

OVERPOPULATION OF INDIA: FACTORS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the overpopulation issue of India and propose recommendations on how to overcome it. First, the paper summarizes the crucial demographic conditions and where India stands by numbers. Then the article presents the development of the state approach to the issue starting from the early years of independence up to the current policies. It does so by scrutinizing its cultural, economic and social factors and implications of overpopulation and identifies socio-economic backwardness, early marriages and family norms, lack of adequate health care infrastructure and education as the correlated and interdependent features supporting the trend of overpopulation. The authors come up with three recommendations to tackle the issue – women empowerment, education and industrialization.

KEYWORDS

Overpopulation, Family Planning, Women Empowerment, Industrialization, Population Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main influencers of politics, economics and cultural development during the course of history have been the demographic dynamics. This major decisive element of a country's attributes has played a crucial role as an asset for the progress and development when it came to internal and external decision making.

The earth we live in has faced a rapid change regarding the demographics of the human race during history. It is estimated that between 1347 and 1351, the global population was reduced from 450 million people to 350 million thanks to the Black Death plague. It may be possible that the number 1 billion of humans on earth was reached in 1810 which increased until 1950 to 2.5 billion and to over 3 billion until 1960. In 1999, the world's population was estimated to be 6 billion which means, that the human race doubled its population in only 40 years. Since 2011, when the world's population has passed the 7 billion, we are registering an annual growth of population of 1.07%. According to the statistics, it is estimated that in 1st of July 2014, India's population was 1.267.401.849, which corresponds to 17.5% of the total population of the world and places India on the 2nd place as the country with the biggest population, with a population density of 386 people/km².

Considering that in 2018, 17.74% of the Earth's population lives in India, this paper will present the state approach towards the issue of overpopulation, get a grasp of underlying factors and try to come up with recommendations (Population of India, 2018).

2. STATE APPROACH AND POLICY

The issue of inevitable overpopulation has been foreseen since the beginning the last century by a limited number of intellectuals, who advocated for birth control (Kumar 1976). After gaining independence, the government put an emphasis on raising awareness of different family planning through local institutions. The first Indian Family Planning program was initiated in 1952 with the plan to achieve zero growth rate by the 21st century, however its results turned out to be less successful compared to China, where strict coercive policies can be applied, although Indian government has also restored to coerced sterilization. Despite the huge diversity among the people living in India, big families are generally favoured and opposed to the modern methods of contraception. The Fourth Plan of the Indian government aimed to reduce birth rate to 25 per 1000 persons by 1980-81 by raising the social acceptability of small families, as there existed the idea that large families are happy, as opposed to the small ones, by raising awareness of family planning methods both in rural and urban areas, and by providing couples with various birth control items. In order to achieve its proposed objectives, the National Population Policy has raised the marriage ages, promote female education, create positive incentives for sterilisation etc. Even though sterilisations have been widely pursued, as the country has 37% of females undergoing these surgeries (Burke, 2014), there are number of problems to them. First of all, this number is misleading because many women decide sterilise only after having as many children as they wanted and at a late age for reproduction (U.S. Congress 1992). The compulsory sterilisations followed after The National Emergency in 1975, made this option less popular among Indians. There is also the issue of safety, as reportedly these surgeries are done improperly and have fatal outcome. Moreover, sterilisations are very unpopular among men and are perceived disgraceful and almost non-existent, when compared to the female numbers (Bhuyan 2016). There are beliefs that “using a contraception reduces a man’s masculinity” and “contraception impairs the health of working men”, which limits the use of contraception to the women, as they are the ones who bear children (Nath and Nayar n.d). From 1990s’ tried to embrace the principles of UN Cairo conference on Population and Development, namely improving education, health care system and diversification of birth control methods instead of putting contraception targets (United Nations 2014). The 2000 National Population Policy proposes to address the needs for health care infrastructure, personnel, child and reproductive care and contraceptives as its immediate objective and to have a stabilised population by 2045 with a zero growth rate. The government popularizes small families by passing laws limiting the possibility of state officials to only two children, as exemplary to their constituencies. It has also tried to discourage big families by denying benefits to third and more children.

3. UNDERLYING FACTORS AND IMPLICATIONS

The causes of the overpopulation can be put in different categories, which combined represent the cause of this destructive phenomena. One of these issues is represented by the early marriage. The origins of child marriage in India are deeply rooted into its historical and cultural background. Early marriages were made backwards societies in order to maximize the chances of survival of the children due the high rate of mortality. Therefore it was advantageous for the Indian people and also to other cultures to marry at a young age. Nevertheless, child marriages

also created further economic, political and social relations due to the high rate of poverty and by the fact that sometimes the only chance of survival for a family was to marry the daughter and have one less mouth to feed. The role of woman in the Indian society is defined by their deeply rooted culture, which gives women a lower social status than to men. This cultural factor has a very large influence upon the development of society from many points of view. Firstly, since the women have a lower social status than men, families struggle to give a male heir, therefore they tend to produce as many children as it takes until one of them will be born a male. Therefore, the family is enlarged rapidly, without taking into consideration the economic issues regarding their welfare. This act of increasing the number of family members in order to have a male heir has a negative effect upon its lineage. When the family realizes that has no possibility to sustain economically, decides to give into marriage one of the young daughters, in order to obtain economic stability in the family. In this case, the family of the bride receives different kind of material reward from the groom's family. This practice is widespread all over India, especially in rural areas, but can lead to domestic violence affecting the bride. It is considered that the younger bride is more valuable than an older one, because it can contribute more to the family of the groom, that is why the prices offered for the young brides are higher than for those for example who are older than 18 and have a legal marrying age (Vogelstein, 2013).

