CAMINHOS DE GEOGRAFIA - revista on line
http://www.ig.ufu.br/revista/caminhos.html
ISSN 1678-6343

Instituto de Geografia ufu
Programa de Pós-graduação em Geografia

RELIGION AND INDIA'S GROWING POPULATION: EVIDENCE FROM SOME SELECTED STATES OF INDIA

Lilia Susana Padilla y Sotelo
Profesora en el Instituto de Geografía
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)
México DF, México
lisupa@yahoo.com

Arun Kumar Acharya
Estudiante de Doctorado, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)
México DF, México
acharya_77@yahoo.com

RESUMEN

Los demógrafos raramente consideramos la creencia religiosa, rituales y las prácticas tradicionales como una variable intermediaria importante para el cambio de la fecundidad de la población. Pero, recientemente el censo de la India demuestra que la religión es un factor importante para el cambio en la población de la India, especialmente dentro de la comunidad musulmana. El censo identificó que a partir de 1981-91 a 1991-2001, la población musulmana en la India creció de 12 a 13 por ciento, con un taza de crecimiento anual de 34.5 a 36 por ciento, mientras que la población hindú declinó a partir de 81.24 a 80.58 por ciento - con un taza de crecimiento anual de 25.1 a 20.3 por ciento. Así pues, este estudio procura considerar como la religión es un factor que determina el cambio de la fecundidad en la India, discutiendo que la religión puede ser un determinante directo para este cambio. Para el presente estudio, los datos se han tomado del censo de la India y Encuesta Nacional de Familia y la Salud –I y II.

Palavras-chaves: Agricultura, indústria e população.

RELIGIÓN Y EL CRECIMIENTO DE POBLACIÓN EN LA INDIA: EVIDENCIA DE ALGUNOS ESTADOS SELECCIONADOS

ABSTRAT

We demographers rarely consider religious beliefs, rituals and traditional practices as an important intermediate fertility variable of population change. Recent data from the Census of India, however, shows that religion is a factor behind growing population rates in India, especially within the Muslim community. The census identified that from 1981-91 to 1991-2001, the Muslim population grew from 12 per cent to 13 per cent of the country's total, with annual growth rate rising from 34.5 per cent to 36 per cent, whilst the Hindu population declined from 81.24 per cent to 80.58 per cent of the total - with the annual growth dropping from 25.1 per cent to 20.3 per cent. So, this study attempts to see how religion is a factor determining population change in India, arguing that religion to be a direct determinant of fertility rates. For this study, data has been taken from the Census of India and National Family Heath Survey-I&II.

Key-word: Religion, fertility, contraceptive use, population growth and India

Recebido em 03/03/2005
Aprovado para publicação em 13/03/2005

INTRODUCTION

India's culture is bound to both its religions and languages. The dominant religions in India are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Hinduism appears to have it roots in the Aryan invaders around 2000 B.C. (Roaldn, 1988) and can be traced back to originating in the Indus River Valley area. Hinduism, however, may well have been influenced by many invasions over thousands of years. One theory states that Aryan-Indo-European tribes from Russia and Central Asia invaded Northern India around 1500 B.C. After the Aryan invasion many important Hindu texts and traditions began to appear. All these widely practiced traditions developed and form what is known today as Hinduism. Hinduism has a pantheon of multiple gods and goddesses, some of whom take on a variety of identities. In the sixth century B.C., two religious groups split from Hinduism - Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism eventually died out in the nation of its own birth and thrives now in South-East Asia and China. Jainism developed after Buddhism. Both religions respect all life unconditionally. Due to this belief, Buddhists and Jainists are strict vegetarians, they do not engage in farming because a farmer must kill plants to harvest them and they wear no silk clothing because the silkworm must be killed to obtain the silk thread. They have instead moved into professional careers in such fields as medicine and law. Wealthy Jains maintain many charitable institutions for both people and animals.

After the Hindu religion, Islam is the second largest religion in India. The Muslim religion known as 'Islam' came on the heels of Muslim invaders who arrived as early as 712 A.D. Over the course of the next few centuries Islam gained a solid following especially in India's northwest. It was especially popular with lower castes since it offered them a chance for social and professional advancement. Following Islam, Christians make up the third largest religious group in India, is represented by almost all denominations, and traces its history in India back to the time of the apostles. Judaism and Zoroastrianism, arriving originally with traders and exiles from the West, are represented by small populations, mostly concentrated on India's west coast. A variety of independent tribal religious groups also are lively carriers of unique ethnic traditions.

