CHAPTER- I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Religion is one of the oldest basic socio-cultural characteristics associated with the mankind and civilisations created by them over thousands of years of known history (Registrar General of India, 2004). Religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices which is based on the idea of the sacred and which unites believers into a socio-religious community. However, the term ‘religion’ is not easy to define because it has so many facets. In simple terms, religion may be defined as man’s belief in supernatural, or in what arouses a feeling of awe or piety in him, or in what he considers sacred (Chandna, 2001).

Religion produces a distinct attitude towards life and this orientation affects further development of the society. A religious group is an association or community that shares similar beliefs, symbols and religious practices.

The population characteristics of religious groups are very important from planning point of view. These need to be studied in order to improve the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving the conditions and well-being of the religious groups. This study aims to examine the major religious groups in the light of their distribution, growth, sex ratio, literacy, work participation and age structure; and compares them with one another as well as with "All Religious Groups”.

The study of religious groups is an interdisciplinary venture as it touches many social science disciplines. It is an economic problem when it concerns economic imbalances; it is a political problem when viewed in relation to majority-minority syndrome and ethnicity; it is a social problem when it concerns social stratification, conversions and communalism; it is a philosophical problem when it is concerned with the basic tenants of the religious groups and explores these groups in the light of underlying philosophical differences; and it is an anthropological problem when seen in the context of cultural invasion. However, the diffusion and concentration of religious groups and study of their population
characteristics in the spatial perspective makes it a geographical problem notwithstanding the fact that geographers have not so far played their due role in the comprehension of these groups more so in the third world countries.

Statement of the Problem

India has the distinction of being the land from where certain important religions of the world, viz. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism originated. Our country is also the origin of some of the indigenous faiths/tribal religions that have survived the influence of many major religions for centuries and are still holding ground firmly. Besides these religions, many religions of foreign origin, such as Christianity and Islam have flourished to a great extent.

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world in terms of religion with the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains constituting the major religious groups. Due to their different philosophy of life and community specific religious beliefs, practices and social structure the different religious groups project different population characteristics. Since these religious groups are a part and parcel of Indian population, the characteristics of the population of all major religious groups influence India’s population characteristics in particular. The present study analyses the population characteristics of each of the major religious groups of India.

As per 2001 Census, out of the total population of 1028 million, the Hindus were 828 million (i.e., 80.5 per cent of India’s population), the Muslims 138 million, the Christians 24 million, the Sikhs 19 million, the Buddhists 8 million and the Jains 4.2 million. Those following ‘other religions’ including the tribal religions were 6.6 million. Thus, India could rightly be considered the epitome of diversity in the world.

The present study helps in obtaining a fairly accurate picture of the relative strengths of different religious groups, evaluating their conditions of life and evolving more realistic plans for their development. Moreover, the existing research studies on population characteristics of major religious groups of India
are very few, and as such, the present study is a modest step towards knowing more about these groups.

**Review of Literature**

Geographical studies on the religious groups of India have been few and most of them were concerned only with the distributional aspect of the religious groups. Some of the geographers such as Sopher (1967), Shortridge (1976), Peach and Gale (2003), Warf and Vincent (2007) deserve special mention in respect of their contribution on religious groups.

Sopher (1967) gave a classification of religious systems and explained their geographic base. Shortridge (1976) mapped the religions in the United States. Peach and Gale (2003) traced the growth and distribution of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Sikhs in England and examined the dramatic changes brought to English townscapes by Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Warf and Vincent (2007) examined the religious diversity at the global scale by using measures of diversity and found China, India, Russia, Japan and Indonesia among the world’s most religiously diverse states.

Geographical studies on religious groups in India are only a few. Hoffman (1948) deserves the credit for the first notable work on religious groups of India. In his study titled, “India: Main Population Concentrations”, he briefly described the concentration of the religious groups in India using the data obtained from Census of India 1941.

However, one of the monumental works on the religious groups of India was that of Brush (1949). In his paper titled, “The Distribution of Religious Communities in India”, he gave the geographic distribution of Indian religious communities on the basis of data taken from Census of India 1941. Likewise, Davis (1951) too discussed the history, position and location of the various religious groups in India using the Census data up to 1941. He found that the partition of India in 1947 had a considerable effect on the geographical distribution of members of different faiths, especially upon the distribution of Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus.
Gosal and Mukherji (1970), in their study titled, “The Religious Composition of India’s Population: A Spatial Analysis”, observed that the minority religious groups were concentrated in peripheral location.

