CHAPTER-VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

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. It 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.

From planning point of view, the population characteristics of religious groups 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.

India has the distinction of being the land from where certain important religions of the world, viz. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism originated. It 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. 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.

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. It is an attempt to obtain 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. It has been found that 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.

Conclusions

The main conclusions drawn from the study are as under:

(I) The spatial distributional pattern of population adhering to different major religious groups in India seems to be the outcome of centuries of their diffusion process. Hinduism being the oldest religion of the land dating back to 4000 B.C., the Hindus were virtually spread all over the country. Likewise, the Muslims too were geographically scattered all over the country and barring few exceptions the spatial pattern of their distribution corresponded with that of the Hindus. However, the distributional pattern of the remaining four religious groups presented a totally different picture and had a tendency of clustering in distinct pockets.

The study brought out that about three-quarters of the Hindu and the Sikh population resided in the rural areas. It showed their heavy dependence on
agriculture and allied economic activities. The Muslims, the Christians and the Buddhists too had a higher proportion of their populations living in rural areas but the proportion was lower as compared to that of the Hindus and the Sikhs. However, three-quarters of the Jain population lived in the urban areas confirming they had much to do with the economic pursuits offered by the towns.

The Hindu pilgrimage centres, lucrative agriculture, and urban and industrial development were the main factors which resulted in high concentration of the Hindu population. The Muslim population was highly concentrated in areas associated with a long history of Muslim rule, intensive agriculture, large scale influx of Muslim migrants and high degree of urbanisation. For the Christians, the areas of relatively high concentration were mainly the tribal areas, the areas of large Dalit population and conversion into Christianity, highly urbanised districts and the areas that had trading relations with the European countries since ancient times. The areas of relatively high concentration of the Sikhs were those where the Sikhism originated, reclamation of agricultural land took place, provision of irrigation led to agricultural expansion and in the highly developed urban area. The Buddhists had a relatively high concentration in the areas associated with tribal population, large scale conversion of Dalits into Buddhism and high degree of urbanisation. The areas of relatively high concentration of the Jains were areas traditionally associated with retailing and trading activities.

Thus, areas associated with mass conversion to a religion, place of origin of a religion and the highly urbanised area supported high concentration of a religious group. Conversely, the areas of relatively low concentration of the religious groups displayed conditions opposite to those found in the areas of relatively high concentration.

In the case of Hindus, the areas of relatively low concentration were those where the resource base was poor, mountains and hilly areas presented geographical constraints, irrigational facilities were lacking, conversion into other religions was rampant and tribal population predominated. The areas of relatively low concentration of the Muslim population included the unproductive areas,
inaccessible forested areas, tribal areas and areas not directly associated with Muslim rule. The Christian population was sparsely distributed where the Christian missionaries were not active, provinces were not under the British administration (princely states) and fertile agricultural land existed. The areas of low concentration of the Sikh population were those where diffusion of Sikhism could not take place, physical constraints hampered agricultural development and where tribal population predominated. The Buddhist population was sparsely distributed where rich resource base existed, conversion of tribal to Christianity was rampant, and the Muslim and the Jain population predominated. The areas of relatively low concentration of the Jains were agriculture predominated areas, areas of low level of urbanisation and industrialisation, tribal areas and the areas in which Jainism was wiped out by subsequent rulers. Apart from these, the other factors which contribute towards the spatial spread of religious groups include royal patronage on a religion, mass conversions due to foreign invasions, ancient trade relations, change in political boundaries, etc.

(II) The investigation of spatial patterns of growth of major religious groups of India provides that the inter-census period 1991-2001 was marked by unprecedented acceleration in the growth of the Jain population. During the period 1981-91, their growth rate was much below than that of the ‘All religious groups’. The abysmally high growth during 1991-01 was the outcome of variations in the Census reporting.

