CHAPTER-II
SPATIAL PATTERNS OF DISTRIBUTION OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA

India illustrates a framework of religious realm consisting of the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains as major religious groups. A very large population base, sustained histories of immigration, long history of colonialism, Government policies and differentials in the natural growth rates among different religious groups contribute to religious diversity (Warf and Vincent, 2007). In 2001, the Hindus numbered 828 million and constituted 80.5 per cent of the total population of about 1028 million of the country (Figure 2.1). Next to the Hindus were the Muslims (138 million, 13.4 per cent), followed by the Christians (24 million, 2.3 per cent), the Sikhs (19 million, 1.9 per cent), and the Buddhists (8 million, 0.8 per cent). The Jains (4.2 million, 0.4 per cent) though in relative terms constituted only a small part of the total population, in absolute terms their number exceeded population of several countries of the world.

The percentage share of the major religious groups in different states and union territories highlights confinement of these groups in a handful of states (Table 2.1). Five states of the country, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal accounted for about half of the Hindu population in the country. In the case of Muslims, 46.83 per cent of the total population was confined to just three states, viz. Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar. Interestingly, Jammu & Kashmir, the only Muslim majority state of the country, accounted for only 4.92 per cent of the total Muslims in the country. About two-fifths of the Christian population was found in just two states, namely, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. It is pertinent to note that about three quarters of the Sikhs and a slightly lower than this proportion of the Buddhists resided in the states of Punjab and Maharashtra respectively. Thus, it revealed that the Sikhs and the Buddhists were the most concentrated religious groups, while the Hindus were the most diffused group.
Figure 2.1
Proportion of Major Religious Groups in India: 2001

Source: Census of India 2001, Religion Data on CD-ROM.
Table 2.1
Per Cent Distribution of Major Religious Groups in India: 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India/States/Union Territories</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
<th>Buddhists</th>
<th>Jains</th>
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Source: Census of India 2001, Religion Data on CD-ROM.
*Population figures for India and Manipur exclude those of Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul subdivisions of Senapati district of Manipur State.
**No Jain Population.
The state-wise distribution of the religious groups provided a picture of spatial variations (Table 2.2). The Hindus, spread over virtually the entire country, outnumbered all the other major religious groups except in Jammu & Kashmir and Lakshadweep; the Muslims outnumbered the Hindus in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya; the Christians outnumbered the Hindus in Punjab; and the Sikhs outnumbered the Hindus. The proportion of the Hindus was more than 90 per cent in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and above 80 per cent in the states of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Tripura, Uttaranchal, Karnataka, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The Muslims formed the largest religious group in Lakshadweep and Jammu & Kashmir making up 95.5 and 67 per cent of the total population of these administrative units respectively. The Christians were the largest religious group in the north-eastern states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. The Sikhs were the largest religious group only in the state of Punjab and accounted for 59.9 per cent of the state’s total population. It is pertinent to note that in none of the states and union territories the Buddhists and the Jains were the largest religious group.

**Rural-Urban Differentials**

Figure 2.2 revealed that about three-fourths of the Hindus and the Sikhs resided in rural areas. The high proportion of the Hindus and the Sikhs in rural areas could be explained on the basis of their dependence on agriculture. The Muslims, the Christians, the Buddhists and the Jains were more urbanised than the Hindus and the Sikhs. The comparatively higher degree of urban residence of the Muslims was explained partly by their greater association with artisan industry and partly by their historic concentration in capital cities of former princely states such as Hyderabad, Lucknow and Bhopal (Ahmad, 1999).
### Table 2.2
Proportion of Major Religious Groups in Total Population in India: 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India/States/Union Territories</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
<th>Buddhists</th>
<th>Jains</th>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
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**Source:** Census of India 2001, Religion Data on CD-ROM.

*Population figures for India and Manipur exclude those of Mao Maram, Paomata and Purul sub-divisions of Senapati district of Nagaland state.

**No Jain Population.
Likewise, the higher degree of urban residence of the Christians could be seen in the light of the job opportunities provided to the Christian converts by the Church which were neither exclusively agricultural nor rural based and subsequently led to the migration of the Christian sweepers, de-classed tenants and artisans as well as second and third generation of converts to urban areas (Srinivasan, 2004). The Jains formed the only religious group which was highly concentrated in the urban areas. Among the Jains three out of four lived in urban areas. This trend, perhaps, was due to their preoccupation in business and other entrepreneurial activities than in traditional occupation like agriculture, artisanship etc. (Jawaid, 2007). Their religion with its emphasis on not killing any living being, debared them from agriculture because a farmer kills millions of insects in various agricultural operations as such trade was virtually the only occupation open to them (Nath, 2000) and this explained their higher proportion in urban than in rural areas.

**Figure 2.2**

*Distribution of Major Religious Groups by Residence in India: 2001*

![Bar chart showing percentage of religious groups in rural and urban areas in 2001.](chart.png)

**Source:** Census of India 2001, Religion Data on CD-ROM.
Spatial Distribution

The discussion on spatial distribution is mainly based on the maps 2.1-2.6 carrying district-wise data provided in the 2001 Census. The districts were grouped into five categories as per varying concentration of the religious groups. The concentration was worked out by using the concentration index (CI) as given by Hassan (2005) –

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

Where, CI was the concentration index, P and A were the actual population of a religious group in a district and actual area of a district respectively, and \( \bar{P} \) and \( \bar{A} \) were the average population of a religious group and average area of a district respectively.

On the basis of the concentration index, the districts have been covered under five categories on the maps:-

(i) Concentration index of 1.75 and above.
(ii) Concentration index of 1.25 and 1.75.
(iii) Concentration index of 0.75 and 1.25.
(iv) Concentration index of 0.25 and 0.75.
(v) Concentration index of below 0.25.

