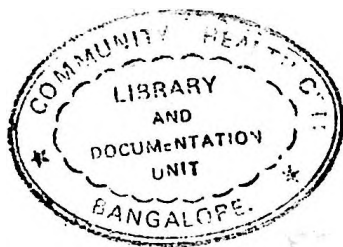


**For A Complete Stop of Dangerous  
Infant Feeding Practices**



**Call for a National Campaign**

# **Battle of the Bottle**

**K. P. Sunil**

On March 27, 1990, replying to unstarred question no 1721 raised by Pramod Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha, Professor M.G.K. Menon, then minister of state in the ministry of science and technology said: " The information and broadcasting ministry has decided that advertisements for baby foods can be accepted by All India Radio and Doordarshan, so long as the manufacturers and distributors of these products do not promote them as being suitable for use as partial or total substitutes for breast milk." This announcement, which formally lifted the ban on TV and Radio advertisements of infant formulas, renewed the debate on breast - feeding.

Breast-feeding has been universally acknowledged as the best means of feeding the new - born child. While breast milk alone cannot give 100 percent protection, its anti - infection properties provide natural protection against many potentially fatal infant diseases.

Needless to say, millions of infants succumb each year to diseases like chronic diarrhoea, pneumonia, meningitis and malnutrition simply because they are not

breast - fed. The reasons, especially in developing countries where the devastation is at its worst, are not hard to find. Contaminated water supply, inadequate fuel for boiling, poor storage facilities, poor sterilisation of bottle and teat, all contribute to work against the health of the baby, already deprived of his mother's milk. One of the biggest advantages of breast-feeding is that the mammary glands react to the microbes brought to it by the infant and respond by producing specific antibodies which fight the invading microbes before they take control of the infant's systems. In contrast, formula milk lacks the immunological properties of breast milk. Combine this factor with contaminated water, an infinite dilution of the formula milk out of sheer ignorance or acute poverty, and one has a situation which is truly alarming.

By the late 1970s, it had been brought home to the world that the bottle was fast replacing the breast in urban and semi-urban conglomerations worldwide, with disastrous consequences to the baby. Realising the need to check this tendency, the World Health Organisation drafted the international code of marketing of breast-milk substitutes to ensure safe and adequate nutrition for infants by the protection and promotion of breast-feeding and by ensuring that breast - milk substitutes like formula infant foods were used only when deemed absolutely necessary and then only on the basis of adequate information and through appropriate marketing and distribution. The WHO hoped that the code would be adopted by all member countries in deference to the right of every child and every pregnant and lactating women to be adequately nourished.

Shortly after the passage of the WHO code, the ministry of social welfare announced that a legislation was on the way to prevent aggressive marketing practices of infant food. What finally took place was not the enactment of any legislation but the adoption of an indigenous version of the WHO code.

In December 19, 1983, the ministry of social welfare, Government of India, passed the Indian National Code for Protection and Promotion of Breast-feeding under resolution 18-11/83-NT. The code constituted a virtual adoption of the WHO draft with minor variations. It formed the first firm commitment from the Government of India that it recognised the evil effects of the bottle, and that it was prepared to launch a crusade against formula infant food.

The code was comprehensive, in Article 4, it placed the onus of ensuring that consistent information was provided on infant feeding, squarely on the government. In article 5, advertisement and other forms of promotion of infant food and breast milk substitutes was totally banned. Under Article 9, it was envisaged that labels on infant formula containers should have necessary information about the appropriate use of the product in a conspicuous and easily readable format and in an appropriate language and should also incorporate a message on the superiority of breast - feeding. Article 11 sought to internalise these principles in a legislation empowering the government to act on the provisions of the code.

Unfortunately, however, all the above provisions are today observed only in the breach.

