CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The present study is an attempt to see how far the changing status of women is related to their fertility performance. The need for such a study is evident and pressing because the population in India is increasing at a very rapid pace and the present rate of growth is also around 2.5 per cent per annum. The serious magnitude of this problem can well be appreciated when it is realized that this country ranks second in the world in terms of population (Red China being first) whereas its position is seventh in terms of world's land area.

A review of India's census figures makes it clear that the population has been increasing continuously not only in terms of absolute numbers but also in terms of the rate of increase and that in the past three decades this increase has been phenomenal. In 1891, India's population was 236 million. In 1921, only three decades later, it had increased by 12 million, i.e., to 248 million. As against this, during the next three decades, i.e., 1921-51, the population increased by 110 million showing an average decennial growth of 36.6 million. But the decade 1951-61 surpassed all previous rates of growth and witnessed an increase of 77.26 million, thus raising the population to the
level of 439 million. The latest available figures suggest a population of about 537 million in 1969 and its annual rate of growth is reported to be 2.5 per cent.1 At the present rate of growth, nearly 12-13 million people are being added to the country's total population every year.

The reasons for the accelerating rate of population growth are well known. The level of fertility is high as the birth rate is still not less than 40 per thousand and so far there is little indication of any decline. On the other hand, a remarkable decline has been witnessed in mortality in recent years. The estimated death rate has dropped from 42.6 per thousand in 1901 to an estimated 14 per thousand in 1967 and there are reasons to believe that it will continue to fall further owing to continuous improvement in the sanitary and health conditions prevailing among the masses. The clear implication is that if the birth rate does not fall appreciably, the gap

2. Ibid., p.30.
between the birth rate and the death rate will widen much to the detriment of the country.

At the beginning of this century, the birth and death rates were almost at the same level as is clear from the following table:-

**Table No. 1**

_Birth rate, Death rate and Rate of Natural Increase of India's Population per thousand._

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Birth Rate</th>
<th>Death Rate</th>
<th>Net Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1911 (a)</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>+6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1921 (a)</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-31 (a)</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>+10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-41 (a)</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>+14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-51 (b)</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>+12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-61 (b)</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>+18.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These figures show that the net increase was very nominal, or practically nil in some cases, till 1920. Something appears to have happened after 1920 and since then the population has been continuously increasing.
The rapid increase in population is disproportionate to the available resources of the country and as a result there is striking imbalance between the existing population and the resources available for its support.

The effect of increasing population on the resources is quite alarming. For example, the backlog of unemployment at the end of the Second Five-Year-Plan period was about 9 million and underemployment was estimated at 15-18 million. Over the Third-Plan period, the labour force increased by 17 million and additional employment is estimated at 14.5 million. On the basis of these estimates, the backlog of unemployment at the beginning of the Fourth-Plan is 9 to 10 million. Though these statistics are not as precise as they should be, they highlight the fact that the additional employment generated during the First, Second and Third Plan periods has fallen short of the overall demand for employment opportunities arising from the growth of population.

A study made by Coale and Hoover also highlighted many important points concerning the relation of India's population increase to its economic development. According to them unless India succeeds in bringing its birth rate down by 50 per cent in the next thirtyfive to

3 India, Planning Commission, Fourth Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline, p. 106.
forty years, it would never be able to break through a successful, advanced and industrial economy. This is because the demand for serving the additional population will make it impossible to provide adequate finances for industrial and technological development. Hence so long as the increase in food production and per capita income continues to be neutralized by the increase in population, there can be no raising of the standard of living and no possibility of improving the quality of social services.

Thus a rapid decline in birth rate is imperative for economic development and improvement in the standard of living of the masses. Although a decrease in birth rate appears to be a simple solution, in practice it will not be easy to attain without a programme of family planning placed on a war footing as a national movement.

The Government of India, dedicated as it is to the task of promoting a welfare state has been aware of the problem almost ever since 1947 when the country attained its independence. The Government has officially supported the policy of birth control. The first official recognition of the problem came with the publication of the First Five Year Plan, which stressed

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that the objective of stabilizing the growth of population over a reasonable period must be at the centre of planned development. Since Government has officially supported the policy of birth control, a comprehensive programme for popularising family planning methods has been launched. A large number of family planning clinics have been opened in both the urban and the rural areas. The number of sterilizations has also increased. Even the sale of contraceptive goods has gone up rapidly. Moreover, contraceptive goods are given free to people with an income of less than Rs. 100 per month. Besides, many surveys have been conducted to study the attitudes of the people towards family planning with the ultimate objective of making the family planning programme more effective.

