

**Programme:** Master in Sociology  
Postgraduate Department of Sociology,  
Patna University

**Semester II**

**Course: CC-6 (Sociology of Population Studies)**  
**Unit-III (Part A) Trends of Population Growth**

**Learning Objectives:**

- To understand the trends of population growth in India.

**Introduction:**

India is one of the most populous countries of the world. The population of India is second only to China. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, the population of India was estimated to be 1,387,297,452 people. Population growth affects country's development in both positive and negative manner. Thus the study of population growth and changes in population growth has become important aspect of demographic studies. This section of Unit-III would be focusing on the trends of population growth in India.

**Growth of Indian Population since 1901:**

India ranks second in the world next only to China in respect of population. India's landscape is 2.4% of the total world, but its population is approximately 17.7% of the world population (5.35 billion in 1991). This indicates the problem of overpopulation as India doesn't have so much of national income to support such a huge population.

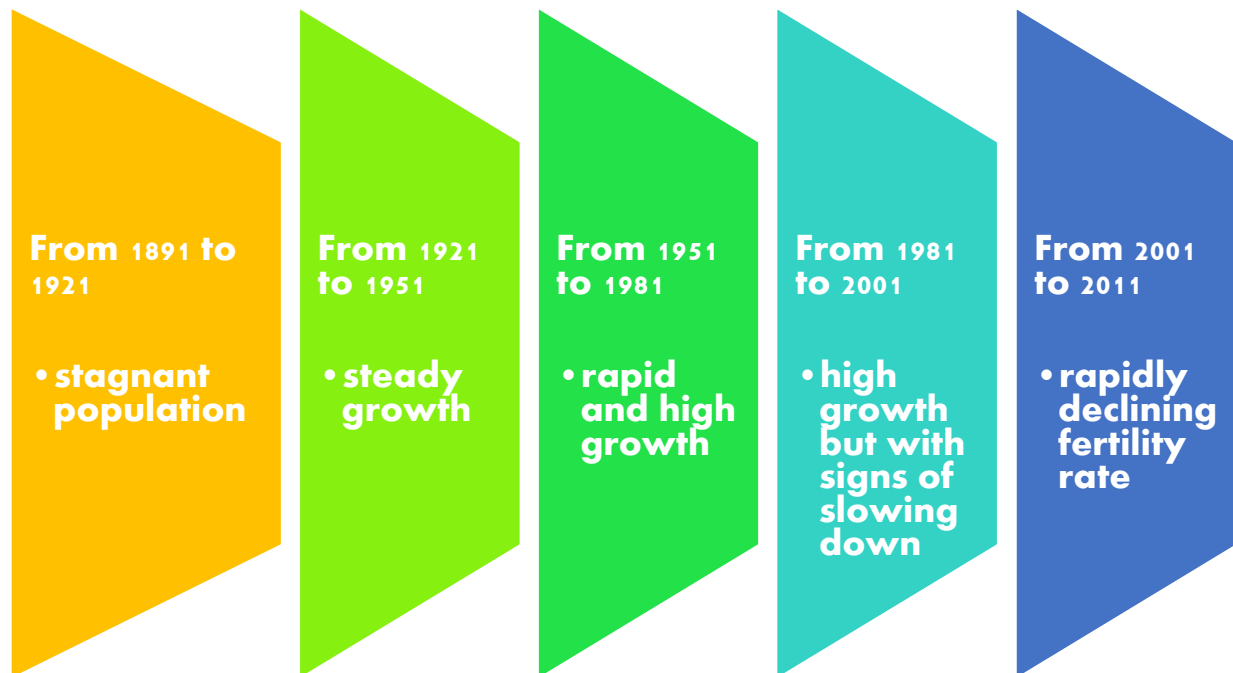
India's population is 102,70,15,247 (more than 102 crore or 1,027 million) according to 1991 census. There have been significant demographic divided as far as trends in population growth are concerned as we can see in the tables below. These significant turning points are the census years 1921, 1951 and 1981.