On November 18, 1988, cutting across party affiliations, the Opposition and the treasury benches joined hands in the Rajya Sabha to unanimously pass the infant Milk Foods and Feeding Bottles (regulation, supply and distribution) Bill presented before the house by the then-minister of human resources development (Bill no XLI-C of 1986). The bill was poorly worded and full of loopholes. Its formulation had clearly been influenced by infant food manufacturers, most of whom are large multinationals, to suit their purpose.

In the first place, by calling the bill the Infant Milk Foods and Feeding Bottles Bill (infant milk food is defined under section Z-F as food marketed as a partial or total replacement for mother's milk), it leaves out of its purview the vast market of cereal foods, complementary foods and weaning foods. These are equally harmful and had also been considered by the WHO code and the 1983 Indian code. The bill also left out of its purview products commonly referred to as pacifiers or soothers which are recognised as amongst the largest source of diarrhoeal infection in infants. Offenders under the bill were considered bail-able and punishment were nominal considering that the offenders, if at all, would be large multinationals for whom a fine of a few thousand rupees would mean next to nothing.

In spite of these obvious drawbacks, it was a positive step in the right direction. However, despite the assurances of the minister who piloted the bill in the Rajya Sabha, it was never placed before the Lok Sabha and never became a law though five years have elapsed since then. And, all the while, advertising of infant foods has continued unabated. Advertisements that violate every provision of both the WHO and Indian codes on the subject :

"Is the best baby in the world getting the best baby food?" asks the advertisement for Amulspray. "Baby's nutritionally complete cereal food - complete with milk, sugar and love" goes the jingle for Cerelac. Doctors recommend Farex" says an agency - spun untruth; while Nestum promises "to add variety to your baby's foods"... And as if this were as not enough, in 1990, the Government of India decided to allow advertisement of baby foods on AIR and Doordarshan as long as manufacturers did not promote them as being suitable for use as partial or total substitutes for breast milk.

This question of allowing advertisements that adhered to certain guidelines has been discussed in several forums. Manufacturers, the medical fraternity, consumers, women's organisation, the Government of India, WHO and UNICEF had all gone into the question and concluded that advertisements of baby foods in any form would suit manufacturers and would also go against the interest of babies and consequently ought not to be allowed. Considering that India is a signatory to the international baby food code which prohibits all advertising of baby foods, the decision of the Janata Dal government can only be termed a retrograde step clearly influenced by a powerful, unscrupulous manufacturers' lobby which markets over Rs. 200 crore worth of baby foods - a full 50,000 tonnes of it - annually, all over India.

In this context, the decision of the Chandra Shekhar government to introduce before Parliament (Bill no 5 of 1991) a revised version is very welcome. The bill, in its title, takes into consideration not only infant milk foods but also infant foods, thereby rectifying a serious defect

of the earlier bill. However, the bill is flawed in the sense that in crucial sections pertaining to advertising or the use of incentives for sale promotion, infant foods have conveniently been left out. Obviously, the manufacturers have had a say in things.

The bill, as it now stands, has, as some one wise-cracked, so many loopholes that an unscrupulous manufacturer could drive a herd of milch cows through it ! Yet the law, if passed, would prove a small step in the right direction. Given the precarious state of the Indian government and the question mark dangling over the future course of political events, the question of the health and well-being of a few million children in the country is hardly likely to exercise the minds of our parliamentarians. In all probability, the current bill is likely to die a natural death without becoming law just like its predecessor. And multinationals will continue to dump infant food on the unsuspecting millions and rake in the profits.

(Taken from The Illustrated Weekly of India, Weekend  
March 2-3, 1991)



# **Baby Food Bill in Limbo**

**Max Martin**

The bill on the banning of baby food advertisement is still pending in Parliament. The bill, which was introduced on January 10, 1991 by the Minister of State for Labour and Welfare Ramji Lal Suman, seeks to ban all advertisements of infant milk food and feeding bottles, gifts of same and any kind of promotion of infant milk foods or weaning foods in hospitals and other health centres.

Moreover, the bill makes it mandatory to label all these tins with "Mother's milk is best for your baby" and "use the tin food only on advice of a health worker".

