitution be amended to this effect".

SHARAD MANIKAR, NASIK

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"In my considered view the objective of population control can be achieved only if the following steps are taken:

First and foremost the matter has to be completely delinked from Politics. We have seen over the years how the matters have gone from bad to worse. Politicians of all hues have been paying lip service to the cause but drag their feet when it comes to garnering of votes. Therefore it is essential that this matter is directly under the President/Vice-President or the Chief Justice of India.

Further there has to be a system of incentives (for those who follow the small family norms) and disincentives (for those who do not care for the small family norm) Incentives can be in the form of hefty monetary inducements, recognition-like Maan Patras-reservations, promotions, concessions in I. Tax, Air/Rail travel, loan facilities etc. for all those couples in the reproductive age who limit their families to one or two children. Even sterilization at Govt. expense could be offered.

Disincentives for those not sticking to the small family norm could be withdrawal of all concessions after a third child as well as withdrawal of eligibility to hold any public office or Govt. post-executive, judicial etc. If any couple gets a fourth child they could be "named" and their voting rights withdrawn. They should also be charged with "treason" - making the country weak and instrumental in squandering the country's resources by criminal neglect. One of the partners should also be compulsorily sterilizes at their expense."

R.K. NIJHAWAN, AURANGABAD

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"It is high time all political parties and intelligentsia should unite to combat this man-made impending calamity.

I feel that both carrot and stick policy should be adopted. Those adopting one child norm should be suitably rewarded like allotment of subsidised housing etc. The reward to those adopting 2 child norm should be comparatively less. Those having more than two children should be proportionately penalised. Stoppage of annual increments can be considered for public servants. Additional increments can be given to those adopting one child norm.



Although forcible sterilisation is now a Taboo due to unfortunate Sanjay Gandhi experiment to all political parties, I feel, it must be enforced with due process of law at least in one area, that is, begging should be made illegal and those practising it can be sentenced to forcible sterilisation by Courts. The simple logic is that those who cannot support themselves by lawful means should not have a right to produce. Similarly criminals can also be sentenced to this additional sentence."

K.P.DHODY, MUMBAI

"Views and ideas expressed in respect of controlling our population are the only means most suitable under the circumstances. No doubt, our government machinery are well aware of the gravity of the situation caused by this tremendous unchecked growth of population. But it is amazing that still no real action is seen from their end.

So the big question is as to what we the people of the biggest democracy of the most populous country in the world should do to avoid this otherwise impending catastrophe. There is a vast number of intelligentsia and hundreds of NGOs who are clamouring about their readiness to do the social-work for the upliftment of the downtrodden. We should all join hands and evolve our strategic plans in order to bring about the necessary awareness of eradication of illiteracy, poverty and ever increasing growth of population in India."

The problem, as you are well aware is a complex one. So a multipronged approach is needed to tackle it effectively. Here we need a strong and candid leader who could unite all the aforesaid forces forging them into a formidable momentum to work towards the "Comprehensive Rural Upliftment". This comprehensive rural upliftment will bring about everything what is needed to educate our gullible rural masses so as to get rid of the poverty, backwardness and their over-population under extremely unhygienic and non existent sanitary-conditions.

Dr. S.S. SADERA, ROURKELA, ORISSA

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Two hunters got a pilot to fly them into the far north for elk hunting. They were quite successful and bagged six big bucks.

The pilot came back as arranged to pick them up. They started loading their gear into the plane, including the six elks. But the pilot objected, said he: "The plane can take only four of your elks. You'll have to leave two behind. They argued with him, the year before they had to leave two behind. They argued with him, the year before they had shot six and the pilot allowed them to put all six aboard, and the plane was just the same model and capacity as this.

Reluctantly the pilot permitted them to put all six aboard. But when the plane attempted to clear the hills, it could not make it and it crashed in the wilderness.

Climbing out of the wreckage, one hunter said to the other: "Do you know where we are?"

"I think so," replied the other hunter. "I think this is about the same place where the plane crashed last year."

...

MY SISTER, in the latter part of her pregnancy and suffering from some of the miseries that can accompany that condition, went for her regular prenatal check-up. Her doctor asked if she was having any problems. "Yes," she replied. "I can't sit comfortably, I can't eat what I like, I'm nauseous most of the time, I can't sleep well, I have to go on kicking and my feet are swelling."

The doctor listened to her politely, then turned to her chart and wrote "No complaints."

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Latest comment from the pundits regarding the population explosion : if the birth rate keeps increasing there will soon be standing room only on the earth, at which time the birth rate should stop increasing pretty quickly.

TO I ARTICLE

## HALF OF OUR POPULATION IS ILLITERATE

It is a matter of real shame that our country will enter the next century as the world's largest illiterate nation. Half of our total population of more than 100 crores is illiterate. Half of the children, and 2/3rd of the girls are deprived of schooling even today. The country has attained such an unfortunate notoriety in the field of illiteracy.

Thirty five million children of 6-10 age group do not attend even primary schools. More than half the children who get enrolled in primary schools drop out before even reaching Class V. Literacy rate of girls is below that of boys; they are in fact marginalised; there is also discrimination within the schooling system along caste and class lines.

Recent surveys conducted in schools in various States show that where schools do exist, particularly in the villages, they present a poor picture. Most of them are deadwood hutments, with crumbling walls, leaking roofs, where wiggly children squat on bare earth; there are no blackboards, no tables, no books, no other teaching aids, only teaching aid frequently available in these schools is stick to beat the children with. More than half the schools recently surveyed in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan showed that there was no teaching activity at all. These are the present conditions despite all the plethora of policies and programmes including those such as Operation Blackboard, Total Literacy Commission, Non-formal Education, District Institutions of Education and Learning, District Elementary Education Programme, etc.

When we talk of literacy in this context the implication is of the inability of a person to read and write even a short simple statement regarding every day living. Mere capability of writing a word or two in one's own language, and to merely put a signature in place of thumb impression is not and should not be a measure of literacy, which measure unfortunately is being adopted in citing figures of expansion of literacy, claiming various dubious attainments.

