

OVER POPULATION AS A MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL THREAT: A STUDY OF HARRY HARRISON'S MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!

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Abstract

Overpopulation has been acknowledged as a global environmental threat for a few decades, as it has catalyzed several unfavorable reactions in the environment. Although developed countries consume the environment's resources and recapitulate it, developing nations are under pressure to become economically strong, and as a result, their industrial advancements destroy the environment as well. This progress threatens the life of our upcoming generation on earth. In addition to this, one of the biggest hazards on the environment due to population explosion is the problem of global warming. Our scientists continuously warn that this gradual increment in population affects global warming that will lead to upsurging sea levels and unfavorable weather altitude in the future. Overpopulation directly harms the existing environmental cycle. For example, to fulfill the requirement of the population density forests are cutting in a frightening manner. Despite deforestation, urban sprawl, food insecurity, climate change, and declining biocapacity are some of the most severe impacts of population explosion. The objective of this paper is to analyze the hazards of Overpopulation on the environment and economic advancement by taking the reference of the novel Make Room! Make Room! by Harry Harrison as the basis of the study. The present study is based on textual analysis of the novel along with secondary data taken from statistical abstracts, census reports and world population report, and various websites related with the theme.

Keywords: Overpopulation, Environment, Soy lent, Epidemic, Pollution.

Introduction

‘Ati Sarvatra Varjayet’ (Samgraha 562) which means an excess of anything is harmful. Although, Human has been considered the finest creation of God as mentioned in the Bible and other religious scriptures. But this beautiful creation of God now challenges the functions of other concoctions of the Almighty as it crosses the extreme boundaries, as a result, disturbs the process of natural cycles. Now in the world, there are limitless mouths present to feed and the quantity of available food is limited. Thus, the available resources are unable to fulfill the requirement of the whole population. In this way, the condition of overpopulation is quite severe, because these natural resources deplete at a very faster level. Population explosion causes environmental damage including deforestation, pollution of different kinds i.e., air pollution, water pollution, noise pollution, etc. The condition of overpopulation gives birth to a condition, a scuffle for resources.

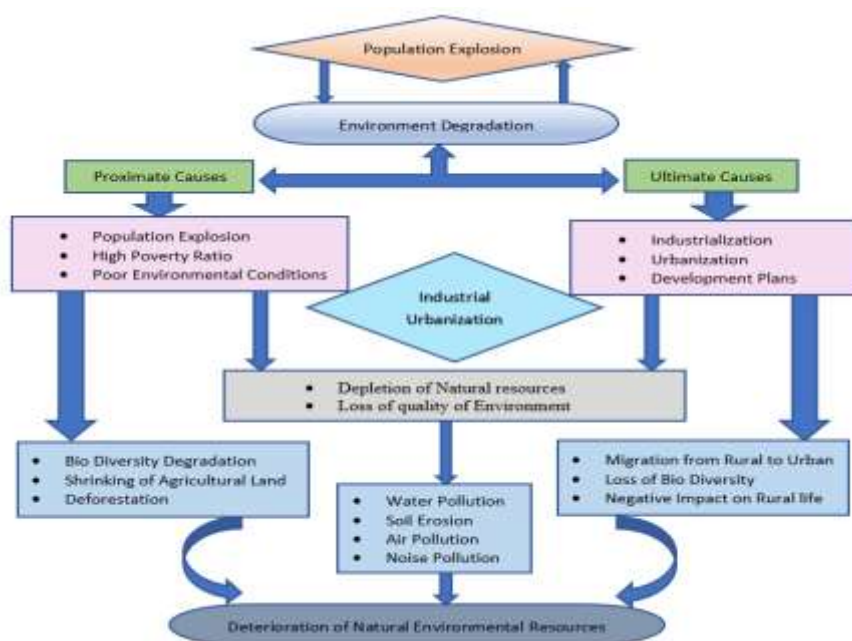
Overpopulation has badly affected the quality of human life in recent years as it touched a mark of 8 billion on 15 November 2022. The latest projection by the United Nations suggests that the global

population could grow around 8.5 billion in 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050(UN 2022). This overpopulation is caused due to declining level of mortality as compared to life expectancy at birth. According to World Population Prospects, 2022 “Globally, life expectancy reached 72.8 years in 2019, an increase of almost 9 years since 1990” (UN 2022).

