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## India and Iran: A demographic comparison having socio-economic implications

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### Abstract

The fast-increasing population in developing countries has been a cause of concern worldwide. The imbalance between population and resources poses serious problems and act as a barrier to the socio-economic development of the country. The paper intends to make a demographic comparison between the two developing countries in transition, India and Iran, in which India is the second-most populous country in the world and Iran, the most populous one in the West Asian region. An attempt will be made to find out the differences and similarities between the demographic arenas of the two countries through a comparison of selected demographic parameters.

**Keywords:** Demographic arenas, socio-economic, linguistic, Asian region

### Introduction

India and Iran have been sharing close relations in social, economic, political, cultural, and linguistic and architecture fields since ancient times. The Prime Minister Shri Jawahar Lal Nehru has mentioned it as "Few people have been more closely related in origin and throughout history than the people of India and the people of Iran". During the medieval period many Iranian poets, writers, scholars and artists brought and spread the Persian language, customs and traditions throughout India and substantially impacted Indian culture. The relations were a bit hampered during the British period but after 1947 the relations strengthened in political, economic and cultural fields again. India and Iran both are developing countries in the transitional phase and had faced the problem of population explosion. They share a similarity in the demographic field, as well. Whereas India is the second-most populous country in the world, Iran has become the most populous country in the West Asian Region. Hence, a comparison between the basic demographic characteristics of both countries will be informative.

### Objectives

The objectives of the paper are:

1. To study the economic status of India and Iran.
2. To discuss and compare the population, its growth rate, birth rate and death rate of the two countries.
3. To analyse and compare the age structure, urbanization, life expectancy and state of education in India and Iran.
4. To find out the similarities and differences in these demographic parameters of the two countries.

### Review of Literature

A thorough review of literature has been done to know the demographic condition in India and Iran. Visaria (2007) <sup>[6]</sup> discussed various demographic characteristics in India such as population growth, fertility, urbanisation, literacy, age distribution, condition of women and workforce participation. Kapila (2007) <sup>[5]</sup> bring about the development journey of India since independence. The chapter elucidates the major strengths and weaknesses of the Indian economy. Jain (2001) <sup>[4]</sup> analysis various demographic characteristics in West Asia. Research in knowing the comparative demography is needed since separate studies in the field of demography are done in India and Iran, but no comparison has been made.

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### Statistics of India and Iran

The size of the Indian population has been increasing fast and is a cause of major concern for India as well as for the world. The ever-increasing population with limited resources has been cited as an alarm for many serious and dreadful problems. Uma Kapila has suggested that around the middle of the present century, India will surpass China and will then become the most populous country in the world. India, with its area of 32,87,260 sq. kms., account for about 2.4% of the total area of the world and seventh in the world in this regard. As far as population is concerned, as per the 2011 census, India has a population of 121.08 crores which accounts for 17.5% of the world population. GDP in India was \$1,310,170,500,357 in 2009 and GDP per capita was \$ 1065 in 2008 and GDP per capita average annual growth rate was 4% in 2008. Unemployment, food and nutritional security, environmental degradation, social infrastructure etc. are some of the challenges ahead of India, due to its large population. According to Dreze and Sen (2002), concern about population growth must not be simply discussed as groundless. The Indian population is already large in comparison to its utilised resources and the further increase will all the more aggravate the problem. However, positive changes have been registered in the situation due to the continuous efforts of the government.

The area of the Islamic Republic of Iran is 1,648,000sq.km. and the size of the population is 6,70,37,517. In 2009, GDP was \$331,014,973,186, GDP per capita was \$4700 in 2008 and GDP per capita average annual growth rate was 1%. Iran has achieved considerable success in controlling the rapid population growth, especially after the mid-90s. Over-urbanization and management of human resources are the main demographic challenges for Iran.

### Comparison of demographic parameters

#### Population growth

In India population has been growing fast at a fast rate since 1921. The total population and average annual growth rate can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1:** Size and Growth Rate of Population in India

Census Year	Total Population (million)	Average Annual Growth Rate (%)
1921	251.2	-0.3
1931	278.9	1.04
1951	361	1.25
1971	548.2	2.20
1981	683.3	2.22
1991	846.3	2.16
2001	1028	1.97
2011	1210	1.64

**Source:** Census of India

The table clearly indicates that there have been some fluctuations and the rate of increase in population was slow till 1921, however, after that population has been increasing. The rate of the average increase in population was slow in the period 1921-1951, but after that population growth is very fast giving rise to 'Population Explosion'. The reason for the population explosion is that due to socio-economic development death rate has reduced but the birth rate has not registered any significant decline.

In Iran, there has been fast population growth after the Islamic revolution in 1979 and especially during the Iran-Iraq war. During 1970-80 the average annual population

growth rate was 3.3%, it rose to 3.6% in 1980-91, however, it came down to 1.3% in 2008. Due to the combined efforts of the Iranian government, religious institutions and non-governmental organizations an extensive network of primary health care centres have been developed. An increase in educational facilities especially among women led to increased use of contraceptives which led to the smaller size of families.

**Table 2:** Size and Growth Rate of Population in Iran

Year	Population	Year	Average Annual Growth
1976	34,000,000	1970-81	3.3
1986	48,000,000	1980-91	3.6
1997	64,000,000	2005	1.5
2008	71,956,322	2008	1.3

**Source:** World Bank, World Development Report.

A comparison between India and Iran shows that the government of both countries have launched widespread efforts to control the population and Iran has an edge over India in this context. The process in India started during the 1980s whereas in Iran it started a bit later in the 1990s.