**Table 1: India: Trends of Population Growth (1901-2001)**

Census Year	Population	Decadal Growth		Change in decadal growth		Average annual exponential growth rate (percent)	Progressive growth rate Over 1901 (percent)
		Absolute	Percent	Absolute	Percent		
1901	23,83,96,327	-	-	-	-	-	-
1911	25,20,93,390	1,36,97,063	5.75	-	-	0.56	5.75
1921	25,13,21,213	-7,72,177	-0.31	-1,44,69,240	-6.05	-0.03	5.42
1931	27,89,77,238	2,76,56,025	11.0	2,84,28,202	11.31	1.04	17.02
1941	31,86,60,580	3,96,83,342	14.22	1,20,27,317	3.22	1.33	33.67
1951	36,10,88,090	4,24,27,510	13.31	27,44,168	-0.91	1.25	51.47
1961	43,92,34,771	7,81,46,681	21.64	3,57,19,171	8.33	1.96	84.25
1971	54,81,59,652	10,89,24,881	24.80	3,07,78,200	3.16	2.22	129.94
1981	68,33,29,097	13,51,69,445	24.66	2,62,44,564	-0.14	2.20	186.64
1991	84,64,21,039	16,30,91,942	23.87	2,79,22,497	-0.79	2.14	255.05
2001	1,02,87,37,436	18,23,16,397	21.54	1,92,24,455	-2.33	1.95	331.47

Source: India 2005, A Reference Annual, p.8.

The trend of growth of population of India can be divided into five distinct phases:



### ***1. From 1891 to 1921: stagnant population***

During most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century India witnessed sporadic, irregular and slow growth of population which drifted into 20<sup>th</sup> century until 1921. Thus the population growth during this period can be termed more or less stagnant when compared to the growth rates observed during the consequent periods. The high birth rate was counterbalanced by high death rate. During this first phase i.e. 1891 to 1921 population of India grew from 236 million to 251 million. However the census year 1921 registered a negative growth rate of -0.31 percent which happened only once throughout the demographic history of India. It is because of this decline in place of rise in population that the year 1921 is considered to be '**year of great divide**' or say '**demographic divide**' population wise. The slow growth rate was because of high death rate of population which was the product of large scale abnormal deaths due to epidemics of influenza, plague, small pox, cholera, etc. Influenza alone claimed 12 million lives in 1918. Food shortages caused by severe droughts in 1911, 1913, 1915, 1918 and 1920 claimed their own toll. In addition, thousands of Indian soldiers lost their lives during the World War I (1914-1918). India can be said in **first stage of demographic transition** during this period.

### ***2. From 1921 to 1951: steady growth***

During the second phase i.e., 1921 to 1951, India's population increased from 251 million to 361 million (Table 1). This duration of 30 years has thus registered a growth of 47.3 percent. Therefore, this period is called the period of steady growth rate. During this period the compound growth rate of population was 1.22 percent per annum. This period was characterised by lower death rate due to improvement in health facilities and sanitation conditions after 1921. These developments helped in controlling epidemics like plague, cholera

and malaria. The crude death rate which stood at a high of 47 per thousand in 1921 declined to 27 per thousand in 1951 (see Table 2). On the contrary, the crude birth rate continued to stay at an abnormally high level and decline only to 40 per thousand in 1951 as against 48 per thousand in 1921. Decline in death rate was also achieved partly through the improvement in the distribution system as a result of improved transportation so that timely supplies of food could be made available to drought and famine stricken areas. The combined effect of these factors was that the population started increasing steadily. Since crude death rate declined considerably and crude birth rate remained very high, the population growth during this period is called *mortality induced* growth. India stepped into the second stage of demographic transition during this period.

