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INTER-RELIGION DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITIES IN INDIA**R. C. CHANDNA****Abstract**

The chief objective of the paper is to analyse inter-religion diversities in selected attributes of population in India. Detailed data on religion released by the Census for the first time form the basis of discussion. The analysis is, by and large, based on state level data tabulated in 6 tables for a comparative analysis. However, maps prepared on the basis of district level data which have recently been released by the Census 2001 were found handy for understanding the regional diversities in various attributes.

The attributes examined in the present inter-religion analysis include distribution, growth, sex ratio, literacy and working force. Hindus, who account for 4 persons out of every five persons in the country were spatially most widespread, Christians were most literate, Sikhs recorded the lowest growth rate as well as sex ratio, and Muslims recorded highest growth rate but were not far behind the Hindus in terms of literacy including female literacy. However, Muslims in North India need to be given the benefit of infiltration from neighbouring countries while comparing their growth rates with their brethren from South India. Since both the main minority communities, namely Muslims and Sikhs recorded contrastingly different growth rates of population, it would be inappropriate to view inter-religion disparities in growth rate in the context of majority-minority syndrome alone. Literacy, instead, has emerged as one of the significant factors influencing growth patterns strongly defying religious connotations. The North-South divide has been found to be the most forceful common feature among all religious communities of India as far as regional patterns of distribution of various attributes are concerned.

Consolidating the fertility decline among Hindus, enhancing the urge for individual well being among Muslims especially of North India, accelerating the literacy transition specifically in the North both among Hindus and Muslims alike, arresting the menace of female foeticide especially among Sikhs have emerged significant issues warranting immediate attention.

Introduction

Rich social composition of a country is perhaps the most sacrosanct characteristic that has the potential for holding the country together in the midst of varied diversities. India has the distinction of being a place of origin of four important religions of the world including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism apart from a few indigenous Tribal faiths that have continued to retain their basic characteristics and have successfully withstood the pressure of major religions for centuries (Census of India, 2001, p vii).

Census of India 2001 has made a commendable contribution. It has promptly provided *The First Report on Religion Data* both in hard and soft copies for the first time. Although

Census of India had been collecting and publishing information about religious affiliations, even that had been kept confidential except at certain minimum geographical unit level. Needless to add that in view of country's rich socio-cultural diversity, the detailed religion data that have now been made available assume critical significance for population geographers, sociologists, anthropologists alike. It is in this context that *The First Report on Religion Data* stands out distinctly from all previous censuses.

The chief objective of the paper is to analyse inter-religion diversities in such select attributes of population as distribution, growth, sex ratio, literacy and work participation rates.

Distribution

India is universally recognised as prominently inhabited by Hindus who account for 80.5 per cent of the country's population (Table 1). The term Hindu originally had a geographical origin and hence territorial significance rather than creedal significance (Radhakrishnan, 1974, p. 12). It applied to all the inhabitants (aboriginal tribes, cultural Dravidians, and Vedic Aryans) of a specific well defined geographic territory. Since censuses could not be held regularly in Jammu & Kashmir and Assam it would be most appropriate to exclude the projected populations of both these states in order to retain the element of accuracy in a comparative analysis. However, when the projected populations of Jammu & Kashmir and Assam are excluded, the proportion of Hindus in the country rises further to 81.4 per cent (Table 2). It is also not meant to convey that the proportion of Hindus is ubiquitously high in all parts of the country. In fact, Hindus are in abject minority in a number of states including Mizoram (3.6%), Lakshadweep (3.7%), Nagaland (7.7%), Meghalaya (13.3%), Jammu and Kashmir (29.6%) and Punjab (36.9%). Of these Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are predominantly Christian majority states. Jammu & Kashmir and the union territory of Lakshadweep are predominantly Muslim majority areas and Punjab is a Sikh majority state. The two major absolute concentrations of Hindus – the Gangetic Plain and Southeastern Coastal Plain – have historically been considered the centres of Indian civilization (Moreland and Chatterjee, 1945, p 135)

Muslims constitute the second ranking religious community accounting for 13.4 per cent of the country's population. However, when the projected populations of Jammu & Kashmir and Assam are excluded, the proportion of Muslims in the country's population gets further reduced to 12.4 per cent (Table 2). Historically, the distribution of Muslims in India is largely accounted for by the routes of Islamic military and commercial penetration as well as by the status of society at the time its impact (Stanley, 1903). According to 2001 census, Lakshadweep (95.5%) among union territories and Jammu & Kashmir (67.0%) among states are the only areas where Muslims are in majority. Other states that have a considerable proportion of

