ABSTRACT

In India it is a widely accepted belief that the Muslim population is rapidly increasing and are generally averse to the idea of small family norm. This is believed to be due their doctrine and practice of religion that is Islam. The Indian population includes followers of six major religions Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism. These six religions account for almost 99.5% of the total population of the country. Between 1961 and 1991 the Muslim population has reported to have grown by 103% faster than the predominant majority group of Hindus, who have reported a growth of 83% over this period. This paper seeks to explore the fertility behaviour among Muslims in Cuttack district of Odisha where they constitute 5% of the total population. The objectives of the present study are to explore the role of religion in determining fertility behavior and to evaluate the degree to which the social, cultural and economic determinants affect fertility behavior among Muslims with reference to age at marriage, level of education, occupation, son preference, infant and child mortality and status of women both in the rural as well as the urban setting. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, magazines and statistical data and primary data was collected with the help of unstructured interview schedules and case study method. A brief look at the Muslims of Cuttack district of Odisha throws light on the fact that they are as heterogeneous as any other communities. The majority of Muslims however are illiterate, poor and engaged in agricultural and petty jobs for whom children are perceived as an economic asset in the long run. They are also motivated to have more children for old age security purposes, particularly in a situation where there is little or no institutional support for the aged and physically disabled and where women are economically dependent on men. Another striking finding of
the present study brings to light the fact of their low fertility rate among some sections of the community. This comes out clearly from the higher age at marriage of girls. Thus in this paper an attempt has been made to demolish the popular stereotype belief that religion is not the only factor which affects fertility behaviour among Muslims rather they are determined by a host of economic, social, cultural and political factors which greatly affect the total fertility rate among Muslims.

The thesis has been divided into 9 chapters. The first chapter comprises of the demographic profile of India, Odisha and Cuttack district, a brief description of the social, cultural, economic and educational factors determining fertility behaviour, the objectives of the study and the research methodology adopted for this study. The second chapter consist of an analytical review of the various books, articles and journals pertaining to this particular study. The third chapter seeks to explore how age at marriage, level of education and occupation determine fertility behaviour in the rural and urban areas. It was found that in the rural and the urban areas of Cuttack district about 30.2% and 24.8% of the respondents respectively were married at an early age i.e. between the age group of 15-19 years. Moreover, this particular category mostly consists of respondents belonging to a poor economic and educational class. The fourth chapter is concerned with occupation as a major determinant of fertility behavior. The data collected revealed that the average number of living children per woman was higher among the agriculturist’s (6.7 in rural areas and 5 in urban areas) and the skilled (2.6 in rural areas and 2.8 in urban areas) and the un-skilled laborers (3.4 in rural areas and 3.2 in urban areas). The primary reason for their larger family size was attributed to the fact that larger the number of children greater will be the helping hands in the family both financially as well as in terms of contribution to the
household work. The fifth chapter evaluates the effect of education on fertility behavior. Education in one way delays the age at marriage and indirectly reduces the period of reproductive capacity which in turn contributes to lower fertility rate. From the study it was found that the average number of living children was 4.6 in the rural areas and 4.2 in the urban areas among those who were illiterate. It was found to be only 1 child per woman in the rural areas and 1.5 children per woman in the urban areas. The sixth chapter explores the influence of infant and child mortality on fertility behavior. Out of the 250 mothers who were interviewed, 71 of them had experienced child deaths. Thus, in an intention to make up for the losses suffered and so as to achieve their ideal family size they remained active in their reproductive activity which eventually led to higher fertility. The seventh chapter deals with the relationship between son preference attitude and fertility. About 41.4% of the respondents who had completed their higher secondary education projected a strong son preference attitude, mainly because of the orthodox and narrow thought process prevailing in their society. The eight chapter is concerned with the female social status and its effect upon fertility behavior. The social status of Muslim Women in Cuttack District is not very favorable. Most of the girls are either illiterate or less educated and are not financially independent they do not stand a place in the decision making process. The last chapter comprises of the final discussion and concluding remarks on the research work. Hence, this study reveals that the role of religion in determining fertility behavior among the Muslims of Cuttack district of Odisha does not stand the empirical scrutiny of data collected from field work. Since the present study is confined to a very smaller area, it cannot be generalized. This is an area where further research needs to be conducted to fill in the existing loop holes.
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