

Case Study: Malthus Still Stands Tall in Over-Population Debates and Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

According to Census 2011, the population of India was 1.21 billion and that of Uttar Pradesh was 1.99 million. Gradually the population increased. In fact, the increase of population in Uttar Pradesh has been so much that the state had to introduce a Population Bill draft titled 'UTTAR PRADESH POPULATION (CONTROL, STABILIZATION AND WELFARE) BILL, 2021. The draft bill in simpler words states that if a married couple now propagates to have more than 2 children then he/she won't be entitled to subsidies/benefits under government schemes. This Bill aims to bring the state's total fertility rate viz. the number of children per woman to 2.1% from the existing 2.7%. The total fertility rate of the Muslim community in Uttar Pradesh in 2015-16 was 3.10 and that for the Hindu community was 2.67. Based on these numbers assumptions were made that this bill is targeting a certain section of society. The idea of population explosion has been popularized by Thomas Robert Malthus through his infamous essay Theory of Population (1798). This paper would attempt to critically analyze Malthus' theory and how it has been challenged ad nauseam. The paper will focus on the theories of Malthus, William Godwin, Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and others. After analyzing all the relevant population theories including Neo-Malthusian theories, their criticism as well as real-world application this paper would see how relevant they are to the present UP Population Bill. It will also analyze a point that is left out from the bill viz. female foeticide and female infanticide. It would conclude by studying whether it is suitable for pan-India implication or will the policy fail again as it did in the past?

INTRODUCTION

According to the Census 2011, the population of India is 1.21 billion. Over the years, it has only grown. According to Worldometer which is one of the most trusted sources worldwide for statistics, the current population of India is close to touching 1.4 billion. The population of India according to the Census of 1951 (The closest to India's independence) was 36,10,88,090 and that of 2011 was 1,21,08,54,977.

If we compare the population of India then versus now, the population has grown threefold and more. If we look at just Uttar Pradesh, the population in 1951 was 60,273,743, and that in 2011 was 199,812,341 meaning that it has three folded as well in approximately 60 years. This high growth rate has made people think that India, as well as Uttar Pradesh, is over-populated already and

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people continue to procreate more offspring which is further worsening the crisis as there are no checks or balances to keep the procreation under control.

Aims

- To understand India's initiatives to tackle/prevent explosion of population
- To analyse the Population Myth given by Malthus and observing why it became a myth by analysing the critiques that it attracted
- To analyse how Malthus' Theory has found its way in the UP Population Bill 2021
- To analyse how socio-political concerns that were left out of the bill such as female infanticide will affect the population of the state if it gets implemented
- To find out whether this is suitable for a Pan-India implication or not

METHODOLOGY

Doctrinal as well as empirical research has been used for this paper. The reason for using doctrinal approach was to tend to the need to have a coherent understanding of the UP Population Bill, Malthusian theory and its critiques without having any form of biased approach. Books, journals, case observations made by the learned Judges were analyzed for Doctrinal approach.

The reason for using empirical method was to tend to the need to understand the practical implication, opinion of the people whose lives will be affected if this bill gets implemented. After studying similar cases, the views, opinion and the possible first-hand experience of the people was important to understand whether this bill is suitable for a Pan-India implication or not. Therefore, both methods was needed and used to provide a well-rounded approach to the subject. Interviews, surveys were conducted to understand people's opinions on the subject.

India's measures to tackle Overpopulation

India has been taking steps to tackle such a high level of procreation since the mid 20th century. India became one of the first nations in the whole world

to initiate an official family planning plan as early as 1952 when it came up with the First Five Year Plan. Since then, till now, India has been trying to continue the efforts to prevent a population explosion. These 5-year plans were not that effective till the 1980s even after investing a lot into it. The then Prime Minister of India, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in his inaugural lecture to the XXI International Population Congress in 1989 noted that there was an "inadequate casual family planning program and the impact of these on our birth rates." He further said that "the rate of increase in financial outlays in family planning is not matched by a commensurate decline in birth rates."