The different surveys conducted in the country show that in the rural as well as urban areas, a large majority of persons shows a keen desire to limit the size of their families. On the other hand, it is also apparent that in most sections, the motivation for the practice of family planning is weak. Even the planned trials have shown that when family planning methods have been explained to people and the requisite supplies made available to them, the response is not very
It indicates that the important thing about family planning is not merely the effective supply of cheap contraceptives but the willingness and the effectiveness with which they are used. Reduction in birth rate cannot be expected through contraceptive practices alone so long as the motivation for the practice of family planning is weak.

The experience of other countries shows that it is quite impossible to reduce the birth rate while general living conditions remain unchanged. Family planning cannot be implanted in the minds of people who do not feel any need for it. Mere expansion of facilities for family control would be inadequate unless the people have a strong motivation to use such facilities. In other words, the problem ultimately boils down to the question of providing the requisite motivation.

It is true that the family size is determined by the desires of millions of couples. But their desires are influenced by external factors, such as, education, information on family planning methods, opportunities for improving the standard of living, laws and practices relating to the age at marriage and the gainful employment of women outside their homes. In other words, fertility is believed to be sensitive to factors like education, economic conditions, and employment of women in gainful pursuits.

This view is also substantiated by fertility studies in the country. Driver in his book on "Differential Fertility in Central India" has shown that women with a primary or above primary standard of education had 1.3 children less than the illiterate women. The Calcutta Fertility Survey has shown that illiterate women had 3.1 children as the average size of the family whereas matriculates and those with education above the matriculation level had 2.8 children as the average size of the family. The National Sample Survey in its 16th round in 1960-61 indicated that for women aged 47 years

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or over, the number of live-births among illiterate women and those with education up to the primary level was 6.6. Corresponding figures for women with a middle and highschool level education were 5.0 and 4.6 respectively and for women with University education it was as low as 2 children. In all these studies, the number of women employed in different occupations was very small, hence they did not study the influence of employment. But the experience of other countries shows that the employment of women outside the home does influence their fertility behaviour.

Some idea of the possible influence of employment upon human fertility when the women were lured out of their homes in a modern type of establishment is afforded by Japan and Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, such women averaged about one half child less than did women who remained outside of the working force. In Japan, women engaged in agriculture and some form of home industry had the highest fertility. Women who were not in the working force or who were engaged in home industries in the non-agriculture sphere had slightly lower fertility. The sharpest reduction, amounting to an average decrease of between one half and one child, occurred among women who left their homes for employment in the modern sectors of the Japanese economy.\(^8\)

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Gendell Murray also came to the same conclusion in her study of 'Swedish Working Wives' and thus concluded that working wives give birth to fewer children than housewives not because they are disinterested in maternity but more so because of their double duty.

Thus it may be concluded that a better and higher education, more widespread employment of women outside their homes and a desire for a better standard of living are bound to lead to the regulation of the size of the family.

**Change in the Status of Women in India**

In India, the changes have been taking place in the status of women in recent years. Higher technical and professional education and new varieties of paid employment, varied opportunities for the development of new skills and wider social contacts are some of the concomitants of the new social order that has been ushered in. This change has enabled women to achieve greater equality with men both within and outside the family, in the legal, social, educational, occupational, political and economic spheres of activity. The old

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order, which confined women to the home as servants and helpers to their men folk, has been or is in the process of being, replaced by a new one in which women are increasingly undertaking many roles, such as wives, mothers as well as partners and co-workers with men in all types of occupations.

At present the percentage of literacy among women is on the increase. The total percentage of literacy in the country according to the 1961 census was 24. It was 34.5 per cent for males and 13.0 per cent for females. It is further noticed that the proportion of educated women is much higher in the urban as compared to the rural areas as 34.5 per cent of all urban women as against 8.5 per cent of all rural women are either literate or had education of different standards. Moreover, the proportion of women students in the total enrolment in Indian Universities was about 13 per cent in 1955-56, about 17 per cent in 1960-61 and is expected to be 21 per cent in 1965-66.

Since education enlarges one's vision, widens the outlook and develops the social personality, it has made

10 India, Planning Commission, Third Five Year Plan, 1961, p. 590.
11 India, Census Commissioner, Census of India, 1961, Subsidiary Tables B iii, p.590-113.
12 India, Planning Commission, Third Five Year Plan, 1961, p.590.
Indian women conscious of their roles other than that of a housewife.

The spread of education has also increased employment opportunities and now it is being widely recognised that certain jobs in offices can, with advantage, be undertaken by them. Now women are freely and actively participating in the political, administrative and professional spheres.

At present the number of women engaged in various occupations of higher prestige in urban areas is steadily increasing. Women are seen working as office secretaries, doctors, teachers, lawyers, stenographers and nurses etc. After India's independence they have been working in the foreign, political, administrative and many other important services. According to the 1961 census, there were four million women workers in the urban areas.\(^{13}\) Although this proportion at present may be small, it does show a tendency to grow steadily due to an increase in the educational levels as in the urban areas the percentage of women engaged in gainful employment is much higher among the highly educated women since the work participation rate according to the 1961 census is much

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lower among women who are barely literate (4.6 per cent) or are educated up to the primary level (4.7 per cent). The rate rises with levels of education and it is 17.3 per cent among matriculates and as much as 71.3 per cent among those who hold technical degrees. Hence this progressive rise in the educational field with the rise in the levels of education of urban women is a matter of great significance.