After Christianity, Sikhism is an another dominant religion in India. This group is a small but important group that has blended Hindu and Muslim ideas. They emerged about 500 years ago as a means to unite warring Hindu and Muslim states. Sikhs reject the Hindu caste system. The British promoted the Sikhs growth by establishing them in colonial administrative positions. More than any other Indian group, the Sikhs benefited from the colonial period. Like Islam, Sikhism is centered in northern India. Amritsar was the actual center of Sikhism prior to the partition. Like Jains, Sikhs represent a small portion of India's large population but are found in much higher than expected concentrations in skilled professions. In ancient India, there developed a social system in which people were divided into separate close communities. These communities are known as a caste system. The origin of the caste system is in Hinduism, but it affects the whole of Indian society. The religious caste system is a simple division of society into four castes, arranged in a hierarchy. From high to low, the caste divisions are priests (Brahman), warriors (Kshatriya), landholders (Vaisya) and servants (Sudra).

In India, religion is a wonderful kaleidoscope of the country's rich social composition. As stated earlier, many religions have originated and certain other religions of foreign origin have flourished to a great extent here. The co-existence of several religious groups in the country makes it unique and the epithet 'unity in diversity' hold true. Religion prescribes a code of life, refers to a system of beliefs, attitudes and practices which individuals share in groups, and through this orientation towards life and death, it is supposed to affect one's fertility behaviors (Chaudhary, 1982). According to Westoff, the religious affiliation of the couple denotes a system of values which can affect family via several routes: (i) directly, by imposing sanctions on the practice of birth control or legitimizing the practice of less effective methods only, or (ii) indirectly, by indoctrinating its members with a moral and social philosophy of marriage and family which emphasizes the virtues of reproduction (Westoff, 1959).

Thus, the study of demography on the basis of religion is all the more important and intriguing in

the case of India because of its religious heterogeneity, and the fact that followers of different religions are living side by side. Recently, the Census of India stated that the Muslim population is growing dramatically compared to the population of other religions in the country. The Census found that during 1981-91 to 1991-2001, the Muslim population grew from a rate of 34.5 per cent to 36 per cent, while during the same time the Hindu population grew from 25.1 per cent to 20.3 per cent. According to the Census of India, the Muslim population is growing because of high fertility rates among Muslim communities and reduced contraception use by Muslim women. Apart from the Census, other studies by Dhamalingam and Morgan (2004), and Mishra (2004) have all stated that the fertility rate is high among Muslims compared to Hindus. They concluded that this is due to a decline in contraceptive use among Muslim communities. While Sriya Iyer (2002) pointed out in her study that the main reason for this is prohibition by 'Islam', she also stated that the low status of women within the Muslim community is a major catalyst for low contraceptive use and high fertility.

This illustrates that whilst the rest of the world is observing a general decline in fertility rates, in India growing fertility rates are apparently due to the intervention of religious aspects. Although India is the first country in the world that officially introduced formal population policy and family planning programs to control high population growth in the 70s, after more than three decades it is still witness to high population growth and has now become the second most populous country in the world after China. It is necessary, therefore, to look at how population dynamics have changed throughout the different religious communities in the country.

Objectives of the study and Data used

In the light of the social norms and inhibitions prevailing in India an attempt has been made in this paper to see how religion is affecting population change in India. As stated previously, two religions (Hinduism and Islam) represent the majority of the population in India, so for this research four states has been selected based on religious group. In two of the states selected - Himachal Pradesh and Orissa - the majority of the population are Hindus whilst the other two states - Jammu & Kashmir and Assam - have been selected because the majority of their populations are Muslim (see the map 1).

For the present study, data has been taken from the Census of India. In India the Census is the most comprehensive single source of accurate information about its territory and people. The first Census of India covered the period 1867-1872 (during British control), although it did not cover the whole of the country. The next Census, in 1881, covered a wider area and was more sophisticated in nature. Since then, a new census has been taken in India every ten years. The recent 2001 census represents the fourteenth.

Apart from the census of India, some data has also been taken from the National Family Health Survey 1 and 2, where a nation-wide large scale probability sample of around 90,000 married women between the ages of 15-49 were interviewed during 1992-93 and 1998-99. The main objectives of these two surveys were to provide reliable and up to date information on fertility, family planning, mortality and maternal and child health.