Framers of the Constitution failed to put compulsory education as a Fundamental Right. The Directive Principle No. 45 was introduced in the Constitution, merely prescribing that "the State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years, from the commencement of Constitution, free and compulsory education for children until they complete the age of fourteen years." Even after four decades of the expiry of this direction embodied in the Constitution we are at this sorry stage. Directive Principle, in substance, constituted merely spelling out desirable objective, without any compulsion on the State to achieve it, and also without its enforceability by Court, leaving it merely as a declaration in the shape of a duty of the State. If it had clearly been made a Fundamental Right, the State could not ignore the attainment of this objective and would have had to find the measures and wherewithal for spreading literacy among all children and adults, males and females. Presently all political parties pay only lip service to this cause at election time but fail to deliver when in power. Instead, they have now started saying that improving the quality of schools is primary responsibility of the community and that private schools can make up the inadequacy of government schools.

Even after fifty years of independence we have reached the stage of spending less than even 4 per cent of our GNP on the cause of education and devote less than half of this amount on elementary education which is a basic essential for building up the future of this nation. Lack of resources cannot be a convincing argument for failing to discharge this national duty. If the government can find the money to implement the Fifth Pay Commission's recommendations which will involve expenditure to the extent of about 3 per cent of GNP surely the requirement of primary education could also be attended to. The position obtaining in this country reminds one of what H.G. Wells meant when he stated "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe".

Education is a State subject. It is understandable that Central Government cannot impose it upon recalcitrant States. Some Union Territories and a few States have voluntarily enacted legislation for compulsory

education; this is very welcome indeed. Kerala is one State which has shown that remarkable results can be achieved, of reaching nearly 100 per cent literacy. Contrasted to this is the State of Bihar where literacy rate is only 44 percent or even less. About 75 percent of the children, who have never gone to any schools, are in six States : Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

The matter of primary education had come up before the Supreme Court in a public interest case. The Court pronounced, as far back as 1993, that the government cannot shirk the responsibility of providing free and compulsory education to the children, that the existing provisions clearly lead to the conclusion that primary education of children is, in fact, a Fundamental Right. Thereafter the Government of India formulated a Bill for amending the Constitution, to make it beyond doubt that it is the responsibility of all States in the country to enact and enforce laws for provision of free and compulsory education. This is the well-publicised 83 Constitutional Amendment Bill. It was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 1997; for all purpose it has since gone into cold storage. It is obvious that it will be appropriate for the Government to gracefully accept this responsibility.

It has been estimated that nearly Rs.1,20,000 crores will be required in the Five Year Plan to provide adequate number of schools, of reasonable quality, for more than 130 million out-of-school children; this involves additional investment of Rs. 20,000 crores per year for the semblance of attainment of a satisfactory state of literacy by 2005. The Constitutional Amendment Bill proposes investment of Rs. 40,000 crores (one-third of the estimated requirement of the Five Year Plan). This figure too has apparently scared the concerned authorities. It means that the Government is not prepared to spend even Rs.8,000 crores per year for providing primary education. It is a matter of great regret that the government does not appear to be willing to even provide this basic and essential requirement for fundamental Right of education for the children.

Another matter of very serious concern is the non-implementation of the official commitments often made by the authorities regarding abolition of child labour. The fact is that very often the children are prevented from attending schools, or are taken out of schools early, so that they may become bread winners. It is really heart-rending to see very small children carrying loads on their heads at work sites, wearing rags, striking red hot iron into shapes, working in workshops of iron-smiths, stitching leather articles. Sometimes they become victims of amputation and distortion of their limbs for being used as beggars on the roads of cities.

Our country has had elitist intellectual tradition. Unfortunately, in cast stratified areas, the pursuit of learning was confined primarily to the upper castes; knowledge was not considered appropriate for the lower castes. Scriptures forbade the lower castes from reading the Vedas. There was also traditional attitude against education of women. Illiteracy of the masses is, therefore, inevitably the result of centuries of wrong pursuits.

There has also been a general belief that too much learning can undermine the social order, put ideas into the heads of peasants and downcasts, raise ambition among the peasants to seek clerical jobs and thereby disrupt the social hierarchical order which elite wanted to preserve. Illiteracy was considered to be the measure to keep the masses powerless.

The cycle of ignorance, poverty, illiteracy and deprivation is a vicious one; one begets the other, and these are the major cause of unchecked growth of population. Illiteracy and population thrive on each other. Advancement of literacy can make a distinct contribution in the field of control of population. When males and females are literate, they become conscious of the need of limiting the size of the family and of ensuring that they bring up the children in the atmosphere of being educated.

There are undoubtedly instances of high endeavour and achievement which show that the objective of spread of literacy can be attained and that the targets set before the country can be achieved.

Obviously, money is not the problem or the main issue; what is needed is the political will and also public pressure.

**LETTERS RECEIVED FROM READERS OF TOI ARTICLE ON  
"HALF OF OUR POPULATION IS ILLITERATE"**

"The issue of providing free education has now become quite controversial. Here, first is the question of having adequate funds and human resources for the purpose. Almost all States face financial crunch; there is a continual paucity of resources everywhere. Although the avowed objectives are praiseworthy, it is being increasingly felt that making free and compulsory education to all children up to class VIII constitutes an "enormous and complex" task. We have around 140 million children in the age-group of 6-11 years who require primary schooling. According to a recent estimate this would require about 1,25,000 crore; earlier estimates were 95,000 crore and 40,000 crore. Then, the mounting drop-out rates at the stage - 79 million children drop out before completing class V, of these, 43 million are girls... complicate the situation. And, about 50 million children currently remain outside the school-fold.

Across the country, the levels of free education at present vary. In Rajasthan, for example, education is free for girls up to 8th class, for boys up to 5th. In Himachal Pradesh, it is free for boys up to 10th standard, for girls up to the University level (both in general and technical education areas). However, the acute resource crunch befogs and dogs the situation. Consequently, a large number of institutions remain without adequate infrastructure or sufficient trained faculty, leading to all - round deterioration in academic standards and all pervasive student unrest and indiscipline. Thousands of posts of teachers continue to remain vacant in each State. Standards of Education have touched an all-time low point in general, State-supported schools and colleges, though there teachers are both qualified and comparatively speaking, very well - paid. Those who can afford private/public schools, send their wards there. In the process, the greatest sufferers are the poor, the lowliest, the lost.