The Sikhs showed the lowest growth rate, while it was the highest in the case of Muslims. This difference was largely an outcome of differentials in fertility rates as also due to difference in the propensity to emigrate. The fertility rate of the Sikhs was lower than that of the Muslims. Moreover, emigration to foreign lands was quite common among the Sikhs. In Punjab, almost every Sikh family had a near or distant relative settled in some foreign country. Nevertheless, the variations in the growth rates of the major religious groups were chiefly due to the time-lag differences in undergoing demographic transition.
The abysmal high growth of the Christians, the Buddhists and the Jains in some of the districts of the country brought out that conversion of people belonging to other religions was quite rampant among these groups. Contrastingly, conversion did not hold sway in the case of Sikhs, the Muslims and to some extent the Hindus. As a result, the variation in the growth rates of these religious groups across the districts of the country could not be much explained on the basis of conversion. It was found that most of the growth was associated with the ‘cultural hearths’ of the religious groups. The Hindus, for instance, recorded above their national average growth in the Indo-Gangetic plains, the Christians recorded above their national average growth in the north-eastern region, the Jains in the western region, the Sikhs in Punjab and the Buddhists in Sikkim.

Surely, religion is only one among several categories that helps in the understanding of demographic patterns. But regional imbalances in development, rather than religion-specific causes, seemed to hold greater explanatory value for variations in spatial pattern of growth. In the ‘Bimaru States’ with slight exceptions all the religious groups recorded relatively higher growth rates quite in contrast to the southern states where all the religious groups were better off demographically.

With slight variations, all the major religious groups registered high growth in the Indo-Gangetic region, the state of Rajasthan and the highly industrial areas. Thus, the areas of high growth were mostly the areas which were either areas of high natural increase or the areas marked by strong processes of industrialisation and urbanisation that attracted migrants. Contrastingly, all the major religious groups with the exception of the Sikhs registered low growth in large parts of the peninsular region. In this region, fertility decline had also embraced all religious groups. However, the high growth of the Sikhs in this region was to be seen in context to internal migration.

(III) The sex composition of the major religious groups varied from one group to another. The Christian community treated its women better as compared to other
religious communities and its sex ratio was the highest among all the religious groups. Contrastingly, the Sikhs, the Hindus and the Jains projected out to be hostile toward their women as these religious groups displayed the lowest sex ratios.

All religious groups presented a contrasting picture in their sex composition in the rural-urban areas. Strangely, as opposed to the general notion of sex ratio being lower in the urban areas than their rural counterparts, the Christians and the Jains recorded relatively higher sex ratio in the urban areas. This could be seen in the light of their higher child sex ratio in the urban areas. The child sex ratio was higher among the Jains in the urban than the rural areas, whereas it was almost the same among the Christians in the rural and urban areas. Contrary to these two religious groups, the urban sex ratio was lower than the rural among the Hindus, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Buddhists. This was attributable to male selectivity in rural to urban migration as also to a relatively lower child sex ratio in the urban areas among these religious groups. The higher costs of living, difficulty of housing and social factors restrict family migration.

Viewed in its regional perspective, there was much of diversity in the sex ratio of the religious groups across the states and union territories of the country. In Kerala, there were more females than males among the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian population. Better healthcare infrastructure, higher status of women along with male selective emigration and out-migration were instrumental for an excess of females over males. Furthermore, on one hand, the Christians recorded an excess of females in a large number of states (mostly the central and the southern states), while on the other hand the Sikhs and the Jains did not record an excess of females over males in any state. Nonetheless, all the major religious groups recorded sex ratio below their average sex ratio in most of the union territories. Male selective in-migration was a plausible reason for deficiency of females in the union territories.

The culture of the majority community had some impact on the minority communities of that region. It was found that wherever a religious group was in
majority, their sex ratio was moderate to high. Male selective migration of a religious group had a significant influence in determining sex ratio among a religious group in a region. The central tribal belt depicted a high sex ratio irrespective of religious affiliations, whereas the tribal belt of the north-eastern region depicted a low sex ratio among all the religious communities except the Christians.

Strangely, the sex ratio among the Hindus was below their average in the states where they were a minority religious group such as in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Nagaland and Mizoram. However, a curious reversal of sex ratio pattern was observed in Punjab. The total sex ratio of the Sikhs in Punjab was above their national average, whereas the sex ratio of other major religious groups was below their respective national average in their native states. This raises an important question. Does majority status by inducing a sense of security in a religious group lead to better sex ratio?

