

# Growing Population Pressure on Employment Opportunities and Sustainable Development in India

Dr. Kanchanmala N. Gawate\*

\*L.A.D. & S.R.P. College for Women, Nagpur. Mobile No. 9766865511, Email Id: [Kanchan.gawate007@gmail.com](mailto:Kanchan.gawate007@gmail.com)

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Population growth has become one of the biggest socio-economic challenges in India. With a population of over 1.4 billion and an annual growth rate that is higher than the global average, the country is putting pressure on its already limited employment opportunities. Job opportunities have not increased consistently compared to the rapid growth of the workforce. As a result, unemployment and underemployment, especially among the youth and in rural areas, have become significant challenges. The United Nations established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which are aimed at being achieved by 2030. These goals include key issues such as eradicating poverty, ensuring quality education, promoting health, providing clean water and energy, creating jobs, and protecting the environment. However, India's rapidly growing population is putting significant pressure on progress towards achieving these goals. Unemployment is one of the most serious socio-economic problems facing India today, especially with a rapidly growing population and a significant number of young people. The problem not only affects individual lives; It also poses a serious obstacle, both directly and indirectly, to the achievement of various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper attempts to explore the complex relationship between India's population growth and employment generation by examining trends from 2000 to 2025. The research draws on secondary data sources such as government reports and census data to shed light on how uncontrolled population growth is leading to economic imbalances, labour market distortions and income inequality.

**Keywords:** Population growth, employment, unemployment, job creation, Indian economy sustainable development.

## Introduction:

The population of any country is the instrument of economic development of that country population is an active factor in economic development. The population of the country determines the amount of output produced in the country. But if the population of the country is too high or low, it affects economic development, in fact, many types of problems arise in the economy, which is why population and economic development are closely related.

India ranks first in terms of population. As the most populous country in the world, India has a huge stock of human resources which, if utilized effectively, can have a significant impact on the economy. However, without adequate employment opportunities, this growing population can become a serious problem.

A large population may be a demographic advantage in terms of labour, but it also puts enormous pressure on resources, infrastructure, and social systems. Rapid population growth increases the demand for food, water, housing, energy, healthcare, and education. This pressure has a direct impact on India's ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Therefore, population growth control is essential to achieve sustainable development. Unfortunately, the rate of employment generation has not increased. Although India's economy is expanding, it is facing a phenomenon known as "unemployment growth". Where economic output increases, but employment does not increase in line with it. A large part of the population is still dependent on agriculture, although many people work in the agricultural and unorganized sectors, they are not fully productive. disguised unemployment arises due to the fact that many people are employed for one job. This problem has persisted in rural India between 1991 and 2024. The

industrial sector has not grown as expected and the service sector is largely available only to the educated and urban population. As a result, while the number of job seekers is growing rapidly, actual job opportunities are lagging far behind.

This research paper examines the ongoing impact of population growth on the employment sector in India. It examines key trends in population dynamics, employment structure. It also assesses the challenges faced by government initiatives for employment generation and highlights the critical need to manage population growth and promote labour-intensive industries to achieve inclusive development.

### Objectives:

- To study the population growth trend in India from 1991 to 2024 and understand its demographic characteristics.
- To observe the patterns of employment creation in major economic sectors. (agriculture, industry, and services) during the same period.
- To study the relationship between population growth rate and employment creation rate in the Indian economy.
- To identify the major challenges posed by population pressure to employment Opportunities sustainable development.
- To examine the impact of unemployment on the process of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in India.

### Hypothesis:

- Rapid population growth in India is putting pressure on employment generation, leading to rising unemployment and underemployment.
- There is an imbalance between the rate of employment generation and the rate of population growth.