Krishan (1971) described the distribution of the Sikhs outside Punjab in the light of Census 1961. Dutt and Devgun (1977) analysed the diffusion of Sikhism from its beginning at the end of the fifteenth century and described the migration patterns of the Sikhs in India. They concluded that the creation of Pakistan forced the Sikhs to concentrate further within the Punjabi Suba. Dutt and Devgun (1979) regionalised India on the basis of religion by using factor analysis technique.

Bhardwaj (1983), in his book titled, “Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography”, put forth that Hinduism spread to areas which were more favourable to the plough agriculture and that the areas less suited for this mode of cultivation remained outside the domain of Hinduism. He also explained the distribution of sacred places in India.

Singh (1986), in his article titled, “Christianity in India: A Temporal View” stated that the distribution of Christians in the country is highly uneven and is associated with the historic, socio-economic and political diversity of the different regions of the country.

Tirtha (1996) described the spatial patterns of distribution of the religious groups on the basis of Census of India 1981. Ahmad (1999), in his book titled, “Social Geography” stated that the religious groups should be seen in the context of regional synthesis of identities.

Chandna (2005), in his research paper, analysed inter-religion diversities in selected attributes of population in India and found that the Hindus who account for four persons out of every five persons in India are spatially most widespread, the Christians are the most literate, the Sikhs register the lowest growth rate as well as the lowest sex-ratio, and the Muslims record the highest growth rate but are not far behind the Hindus in terms of literacy.

Krishan (2007), in his paper titled, “Minorities in India: Demographic Growth and Spatial Dispersal since Independence”, noted that all the minority
religious groups were spatially dispersed and their basic religious structure had remained the same during the period 1951-91.

Studies by non-geographers on religious groups of India are relatively numerous. However, most of these are related to the analysis of the levels of fertility of the religious groups. Some of these studies included those done by Day (1984), Khan and Patel (1997), Bhasin and Bhasin (2000), Dharmalingam and Morgan (2004), Bhagat and Purujit (2005), Bhat and Zavier (2005), James and Nair (2005), Krishnaji and James (2005), Kulkarni and Alagarajan (2005), and Nasir and Kalla (2006).

The book length works of some non-geographers such as Ahmad (1994), Singh (1999), Iyer (2002), Joshi et al. (2003) and Vempeny (2003) on the religious groups deserve particular mention.

Ahmad (1994), in his book titled, “Muslims in India: Their Educational, Demographic and Socio-economic Status with Inter-Community Comparisons Based on Field Surveys Conducted in 1991”, found that the distribution of the Muslim population in India revealed a tendency towards clustering and they are concentrated in pockets across the country.

Singh (1999), in his book titled, “A History of the Sikhs” described the great migration of Sikhs from Pakistan and the resettlement of the Sikhs in independent India.

Iyer (2002), in her book titled, “Demography and Religion in India”, examined the role of religion on population growth in India through econometric analysis based on fieldwork carried out among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christian women of Karnataka. She examined the importance of religion for demographic behaviour in India, and deduced that religious differences in fertility are, in fact, due to socio-economic characteristics. She also made some recommendations for population policies in countries characterised by religious population.

Joshi et al. (2003), in their book titled, “Religious Demography of India” analysed the demographic changes of various religions in the past one century and found that the percentage of Hindus (including Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs),
for which the authors have given a common term of ‘Indian Religionist’ would be reduced to minorities in the second-half of the century.

Vempeny (2003), in his book titled, “Minorities in Contemporary India”, traced the origin of Christians and Muslims in India and briefly described their educational, occupational and population position.

Apart from the studies mentioned above, the studies carried out by a number of non-geographers have also been reviewed as under:

Mahalanobis (1946) studied the distribution of Muslims in the population of India using the Census data of 1941, and provided a factual study of the Muslims in India.

Mathew (1982) briefly traced the history of religious conversions in India specifically to Islam and Christianity in medieval times and in the period prior to independence. He also analysed the recent conversions to Islam in Tamil Nadu.

Gokhale (1986) studied the socio-political effects of the conversion of the untouchables of Maharashtra into Buddhism in the light of the origin of that conversion, the institutions that were established as a result of it and the processes of social change that followed it.

Bhatia (1990), in his study titled, “Population Growth of Various Communities in India: Myth and Reality”, projected the prevailing growth rates among the Muslims and the Hindus into the next century; and assuming the same rate of increase into the future found that in a hundred years from 1981, i.e., by the year 2081, the growth rate of the Hindus will be higher than that of the Muslims and as such it is simply not true that the Muslims will outnumber the Hindus in India.

Chaube (1999), in his article titled, “The Scheduled Tribes and Christianity in India”, analysed the Census reports on religion and highlighted that Christianity is closely associated with the scheduled tribes, largely because it happens to constitute religious identity of the four north-eastern states of India and that the most remarkable point about the Christian population in India is that its share in the total population of India has fallen since 1951.
Mondal (2000) elaborated upon the demographic and socio-economic features of the Muslim population in India and concluded that the Muslims were distributed all over the country and were poor, mostly self-employed and least educated religious group.