The districts with concentration indexes between 1.25 and 1.75 and the districts with concentration index of 1.75 and above were clubbed together as areas of relatively high concentration for the purpose of discussion. In the same manner, the areas that had concentration indexes between 0.25 and 0.75 were found interspersed in areas that recorded concentration index of below 0.25, and hence, were grouped together as areas of relatively low concentration. Thus, the spatial distribution of the major religious groups was studied by dividing the country into three types of areas:-

(A) Areas of relatively high concentration (above 1.25)
(B) Areas of relatively low concentration (below 0.75)
(C) Areas of moderate concentration (0.75-1.25)
(A) **Areas of Relatively High Concentration (Above 1.25)**

An in-depth analysis of the maps (2.1-2.6) provided that the areas of high concentration were not the same for all the major religious groups in the country. Therefore, following discussion is based on the religion-wise concentration of population.

**The Hindus**

India being the land of origin of Hinduism, the Hindus were found virtually spread throughout the country. Making 80.5 per cent of India’s population, there was not even a single district without the Hindu population. The Hindus were highly concentrated in 248 districts. The areas of relatively high concentration of the Hindus consisted of: (i) Gangetic Plains and Eastern Part of Haryana Plains, (ii) Coastal Plains, and (iii) Highly Urban-Industrial Areas (Map 2.1).

(i) **Gangetic Plains and Eastern Part of Haryana Plains**: The Gangetic plains along with the adjoining eastern parts of Haryana plains formed the largest single belt of very high concentration of Hindu population. Owing to level land, fertile soil, availability of water and suitable climate the region is an agriculturally prosperous area and supported about 31 per cent of the country’s total Hindu population. The region is the main foci of the domain of the Vedic Aryans and has the largest number of Tirthas and within these plains the Ganga-Yamuna Doab has been regarded as the “mons Veneris” of the world (Bhardwaj, 1983). Moreover, the region is marked by early urbanisation with Hastinapur, Mathura, Ayodhya, Patliputra, Vaishali and Rajgir as the capitals of Hindu Kings. Twelve of the country’s million plus cities are located in this region. These plains were marked by regional variations in the concentration of the Hindus with the eastern parts having a higher concentration of the Hindus than the western. The Hindus had an exceptionally high concentration index in Medinipur, Haora, Nadia and both North and South Twenty Four Parganas districts of West Bengal. Very high concentration of the Hindus in the eastern segment of Gangetic plains was
IN Concentration of Hindus: 2001

Concentration Index

1.75 and Above
1.25 - 1.75
0.75 - 1.25
0.25 - 0.75
Below 0.25

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

MAP 2.1

INDIA

Concentration of Hindus: 2001

Concentration Index

1.75 and Above
1.25 - 1.75
0.75 - 1.25
0.25 - 0.75
Below 0.25

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

MAP 2.1
due to a set of factors, which included intensive agriculture, rapid industrialization, large scale legal and illegal migration of the Hindu population from Bangladesh.

(ii) **Coastal Plains:** The Hindu population was highly concentrated in the east coastal and Malabar plains. Strewn by the fertile deltaic tracts of the Mahanadi, the Godavari, the Krishna and the Cauvery rivers the east coastal plains are regions of agricultural prosperity. There is a close correlation between heavy population densities and good cultivated land (Hoffman, 1948). Moreover, as the Aryan invasion of South India was through the east coastal plains they have long been the centre of Indian civilization and commercial prosperity. The Malabar plains had a long association with Islam through the Arab traders and the plantation agriculture also attracted Muslim migrants from other parts of the country.

(iii) **Highly Urban Industrial Areas:** The metropolitan centres and highly urban-industrial districts depict high concentration of Hindu population. North-East, East, Central, West, North districts of Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Mumbai Suburban and Mumbai were among the top ten districts of the Hindu concentration. The North-East district of Delhi recorded the highest concentration of Hindus (81.6) in the country. The Hindus also had high concentration in Chandigarh, Mahe, Bangalore, Pondicherry and Yanam. The vast economic base coupled with ample social, infrastructural and employment facilities of these districts accounted for high Hindu concentration. Apart from the above mentioned areas, the Ahmadabad-Vadodara industrial region of Gujarat and the Bangalore-Madurai-Coimbatore industrial region of South India were the other two pockets of high Hindu concentration. The industrial dynamism had attracted many of the Hindus towards these regions.
The Muslims

The areas of high concentration of Muslim population covered 186 districts in the country. Out of these, 160 had an exceptionally high concentration of the Muslim population and accounted for about 68 per cent of the total Muslim population of the country. This category included five types of areas: (i) Kashmir Region, (ii) Gangetic Plains, (iii) Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys of Assam, (iv) Malabar Coastal Plains and Lakshadweep, and (v) Highly Urbanised Districts (Map 2.2).

(i) Kashmir Region: With 67 per cent of the total population registered as the Muslims, Jammu & Kashmir had the distinction of being the only Muslim majority state of India. Anantnag, Baramula and Srinagar supported a Muslim population of about 1.1 million each. These districts are part of the valley of Kashmir where Islam did not come as a revolt against or a destroyer of established tradition but as a preserver and consolidator of the tradition. Even Muslim rule in Kashmir was not an outside import but was a result of the conversion of a local ruler Nund Rishi who made the conversion into a massive emotional and spiritual upsurge that swept through every Kashmiri heart (Puri, 1990). Although the proportion of Muslims in each of the districts in Kashmir region of the state of Jammu & Kashmir was above 95 per cent but the region held only 5 per cent of the total Muslim population of the country. Most of the Muslims of valley were engaged in household industries with majority of them residing in the urban areas.