A bill, on the same lines, was introduced in 1986. But despite the then government's repeated promises the bill was not passed in the Lok Sabha.

But why this hue and cry against baby food? Because it is bad for babies.

A study by UNICEF reveals that in the first six months, the risk of illness or death from diarrhoea is 25 times higher for children who are bottlefed, compared to those who are exclusively breastfed. Child specialists and health activities endorse the same.



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Says Dr. S. Ramji, assistant professor of pediatrics at the Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, "More than 80 percent of infants brought here with diarrhoea are bottlefed. On the contrary, you can just see the occasional mirth of an exclusively breastfed child."

"The disease occurs because of unhygienic feeding habits and malnutrition," says Dr. Mira Shiva of Voluntary Health Association of India. "It is not always possible for mothers to keep the feeding bottle clean and sterile. And mothers tend to dilute the milk to cut down costs (around Rs. 30 for a tin of half kg)."

But as the belief goes that everything that comes nicely packed is good, more and more mothers go for tin food. Moreover, there is the problem of urban working mothers who cannot spend the daytime with their babies. Others imitate them. "Only less than 10 per cent of mothers have problems in lactating. For that prescription will do, not ads," says a doctor from the Capital's Lady Irwin Medical College.

In short, mothers who can stay with the infant at least for the first three months don't have to go in for milk substitutes and spend atleast six times extra money in the process.

"If at all they cannot breastfeed, cattle milk is economical, though it is not as nutritious as breastmilk: but it can be easily complemented," says Dr. Ramji.

The marketing of baby food worldwide by multinationals is aggressive indeed. It is a six-billion - dollar industry. Apart from advertisements, they provide free

supplies to hospitals. According to a report published by Action for Corporate Accountability, Minneapolis, USA, the companies still give free or cost-reduced supplies to hospitals in Mexico, Mauritius and Malaysia. Nestle, the leading multinational with more than one third of the world market, provides free supplies to atleast 20 countries, according to the report.

Bottlefeeding in hospitals interferes with breast-feeding at the most crucial time. With a lack of suckling stimulus it will be difficult for mothers to lactate. Apart from that, says a pediatrician, the infants get used to passive feeding habits with bottle milk, leaving out nutritious breast milk. The latter has proteins and antibodies vital for the baby's health.

Manufacturers promote baby food by sponsoring international scholarships and seminars for doctors and providing research facilities for hospitals.

It is against this aggressive promotion that protests mounted worldwide, giving birth to a baby food code. Baby food Action Network an international body based in the U. K. even called for boycott of Nestle products.

Nearer home, organisations like Voluntary Health Association of India, Delhi Consumers' Forum, and various doctors' associations have been demanding control on the activities of manufacturers.

The government adopted the National Code for Protection and Promotion of Breastfeeding in 1983, on the lines of the WHO / UNICEF code. This is applicable to infant milk foods, ie, breast-milk substitutes and any formula that partially or totally replaces breast-milk.

The major provisions of the code include :

- ☐ No direct promotion of such products to the public.
- ☐ No promotion of them in health-care facilities
- ☐ No free samples or gifts to mothers
- ☐ No contact with mothers by company sales personnel
- ☐ No promotional samples or gifts to health workers
- ☐ The provision of clear and consistent information to health professionals.
- ☐ No Picture of infants on labels plus clear and consistent information on labels.
- ☐ No promotion of sweetened condensed milk for infants.

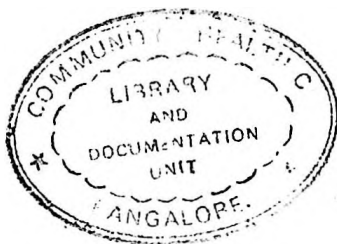
To give teeth to the code, professional and consumer group put pressure on the government. The '86 bill was a result of that, but was however scuttled. Reportedly, the producers of Amul, the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation, were behind the blocking of the bill, because the ban on ads of breast milk substitutes would have deprived them of the cutting edge over multinationals like Nestle.