When Governments resort to "free education" as a populist measure, the results are disastrous on both economic and educational fronts. Everybody should be keen to empower the women and impart her education of quality. However, we are to remember where we stand after so many decades of independence. As per 1991 census, literacy among the females is just 49.42 per cent, and among the rural population it is still worse. It follows that first we should wholly concentrate on the education of poor girls and later think of free education of poor girls and later think of free education of all girls at higher levels. Otherwise those left out, will continue to be left-out for ever and the benefit would be reaped by girls belonging to higher income-groups."

DR. ATMA RAM, DHARAMSHALA

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"Even after 50 years of independence, in reality we are still far from the total literacy.

We must have thought over this problem hundreds of times on various platforms but without any will and must have only enjoyed parties and fun on those occasions. All these meetings were really inconclusive.

If our education system needs to be modified, now we have to modify our existing system or temporarily setup a parallel education system which can be decided later. Unfortunately our Politicians or our Major Policy makers are not to be trusted for making any of these changes as they are busy in either of the following :

1. Keeping hold over their chair;
2. Infighting with opposition parties;
3. Infighting within their own party
4. Making money to win future elections;
5. Looking after their own vested interests

The removal of illiteracy is a very big problem and there cannot be a ready-made solution for the same let us stop wasting any more time and make a beginning."

J.S. DIWEKAR, THANA, MAHARASHTRA

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"Falling of standard in education is a curse to the nation. If things continue as they are the present situation will definitely lead the nation to the catastrophe.

Lack of political will is the basic cause of lack of funds for education. Education of the country is dependent on the country's governance. Nation's government depends on the people who man it as the representatives of the people. If the representatives are selfless, honest, devoted, THE NATION IS BOUND TO PROSPER; ELSE the nation's future is doomed. Nation needs Statesmen, not the present day politicians.

During Freedom struggle it is the 'Statesmen' who were forerunners in the struggle. The Statesmen continued to be the persons who manned the government for nearly two decades after independence but now the power hungry politicians manage to snatch the majority in parliament by hook or crook. If the nation is to survive we have to strive to produce statesmen who are men of scientific temper.

The nation needs Statesmen and not the representatives with criminal background elected on muscle power, money - power and misuse of government machinery. The intelligentsia must come forward to check such unscrupulous people being elected."

V.N. VERMA, BHOPAL

"It, indeed, is a matter of grave concern for a country with over 100 crores of population to have such an abysmal approach towards imparting even the basic education to millions of children. Mr. Shourie has, though, very correctly pointed out the changes & implementations of Directive Principle No 45 and it being declared a fundamental right but has been oblivious of the fact that in a country like our's where there is high degree of instability at the political level it would be too much to expect out of any party to think on such sensible and top priority lines. The author has been one of the very few well known figures in the country who even in this age of internet and E-mails has taken the opportunity to open our eyes and look at those who are well below the basic amenities of life but could become a force to reckon with if their base is strengthened, by way of good education.

It is hightime that more schools be constructed and education be made a fundamental right."

MANISH OBEROI, NEW DELHI

"I am sorry to say, even after completion of 50 years of independence we could not achieve a break through on imparting Basic Primary education to the entitled children. I give the following suggestions for imparting Basic Primary education to children at least upto Vth standard.

1. The economic and financial disparity between the rich and the poor must be minimised from the existing level.
2. Basic Primary education should be made compulsory, simple and attractive for the children by introducing simple teaching aids. Free books and one meal a day do not suffice their requirements, because they are already undernourished and who will provide them supper, clothing etc.
3. Necessary steps are to be initiated to alleviate the poverty of the down trodden at the grass root level.
4. Village Panchayats and Anganbadi workers should be assigned with more duties in propagating the benefits of primary schooling to the villagers.
5. Child labour is still prevalent on a large scale and it should be totally abolished by punishing the touts and employers.
6. The village folk should be made to understand the benefits of small family norms through adult education centres and the doctors employed in Primary Health Centres.
7. Total prohibition should be introduced in the country regarding manufacture, sale and consumption of any type of liquor. Because when we try to enhance the pockets of the downtrodden the menfolk resorts to drinking.
8. Certain Volunteer Hindu Organisations can bring about a positive change, provided they don't toe the lines of caste and class society and with adequate financial assistance from the Govt.
9. Qualified doctors should be posted in Primary Health centres equipped with sufficient stock of medicines.
10. Begging of any kind should be discouraged.
11. Media too can enlighten the evil effects of children taking to child labour, begging, pickpocketing, goondaism etc through short serials and documentaries.
12. Highly placed people should change their attitude towards the poor by adopting a poor family, educate their children and make them enter the mainstream. The gesture will be a service to humanity and service to God as well."

VASU NAIR VIJAYAN, BIKANER.

"I do agree with it. It reflects in Mumbai city on the roads where 1.5 lacs of people are living on rag picking. Painfully, among them 55% are 12 to 15 years old children. These ill-fated children are living on platforms, park, under-bridges, on the pavements and also wherever they find a suitable place, corner on the streets. They sell the rags and spend their money for the food, smoking, gambling and movies.

Secondly India is the most child labour country in the world. In the industries like beedi making, match-box making, carpet making, hotel cleaning and works in construction, mostly child labourers are engaged.

Thirdly we are having beggar population at higher level, in this children are also taking major portion. This is common to see the begging children are seen in railway stations and also entertaining the passengers in the train by dancing and singing and some others doing cleaning voluntarily the floor of the compartment of the running train in mostly second classes.

Fourthly the condition of the children in the villages are different kind. They have to take care of their younger ones as a creche nurse and some others have to look after their household animals like one or two goats or cows, in order to send their parents for any work. The most population of our country is living only in the villages.

Fifthly, the dowry system in marriage makes still worse. What the parents of the girl child are thinking, that spending money on the higher education for girls is not advisable and it would be better to give it as a dowry for her marriage.

Lastly our religions and superstitious thinking also join together in stopping them (particularly girl children) from higher education, and exploiting.

It is not a big surprise when one of the state is having a literate of 100% other states can even achieve the same. What is needed is political will and also public pressure and awareness. We cannot escape from our genuine responsibility.

Fund is not the main problem. Only motivation, patriotism are needed to achieve this national goal. We can raise any amount of funds."

