

POPULATION AGEING: MAGNITUDE AND RAMIFICATIONS

Dr Anagha Tendulkar Patil

Head and Associate Professor

Department of Sociology

Sophia College (Autonomous)

Abstract

Society is a growing mechanism. As society evolves; the various aspects of society are organically altered. One of the significant, but understated aspect with reference to society is the demographic aspect. This paper focusses on the phenomenon of Demographic Ageing. The size of the population of India is cited as a problem and impediment to growth and development by several scholars. Many interventions are designed to curtail the growth in population. However, the quality and pattern of the demographic design is equally important. This paper focuses on one of the emergent patterns in Indian demography, Population ageing. It elaborates on the concept and phenomenon of Population Ageing and comments on the probable consequences of it on Indian society.

Key Words:

Population Ageing, Indian Society, Measurement of Demographic Ageing

Introduction

Demography predominantly uses a quantitative paradigm to analyse features of population and predict upcoming trends. Working population, labour, and children below six years of age are the target groups of deliberations. While in the process, the scholars have come across a new scenario of a skewed growth in the size of the group of elderly and the situation certainly is attention worthy.

Population Ageing is defined as ‘The increasing proportion of older people within the total population’. (World Health Organization, 2003) It is an issue that is given serious attention to by all the developed countries. However, in Indian Sociological discourse the existence of the phenomenon of Population Ageing is not even acknowledged. India at present seems to be completely oblivious to it. Since the changes in demographic profile of the country lead to the

phenomenon of population ageing, the phenomenon is also referred to as Demographic Ageing.

On a global level, the phenomenon of population ageing was first discussed in 1982 when the United Nations organized the first world conference on ageing in Vienna. In simple terms, population ageing is the increase in the number of elderly in the total population. Population ageing, thus, is a counterpart to the population ‘youthening’ and the associated decline in the median age of the population. (UN, 1951, 1956, 1973: US bureau of the Census, May 1975) Broadly speaking, population ages in two ways — either as an impact of demographic changes at the base of the age pyramid because of the decline in fertility, which implies ageing at the base, or as an impact of improved mortality among older persons, which means ageing at the apex. It indicates a gradual but steady shift of the dependency burden from younger to older population on persons in productive ages over a span of time.

Population ageing is certainly different from individual ageing. Individual ageing is a continuous process; a person ages inexorably from the time of birth to the moment of death, whatever the form of lifecycle. Populations, however, can become older or younger depending on the age structure composition of the people. “To survive into old age is no longer an unanticipated privilege for a small minority of people, but an experience shared by the majority.” (Stokes, 1992:1)

Methodology

The paper is exploratory in nature. Through a descriptive secondary method of research, this paper studies the phenomenon of Population Ageing. There has been heavy reliance on already published articles about ageing and population ageing. Libraries and documentation Centres were visited. Electronic data base was extensively utilised.

Measurement of Population Ageing

The age of the population can be determined in several ways. In ‘Handbook of Indian Gerontology’

an extensive discussion on the measurement of population ageing is presented. (Ed. Ramamurthy, Jamuna, 2004) The most used index of ageing is merely head count ratio, i.e., the proportion of elderly (60 or 65 years and above) in the population.

Traditionally ageing of population is measured in different ways. Mean Age and Median Age are also utilized to understand the extent of population ageing. But the Mean and Median measures can evoke misleading results. Standardization regarding

ageing is potentially difficult if these measures are used across societies.

Discussion

Aging is common across the globe, but its manifestations are varied. The population of the world in 1995 was 5.7 billion; it is 7 billion as per the 2011 record and is expected to reach 9.4 billion by 2050. (UN, 1996) The percentage of elderly in the world population in 1995 was 9.5. It was recorded as 9.9% in 2000. It is estimated to reach 14.6% in 2025 and 20.7% in 2050. (UN, 1998)

Table 1 <u>Population of Aged across the Globe, 1995–2050</u>		
Year	Population (billion)	% aged 60+
1995	5.687	9.5
2000	6.091	9.9
2025*	8.039	14.6
2050*	9.367	20.7

*Source: United Nations, 1998. World population projections * Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.*

Across the world, Europe has the highest proportion of aged people. It is deemed to be the oldest world region demographically. Needless to say, by the same parameter Africa is the youngest in the world.

Anil Bagchi (2006) observes that the world map on aging shows a general north-south divide, which resembles the global distribution of wealth. Most youthful nations are generally associated with a low standard of living. The reverse is the case for the greying countries, with wealth and health as their national attributes.

The demographic scenario in Asia is transforming at an alarming pace. From 1950, Asia’s demographic transition has resulted in dramatic changes in the characteristics of the Asian population. Decline in total fertility and mortality rates and reduction in infant mortality rate have changed the Asian demographic scenario completely. Of course, it is important to remember that this picture is not representative of the whole of Asia. The Asian continent can be divided into three broad regions: South and Central Asia, South-East Asia, and East Asia. In the less developed countries of South and Central Asia and parts of South-East Asia where the rate of economic development is

considerably low, infant mortality is still high. Traditional beliefs and norms have kept fertility rates high and life expectancy has not improved. In such societies, the problem of ‘population aging’ does not prevail yet.