The child sex ratio varied widely among the religious groups. On the one end of the spectrum were the Sikhs with an abysmally low child sex ratio (786), while on the other end were the Christians with the high child sex ratio (964) in the country. A very high proportion of the Christian population resided in the peninsular and the tribal areas of central and north-eastern region. In both the regions, the status of women was high and the practice of infanticide and foeticide was almost non-existent. Contrastingly, more than three quarters of the Sikhs resided in north-western region which being highly patriarchal, the status of women is low and the practice of infanticide in the past and in recent years of that of foeticide is deep rooted.

The sex ratio in the 0-6 age group was lower than the national average among the Hindus, the Jains and the Sikhs but higher than national average among the Christians, the Muslims and the Buddhists. Unlike in the case of total sex ratio in which at least one religious group (the Christians) recorded preponderance of females, in the child sex ratio, none of the six major religious groups recorded sex ratio in favour of the girl child. However, a normal sex ratio
is about 950 girls per 1000 boys and the Christians and the Muslims stood close to that level.

The Hindus recorded lower than their national average child sex ratio in the states where they were in a minority group. On the other hand, the child sex ratio among the Muslims and the Christians was higher than their national average in the states where they were a majority religious group. Likewise, the Buddhists and the Jains recorded above national average child sex ratio in the states where they were in sizeable number. However, this did not hold true in the case of Sikhs. The child sex ratio among the Sikhs in Punjab (a Sikh majority state) was lower than their national average.

In a country like India which is marked by masculinity, females equal to or in excess of males in some areas is a unique phenomenon in itself. Areas having a relatively high sex ratio were often the areas marked by male selective out-migration in search of better employment opportunities. There was not even a single geographical area where all the major religious groups recorded preponderance of females over males. Thus, the variation in the degree of influence generated by various factors operating at local level, on the religious groups seemed to have given rise to difference in the spatial pattern of sex ratio of major religious groups.

The areas where the religious groups recorded low sex ratio were those related to masculinisation of sex ratio and the spatial patterns of sex ratio associated with them was a disturbing factor. This demographic imbalance was not due to problem of under-counting of females but was a case of ‘missing women’. These were the areas that experienced male selective in-migration or a high female mortality and were mostly associated with a low child sex ratio characterised by a strong ‘son preference’ and a resultant neglect of girls and female infants.

The areas of moderate sex ratio were the transitional areas sandwiched between areas of relatively high and relatively low sex ratios. These were the areas which recorded relatively high child sex ratio and in which sex selective migration acted as a balancing force.
Among the states, religious affiliation mattered a little where overall development indicators were healthy. Thus, there were regions where all the major religious groups had either a high sex ratio or a low sex ratio, so it appeared that the effect of religion was weak in several parts of the country and more than religion, it was the regional impact that determined the spatial patterns of sex ratio among the different religious groups. Within a religious group there were social and economic differences among its members such as differences in income, education level, status of women and so on, which affected sex ratio of a religious group.

(IV) There were much of variations in the literacy rates of the six major religious groups of the country. Their literacy rates varied from 59.1 per cent (among the Muslims) to 94.1 per cent (among the Jains). The variations in their literacy rates were largely an outcome of their geographical positioning, economic activity, need for education and social structure. Moreover, their literacy rates were also the product of certain historical factors such as socio-religious movements like Arya Samaj movement, Singh Sabha movement, Neo-Buddhist movement and the work of the Christian missionaries.

The difference in the literacy rates of the religious groups owed much to the level of literacy of their females. Living in the same country, while only 50.1 per cent of the Muslim females were literate the corresponding figure for the Jain females was an astonishing 90.6 per cent. So, while the literacy figure for the Jain females outmatched the female literacy rates of many of the developed countries of the world, those for the Muslim females was below the female literacy rates of many of the third world countries. Thus, the situation of the Muslim females was much more precarious as only half of the Muslim females were literate.

The gender gap in literacy was the largest among the Hindus (the largest religious group) and not among the Muslims, and was the smallest among the Jains (the smallest religious group). The comparatively smaller gender gap among the Muslims could be seen in the light of their relatively lower male
literacy rate as compared to other religious communities. In fact, the Muslims displayed the lowest female as well as male literacy rates among the major religious groups. The low literacy among the Muslims was largely the result of their poor socio-economic conditions.