Religion and Population Issues in India

Among the various social characteristics of populations, religion is important in the sense that it influences various types of demographic behaviors. While sociologists study religion from various angles, demographers treat it as a variable when studying marriage, fertility, mortality, migration - studies which emphasize the relationship between religious affiliations and fertility behaviors are numerous. Thus, religion has immense social, economic, and political significance in most societies, and it plays an important role in sanctioning or promoting acceptance or creating resistance in demographic changes (Pearce, 2001). For example, in India, lower contraceptive use rates and higher fertility rates among Muslims in comparison with Hindus and other religions are always debated in both academic and political circles (Pai Panandiker and Umashankar, 1994).

Earlier research in India found that the low use of contraception and higher fertility, especially

within the Muslim community, is due to the low socioeconomic status of Muslim communities (Mistry, 1999), while others argue that it is due to pronatalist ideology and greater opposition to family planning among Muslims (Gandotra, 1998). Among the other reasons for lower contraceptive use and high fertility is the differential marriage pattern, including an early age of marriage, greater remarriage rates (Bhagat and Unisa, 1991) and gender roles (low status of women) (Mistry, 1999). However, most religions relate, either directly or indirectly, to population issues. In the following section, some of the major religions will be examined for an understanding of their points of view in this respect.

Hinduism: Traditionally, the Hindu religion stressed the importance of marriage and the begetting of children. Even today, marriage is universal amongst Hindus because it is expected that a man should go through the various stages of his life performing the duties attached to each stage, and marriage is considered to be one such duty. After the first stage, bramhacharyashram, when he is

a student and devotes his time and energies to the pursuit of knowledge, a man enters the second stage, grihasthashram, by getting married. The aim of Hindu marriage are said to be dharma (religion), praja (progeny) and rati (pleasure). When a man gets married and becomes a householder, he accepts dharma as the highest aim of marriage, indicating that it is desired not so much for sex or progeny but rather for obtaining a partner for the fulfillment of one's religious duties. For the woman, marriage is essential because although a man goes through several sacraments throughout his life, marriage is the only sacrament that she is allowed (Bhende and Kanitkar, 2003).

Procreation is the second aim of Hindu marriage, and bringing forth a son has always been considered necessary because only then can he ceremoniously kindle the funeral pyre and thus effect the salvation of his father's soul. Therefore, he is called *putra* (son). Even a daughter is desired because *kanyadaana*[1] adds to the *punya* (sacred) of the parents. Newly married Hindu couples have, therefore, always received blessings from their elders like '*may you have eight sons and five daughters*' (Bhende and Kanitkar, 2003).

Islam: The Muslim thinking on population was mainly pro-populationistic. The Muslim tradition says 'Marry the affectionate prolific woman, for I shall be proud of you among the nations'. Of the many objectives of marriage, one of the utmost importance is man's procreation of sons and daughters, thereby renewing and extending his own life.

Islam texts are also clear on the point that the primary objective of the establishment of a family is the perpetuation of the human species through the satisfaction of the sexual urge, which is achieved through sexual intercourse between husband and wife. It is, however, worth noting that one important work by an Arab author of the fourteenth century, Ibn khaldoun (1332-1460), made two interesting points: that a densely settled population was conducive to higher standard of living, for it helped achieve a greater division of labor and a more effective utilization of resources, and; it also ensured military and political security and population size increased and decreased in synch with economic fluctuations, and that favorable economic conditions and political stability brought about population growth. Here, he sounded a note of warning, and stated that economic progress also encouraged luxurious living, led to higher taxation and brought about political instability, which in turn caused economic depression and depopulation (Bhende and Kanitkar, 2003).

Population growth in India

At present, India is the second most populous country in the world. According to the 2001 Census, the population of India is about 1027 million (over one billion). That is about eleven times higher than the population of the United States and more than twice the population density of China (although China's population is almost entirely located on the eastern side of the country). India's current population growth rate of 1.7 per cent exceeds both China (0.9 per cent) and the United States (0.6 per cent), who are respectively first and third in total population (United Nations, 2001). India has about 17 per cent of the world's population, while it has only 2.4 per cent of total land area of the world.