### Research Methodology:

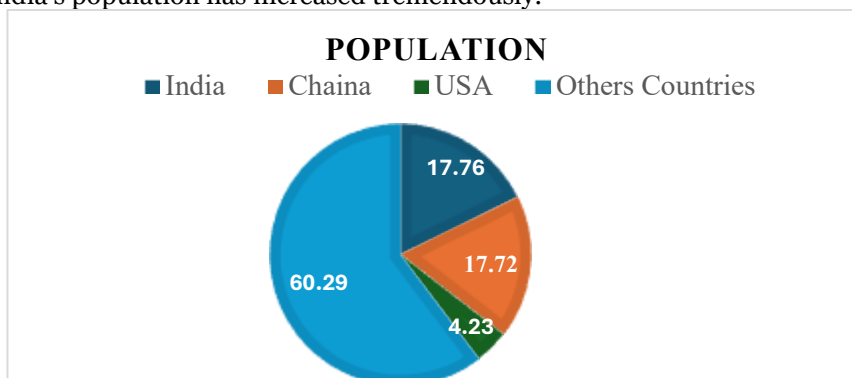
The presented research methodology is based on secondary sources, which includes information obtained from various published articles, lectures, statistics, news channels, and websites as well as access to various government programs related to population growth and unemployment in India.

### Summary of the review of Literature:

A review of the relevant literature reveals that India's population has grown tremendously from 1991 to 2024. Although the economic reforms undertaken in India after 1991 have boosted GDP growth, employment generation has not increased at the same pace. As a result, the growth of the workforce, skill shortages, lack of structural change, and imbalances in distribution have created serious disparities in employment opportunities. Due to population growth, the labour supply is increasing, but job creation is not happening at the same pace, resulting in increasing unemployment and underemployment. Especially in the agricultural sector, the poor are working in 'disguised unemployment', even if they are not fully unemployed. India's economic growth has not been inclusive. Due to India's population growth, employment generation has become a qualitative challenge, not just a quantitative one. India must use its large population as a productive force, which requires appropriate education, technology and employment-oriented policies.

### Analysis and Discussion:

India has undergone significant demographic changes from 1991 to 2024. The population has increased due to high birth rates, declining mortality rates, and advances in healthcare. India's population growth in 2023 has recognized India as the most populous country in the world, surpassing China. China's population is 17.72%, while India's is 17.76%. The United States' share is 4.23%, which is relatively low, and the population of the rest of the world is less than 4%. It can be seen that one-third of the world's population is in India and China. This shows that India's population has increased tremendously.



Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/india>**Demographic Overview of India 1991 - 2024**

Year	Population in Cr.	Growth Rate (%)	Birth Rate (%)	Death Rate (%)	Sex Ratio (Females per 1000 Males)	Density (Persons per Sq.) km.	Literacy Rate Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
1991	84.6	23.9	29.5	9.8	927	267	52.2	63.9	39.3
2001	102.8	21.5	25.4	8.4	933	324	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	121.0	17.7	21.8	7.1	943	382	74.0	82.1	65.5
2021	138.0	14.0	19.5	6.5	948	425	78.0	84.7	71.5
2024 (est.)	142.8	1.0 (annual)	17.2	6.2	952	440	81.5	87.4	75.3

Source: Census of India Reports, <https://censusindia.gov.in>

India's population growth rate has slowed significantly, from 23.9% in the 1980s to about 1% per year by 2024. This is because India has seen a significant decline in both birth and death rates between 1991 and 2024. The birth rate was 29.5 per thousand population in 1991, which has come down to about 17.2 in 2024. This decline is due to family planning, female education, healthcare reforms, urbanisation and awareness about single-parent families, while the death rate has declined from 9.8 per thousand in 1991 to 6.2 per thousand in 2024. This is due to better medical care, vaccination, improved nutrition and sanitation facilities. The decline in both these rates indicates that India is now moving towards the third stage of the demographic transition, where both birth and death rates decline and population growth stabilizes. But India is the number one country in the world in terms of population and it is seen that the population in India has increased tremendously.