As far as the urban-rural difference in literacy was concerned, it was the highest among the Hindus and the lowest among the Jains. This could well be explained from the viewpoint that a high proportion of the Hindu population residing in the rural areas was engaged in agricultural and related activities and thus the need to be literate was less. Contrary to this, high proportion of the Jain population residing in the rural areas was engaged in non-agricultural activities, which increased the value of education among them as well as proportion of literacy. More than religion, it depends on the need of education for a particular occupation, access to the educational facilities, social awareness and economic capability of a religious group that explained urban-rural difference in their literacy rates.

Regionally, the Indo-Gangetic plains and the interior peninsular plateau emerged out as areas where all the religious groups with some slight variations recorded relatively lower rates of literacy. Conversely, the literacy rates among all the religious groups during the study period were relatively higher in the coastal plains; Himachal, Garhwal and Kumaun Himalayas and in the central upland region. Besides that, all the major religious groups displayed very high literacy rates in the urban-industrial clusters of the country. Thus, it is interesting to note that there were regions which had high or a low literacy, across all the religious groups.

As such, more than religion it was the socio-economic conditions of the religious groups and the level of development of a region which influenced the literacy rate of the different religious groups. Instead of exhibiting a uniform literacy rate independent of regional constraints the religious groups tended to follow the pattern of literacy of the regions in which they were based. The rural-urban concentration, social stratification, level of female literacy and economic
activity undertaken by a religious group were some of the factors in a set of complex factors which determined the level of literacy of a religious group.

The value and need for education varied from one religious group to another which explained the differential in their literacy rates. Gender differential in literacy rates was so pervasive that it existed in all the religious groups and across all the states, though in varying magnitude. Education is one of the key inputs for economic growth and development. Any religious group could flourish only when its human resources had developed to the fullest extent. An illiterate population faces many handicaps and problems.

(V) All the religious groups displayed varied proportion of workers in their population. This could largely be attributable to the difference in the proportion of their females in the workforce. Higher work participation rate of the Buddhists was primarily due to their high female work participation rate. Contrastingly, the low work participation rate for the Muslims was mainly due to their low female work participation rate. More than religion, it was the region and its socio-cultural manifestations, which influenced the proportion of workers.

There were striking variations in the level of work participation rate among different religious groups both within and across districts in India. All the major religious groups recorded higher than their average work participation rates in the north-eastern region. Although the Muslims had the lowest work participation rate among all the major religious groups but in the Muslim majority state of Jammu & Kashmir not only the Muslims but other religious groups too had recorded above their national average work participation rate. The Himalayan hill states presented a contrasting picture with most of the religious groups recording above average work participation in Himachal Pradesh and below their national average in Uttaranchal. This refuted the earlier notion that held that out-migration of male led to high female work participation and a resultant high work participation in the Himalayan states.

All the religious groups except the Sikhs in Punjab and the Muslims in West Bengal and Haryana recorded below their national average work
participation in Indo-Gangetic plains. Interestingly, in Kerala which was regarded as the best state in terms of demographic characteristics the work participation among all the religious groups except for the Sikhs was lower than their national average. The general notion that the Sikhs are orthodox and do not allow their women to work gets refuted as in Punjab, the only Sikh majority state, the Sikh female had higher work participation rate than their national average. The analysis further shows that in the central tribal belt it's only the Christians that have recorded above average work participation rate. In the national capital territory region, all the religious groups except for the Christians recorded below their national average work participation rate. The inter-state variation in the work participation of the religious groups was a reflection of the state employment policies, the socio-economic conditions of the religious groups and availability of land with them.

Although both the Sikhs and the Jains had below national average work participation rate they recorded a high male work participation rate of above 50 per cent in all the 35 states and union territories. The north-eastern region presents a contrasting picture with most of the major religious groups recording either their highest or their lowest gender gaps in work participation in one or the other state located in this region. The gender gap in work participation was higher than average for all the major religious groups in most of the southern states.

One of the stark findings was that wherever the minority religious group was a majority or had a substantial population base the gender gap in their work participation rate tended to be below their national average. The Muslims, for instance, had lower male-female differential in their work participation in Jammu & Kashmir and Lakshadweep – the Muslim majority areas. The Sikhs had below their national average gender gap in Punjab which is the only Sikh majority state. The Buddhists had lower than their national average gender gap in work participation in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh – the states which support the sizeable Buddhist population. The Christians too had recorded smaller male-female differential in work participation in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya–
the states which had the Christian majority. Strangely enough, the gender gap in work participation among the Hindus was higher than their national average in states where they were a minority group.