Population growth in India has gone through four different phases, these being: Phase 1 during 1901 to 1921, where India experienced 'stagnant population growth' (due to a high mortality rate); Phase 2 is from 1921 to 1951, where the country's population grew steadily due to the introduction of modern medicine (decreasing mortality rate); Phase 3 is from 1951 to 1981, during which the population grew rapidly, and; finally Phase 4, from 1981 to 2001, where the country's population grew rapidly but then shows that growth rates are beginning to decline. It should be noted that during the period 1981-91, the population of India increased by 23.86 per cent and the average annual exponential growth rate was 2.14., both indicators of population growth being lower than those observed during 1971-81. It can be further noted that the lowering of population growth continued during 1991-2001, with the growth rate for that decade being 21.34 per cent, and the average annual exponential growth rate being 1.93 per cent (see table 1).

[1] Kanyadaana; Giving the hand of daughter to her husband during the time of her marriage.

The reasons for this rapid population growth is the contact with Western nations, in particular Great Britain, which help India to import the western medicine for different diseases. Due to this the mortality rate decline dramatically in India, for example in 1911-1921 the death rate in India was 48.6 per thousand, while in 1998-99 it is 9.7 per thousand (IIPS, 1999). It must be noted that the ill effects of severe famines have been considerably reduced by preventive and relief measures; the plague has been eradicated; cholera has been brought under control; small-pox has been eradicated from the Indian sub-continent according to the reports of the World Health Organization, and malaria, which is an extremely debilitating disease, has been brought under control. Public health measures and the advancement in medical science mainly imported from developed countries have further contributed to a reduction in mortality levels in India. The above discussion highlights the fact that decline in the mortality levels specially after 1921 is the main reason of high population growth in India.

Apart from this, as the largest democratic nation in the world, India has been unable to enforce population controls like those in China. In addition, India is also a multi religious country with each religion having a different social norm, which makes it very difficult for the government to control the population. It is thus clear that in addition to other factors, religion in India plays an important role in population change and for that reason will be discussed here.

Table 1

Total population growth in India (1901 - 2001)

Census year	Total population	*Growth*	
		Absolute	Per cent
1901	238,396,327	-	-
1911	252,093,390	13,697,063	5.75
1921	251,321,213	-772,177	-0.31
1931	278,977,238	27,656,025	11.00
1941	318,660,580	39,683,342	14.22
1951	361,088,090	42,427,510	13.31
1961	439,234,771	78,146,681	21.64
1971	548,159,652	108,924,881	24.80
1981	683,329,097	135,169,445	24.66
1991	846,387,888	163,058,791	23.86
2001	1,027,015,247	180,627,359	21.34

Source: Census of India 1901-2001.

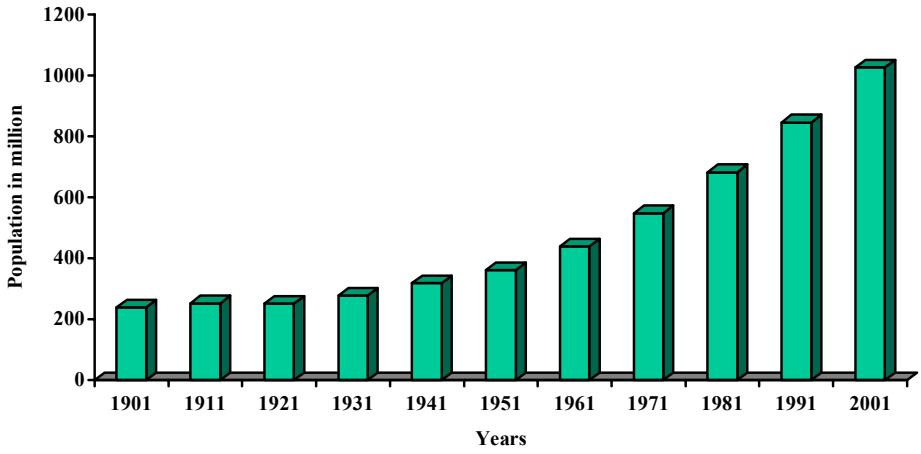
Religion and Population Change in India

As previously mentioned, religion in India plays an important role in the country's changing population structure. This is thanks to different religions which have different norm and different social practices. Basically, Hindu and Muslim are the two major largest religious groups in India, both of which play a key role in demographic changes in India. From the table, we can see that in 1961 the total population of Hindu religion was 366.52 million whilst the Muslim population was 46.94 million and the total population of others religion (Christian, Sikhs, Buddhist and Jains) was 25.46 million. This shows that the Hindu population was the dominant group in India, followed by the Muslim population. After 40 years, however, the scenario has changed. In 2001, even though the Hindu population remains the largest population group, over the same period the Muslim population is three times larger than it was in 1961 and the total population of other religions have also doubled. This reflects how the Muslim population is growing much faster than the Hindu population.