(ii) Gangetic Plains: A little less than half of the Muslim population of the country resided in these plains. Owing to the agricultural prosperity of this region the Muslim invaders (Iranians, Turks, Afghans and Mughals) who came with hordes of their armies followed by large groups of immigrants settled throughout these plains adopting the country as their own homeland. Masses in large numbers converted themselves to the new religion due to the social appeal of the Islamic doctrines, some by persuasion and others by coercion (Madani, 1993). The greatest glories of Islamic rule and civilization were in
INDIA
Concentration of Muslims: 2001

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

Concentration Index
- 1.75 and Above
- 1.25 - 1.75
- 0.75 - 1.25
- 0.25 - 0.75
- Below 0.25
this region. Jaunpur (capital of the Sharqi kings), Fatehpur Sikri (city of Akbar), Agra (city of Shah Jahan), Bareilly (centre of the Rohilla Kingdom), Faizabad and Lucknow (the seats of the Nawabs of Oudh) are all located in the Gangetic plains (Robinson, 1974). Moreover, Delhi and Agra were the seats of Muslim rulers and even during the British rule a large segment of Gangetic plains had independent Muslim princely states. The Muslims were highly concentrated in the districts of West Bengal that adjoined the Muslim dominated country of Bangladesh. The share of the Hindus and the Muslims in West Bengal in 1951 was 78.45 per cent and 19.85 per cent respectively, but during the last 50 years, the share of the Hindus in West Bengal had come down to 72.5 per cent, whereas the share of the Muslims had increased to 25.2 per cent (Pramanik, 2008). In recent times the region has experienced large scale illegal immigration of the Muslims from Bangladesh (Chattopadhyay, 2007).

(iii) **Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys:** These valleys provided the transit route that connected the otherwise inaccessible forested north-eastern region with the rest of the country; and owing to fertile soils, availability of water and suitable climate, these are also agriculturally prosperous regions. Conversions to Islam occurred at various points of time in this region. The first group of Muslims came and settled in this region between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries as a result of the failure of the Muslim invasions that led to sizeable number of the Muslims staying back in Assam (Misra, 1999). During the colonial rule, a large number of Muslim cultivators from Bengal were made to settle in the Brahmaputra valley to work on the newly started tea plantations (Singh, 1987). The Muslims had also come to Assam at different phases of the present century from Bangladesh (Ahmed and Yasin, 2001).

(iv) **Malabar and Lakshadweep Islands:** Malabar and Lakshadweep were en route of the Arab traders. Malabar was an important ancient trading centre and was the first to receive a handful of the Muslims as Arab traders during
the seventh century A.D. These Muslims married Malabari women and the
growth of Muslim population was primarily through inter-marriages and not
through large scale conversions as these did not take place because of the
seasonal and temporary nature of Arab trading activities (Thapar, 1996). The
Muslims of Malabar are collectively called Moplahs which trace their origin to
the conversion to Islam of King Cheraman Perumal of Kerala who reigned
over this region (Vempeny, 2003). In the same manner, Islam took roots in
Lakshadweep through Arab and Persian traders who established themselves
in the native soil and married with natives. The Muslim population formed 95.5
per cent of the total population of Lakshadweep and almost all of them
belonged to the scheduled tribe category.

(v) **Highly Urbanised Districts:** The Muslim population had high
concentration in the highly urbanised districts such as Delhi, Kolkata,
Chennai, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe,
Chandigarh and Ahmadabad. All these districts are pivots of economic activity
and are highly urbanised with ample of employment opportunities and a good
social infrastructure. The North-East district of Delhi with a Muslim population
of 481,607 spread over an area of 60 sq. kms. had the highest concentration
(concentration index-190.9) of the Muslims in the country.

**The Christians**

There was a high concentration of the Christian population in 138
districts. These districts made up one-fourth of the total districts of the country
and supported four-fifths of the total Christian population in the country. The
following areas were included under this category: (i) Peninsular Region, (ii)
North-eastern Region, (iii) Chhotanagpur Region, and (iv) Highly Urbanised
Districts (Map 2.3).

(i) **Peninsular Region:** The peninsular region had three distinct enclaves of
the high Christian concentration. Kerala and Tamil Nadu formed the largest
enclave while Goa the smallest. The third enclave was confined to the deltaic
INDIA

Concentration of Christians: 2001

Concentration Index

1.75 and Above
1.25-1.75
0.75-1.25
0.25-0.75
Below 0.25

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

Concentration of Christians: 2001

0 500 Kms

MAP 2.3
parts of Godavari and Krishna rivers. Kerala and Tamil Nadu formed a large cluster of the high Christian concentration encompassing all the districts of Kerala and most of the districts of Tamil Nadu. This area accounted for about 41 per cent of the Christian population of the country. The region had a long association with Christianity with the written records testifying the presence of the Christians in Malabar from the sixth century onwards (Madan, 2004). The region had trading relations with the Roman Empire through the three ancient sea ports of Cranganore (near Cochin), Goa and Tranquebar (on east coast). Christianity spread in various directions from these three ports (Abraham, 2004). Furthermore, many Christian missions remained active in the region and spearheaded the conversion of local people into Christianity (Hardgrave, 1969). Conversions to Christianity were largely motivated by social and economic considerations. South India had a rigid caste system and slavery was prevalent in Travancore but the missionaries enabled the lower castes to share the blessings of the newly introduced plantation agriculture and propagated social equality (Kooiman, 1991). People who converted into Christianity got many advantages through their association with foreign missionaries, including right to access to public roads, exemption from extracted unpaid labour, a regular day off from work to observe the Christian Sabbath, the advocacy of missionaries in disputes with rivals both inside and outside the courts and access to western style education in missionary schools which sometimes led to clerical jobs in the colonial government (Kent, 2004). Almost 75 per cent of the Christian population of Kerala resided in the rural areas but the corresponding percentage was much lower in Tamil Nadu.