Muslim population include Assam (30.9%), West Bengal (25.2%), Kerala (24.7%), Uttar Pradesh (18.5%), Bihar (16.5%) and Jharkhand (13.8%). In all these states the proportion of Muslim population was above their national average of 13.4 per cent. Similarly, Karnataka (12.2%), Uttaranchal (11.9%), Delhi (11.7%), Maharashtra (10.6%), and Andhra Pradesh (9.2%) are other areas where Muslims have some concentration, though less than their national average (13.4%). The relative concentration of Muslims in Assam – West Bengal area, both before and after the partition is an old phenomenon perhaps dating back to 12th century when Buddhists of this region got converted to Islam in large numbers. Since it was soon followed by the establishment of Muslim rule, the conversion process got further stimulus (Gosal and Mukerji, 1970, p. 94). The post-independence period has further witnessed large scale infiltration of Muslims in the areas bordering Bangladesh. It may be important to add here that over 60 per cent of the immigrants in Assam at the time of 1951 census were from areas now in Bangladesh (Gosal 1961, p. 114). Needless to say that in all these areas this religious community has the potential for expressing forcefully in a democratic set up. If they so desire, the Muslims in these areas can vie for better share in the national kitty that can certainly help them in their effort to gain better socio-economic status in Indian social set up. Here one is reminded of John Brush's (1949, p. 82) assertion that an essential preface to the understanding of political geography of Indian sub-continent is the study of spatial distribution and relationships of its major religious communities i.e. Hindus and Muslims.

Christianity reached India in the first wave of missionary expansion from the Roman world and again during the modern era of Western European economic and political dominance (Brush, 1949, p. 91). It is probable that before the end of 5th century, congregations of Christians existed in the south (Latourette, 1937, pp. 231-233). Christians account only for 2.3 per cent of country's population even when the figures are adjusted by excluding the populations of Jammu & Kashmir and Assam. In contrast to their very low average (2.3%) for country as whole, Christians constitute predominant

Table 1
India: Proportion of religious communities to total population by States & UTs – 2001

India/ Others States/Union Territories	All religious communities	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains	
India	100.0	80.5	13.4	2.3	1.9	0.8	0.4	0.6
Jammu & Kashmir	100.0	29.6	67.0	0.2	2.0	1.1	0.0	0.0
Himachal Pradesh	100.0	95.4	2.0	0.1	1.2	1.2	0.0	0.0
Punjab	100.0	36.9	1.6	1.2	59.9	0.2	0.2	0.0
Chandigarh	100.0	78.6	3.9	0.8	16.1	0.1	0.3	0.0
Uttaranchal	100.0	85.0	11.9	0.3	2.5	0.1	0.1	0.0
Haryana	100.0	88.2	5.8	0.1	5.5	0.0	0.3	0.0
Delhi	100.0	82.0	11.7	0.9	4.0	0.2	1.1	0.0
Rajasthan	100.0	88.8	8.5	0.1	1.4	0.0	1.2	0.0
Uttar Pradesh	100.0	80.6	18.5	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.0
Bihar	100.0	83.2	16.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
Sikkim	100.0	60.9	1.4	6.7	0.2	28.1	0.0	2.4
Arunachal Pradesh	100.0	34.6	1.9	18.7	0.2	13.0	0.0	30.7
Nagaland	100.0	7.7	1.8	90.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3
Manipur	100.0	46.0	8.8	34.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	10.9
Mizoram	100.0	3.6	1.1	87.0	0.0	7.9	0.0	0.3
Tripura	100.0	85.6	8.0	3.2	0.0	3.1	0.0	0.0
Meghalaya	100.0	13.3	4.3	70.3	0.1	0.2	0.0	11.5
Assam	100.0	64.9	30.9	3.7	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
West Bengal	100.0	72.5	25.2	0.6	0.1	0.3	0.1	1.1
Jharkhand	100.0	68.6	13.8	4.1	0.3	0.0	0.1	13.0
Orissa	100.0	94.4	2.1	2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
Chattisgarh	100.0	94.7	2.0	1.9	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.5
Madhya Pradesh	100.0	91.1	6.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.9	0.7
Gujarat	100.0	89.1	9.1	0.6	0.1	0.0	1.0	0.1
Daman & Diu	100.0	89.7	7.8	2.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	100.0	93.5	3.0	2.7	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.0
Maharashtra	100.0	80.4	10.6	1.1	0.2	6.0	1.3	0.2
Andhra Pradesh	100.0	89.0	9.2	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Karnataka	100.0	83.9	12.2	1.9	0.0	0.7	0.8	0.2
Goa	100.0	65.8	6.8	26.7	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0
Lakshadweep	100.0	3.7	95.5	0.8	0.0	0.0	-	-
Kerala	100.0	56.2	24.7	19.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tamil Nadu	100.0	88.1	5.6	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Pondicherry	100.0	86.8	6.1	6.9	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	100.0	69.2	8.2	21.7	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.1

Source: Census of India, *The First Report on Religion Data*, 2001, p. xxix.