The sex ratio in India has shown a steady improvement from 1991 to 2024. In 1991, there were only 927 females for every 1000 males, which highlighted issues such as gender imbalance, female infanticide, and lack of education and healthcare for women. However, in the subsequent period, initiatives such as "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" and "Janani Suraksha Yojana," along with increasing awareness about women's rights, have had a positive impact. As a result, the sex ratio has increased from 927 women per 1,000 men in 1991 to an estimated 952 in 2024.

The population density in India has increased from 267 persons per sq. km in 1991 to an estimated 440 persons per sq. km in 2024. This steadily increasing density is indicative of the rapid growth of the population and the limited geographical area. Due to urbanization, industrial development and migration from rural areas to cities, the population is increasingly concentrated in cities. This surge in population density is putting considerable pressure on job opportunities, housing, infrastructure, transportation, healthcare, and education systems.

India's literacy rate was 52.2% in 1991, but it is projected to reach an impressive 81.5% by 2024. Male literacy has increased significantly from 63.9% to 87.4%, while female literacy has increased from 39.3% to 75.3%. This remarkable progress can be attributed to various government initiatives such as the National Literacy Mission (1988), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2001), Right to Education Act (2009) and Digital India (2015), all of which have played a significant role in promoting education. Especially as awareness about the importance of educating women is growing. There has been a significant improvement in literacy, but female literacy rates are still much lower than male literacy rates.

The statistics clearly show that the birth rate and growth rate are continuously decreasing. However, the absolute population continues to increase due to the cumulative growth rate. Although this trend indicates long-term population stabilization, its immediate effect is that the number of workers seeking employment continues to increase.

**Employment Trends in India:**

Initially India's economy was primarily based on agriculture, with around 70 to 75 percent of the population relying on farming for their livelihoods. The early five year Plans were all about boosting agricultural development, improving irrigation, and implementing the Green Revolution from 1960 to 1970. While these efforts did increase agricultural output, they fell short in generate sufficient new jobs. Industrialization began in the 1950s–80s, and industrial employment gradually increased due to the expansion of the public sector and infrastructure.

After the economic liberalization in 1991, we began to see a shift in the employment landscape. The proportion of jobs in agriculture started to decline, while the industrial sector covering manufacturing, construction, and mining along with the service sector, which includes information technology, banking, education, health, and transport, experienced rapid growth. This trend is indicative of India's structural transformation, where workers are shifting from low-productivity agriculture to high-productivity industries and service sectors.

### Sectoral Distribution of Employment in India 1991-2024:

Year	Agriculture (%)	Industry (%)	Services (%)
1991	64	15	21
2001	58	17	25
2011	49	21	30
2021	46.5	23	30.5
2024 (est.)	45.8	22.3	31.9