The areas of relatively high work participation varied from one religious group to another. However, the Himalayan and the peninsular region emerged as the regions where all the groups irrespective of their religious affiliations recorded high work participation. Contrary to this, in the northern plains the proportion of workers was low among all the religious groups. The culture in the former region valued women’s work, whereas the culture of the latter region valued women’s seclusion from the workforce. More than religion, the geographical location, economic, socio-cultural milieu prevailing in a region also influenced the work participation among the religious groups.

(VI) The Muslims and Jains were the two religious groups, which had age structures quite diverse from the other major religious groups. The Muslims had the highest proportion of 0-14 years age group and the lowest proportions of ‘working’ and 60 years and above age groups, whereas the Jains had the lowest proportion of 0-14 years age group and the highest proportions of ‘working’ and 60 years and above age groups. This highlights that the Muslims were in the early stage of demographic transition, while the Jains were at an advanced stage.

In all the religious groups, the proportion of females was lower than that of the males in 0-14 years of age group but higher than the males in the 60 years and above age group. The low proportion of females in 0-14 years of age group portrays discrimination against the girl child by all the religious groups. The proportion of females in the ‘working’ age group was lower than males among the Hindus, the Muslims, the Buddhists and the Jains. Strangely, among the Christians and the Sikhs, females outnumbered males in the ‘working’ age group. This type of age structure could happen in two conditions. One, if male mortality was higher than female in 15-59 years age group. Second, if there was emigration of males of the ‘working’ age group.
There were marked variations in the proportion of ‘young dependents’ among the major religious groups across the states. All the religious groups had higher than their average proportion of the ‘young dependents’ population in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, thus, highlighting higher fertility irrespective of religious affiliations in these states. Interestingly, the union territories registered above national average proportion of ‘working’ age group among all the religious groups. Union territories being highly urbanised provide greater employment opportunities, thereby attracting persons of the ‘working’ age group. Contrary to this, lower proportion of ‘working’ age group was associated with states where a religious group had a higher proportion of the ‘young dependents’ age group. For instance, the lowest proportion of ‘working’ age group among the Hindus and the Muslims was in Bihar and Haryana respectively, the states that had the highest proportion of ‘young dependents’ population.

Wide inter-religion and intra-religion variations existed across the states in context to the proportion of ‘old dependents’ (60 and above age group) population almost all the religious group had low proportion of ‘old dependents’ in the north-eastern states. Contrary to the north-eastern states, the southern states displayed ageing of population irrespective of religious affiliations.

Dependency ratio varied across religious groups. While the Muslims, the Hindus and the Buddhists had relatively high ratio, the Christians and the Jains had the lowest. The spatial patterns of dependency across the religious groups revealed that although each and every religious group had a distinct pattern of dependency, yet there were innumerable examples of regional trends prevailing over religious patterns. For instance, in most of the north-eastern hilly region and the Gangetic plains all the religious groups recorded a high dependency ratio with a few exceptions. In two southern states, namely, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, every major religious group recorded a low dependency ratio.

Moreover, the religious groups recorded a relatively high dependency in areas associated with their high concentration and vice versa. This was largely due to a higher proportion of the ‘working’ age group in areas of low
concentration as against the young and aged population in areas of high concentration.

In fact, both religion and regions were significant in determining the age structure of the religious groups through their influence on fertility, mortality and migration. It would be as incorrect to attribute the higher Muslim dependency and young age group entirely to something inherently ‘Muslim’ as it was lower dependency of Jains primarily represents something related with ‘Jain’ religion. It seems that the socio-economic conditions of the religious groups in different regions of the country had an impact on the age structure of the religious group and the age structure of the religious group was an inter-play of religion and region both.

Thus, it comes out strikingly that the Muslims due to their high rate of natural increase, very low literacy rate (especially among the females), a very low work participation rate and a high dependency ratio are found to be lagging far behind all other major religious groups of the country. All these factors have slowed down their progress and deprived them of a chance to join the mainstream of the nation.

Suggestions

The following suggestions emerge out of the present research study:

1. In the Indo-Gangetic region, most of the major religious groups recorded a high growth rate. Thus, there is an urgent requirement for region specific policies and programmes relating to fertility control and family planning, keeping in view the socio-economic conditions of the population belonging to a religious group.