- Note:**
1. Population figures for India and Manipur exclude those of Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Nagaland state.
 2. All religious communities include 'Religion not stated'.

majority in three states located in the Northeast. Their proportion is highest in Nagaland (90.0%) Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab; (ii) Muslims, the second ranking religious community of the country, constituted religious majority community in Jammu & Kashmir among states and in Lakshadweep among union territories apart from having considerable proportion in the total population of such states as Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh; (iii) Christians, the third ranking religious community, have their stronghold in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya where they constitute a majority and also have followed by Mizoram (87.0%) and Meghalaya (70.3%). Other areas that have considerable proportion of Christian population include Goa (26.7%), Andaman & Nicobar (21.7%), Kerala (19.0%), Arunachal Pradesh (18.7%), Pondicherry (6.9%), Sikkim (6.7%) and Tamil Nadu (6.1%). Thus, Christians have their concentration primarily in tribal belt of Northeast and Andaman & Nicobar and in former colonies of Goa and Pondicherry apart from Kerala and Tamil Nadu in the South and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in the North and Northeast respectively. The extensive missionary activities carried on by Christian missionaries during the colonial period may explain to a large extent their concentration in tribal areas that experienced large scale conversions during the British period.

Sikhs who account for only 1.9 per cent of the country's population, have their main concentration in Punjab-Haryana plains covering Punjab (59.9%), Chandigarh (16.1%), Haryana (5.5%) and Delhi (4.0%). Localisation of Sikhs in the pre-partition eastern Punjab can be traced to 15th century when a reform movement began at this scene of struggle between Islam and Hinduism (Brush, 1949, p. 89). In rest of the country no where their proportion was more than their national average of 1.9 per cent. Thus, Sikhs constitute majority only in one state i.e., Punjab where 6 persons out of every 10 persons are Sikhs. In Punjab, Hindus account for 36.9 per cent of the state's population. The incidence of combined families of Sikhs and Hindus and inter-religion marriages between the two is common in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi etc. The degree of religious co-existence found in Punjab is commend-

able and needs to be followed in rest of the country as well.

Buddhists account for only 0.8 per cent of the country's population and do not constitute the majority in any part of the country. The largest concentration of Buddhists, however, occurs in Sikkim (28.1%). It is followed by Arunachal Pradesh (13.0%), Mizoram (7.9%), Maharashtra (6.0%) and Tripura (3.1%). In Mizoram and Sikkim, Buddhists constitute second ranking religious community. In rest of the country, the proportion of Buddhists is less than their national average of 0.8 per cent. Jains account for 0.4 per cent of this country's population. Their proportion exceeds 1.0 per cent only in four states, namely, Maharashtra (1.3%), Rajasthan (1.2%), Delhi (1.1%) and Gujarat (1.0%).

Thus, in terms of regional distribution of various religious communities (i) Hindus were most widespread areally and constituted majority community in most parts of the country except in Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Lakshadweep, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab; (ii) Muslims, the second ranking religious community of the country, constituted religious majority community in Jammu & Kashmir among states and in Lakshadweep among union territories apart from having considerable proportion in the total population of such states as Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Uttaranchal, Delhi, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh; (iii) Christians, the third ranking religious community, have their stronghold in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya where they constitute a majority and also have considerable proportion in Goa, Andaman & Nicobar, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala etc. (iv) Sikhs, the fourth ranking religious community of India, too have their majority in one state i.e., Punjab and are in considerable proportion in Chandigarh, Haryana and Delhi ranging between 4 to 16 per cent, (v) both Buddhists and Jains do not constitute majority in any area although the proportion of Buddhists is considerable in Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. The two significant observations that emerge from the above discussion are, one, that India is characterized by a rich social composition and, two, the social composition of the country varies from one part of the country to another in a manner that leaves its imprint upon the polity of the area concerned.

Table 2
India: Primary Census Abstract by Religion – 2001

Religion	%age of total population		Growth 1991-2001		Sex Ratio 0-6 Age Group	Sex Ratio 0-6 Age Group	%age of Population 0-6 Age Group	Literacy		Work Participation Rate			
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Unadjusted	Adjusted				P	M	F	P	M	F
Hindus	80.5	81.4	20.3	20.0	931	925	15.6	76.2	53.2	40.4	52.4	27.5	
Muslims	13.4	12.4	36.0	29.3	936	950	18.7	67.6	50.1	31.3	47.5	14.1	
Christians	2.3	2.3	22.6	22.1	1009	964	13.5	84.4	76.2	39.7	50.7	28.7	
Sikhs	1.9	1.9	18.2	16.9	893	786	12.8	75.2	63.1	37.7	53.3	20.2	
Buddhists	0.8	0.8	24.5	23.2	953	942	14.4	72.7	61.7	40.6	49.2	31.7	
Jains	0.4	0.4	26.0	26.0	940	870	10.6	94.1	90.6	32.9	55.2	9.2	
Others	0.6	0.7	103.1	111.3	992	976	18.0	47.0	60.8	48.4	52.5	44.2	
All Religious Communities	100	100	22.7	21.5	933	927	15.9	64.8	75.3	53.7	39.1	51.7	25.6

Source: Census of India, *First Report on Religion Data, 2001*, pp. xxviii to liii.