Impacts of Overpopulation on the Environment

Overpopulation has immense environmental implications. No doubt, it has contributed to the national economy at the global level, but it has caused some severe impacts on the environment Figure: 1 shows different situations which arise due to overpopulation.

Figure: 1 **Effects of Overpopulation on the Environment**



These are some of the major concerns associated with rapid population growth.

In the present paper, the researcher tries to connect the link between the present social environment and the conditions which American science fiction author Harry Harrison portrayed in his dystopian novel *Make Room! Make Room!* Arises due to population explosion. In this novel writer explores the adverse consequences of both population explosion on society and controlling of basic resources by a wealthy class, which is in minority. Because of the hoarding of resources by the wealthy class, the working class leads a very miserable life in which they are deprived of even basic human needs- food, cloth, and shelter and forced to live a very miserable life suffering from plague and other health diseases due to lack of hygiene and availability of food. Common people have to do immoral works

like- murder, theft, and robbery just to fill satisfy their hunger. Everywhere there is a scarcity of basic needs people are constrained to eat whatever they get because they think it is better to live than to die due to a lack of supply of water and food.

Welfare

Population explosion undoubtedly affects the quality of life. QUL (Quality of Life) includes an individual's satisfactory approach in different basic aspects of life such as:

- Financial Status
- Health
- Education
- Social Status
- Family Life
- Employment

According to Quality-of-Life Index 2022, Switzerland ranks first in QUL with a comparatively low population as compared to India which ranks 48. Rapid population growth has inflicted a burden on existing of a such huge population which results in an increasing poverty rate. This elevation in poverty leads to inhuman activities.

Deforestation

People usually think that in urban areas they will get a better lifestyle and can easily resolve the problem of unemployment. As a result, people migrated from the village towards cities, and increasing urbanization has prompted deforestation at a very fast speed to fulfill the infrastructural demand of the increasing human population. According to the World Migration Report, 281 million international migrations happened in the world in 2020. And net migration from rural to urban during 2001- 2011 was 11 million which has risen during 2019- 2020 up to 140 million in India. Increment in population in urban areas caused a steady increase in the alternative of land utilization to fulfill the economic needs in the form of agricultural products. Although, to control deforestation an Act was enacted in India in 1980. Due to that conversion of forest areas to residential, agricultural, and residential areas was reduced to some extent.

In the novel, there is a character named Soloman Khan a retired engineer who forcefully retired from his job due to overpopulation. Because there are several young person's available to do the job. Once

there was a time when Solomon came to New York City to fulfill his dreams but as a result of overpopulation unable even to get the food of his choice. There was a scene when he gets strawberry jam to taste due to his roommate Andy Rusch. He feels as if he gets nectar because many years have passed since they get food of their choice and taste. During the investigation of Michael O'Brien's murder who is a rich person and has all the luxury and lives in a villa among the rich class, Andy brings with him soap, a towel, a whiskey bottle, and some vegetables – onion and tomato. This shows how depravedness there is in the city where even an investigation officer is unable to fulfill his desire to eat a food of his choice. And it's a very surprising thing that when Rusch comes home with all these things after seeing all these products in his roommate's hands tears come to Solomon's eyes. He feels as if he is in heaven. This scene makes us aware of the problems that arise due to overpopulation. Due to population explosion, people are bound to eat tasteless food because there is everywhere scarcity to get good food and pure water.

The novel shows a dystopian picture of the future when the world will fight the crisis of overpopulation. The author depicts that there is no place to live on the earth, human beings are scrambling over each other to find a place to sit and sleep, fighting to get frightened over filthy water, satisfying their hunger with the unpleasant and dirty smell of soy and lentil paste. A kid named Billy Chung steals a box of soylent steaks to satisfy his hunger and decides to sell the rest steaks. This shows how the lack of availability of resources provokes a kid to do some unfair means. Harrison writes, "The planet's population has exploded. The 35 million inhabitants of New York City run their TVs off pedal power, riot for water, loot and trample for lentil 'steaks' and are controlled by sinister barbed wire dropped from the sky" (34).