M. AMALA SUNDARA RAJ, MUMBAI

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"At 50, India indicts a society that has scrambled on the juggernaut of development, uncaring about the individual crushed under its wheel. So much has been the extent of humanitarian degradation in this shifty fifty period that our democracy - one of the largest in the world has not been able to declare "Literacy as a human right" a major achievement. The promise of total literacy remains written with invisible chalk on a non-existent blackboard. Short sighted education planners have not been able to read the writing that has been on the wall for years, namely - that an illiterate nation cannot compete in a technology driven world, leave alone participate in the new information revolution.

The total literacy campaign undertaken by the National Literacy Mission, fell by the wayside in the absence of follow up. Today as the population lurches towards the billion mark 64 percent men and little over 40% women cannot read and write. Illiterates and semi-illiterate parents see no reason to send their children to schools. As ironic as it may sound, but they put forward the question - "Will an Education get them a job?"

It is hard to digest but the true fact is that illiteracy is spinning up a cobweb at a rampant pace and is unendingly spreading its tentacles to let loose poverty, manifold exploitation, unemployment and other such horrendous phenomenon in the spirit as it is in the body of its ravaged and polluted environment. A third of the country's population precariously subsists below the poverty line. Over 20 million children are enslaved in bonded employment, often under life threatening conditions. The Sivakasi fireworks factory in the south is a case in the point.

The cementing forces of Swaraj, Swawalamban and Swadeshi cannot be set into motion to build a firm and concrete platform at the grassroot level for a truly independent and assertive India without letting the seed of "full literacy" to sprout and bloom to its fullest from its present apparent dormant stage. Looking at the present scenario, can India today be legitimately proud of the fact that the number of illiterates today outnumbers the total population of India in 1961?

In this ebb and flow of tides sweeping and lashing the nation, on what or whom can an idea of total literacy be grounded? No single institution as vigilant and well intentioned as it may be can be made to bear the burden that must be borne by all and each of us."

SHRUTI GUPTA, NOIDA

TOI ARTICLE

## CLEAN UP THE ELECTION SYSTEM

We are no doubt the largest democracy in the world in terms of population, but can we be termed a functioning democracy? The well known economist and former US Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, had called India a functioning anarchy". The doubt arises whether even the appellation "functioning" is correct any more. As our present Prime Minister recently said: "The outer shell of a democracy is there, but it appears to be moth eaten from inside".

The election system is the bedrock of our democracy; however, there are some basic flaws in it which are detrimental to the interest of democracy. The Election Commission has repeatedly brought these flaws to the notice of the government but has not been able to get remedial action taken.

The most important issue concerns the criminalisation of politics in the country. It is well known that anti-social and criminal elements have entered the election arena and many are now in certain legislatures and some are occupying ministerial berths. There is now a definite nexus between political parties and anti-social elements. This unfortunate position has arisen despite (or because of) the provision in Representation of People Act (1951) that a person "convicted" under any of the offences mentioned in its Section 8 is debarred from standing for election for a period of six years from the date of conviction.

Everyone knows how our criminal justice system operates. Cases in courts languish for years. "Conviction" in a case, if at all, comes only after years. Meanwhile the person even though accused of serious crimes such as dacoity or rape gets released on bail, can stand for election, get elected and be in a seat of power. In fact, conviction by a court enables a person to go to the higher court; and while the appeal remains pending, he claims eligibility to stand for election. A further incongruity that has been pointed out by the Election Commission is that, if a person has been sentenced to imprisonment, say for ten years for rape, he becomes entitled to contest for election from inside the jail on completion of six years of imprisonment. Such flaws need to be removed. It can of course be contended that a person is innocent till he is proven guilty i.e. till he is innocent till he is proven guilty i.e. till he is actually convicted but it is important in the public interest that when a prima facie criminal case is made out against a person and charges of specified offences have been framed he should stand disqualified and should not be allowed to be a member of the legislature.

Other matters of important consequence are those concerning registration of political parties, donations to them and of maintenance of accounts by them. The present provisions have resulted in the mushrooming and proliferation of political parties. There are now 650 political parties registered with the Election Commission, out of which 150 had contested the elections in 1998. Under the present law there is no provision for deregistration and hence once registered a party continues in perpetuity.

Donations to political parties have necessarily to be allowed; banning of donations is not practicable nor desirable. There is however, a need to effectively enforce the existing provisions about the eligibility of companies which can give donations and the limitations on the quantum they can donate. State funding of elections has often been talked about, but obviously there are only certain areas in which assistance can be provided by government such as making available copies of electoral rolls; it cannot be contemplated that assistance can be provided along with placement of limits on the number of microphones or loudspeakers to be used or even on facilities of carriage of voters to the polling booths because all such measures can prove unenforceable.

Then there are matters which affect the candidates standing for election and also the elected representatives; the ceiling on expenses, code of conduct governing candidates, action relating to submission of false declarations, adoption of corrupt practices, anti-defection provisions. Space will not permit discussion of these points in detail, but on matters of this nature the Election Commission should have the final authority to prescribe regulations and to make recommendations. It needs to be kept in view that the Election Commission is now a multi-member, neutral and independent body, members of which have the status of Supreme Court judges. It can be relied upon to determine the recommendation it should make to the President of India or Governor of State in the matter of any alleged corrupt practice which has been decided upon by the court, considering that "corrupt practice" can range from a serious dereliction to a minor technical infringement. The Election Commission should also have the authority to make recommendations relating to action on the defection of an elected representative from the party and also to enforce the decision taken by a court on an election petition.

Political parties must be placed under statutory obligation to maintain accounts and to get them annually audited. Failures in these matters have been adversely commented upon by the Supreme Court. Section 77 -A, of the Representation of People Act (1951) needs to be amended to ensure that any expenditure incurred by a political party in the constituency of a candidate should be counted as part of his expenses for purposes of determining whether he is observing the ceiling limit imposed on the expenses. One other important matter that needs to be highlighted is that at present there are two Acts on the statute books, both named Representation of People Act one of 1950 and the other of 1951 - causing avoidable confusion. One wonders why it has not been possible for the law makers to either give these Acts different names or to incorporate the amendments made by the latter Act in the former.

The suggestion has been made that the age limit of candidates should be lowered to 21 from 25 for the Lok Sabha and state legislatures and to 25 from 30 for the Rajya Sabha. It is unthinkable that in securing representation to our lawmaking bodies we should thus disregard the absolute requirement of maturity of the persons standing for election. Such a suggestion needs to be rejected outright.