Note: Adjusted figures exclude Jammu & Kashmir and Assam from 1961-2001.

Growth

One of the basic requirements of population growth analysis is that the data at two points in time should be comparable. Since no census could be conducted in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991 and in Assam in 1981, it has been deemed fit to exclude the populations of these states from the present inter-religion growth calculation in order to ensure accuracy. Such an adjusted population of India recorded a growth of 21.5 per cent during 1991-2001. However, the inter-religion growth rates varied significantly. Muslims recorded a growth rate of 29.3 per cent, followed by Christians (22.1%), Hindus (20.0%), and Sikhs (16.9%) in this order (Table 2).

Growth of population of any community is the function of its fertility, mortality and migratory behaviour. Muslim population of India still seems to be in the early second stage of demographic transition model. It is characterized by high fertility and high but sharply declining mortality. High

fertility among Muslim population of India is corroborated by their high (18.7%) proportion of population in 0-6 age-group. There were 261 districts out of a total of 593 in the country where the proportion of population in 0-6 age group among Muslims was more than 18 per cent (Table 3). Of these, the proportion was more than 21 per cent in 109 districts implying very high fertility in these districts. Interestingly, all the districts with more than 18 per cent population in 0-6 age group were located, without exception, in the northern states indicating a clear North-South divide as for as growth rate of Muslim population was concerned. Since no inter-religion data on migration are available, it may not be easy to ascertain the role of migration in their high growth rate. However, at the inter-state level the role of migration could be seen in areas like Delhi. For instance, Muslim population in Delhi recorded a growth rate of 82.49 per cent during 1991-2001 as against the average growth rate of 47.0 per cent for all communities.

Table 3
India: Proportion of Population in 0-6 Age-group by Religion (Per cent) 2001

Religion	Number of Districts					With Negligible Population of	Total No. of Distts.
	0-12.00	12.01-15.00	15.01-18.00	18.01-21.00	21.01+		
Hindus	89	192	153	145	14	-	593
Muslims	28	134	170	152	109	-	593
Christians	208	172	122	68	21	2	593
Jains	339	149	33	20	23	29	593
Sikhs	245	185	96	35	18	14	593
Buddhists	159	127	131	91	63	22	593

Source: Census of India, *The First Report on Religion Data*, 2001, Maps 7-12.

The most popular explanation offered for high growth rate of Muslim population relates to their poor performance in the field of literacy, especially female literacy. However, 2001 census data on literacy rates of different religious communities belies it. Their literacy rates according to 2001 census were not far behind the national averages. For example, average literacy rates in the

country for persons, males and females were 64.8 per cent, 75.3 per cent and 53.7 per cent respectively. In comparison, the corresponding figures for Muslim population were 59.1 per cent, 67.6 per cent and 50.1 per cent for persons, males and females respectively. A female literacy rate of 50.1 per cent among Muslims clearly defies the proposition that high growth rate of their

population was the product of their poor performance on literacy front. In fact, certain segments of Hindu society (scheduled castes) may have much lower female literacy rate in comparison to Muslim females.

Regionally, Muslim population growth rate was comparatively high in backward states especially of North India including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Jharkhand etc. and low in southern states like Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu etc. This North-South divide in degree of socio-economic advancement of Muslim population gets reflected very strongly in its growth pattern. For instance, Muslim population in Mallapuram district of Kerala recorded the highest growth rate of only 15.84 per cent in the state which was almost half of their national average. Given the consistently low growth rate of Muslim population in Southern states, it may not be unfair to deduce that Muslim population of Northern states must have recorded a disproportionately high growth rate so as to have neutralised the gains made by the community in southern parts of the country and still let the community yield a high national average growth rate of 29.3 per cent. It also establishes that the Muslim population of South India is distinctly different from that of North India in terms of socio-economic variables. Literacy differentials apart, the Muslim population of the South is economically also far ahead of their brethren in North India. They are economically more awakened and by now have a large segment of educated middle class that is engaged in a variety of economic activities whereas Muslim population of North India is still continuing with their traditional activities like petty household industries, fruits and vegetables selling, construction labour etc. However, gradually but surely the middle class segment among Muslims of North India is widening though in selected pockets only. As the community becomes economically awakened, the individual well being becomes supreme and community affiliations get weakened. No wonder, the so called minority psyche is also much more obvious in North in comparison to that in the South. Above all, to be fair to the Muslim population of North India it would be worth mentioning here that their growth rate in fact would

not have been so high but for the infiltration from Bangladesh implying that their natural rate of growth may have been much less.

