

Increasing Population of India – Boon or Bane

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Abstract

As India is set to overtake China as the world's most populous country sometime in mid-2023, should we be worried? It can't be explained in a clearly binary way — a boon or a bane, though. Instead, it's a mixture of them — a combination of opportunities and responsibilities. To explore the impact of such a "paradigm shift," one must first gain some insight into the underlying dynamics of the Indian population.

Keywords: Indian Population, Boon, Bane, opportunities, problems, Government, plannings.

Introduction

The topic has come to focus as India will be the world's most populous country in 2023, surpassing China. According to the latest World Population Prospects report, it may go up to 1.429 billion next year when China's would be 1.426 billion.

The recent State of World Population (SOWP) report of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is titled "8 Billion Lives, Infinite Possibilities," and Andrea Wojnar, the Representative UNFPA India, has described "India's 1.4 billion people as 1.4 billion opportunities."

Context

- By mid-2023, India is expected to surpass China as the most populous country.
- As this can be a great demographic advantage than a serious concern, India must focus on exploiting benefits from the available demographic dividend.

When will India surpass China?

- United Nation reports suggest that India will have a population of 142.86 crore by mid-2023, which is 2.9 million higher than China's population of 142.57 crore.
- Considering the limited information for both China and India, especially in the absence of the Census 2021, it is difficult to predict the exact date on which India will surpass China and become the most populous nation.

Is the change in demographic order a Boon or Bane?

Whether this change in demographic order will prove to be a burden or resource largely depends on the following points:

- Population is a resource as long as the country's carrying capacity is intact.

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- Carrying capacity does not refer to only per capita availability of natural resources. It is dynamic and changes with changing technology, the efficiency of production and consumption systems of a country.
- India is already at replacement level fertility with the total fertility rate (TFR) at 2.0 in 2023. This means two children are replacing their parents.
- This is an indication of the stabilisation of the population. However, it continues to experience positive growth, but in a decelerated mode until 2064, from which point it will become negative growth.
- The peak of India's population size will be around 169.6 crore in 2063.

It tells us about:

- Available support ratios in the form of the number of the working-age population (15-64 years).
- And, the dependent population (0-14 years and 65 years and above).
- With 68% of the working age population in 2023, the country continues to have a demographic window of opportunity for the next 35 years to reap an economic dividend.
- However, the availability of a demographic window of opportunity in itself will not automatically turn into economic dividend.

Mechanisms to translate the demographic bonus into economic dividend

- **Employment or Job Creation:** To realise the vision of demographic dividend becoming a reality India must generate sufficient and quality jobs for its working-age population.
- **Education and Skills Generation:** A skilled workforce is critical for better productivity of economic activity and reduces excessive public spending and helps in greater capital creation.
- **Focus on the Health of the Workforce:** Ensuring a healthy lifespan by preventing diseases and disabilities is an important mechanism that translates demographic opportunity into economic gains.
- **Good Governance:** Good governance should be reflected through conscientious policies that helps in creating a healthy environment for increasing the efficiency and productivity of the population.

India's opportunities from its demographic advantage

- **Potential to become a worldwide market**
 - With lower manufacturing costs due to a relatively cheaper workforce, India can become a worldwide market for both production and consumption. This is evident in India's IT sector.

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- India's opportunity must be looked at in comparison to the consequences of population decline and ageing across countries like Japan, China, the United States and other major economies.
- Opportunity to boost per capita GDP: Available demographic opportunity in the form of a greater share of the working-age population has the potential to boost per capita GDP by an additional 43% by 2061.

Areas of concerns for India

- In Indian perspective, a total fertility rate of less than 1.8 may not be economically beneficial. This is because once fertility tends to decline, it is hard to reverse it.
- Therefore, drastic population control methods run the risk of inducing forced population ageing, which would result in the nation "getting old before getting rich".
- The invisible and unsustainable production, consumption, and unequal distribution, rather than the visible population size, are what are inflicting greater harm and economic devastation.

Instead of population control the government should focus on:

- **The policies that support an enabling environment** that can provide high-quality education, good health care, respectable employment opportunities, good infrastructure, and gender empowerment.
- If India falls short in this, its "demographic dividend" can become a "demographic disaster".

Young Population

The median age of India's population is 28.2 years. An average Indian is 10 years younger than the average Chinese, whose median age is 39 years, and also an average North American, whose median age is 38.4. India's growth story may be becoming more and more entwined with its young population because more than two-thirds of its population is of working age. The young Indians might also serve as the largest consumer and labour source in the knowledge and network goods economy.

The challenge is not about how to contain the population but about **how the government exploits the population growth to its best economic advantages** i.e. how the government trains this large young population to make it productive, effective, competent and contributing to the economic growth.

The challenge in the next 15 years for the Indian government is **to raise the economic status of India from being a low middle income country to at least a high middle income country.**

- For this, the government needs to take necessary steps in creating the economic growth momentum by ensuring that investments are adequately made in key infrastructure areas,

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particularly social infrastructure like education, water and health so that a demographic dividend does not become a demographic liability or disaster.

The requirement of creating so many jobs will not be a challenge if the economy starts growing at a faster rate.

Population Explosion as a Boon: Any country's development relies a lot on its human resources. Without human resources, it is difficult to progress. A country needs both unskilled and skilled labour for complete development. India, being the second most populated country has vast potential for human resource. The more the population, the more is the scope for utilization of human resources. Instead of developing one sector, many sectors can develop simultaneously as there is manpower for the same. Population explosion becomes a boon as it pushes development in such cases.

Population Explosion as a Bane: In a country like India, it is very difficult to implement all the welfare programmes to the grass root levels. As a result, the rich become richer while the poor become poorer. The middle class benefits the most, but the poorest are left out. Population increase in such a case becomes a burden because there is no utilization of human resources. On the other hand, there is increased pressure on limited resources. Many times, it can lead to crimes. Population explosion becomes a bane in such cases as it holds back the development of a society.

Conclusion

As the country with the largest population in the world, there are advantages and disadvantages. India's younger population, however, results in higher support ratios because there are fewer diseases, disabilities, and caregiving responsibilities. If the younger population get education and skill in time, Indian population will definitely become a boon because Indian brains are already accepted worldwide which is evident from the Indian who are at prime posts in top multinational companies since many years and this trend is continuous and can be enhanced in future.

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