There has also been the suggestion to introduce the list system, to increase the total strength of Parliament by 25 per cent and to divide the additional seats among the major parties on the basis of proportionate votes gained by them in the general election. This system is stated to have certain merits, but to all appearances it is not a proposition which is workable without creating fresh complications and difficulties.

A very important matter raised by the Election Commission relates to the delegation to it of disciplinary control over the election staff which is placed at its disposal at election time. The Election Commission has in fact filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court on the subject. Another suggestion the Election Commission has made to the Prime Minister is that three months prior to the announced date of election in a state, the chief minister and other ministers should vacate their seats so that the electoral systems remains free of any possibility of pressures and manipulations. On these important matters no decision appears to have so far been taken, though the Election Commission has been pursuing these for some years.

H.D. SHOURIE

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The expectant father paced the hospital waiting room. "Say, this is our first child," he said to the relaxed veteran slouched in the corner reading a newspaper. "How long do you have to wait, after the baby is born, before you can-uh resume marital relations with your wife?"

"Well, that depends," said the seasoned sire, "On whether she's in a ward or a private room."

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A SCHOOL GOVERNOR, reading a speech from notes to mark the retirement, after 42 years, of one of the staff, began: "Today, we come to another milestone in the life of our school."



## VIEWES OF OUR READERS ON THE ARTICLE ON ELECTORAL SYSTEM

In relations to COMMON CAUSE article on "Electoral Reform" we have received quite a few letters in which the readers have been kind enough to give their views. Limitation of space does not permit reproduction of the letters. We have, as an alternative, summarised in the following paragraphs the points and views which have been communicated by the readers. Names and addresses of the writers of these letters appear at the end of this summary.

**Issue of Identity Card to Voters :** It is still hanging in the air. Some of the voters who were photographed for this purpose 3/4 years back have not yet been delivered the cards. It is very obvious that though the scheme was accepted by all the political parties they got apprehensive that they may no more be able to muster a good number of their own candidates elected which they hitherto managed to do by generating mass bogus voting. The scheme has, therefore, been slow paddled by the ruling parties in their respective states.

**Registration/De-registration of Political Parties :** Political parties are registered with the Commission under the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of People Act, 1951. Under this section any small group of persons, if they so desire, can be registered as a political party, by making a simple declaration. This has resulted in mushrooming and proliferation of a large number of non-serious parties or parties without any manifesto to benefit the people incase candidates of such parties get elected. As per available details more than 650 parties; are presently registered with the Election Commission, out of which 150 or so contested the general elections of 1998. The same trend was there in 1996 general election as well as in 1991 general elections.

In addition to there not being sufficient conditions under Section 29A to deny registration to a political party, once a political party is registered, it would stay registered in perpetuity, even if it does not contest any election over decades of its existence. This is because there is no specific provision to de-register a party.

Under these circumstances there is need to introduce another clause in existing Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act 1951, for regulating registration/de-registration of political parties. This can be done by the Election Commission.

**Minimum Education Qualification for Voters and those contesting for Parliament/Legislative Assemblies :** The adoption of universal adult franchise in a vast country of India's size and population was perhaps the boldest and most revolutionary step taken by the framers of India's Constitution. In a newly independent country with appalling backwardness, dismal poverty and rampant illiteracy, it was an act of faith for the founding fathers to give a vote to every citizen who was not less than 21 years of age (since reduced to 18 years) and not otherwise disqualified under any law on grounds of non-residence unsoundness of mind, crime or corrupt or illegal practice. Some members of the constituent assembly had expressed fears that universal adult suffrage might give rise to the new class of professional politicians which could be its undoing in-as-much as these people tend to become parasites on society and begin to live on their ministerships and membership of legislature.

Experience has now proved that adoption of universal adult franchise has not proved successful at all. Present P.M. of India himself has accepted it while saying, "outer shell of democracy is there but it appears to be moth-eaten from inside". Following suggestions are made in this regard:

- (i) A candidate contesting for a legislative assembly or parliament should have at least a degree qualification in any field.

- (ii) The lower age limit of a person contesting MP/MLAs election should be raised to 30 years.
- (iii) Voting age should be raised from the present 18 years to 25 years. 90% of the voters in the age group of 18-25 years have either a very limited or no interest or knowledge at all in matters relating to elections and like. This will also cut costs by way of reduction in the number of ballot papers, ballot boxes, security etc.

**Recognition of National/State Political Parties** : There should be a clear cut definition of 'National Party' and 'Regional Party'. A national party should be one which is able to contest from not less than 90% of the total constituencies in the country during general elections. There should not be more than 3 National parties. A party which fails to secure less than 10% of the seats it contests for three successive elections should be de-registered as a national party. The Election Commission should be the absolute authority in framing and implementing rules for registration and de-registration of political parties. De-registered National parties can continue to be regional parties if these qualify the norms fixed by State Election Commission which should be similar to norms framed by Chief Election Commission of India.

**List System** : Our country has the largest number of illiterates in the world. Universal education has dangerous portents. It is much worse when seen in the context of dismal poverty and backwardness. Electoral reform suggestions like List System of Voting and provision of recall etc. can hardly work in India in the context of the present level of illiteracy and the absence of requisite education.

**Disqualification on Grounds of Defection** : Anti-defection law was enacted with a view to cleanse the democratic system. This has failed and has encouraged mass defections. Therefore, anti-defection law should be scrapped. Once a member is elected as a member of a house on the ticket of a particular recognised political party, he must remain in this party until the dissolution of the House or till the end of his membership (whether be expiry of his term or by resignation or otherwise).

Similarly the identity of a political party should not undergo any change during the life of the House i.e. Lok Sabha/Legislative Assembly. Once the House is dissolved the parties and members will be at liberty to join or not to joint any alliance/party.

**Criminalisation of Politics and Disqualification** : Every knowledgeable and right thinking Indian is worried about the entry and gradual dominance of criminals into politics. Election Commission declares its hands are bound by law: Representation of Peoples Act allows it to debar candidates convicted of certain crimes but it cannot stop those under trial for multiple murders or rape, for corruption or theft from the public exchequer, from sitting in the country's highest forum. It is common knowledge of everyone and generally acknowledged that most peaceful, free and fair polls were conducted during Seshan's regime which resulted in returning to our houses of Legislatures the largest ever number of history-sheeters, mafia dons and persons with criminal background including those charged with serious crime like murder, rape, smuggling, kidnapping and dacoity. As many as 1500 such persons, became candidates for Lok Sabha and 40 of them actually got elected. In the State Legislatures all over the country, some 700 sitting members were believed to belong to this category with one state alone having 169 of them.

