

B.A. Part IInd (Economics Honours)
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POPULATION – SIZE AND GROWTH

According to the census 2011, the Indian population increased to 1.21 billion with a decadal growth of 17.70%. Adult literacy rate increased to 74.04% with a decadal growth of 9.21%. The motto of the census was 'Our Census, Our future'.

The population of India as per 2011 census was 1,210,854,977. India added 181.5 million to its population since 2001. India, with 2.4% of the world's surface area, accounts for 17.5% of its population. Uttar Pradesh is the most populous state with roughly 200 million people. Over half the population resided in the six most populous states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh of the 1.21 billion Indians, 833 million (68.84%) live in rural areas while 377 million stay in urban areas. 453.6 million people in India are migrants, which is 37.8% of total population.

The National Population Policy (NPP) 2000 outlines the long term objective of achieving a stable population by 2045, at a level consistent with the requirements of sustainable economic growth and social development.

India is experiencing an explosive growth in its population with all the attendant ill-effects of this phenomenon. At the time of Independence, population of our country was only around 360 million. Since then, it has increased to more than three times that figure. The authorities did not realise the fact that an important by-product of economic growth happens to be a rapid growth in population.

Economic growth unleashes several forces which accelerate population growth and tends to neutralise the gains of economic development. Insufficient attention was paid to the need of a vigorous and effective policy for population control. The result was that by 1961, our population had jumped to a figure of 439 million (which was 21.5% above 1951 figure). Even then the authorities remained sluggish in formulating and implementing an effective population policy. Consequently, our population continued to experience an unchecked growth. Having recorded 24.8% and 24.7% growth rates in the next two decades, it touched a figure of 683 million by 1981. The 1991 census put the figure at 844 million and the estimated figure for 2008-09 (as per Economic Survey 2009-10) is around 1154 million. While our death rate has fallen to a very commendable figure of 7.4 per thousand p.a., the corresponding figure for birth rate is still at a high of 22.8 per thousand per annum. Such a wide divergence between the two rates is adding rapidly to our population growth. In addition, with increasing life expectancy at birth, there is an increase in the proportion of aged persons and economic dependency.

The percentage decadal growth of population in rural and urban areas in the decade 1991-2001 was 18.08 percent and 31.48 percent respectively. Urban population constitutes 27.82 percent of the total population of the country, which is higher by 2.11 percent points as compared to the percentage in 1991. The density of population has increased steadily from 117 persons in 1951 to 325 persons per sq.km in 2001. However, the sex ratio of country as a whole has improved from 927 females per 1000 males in 1991 to 933 females per 1000 males in 2001. The sex ratio of a country as a whole in the age group 0-6 years was noticed to 927 females per one thousand males. The literacy rate for the

country as a whole in 2001, worked out to 64.84 percent for the population aged seven years and above. The corresponding figures for males and females were 75.26 percent and 53.67 percent respectively. The literacy rate was estimated around 67.6 percent in 2005-2006.

It needs no iteration that a rapid increase in population has been a hurdle in our economic growth in several ways. It has made a tremendous addition to our demand for consumption goods (especially for the basic necessities like food, housing, clothing, health care, and education, etc.) thereby contributing to the demand for scarce productive resources. In addition, growing population has counterbalanced a sizeable portion of the increase in our national income leading to a slower increase in our per capita income. Faced with certain other drawbacks in our planning and growth strategy, we have also failed in providing adequate employment opportunities to our growing work force. As a result, there has been a rapid increase in unemployment, both open and disguised. Population growth has also eroded the effectiveness of our poverty-eradication programmes. The unfortunate fact is that the population problem remains unsolved even now. Projections show that it would continue to grow rapidly for some more decades.

Some of the major causes of population explosion in India include the following:-

Since Independence, in spite of inadequate public health care and other medical services we have been able to control many mass-killer diseases. Some of them like small pox have been totally eradicated and some epidemics like plague are well under control. Due to better healthcare of females, there has been a substantial decline in both infant mortality and female mortality during child-

bearing. Unfortunately, we have failed in providing safe drinking water to our masses. Had we succeeded in providing this basic necessity, we would have been able to control a large number of additional diseases as well. All these factors have brought down the death rate and added to the reproductive life of our female population. The data given in the Economic Survey 2009-10 shows that our death rate fell from around 27.4 per thousand in 1950-51 to around 7.4 per thousand in 2008-09. This figure is very close to the level of death rate prevalent in the world's most advanced countries. Correspondingly, the life expectancy at birth (in years) has also recorded a creditable increase from around just 32 in 1950-51 to 62.6 for males and 64.2 for females in 2006-07, and is expected to increase further in the coming years.

While death rate has declined substantially, and is expected to stay low in the foreseeable future, fall in birth rate has been quite disappointing due to several reasons. It was 39.9 per thousand in 1950-51 and fell to only 25.0 per thousand in 2001-02 and 24.8 per thousand in 2002-03 and 22.8 per thousand in 2008-09. Leading causes for our failure in achieving the needed decline in birth rate include absence of an effective system of economic incentives and disincentives for promoting small family norms, insufficient availability of medical facilities for restricting family size, absence of social security (because of which children are considered a source of income to aged parents), low average age at marriage, better health and longer reproductive life span of potential mothers, and the like.