

# ❖ Population Geography

## ▪ The Malthusian Theory of Population

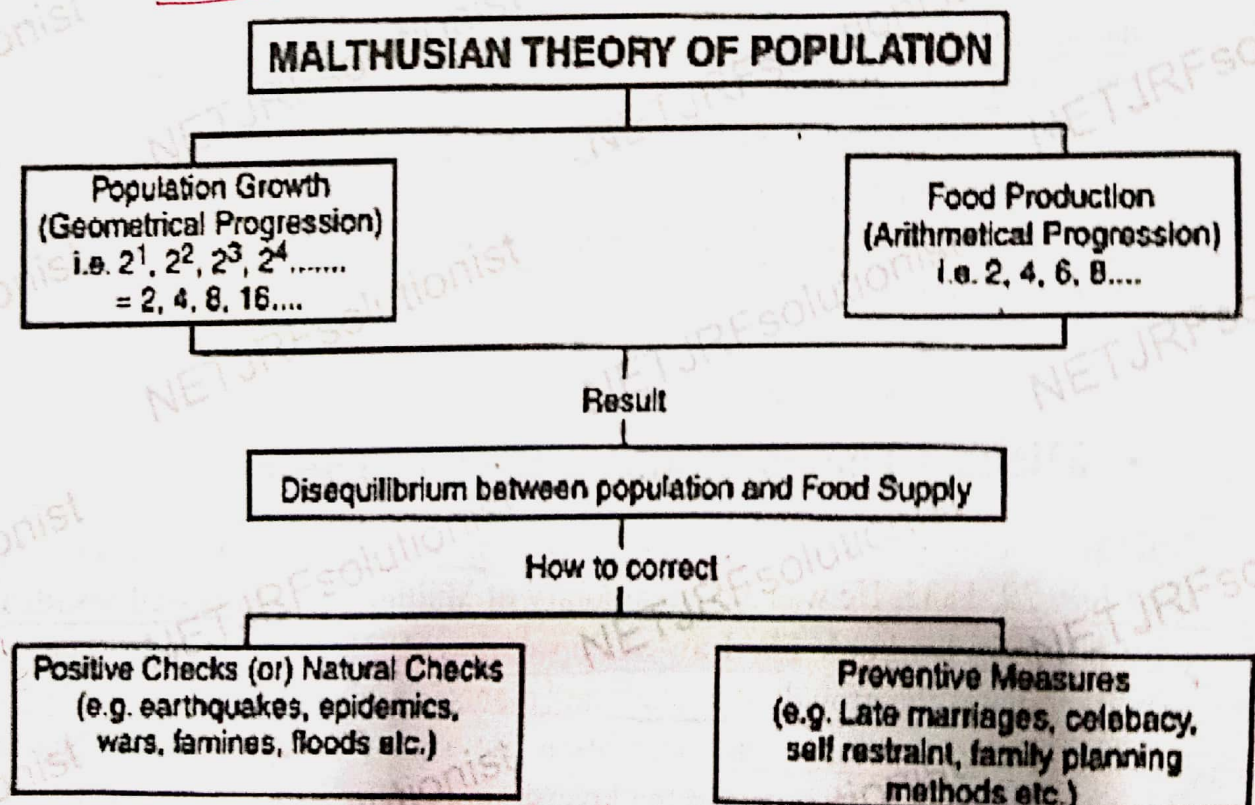
Basics in Western countries

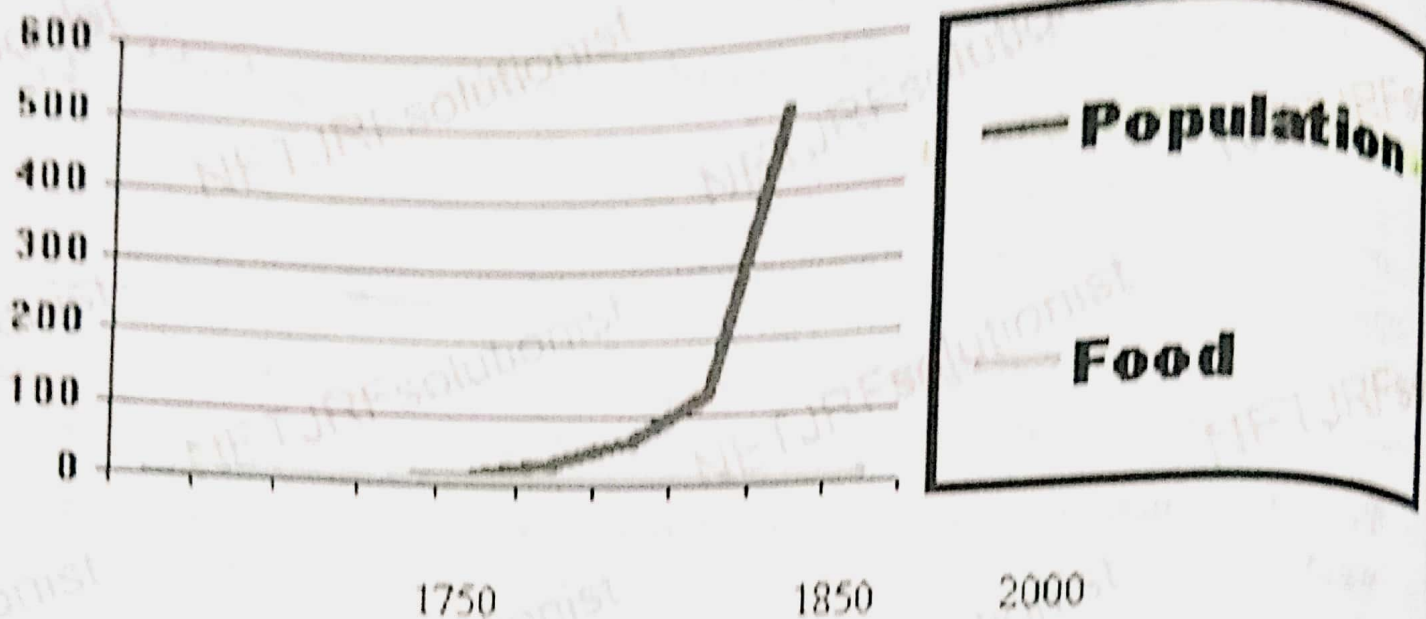
**Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834)** was the key figure to analyse the population statistics. His formulation on population was a landmark in the history of population theories. He generalized the relationship between population factors and social change. His empirical approach to the population problem was a result of his study of the experience of West European countries. In his book "Essay on the Principle of Population" (1798) Malthus argued that two types of checks hold population within resource limits:

1. **Positive**, which raise the death rate, i.e. positive checks include **hunger, disease and war**
2. **Preventive**, which lower the birth rate i.e. preventive checks includes **family planning, postponement of marriage and celibacy.**

Malthus contended that the world's population was growing more rapidly than the available food supply. He argued that the food supply increases in an **arithmetic progression** (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and so on), whereas the population expands by a **geometric progression** (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64 and so on). In simple words, food supply increases at a slower rate than population. This means that there will be shortage of food sooner or later. This is because of the operation of the **Law of Diminishing Returns** in food production.

According to him, the population could increase by multiples, doubling every 25 years. He said the gap between the food supply and population will continue to grow over time. Even though food supply will increase, it would be insufficient to meet the needs of expanding population. Moreover, the **famine** and other natural calamities cause widespread sufferings and increase the death rate, which is nature's check against population.





**Malthus' Theory of Population and Food Growth Over Time**  
 % increase on left axis

### Criticism of Malthus Theory:

The principle theory of population of Malthus has been critically analysed by others.

They have pointed out the following flaws:

1. Malthus' basic premise on sexual passion has been criticised as it mixes up desire for pleasure and sex (a biological instinct) with desire for children (a social instinct).
2. It has been noted that population has rarely grown in geometrical proportion and means of subsistence have only rarely multiplied in arithmetic progression.
3. Malthus has assumed a time span of 25 years for a population to double itself. But the doubling period varies from country to country.
4. Malthus established a causal relationship between positive checks in the form of natural calamities and overpopulation which is not necessary, as natural disasters can happen in under populated areas also.
5. Malthus ignored the role of changing technology and transformations in the socio-economic set-up of a country.
6. Malthus ignored the biological limitation of a population, that is, it cannot grow beyond a limit.