Thus, growth rate of Muslim population during 1991-2001 was highest in comparison to other religious communities; the share of Muslim population in the country's total population increased from 9.5 per cent in 1951 to 13.4 per cent in 2001; Muslims of North India and South India displayed contrasting growth rates in consonance with their differences in literacy rates, levels of individual well being and extent of infiltration. The negative correlation between literacy and growth rate gets demonstrated more clearly in the context of North-South divide. The focus on individual well being, a symptom of socio-economic awakening, too was much more in case of South Indian Muslims in comparison to the North Indian Muslims and hence community affiliations were stronger in North than in South. Similarly, the northern states were subjected more to infiltration from neighbouring countries in comparison to southern states. Thus, North-South divide in case of Muslim population was significantly pronounced in terms of various socio-economic variables influencing growth rate of population.

Next to Muslims, Jains recorded the second highest (26.0%) growth rate of population during 1991-2001 (Table 2). It was higher than the national average of 21.5 per cent for all religious communities. Jains accounted for only 0.4 per cent of the country's population implying that even a small absolute increase in their numbers could yield high increase in terms of percentages. However, when viewed in the context of their extremely slow growth rate (4.6%) during previous decade of 1981-1991, their growth rate of 26.0 per cent during 1991-2001 was a significant jump warranting an explanation. It is also difficult to understand high growth rate of Jains who constitute the most literate (94.1%) religious community of India and in whose case literacy rates were more than 80 per cent in 490 districts out of 593 districts in the country. In fact, it is believed that during 1991 census many Jains declared themselves as Hindus but at the time of 2001 most of them reverted back to Jainism resulting a spurt in their growth rate during 1991-2001 in comparison to 1981-91. It is corroborated by their

low rate of natural growth reflected by their low proportion (10.6%) in 0-6 age group. Had their growth been high due to higher fertility rate, their proportion in 0-6 age-group would also have been high.

Christian population in the country registered a growth rate of 22.1 per cent during 1991-2001 which was only marginally higher than the national average for all religious communities together. Although Christians in India constitute one of the highly literate segments of Indian society with general literacy rate of 80.3 per cent and a high female literacy rate of 76.2 per cent, yet there were about 90 districts in the country having more than 18 per cent of Christian population in 0-6 age group which is a sensitive index of a community's fertility level. Christians, on an average, had only 13.5 per cent population in this age group which was fairly less than the national average of 15.9 per cent. It means that within Christians there were some sections/regions which had comparative high fertility and also high proportion of 0-6 age-group population. Interestingly, ninety districts having more than 18 per cent of their population in 0-6 age group were located mostly in the Northeast (Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland). In addition, such districts were also sporadically spread over to other such regions as Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (more so in the eastern U.P.). Should it mean that within Christians also there were poorly literate sections and regions that display comparatively high fertility rate. In most of 90 districts referred to above, the literacy rate among Christians was either less than 50 per cent or ranged between 50 and 60 per cent which was significantly low in comparison to their national average of more than 80 per cent. Thus, a negative correlation between literacy and fertility level could be observed even within the various segments of same religious community.

In case of Hindus, population growth rate (20.0%) recorded was lower than the national average (21.5%). It indicates a continued decline in fertility in their case. The proportion of population in 0-6 age-group in their case was 15.6 per cent. However, there were 312 districts in the country where the proportion 0-6 age-group

population among Hindus was more than 15 per cent. In case of 159 such districts this proportion was more than 18 per cent. All these districts of more than 18 per cent population in 0-6 age-group among Hindus constitute a continuous belt covering almost entire Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, most parts of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand apart from a few districts in Chhatisgarh. These are critical the areas where fertility decline among Hindus needs to be accelerated.

Sikhs have displayed the lowest rate of population growth (16.9%) among all religious communities of India. From among four major religious communities of the country, Sikhs displayed the lowest (12.8%) proportion of population in 0-6 age-group implying that Sikhs had the lowest fertility rate, lower than even the Christians. Regionally, in 245 districts out of 593 districts in the country this proportion was less than 12 per cent and in another 185 districts it ranged between 12 and 15 per cent. The districts having more than 18 per cent of their population in this age group were few (53) and far between. Such districts were sporadically distributed in almost each state. Sikhs constitute the most enlightened and highly literate segment of Indian society and the Punjab state where they are in majority is one of the most prosperous states with highest per capita income. The small family norms are most accepted in this part of the country. However, it is alarming to note that recently with their over-enthusiasm for limiting their family size, the incidence of female foeticide has emerged as a handy method of family planning. Consequently, sex ratio of 0-6 age-group population of Sikhs has dipped to the lowest in the country. Sex ratio of 0-6 age-group population among Sikhs is only 786 females per thousand males (Table 2). Easy access to pre-birth sex determination technology coupled with undoubtedly strong preference for a male child together seem to have caused a sharp fall in sex ratio of 0-6 age-group population among Sikhs. The seriousness of the problem has already been realised by those who formulate policies and a beginning has already been made in this direction by enforcing all possible checks to stop pre-birth sex determination.