However, as time progressed, these continuous efforts appeared to give proper results towards the 2000s, as the contraceptive usage in married women went from 13% in 1965 to around 48% in 2009. The total fertility rate of India in 1960 stood at around 6 children per woman but, by 2010, it plummeted to 2.1 children per woman which was a huge drop. In 2016, the total fertility rate of Uttar Pradesh alone stood at 2.7 children per woman. The controversial Uttar Pradesh Population Bill, if implemented, seeks to bring that rate down to 2.1.

To maintain the equilibrium when it comes to population then, the Two-Child Policy is widely appreciated as it maintains the population in such a way that there is no addition or subtraction to the population as a result of family planning. Still, the balance might fluctuate but, it will only be due to other reasons such as medical reasons or famine or pandemic, or catastrophes like that. This is one of the prime reasons as to why the Government of India has set a target of total fertility rate at the replacement rate i.e., 2.1. This way, India won't see a population shortage or explosion and it'll keep on running smoothly.

Theory of Overpopulation is new?

The topic of overpopulation is not new for the world and certainly isn't too old as debates on this topic over the years have only increased. In 1798, the first edition of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* got published anonymously. In a way, it solidified the pre-existing ideas such as infinite human desires for social pleasure must be futile because population increase will always outpace production growth.

This essay became a topic of debate as it not only talked about and explained such controversial concepts but, also gave some relevant logic to prove them. The book as mentioned was published anonymously, however, later the author was identified as Thomas Robert Malthus (An English economist and demographer, specializing in the field of Poor laws on Population growth).

In 1804, Malthus revised it by shifting the focus of the essay from calculation to the actual theoretical part to prove that his theory was correct. To understand the population myth, we will first have to look at what the *Essay on the Principle of Population* said, and then we will look at its critiques to understand why it became a myth.

Malthus' Essay on Principle of Population

Thomas Robert Malthus' paper titled *An Essay on the Principle of Population* made a few significant arguments that attracted a lot of attention. Let us boil down those arguments to the most basic three put forth by him and look at each:

The population when unchecked, increases at a geometrical ratio but, the subsistence increases only in arithmetic ratio- The attraction between sexes and the urge to procreate is high in the society and it does not appear to be reducing anytime soon. Such passion and urge to procreate will lead to doubling the population every 25 years as it will grow at a geometrical ratio e.g. 1,2,4,8,16,32... Whereas, subsistence means the production of food increases only at an arithmetic ratio e.g. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7... where the common difference is 1.

The population must always be kept down when compared to the means of subsistence- The second point builds on the first, if the population isn't kept under the means of subsistence then it will outgrow subsistence's limit, and then the land will be overpopulated. If the geometric progression and arithmetic progression continues respectively then there will come a time after approximately 225 years, as Malthus argued that the population to subsistence will be 512 to 10. In 300 years the population to subsistence will be 4096 to 13 and in 2000 years the ratio will be incalculable. Therefore, for humans to survive, the population must always

be kept under the means of subsistence or a *Positive Check* such as a famine or pandemic will occur through which nature will maintain the balance between the aforementioned.

If Preventive check isn't used to control the population then *Positive Checks* will do the work- Preventive check, in simpler words means family planning, late marriage, and controlling the urge to procreate. Positive Checks on the other hand come into the frame when preventive checks are not applied and the population exceeds the means of subsistence then nature itself unleashes some kind of catastrophe such as famine, drought, plague, pandemic, etc. to bring the population at least to the level of subsistence. Positive checks back then used to harm the poor of society the most. The richer section of the society is capable enough to protect themselves from such events as much as possible, however, the same cannot be said about the poor.

These were the three most significant arguments put forth by Malthus in his essay. Even today, when someone talks about overpopulation from an informed point of view then the mention of Malthusian theory and the aforementioned arguments will be a part of that discussion. At a glance, those theories might seem correct, however, his critiques made some strong arguments as well that was accepted widely. It is important to note that Malthus allegedly belonged to the Dystopian school of thought where nothing was perfect or ideal. This obviously would attract criticism from the philosophers belonging to other schools of thought such as Utilitarianism, Marxism, etc. Let us look at those critics' arguments to understand the flaws or loopholes in Malthus' essay.

