PREFACE

Religion is frequently cited as a significant factor that influences the fertility decision of the people. Fertility differentials based on religious affiliation of the people have been observed in developed as well as developing countries. Social scientists and demographers have formulated different hypotheses to explain differentials in fertility by religion.

In India, fertility estimates from various sources have found that, among the major religious groups Muslims had the highest fertility and the Sikhs had the lowest. In between these two extremes are the Hindus and the Christians. For the country as a whole, the Muslim fertility has always been higher than Hindu fertility and Christian fertility lower than the Hindu fertility.

The principal objective of the study was to understand the dominant factors that determine fertility differentials among the religious groups in Kerala. The study has examined the socio-economic, demographic and regional factors responsible for the fertility differentials among the religious groups in Kerala. The principal data for the study are from the National Family Health Survey-II (1998-1999). The main statistical technique used in the study is regression analysis.

Kerala underwent a rapid fertility transition during the past three decades and it has been well recognized in the demographic literature. Even though the State achieved replacement level fertility large differences in fertility were seen among the major religious groups- the Hindu, Muslim and the Christian. The State’s overall achievement of replacement level fertility and the differences in fertility among the religious groups call for an in depth examination of the reasons for religious fertility differentials in
Kerala. In fact Kerala is the only State in which the proportion of the three religious groups is sufficiently high enough to make such an investigation.

A review of the previous studies from various parts of the world has identified the differentials in fertility among religious groups. Empirical studies of fertility differentials among different religious in India and, Kerala in particular, showed that within India there are large spatial variations in the religious compositions and regional differences in fertility. It is to be noted that fertility declined in all States in varying degrees and it varies among the different socio-economic groups also. While all the major studies focused on fertility differentials among the Muslims and the Hindus, present study focused on fertility differentials among the three major religious groups, the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian, in Kerala.

Levels and trends in fertility of the major religious groups in India and in Kerala showed that the pattern of the religious differentials in fertility in Kerala is different from that of India in general. The effect of religion on fertility is generally complicated because of the simultaneous effects of other socio-economic, demographic and geographic variables on fertility. When we examine these factors it is clear that all these factors are mutually interrelated and interdependent. The present study addressed the question whether the differentials in fertility by religion are due to the differences in socio-economic variables by religion or because of religion per se or because of the regional settings or because of a combination effect of all these factors.

An analysis of the district level fertility differentials in Kerala showed that there were regional variations in the socio-economic background as well as the composition of population in Kerala. The southern districts of Kerala always had a lower fertility level than that of the Northern districts. Regression analysis clearly highlighted that
percentage of Muslim population and per capita income played a significant role in determining fertility in the districts of Kerala. It has been observed that the Northern districts of Kerala have recorded higher fertility compared to the Southern districts.

The multivariate regression analysis carried out using the data from the NFHS-II (1998-99) clearly indicated that the influence of religion remains significant after controlling for other socio-economic variables. But religious fertility differentials were not remaining constant at different socio-economic levels. In order to get a better understanding on this, new variables representing different combinations of religion and the other variables have been introduced and its effects on religious fertility differentials are analysed.

The interaction analysis shows that the effect of various socio-economic factors on religious fertility differentials is not the same at different regions. Couples with same socio-economic characteristics residing at different region may take different fertility decisions. Thus, the fertility differential among the religious groups is a phenomenon caused by the differentials in the spatial settings. But the complex relationship between fertility and the spatial dimensions and the ways through which these relationships influence religious fertility differentials are yet to be analysed clearly.

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