#### Birth rate and death rate

The birth rate and Death rate per 1000 population in India and Iran are

**Table 3:** Birth Rate and Death Rate per 1000 population in India and Iran

Country	Crude Birth Rate			Crude Death Rate		
	1971	1991	2008	1971	1991	2008
India	41.2	32.5	23	19	11.4	7
Iran	45	44	19	16	9	6

**Source:** Census Reports, Economic Survey and World Bank, World Development Report.

There has been a steep decline in the death rate in India from 19 in 1971 to 7 in 2008. The birth rate also shows a downward trend from 41.2 in 1971 to 23 in 2008. However, the pace of decline in the birth rate has been much slower than that in the death rate. This accelerated the rate of natural increase in population.

In Iran, during the last 15 years, there has been an appreciable reduction in the crude birth rate which came down from 44 per 1000 population in 1991 to 19 per thousand in 2008. Improved health services, as well as socio-economic development, have significantly contributed to reducing the death rate from 16 per thousand in 1971 to 6 per thousand in 2008.

Thus, India and Iran both countries are undergoing demographic transition characterised by "declining fertility and mortality in an intermediate level of socio-economic development". Clearly, Iran has an edge over India in controlling the birth and death rate. Improved health services, increase in education especially among women, adoption of family planning programs etc. have contributed to this demographic transition. The total fertility rate in India has declined from 5.3 in 1970 to 2.7 in 2008 however, in Iran it declined from 6.7 in 1970 to 1.8 in 2008. Here also Iran is performing better than India.

#### Age structure

Comparative data about the age structure of the two populations is presented in the following table which suggests a younger profile of the Indian population. A

significant difference exists in the composition. Though the trend of the population is the same in both countries, the dependency ratio is higher in India than Iran.

**Table 4:** Age Structure of Population in India and Iran

Country	Age structure of population (%)					
	2005			2008		
	0-14 yrs.	15-64 yrs.	65+yrs.	0-14 yrs.	15-64 yrs.	65+yrs.
India	33	62	5	32	63	5
Iran	26	69	5	24	71	5

Source: World Bank, World Development Report.

### Urbanization

Patterns of urbanization in India and Iran reveal substantial differences. There is a vast difference in the level of urbanization in India and Iran. Presently, whereas about 30% of the total Indian population is living in urban areas, Iran's 68% population is urban. The pattern of urban concentration also has differences as well as similarities. In 2005, about 12% of the Indian population lived in urban cities of one million or more whereas in Iran this was 24. We can further interpret from the above data that the urban population is much more concentrated in metropolitan cities in Iran than in India. Thus, urbanization in Iran is massive and more concentrated.

**Table 5:** Urbanization and Urban Concentration in India and Iran

Country	Urban population as percentage of total population		Population in cities of 1 million or more (% gross)	
	1991	2008	2005	2008
India	25.72	30	12	13
Iran	57	68	24	24

Source: World Bank, World Development Report & Census of India

**Table 7:** Enrolment at School in India and Iran

Country	Percentage of age group enrolled in schools											
	Primary				Secondary				Tertiary			
	Total		Female		Total		Female		Total	Female		
	1980	2007	1980	2007	1980	2007	1980	2007	1980	2007		
India	84	113	79	111	41	57	30	52	6	13	4	11
Iran	93	130	99	147	52	76	43	77	4	30	3	31

Source: World Bank, World Development Report.

### Findings and Conclusion

To bring out the differences and similarities in different aspects of the population in India and Iran a review of various parameters has been done. The analysis brings out the fact that with greater per capita GDP, people in Iran have a better life than people in India. High population growth has hampered the developmental activities in both countries but vigorous efforts by the government to slow down the population growth has achieved considerable success with Iran having an edge over India. India has a relatively high percentage of the younger population which will accelerate the growth process in future and contribute to the development of society and the economy. However, to make efficient use of the human resources, the percentage of enrolment in secondary and post-secondary education should be increased in both countries. The life expectancy data throws light on the fact that Iranian people have greater life expectancy than Indians due to developed health care facilities, availability of nutritional food and better lifestyle. Greater per capita GDP in Iran has contributed to population control, greater life expectancy and a high ratio of female literacy. This suggests that India, on one hand, should work towards greater economic growth and on the other make provisions for better health care facilities in order to attain

### Life expectancy

Life expectancy gives an idea about the socio-economic development of the area. In 1994, life expectancy in India was 60 which rose to 64 in 2008, whereas in Iran it increased from 68 to 71 during this period. This indicates that Iran has certainly developed an extensive network of health services and availability of nutritional food along with an improved lifestyle.

**Table 6:** Life Expectancy at birth in India and Iran

Country	Year	
	1994	2008
India	60	64
Iran	68	71

Source: World Bank, World Development Report.

### Education

Education is an important aspect of manpower development. The education system has expanded rapidly both in India and Iran but Iran has performed better than India in all spheres of education. The adult literacy rate in Iran has increased from the level of 66% in 1991 to 82% in 2006 whereas in India it raised from 48% to 63%. The data about the percentage of age group enrolled in school shows that Iran is much ahead of India in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Similar results are seen in the school enrolment of females. However, the post-secondary education system in India and Iran are alarming with only 13% and 30% of the appropriate age group being enrolled. The situation at secondary level education is also not very satisfactory. It is the secondary and post-secondary level of an educational system that is key to human resource development.

the goal of welfare of society and development of the economy.

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