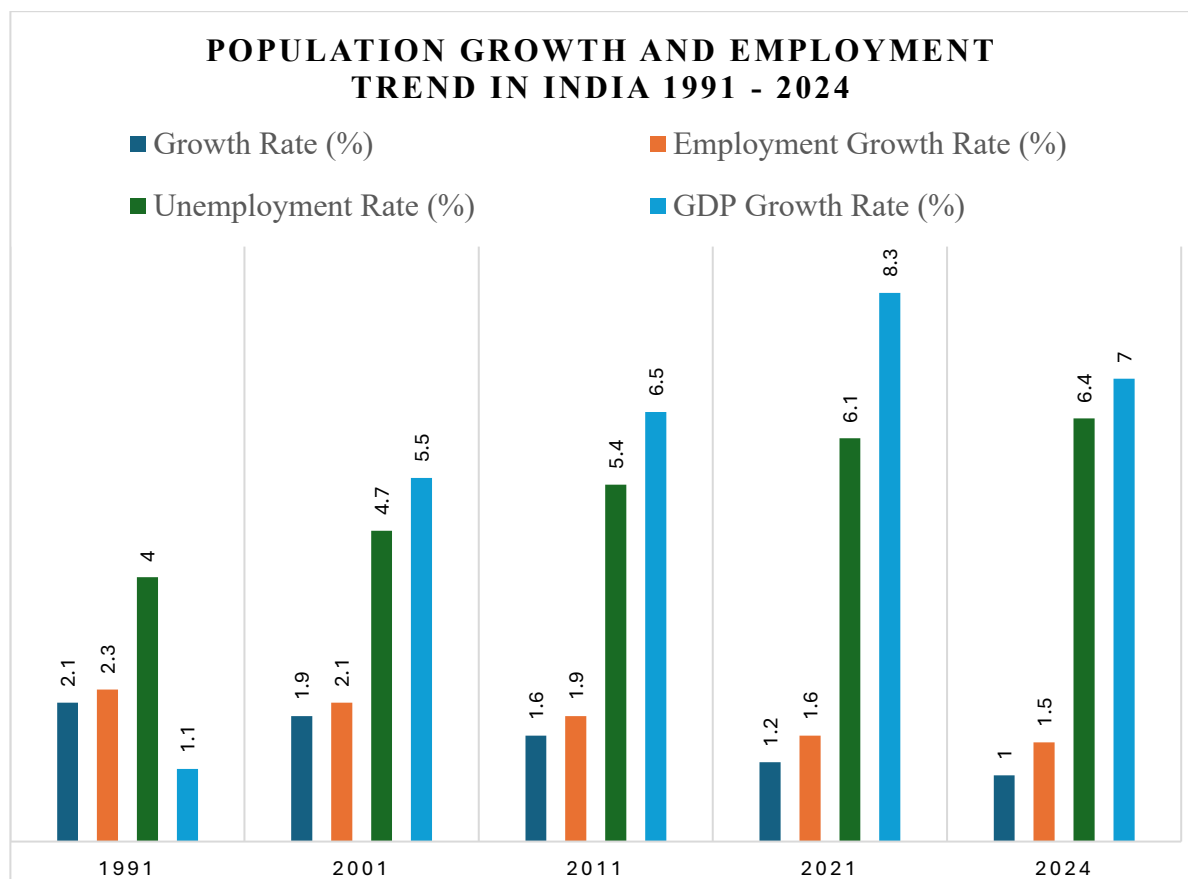
Source: Periodic labour force survey (PLFS) annual report  
Economic survey report 2024-25

There have been gradual changes in India's employment sector. from 1991 to 2024. The percentage of people working in agriculture has decreased from 64% in 1991 to 45.8% in 2024, showing that many workers are moving away from farming in to industry and services. In 1991, the industrial sector accounted for 15% of employment, which rose to 23% by 2021, but decreased slightly to 22.3% in 2024, suggesting that growth in industrial jobs has slowed down. On the other hand, the services sector continues to grow; its share has grown from 21% in 1991 to 31.9% in 2024. These statistics reveal that while India's employment structure is gradually shifting from agriculture to industry and services, but the change has not happened at the expected pace.

### Population Growth and Employment Trend in India 1991 - 2024

Year	Population in Cr.	Growth Rate Annual (%)	Employment Growth Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	GDP Growth Rate (%)
1991	84.6	2.1	2.3	4.0	1.1
2001	102.8	1.9	2.1	4.7	5.5
2011	121.0	1.6	1.9	5.4	6.5
2021	138.0	1.2	1.6	6.1	8.3
2024 (est.)	142.8	1.0	1.5	6.4	7.0

Source: Census of India, Periodic labour force survey (PLFS) annual report,  
Economic survey report 2024-25, World Bank



