

# Cultural Values and Population Action Programs in Turkey(1)

Readers will notice a striking similarity between Turkey and the Arab World regarding cultural values and problems of social change generally faced by Eastern countries nowadays. It is this similarity which has induced us to condense this valuable report in the following pages.

Social change, considered almost an everyday matter for people in Turkey, is most noticeable in the waves of rural to urban migration occurring increasingly since the early 1950's. While the rural population counted 81% in 1950, it shrank to 75% in 1960 and to 66% in 1975.

In Turkey, rural society may be considered roughly to correspond to traditional society, urban settlements to modern society, and semi-urban settlements to transitional society.

To understand the process of social change, we need to examine the socio-cultural aspects of traditional society, which, by protecting and carrying over old belief and value systems, is the main source of cultural values in society. For this purpose, certain prominent aspects of rural, social and family structures will be examined on the grounds that they form the social context out of which cultural values develop.

## Family Structure

Though it was generally assumed that the typical traditional family was an extended family, a study made by Timur (1972) has shown that even in the villages nuclear families comprise 55.4% of all the families. In the three metropolitan areas: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, nuclear families reached 67.9% in 1968.

Between the two above structures, there exists the so-called transient-extended family, i.e. one in which some members of the older generation are living in a potentially nuclear household temporarily. In the 1968 survey, the national figure for transient-extended families was 13.1%.

The increasing spread of nuclear families does not mean, however, complete separation between the older and the younger generation. Kinsmen are still called upon to provide material support when needed. This function of the family may be expected to continue as long as other institutions such as social security system, insurance, cooperatives, etc. are not well established that they might replace the family in providing security.

Extended family type is the ideal that is commonly valued, especially in rural areas. According to recent statistics, 61% of the men in nuclear families preferred to live with their sons. In the eyes of the villagers, the extended family may be identified with wealth and prestige. Living with the married son, in contrast to living with the married daughter, provides the elderly with financial and psychological security; thus it is highly valued.

## Marriage and Inheritance

In Turkey polygamy is rare, monogamy is the rule. Civil marriage is practiced with or without an additional religious ceremony. Marriage between members of different sects is rare and not encouraged. Arranged marriages are quite common though there is an increasing tendency to get the consent of the young people.

Marriage in the traditional rural context appears to assume more of a social than an individual character. It is instrumental in strengthening existing kinship ties or in increasing the number of relatives and friends who are potential sources of aid. For those reasons, arranged marriage is preferred to other type of marriage; for the same reasons, abduction and elopement are not, generally, condoned.

Marriage implies an economic importance symbolized by the bride price which serves various functions. One of them is to ensure the rights and status of the young bride in her husband's family. Another is to serve for the preparation of the bride's trousseau. A third function is providing support for the wife in case of divorce. Research has shown, however, that divorce is quite rare in rural Turkey.

Bride price can also be considered as a security for the woman who in the old system of religious code got no share in inheritance. Under the new laws of to-day, inheritance is shared equally by men and women. Attitudes toward arranged marriage, bride price and inheritance vary a great deal. In some areas, the more modern minded class condemns arranged marriage and bride price and favors an equal share for women in inheritance, while continuation of traditions is observed in many areas.

## Kinship and Community

In traditional rural areas, family and kin often take the place of friends and public services in providing support and security to the individual. More than any other kin, brothers are thrown together by the social system. With increased mobility and outmigration from the village, this pattern of lifelong daily contact and mutual services is becoming less common.

The positive functions of the kinship system are at times discredited by blood feuds, strife and competition between families, clans and tribes. In spite of still commonly practiced endogamous marriage within kin, negative attitudes toward it are also found. In some cases, it is believed that more conflict is involved in marriages with relatives.

## Group Loyalties and Respect for Authority

Loyalty to the in-group: family, kin, community, symbolized by respect for it and for its elders, is a traditional social value in Turkey. It is strong even among young people in the urban setting. Out of loyalty to the in-group stem loyalty and respect for state authority,

(1) By Dr. Cigdem Kagitcibasi, a report prepared for UNESCO, October, 1977, Bogazici University, Istanbul.

manifested in the strong value that Turks put on nationalism and patriotism (1970, 1973 research).

In Arab countries, however, if loyalty to the in-group is still considered a social value, especially in rural areas, it is doubtful that it has already evolved into respect for state authority and its derived sense of nationalism and patriotism. Loyalties, responsibilities and respect in the family kinship and the community extend to people in the established positions of power, such as the father in the family, the landowners, the wealthy people, the political leaders and the descendants of prestigious families in rural districts.

### Community Religion

"Religious affiliations often intermix with group loyalties and religion is more of a community religion than an individual affair. It involves identification with a community and acceptance of its ethics and rules of conduct" (Kagitcibasi p. 37).

Religion tends to perpetuate tradition and to sustain separation of the sexes. Social change involves a weakening of religious ties and generally leads to a set of reactions which attempt to avoid tension and satisfy frustrated needs.

### Sex Roles

The "second class status" of women in the Middle East applies to Turkey especially in the traditional rural society, as shown by a large number of research studies carried out between 1973 and 1977. "In the traditional context, the social status of women is still evaluated in terms of age and child-bearing (Kagitcibasi p. 40)." A woman accepts her inferiority as part of the metaphysical order. A clear division of labor based on sex both helps the woman face the status difference and yet, at the same time, serves to perpetuate this difference.

Woman's work in the home, to which she often adds rural work in the fields, is of no less importance than man's work and even requires more time. Yet it does not receive social recognition, probably because it does not bring in cash income and, when it does, it is often irregular. Another important reason is the belief that man should be the bread-winner and that it would be degrading for him to have his wife share with him this task.

### Family Honor

At the basis of woman's subordination is the double standard imposed on her by the concept of "honor". This term, in general use, may denote keeping a promise, showing respect for elders, honest dealing, etc., but sexual honor, which means that men completely control the sexuality of their women, is by far the most important sphere and shapes the whole structure of sex-role relations and related values. A young girl has to be constantly watched and protected from any possible attack on her virginity, "her most precious possession". Early marriage for a woman is preferable as a safeguard of her chastity. Honor is far from being a private or individual affair. The "reputation" or "honor" of a girl or woman has to be protected by her husband her father or brother. "An insult to honor" is a most serious matter and is often the reason for vengeance, killing and blood feuds. (Kagitcibasi p. 46)."

(To be continued in next issue)