

## **1. The Country's Population can be an Asset: it is not a Liability**

### **Context:**

- ▶▶ Our honourable Prime Minister in his recent address to the nation on Independence Day, said that a “population explosion”—posed a formidable challenge to our future.

### **The Suggested and the Prevailing View:**

- ▶▶ Responsible citizens with small families, who contribute to their own welfare and to the good of the nation are seen as role models.
- ▶▶ Parents should think about their capacity to provide for education and healthcare before extending their families.
- ▶▶ Small families are in the national interest.
- ▶▶ Governments, at the Centre and in the states, should bring supportive schemes.

### **Challenges with the Prevailing view:**

- ▶▶ This is a belief system that dominated thinking 50 years ago. Family planning was the buzzword.
- ▶▶ Governments provided proactive support.
- ▶▶ The Emergency culminated in the compulsory sterilization program. It led to widespread resistance and resentment among people.
- ▶▶ Such thinking did not recognize the economic or demographic factors underlying rapid population growth.
- ▶▶ It is important to understand the population issue in a new and correct context.

### **Old Thinking:**

- ▶▶ The belief that India will remain poor because its population is growing is based on a simple logic of arithmetic.
- ▶▶ The larger the population, as a denominator, the smaller the per capita availability of everything.

### **New Thinking:**

- ▶▶ This reasoning does not recognize that India's population might be growing too rapidly because it is poor.
- ▶▶ For the poor, children are a source of supplementing family income when parents are young, and of financial support in old age.

- ▶▶ High infant mortality rates only strengthen the motivation for more children.
- ▶▶ Population growth rates are always high in the early stages of development because of demographic factors.
- ▶▶ As death rates drop because of improvements in public health systems that eliminate epidemic diseases, birth rates do not because poverty and illiteracy persist.
- ▶▶ As income levels rise, poverty is reduced and literacy spreads, birth rates also come down.
- ▶▶ As development leads to higher income levels, birth rates decline further to levels that merely replace the existing population.
- ▶▶ Such demographic transitions are integral to development processes.
- ▶▶ At later stages, in rich countries, birth rates might drop further so that their population declines.

### India: A Case Study:

- ▶▶ The demographic transition in India has been much slower than elsewhere in Asia because poverty and illiteracy persist and the public provision of education and healthcare has been grossly inadequate.
- ▶▶ The average annual rate of population growth, which was 2.1% in 1951-1971 and 2.2% in 1971-1991, dropped to 1.8% in 1991-2011 and 1.3% in 2011-2016.
- ▶▶ Birth rates dropped from 37 in 1971 and 29 in 1991 to 22 in 2011 and 19 in 2016, while fertility rates dropped from 5.2 and 3.6 to 2.4 and 2.3, respectively.
- ▶▶ Projections in the Economic Survey 2019 suggest that average annual population growth in India will slow progressively to 1.1% during 2011-2021, 0.7% in 2021-2031 and 0.5% in 2031-2041.
- ▶▶ The fertility rate will drop to 1.8 in 2021 and 1.7 in 2031.
- ▶▶ The natural replacement level fertility rate is 2.1 – an Indian woman would have to give birth on average to 2.1 children for the population size to remain constant.
- ▶▶ In India, given the sex ratio, with more men than women compared to the natural level, the replacement rate would need to be higher.

### India's Hope about Future:

- ▶▶ India's population will continue to grow at progressively slower rates because of the relatively high proportion of young people in our population.
- ▶▶ Though our population will begin to age significantly in about a decade, the number of working-age people (20-59 years) and their share in the total population will continue to increase for more than two decades and peak at 59% in 2041.
- ▶▶ For low-income countries with high underemployment, a large population is an asset rather than a liability.

- ▶▶ The high proportion of young people in the population will mean an increase in our workforce if a higher proportion of women enter the workforce.
- ▶▶ It will also mean an increase in savings rates for some time, as young people save while the old do not.
- ▶▶ This source of economic growth will not be available to many Asian countries as their workforce contracts. They would have to rely on productivity increases to sustain growth.

### Way Forward:

- ▶▶ We can harness this demographic dividend only through education that creates capabilities among our people.
- ▶▶ There need not be an worry that a population explosion will lead to an uneducated and unhealthy society because the causation runs in the opposite direction.
- ▶▶ Instead, focus should be on providing education and healthcare. This would make our large population a source of rapid economic growth, which could bring about a profound change in the well-being of people.

**Source: Livemint**