Although, over past decades, the populations of different religious bases have been growing steadily, the actual growth rates show that apart from the Muslim community, Hindu and other

Figure 1

Population growth in India (1901 – 2001)



Source: Census of India 1901-2001.

Table 2

Population growth in India according to religion during 1961 to 2001 (in million)

Religion	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Hindu	366.52	453.43	549.77	687.64	827.57
Muslim	46.94	61.41	75.51	101.59	138.88
Others	25.46	33.40	39.99	49.32	62.11

Source: Census of India 1901-2001.
Others religion include the population of Christian, Sikhs, Buddhist and Jains.

religious populations are gradually declining. In table 3, we have tried to calculate population sizes in India according to religion. This table shows that in 1961 the proportion of Hindus within the total population was 83.44 percent whilst the Muslim and other religious populations were 10.68 per cent and 5.88 per cent respectively. By 2001, however, the Hindu population had declined to 80.58 per cent of the total, whilst the Muslim population had gone up to 13.45 per cent of the total. Thus, it can be observed that between 1961 and 2001 the Muslim population has grown continuously.

To the see the actual changes of population structure according to religion in India, this study has selected four states and calculated the proportion of population during two different time periods 1961 and 2001. Table 4 shows that in 1961 approximately 95.9 percent of population in the state of Himachal Pradesh were Hindus, whilst only 1.3 per cent were Muslims with other religions making up 2.8 per cent. Four decades later (2001) and in this same state the Hindu population has declined slightly but the Muslim population has increase to 2 per cent. In the case of another state where Hinduism is dominant – Orissa – the table shows that in 1961 about 97.5 per cent of the population was Hindu, with 1.2 per cent and 1.3 per cent made up of Muslims and other religious groups respectively. By 2001, however, the Hindu population had declined down to 94.4 per cent of the total with Muslims and others religious groups both growing in size.

Table 3

Proportion of population according to religion during 1961 to 2001 in India (in percentage)

Religion	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Hindu	83.44	82.71	80.45	81.24	80.58
Muslim	10.68	11.20	11.50	12.00	13.45
Others	5.88	6.09	8.05	6.76	5.97

Source: Census of India 1901-2001.
Others include the population of Christian, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains and others religion.

So if this is the case in Hindu dominant states, what will the situation be like in traditionally Muslim dominant states? To understand the situation we need to look at the two most Muslim-dominant states in India; Jammu & Kashmir and Assam. In the state of Jammu & Kashmir in 1961 about 28.4 per cent of population was Hindu and 68.3 per Muslim (with others religion making up 3.3 per cent). By 2001, the Hindu populations in these two states had increased with the Muslim population declining. Though the Muslim population has declined the changes are very small. The major change has been due to the war between India and Pakistan in 70s. During this conflict, Pakistan occupied some part of Jammu & Kashmir, (which is now known as Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) where the majority of population are Muslim. Due to this we can observe a increase in the Hindu population and decline in the Muslim population. In the case of Assam, however, we find that in 1961 about 71.3 per cent of population was Hindu and 25.3 per cent of the population was Muslim. By 2001, the Hindu population had declined to 64.9 per cent - reflecting that in the space of 40 years the state had lost 6.4 per cent of its Hindu population – whilst the Muslim population had increased to 30.9 per cent, a very significant rise. Table 4 therefore highlights how in almost all four states studied, the Muslim population is increasing compared to the Hindu population. As this discussion shows a differential population growth according to religion in India, so it urge us to investigate the fertility differential among these religions.

Table 4

Proportion of population according to religion in selected states during 1961 and 2001 (in percentage)

States	Himachal Pradesh		*Orissa*		Jammu & Kashmir		Assam	
Religion	1961	2001	1961	2001	1961	2001	1961	2001
Hindu	95.9	95.4	97.5	94.4	28.4	29.6	71.3	64.9
Muslim	1.3	2.0	1.2	2.1	68.3	67.0	25.3	30.9
Others	2.8	2.6	1.3	3.6	3.3	3.4	3.4	4.2

Source: Census of India 1901-2001.
Others include the population of Christian, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains and others religion.