2. There is a need to take along all the religious groups in order to achieve the goal of population stabilisation. However, as the Muslims recorded the highest growth rate, this religious group needs formulation of special programmes and policies by the government having focus on control of their population. The Muslim religious leaders can also play a significant
role in this regard. They should create awareness among the Muslims to get rid of illiteracy and backwardness.

3. As knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance, there is an urgent need to have more schools and more jobs for the Muslim children. Greater job opportunities for them would lead to improve their literacy rate and bring them at par with other communities of the country.

4. The Sikhs had an abysmally low child sex ratio. There should be a strict social boycott of such Deras that propagate granting of a son. In fact, the Sikh religious leaders should come forward to change the mind-set of their community.

5. As none of the six major religious groups recorded sex ratio in favour of the girl child, the enlightened members of these communities in general and of the Sikhs in particular should address the issues related to son preference, dowry and patriarchy.

6. Gender differential in literacy and work participation was so pervasive that it existed in all the religious groups. Thus, there is a need to strengthen the programmes focused upon women empowerment especially those related to their literacy and work opportunities. In fact, women’s education and economic empowerment would enable the nation in achieving other development goals as well.

7. Regionally, the Indo-Gangetic plains and the interior peninsular plateau emerged out as areas where all the religious groups with some slight variations recorded relatively lower rates of literacy. As such, there is a dire need of region specific programmes relating to literacy.

8. Any religious group could flourish only when its human resources had developed to the fullest extent and education is one of the key inputs for economic growth and development.

9. A variety of employment opportunities should be provided for the Muslims in general and their females in particular so as to increase their work participation rate.
10. The present research work demands a field survey to collect more information on socio-economic characteristics of religious groups, and also on their values and beliefs that may affect their socio-economic conditions.

11. As the proportion of the ‘young dependent’ population among all the major religious groups was higher than their national average in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan, it calls for effective monitoring of the family welfare programmes targeting all the religious groups. These states should focus on bringing down infant and maternal mortality rates as also the birth rate.

12. The southern states displayed ageing of population irrespective of religious affiliations. The State governments of these states should make a separate budgetary provision for the welfare of the aged population especially in the sector of health insurance and healthcare. More and more NGOs should come forward and take up issues related to the senior citizens.

13. There is a need for district-wise data on poverty by religious groups. This could pave way for community specific poverty eradication programmes.

14. The age structure of the religious groups needs to be considered while chalking out social welfare programmes. As the proportion of the young age group was the highest in the Muslim population, it calls for an effective coverage of health and education services targeting this religious group. Similarly, as the Christians and the Jains had a high proportion of their populations in the 15-59 (reproductive) age group, there is a dire need for targeted family welfare programme and reproductive healthcare particularly among these religious groups.

15. The high proportion of ‘60 and above’ age group among the Sikhs and Jains demands an increase in social sector investment and programmes related to the welfare of senior citizens in general and for the senior citizens belonging to the Sikh and the Jain community in particular. This would help to add quality of life to years.
In fact, besides the various central and state agencies, even the religious leaders and the intelligentsia of each religious group should come forward to educate people of their respective community on the linkage between population and development.

**Scope for Future Research**

1. The present research study analyses the population characteristics of the six major religious groups of the country. However, the Census Organisation, besides providing district-wise data-set on the six major religious groups also provides data under the category of ‘Others’. This category represents population professing tribal religions. Future research can be conducted taking into account the population characteristics of those included in ‘Others’ category on the lines of the present research.

2. The present study undertakes the population characteristics of the six major religious groups of the country in their spatial perspective only and not in temporal perspective, as the censuses prior to the 2001 Census (especially those after Independence) did not provide data on some of the important attributes such as literacy, work participation rate and dependency ratio. As all the censuses provided district-wise data on the total, male and female population belonging to a religious group, a temporal study of the distribution, growth and sex ratio of all the major religious groups can be taken up in future.

3. The present research covers all the 593 districts of the country as per the Census 2001. The future researchers can divide the districts into various clusters on the basis of the numerical strength of a religious group, and thus, can make a comparison of the religious groups in terms of their population characteristics between the clusters of large and small numerical strength.

4. Even a long period (1901-2001) geographical perspective of a single religious group would come out as an excellent piece of research.