Similarly, in Goa the Christians constituted about one-fourth of the population of the state. Christianity was brought to Goa by the Portuguese who ruled over it till 1960. In fact, Francis Xavier a Jesuit, who lived as a preacher, did exemplary work for the poor people which led to the conversion of thousands of deprived people into Christianity (Rayanna, 1982). The Portuguese offered rice donations to the poor baptized Christians, good positions in the Portuguese colonies to the middle class and military support
to local rulers. The region also witnessed forced conversions. Most of the Christians were in tertiary activities and a little less than half lived in urban areas.

The deltaic region of Godavari and Krishna too was an area of high concentration of the Christian population within South India. The region underwent mass conversion of the Dalits into Christian faith under the influence of Christian missionaries.

(ii) **North-eastern Region:** The region supported 25 per cent of the Christians of the country. The Christians constituted 90 per cent of the population of Nagaland, 87 per cent of Mizoram and 70.3 per cent of Meghalaya’s population. The region had experienced conversion movements from the mid nineteenth century onwards that drew scores of separate tribal people toward Christian faith (Frykenberg, 2008). Unlike the Hindus who viewed tribal as inferior or the Muslims who did not venture into their territory, the Christian missionaries viewed them as people without religion and hence nurtured the identities of tribes through developing their mother tongues and translating Bible into tribal languages (Oommen, 2009). The British rule brought with it modernisation in the form of alien administration and judicial system, modern medicine, education, a money economy to replace the barter and a new life style. Thus, the tribes of the region were forced to take a long re-look at their traditional life, their polity, socio-cultural and religious life. Consequently, tribals of the region fully understood the benefits of Christianity and even today they feel that Christianity stood by them in many ways and had helped them to secure their lost status and dignity (Kanjamala, 2009).

(iii) **Chhotanagpur Region:** The region is one of the tribal regions of the country. During the British rule the tribal of this region got converted to Christianity as Christianity addressed not only their spiritual but also their material grievances. Christian missions helped tribal to regain their land lost to the Zamindars and protected the landholding rights of cultivators (Schermerhorn, 1978). Five districts of this region, namely Jashpur, Gajapati,
Kandhamal, Sundargarh and Ranchi supported a Christian population of above 1 lakh each.

(iv) **Highly Urbanised Districts:** Owing to their small size and strong economic base the highly urbanised districts of the country too were areas of high concentration of the Christians. Some of these districts like Kolkata, Pondicherry, Chennai and Mumbai had a long colonial history and had acted as bases of various colonial powers and the missionaries associated with them. Chennai had the highest Christian concentration in the country followed by the districts of Mumbai Suburban and Mumbai.

**The Sikhs**

High concentration of the Sikhs was found in sixty districts of the country. These relatively high Sikh concentration districts supported 93.5 per cent of the total Sikh population. The high Sikh concentration areas included: (i) Punjab-Haryana Plains and North-western Rajasthan, (ii) Terai Region of Uttar Pradesh, and (iii) Highly Urbanised Districts of the Country (Map 2.4).

(i) **Punjab-Haryana Plains and North-western Rajasthan:** The Punjab plains had the distinction of having the largest proportion (59.9 per cent) of the Sikh population in the country. The region was the hearth of Sikhism and converts were largely from the Hindu agricultural and artisan castes (Brush, 1949). About three-fourths of the Sikhs of India were concentrated in Punjab. The districts of Rajasthan and Haryana that adjoined Punjab such as Ganganagar, Hanumangarh and the northern and western districts of Haryana too had high concentration of the Sikhs. Besides, having a cultural affinity with Punjab, these districts had attracted the Sikh farmers due to the availability of agricultural land and irrigation facilities such as the Gang canal of Rajputana state (Kaur, 1979). The exceptionally high concentration of the Sikhs in an area of little more than 50,000 sq. km. was due to a large number of factors one of which included significant population re-distribution after independence. Punjab went through three phases of population change: (i)
INDIA
Concentration of Sikhs: 2001

D. N. A. = Data Not Available
Concentration of Sikhs: 2001

Concentration Index
1.75 and Above
1.25 - 1.75
0.75 - 1.25
0.25 - 0.75
Below 0.25

0 500 Kms
Kms
replacement of a large number of Muslims by the non-Muslims at the time of partition in 1947, (ii) population re-distribution during 1947-66, and (iii) spatial containment of the population due to check on agricultural out-migration since its reorganisation in 1966. These changes made the state demographically more homogenous, giving the Sikh population a majority (Kundu and Bhatia, 2002). Nearly 80 per cent of the Sikhs lived in the rural areas of Punjab and half of the Sikh population was engaged in agriculture. Ludhiana, which enjoys both agricultural and industrial prosperity, had the highest concentration of the Sikhs in this region.

(ii) **Terai Region of Uttar Pradesh:** The Sikhs had a high concentration in Kheri, Pilibhit, Rampur, Bijnor and Udham Singh Nagar districts of this region. The region witnessed reclamation of some agricultural waste lands which led to the in-migration of the Sikhs during the thirties from upper Ganga-Yamuna doab and central Punjab and in the early fifties mostly from Punjab (Kaur, 1979). The region supported 2.7 per cent of the Sikh population of the country.

(iii) **Highly Urbanised Districts:** The Sikh concentration was also high in the highly urbanised districts of the country, namely, Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Chennai. In fact, the West district of Delhi had the highest Sikh concentration in the country. The district supported 2.4 million of the Sikh population on an area of 129 square kilometres. High Sikh concentration in these districts was partly due to the small size of these districts and partly to the settlement of uprooted Sikhs from West Pakistan as also to the internal migration of Sikhs in subsequent years for industry, trade and transport.

**The Buddhists**

There was a high concentration of the Buddhist population in only 76 out of the 593 districts of the country. These districts collectively supported 88.6 per cent of the Buddhist population of the country. Areas of high Buddhist concentration included: (i) Maharashtra, (ii) Sikkim and adjoining Doars
Region, (iii) Highly Urbanised Districts, and (iv) Scattered Pockets of High Concentration of the Buddhists (Map 2.5).