Further, the novel shows how human beings behave in the crisis of overpopulation. People revert to dog eat – dog morality and social structure collapse in the face of lack of availability of basic requirements. In the novel, there is a female character named Shirl Greene who is the girlfriend of Brien and lives with him in his villa. Shirl is portrayed as a concubine in the novel because she sells her body to get a place to live in and food to eat and signs a contract permitting her body to serve as a mistress to Brien. What a miserable condition it is! where a girl has to sell her body due to lack of food and place. After the death of Brien, Greene has to make physical relationships with other men to swell her belly. Harrison states "One time we had the whole world in our hands, but we ate it and burned it and it gone now" (paperback).

Andy Rusch is a detective in the police force trying to control the massively overcrowded population that does not have sanitary food or water to keep itself healthy and alive. The only food that is available

for the poor class is a product called 'Soylent' made up of human corpses secretly. The government tries to maintain a system but due to resources hoarded in the hands of the rich, the rich get richer, and the poor stay underneath. Harrison asserts "Two, four, six, eight- welfare rations come too late. Three, five, seven, nine – Medicare is still behind" (164).

In the novel, we find the thrilling fact that human corpses are used to prepare food for poor people. And in the end, when Andy reveals the fact of Soylent's food, he is killed by the company holders and he screamed in desperate pain 'Soylent Green is People'. Here through this line, Harrison shows the psychology of upper or so-called elite people who can do anything to become richer. Secondly, Harrison depicts the helplessness of the poor people who eat whatever they get in the name of food without thinking of their quality and material. The same concept is also highlighted in the essay 'Modest Proposal' by Jonathan Swift, the novel shows the negligence of the government of Ireland in the supply of basic required articles due to overpopulation. In his essay Swift ironically proposes that the poor people of Ireland sell their children as food to the upper class. As government shows their lack of interest in introducing some government policies, Swift proposed to the government to criticize their ill-handedness 'A Modest Proposal for preventing the children of the poor people in Ireland from being a burden to their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to their public' (Swift 612).

The novel also mentions the solution to control the growth of the population with the help of government policy (Birth control) "we got a plague of people, a disease a people infesting the world. We got more people who are living longer. Less people have to be born, that is the answer. We got death control- we got to match it with birth control" (179) which is somehow linked with Malthusian theory. Malthusianism states that reducing population growth will restore the balance of resources to population size, as there are enough to go around. Harrison states "Birth control does mean no children. It just means that people have a choice in how they want to live. Like rutting, unthinking, breeding animals- or like reasoning creatures. Will a married couple have one, two, or three children- whatever number will keep the world population steady and provide a full life of opportunity for everyone? Or will they have four, five, or six, unthinking and uncaring, and raise them in hunger and cold and misery? Like world out there..." (177).

To conclude, we can say that rapid population growth continues to be a matter of concern not only for one country but for the whole world as it leads to so many environmental hazards. The present study seeks that the problem of overpopulation leads to the exploitation of natural resources. "The outcome of the high population growth rates is increasing number of people below the poverty line, an increasing population density, and pressure on natural resources" (Nagdeve 16). Environmental

degradation is directly related to population explosion and the development activities of human beings. Growing population pressure on the cultivation of land lead to the degradation of soil, thus affecting production and economic growth. Environmental effects such as global warming, and different kinds of pollution lead to adverse effects on the health of people. As Dr. Dewaram explains in his research paper “the growth of population is a fundamental factor in its relationship to natural resources, environment, and technology” (17). In a nutshell, it is demand of time to control the birth rate which results in increase of poverty, protection and conservation of natural resources and the environment to create a healthy world and smiling human beings. At the end of the novel the author concludes with a blessing note “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain...Christ shall return to reign gloriously on Earth” (229).

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