In India the poverty and illiteracy are the second biggest factors for the overpopulation phenomena. India's high population growth is another factor which maintains the rate of poverty and vice-versa, poverty sustains overpopulation. One of the reasons why this is happening is because of the Indian economic stagnation. The productivity rate in the agricultural sector is not increasing due to the farming methods of the population. Millions of people are able to survive only relying on farming, and knowing that the Indian arable land is too small in comparison with the population's desired exploitation quota, farming becomes less efficient. Farmers are not able, due to the high population density, to farm larger areas of land, this is why each farmer is limited to less than 1 hectare. The low efficiency in productivity of these small individual farms hampers the growth of hiring opportunities. To the contrary, as the family continues to grow, but the available land mass remains unchanged, the resources have to be shared between many, lowering both the efficiency and the family's income per capita.

In order to achieve the necessary self-sufficiency levels, many people choose to migrate from the rural to urban areas, where they can find jobs only in mass-production factories, many of them in the textile sector. These jobs are unstable due to their profit-oriented strategies, neglecting the employees' needs and workplace security which can often lead to accidents and disasters.

The problem complicates further when also failing to succeed in the cities, the families continue to expand in order to create more workforce able to economically sustain the family. And the cycle goes on. This method of family expansion, is leading to the faulty enlargement of the cities, which are unable to provide the population with an economically stable job supply, therefore the overpopulation in the urban areas leads to unsatisfiable job demand and to the urbanization of poverty.

The situation is aggravated by the flow of foreign workers coming from even poorer countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh or Nepal. As they agree to take jobs on less favorable conditions than is the minimum for the Indians, the migrants take over a part of low income jobs, thus limiting the opportunities for Indians. As they settle down, the immigrants create families and further contribute to the overpopulation (Rothbard, 2012). This process is accelerated by the climate change as ecological migrants constitute a considerable part of the inflow (Boas, 2015).

Another threat to the overpopulation, closely related to poverty is the lack of proper education and high rate of illiteracy. Many Indians are not going to school due to the low social status of families and poverty, but also because of the lack of the necessary educational infrastructure which is negatively influenced by the high birth rate. Therefore the government is not capable of keeping up with this pace of education demand. As a side effect, children also miss out on sexual education, which later translates into issues regarding family planning (Solomon, 2014).

One of the biggest effects which come with the overpopulation is the increasing of unemployment. Regardless the numerous opportunities provided by the developing country, the state is unable to provide a job for every job seeker. The rapid increase of population has created dis-equilibrium between the population and the food supplies. This results in the increase of health problems caused by malnutrition and affects the productivity of the population. As in this conditions it becomes harder to properly sustain a family, the standard of living is constantly decreasing (Dumas, 1987). Even if people cannot afford to sustain families with large number of members, they continue to reproduce, in order to assure the survival of the family by producing more workforce and hoping for a bigger income (Jain et al. 2009).

The alternative for those left out from the job market or simply those who want to make more profit is entrepreneurship which is very popular in India. The biggest problem in this regard is the bureaucracy. Because of the long and complicated paperwork and the high chances of being turned down, some prefer to establish their affairs illegally. The economic problem comes when these illegal merchants enter into a direct competition with the legally established small businesses on a more favorable terms by evading taxes and regulation. This way the illegal businesses not only contribute to the expansion of black and shadow markets which hampers the adequate economic policy making but also makes it harder for legal small businesses to stay in the market. The growth of population results in an automatic raise of the jobseekers number who influence the stagnating productivity in a negative way, leading to the increasing of product prices on the market as a response to the growing demand (Kachru, 2011; Tiwary, 2007).

Last, but not least, we must mention the inefficient utilization of resources which has serious consequences in a medium and long term, and which contributes to the economic stagnation, hence to the stagnation of poverty. Due to the overpopulation, efficient utilization of resources is extremely hard of a challenge to accomplish in a country like India. The natural resources of the state are under overexploitation because of the rising demand of the growing population (Verma, 2016).

One effect of the overpopulation, regarding the exploitation of the natural resources is the inefficient production method which is not in harmony with the demand. The majority of people from the agricultural sector continuously try to produce for themselves on small parcels of land even if it doesn't ensure a sustainable survival of the family. Another problem in this regard is the high demand of products which automatically brings higher prices. Thanks to the increasing prices, the poor families will choose firstly to grow in size, in order to make profit from the larger number of labor force.