(i) Maharashtra: Maharashtra had the distinction of supporting the largest number (5.8 million) of Buddhist population in the country. Although the region had a long association with the Buddhism and had remained one of the chief centers of the Buddhism in ancient times, the high concentration of the Buddhists was chiefly due to the conversion of thousands of untouchables into Buddhists under the charismatic leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. On October 14, 1956, thousands of untouchables (chiefly Mahars) of Maharashtra led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, renounced their ancestral Hindu faith and converted en masse to the Buddhism. In conversion the Mahar people recognised their true identity and abandoned Hinduism which had oppressed them for centuries. The 1961 Census, the first enumeration after the 1956 conversion showed that the Buddhist population in Maharashtra had risen to 2,789,501, it had been 2,487 in 1951 (Gokhale, 1986). It is an area of Neo Buddhism with more than half of the Buddhists residing in the rural areas and a large segment working as agricultural labourer.

(ii) Sikkim and adjoining Doars Region: It is an area of the traditional Buddhist population tracing origin to the seventeenth century Tibetisation of the original inhabitants of Sikkim (Lepchas) by the Tibetan Bhutias (Bhasin and Bhasin, 2000). Mahayana Buddhism entered Sikkim from Tibet and till 1975 (the year in which Sikkim was incorporated in India) Buddhism was the state religion of the kingdom of Sikkim. The high concentration of Buddhists in Sikkim Himalayas owed itself to the royal patronage enjoyed by the Buddhism. The Sikkim Himalayas were home to 1.5 million Buddhists, majority of them (91 per cent) resided in rural areas.

The Doars region of West Bengal that adjoined Sikkim and Bhutan too had a high concentration of the Buddhists. There were about 1.8 lakh Buddhists in Darjeeling district alone. Doars were part of the Buddhist Bhutanese kingdom and had a long association with Buddhism (Karlsson,
INDIA
Concentration of Buddhists: 2001

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

Concentration Index
1.75 and Above
1.25 - 1.75
0.75 - 1.25
0.25 - 0.75
Below 0.25

MAP 2.5
Moreover, the introduction of tea plantation led to large scale in migration of the Buddhists Lepchas from Bhutan and Sikkim as labourers.

(iii) **Highly Urbanised Districts:** The highly urbanised districts like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Chandigarh and Bhopal because of their small size and urban dynamism too were areas of high concentration of the Buddhist population.

(iv) **Scattered Pockets of High Concentration of the Buddhists:** There were a few scattered districts located in the north-eastern region which were associated with high concentration of the Buddhists. These included Tawang and West Kameng districts of Arunachal Pradesh, Lawngtlai and Lunglei districts of Mizoram and the districts of Tripura. Tawang is an important seat of Buddhism and had large base (twenty-nine thousand) of the Buddhist population. The religious beliefs of the tribes in the western parts of Arunachal Pradesh had been influenced by Buddhism from Tibet and Bhutan (Chaudhury and Duareh, 2004). The high concentration of the Buddhists in Mizoram and Tripura was attributed to their location. Both states shared common borders with Bangladesh and had received sizeable number of Chakma refugees from Bangladesh who settled in these states and followed Buddhism (Chaube, 1999). Thousands of Chakmas and Hajongs fled into India following the construction of the Kaptai hydro electric dam and the ethnic conflict in Chittagong hill tracts during the 1970s and 1980s (Singh, 2009).

**The Jains**

The concentration of Jain population was relatively high in 108 districts of the country which collectively supported 78.9 per cent of the country’s Jain population. The areas of relatively high concentration of the Jain population included: (i) Western Region, and (ii) Scattered Urban and Industrial Areas (Map 2.6).
INDIA
Concentration of Jains: 2001

Concentration Index

1.75 and Above
1.25 - 1.75
0.75 - 1.25
0.25 - 0.75
Below 0.25

Kms

D. N. A. = Data Not Available

Concentration of Jains: 2001
(i) **Western Region:** The western region encompassing the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra had the distinction of being the largest hub of Jain population. The Jains accounted for more than 1 per cent of the population of these states. The region consisted of the industrial belts of Mumbai-Pune and Ahmadabad-Vadodara as also the highly urban and industrial eastern region of Rajasthan with Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur as main urban centre. The periodic persecution of the Jains in Magadha on a large scale led to their out-migration, which was mostly directed westwards. Moreover, most of the followers of Jainism had been drawn from among the trading communities of Gujarat and adjoining Marwar region of Rajasthan (Bangulia, 2005).

(ii) **Scattered Urban and Industrial Areas:** The highly urban districts such as Kolkata, Chennai, Pondicherry, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chandigarh as well as the industrial corridors of Agra-Delhi-Saharanpur-Ambala, Indore-Ujjain, Gwalior and its adjoining area, Jabalpur-Bhopal and Dharwad-Belgaum were areas of high concentration of Jain population. All these areas offered the facilities (trading and retailing) of well developed urban centres.

From the above discussion, it could be discerned that the areas of high concentration of the religious groups were the highly urbanised areas, the ‘religious hearth’ and the areas where the conversion and diffusion of a particular religion was rampant.

(B) **Areas of Relatively Low Concentration (Below 0.75)**

These areas are at the other end of the spatial spectrum. A perusal of the maps (2.1-2.6) highlights that the areas of low concentration varied from one religious group to another. This might be the result of the difference in religious ideologies as also in the magnitude of various economic, political, social and historical factors that had influenced the different religious groups from time to time.
The Hindus

In one-third of the total districts of the country, the concentration of the Hindus was low. The concentration index was below 0.25 in 67 out of the 220 districts that registered very low Hindu concentration. These districts collectively accounted for only 20 per cent of the Hindu population. The areas of low Hindu concentration consisted of: (i) Himalayan Region, (ii) Thar Desert, (iii) Central Tribal Belt, and (iv) Southern Parts of Andhra Pradesh (Map 2.1).