Even now Nestle India Ltd. claims that they support the legislation on the code. Nestle and other multinationals can always advertise products like Nestum, Cerelac and Farex, which are not exactly infant milk foods, but prop up the company name besides fetching good profits.

The bill, if passed, will put some control on advertising of baby food products.

As Ramji Lal Suman puts it. "It is for the good of all children of our country. The multinational lobby will be there to stall it but we will not budge."

(Taken from Sunday Mail March 3, 1991)



## **Let Us Know, They may Be Breaking The Rules**

Are you aware of the promotional activity of the baby food industry? Use this questionnaire to inform, us about promotion of artificial infant milk and commercial weaning food in your community. Please feel free to write on additional sheets. Read and pass on copies.

IBFAN aims to stop the unnecessary promotion of bottle feeding worldwide. Concern about the decline in breastfeeding and the consequent illness and death of babies led to the adoption of the WHO/UNICEF International Code on the marketing of baby milk. The promotional activities of the baby food industry, together with misguided hospital practises have destroyed breast feeding for millions of mothers and babies.

In order to ensure that companies abide by the Code we need your help.

All we ask is that you become aware of the promotional activities of the baby food industry, in India. Use this questionnaire to inform us. The questions will help you to identify some of the important violations that often occur.

Name .....

Address.....

Date.....

Confidential

Yes

☐

No

☐

1. Are mothers still getting free milk or weaning food samples

If yes, state brand.....

Name and address of hospital / clinic.....

Confidential

Yes

☐

No

☐

2. Are hospitals, maternity wards or health clinics receiving free or low - cost supplies of baby milk / weaning foods ?

Are they receiving free gifts ?

Please give as much details as possible, addresses etc.

Confidential

Yes

☐

No

☐

3. Do baby milk products or weaning complementary food labels show pictures of babies ?

Yes ☐

No ☐

If Yes, state brand / company name.....

.....

.....

Do they have adequate warnings ? Yes ☐

No ☐

IF NO give examples

.....

.....

5. Is breastfeeding actively supported in your region ?

Facilities for working mothers, nursing rooms

☐

Good literature etc.

☐

Anything else?.....

.....

6. Do hospital practices discourage breastfeeding? eg.

Conflicting / Unhelpful advice

☐

Strict feeding routines

☐

Unnecessary separation of mother and baby

☐

Contact

between Company reps and mothers

☐

Promotion of formula milk ☐

Anything else ?.....

.....

7. Do hospital practices encourage commercial weaning foods ?

.....

.....

(Send your responses to the Centre for Development and Women's Studies, we will communicate them to IBFAN)



## **For A Complete Stop Of Dangerous Infant Feeding Practices**

Ten years after India signed the International Code of Marketing Breast Milk Substitutes, prohibiting the advertising of commercial infant formula to the public, no laws exist in India to deter the baby food companies from continuing to promote inappropriate and dangerous infant feeding practices.

### **Why not commercial infant formula or weaning foods ?**

It is universally accepted that breast - feeding is the best food for babies. Its anti-infective properties provide natural protection against many potentially fatal illnesses, whereas routine bottle feeding causes mothers' milk to dry up due to the lack of suckling. The bottle - fed baby becomes hooked on to a infant formula which many mothers can neither afford nor safely prepare. However, aggressive, high pressure advertising and promotion technologies coupled with contaminated water supply, inadequate fuel for boiling, poor storage facilities, illiteracy and low buying power - all work against the health of babies. The situation takes an alarming turn when formula milk is very diluted out of sheer ignorance or acute poverty.

Where weaning foods are concerned, locally, available, traditionally accepted weaning foods like dal, rava (sooji), bananas etc., provide enough nutrition at a much lesser cost. It is clear that there is no justification at all for the current spate of advertising of weaning foods.