A panel of eminent persons, former Supreme Court Judge Kuldeep Singh, Former Home Secretary Madhav Godbole, Former Maharashtra Governor C. Subramaniam and activist Swami Agnivesh had compiled a list of 72 candidates contesting elections for Parliament during 1998 against whom criminal proceedings were pending. It was by no means an exhaustive list because : only 500 of the 4,693 candidates in the fray could be investigated. Under the provisions of existing laws these candidates could not be debarred from contesting elections. The government servants facing criminal proceedings are placed under

suspension until cleared. Why can't the same yard stick applied to the politicians ? It is pity law-breakers become law-makers.

It is necessary to impose following restrictions to check entry of criminals into politics :

- i Any person who has been convicted by a court of law and sentenced to imprisonment for six months or more should be debarred from contesting elections.
- ii Any person against whom charges have been framed by the court for any offence under which minimum punishment is for 6 months, should not be allowed to contest the election, till acquitted.

**Use of caste and religion in electoral politics is increasing** : Religion is playing an increasingly larger role in the electoral politics of the country, disregarding various legal barriers and code of conduct.

Current controversy over the issue of Christian conversions and Hindu reconversions in Gujarat are reported to be calculated attempts by political parties to build up their religious vote banks. Almost every top leader has played the religious card to influence voters without openly violating the law in the Parliament and Assembly elections.

This needs to be discouraged and Election Commission should concentrate itself on finding out some mechanism through law or otherwise to check the tendency to motivate voters by invoking religion, caste and language as considerations.

Top leaders of all political parties may proclaim the goal of a casteless society, but behind the formal lists of the party candidates nominated for the contests, there is probably an inside story of careful calculation in terms of caste appeal. Behind the formal electoral returns, knowledgeable observers can discern the intermediaries who join together the ballots of a caste group to the candidate with a party label.

**Chief Ministers to demit office three months before holding election in a State** : CEC's suggestion that Chief Ministers of those States where polls are to be held should step down three months prior to election and allow neutral administration headed by the Governor of State to hold a truly free and fair election doesn't appear to be practical. While proving counter productive it will also raise many issues.

No politician would like his or her tenure to be cut short and as a logical extension of this idea the Prime Minister and his Cabinet Should also step down three months before a Parliamentary election.

Role of Bureaucracy, particularly police, in such a situation will gain more importance than what it is. It is a well known fact that bureaucracy and police force in the country have got politicised over the years and are used as moulded luggage by their political bosses, therefore, neutrality can't be expected.

It is also a well known fact that institution of Governor has also been politicised in recent years; large number of Governors appointed in the States are hard core members of the political party in power at the Centre. Therefore, instead of fair and free elections, the election will be conducted as per the wishes of the political party in power in the Centre.

Entire administration of a state undergoing polls will be reshuffled for the purpose of elections by the Governor as soon he takes over and government will hardly perform any other duties in the State; as a result development work and other important works of the State and public will suffer.

There should be provision in the law for "RIGHT TO RECALL". This non-functioning anarchy of ours can be set right to some extent if mechanism is devised to bestow upon the people of the country the right to recall its delinquent and recalcitrant legislators and parliamentarians. If such a law is not enacted, the vultures among politicians may one day even devour whatever littler is left of our democracy.

**Inordinate delay in the Judicial Process** : Health profile of Indian Democracy seems to have deteriorated over the years because of repeated misuse of election system as practised in India. There is no denying the fact that this system has faults as it allows people with criminal background to contest and win elections and even occupy ministerial berths. Once such a person gets hold of the seat of power, he can always find ways and means to manipulate and utilise the police, bureaucracy and even judiciary to his advantage and get acquitted or may succeed in getting the case stretched till eternity. The ideal solution would be to establish special courts in all States and Union Territories with a clear mandate to hold speedy trials and pronounce decisions within specified time-frame.

As per available information there are 23 cases of 1990 vintage and 27 other cases emanating from 1991 elections which are still awaiting verdict of courts despite the clear provisions in the Representation of People Act. Which stipulate that election petition "shall be filed as expeditiously as possible" and such cases would be concluded "within six months". Chief Election Commissioner is stated to be seized of the problem and has initiated necessary action.

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Names of writers whose views have been summarised on the preceding pages.

Dr. V.K. Parashar, Jaipur

Prof. Naresh Umrigar, Bardoli (Gujarat)

Ms. Lata Bhave, Killa Pardi (Gujarat)

Mr. Gauri Shankar, New Delhi

Mr. A.V. Vaidya, Thane (Maharashtra)

Mr. R.S. Raghavan, Mumbai

Mr. Priya Ranjan Kundu, Madhyamgram (WB)

Mr. Laxman Agnani, Indore

Mr. M.L. Nayar, Noida (UP)

Dr. P.R. Rotithor, Ratnagiri

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Everyday for six months, a businessman walked past a poor fellow who was selling shoelaces and dropped a dollar in the seller's box. But being charitable, the businessman never took any shoelaces out of the box.

One day when he had dropped his usual dollar, the businessman felt the poor fellow's hand on his arm. He noticed the fellow was about to say something. "Yes," said the businessman without waiting for the question. "I suppose you're wondering why I never take shoelaces after I put my dollar in the box."

"No", replied the poor fellow. "From today you have to put two dollars since the cost of shoelaces have gone up."

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AN AVANT-GARDE art gallery was having an exhibition of abstract paintings. In sauntered an elegantly dressed woman who stopped before a small, oblong white panel, in the centre of which was a tilted black prong. She signalled to the gallery owner and said, "I find myself very interested in this provocative piece. I may buy it."

"Madam \_\_\_\_\_"

"What does the artist call it?"

"What would you call it?" persisted the woman.

Replied the owner, "To me, it's a light switch."

\*\*\*

A GUY goes to visit his grand-mother and brings his friend along. While he is talking to his grandmother, the friend starts eating the peanuts on the table, and finishes them off. As they are leaving, the friend apologises for finishing of the peanuts.

"That's all right," says the grandmother, " since I lost my dentures, I only suck the chocolate off them."

## IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

We reproduce hereunder a letter which has been addressed to the Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Food & Consumer Affairs, GOI, suggesting that the State Governments should be requested to secure Monthly statements of pending cases in the District Forums and State Commissions, and these statements should be forwarded to the National Commission as well as Government of India. The requisite details will be evident from the letter:

"The Ministry is aware of the problems of delays that are coming about in the disposal of cases in District Forums and State Commissions. There is obvious need of initiating additional specific measures for minimising the delays. I am writing this letter to convey some suggestions in this regard, for consideration of the Ministry.

Delays are also unfortunately coming about at the level of National Commission. Pendency at apex level is stated to have increased to about 6000. You will agree that even if 50 cases are listed every day, long adjournments will have to be given for the hearings. The problem of this apex level can be solved only if more Benches of the National Commission are established. Obviously this can be done only if the Consumer Protection Act is amended. You would be in the best position to determine what measures can be utilised for attainment of this objective, and also to enable more Benches of State Commissions are to be established in the States where pendency goes beyond certain specified limit. These were among the suggestions which were made by the Study recommendations regarding modifications in the Consumer Protection Act in the context of experience of its operation.

At the levels of District Forums and State Commissions delays come about due to certain inadequacies. These include : (i) delays in filling the vacancies in the position of Presidents and non-judicial members where these come about in the District Forums/State Commissions; these delays badly hold up disposal of cases; (ii) non-observance of full working hours by the Benches and often working for only half a day and not working on all days of the week; (iii) inadequacies in relation to infrastructure, including the provision of court-rooms, furniture, staff, equipment, and even stationery and stamps.

State Governments need to be persuaded to nominate a senior officer and to give specific responsibility to him to see that any deficiency that comes about in the functioning of District Forums/State Commissions should immediately be dealt with and removed. There is no reason why any deficiency in relation to infrastructure should be allowed to come about, considering that the Government of India is providing funds to the State Governments for meeting requirements relating to effective implementation of the Consumer Protection Act.

In respect of the functioning of District Forums and State Commissions I wish to bring to your notice the provision of Section 24-B of the Consumer Protection Act which clearly lays down that the State Commissions shall have administrative control over the District Forums and the National Commission will have administrative control over the State Commissions; administrative control comprises the requirement of calling for periodical Returns, issuance of instructions and generally overseeing the functioning of State Commissions and District Forums. From all accounts the administrative control, as provided in and envisaged in the Act, is not being adequately exercised, respectively, by the State Commissions and national Commission, ostensibly because of their preoccupations with the work relating to cases which are listed daily for disposal. I feel that this provision of the Act needs to be brought specifically to the notice of the National Commission and State Commissions. They should, respectively, be requested to designate a particular officer, within their organisation who will continue to secure monthly information from the State Commissions/District Forums, for maintaining a close watch on the disposal

of cases. Presidents of National Commission and State Commissions should write, respectively, to the Presidents of State Commissions/District Forums pointing out the delays and problems of pendency of cases and asking for Special Reports for efforts expeditious disposal.

I am also of the view that your Ministry should prescribe a Proforma for submission of Monthly Report by the State Governments to the Ministry, and another Proforma which may be prescribed for submission of Monthly Reports by the District Forums and the State Commissions to the State Governments and to the National Commission.

Tentative suggestions of the respective Proforma are given in the enclosures.

It needs to be pointed out to State Governments that Supreme Court, on the Writ Petition of COMMON CAUSE had ordered in 1994 that where pendency before a District Forum exceeds 250, another Forum should be established in that district. In Delhi as many as six Forums have thus got created for expeditious disposal.

In the interest of ensuring more effective implementation of the Consumer Protection Act I earnestly hope that you will kindly consider these suggestions for adoption. I would be grateful for information about the action you propose initiating on these suggestions".

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A MAN from Chicago won \$ 100,000 in a weekend's gambling in Las Vegas, flew home, arriving at 3 a.m., made a deep hole in his backyard and buried the money there. Next morning, he went out and found the hole empty, the money disappeared. Footsteps led from the hole to the house next door, where a deaf-mute lived.

Enraged, the man rushed to the house of a professor, who was qualified in the sign language of the deaf-mute and knew the man next door. He dragged the professor to the neighbour's house, held a gun against the head of the deaf-mute, then said to the professor : "You tell this guy that if he does not return my \$ 100,000, I am shooting him."

The professor conveyed the message to his friend, and the friend replied in sign language : "Tell him not to shoot me, I have hidden the money under the cherry tree." The professor turned to the man with the gun and said: "He's not going to tell you. He said he'd rather die first.

...

EARLY to bed and early to rise and you'll never meet the rich and famous.

...

IF AT First you don't succeed, deny you were ever trying.

...

A young businessman had just started his own firm. He rented a beautiful office and had it furnished with the latest office equipment and art objects. Sitting there, he saw a man coming in the outer office. Wishing to appear busy and also to impress the visitor, the businessman picked up the phone and started to pretend he had a big deal working. He threw huge figures around and made giant commitments. Finally, he hung up and asked the visitor: "Can I help you?"

"Sure, I've come to install the phone."

...

One woman to another at a party, "Why are you wearing your wedding ring on the wrong finger?"

"Because," replied the second woman, "I married the wrong man."

...

Question: Why are lawyers buried four meters deep when they die instead of the normal two metres?

Answer: Because deep down, they really are good people.

...

Smith goes to see his supervisor in the front office. "Boss," he says, we're doing some heavy house-cleaning at home tomorrow, and my wife needs me to help with the attic and the garage, moving and hauling stuff."

"We're short handed, Smith," the boss replies. "I can't give you the day off."

"Thanks boss," says Smith. "I knew I could count on you!"

...