(i) Himalayan Region: The Himalayan region was one large block of low concentration of the Hindu population. The low concentration in this region was directly influenced by the physical environment as the climate, soil and slope morphology was not suitable for agricultural activities. However, the low concentration of the Hindus in the eastern segment of Himalaya was due to lack of Aryanisation of this region (owing to its high inaccessibility, dense forests and poor soil quality as it was outside the domain of plough agriculture) as well as the adoption of an ‘inner line’ policy in areas like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram by the British which laid down a line beyond which no person could move without the permission of the authorities and hence it discouraged the Brahmin and Gosians from travelling to these areas and restricted the spread of Hinduism (Singh, 1987).

(ii) Thar Desert: The region is marked by lack of availability of water, meagre cultivable land coupled with slow process of urbanisation and industrialisation.

(iii) Central Tribal Belt: A large segment of this belt was characterised by dense forests, poor drainage, poor soils and dominance of tribal. Moreover, Hinduisation in this area took place much later and was a slow process (Bhardwaj, 1983).

(iv) Southern Parts of Andhra Pradesh: Southern Andhra Pradesh being part of the Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh was one of the most under-
developed regions of the country that suffered from the vagaries of climate. It was neither an industrially developed region nor an agriculturally prosperous area.

**The Muslims**

The concentration of the Muslim population was relatively low in more than half of the districts of the country. Out of the total 345 districts that had low Muslim concentration, 201 recorded concentration indexes of below 0.25. These low concentration districts supported only 17.6 per cent of the Muslim population of the country. The areas marked by the low Muslim concentration included: (i) Himalayan Region, (ii) North-western Region, (iii) Central Tribal Belt, and (iv) Peninsular Plateau and Adjoining Eastern and Western Coastal Plains (Map 2.2).

(i) **Himalayan Region:** The concentration of the Muslim population was low in most of the Himalayan region except the Kashmir Himalayas. The region is marked by difficult terrain, harsh climatic conditions and meagre cultivable land. Furthermore, the eastern Himalayan region is a tribal infested area where Muslim power had never penetrated. In fact, the Himalayan region supported very small Muslim population. For instance, in Lahul & Spiti and Kinnaur the Muslim population was 134 and 306 persons respectively. These districts were among the bottom ten districts in terms of Muslim population. Likewise, in seventeen districts of eastern Himalayas the number of Muslims were less than one thousand and in another ten districts the Muslim population ranged from one thousand to two thousand.

(ii) **North-western Region:** The north-western region consisting of the states of Punjab, Rajasthan and Gujarat supported the low Muslim concentration. These states lie along Indo-Pak border. Prior to the partition of the country and formation of Pakistan, the region supported the large number of Muslims. The partition of the country in 1947 led to mass exodus of Muslims living in this region to the newly formed adjoining Muslim territory of Pakistan. Muslim
population in the districts bordering Pakistan (Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Firozpur, Ganganagar, Bikaner, Jaisalmer, Barmer and Kachchh) ranged from 3,370 in Firozpur and 329,254 in Kachchh. The relatively low concentration of the Muslims in these districts was because of poor local resources and physical handicap.

(iii) Central Tribal Belt: The belt being a tribal dominated area remained outside the Muslim influence. The Muslims in these districts were in very small number with the Baudh district of Orissa supporting the minimum number of Muslims (747 Muslims only).

(iv) Peninsular Plateau and Coastal Plains: The peninsular plateau and the adjoining coastal plains with the exception of Malabar coastal plains, was an area of relatively low concentration of the Muslims that made up more than 10 per cent of the populations of the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra each and 9.2 per cent of that of Andhra Pradesh. The percentage share of the Muslims in Tamil Nadu’s population was 5.6.

The Christians

Nearly three-fourths of the total districts of the country had low concentration of the Christian population. The areas of low Christian concentration included: (i) Himalayan Region, (ii) Indo-Gangetic Plains, (iii) Western and Central Region, and (iv) Interior Peninsular Region (Map 2.3).

(i) Himalayan Region: The Himalayan region right from Jammu & Kashmir in the west up to Arunachal Pradesh in the east formed a contiguous belt of the low Christian concentration. However, it is broken by Sikkim state over a short distance. The region is one of the least accessible regions in the world. Few missionaries were able to withstand the exhausting mountain travel, severe cold and hostility of the Hindus, the Buddhists and the Muslims found in great numbers in this region. Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, northern parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal were never annexed by the British.
Moreover, missionary activities started only in the post-Independence period. Leh along with five other districts of this region, viz. Kargil, Lahul & Spiti, Uttarkashi, Chamoli and Rudraprayag figured among the bottom ten districts of the lowest concentration of Christian population. All these districts were part of the most inhospitable parts of the Greater Himalayas which were least suited for human habitation and had poor resources base.

(ii) *Indo-Gangetic Plains:* Christianity in these plains received a set back under Muhammad-bin-Tughluq, Timur and some other Muslim rulers. The blow was so shattering that the Churches became extinct, and all traces of their existence were obliterated by the end of the fifteenth century (Abraham, 2004). Moreover, the region formerly part of the North-West Provinces and Oudh came under the British Rule quite late. Prior to British annexation of Oudh, the region was ruled by the Shia Nawabs and unlike the Muslims, the Christians were perceived by the people of this region as alien and Christianity entered in the form of Roman Catholicism – the religion of the Irish soldiers and not as the religion of the Crown, i.e., Protestantism (Srinivasan, 2004). The Christians formed only 0.1 per cent of the population of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar while in Punjab and West Bengal their proportion was 1.2 and 0.6 respectively.