Religion and differential fertility

Religion and fertility change is highly debated in the Indian context. As the different religions of India have different social norms, this affect very much fertility behaviors in the country. It has been observed that the levels and pattern of fertility vary according to religion. A study of differential fertility among different religions is useful, as it will give an idea of the future proportion of each group as part of the total population. This is also important for the implementation of family planning programmes because it helps us to identify high fertility groups on which the programme efforts can be concentrated. So to bring out a clear picture on the population change according to religion in India, here we will attempt to analyze the fertility pattern of different religions in India across four selected states. Results can be seen in table 5.

Table 5

Fertility rate according to religion in selected states during 1992-93 and 1998-99

Country/ States	Hindu	Muslim	Others
India			
1992-1993	3.30	4.41	2.77
1998-1999	2.78	3.59	2.33
Himachal Pradesh			
1992-1993	2.90	4.87	4.38
1992-1993	2.11	3.23	2.71
Orissa			
1992-1993	2.90	2.45	3.36
1992-1993	4.23	3.01	2.43
Jammu & Kashmir			
1992-1993	3.01	3.88	2.64
1992-1993	2.68	2.72	3.24
Assam			
1992-1993	2.92	5.03	4.81
1992-1993	2.00	3.05	1.42

Source: National Family Health Survey I and II.
Others include the population of Christian, Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains and others religion.

Table 5 shows that in India during the year 1992-93 the total fertility rate of the Hindu population was 3.30 per woman, while the fertility rate was 4.41 per woman within the Muslim community. The fertility rate of others religion was 2.77 per woman. During this period, the fertility rate among Muslim was high. Which reflects that during in 1992-93 in every 1000 Hindu women added 330 new Hindu children and at the same time in every 1000 Muslim women added 441 new Muslim children, which shows that in a year nearly in ever 1000 Muslim women gave birth 111 more children compared to Hindu women. During 1998-99, India experienced a decline in the total fertility rate across all religion. For example the total fertility rate of Hindu population is 2.78 per woman, for Muslim it is 3.5 per woman and the total fertility rate of others religion is 2.71 per woman. This demonstrates that during this period, the Muslim fertility rate was also higher compared to any other religions in India. in other words, in the year 1998-99, every 1000 Hindu women gave birth 278 new Hindu children, whilst in the same time in 1000 Muslim women gave birth 350 new children, which reflects that in this period of time every 1000 Muslim women giving birth population 72 more children compared to the Hindu women in India.

Fertility changes across states shows that in Himachal Pradesh, during 1992-93, the total fertility rate for Hindus was 2.9 per woman and for Muslims and other religions was 4.87 and 4.38 per woman respectively. This illustrates that during this period Muslim and other religion's fertility rates were high compared to that of the Hindu population. After fives year (1998-99), however, Himachal Pradesh has observed a great change in fertility rates, with the fertility rate for Hindus moving closer to replacement level fertility (2.11 per woman) whilst for Muslims although the fertility rate has dropped it remains above the 3 per woman mark. In other states, declining fertility rates have also been observed across all religious groups of Orissa, Jammu & Kashmir and Assam. It is clear from table 5 that as well as finding a decline fertility rate in selected states across religious groups, it is also apparent that total fertility rates among Muslims is considerably higher when compared to others religions in India. In other words, every Muslim woman has on average one child more that their Hindu counterpart. From simple calculations, we can work out that in the year 2001 for every six Hindus there was one Muslim, which is a dramatic change from the situation in 1961 when there was only one Muslim for every ten Hindus. It is thus important to point out that the higher fertility among Muslim communities is a important contributing factor to high population growth in India. The main reason for high fertility rates among Muslim women is the low use of contraception devices.