**SUBJECT :IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT.**

FORM FOR SUBMISSION OF MONTHLY STATEMENTS BY STATE GOVERNMENTS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

STATE GOVERNMENT/UNION TERRITORY

**NOTE:** Pendency of cases to be Assessed from the date of filing Complaint/Appeal/Revision.

Name : \_\_\_\_\_

| Number of cases pending before State Commission/ District Forums. | Cases pending for more than 3 months. | Cases pending for more than 6 months. | Cases pending for more than 1 year. | Cases pending for more than 3 years. |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

State Commission New Complaints:  
Appeals:  
Revisions:

District Forums

Name of District

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**SUBJECT :IMPLEMENTATION OF CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT**

FORM FOR SUBMISSION OF MONTHLY REPORT BY STATE COMMISSION AND DISTRICT FORUMS TO THE STATE GOVERNMENT/UNION TERRITORY

STATE GOVERNMENT/UNION TERRITORY

**NOTE:** Pendency of cases to be Assessed from the date of filing Complaint/Appeal/Revision.

Number of cases pending (including appeals and revisions) pending before the State Commission

| State Commission | Cases pending For more than 3 months. | Cases pending for more than 6 months. | Cases pending for more than 1 year. | Cases pending for more than 3 years. |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

- (i) New Complaints :
- (ii) Appeals :
- (iii) Revisions :

Number of cases (Complaints) pending before the District Forum of District .....

| Name of District Forum | Cases pending For more than 3 months. | Cases pending for more than 6 months. | Cases pending for more than 1 year. | Cases pending for more than 3 years. |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

- NOTE :**
1. Information should be furnished on separate sheet about the reasons for delay in disposal of cases more than one year and 3 years, indicating the steps being taken for expediting disposal.
  2. Information should also be furnished on separate sheet in regard to the following, highlighting any deficiencies experienced during the month of Report:-
 

|                   |                |                 |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| (a) accommodation | (b) furniture  | (c) equipment   |
| (d) staff         | (e) stationery | (f) stamps etc. |
  - (ii) If any vacancy has occurred during the month of Report in position of President of State Commission/ District Forums or in the position of non-judicial members, particulars may be furnished about the date when the vacancy has occurred and of the date when the vacancy has been filled. If delay of more than one fortnight has occurred in filling any of the vacancies, reasons may be furnished along with the information about action being taken to expedite appointment.
  - (iii) Copy of this Monthly Report may also be sent by State Govt. to the State Commission and to the National Commission (address: 5th Floor, Old Indian Oil Building Behind Janpath, New Delhi-110001).

## OUR ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

COMMON CAUSE as a public interest organisation has to its credit a large number of public causes which have been taken up by it for redressal of problems of the people.

Its activities have given benefits to innumerable persons, spread all over the country. Almost four million pensioners benefited from three important decisions which the organisation secured from the Supreme Court some years ago, in relation to extension of liberalisation of pension, restoration of commutation of pension, and extension of the scheme of family pension. The important case relating to Delhi Municipal Corporation Property Tax, decided at its instance by the Supreme Court, helped to straighten out the problems of the levy and assessment of this tax. Various manifestations of this matter have since continued to be pursued by the organisation of securing proper restructuring and rationalisation of the tax. Various issues relating to Rent Control Law and their

distortions have continued to be taken up for being sorted out. We have maintained close relationship with various Associations of homeowners, tenants, ratepayers, welfare organisation etc.

### OUR GRATEFUL THANKS

*We have the privilege of receiving assistance also from the well known Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung of the Federal Republic of Germany, the Foundation which is supporting various projects and activities connected interalia with consumer awareness, entrepreneurship development, economic and civic education, environment protection, legal services, income generation and rural development. The Foundation is named after the known socio-liberal statesman Friedrich Naumann and works towards his ideals and the vision of Liberal society. In India the Foundation operates from USO House, 6, Special Institutional Area, New Delhi-110067*

*We are also grateful to Kumari L.A. Meera Memorial Trust, Kerala, for providing us financial assistance for our activities.*

Writ petitions on various important issues have been filed by COMMON CAUSE in the Supreme Court and Delhi High Court. Quite a few matters have also been taken up for redressal through the National Commission established under the Consumer Protection Act. The Writ Petitions filed in the Supreme Court include, for instance, disruption of the work of courts by lawyers' strikes, problems of accumulated backlog of cases in courts all over the country, malfunctioning of blood banks and the requirement of appropriate collection and testing of blood for transfusion purposes, challenging the pension being given to Members of Parliament, inadequacies in the implementation of Consumer Protection Act, problems arising from the accumulation of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) of Banks, the factum of hundreds of thousands of small investors having been defrauded by Finance Companies, and failure of the government machinery in fulfilling the constitutional requirements of spreading free and compulsory education for the children in the country. The cases taken to Delhi High Court include the problems of conversion of leasehold properties to freehold, non-implementation of Apartments Ownership Act, problems connected with building bye-laws and unauthorised constructions which have widely

proliferated, large scale development of Unauthorised Colonies in Delhi, extensive resort to load-shedding by Electricity Supply Undertaking of Delhi and large scale theft of electricity. A Writ Petition filed against Delhi Electricity Supply Undertaking resulted in a beneficial verdict relating to bills based on defective meters. From time to time various matters have been taken up for straightening out problems related to income tax, wealth tax, gift tax, capital gains tax, for avoidance of aberrations, harassments and discriminations.

The organisation has also been taking up various problems of the consumers, with a view to give them the feel that they can fight their battles in relation to any defective products and deficient services for which they make payments. A major achievement of the organisation has been to secure amendment by the Government of the relevant rules prescribing the mode of price printing on packages with the result that now the price, inclusive of all local taxes, is being printed on packages, all over the country. The matters relating to various areas of inefficiency of the public sector functioning, as of electricity supply, telephone services, airline, etc., have been taken up for redressal of grievances of consumers. Cases were filed by the organisation for setting right the inadequacies of quality control for manufacture of sensitive items such as intravenous fluids, and removal of distortions in strict observance of the orders for supply and sale of iodized salt.

Other noteworthy activities of the organisation include securing of orders of the Supreme Court leading to establishment of Consumer "Courts" in all districts of the country, issue of notices to Government of India and Election Commission by Supreme Court on Writ Petition regarding non-maintenance and non-audit of accounts of political parties and non-establishment of Lokpal institution as well as strengthening of anti-corruption machinery at the centre and in the States.

**Membership of the organisation is open to all. Membership fees are Rs 100 for annual membership for individuals, Rs 500 for life membership and Rs 200 for annual membership of organisations and associations. Quarterly Periodical COMMON CAUSE goes free to all members; it has no separate subscription. Donations to COMMON CAUSE are eligible for exemption available under Section 80G of Income Tax Act. Everybody can take membership of the organization. No form is required. Send your name & address, written in capital letters, along with cheque/DD, drawn in favour of COMMON CAUSE.**

H.D. SHOURIE, Director