Thus, among various religious communities of India while Muslims displayed the highest growth rate, Sikhs displayed the lowest rate of population growth. So it would be inappropriate to view the inter-religion diversities in growth rates in the majority-minority syndrome alone. Literacy rates have emerged as a significant indicator of growth of population. Even within the same community a negative correlation between growth and literacy could be observed as is true of Muslims of South and North India. North-South divide is most prominent in case of Muslim population probably due to the sharp differences in literacy and individual well being between North and South India in their case. However, the issues of great importance that emerge from the above discussion and warrant immediate attention include: (i) how to consolidate and accelerate further the fertility decline among Hindus; (ii) how to enhance individual well being among Muslims of North India; (iii) how to convince poorly literate section of Christian population to follow small family norms; (iv) how to bridge the North-South divide in literacy and hence fertility; (v) how to arrest the increasing incidence of female foeticide without impairing our struggle for controlling the population growth; and (vi) how to bridge the intra-community differences in literacy and individual well being and hence population growth rates.

Sex Ratio

On an average there were 933 females per thousand males in the country in 2001. However, the sex ratio varied widely between various religious communities. For instance, Christians in India displayed the highest sex ratio of 1009 females per thousand males. Christians were the only community in the country to have more females than males in the population. Out of 593 districts in the country, Christians sex ratio was more than 1000 in 244 districts implying excess of females over males (Table 4). Thus, in about 45 per cent of the districts in the country sex ratio of Christians was such that the number of their females was more than males. In another 158 districts sex ratio among Christians was above 951 females per thousand males. When a comparison between the regional patterns of their sex ratio and literacy is made, by and large there is a positive correlation between

the two except in the Northeast. In case of Northeast while literacy rate among Christians is low, their sex ratio is high. It may be related to their male-selective out-migration in search of greener pastures. High literacy normally indicates comparatively better status of women implying subdued role of such indicators as son preference. However, sex ratio in the 0-6 age group among Christians was only 964 which, of course, was highest when compared with the corresponding figures of other religious communities. Does it indicate the intrusion of such factors as female foeticide even in highly literate community like Christians. This would require serious continuous investigation before it could be established in case of Christians.

Among other religious communities, Buddhists (953) and Jains (940) also displayed higher sex ratios than the national average. In case of both these communities, the number of districts having less than 850 sex ratio was much larger than those having a balanced sex ratio implying wide regional variations in case of each community. For instance, among Buddhists sex ratio was less than 850 in 227 districts and there were also 94 districts having a sex ratio of more than one thousand (Table 4). Similarly, in case of Jains 113 districts had a low sex ratio of less than 850 and their sex ratio was more than 1000 in only 73 districts. Such a distributional pattern of sex ratio among Buddhists and Jains was associated with their small absolute numbers in most of districts. Another factor that seems to have contributed to regional variations in their sex ratio was male selective migration from one part of the country to another in response to the changing scenario of employment opportunities. Needless to mention that while Jains constitute the most highly literate religious community, Buddhists are also not very far behind (Table 2). Interestingly, while in case of Buddhists sex ratio in 0-6 age group (942) was close to their average sex ratio (953), in case of Jains this was not the case. Jains displayed a low sex ratio of 870 in 0-6 age group as against their national average of 940. How far it was associated with growing menace of female foeticide in general was difficult to ascertain and would require detailed micro level analysis.

Table 4
India: Sex Ratio by Religion – 2001

Religion	Number of Districts					With Negligible Population of	Total No. of Distts.
	850 & Below	851-900	901-950	951-1000	1001+		
Hindus	106	101	171	145	70	-	593
Muslims	115	78	204	137	59	-	593
Christians	64	48	79	158	244	-	593
Jains	113	84	212	98	73	13	593
Sikhs	318	147	77	22	19	10	593
Buddhists	227	79	103	86	94	4	593

Source: Census of India, *The First Report on Religion Data*, 2001, Maps 1-6.

While the sex ratio among Hindus (931) and Muslims (936) was close to the national average of 933, Sikhs displayed the lowest sex ratio (893) among all religious communities of India. Not only that, low sex ratio among Sikhs was quite widespread regionally. Sikhs had a low sex ratio of less than 850 in 318 districts and in another 147 districts their sex ratio ranged between 851 and 900. However, since the sex ratio among Sikhs has been low for decades, it may be safe to say that a search for some genetic factor in their case may have to be taken up. But what is more alarming in their case is sharply declining sex ratio in 0-6 age group. Sikhs displayed extremely low sex ratio of 786 in 0-6 age group at the time of 2001 census. It does point to the growing menace of female foeticide among them. Interestingly, in case of both Hindus and Muslims, the sex ratio in 0-6 age group was close to their respective average sex ratios. Hindus had a sex ratio of 925 in 0-6 age group as against their average sex ratio of 931. Similarly, Muslims had a sex ratio of 950 in 0-6 age group in comparison to their average sex ratio of 936. In case of both these communities if there is any incidence of female foeticide, it is yet to get reflected in their age specific sex ratios.