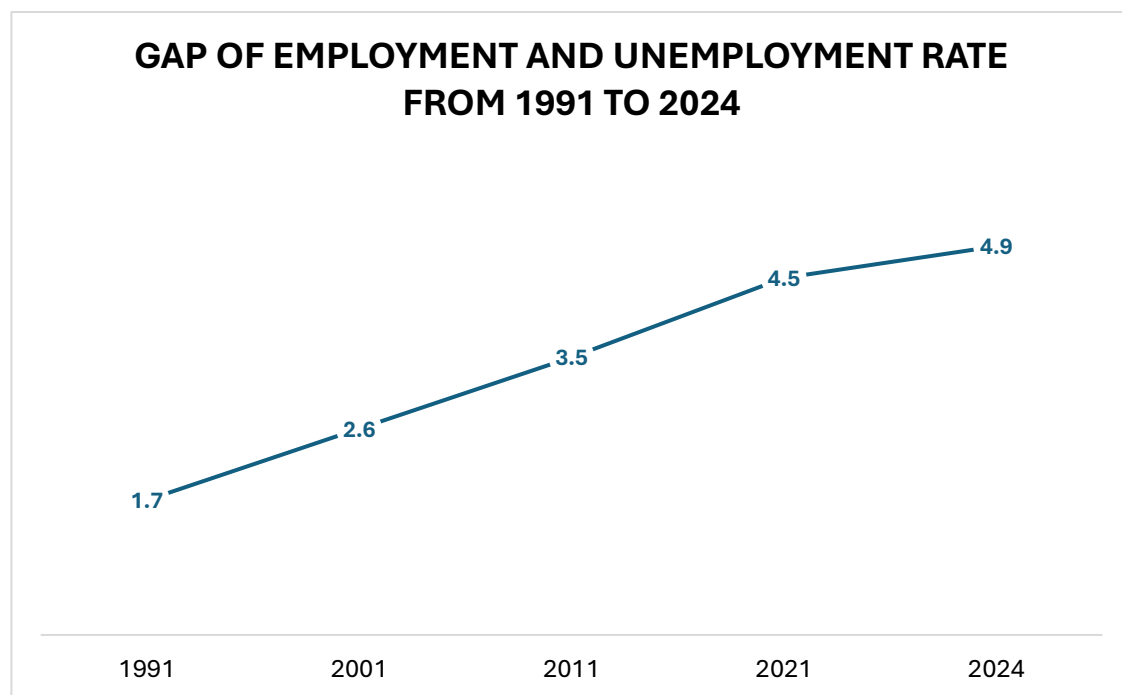
Between 1991 and 2024, India has seen a steady decline in its population growth rate, yet the total number of people continues to rise at a rapid pace. While the GDP growth has jumped from 1.1% to 7%, employment growth has consistently slowed and unemployment has increased.

This trend indicates that India's economic expansion is not translating into job creation. The economy is growing, but it's not generating enough jobs to match the increasing population. Consequently, this has led to greater pressure on employment, resulting in a rise in low-quality jobs, higher unemployment, and uneven economic growth.

### Gap of employment and unemployment rates from 1991 to 2024

Year	Population in Cr.	Growth Rate Annual (%)	Employment Growth Rate (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Gap (Unemployment – Employment %)
1991	84.6	2.1	2.3	4.0	1.7
2001	102.8	1.9	2.1	4.7	2.6
2011	121.0	1.6	1.9	5.4	3.5
2021	138.0	1.2	1.6	6.1	4.5
2024(est.)	142.8	1.0	1.5	6.4	4.9

Source: Census of India, Periodic labour force survey (PLFS) annual report, Economic survey report 2024-25, World Bank



The gap between unemployment and employment growth rates in India has been steadily widening from 1991 to 2024. In 1991, with a population of 84.6 crore the gap stood at 1.7%, which meant that job creation was nearly keeping pace with population growth. In 2001, when the population hit 102.8 crore, and the gap grew to 2.6%, meaning a decline in job opportunities. By 2011, with the population reaching 121 crore the gap had widened further to 3.5%, highlighting a rise in unemployment. In 2021, with a population of 138 crore the gap increased to 4.5% and is expected to rise to 4.9% by 2024. This growing gap shows that while the population continues to expand, employment creation is not growing up, which is putting a pressure on employment opportunities.