Concluding on these influencing factors and their effect brought by the phenomena of overpopulation, enough evidence has been presented to claim that these factors are interdependent and correlated, creating a chain of reactions with short and long term implications.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper proposes three methods of addressing India's demographic problem – education, women empowerment, industrialization.

The National Policy for Empowerment of Women marked a diversification of population policy from control to family welfare and women empowerment. Among other ways of achieving this are the vocational training schemes for girls, which have the possibility to fundamentally alter the logic behind India's family planning, and shows explicitly how women empowerment can be useful in this regard. As already mentioned, family planning has been driven by economic need and the desire to have sons. As daughters get married to ease the financial burden of the family, making women employable sources of income will not only discourage early marriages but also raise their bargaining power in family, therefore also in the matters regarding family planning. Murthi (1995) demonstrate how female literacy and labor force participation have a correlation to fertility rates (Murthi et al, 1995). Dyson and Moore (1983) have demonstrated how women autonomy explains the demographic differences between the North and the South of India (Dyson and Moore, 1983). Even though this seems an effective method, the limitation imposed by the patriarchal primacy in many traditional and rural societies, where the issue of overpopulation is even more accentuated, has to be taken into consideration in order to design long term policies and avoid unnecessary backlashes.

The second key, we find, lays in education. Providing proper education for as many people as possible in India would be one of the most important step the government could make in order to reduce the pace of overpopulation and its implications. Education provided by the competent institutions would illuminate and inform the students not only about the effects of the unhealthy reproduction, but also prepare children for responsible family planning and create ground for change in societal attitude regarding family norms. This way, the sexual and family education provided for the students may alter their understanding of sustainable family and help them plan for themselves a better future. Apart from sexual and family aspects, education in general lays ground for economic change, diverting the concentration of workforce from unskilled labor to specialized profitable sectors.

As we can see, education can contribute to the solution of India's overpopulation problem in two ways; firstly by directly educating on the matters of sexual life and family planning, and secondly by addressing poverty with the help of educated, skilled workforce and the diverted economic development path. This approach and recommendation for population growth rate control is based on consistent research showing that educated societies are inclined to have fewer children and bear them at an older age. At the same time, thanks to the public support and appreciation for education, these people positively contribute to the economic growth of their communities (Reading 2011).

The third recommendation of this paper addressing overpopulation is boosting the temp and the scale of industrialization in India and specifically of those regions where the fertility rates are extremely high. Though India is considered a developing country overall, the diversity in the level of development, industrialization and modernization is striking, which we find as one of the reasons of uncontrolled population growth. This line of thinking and the recommendation thereof finds its roots in the United Growth Theory. The proponents of the theory propose several channels how industrialization negatively correlates to the fertility rates (Galor & Weil, 2000;

Doepke 2004). It does so by increasing the potential return benefits of investing in human (children) capital, which limits parents in their capacities to sustain quantity as they tend to choose quality. Child labor becomes less beneficial as industrialization pushes towards centralized production with simultaneous application of more rigorous child labor rights. Urbanization, as a consequence of industrialization, raises the costs of child bearing which also negatively influences fertility rates. We do not attempt to claim that all of these channels will play out in India, as different sociocultural environments adapt to such changes according to their structural circumstances. For example in France industrialization altered the fertility rates by its effect on human capital formation (Franck & Galor, 2015), as opposed to South Carolina, where the increased costs of raising a child explains the best the decline in fertility (Wanamaker, 2010). Modernization of rural areas through industrialization is highly likely to bring about change in the customs and perceptions of family planning and change the cost opportunity of parents choosing quality over quantity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this paper has been to present the evolving situation of India's overpopulation problem. As the reader could have observed, we have not drawn a particular linear or cyclic cause-effect picture, because of the highly interdependent nature of the socioeconomic factors around overpopulation issue. Instead, we tried to present the bigger picture of the problem revising the state policy, demonstrating the role of cultural norms that drive population growth, and the implications this has on the demographics and the economy of India. The issue has entered and remained in the agenda of the Indian governments after the independence, starting with an accent on contraceptives and later shifting to education, improved health care system and the diversified birth control methods. The issues of socio-economic backwardness, early marriages and family norms, lack of adequate health care infrastructure and education are among the major factors and implications that aggravate India's population problem. There is a repeating pattern of poor families making more children for number of reasons - creating more workforce in order to improve family's economic state; having male heirs; securing themselves in old age in the absence of adequate social security system – reasons largely based on erroneous calculations and family planning that usually further deteriorates the problems that they had tried to solve. This paper has proposed three long term recommendations that, in the authors' view have the potential to bring fundamental change to India's population growth trends. These are women empowerment, education, and industrialization. By empowering women it is possible to change their perception in the family and society and give them a bigger say in family planning. Education offers two paths towards lowering fertility rates – responsible family planning through sexual education and increase in the level of education in general, which can ease poverty, one of the driving forces of overpopulation. And finally industrialization has the potential to alleviate the issue by increasing the benefits of investment in human capital, restricting child labor regulations, rising the costs of child bearing etc. Based on the arguments that explain the factors and implications of the phenomena, these three recommendations provide necessary ground for addressing India's overpopulation.

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