Thus, while Christians in India displayed excess of females over males, Sikhs by contrast displayed acute paucity of females especially in 0-6 age group. Interestingly, although literacy rates of both males and females were high in both these communities, yet the two displayed contrastingly different sex ratios. It suggests the role of some genetic factor in case of Sikhs that may need

investigation by scholars from genetics. However, since Sikhs have an extremely low sex ratio in 0-6 age group, a cautious watch in the matter seems an unavoidable recommendation in this case.

Literacy

During 1991-2001, the literacy transition in India seems to have reached a decisive stage, if the progress of literacy in various religious communities is any indication. During this period both male and female literacy rates have advanced fairly among all major religious communities of India. Not only that, the inter-religion literacy differentials between four major religious communities of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs have also narrowed down considerably by 2001 in case of both males and females. It is satisfying to note that while India had an average female literacy of 53.7 per cent in 2001, the female literacy rate in case of no major religious community was less than 50 per cent including the female Muslims. Muslims otherwise had comparatively lowest literacy rate (59.1%) from among major religious communities of India. In their case male literacy rate was 67.6 per cent implying that 2 out of every three Muslim males in India were literate. In case of Muslim females the literacy rate was 50.1 per cent which was not far behind the national average (53.7%) for females. It means that among Muslim females one out of every two was literate. Does it not mean that Muslims in India are not far behind the Hindus in the field of literacy. In fact, females belonging to some sections of Hindu society (scheduled castes and backward castes) may have even less than Muslim female literacy rate.

Viewed in regional perspective, Muslim literacy rate in 127 districts out of 593 districts was above 80 per cent which was a significantly high literacy rate in Indian context and that too for Muslim population who are considered relatively backward section of Indian society. In another 131 districts, the literacy ranged between 60 and 70 per cent. At the other end of the scale, there were 124 districts with less than 50 per cent literacy rate among Muslims (Table 5). Interestingly, the North-South divide was too sharp in this case. While the entire Indo-gangetic plain displayed less than 60 per cent literacy rate for Muslims, the states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh and Orissa displayed comparatively high literacy mostly above 70 per cent and 80 per cent among Muslims. This North-South divide in literacy was very clearly reflected in growth of Muslim population implying that literacy was the key factor that had the potential of neutralising the factor of minority psyche, if any, with regard to population control among Muslims.

The inter-religion literacy comparison also reveals that Christians displayed a high literacy rate (80.3%) both among males (84.4%) and females (76.2%). High literacy rates in their case were most widespread as in 299 districts their literacy was above 80 per cent and only in 31 districts it was less than 50 per cent. The low literacy rates in their case were confined mostly to the Northeast, Uttar

Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, while rest of the country by and large had high literacy among Christians. In terms of literacy, Sikhs were next to Christians. Sikhs had a general literacy of 69.4 per cent and male and female literacy of 75.2 per cent and 63.1 per cent respectively. In their case high literacy rates were much more widespread. There were 340 districts which had a high literacy rate of more than 80 per cent among Sikhs. By contrast, there were just 14 districts where Sikhs had a low literacy of less than 50 per cent. These were sporadically distributed mostly in northern states.

Hindus ranked third in terms of literacy among four major religious communities of the country. In case of Hindus average literacy rate was 65.1 per cent, while their male and female literacy rates were 76.2 per cent and 53.2 per cent respectively. When compared with respective rates among Muslims, Hindus were not too far ahead. Regionally too areas of high literacy rates of above 80 per cent were too confined in case of Hindus. There were only 67 districts in the country having more than 80 per cent literacy rate among Hindus. Such districts were located either in areas having considerable proportion of Christian population like Kerala and the Northeast or in Jammu and Kashmir where Hindus were in minority struggling hard for making a living. The most widespread literacy rate among Hindus was 50 per cent – 70 per cent and the deviations from it, either way, were spatially confined. A comparison between Hindus and

Table 5
India: Literacy Rate (Per cent) by Religion 2001

Religion	Number of Districts					With Negligible Population of	Total No. of Distts.
	Less than 50	50.01 – 60.00	60.01 – 70.00	70.01-80.00	80+		
Hindus	73	112	172	169	67	-	593
Muslims	124	108	113	121	127	-	593
Christians	31	68	82	113	299	-	593
Jains	24	11	24	37	490	7	593
Sikhs	14	29	85	124	340	1	593
Buddhists	69	69	123	23	306	3	593

Source: Census of India, *The First Report on Religion Data*, 2001, Maps 13-18.

Muslims in this respect reveals that while in case of Muslims 127 districts had more than 80 per cent literacy, in case of Hindus the corresponding figure was only 67 districts. But reverse was also true i.e., while Muslims had a low literacy of less than 50 per cent in 124 districts, the number of such districts in case of Hindus was only 73. It implies that regional disparities in literacy were more pronounced in case of Muslims in comparison to Hindus.