### Challenges to Employment Opportunities due to Population Pressure:

#### High Labour Force Growth:

The workforce in India has grown rapidly between 1991 and 2024. Due to population growth and the growing youth population, millions of people enter the job market every year, but the pace of job creation has not kept pace. Despite GDP growth, employment opportunities have remained limited. This imbalance has led to an increase in unemployment and underemployment.

#### Mismatch Between Skills and Jobs:

India's education system produces a large number of graduates every year, but they lack the technical and practical skills required by industries. Between 1991 and 2024, industries became more technology-based, but training institutions did not grow at a faster rate. This led to structural unemployment.

#### **Over Reliance on Low-Productivity Sectors:**

A large portion of India's workforce is still engaged in agriculture and the informal sector, which have low productivity and limited earning capacity. Despite growth in the industrial and service sectors, rural employment has remained stagnant. This structural imbalance creates disguised unemployment, where workers contribute very little to production. From 1991 to 2024, the migration of workers from agriculture to manufacturing and services has slowed.

#### **Limited job opportunities in the formal sector:**

The formal employment sector has not provided adequate opportunities for the growing labour force. Capital-intensive industries grew after liberalization after 1991, but employment generation in this sector has declined. Most of the employment is in the unorganized sector, where wages are low and security are lacking. Between 2011 and 2024, many manual jobs were eliminated due to technological advancements.

#### **Regional Disparities in Employment:**

Population pressure is not uniform everywhere in India. In states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, population has increased but industrialization has decreased. While in the south and west, there are more employment opportunities, due to which migration has increased. While congestion and competition have increased in urban areas, disguised unemployment has increased in rural areas.

#### **Educated Youth Unemployment:**

India's youth is a large labour force. But the economic growth between 1991 and 2024 did not create enough jobs. The spread of education increased, but employment opportunities for educated youth did not arise. This left many young people frustrated by unemployment, resulting in discontent, migration abroad, and increased educated unemployment. Lack of employment can also lead to social instability.

#### **Resource Constraints:**

Population growth puts a strain on the resources needed for job creation – capital, infrastructure, education and health. It becomes difficult for the government to provide funds for large-scale employment schemes. The growing population increases the demand for public services, resulting in a shortage of funds for development projects. This makes it financially difficult to effectively implement employment policies.

#### **Pressure on Agricultural Sector:**

Due to the lack of industrial employment, a large section of India's population still depends on agriculture, but land availability is limited and productivity is low. Although many people work in agriculture and the unorganized sector, they are not fully productive. Hidden unemployment arises because a large number of people work for the same job. This problem has persisted in rural India from 1991 to 2024. Employment policies find it difficult to divert this surplus labour force to other sectors.

#### **Pressure on Wages:**

Population growth increases the supply of workers, which reduces their bargaining power. Since employment opportunities are limited, employers pay lower wages. As a result, they cannot meet their basic needs. This wage pressure, the standard of living declines, poverty and inequality increase.

#### **Policy Implementation Challenges:**

Although there are many good employment schemes, their implementation is difficult due to population pressure. Government schemes like MGNREGA, Skill India, PMEGP face administrative and financial limitations. Lack of coordination between the Centre and the states leads to delays. The scale of the problem is large, and more resources are required for implementation. As a result: Many schemes have not reached all the people and the gap between demand and supply of employment has increased.

#### **Impact of unemployment on sustainable development goals in India:**

Unemployment in India poses a significant socio-economic challenge, impacting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in profound ways. It is a major reason of poverty; without stable jobs or decent wages, people struggle to meet their basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. The ongoing issue of unemployment in both rural and urban settings not only keeps poverty alive but also widens the gap in income inequality, making it tough to reach SDG 1, which aims to "End poverty everywhere." Additionally, food security, tied to SDG 2, "Zero hunger," is severely affected. Families lacking a steady income often find it hard to buy enough nutritious food, leading to increased malnutrition, particularly among children and women. The challenges of rural

unemployment, underemployment, and low-paying informal jobs hinder efforts to ensure food security and combat hunger effectively.