Religion and contraceptive use

In India, levels of contraceptive use are affected by the religious views and beliefs of many people. As we have seen from the earlier discussion, different religions have different opinions with regards family planning. Thanks to this, different religious groups perceive the use of contraception differently from one another, and consequently we can observe great variation in contraception use among these different groups. Table 6 presents contraception use by different religious groups in the Indian context. From this table it appears that in India during 1992-93 approximately 41.6 per cent of Hindu women were using contraception (both modern and traditional methods), while at the same time only 27.7 per cent of Muslim women and 37.4 per cent of women of other religions were using contraception. This shows that during 1992-93, the majority of Muslim women (72.3 per cent) were not using contraception compared with women of any other religion. During 1998-99, the percentage of contraception use among all religions increased, although rates were higher among Hindu women (49.2 per cent) and other religions (48.6 per cent) than Muslim women (37 per cent). This reflects that after five years of government intervention and family planning programs, there has been some successes, which we can be seen by an increase in the use of contraception by Indian women. It can also be seen, however, that Muslims remain at the top of the list of non-users of contraception (63 per cent).

Although this is the overall situation in India, contraception usage rates by religion across the four selected states show that in Hindu-dominated states like Himachal Pradesh and Orissa, during 1992-93, Hindu women (58.8 per cent and 35.2 per cent) and the others religion women (72.9 per cent and 49 per cent) were far more frequent contraceptive users than Muslim women (41.4 per cent and 19.1 per cent). The same trend is also observed in the Muslim majority states (Jammu & Kashmir and Assam), where the level of contraception use is high among Hindu and women of other religions. This shows that contraception use among Muslim communities is always low compared to any other religious group in India. In addition, such low level of contraception use among Muslim communities results in a higher fertility rate as can be seen from table 5.

Table 6

Use of contraceptive methods according to religion in selected states during 1992-93 and 1998-99 (in percentage)

States	Use of contraception		Not using contraception	
	1992-93	1998-99	1992-93	1998-99
India				
Hindu	41.6	49.2	58.4	50.8
Muslim	27.7	37.0	72.3	63.0
Others	37.4	48.6	62.6	51.4
Himachal Pradesh				
Hindu	58.8	68.3	41.2	31.7
Muslim	41.4	50.9	58.6	49.1
Others	72.9	56.5	27.1	43.9
Orissa				
Hindu	35.2	46.3	61.8	53.7
Muslim	19.1	32.9	80.9	67.1
Others	49.0	40.7	51.0	59.3
Jammu Kashmir				
Hindu	51.8	53.2	48.2	47.8
Muslim	34.3	45.4	65.7	54.7
Others	61.8	66.1	38.2	33.3
Assam				
Hindu	48.3	47.8	51.7	51.4
Muslim	32.3	32.4	67.7	66.5
Others	19.1	35.3	80.9	62.8

Source: National Family Health Survey I and II.
Others include the populations of Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and other religious groups.

The main reason for low contraceptive among the Muslim population is their devotion to 'Islam', which does not permit contraceptive use. For Muslims, the Koran is the primary source of religious authority in Islam and in practice, most Muslims rely on interpretations of the Koran and other religious writings by local ulama (Islamic scholars) to guide their choices (Boonstra, 2001). In the case of Muslims, Islam encourages marriage and procreation within marriage, and most Muslims interpret this as discouraging / prohibiting the use of contraception (Boonstra, 2001, Khan, 1979). The Koran also mentions that children are the 'decoration of life' and forbids infanticide, which is interpreted by some to imply that Islam does not permit contraception. Apart from this, another factor is the lower status of women, compared to women of other religions in India (Boonstra, 2001). Within Muslim communities, men decide whether women will use contraception.

Conclusion

In this study we found that the population of India is growing at a high rate, although in the last few decades the speed of population growth has showed a decline sign. It must be repeatedly emphasized that the future course of population growth in India, a country already over populated, will depend mainly on the reproductive behaviors of its people. Although the mortality rate has declined considerably over the years, there is scope for even further decline, in which case there is all the more reason why the birth rate should correspondingly decrease. A further reduction in birth rate will certainly depend on the effectiveness with which family planning programs - recently re-named the family welfare programme - is implemented.

On the other hand, we have seen from analysis of population data that religion is an important factor in demographic change in India. This is due to the different perceptions that people of different religions have. We have seen that for the last few years the Muslim population has been constantly increasing, while during the same period the population of Hindu and other religions has declined, and this is due to high fertility rates among Muslim communities and lower rates among Hindus and other religious groups. Although Hindus continue to make up an overwhelming majority of the country's total population (80.58 per cent), their growth rate has declined by 4.8 per cent in the period 1981–1991 to 1991-2001 (from 25.1 per cent to 20.3 per cent). Compare this with Muslims who account for 13.45 per cent of the country's total population, with a growth rate that has gone up by 1.5 per cent from 34.5 per cent to 36 per cent. In other words, for every Muslim there are six Hindus in the country. This is due to higher fertility rates, lower contraception use and early marriage among Muslim. Low use of contraception among Muslim communities is due to its symbolic prohibition by 'Islam'. Although the last few decades have seen fertility levels decline and contraceptive use in Muslim communities increase, it is still at a much lower level when compared to Hindus and other religious groups. Thus, population growth in India is strongly influence by religion through fertility patterns and contraceptive use.