Godwin's Critique on Principle of Population

William Godwin was an English journalist and a political philosopher. He mostly had opposing views to that of Malthus on overpopulation and the means of subsistence getting short. Since Godwin believed in the Utopian school of thought to some extent and Malthus believed in the dystopian school of thought to some extent, having opposing views was extremely normal as these schools of thought



have been opposing each other in one way or the other for centuries now.

Godwin's first critique of Malthus' essay was on institutional accountability. Godwin never liked institution or government's involvement in anything which could easily be observed through his writings, therefore, he didn't like Malthus' argument which asked the institutions to take up the responsibility. Malthus, in his argument, talked about having late marriages, his writing in a way signified that he was asking the institution of marriage as well as governments to do this however, Godwin shifted this responsibility on the individual by saying "The very admission of the necessity of prudence to prevent the misery from an overcharged population removes the blame from public institutions to the conduct of individuals."

While building on the aforementioned, Godwin's other critique was on a psychological aspect viz. individuals controlling their urges to procreate especially if they are poor. Malthus agreed that the proposition of sexuality can indeed be controlled by reason and in his second as well as the following editions of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, he added "moral restraint" to the Positive Checks section.

Marx's Critique on Malthus' Theory

Karl Marx said that social factors create a "law of population peculiar to the capitalistic mode of production." He further added that "every particular historic mode of production has its own special laws of population, historically valid within that particular sphere." Marx's critique of Malthusian Theory did not quite focus much on the overpopulation or it exceeding means of subsistence rather it was written while keeping capitalism in mind which was Marx's forte.

Marx's critique focused on the fact that there is enough means of subsistence however, the distribution of the same is not equal throughout the world as the majority of that is held by the capitalists alone and the poor get a very little part of it.

Darwin's Work Influenced by Malthus?

Thomas Malthus' work on the *Principle of Population* has influenced Darwin's theories be it evolution or

artificial selection or natural selection. Darwin was fascinated by the idea that the human population was growing faster than food production could sustain. If we draw parallels between Darwin's "Survival of the Fittest" and Malthus' "Poor will suffer the most as a result of Positive Checks" then both of them convey the same meaning to some extent.

If we look through the sociological lens then the poorer section of the society is usually considered weaker when compared to the richer section due to the lack of money, power, and dominance that comes with both. So, in some way, the poor or the weak won't survive in catastrophes such as droughts, famines, etc. Darwin's theories were influenced by Malthus and in a way it supported Malthus' theory however, Darwin's theories also built a separate path for itself without getting too caught up in Malthus's critiques arguments.

Now that we know what Malthus's theory was and what criticism did it primarily drew, let us move forward to understand how it became a myth in the bigger argument by his followers only.

Theory Turned Myth: How Neo-Malthusianism Helped in the Collapse of Malthus' Theory

Neo-Malthusian and Malthusian methodologies are not that different. Therefore, the critique of Malthusian Theory applies to Neo-Malthusian theory as well. Let us look at those theories and their critiques respectively.

- Misleading Results/Partial Explanations- One of the biggest critiques of both Malthusians and Neo-Malthusians when analyzed critically will be that both of them focus on a very small portion of the bigger picture which provides either misleading or partial explanations and the crucial thing to note is that they run primarily on assumptions rather than facts.
- Alleged catastrophes never hit- According to Dennis Hodgson in *Demography as Social Science and Policy Science*, he mentioned that when the 'catastrophes' predicted by the Neo-Malthusian 'orthodox demographers' never came then their assumptions were subject to scrutiny with startling results.