### **Towards an International Code of Marketing :**

By the late 1970s it was brought home to the world that the bottles of commercial preparations of infant milks was fast replacing the breast in urban and semi-urban conglomerates world - wide, with disastrous consequences on babies. At the World Health Assembly in 1981, the late Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, cited the use of baby foods as an example of 'how publicity has made us the victims of habits which are economically wasteful and wholly contrary to good health'. Realising the need to check this tendency, the World Health Organisation and UNICEF, with support from the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) formulated an International Code of Marketing of Breast - milk Substitutes, to ensure safe and adequate nutrition for infants.

India voted in favour of the WHO code in baby food marketing and immediately appointed a committee to recommend its implementation.

The code was to protect and promote breast feeding by ensuring that breast - milk substitutes, like formula infant foods, were used only when absolutely necessary - for example, in orphanages.

After the passage of the WHO / UNICEF code in 1981, the Ministry of Social Welfare announced their intention to introduce legislation to prevent aggressive marketing of infant foods in India.

## **Towards a national code - a bill introduced**

In November 1986, cutting across party lines, there was a discussion in the Rajya Sabha, on the Infant Milk Foods and Feeding Bottles ( Regulation of production, Supply and Distribution ) Bill. Despite the professed good intentions of the government, the manufacturers of baby foods had influenced the drafters of this Bill, since it only covered " Infant Milk Food ". Infant foods such as complementary weaning and cereal foods and pacifiers were conveniently left out of the scope of the Bill.

Article 5 of the Bill banned advertisements and other forms of promotion of infant food and breast milk substitutes.

Moreover the Bill lapsed as it was never placed before the Lok Sabha.

The situation created by the indifference of the powers-that-be which allowed the Bill to gather dust and pass into oblivion was a golden opportunity used to the hilt by baby food manufacturers.

A revised version of the old bill, Infant Milk Foods Feeding Bottles and Infant Foods (Regulation, Supply and Distribution) Bill, 1991 is now on the cards. While seeming to cover " Infant Foods " it is silent about " Infant Foods " especially in the clause on advertising !

## **Advertisements Galore**

Advertisements on infant foods that violate every provision of the WHO and Indian Codes still appear in newspapers and magazines. In 1990, the Government of India allowed advertisement of baby foods on AIR and Doordarshan even (so long as manufacturers did not promote them as being partial or total substitutes for mother's milk).

It is clear that if the manufacturers do not promote them as being partial or total replacement of mother's milk, they will in fact do precisely that to protect their advertising interests !

The spate of advertisements on "Infant Foods" point to the general awareness among manufacturers that there would be no deterrent to their continued advertising. The millions once spent on direct advertisements is now being spent to push artificial baby food into hospitals, and health centres. The baby food manufacturers use the print media, doctors, conferences, exhibitions and even shops for advertising baby food. These continued unethical, aggressive and totally inappropriate marketing practices of baby food companies is an issue that concerns all people who care about justice in health care.

This trend needs to be stopped - it is clear that manufacturers are making use of the loop holes in the Code and in the proposed Bill, which anyway, does not prohibit advertising of infant and weaning foods:

Even in the interest of the economic crunch that India currently faces, the promotion of formula milk and weaning foods is a waste of money. That it is dangerous to the health of babies, has already been stressed.

### **Call for support - and action**

That something must be done to check the conduct of baby food promoters cannot be contested. A more inclusive Bill, with strong measures to control advertising and sales of baby foods, is the need of the hour.

We communicate this information to you, because we feel that it is time to generate a national debate and a national campaign to demand strong legal action against companies which defy the Code.

How can you support such a campaign ?

Can you suggest things that can be done ?

Will you be willing to participate in any action planned ?

Please reply to the following organisation which is facilitating such a process at the initial stages.

**Centre for Development  
and Women's Studies**

1829, 18th Main Road,

Annanagar (West.)

MADRAS - 600 040.

April 1991

Madras