From this study it appears that 'religion' could be an important intermediate fertility variable affecting population change. In addition, the Indian government should implement different programs to improve the status of Muslim women providing them with greater education and employment opportunities. India needs a comprehensive approach to control population growth and address family panning methods among Muslim communities. If not, it will be very difficult for India to maintain stable population growth by the year 2015.

A final point is that as a multi-religious country by constitution, and dominated by Hinduism, India has faced a great number of conflicts between Hindu and Muslim communities in the past. A growing Muslim population must be a unwelcome issue among Hindu religious leaders, and it would not be presumptuous to believe that this may be a cause of conflict amongst these two communities in the future.

References

ACHARYA, Arun Kumar, 2004, "Gender preference and India's missing girls: Evidence from some selected states of India". Presented at the Population Association of America annual Meeting, April 1-3, Boston, United States.

AKBAR, K.F., 1974, "Family planning and Islam: A review", Hamdard Islamicus, XVIII(3).

BHAGAT, R.B. and Unisa, S., 1991, "Religion, caste/tribe and marriage age of females in India: A study based on recent census data", Journal of Family Welfare, 37 (1), India.

BHATIA, P.S., 1990, "Population growth of various communities in India-Myth and reality", Demography India, 19(1), India.

BHENDE, A.A, and Tara Kanitkar., 2003, "Principles of Population Studies", Himalaya Publishinh House, Mumbai, India.

BOONSTRA, H., 2001, "Islam, women, and family planning: A primer", The Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, December Issue.

Census of India., 2001, www.censusindia.net

CHAUDHARY, R. H., 1982, "Social Aspects of Fertility", New Delhi: Vikas Publications.

DHARMALINGAM, A, Mogran, S. Philip., 2004, "Pervasive Muslim_Hindu fertility differences in India", Demography, volume 41, No.3, August.

GANDOTRA, M.M, R.D. Retherford, A. Pandey, N.Y. Luther, and V.K. Mishra., 1998, "Fertility in India, National Family Health Survey Subject Reports", No.9, Mumbai: International Institute for Population Sciences, and Honolulu; East-West Center.

IIPS (International Institute for Population Sciences)., 1993, National Family Health Survey 1 (NFHS 1), Mumbai, India.

IIPS (International Institute for Population Sciences)., 1999, National Family Health Survey 2 (NFHS 2), Mumbai, India.

IYER, Sriya., 2002, "Religion and the Decision to use contraception in India", University of Cambridge, England.

KHAN, M.E., 1979, "Family Planning Among Muslims in India", New Delhi, Monohar Publications.

MISHRA, Vinod., 2004, "Muslim/Non-Muslim differentials in fertility and family planning in India", East-West Center working papers, Population and Health Series, No.112, Hawaii, United States.

MISTRY, Malika., 1999, "Role of religion in fertility and family planning among Muslims in India", Indian Journal of Secularism, 3(2), July-September.

PEARCE, L.D., 2001, "Religion's role in shaping childbearing preference: The impact of Hinduism and Buddhism", Presented at the Population Association of America annual Meeting, March 29-31, Washington, DC.

PAI PANANDIKER, V.A and Umashankar, P.K., 1994, "Fertility control and Politics in India, The New politics of Population: Conflicts and Consensus in Family Planning". Eds. J.L. Finkle ad C.A. Mcintosh, A Supplement to Population and Development Review, 20.

ROALDN, Breton., 1988, "Religion and Demographic Change in India", Population, Vol.43, No.6.

WESTOFF, C.F., 1959, "Religion and Fertility in Metropolitan America", Thirty Years of Research in Human Fertility, Retrospect and Prospect, Milbank Memorial Fund, New York, United States.

UNITED NATIONS., 2001, "World Population Monitoring 2000: Population, Gender and Development", New York, United States.