Lobo (2002), in her book titled, “Globalization, Hindu Nationalism and Christians in India”, gave an account of the historical background and geographical distribution of Christians in India, and stated that the Christians in India consisted of different groups of catholic Christian such as the Syro-Malabar Christian who had been in India for 2000 years and constituted the largest group amongst the Catholics. Secondly, the Konkan Catholics of Bombay, Goa and Mangalore, who were the products of the Portuguese occupation; thirdly, the Catholics of South India; fourthly, the scattered groups in North India like the Catholics of Bettiah in Bihar; fifthly, the tribal Catholics of Chhotanagpur; and lastly, the Catholics of tribal origin in the north-eastern states.

Aruga (2003) studied the socio-economic characteristics of the religious groups of India by using a large micro level household survey data set and concluded that there were considerable differences in the socio-economic characteristics of these groups.

Paul (2004), in his research paper titled, “Religion in India: A Demographic Perspective”, analysed Census 2001 data on religion and indicated that the decline of Muslim growth rate in southern states of India was indicative of Muslims adopting family planning in these states and that the high growth of Muslims in some northern states and Delhi was due to in-migration of Muslims.

Sotelo and Acharya (2005) analysed that religion was an important factor in demographic change in India and found that for the last few years the Muslim population had been constantly increasing while during the same period the population of Hindus and other religions had declined.

Mistry (2005), in her research paper titled, “Muslims in India: A Demographic and Socio-economic Profile”, presented a demographic history of the Indian Muslims, including the growth and distribution of the Muslim population across Indian states over the past century.
Rajan (2005), in his paper titled, “District Level Fertility Estimates for Hindus and Muslims”, had reconfirmed that there was a regional variation in fertility in India with higher fertility in the north than in the southern and western parts, irrespective of religious affiliations and highlighted that the higher population growth rates among Muslims as reported in 2001 Census should be studied in the context of cross national migration of Muslims.

Rijo and Mutatkar (2005), in their study titled, “State-wise Estimates of Poverty among Religious Groups in India”, found that religious diversity in India also had an economic dimension and a comparison made by them on the basis of average consumption level of religious groups highlighted that the Muslims had the lowest monthly per capita expenditure both in the rural and urban areas, whereas it was the highest among the Sikhs in rural areas and among the Christians in urban areas.

Bose (2005) in his study titled, “Beyond Hindu-Muslim Growth Rates: Understanding Socio-economic Reality”, based on 2001 Census data on religion, found that 49 districts of India had substantial Muslim population and that more than religion it was the geographical location and economic conditions prevailing in those areas that influenced the demography of the religious communities.

Flygel (2005), in his research paper titled, “The Invention of Jainism–A Short History of Jaina Studies”, highlighted that there had been a vast improvement in the formal educational standard of the Jains in India and that amongst young Jains University degree is already the rule and is perceived to be a key ingredient of the life course of a successful Jain.

More recently Ponnapalli and Ram (2010) analysed district level 2001 Census datasets by religion using Standardised Index of Diversity and found that out of the 593 districts of the country, the Hindus were predominant in 390 districts and in 22 districts Muslims were in majority. They further found that the other minority religious groups were found in majority in the remaining districts which were situated in the peripheral areas of the country.

Thus, the review of studies given above provides that no specific research work was done to reveal the spatial patterns of the population characteristics of
major religious groups of India. These studies covered only one or two aspects of the population characteristics of major religious groups in one or two states. Therefore, it became judicious to undertake this study which would be highly significant in depicting the different aspects of the major religious groups of India in terms of their population characteristics.

**Objectives**

The present study is an endeavour to ascertain the population characteristics of six major religious groups, viz. the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains. The specific objectives of the study are as under:

1. To examine the geographical distribution of major religious groups of India;
2. To compare and analyse the spatial patterns of growth of major religious groups;
3. To analyse spatial variations in the pattern of sex ratio of major religious groups;
4. To examine the level of literacy achieved by major religious groups;
5. To analyse the spatial pattern of work participation of the major religious groups;
6. To examine the age composition of the major religious groups and to analyse the spatial pattern of their dependency ratio; and
7. To provide valuable knowledge on various aspects of religious demography of India.