(iii) *Western and Central Region:* The western and the central region of the country encompassing the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh was an area of low concentration of the Christian population. The region was part of the princely states of Rajputana, Central India (Madhya Pradesh) and Western India (Gujarat) which never came under the British rule. As such, the Christian missions did not work in these areas leading to low concentration of the Christians (Chaube, 1999). Most of the districts of these regions had the Christian population of less than one thousand each.

(iv) *Interior Peninsular Region:* A large tract of this region was part of the erstwhile princely state of Hyderabad which was ruled by the Muslim Nizams.
As the area was never annexed by the British, there was low concentration of the Christians in this region.

**The Sikhs**

Nearly 80 per cent of the districts of the country had low concentration of the Sikhs. The only large cluster of high Sikh concentration was confined to the state of Punjab and the adjoining districts of Haryana and Rajasthan states (Map 2.4). Elsewhere, the Sikhs had a low concentration. Limited expansion of Sikhism took place in the first-half of the nineteenth century when Maharaja Ranjit Singh conquered lands beyond Punjab. Out-migration of the Sikhs took place only after the annexation of Punjab by the British in the second-half of the nineteenth century. The Sikh out-migration was the result of three factors – the British preference of the Sikhs in armed forces which led to their migration to different parts of the country, the partition of India which led to the settlement of the Sikhs ousted from Pakistani Punjab and the reclamation of wastelands in the adjoining areas of Punjab which caused migration of Sikh farmers (Dutt and Devgun, 1977).

**The Buddhists**

In 491 of the 593 districts of the country, the concentration of the Buddhist population was low. The areas of low Buddhist concentration included: (i) Himalayan Region, (ii) Indo-Gangetic Plains, (iii) Thar and Adjoining Areas, and (iv) Central Tribal Belt and Peninsular Plateau (Map 2.5).

(i) **Himalayan Region**: The low concentration of Buddhists is partly to inhospitable conditions for habitation and poor resource base and partly to social factors. The low concentration of the Buddhists in western Himalayas especially in Kashmir region resulted from forcible stamping out of the religion by the Muslims in the fifteenth century (Harvey, 1990). In the eastern Himalayas the low concentration of the Buddhists was partly due to lack of attempt made by the Ahoms (followers of Buddhism) to spread Buddhism. However, on the other hand, the Ahoms ruled over Assam for six hundred
years (Singh, 1987); and moreover, in the eastern Himalayas, Buddhism had
got mixed up with the mainstream of the Hindu culture.

(ii) **Indo-Gangetic Plains:** Although the Indo-Gangetic plains were regarded
as the hearth of Buddhism, but presently this region had low concentration of
the Buddhist population. This could partly be due to the persecution of the
Buddhists by King Sasanka of Bengal who conquered this region and
destroyed many Buddha images and partly to the persecution of Buddhists by
the Muslim raiders like Muhammad Bakhtyar Khilji who destroyed Nalanda
and other monasteries of Bihar and put to sword thousands of monks (Sen,
1999).

(iii) **Thar and Adjoining Areas:** The Thar and the adjoining areas of Kutch,
Kathiawar and Gujarat plains were of low Buddhist concentration. Buddhism
failed to make substantial inroad in this area. The Mauryan Empire whose
most renowned emperor, Ashoka converted to Buddhism had minimal impact
in Rajasthan.

(iv) **Central Tribal Belt and Peninsular Plateau:** Owing to poor resource
base and backwardness of the economy the region in itself was an area of low
population concentration. The Buddhists were less than 100 in number in
majority of the districts lying in this belt.

**The Jains**

In three-fourths of the districts of the country the concentration of the
Jain population was low. These districts collectively supported only a little
more than one-tenth of the Jains. The districts of low Jain concentration were
mostly clustered in three main areas: (i) Himalayan Region, (ii) Gangetic
Plains, and (iii) Eastern Part of Central Tribal Belt and South-eastern
Peninsular Region (Map 2.6).

(i) **Himalayan Region:** Himalayas formed a single largest area of low levels of
inhabitation and industrialisation. Since most of the Jains were in tertiary
sector the Himalayan region owing to its weak economic base failed to attract the Jain trading community. Moreover, since ancient times Jains had been living in urban areas and Himalayas portrayed as an area of least urbanisation.

(ii) **Gangetic Plains:** The Gangetic plains although associated with the advent of Jainism, had emerged as an area of low Jain concentration that could be chiefly due to the failure of the religion to wield a continuous hold on the population as also to persecution of Jains at the hands of Muslim (Sangave, 2001).

(iii) **Eastern Part of Central Tribal Belt and South-eastern Peninsular Region:** The low concentration of the Jains could be seen in the light of physical constraints of this region, lack of urbanisation, slow pace of industrialisation and certain other factors that influenced the diffusion of Jainism in this part of the country. Though many south Indian dynasties such as Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Kadamba, Pandya, Chola and Vijayanagar patronised Jainism, the religion faced a decline after the fourteenth century when royal patronage was withdrawn because of change in the rulers who followed Saivism and Lingayatism (Shah, 1998). The region underwent vigorous persecutory policies followed by the non-Jains against the Jains.

(C) **Areas of Moderate Concentration (0.75-1.25)**

These were the transitional areas which were located either in an area of high concentration or of low concentration. Except for the Hindus and the Muslims there was a virtual absence of distinct belts of moderate concentration in the spatial distribution of the Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains. In fact, in the spatial distribution of the Hindus and the Muslims too, the districts that had moderate concentration were found scattered throughout the country.
The Hindus

The Hindu population was moderately concentrated in one-fifth of the districts of the country. The main areas falling in this category included: (i) Chhattisgarh Region, (ii) Himachal Pradesh, (iii) Maharashtra and Adjoining Areas, and (iv) Brahmaputra Valley (Map 2.1).

