



TRANSITION AGE IN INDIA - A STUDY

S.Mallesh

Research Scholar
Department of History
Osmania University

Abstract

*A transitional period is a period of great turbulence and turmoil, as a study of the history of **Europe from the 17th to the 19th century**, when Europe was passing through its own transition, reveals. After Kaliyug there is a period known as pralaya, after which Satyug again starts. This pralaya can be regarded as the transition period of turbulence and turmoil, and India is going through this period, after which there will again be a age of prosperity (Satyug) for our country. We are presently in India living in a transitional period of our history, the transition being from feudal agricultural society to modern industrial society.*

Introduction

We are presently in India living in a transitional period of our history, the transition being from feudal agricultural society to modern industrial society.

A transitional period is a period of great turbulence and turmoil, as a study of the history of Europe from the 17th to the 19th century, when Europe was passing through its own transition, reveals. During this period in Europe there was great turbulence, wars, social churning, chaos, revolutions, intellectual ferment, etc. There were theories of Voltaire, Rousseau, the Encyclopaedists, etc which were advanced. It was only after going through this fire that modern society emerged in Europe. India is presently going through this fire. We are going through a very painful period in our history.

In our Shastras it is mentioned that there are four yugas- Satyug, Tretayug, Dwaparyug and Kaliyug. After Kaliyug there is a period known as pralaya, after which Satyug again starts. This pralaya can be regarded as the transition period of turbulence and turmoil, and India is going through this period, after which there will again be a age of prosperity (Satyug) for our country. Kaliyug and Pralaya have been described in the sixth chapter of Vishnupuran, which strikingly bears resemblance to what is happening in India today. For example, there is mention therein :

- 1) In Kaliyug the powerful will rule over everybody, whether he is a good man or bad man.
- 2) In Kaliyug whatever nonsense anyone will say will be regarded as Shastras (a learned discourse)
- 3) In Kaliyug wives will leave husbands who are poor, and only the rich people will be the husbands of women.
- 4) In Kaliyug people will go only after money and not after knowledge.

- 5) In Kaliyug people will not help even their near and dear ones.
- 6) In Kaliyug many people will commit suicide (In recent years 250,000 farmers have committed suicide).
- 7) In Kaliyug the kings will not protect their subjects, but instead will take away their subjects property in the name of taxation.
- 8) In Kaliyug the weak will become slaves.
- 9) In Kaliyug many children will die at an early age. (Today many children in India die because of malnutrition, cold, etc)
- 10) In Kaliyug foolishness (Paakhand) will grow. (Today in India most people are casteist and communal, and believe in superstitions like astrology).

As regards pralaya it is mentioned that in this period there will be no water, because of which people will die. (Today there is great water shortage in large parts of India). Various other descriptions of pralaya are also given in Vishnupurana

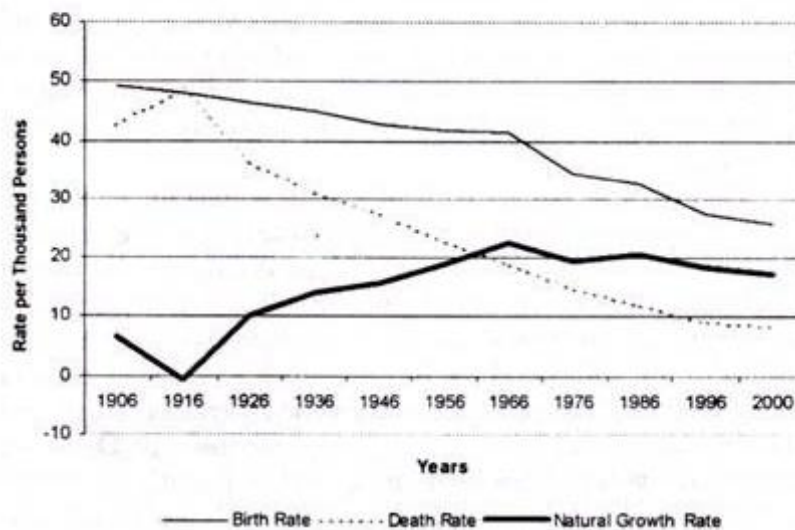
We should not give a literal interpretation to all that is mentioned in the sixth chapter of Vishnupurana, but it certainly gives an idea about the great turbulence and turmoil which takes place in a period of transition. It shows that our ancestors, who had great vision, had a dynamic, not static, understanding of history.