**Study Area**

The present study has been conducted in India, a country known for one of the oldest civilisations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety of cultural heritage. Lying entirely in the northern hemisphere, the mainland extends between latitudes 8°4’ and 37°6’ north and between longitudes 68°7’ and 97°25’ east, measuring about 3,214 kilometres from north to south and about 2,933 kilometres from east to west.
Administratively, as per the Census data available in 2001, it is divided into 28 states, 7 union territories and 593 districts (Map 1.1 & Appendix 1). Geographically, it is bounded by the Great Himalayas in the north and it tapers off into the Indian Ocean between the Bay of Bengal on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west. Covering an area of 3,287,263 sq. km., India depicts diverse topography which comprises of the snow covered Himalayan Peaks, the dry Thar Desert, the fertile Great Northern Plains, the rugged Deccan plateau, the Coastal plains and the Islands.

India is a member of the SAARC regional bloc and has Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and across the sea Sri Lanka and Maldives as her neighbours. India accounts for 2.4 per cent of the world’s surface area and supports 16.7 per cent of the world’s population (2001). As the second most populous and the seventh largest country in the world, India stands apart from the rest of Asia, marked off as it is by the Himalayas and the Indian Ocean, which gives India a distinct geographical entity.

The diversity extends beyond topography. India has one of the most turbulent histories of all civilisations which give one explanation for its vast and culturally diverse population. Indeed, from Aryan invasion nearly 5000 years ago to Muslim and Mughal intrusions in the middle ages to the appearance of the British empire just 250 years ago, the Indian identity has been moulded by a string of influences. As a result, many major religious groups came up in India. The study of the population in terms of religion serve as a basis for identifying which religious groups are lagging behind and by how much, so that targeted corrective assistance may be provided to the affected groups.

**Methodology**

The study is based on the data taken from the 2001 Census of India. This is the latest data available on the religious groups which appeared in the year 2004 only. In this context, it is pertinent to mention that the data produced in 2011 Census on religious groups by different districts of the country would be available only after its publication which may take a few more years.
The district has been employed as the basic unit of the study. There were 593 districts in the country in 2001. This number is good enough to have a detailed spatial analysis of various population characteristics of the major religious groups in the country.

The district-wise data has been mapped by choropleth method and the discussion on spatial pattern of the religious groups in context to their population characteristics is mainly based on what emerges on these maps.

The distribution of the population of religious groups is analysed on the basis of a modified form of concentration index. The modified index of population concentration is the ratio between the actual and the average population of a spatial unit on the one hand, and the ratio between the actual area and the average area of the spatial unit on the other. The index, thus, derived can be mathematically expressed as under:

\[
CI = \frac{(P/\bar{P})}{(A/\bar{A})}
\]

Where, CI is the concentration index; \( P \) and \( A \) are the actual population and area of the unit; and \( \bar{P} \) and \( \bar{A} \) are the average population size and average area of spatial unit respectively.

To measure the growth rate of various religious groups, 1991 Census data is used. The growth rate is calculated by using the formula:

\[
\frac{P_1 - P_0}{P_0} \times 100
\]

Where, \( P_1 \) is the population of a religious group in 2001; and \( P_0 \) is the population of a religious group in the base year (1991).

The analysis of the sex composition of the population belonging to different religious groups is done using the measure of sex ratio. Similarly, from the Census tables pertaining to number of illiterates and literates by each religious group, the literacy rate is calculated. Further, from the literacy rate the gender gap in literacy is analysed.
From the Census tables depicting workers and non-workers by religious groups the work participation rate, which is the percentage of workers to total population is calculated.

The age structure of various religious groups is analysed by using dependency ratio as a measure. Dependency ratio is computed as under:

\[
\text{Dependency Ratio} = \left( \frac{P_{0-14} + P_{60+}}{P_{15-59}} \right) \times 100
\]

Where, \( P_{0-14} \), \( P_{60+} \), and \( P_{15-59} \) refer to population in the age groups 0-14 years, above 60 years and 15-59 years respectively. Furthermore, the population of various religious groups is compared with reference to three broad age groups: ‘Young Dependents’ (less than 15 years), ‘Working Age Group’ (15-59 years) and ‘Old Dependents’ (60 years and above).

**Scheme of the Study**

The study has been organised into eight chapters. The first chapter has been devoted to the general introduction of the problem under study. In the second chapter, the spatial distribution of the major religious groups is discussed. The third chapter examines the growth of the major religious groups during the Census period 1991-2001 in a spatial perspective. The fourth and fifth chapters deal with the spatial aspects of sex ratio and literacy of the major religious groups respectively. In the sixth chapter, an attempt has been made to assess the work participation rate of the major religious groups in a spatial perspective. The seventh chapter examines the age structure of major religious groups in the light of their dependency ratio. The last chapter provides a distilled version of various conclusions arrived at on the basis of findings of the present study and an overview of the population belonging to the major religious groups.
Source: Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India