- Over simplicity of complex relationships to prove a point- In *Population Growth, the Dependency Rate, and the Pace of Economic Development* by Allan C Kelley, he found that one of the assumptions of the Neo-Malthusians viz. high fertility would produce lower savings to be only partially correct. In the aforementioned, it is found that the actual relationship between both is much complicated than how it has been assumed and projected to the world to believe.
- Children are Short-term source of Expenditure: Another crucial argument by Neo-Malthusians is that due to the urge to procreate, more children will be born leading to more expenditure and means of subsistence running out faster than before. If we look at the topic of children from a sociological lens then children are not just a short-term source of expenditure for parents rather they are long term investment which will bear sweet fruits when the parents get old and need their children's support either financially or morally or any other manner for that matter.
- It can also be said that children are like "risk protection" for parents. As in, if any unfortunate events happen and the parents are not able to support the family or fulfill the needs then the children will take the baton from the parents to fulfill those needs.
- Reduced population results in less energy consumption- In *Is There A Population Problem In The Industrialised Countries* by Hofsen E., it is mentioned that according to the UN Estimates per capita energy consumption in the US is 50 times more than that of India.
- "The rich nations of the world that constitute 18% of the total population consume 66% of the Gross World Product whereas, the poorer nations that constitute 50% of the world's population consume 14% of the Gross World Product." Therefore, Neo-Malthusians views that are focused on birth rates, in a way, are just doing the job of diverting the attention from the exploitation of resources.

In a similar fashion, many other claims/arguments of Neo-Malthusians have also been debunked. Mahmood Mamdani in *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste and Class in an Indian Village* hinted at fraudulence with proper evidence against

the Neo-Malthusians. According to Mamdani, despite contrary evidence, their studies came to a pre-determined conclusion.

Due to all the aforementioned factors, the Malthusian and the Neo-Malthusian theories started becoming a myth and over time they became a myth to a great extent, however, they still hold significance in over-population debates because a section of the society still believes that their theories especially about the population exceeding the means of subsistence and positive checks such as COVID-19 are true. Let us now proceed to Uttar Pradesh Population Bill's scenario to analyze it critically and see how much of Malthus' arguments unofficially are based on the bill.

Uttar Pradesh Population Bill

If we look at Uttar Pradesh's population according to Census 2011 then it was 199,812,341. It grew threefold when compared to the data of Census 1951 as aforementioned. Having such a high population in a state can sometimes become a bit tough to manage for a government especially when it already is the most populous state of the country. Therefore, to prevent a population explosion and to maintain the equilibrium in population, a two-child policy bill was introduced by the Government of Uttar Pradesh this year.

The presence of some parts of Malthusian theory and Neo-Malthusian theory can indeed be observed in the bill where it stated "In UTTAR PRADESH, there are the limited resources ecological and economic resources at hand, it is necessary and urgent that the provision of the basic necessities of human life including affordable food, safe drinking water, decent housing, access to quality education, economic/livelihood opportunities, power/ electricity for domestic consumption, and a secure living is accessible to all citizen. it is necessary to control, stabilize the population of the State for promotion of sustainable development with more equitable distribution." In the aforementioned, it could easily be observed that the state is introducing this bill to prevent a population explosion and prevent the population from exceeding the means of subsistence as argued by Malthus and Neo-Malthusians.



It is possible that the Malthusian theory might have been the base of this policy in one way or the other as even today it is one of the most significant theories when it comes to over-population. However, the way in which this bill has been constructed has raised some questions from the social point of view such as- Is this bill targeting a certain section of the society, and will this bill forget to take female foeticide and infanticide into consideration?

As per the data available, the Total Fertility Rate of the Muslim community in Uttar Pradesh in the year 2015-16 stood at 3.1 children per woman and that of the Hindu community was 2.67 children per woman. As per these figures, the Muslim community will be asked to abide by this law probably more strictly than its Hindu counterparts.