The countries of South-East and East Asia are experiencing rapid aging of their populations. In an effort to replicate the economic growth and prosperity of first world countries, certain Asian countries have achieved higher per capita income, improved standards of living, and increased level of education especially among women. Higher age at marriage, lower fertility, better awareness about health and sanitation, and better access to medical and life-saving facilities have led to a significant demographic shift: people are living longer and life expectancies have steadily risen in most of these countries. Moreover, the governments seem to reinforce low fertility in most countries for obvious economic and demographic reasons. The combination of low fertility and high life expectancy has consequently resulted in rapid aging of the population in Asian countries.

Countries that have begun to experience the initial tremors of population aging are largely unaware of the gravity of the grey explosion. They are not just

aging but their populations are aging faster than in other countries. The UN report 'Lifelong Preparation for Old Age in Asia and the Pacific' (1996) makes a reference to population aging as a worldwide phenomenon. It comments about the process happening much faster in Asia than in Europe or North America.

Japan has the oldest population in Asia and the most rapidly aging population in the world. Bangladesh, by contrast, has the youngest population of any major country in the region.

It would be appropriate to understand the dynamics of the demographic transition theory in this context. Before the onset of demographic transition, both birth and death rates are high. The growing population, which is due to the high birth rate, is checked by the high death rate leading to a relatively stable population. This stage is followed by the stage where due to the dramatic breakthrough in health and family planning technology as well as improved awareness about appropriate nutritional standards and fitness, the death rate drops with total population growth reaching a considerably high level. Eventually birth rate also drops but it takes a span of years for the population to stabilize. The length of the transition phase has a serious bearing upon the nature of the population. The quality and quantity of the population further determines the gravity of pressure on national resources and moreover the individual's access to it.

In Asia, the death rate fell rapidly in the decade after World War II. In the second half of the twentieth century, life expectancy increased by more than 20 years in all three of Asia's sub-regions. By 2050, India and China the two most populous countries will share the major proportion of the world's elderly. In India, according to census statistics, there were 12 million in the 60+ age group in 1901; it was 24.7 million in 1961. In 1991, it was reported to be 55.6 million and in the 2001 census, India had an elderly population of 76.6 million. In India, demographic aging is occurring at both levels, from the base and also from the apex. This implies that there is a decline of the population at age 0-14 years as well as increase in the population aged 60 and above, simultaneously.

Concluding Comments

The pace at which many countries in Asia are aging is a matter of great concern because of its anticipated social, economic, and political implications. Asian countries have limited time at their disposal to prepare for the inevitable

consequences of population aging. Moreover, they have several financial challenges to face along with handling the increasing number of elderly. The cultural context is changing rapidly, and the process of urbanization is proving detrimental to the current esteemed status.

Most aging countries in Asia have a handicap in the form of weak administrative and financial structures. The political structure is not strong and stable enough to look after its aged population. One can witness varying levels of social and economic development which have remarkable implications for the growth and structure of the Asian population.

Bibliography

- Bagchi, Anil. (2006) The Ageing World. Dorling Kindersley (India) Pvt. Ltd. and Pearson Education in South India.*
- Bose, Ashish. (2001) Population of India 2001 Census Results and Methodology. B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi.*
- Census of India. (1971) Population Of India An Analysis of the 1971 Census Data. Brought out by Registrar General, New Delhi, India.*
- Census of India. (1981) Population Of India An Analysis of the 1981 Census Data. Brought out by Registrar General, New Delhi, India.*
- Census of India. (1991) Population Of India An Analysis of the 1991 Census Data. Brought out by Registrar General, New Delhi, India.*
- Census of India. (2011) Population Of India An Analysis of the 2011 Census Data. Brought out by Registrar General, New Delhi, India.*
- Census of India. (1991) Ageing Population Of India An Analysis of the 1991 Census Data. Brought out by Registrar General, New Delhi, India.*
- Chakraborti, Rajagopal. D. (2004) The Greying of India [Population Ageing in the Context of Asia]. Sage Publication.*
- East- West Centre: (2002) The Future of Population in Asia. Honolulu, Hawaii.*
- Open University. (1979) Ageing in Society Block 1- An Ageing Population. The Open University Press.*
- Open University. (1979) Assisted Independence Block 4- An Ageing Population. The Open University Press.*

Rajan, Irudaya. S. Mishra, U.S., Sarma, Sankara. P. (1999). *Indias Elderly: Burden or Challenge*. Sage Publications.

Ramamurthi, P.V. & Jamuna, D. (2004) *Handbook of India Gerontology*. Serial Publications, New Delhi.

Stokes, Graham. (1992) *On Being Old The Psychology of Later Life*. The Falmer Press.

United Nations: Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *The Ageing: Trends and Policies UN*, New York, 1975.

United Nations: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific. *Lifelong Preparation For Old Age In Asia and The Pacific*. New York, 1996.

United Nations: Dept. of International Economic and Social Affairs. *Ageing and Urbanization. Proceedings of the United Nations International Conference on Ageing populations in the context of Urbanization*. Sendai (Japan). New York: 1991.

United Nations: Dept. for Economic and Social Information and policy analysis. *Ageing and The Family. Proceedings of the United Nations International Conference on Ageing Populations in the Context of the Family*. Kitakyushu (Japan). New York, 1994.

United Nations: Dept. for Economic and Social Information and policy analysis. *Ageing. Proceedings of the United Nations International Conference on Ageing Populations*. 1998.

United Nations: Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs. *World Population Ageing (WPA)*. 2002.

United Nations: *The World Ageing Situation: Strategies and Policies*. United Nations, New York, 1985.