I urge all patriotic and modern minded people of India, particularly the youth, to come forward and help the country in this difficult transitional period.

Demographic Transition in India

It is important to examine the process of demographic transition in India in order to anticipate future trends in growth in population. Historical and contemporary trends have shown that the transition itself and its pattern, sequence and timing may vary greatly from country to country and over time (UN, 1971). Nevertheless, the theory of demographic transition is a very important tool to assess the dynamics of population in any country.

One striking similarity between the Indian experience and the experiences of other countries with respect to the transition is the fact that the decline in mortality rate has preceded the fall in fertility (Visaria, 1995:3). If one examines the trends in vital rates in the country, it appears that India is fast approaching the completion of third stage of transition with a death rate already at low level and a rapidly declining birth rate

Trends in Birth Rate, Death Rate and Rate of Natural Growth in India

Since the rate of natural increase, which speeded up in the initial phases, has now shown a tendency to narrow down during the last two decades, a stage is set to enter the next phase to bring about a new balance between mortality and fertility at lower levels. However, the speed with which India achieves this stage depends on the transition of vital rates in some of the major states, which appear to be still in the initial phases of transition.

The process of demographic transition in India is said to have set in sometime in the late 1920s and early 1930s when death rates started declining. Prior to that, India's population was in the first stage with very high birth and high death rates. The death rate fluctuated from year to year, and as a consequence, the size of population remained almost stationary. With the onset of decline in the death rates, the population of the country entered the second stage of transition.

Birth rates responded only in the second half of the last century. Evidences indicate that decline in birth rate remained only marginal for over fifty years since the turn of the last century. A definite dent in the birth rate was noticed only from 1961-70 onward, which marked the end of the second stage or the 'early expanding stage'.

Thus, India's population entered the third stage of transition sometime in the close of the 1960s. As decline in the death rates was much more rapid, the rate of natural increase in the population went up from 1.2 to 1.3 per cent during 1921-51 to 2 to 2.2 per cent during 1951-81.

As elsewhere in the less developed parts of the world, the decline in death rates was much more rapid in India than what had happened in the more developed countries earlier. By the close of the 1980s, the death rates had already declined to the neighbourhood of 10 per thousand – a rate very similar to those prevailing in the developed countries. Interestingly, around the same time, decline in birth rates also gathered momentum.

The decline in birth rates was experienced almost throughout the country, though there were significant regional variation in its pace. In fact, at the aggregate all India levels, fertility declined at a faster pace than was actually expected (Visaria, 1995:5). The continuing deceleration in the pace of population growth in the country over the last two decades is indicative of the fact that India's population is closing towards the end of the third or late expanding stage of demographic transition.

The demographic scenario at the aggregate national levels, however, conceals many of the regional peculiarities. India is a vast country with a great amount of regional diversity in terms of its geography, historical experience and socio-cultural attributes including demographic situation. An analysis of the state level trends in fertility and mortality reveals that the transition has not occurred at a uniform pace, nor have the period and pattern been identical in different parts of the country.

Different states are, in fact, at different stages of demographic transition. On an average, the peninsular India appears to be ahead of its counterpart in the north with respect to the transition. On the one extreme, states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa are on the verge of completing the transition.

In addition, some of the smaller states like Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura are also found to be very close to the completion of the transition. Remarkably, these states are located in the northeastern parts and have a substantial proportion of Christians in their population. A rapid transition in fertility and mortality rates in these states can be attributed to the works of Christian missionaries, who have been operational since a long time in past now. The union territories of Chandigarh and Pondicherry are also characterized by a similar demographic situation.

On the other extreme, the BIMARU states – Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh – in the Hindi belt of the north are still in the 'early expanding stage' of transition. Though, death rates in these states have come very close to 10 per thousand persons – in Bihar and Rajasthan the rates are even lower than this – birth rates are still over 30 per thousand. As a result of this, the natural rate of growth in these states is still above 2.1 per cent per annum.

All other states in the country are located between these two extremes. Although, there may be differences of opinion in assigning a particular stage to a particular state, the states can be neatly grouped in three broad categories on the basis of the levels of birth and death rates and resultant rate of natural increase.

Based on this, some broad generalizations can be made that can be incorporated in development plans. The 15 major states of the country have been grouped in three categories representing roughly three stages of transition (Table 4.4). These states taken together account for more than 90 per cent of the country's population in 2001.