In *Lt. Col. Nitisha & Ors. V. Union of India & Ors.*, as per Dr. Chandrachud's words, indirect discrimination is an action that has a disproportionate impact on a certain community, even if it appears 'neutral' on the face of it. The Supreme Court then referred to the case of *Fraser v. Canada*, which laid down a simple test for understanding whether a policy action has a disproportionate impact on a certain group - one must embark on an inquiry to see if the law in question has the effect of 'reinforcing, perpetuating or exacerbating disadvantage'.

This bill also violates our fundamental right granted to us by the Constitution of India viz. The choice to Reproduce. In the landmark case of *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy V. Union of India*, the court held that privacy extends to personal autonomy relating to our mind, body, and choice-making. The most crucial part of personal autonomy is reproductive rights.

In *Suchita Srivastava & Anr. V. Chandigarh Administration*, the Apex Court held that the term "Liberty" under Article 21 of the Constitution of India includes a woman's right to make reproductive choices. This right includes a woman's entitlement to give birth and make decisions regarding reproduction free from discrimination. The Population Bill violates this and will discriminate between women based on the number of children they have.

If the bill is passed in its current form then it will lead to an increase in female infanticide and female foeticide that has been practiced in India for a long time now especially in Rural India. According to Census 1991, 2001, and 2011, Urban India has a higher child sex ratio than rural India. Let us now analyze the bill critically to see how it has allegedly not taken the social evils such as female infanticide, and female foeticide into consideration.

Female Infanticide and Foeticide in Uttar Pradesh and the Bill's Possible Contribution

A research paper titled *Probabilistic Projection of the Sex Ratio at Birth and Missing Female Births by State and Union Territory in India* found that the state of Uttar Pradesh is expected to miss out on more than 2 million of female births from 2017 to 2030.

This research was published in 2020 when there was no idea of even the existence of the UP Population Bill. Now that this bill has been drafted, chances are that if it gets implemented then this figure will likely shoot up. If we look at China as an example when it adopted One-Child Policy and subsequently Two-Child Policy then it increased the abandonment of girl children, falling sex ratios, and a society that thrived on forced sterilization. To prove further that Uttar Pradesh will be no different, the child sex ratio of UP has dropped from 916 in 2001 to 902 in 2011. After the bill, it will only worsen as did China.

CONCLUSION

The bill does have traces of Malthus' theory and it can be said that he still stands tall in overpopulation

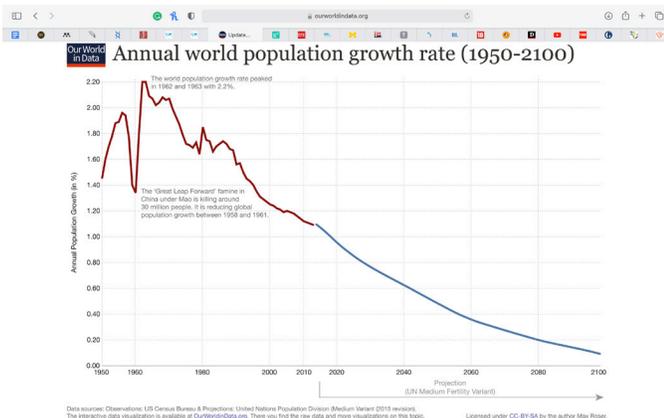


Figure 1: Graphics by- Our World In Data

debates and Uttar Pradesh's Population Bill. However, a pan-India application of this bill would create a lot of chaos and would violate our fundamental rights. The population of UP came down from 3.8 in 2005-06 to 2.7 in 2016 on its own without much of government's interference so, in a way this bill isn't the need of the hour.

Generally speaking, the fear of over-population is unnecessary as shown in the Figure 1, the Annual World Population Growth Rate according to Our World in Data has been decreasing since the 2000s and will continue to do so. The population will grow as our total fertility rate is still more than the replacement rate but, that doesn't mean that we have to be alarmed and take measures to control it. Even if we have a huge population crisis then we can try to work around with it by creating more advancements in technologies, more employment, more awareness, etc. Therefore, all this fear of population explosion is nothing more than a Population Myth that we believe and are trapped within.

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