Thus, of the four major religious communities in India, Christians had the highest literacy rate followed by Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims in this order. Of the remaining religious communities Jains displayed the highest literacy of 94.1 per cent while Buddhists had a literacy rate of 72.7 per cent. Spatially, high literacy rates of above 80 per cent were most widespread among Jains (490 districts) followed by Sikhs (340 districts), Christians (299 districts), Muslims (127 districts) and Hindus (67 districts) in this order. It implies that high literacy areas in case of Hindus were most confined. Though the North-South divide in literacy was observed in case of all communities, it was most pronounced in case of Muslims.

Work Participation Rate

India is characterised by low work participation rate associated with its stage of demographic transition and inhibitions and limitations of its females in this regard. On an average, only 39.1 per cent of India's total population constituted its workforce. The

corresponding figures for its males and females, separately, were 51.7 per cent and 25.6 per cent. In terms of inter-religion comparison in this regard, Hindus had the highest work participation rate (40.4%) followed by Christians (39.7%), Sikhs (37.7%) and Muslims (31.3%). However, the female working force displayed wider inter-religion diversities, perhaps a reflection upon varying degree of status of women among different religious communities. The female participation was highest among Christians (28.7%), followed by Hindus (27.5%), Sikhs (20.2%) and Muslims (14.1%). It implies that as the inhibitions with respect to female participation in work outside home among Muslims get diluted the gap between participation rate of the two major religious communities of Hindus and Muslims would also be narrowed down to a great extent.

Spatially, a high work participation rate of above 45 per cent was most widespread among Hindus. There were 213 districts where work participation rate among Hindus was more than 45 per cent (Table 6). It was followed by Christians (156 districts), Sikhs (137 districts), and Muslims (68 districts) in this order. By contrast, there were as many as 349 districts where the work participation rate was less than 35 per cent among Muslims. In terms of distributional pattern of low participation rate Muslims were followed by Sikhs (221 districts), Hindus (123 districts) and Christians (112 districts) in this order.

Table 6
India: Work Participation Rate (Per cent) by Religion 2001

Religion	Number of Districts					With Negligible Population of	Total No. of Distts.
	0-35	35.01-40.00	40.01-45.00	45.01-50.00	50+		
Hindus	123	116	141	124	89	-	593
Muslims	359	121	45	25	43	-	593
Christians	112	171	154	99	57	-	593
Jains	417	74	37	23	34	8	593
Sikhs	221	148	86	42	95	1	593
Buddhists	218	131	100	73	68	3	593

Source: Census of India, *The First Report on Religion Data*, 2001, Maps 19-24.

Thus, inter-religion diversities in work participation rate were more pronounced in case of female participation in comparison to male participation rates. It was a clear reflection upon inter-religion differences in the status granted to their women folk. For instance, in Christianity females enjoy comparatively better status while in Islam women are not that fortunate. No wonder, the female participation rate among Christians was the highest and that among the Muslims the lowest.

Summing up

Hindus, who account for 80.5 per cent of the country's population, are in minority in states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Union Territory of Lakshadweep. Of these Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshadweep were Muslim majority areas, Punjab was a Sikh majority state and Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were the stronghold of Christians.

However, practically in all large administrative units in India the society was found to be multi-religious. What emerges from this is that India is characterised by rich social composition that varies from one part of the country to another yielding high degree of socio-cultural diversity. It may be mentioned here that religious minorities have relatively secure status in the Indian Union due to elaborate legal safeguards provided in the country's constitution.

It would be inappropriate to view inter-religion diversities in the rate of growth of population in minority-majority syndrome alone as the Sikhs displayed the lowest rate of growth of population and Muslims the highest growth rate. Instead literacy status of a community has emerged as the most critical indicator of its growth status. The North-South divide in the growth pattern is the strongest among Muslims, though other communities also have its traces. Consolidating the already established fertility decline among Hindus, enhancing the urge for individual well being among Muslims, convincing the poorly literate sections among all religious communities to follow small family norms, accelerating the literacy transition in the North with a view to bridging the North-South divide in literacy, arresting the growing

menace of female foeticide, and discovering the role of genetic factor, if any, in low sex ratio among Sikhs are the important issues that warrant serious consideration by those who are involved in policy formulation.

Christians were the only religious community in the country to have excess of females over males. By contrast, Sikhs displayed acute paucity of females. The contrastingly different sex ratio of these two highly literate communities suggests possible role of some genetic factor in case of Sikhs as they have had low sex ratio since decades. However, the recently emerging phenomenon of extremely low sex ratio among Sikhs in 0-6 age group warrants a cautious watch in the years to come.

Of the four major religious communities of India, Christians displayed the highest literacy rates of both males and females. Muslims, on the other hand, had the lowest literacy rate. The regional disparities were also quite conspicuous in case of Muslims who displayed a sharp North-South divide in their literacy rates. However, the literacy rates of Muslims are fairly comparable with those of Hindus and are not very far behind the same.

The inter-religion diversities in participation rates were more pronounced in case of female participation rates in comparison to male participation rate. It is perhaps a reflection upon the varying status being granted to women by different religious communities of India.

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Dr. R.C. Chandna
Professor (Retd.)
Department of Geography
Panjab University, Chandigarh.