Further, under the influence of Western education, the ideal of individual freedom has struck deep roots. Now women like to live as equal partners in men's lives and not merely as their appendages. Besides, the ideals of both men and women have undergone significant changes. Few parents even two to three decades ago, thought in terms of careers for their daughters. But now they readily spend on their daughters' education with a view of equipping them for gainful employment. Husbands, who at one time thought it an outrage to allow their wives to work, not only do not grudge it now, but even welcome a career for them as it lightens their own burdens.

All the same employment of women is not new to India. Even in the past women, belonging to the lower

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14 India, Census Commissioner, Census of India, 1961: Subsidiary Tables B iii, p.113.
sections of the community, sought gainful employment and were engaged in occupations of lower prestige. As pointed out by D'Souza, out of 41 million women workers in 1951, 33 million were engaged in agricultural occupations. Thus it is obvious that the majority of them were engaged as unskilled workers. Since they lived at a subsistence level, they were pushed into jobs through sheer economic necessity and not pulled out by any lure of outside employment. At the same time, women belonging to the upper classes did not seek employment outside their homes. It was firstly because they were not fully qualified for the jobs of higher prestige and secondly, such jobs were very scarce. In the past as well as today, a woman's status is derived from her husband or father. Previously as the job opportunities corresponding to their fathers' or husbands' status were not available, they could not seek a career, even if they wanted to. According to D'Souza, besides other reasons, the important reason for women not taking up any jobs is the requirement of family status consistency. He says that in any social group as compared

* Here by lower prestige occupations we mean those occupations which do not require any schooling or technical training and fetch very low incomes.

to other groups there is a tendency for the social status of members to form a consistent pattern and this is true more in the case of women's employment.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus it appears that a woman, if there are no other reasons, would take up a job if its status is comparable to the prestige of her husband's occupation. He further explains this by mentioning that most of the women workers in the past as well as now are engaged in unskilled jobs or occupations involving very little skill. These are occupations of lowest prestige. The majority of the male workers, too, are engaged in low paid, unskilled jobs. Since both husband and wife are in occupations of similar prestige, there is no problem of status inconsistency,\textsuperscript{17} hence the majority of the women work in low prestige occupations.

In the recent years the situation has been fast changing. A new pattern is emerging in which women of the lower middle, middle and even higher income groups have started taking up paid jobs because due to the rising cost of living the earnings of their husbands do not


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. p.5.
suffice for the family needs nor enable them to acquire all their comforts and luxuries. Thus women workers on the whole can be divided into two broad categories: women who are working for mere subsistence and women who are working to raise their standard of living. In other words, this entry of the lower middle or middle and high class women in gainful employment outside their homes is in many ways different from the entry of the lower class women. Those who are working merely for subsistence are more or less illiterate or have very little education whereas those who are working for raising their standard of living are generally well educated. Since the income of the first category of women is just sufficient to maintain the subsistence level, they do not educate their children also. For them additional children mean an additional income and the younger children can be easily looked after by the older ones. Hence they do not feel the necessity of restricting the size of their families. But the situation is different in the case of the second category of women. Work outside the home enlarges their mental horizon and increases their aspirations in life. It also increases their sense of responsibility towards their children, and in a way, it prevents them from bringing into the world more children than they can afford to bring up at a reasonable standard or the standard
corresponding to their social status.

Thus it is obvious that the status of women has been changing in recent years and the important factors associated with the changing status of women are higher education, their employment in higher prestige occupations and higher incomes.

Objective of the Study

A number of studies on fertility performance and family planning attitudes have been undertaken during the last decade or so, but very little attention has been paid to studying the fertility pattern in terms of the changing status of women. The present study is undertaken to see how far a change in the status of women, as indicated by these factors, brings about changes in their fertility performance.

The major objective of the study is to find out the relationship between the social status of women and their fertility performance. The study is based on the assumption that among the factors that determine fertility, social factors are relatively the more important. Of course, biological and psychological factors do play an important role, but whatever may be their role, these can eventually be reduced to social factors especially when they assume the character of collective phenomena. Among the social factors, the one selected for the present
investigation is the status of women. The major assumption in the study is that among the socio-cultural factors, social status is an important factor in fertility since the higher the social status, the lower the fertility.

This assumption is based on a logical connection between social status and fertility performance. The general relationship is derived from the association of high status (due to higher education and higher prestige jobs) and low fertility norms and a high degree of rationality in family planning and low status (due to less or no education and lower prestige jobs) with opposite characteristics.