**Table 2: India: Changing Birth Rates, Death Rates and Natural Increase, 1911-2001**

Year	Crude Birth rate per thousand	Crude Death rate per thousand	Natural rate of increase per thousand
1911	49	43	6
1921	48	47	1
1931	46	36	10
1941	45	31	14
1951	40	27	13
1961	42	23	19
1971	37	15	22
1981	34	12	22
1991	31	11	20
2001	26	9	17

**Note:** Birth and Death rates have been rounded off.

**Source:** Census of India 1991 and 2001.

### 3. From 1951 to 1981: rapid and high growth

After 1951, there was a steep fall in the mortality rate but the fertility remained stubbornly high. Therefore, this period experienced very high rate of population growth and is often referred to as *the period of population explosion*. As a matter of fact the birth rate increased from 40 per thousand in 1951 to 42 per thousand in 1961 and stayed at 34 per thousand in 1981. However, it fell to 26 per thousand in 2001. In contrast death rate fell rapidly from 27 per thousand in 1951 to 9 per thousand in 2001. Consequently the natural rate of growth, which fell slightly from 14.0 per thousand in 1941 to 13 per thousand in 1951 rose steeply to 22 per thousand in 1971 and remained at the same level in 1981 also. During the third phase, the population of India went up to 683.3 million (in 1981) from 361.09 million (in 1951) recording an increase of 89.36 percent in a short span of thirty years. The compound annual growth rate per annum was 2.14 during this period. This unprecedented growth rate was due to the accelerated developmental activities and further improvement in health facilities. The living conditions of the people improved enormously. Death rates declined much faster than the birth rates (Table 2). This situation resulted in high natural increase. Thus, it was *fertility induced growth*.

### 4. From 1981 to 2001: high growth but with signs of slowing down

The last phase of 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., the period between census years 1981 and 2001 is known as the period of high growth with definite signs of slowing down. Although the rate of growth was still very high, it started declining after 1981. The highest ever growth rate of 2.22 percent

was recorded in 1971 which continued in 1981 also. It declined to 2.14 percent in 1991 and further to 1.95 percent in 2001 (Table 1). This declining trend marks the beginning of the new era in the country's demographic history. During this period, birth rate declined rapidly, from 34 per thousand in 1981 to 26 per thousand in 2001 (Table 2). Declining trend of death rate continued but at a slower rate. The difference between birth and death rates narrowed to 17. This declining trend is a positive indicator of the official efforts of birth control and people's own inclination to opt for smaller families. It seems that the country has now reached a take-off stage in its demographic evaluation.

#### ***5. From 2001 to 2011: rapidly declining fertility rate***

Prior to 1921, India was in the first stage of demographic transition. But from 1921 onwards it has entered into the second stage of demographic transition in which the high growth potential of the population is being realised as a high actual growth of population. India is now in the fifth stage of demographic transition. During this stage, fertility rate has been declining rapidly. Total fertility rate for India has declined to 2.2 in 22 states of India according to the latest government data. The total fertility rate (TFR) has more than halved in both rural and urban areas falling even below the replacement level in the former where it is 1.7, down from 4.1 in 1971. In rural areas, TFR has fallen from 5.4 to 2.4 during the same period. The reason behind this rapidly declining fertility rate is higher education, increased mobility, late marriage, financially independent women and overall prosperity. Bihar, with the highest TFR of 3.2, had the maximum percentage of illiterate women at 26.8%, while Kerala, where the literacy rate among women is 99.3%, had among the lowest fertility rates. As more cities come up, people move for jobs and employment tenure gets shorter, TFR may fall further. India has entered a 37-year period of demographic dividend, which could spell faster economic growth and higher productivity. As such, the government needs to engineer its policies to take care of higher medical costs as the population ages and productivity shrinks.

#### **Conclusion:**

The story of population growth in India is fairly in tune with the classical theory of demographic transition. During most of the nineteenth century India witnessed a fluctuating but ultimately more or less a stagnant growth of population, which drifted into the twentieth century until 1921. Thereafter, country passed through successively all the phases of demographic transition and is now widely believed to have entered the final phases of demographic transition which is normally characterised by rapidly declining fertility. However, it is yet to be seen as to how long will this phase extend and when India will achieve a stable population. The National Population Policy (NPP) adopted by the Government of India in 2000 states that 'the long-term objective is to achieve a stable population by 2045; at a level consistent with the requirement of sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental protection.' Considering the significance of population control, World Population Day is celebrated on 11<sup>th</sup> July each year.

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