Unemployment has a significant impact on health, which ties into SDG 3, "Good health and well-being for all." When people are out of work, they often struggle to cover medical expenses, health insurance, or even preventive care, which raises their risk of falling ill. Moreover, the stress and mental health issues that come with unemployment can take a toll on overall well-being. It also affects children's education, linking it to SDG 4, "Quality Education." Families in financial distress may have to keep their kids at home to work, leading to gaps in literacy and skills, and making it tough to ensure inclusive and quality education for everyone. High unemployment stands in stark contrast to SDG 8, "Productive employment and economic growth for all." A shortage of jobs hampers economic growth, lowers productivity, limits earnings, and undermines the rights of informal workers and social safety nets. Additionally, unemployment impacts SDG 10, "Reducing Inequality," as it exacerbates socio-economic divides. It drives rural-urban migration, which puts a strain on urban infrastructure, leads to the growth of slums, and overwhelms public services, complicating efforts to achieve SDG 11, "Sustainable Cities and Communities." Lastly, unemployment also relates to SDG 16, "Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions." High unemployment rates, particularly among young people, can heighten the risk of social unrest, crime, and exploitation, which threatens the goal of fostering a peaceful and inclusive society.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations:**

India's population grew rapidly from 84.6 crore to about 142.8 crore between 1991 and 2024. Although India's population growth has slowed, the total population is growing and this growing population has put a lot of pressure on employment generation, which is a major obstacle to sustainable development in India. It affects everything from economic growth and social inclusion to health, education, and governance. Although GDP is growing rapidly, employment growth is limited and unemployment continues to rise. Industrial growth is not labour-intensive but capital-intensive. This situation shows that India is experiencing economic growth but not employment generation, that is, "unemployment growth". Due to the growing population and low employment generation, the number of unemployed, underemployed and unorganized workers has increased. The rapidly growing population is not only slowing down the pace of India's economic growth but is also giving rise to economic and social problems. The pressure of the growing population makes it impossible for every educated and uneducated person to find employment. The unemployment rate is increasing faster than the rate of employment generation. When a person does not find employment despite trying, he becomes depressed and his standard of living declines. In short, the challenge before India is not only to sustain high GDP growth but it must be inclusive and employment generating.

Family planning, education and industrialization policies are necessary to maintain a balance between population growth and employment generation. It is necessary to focus on investment and employment-oriented development in sectors that increase productivity. Therefore, economic growth can be converted into employment generation. Labor-intensive industries like textiles, construction, food processing can provide large-scale employment to the growing workforce. The government should provide tax breaks, infrastructure facilities, and easy regulations to such industries. Skill development, human resource investment, infrastructure and strategy are necessary to maintain a balance between population and development. Promoting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) will increase employment in rural and urban areas. Encouraging local entrepreneurship in rural areas will reduce the pressure of migration and maintain balanced regional development. About half of the workforce is still employed in agriculture, but productivity is low. Modern technology, irrigation, crop diversification and Agro-processing industries are necessary for the development of the agricultural sector. Population pressure increases the need for infrastructure and public investment. Investment in roads, electricity, water, housing and energy sectors creates direct and indirect employment. Emphasis should be placed on creating sustainable assets. Increasing infrastructure projects through public-private partnerships will increase employment generation in both rural and urban areas. Economic policy (Industrial Policy, Employment Policy) and population policy will have to be formulated in an integrated manner. Initiatives like Skill India, Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) need to be strengthened. Training in new sectors IT, green energy, healthcare will increase productive employment. Expansion of industry and service sectors is necessary to increase employment in the informal sector. Schemes like "Make in India" and "Startup India" should focus more on job creation. Promoting ease of doing business, digitalization and entrepreneurship will create stable, quality jobs. Last but not least, India needs to implement the right policies to achieve the "demographic dividend" otherwise this population can become a burden.

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