(i) Chhattisgarh Region: The Chhattisgarh region and the adjoining districts of Orissa formed an area of the moderate concentration of the Hindu population. The area is marked by tribal predominance, dense forests and poor soils.

(ii) Himachal Pradesh: Moderate concentration of Hindus in Himachal Pradesh in spite of being a hilly state was mainly due to post-independence developmental works that enhanced its economic base. Himachal Pradesh is quoted as a successful model of not only hill area development but also for having realised development in education, health and social services.

(iii) Maharashtra and Adjoining Areas: The compact block consisting of Maharashtra, western parts of Madhya Pradesh and central Karnataka in spite of physiographic handicaps was an area of the moderate Hindu concentration. This block comes under the urban sphere of influence of Mumbai, Ahmadabad-Vadodara, Bhopal-Indore and Bangalore urban agglomerations.

(iv) Brahmaputra Valley: The Brahmaputra valley of Assam is one of the most fertile agricultural tracts in the country. The region is engulfed by areas marked by low concentration of the Hindu population. The moderate concentration of the Hindus was primarily due to the agricultural prosperity and post-independence developmental activities as also due to the efforts made by Bhaskaravarman, the King of Kamrup in popularising Hinduism in this region; otherwise, it is dominated by tribal community.
The Muslims

The Muslim population had moderate concentration in 61 of the 593 districts of the country. There were three small pockets characterised by the moderate concentration of the Muslims. These included: (i) Mewat Region of Rajasthan, (ii) Central Maharashatra and North-eastern Karnataka, and (iii) Southern Coromandel and Tamil Nadu Uplands (Map 2.2).

(i) **Mewat Region of Rajasthan**: The region comprised of the north-eastern parts of Rajasthan and being located on the strategic south-west frontier of Delhi had remained an important territory of the Mughals (Choy and Singh, 2002). It was a stronghold of Meo Muslim community. The region houses the Dargah of Khwajah Muin-ud-Din Chisti at Ajmer which is one of the most revered pilgrimage centres of the Muslims. But despite its proximity to Delhi, Gurgaon and Jaipur it is an impoverished region characterised by endemic poverty which resulted in moderate concentration of the Muslims.

(ii) **Central Maharashatra and North-eastern Karnataka**: The region was ruled by a number of Muslim rulers; hence, it had a long association with Islam. The moderate concentration of the Muslim population could be explained in terms of the geographical hardships faced by the region as it is a dry inland plateau broken by numerous hills and without much agricultural or industrial development.

(iii) **Southern Coromandel and Tamil Nadu Uplands**: An intense network of mini industrial centres and tanning industry attracted many Muslim entrepreneurs. Furthermore, some of the districts lying in this region such as Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram and Thanjavur had a notorious tradition of Harijan oppression and in recent years the region witnessed conversion of Harijans into Islam (Mathew, 1982).
**The Christians**

The Christian population had moderate concentration in only 35 of the 593 districts of the country. These districts were mostly part of the north-eastern, southern and eastern regions (Map 2.3) and had substantial tribal population which under the impact of various Christian missions embraced Christianity. Lack of developmental activities caused out-migration of the Christians to the relatively developed nearby districts.

**The Sikhs**

The Sikhs had moderate concentration of population in only 14 districts. These districts included: (i) Rajauri, Punch, Pulwama and Srinagar districts of Jammu & Kashmir, (ii) Alwar and Bharatpur districts of Rajasthan, (iii) Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Ghaziabad and Bareilly districts of Uttar Pradesh, (iv) Gwalior and Indore districts of Madhya Pradesh, (v) Solan district of Himachal Pradesh, and (vi) Dhanbad district of Jharkhand (Map 2.4). The concentration of the Sikh population was mostly associated with in-migration of the Sikhs either due to the reclamation of the wastelands and the development of irrigation as in the districts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh or due to industrial development as in the districts of Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jharkhand. Moreover, many Sikhs displaced from West Punjab on account of partition settled in these districts. Some of these districts such as Gwalior and districts of Jammu & Kashmir had a long association with Sikhism.

**The Buddhists**

The Buddhists had moderate concentration only in 36 districts. These districts were mainly located in: (i) Ladakh Region, (ii) Gangetic Plains, and (iii) Central Parts of Maharashtra (Map 2.5).

**Ladakh Region:** The region had a long association with Buddhism. Buddhism came to Ladakh in two waves, the first one related to the second century A.D. when Buddhism spread from Kashmir and the second one in
eighth century A.D. when a Tibetan royal representative annexed Ladakh and led to the Tibetisation of the area. Leh had Buddhist population of 90,618 spread on an area of 45,113 sq. kms. The moderate concentration of Buddhists in Leh was primarily due to the large size of this district.

(ii) **Gangetic Plains:** The districts of Ghazipur, Ghaziabad, Kheri, Buxar, Siddharthnagar, Kushinagar and Sant Kabir Nagar lying in the Gangetic plains were areas of moderate concentration of the Buddhists. This area is characterised by poor resource base, high incidence of poverty and large number of Neo-Buddhist population which is chiefly drawn from among the dalit population.

(iii) **Central Parts of Maharashtra:** Maharashtra in general supported high concentration of the Buddhist population but its central parts were areas of moderate concentration of the Buddhist population. This could partly be due to rough terrain and scarcity of water which made the region less suitable for agriculture and partly due to small population of Mahars (a low caste) which had converted to Buddhism and spearheaded the Neo-Buddhist movement. In fact, it was the region which opposed the Neo-Buddhist movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

**The Jains**

The Jain population had a moderate concentration of population in 43 of the 593 districts. Most of these districts were found adjacent to the areas of the high concentration of the Jain population (Map 2.6).

It emerges from the above discussion that spatial distribution of the religious groups varied from one group to another and no two religious groups displayed identical patterns of concentration. Nonetheless, the Hindus being the largest religious group, their distribution and their relative concentration corresponded to that of the general population.