Birth Rate, Death Rate and Rate of Natural Increase – Major States, 2000

<i>States</i>	<i>Birth Rate</i>	<i>Death Rate</i>	<i>Natural Growth Rate</i>
<i>Group I</i>			
Kerala	17.9	6.4	11.5
Tamil Nadu	19.2	7.9	11.3
<i>Group II</i>			
Andhra Pradesh	21.3	8.2	13.1
Assam	26.9	9.6	17.4
Gujarat	25.2	7.5	17.7
Haryana	26.9	7.5	19.4
Karnataka	22.0	7.8	14.2
Maharashtra	20.9	7.5	13.4
Orissa	24.3	10.5	13.7
Punjab	21.5	7.3	14.2
West Bengal	20.6	7.0	13.6
<i>Group III</i>			
Bihar	31.9	8.8	23.1
Madhya Pradesh	31.2	10.2	21.0
Rajasthan	31.2	8.4	22.8
Uttar Pradesh	32.8	10.3	22.5

Group I comprises of the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. From among the major states Kerala has the distinction of being the leading one in the country in demographic transition. Decline in mortality rate in the state began in the late 1940s, and currently crude death rate is one of the lowest not only in the country but also in the entire world. With an unprecedented decline during the last three to four decades, fertility rate has already reached below replacement level in the state.

The state, which remained marked with one of the most rapid growth up to 1971, has since then, witnessed a substantial decline in the pace of growth. This rapid decline in the pace of growth became the subject of much discussion and debate at both national and international levels.

Tamil Nadu, too, has witnessed a rapid transition during the recent past. During the last two decades, the annual exponential growth rate in the state has been of the order of 1.25 per cent, which is marginally higher than that in Kerala. The 1990s have further witnessed deceleration in population growth in Tamil Nadu.

A rapid fertility transition in Kerala is generally attributed to a high level of female literacy for many decades, and a remarkably higher status of women in the society. Kerala is, therefore, often considered as a unique case. Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, is very close to average Indian situation. It is, therefore, sometimes suggested that Indian policy makers should look at the experience of Tamil Nadu as a model for achieving demographic targets in other states.

Nine out of fifteen states fall in Group II. They are: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab and West Bengal. Obviously, they belong to different regions of the country and present diverse conditions. While the states like Punjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh rank very high in the country in terms of the levels of development, Orissa occupies one of the lowest positions.

Likewise, while Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Maharashtra and West Bengal are on the verge of moving into the next stage of transition, others like Gujarat and Haryana appear to be only in the middle of the stage. Taken together, these states account for nearly 45 per cent of the population of the country.

Finally, Group III is represented by four states, namely, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Data on mortality trends indicate that mortality transition among these states began only in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This shows a lag of more than 20 years in the onset of demographic transition among these states as compared to those in Group I.

Although, death rates in these states are not much different from those in Group II, they stand distinctly apart from the rest of the states in the country in terms of fertility levels. A crude birth rate of still over 30 per thousand persons and a resultant natural growth rate of over 2 per cent per annum put them very high in the agenda of planners and policy makers.

As already noted earlier, these states have exhibited hardly any sign of deceleration in the growth rate of population during the recent times. Since they account for over 35 per cent of the country's population, the performance of the transition in India's population will continue to depend on demographic behaviour in these states for quite some time in future.

The fact that there are still possibilities of decline in death rate – particularly infant mortality rate, which is significantly higher than the nation's average, except for Bihar – there is every possibility that the rate of natural growth will continue to hover around 2 per cent per annum. In the absence of respectable levels of literacy among females and with possibly high mortality rates among children, the demographic transition in these states will rather be slow, and it will take another two to three decades to come out of this stage of transition.

Conclusion

India is undergoing a great transition, as the post-reform generation strikes out into the world. The thinking, attitudes, culture, political preferences, consumption patterns and ambitions of the post-reform generations differ greatly from that of the earlier generations. As a consequence, the country is also witnessing rapid changes not only on the socio-political and economic fronts but also on the humanities front. This book seeks to explore great transition in India through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. In doing so, it lays foundation not only for understanding India but also in initiating a new chapter for Indian and South Asian studies. With contributions by leading scholars, the book will be of great interest to students, researchers, and for anyone wishing to explore India in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. A

“transition” is a **Movement, Passage, or Change from One Position to Another**. The word “transition” is often used in human services to refer to the general process of someone moving, or being moved, from one set of services to another.

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