However, the relationship between social status and fertility cannot be logically explained in a direct manner. On the other hand, there are other factors which have a direct bearing on fertility, such as, age at marriage, mortality experience, knowledge and use of family planning practices and so on. These may be regarded as intervening variables. That is to say, social status, which may be regarded as an independent variable, influences the intervening variables and the latter influence fertility which may be regarded as the dependent variable.
While speaking about the impact of the changing status of women on fertility, with regard to the factors of education and employment of women, we have to take into account all women, whether educated or uneducated, whether employed or unemployed. Arranging all these women in a single dimension of social status raises a serious methodological problem. This is due to the fact that the dimension of occupational prestige is applicable only to the employed women. It is also true that the dimension of the amount of education, another correlate of social status, varies in the case of educated women only. But with regard to education, all uneducated women can be placed at the extreme end of the dimension. In this sense all non-working women cannot be placed on any one extreme of the continuum of occupational prestige.

With a view to circumventing this problem the women in our universe are divided into four *a priori* status categories in the following descending order of social status: highly educated working women, highly educated non-working women, less educated non-working and less educated working women. This classification is based on the demonstration, as already mentioned by D'Souza that in India, the employment of women, by and large conforms to the requirements of family status.

* By highly educated women, we mean all those who had completed matriculation or had education above the matriculation standard and the less educated or uneducated are those who were either illiterate, just literate or had an education up to the primary or below the primary level.
So a woman would take up a job, if the prestige of that job is consistent with the status of her husband or father otherwise she would prefer to remain unemployed. This explains why more highly educated women are on the rolls of the Live Registers of the Employment Exchanges in Punjab than men, though their educational attainments are equal to those of men. In 1965, 324 postgraduate women as against 296 post-graduate men were borne on the Live Registers of the Employment Exchanges in Punjab (Reorganised state). Similarly in 1966 and 1967, 627 and 551 women respectively as against 516 and 548 men respectively had themselves registered for employment purposes.

Since education is one of the important indices of social status, it is evident that the higher educated women are higher in status than the illiterate and less educated. But among the higher educated women, it is necessary to justify the assumption that higher educated working women fall into the highest status category.

The higher educated husbands have jobs of higher prestige and their wives would also be highly educated. In order to keep the status consistency, the wives would also have jobs of higher prestige. But there is no

18 Ibid., p.4.

denying the fact that a woman who is engaged in
gainful employment acquires an independent status of
her own because of her economic independence. Thus
in the case of working women, their acquired status is
equal to their derived status. Since the acquired
status has its independent entity, it ranks higher
than the derived status. On the other hand, in the
case of highly educated non-working women, the status
is only derived, therefore, they would rank lower
than the working women of the same educational category.
Moreover, the family income of highly educated working
women would be higher than that of the non-working
women, contributing to a higher standard of living on
the part of the former. Due to these reasons highly
educated working women have been put at the top of
the social status hierarchy even though they have a
similar educational background.

Education being an important index of social
status as mentioned above, the higher educated non­
working women are higher in status as compared to the
less educated and illiterate. But among the less
educated and illiterate women, the less educated
non-working ones would rank higher than the working
ones because their husbands have sufficiently higher
types of jobs and, being less educated, they are
unable to secure jobs consistent with the status of
their husbands. Since their derived status is higher, they rank higher than the less educated working women.

As indicated earlier, the vast majority of women in India have been working in jobs of lower prestige, such as in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. They are mostly illiterate and less educated women. In their case it can be seen that their husbands are employed in low prestige jobs. So their derived as well as acquired status is low. It is therefore, clear that illiterate and less educated working women belong to the category of the lowest status.

Thus the evidence and inference from D'Souza's studies would support the assumption that the four categories of women - higher educated working, higher educated non-working, less educated non-working and less educated working, would form a hierarchy of social status in a descending order.

Therefore, the important hypothesis to be tested in this study is (1) that the fertility of women is negatively correlated with the social status of the four categories of women. Apart from this, a number of other hypothesis, such as, the following can be derived from the above discussion.

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(2) The higher the social status of women, the higher will be the age at marriage and vice-versa and the higher the age at marriage, the lower will be the fertility.

(3) The longer the duration of married life, the greater will be the number of pregnancies, unless the couples practice family planning or the period of co-habitation is otherwise interrupted.

(4) Even in the case of married couples with a longer duration of married life, the number of pregnancies would be larger in the case of those women whose age at marriage is lower irrespective of the age of the man.

(5) The higher the occupational prestige, the lower will be the fertility and vice-versa.

(6) Women of higher social status would be more prone to accept family limitation than the women of a lower social status.

(7) Women of higher social status would have a more favourable attitude towards women's age at marriage.

If these hypotheses are found valid, then it can be inferred that social status is a causal factor between fertility and social status.)