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Population Growth of Various Communities in India — Myth and Reality

Introduction

INDIA is a multi-religious nation with Hindus as the most predominant community (82.35%), followed by Muslims (11.73%). Other main minority communities are Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains.

Sometimes apprehensions have been expressed that in India, Muslims will become a majority community and Hindus will be reduced to a minority as Muslims are growing at a faster rate than Hindus. The reasons advocated in support of such an apprehension are that Muslims have higher fertility as they practise polygamy and that the practice of family planning is much lower among them than among Hindus and other communities.

This paper examines levels of population growth of various communities and factors associated with such growth, namely nuptiality patterns, levels and trends in fertility, practice of family planning, and incidence of childlessness particularly in the context of two major communities i.e., Hindus and Muslims. At the end it also draws some conclusions whether Muslims will outnumber Hindus and will become a majority community in the country.

Nuptiality Patterns by Religion

Main findings on some important nuptiality indicators are given in Table 1.

(i) *Mean Female Age at Marriage*

It could be observed that Hindus and Muslims have almost same mean female age at marriage in rural areas (around 16.5 years) as well as in urban areas (around 17.5 years). Amongst all religious communities Christians have the highest mean age at marriage i.e. around 19 years and 20 years in rural and urban areas respectively, closely followed by Sikhs.

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- (ii) *Percentage of Currently Married Women in Reproductive Age Group 15-49 Years* In this respect also Hindus and Muslims are very close to each other having around 75% and 83% currently married women in the age group 15-49 years in rural and urban areas respectively. Again, Christians and Sikhs are widely different from other communities in this regard, having the lowest and second lowest proportion of currently married women in the reproductive age group.
- (iii) *Incidence of Polygynous Marriages By Religion and their Impact on Fertility*
- (a) *Incidence of Polygynous Marriages.* As a part of 1961, Census, Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India conducted a survey of consanguineous and affinal marriages. Altogether particulars of 99,457 married males and their spouses were available from this survey for the purpose of analysis of incidence of polygynous marriages and the findings based on this study are reproduced below.

"If the time when the marriage had taken place is ignored, in India as a whole, the incidence of polygynous marriage is highest among the persons returning their religion as tribal religion (15.25%), next come the Budhists (7.97%) followed by Jains (6.72%). Among the Hindus 5.80% of the marriages in the sample are polygynous marriages; among the Muslims it is 5.73%. These data - seem to be of considerable interest; as they are contrary to the prevailing notion that incidence of polygynous marriage is higher among the Muslims than among other communities. As, however, the marriages covered were not selected on random sampling basis, it would be risky to draw any quantitative generalisation from the same. But at the same time, it is to be kept in view that the size of the sample is fairly large, and hence until more valid quantitative data are available, one would be justified to question the validity of the prevailing notion in the matter".

Thus the analysis of nuptiality patterns by religion clearly brings out that Hindus and Muslims have almost similar pattern whereas Christians and Sikhs have patterns which are different from those of these two major communities and which are likely to result in lowering their fertility in comparison with two major communities.

- (b) *Impact of Polygynous Marriages on Fertility.* It is generally felt that such marriages increase fertility but which actually is not normally true. Practice of polygynous marriages is likely to increase fertility only in populations which have sex ratio (i.e. females per 1,000 male) highly in favour of females as only in such situation some females are likely to remain unmarried in the absence of polygynous marriages. But the practice of polygynous marriages amongst those populations which have sex ratio unfavourable to females is rather likely to reduce fertility as more than one women married to a common husband are likely to produce less children, than if they are married to separate husbands.

In India none of the main communities, has sex ratio favourable to females.

According to 1981 census, Hindus and Muslims are again very close to each other in this respect having sex ratio of 933 and 937 respectively. Sikhs, however, have the lowest and most disturbing sex ratio of 859 only. Thus, in India, practice of polygynous marriages among Muslims and even among other communities is not likely to increase their fertility, rather it is likely to reduce fertility.

TABLE 1 : IMPORTANT NUPTIALITY INDICATORS BY RELIGION - INDIA

Religion	* Mean female age at marriage (1981)		Percentage of currently married in reproductive age group 15-49 years (1981)		** Incidence (%) of polygynous marriages All Periods (1961)
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	
All religions	16.51	17.63	82.89	74.00	5.94
Hindus	16.38	17.56	83.85	74.57	5.80
Muslims	16.48	17.37	82.23	75.13	5.73
Christians	19.17	19.88	63.44	59.19	NA
Sikhs	18.94	19.05	70.42	70.31	NA
Budhists	16.56	16.72	80.60	76.60	7.97
Jains	16.92	18.62	76.11	70.06	6.72
Tribals	NA	NA	NA	NA	15.25
Others	NA	NA	NA	NA	4.13

SOURCE: * Padmanabha, P., Registrar General and Census Commissioner, India. Census Series-I, Part-EL Special Reports and Table Based on 5 Percent Sample Data.

** Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India. *Polygynous Marriages in India - A Survey*, Census of India 1971, Series-I, India, Miscellaneous Studies, Monograph No. 4 (1961 Series)

Attitudes Towards And Practice of Family Planning by Religion

It could be seen from the findings (Table 2) of the two All India Surveys conducted by Operations Research Group in 1970 and 1980 that the disapproval of family planning was highest amongst Muslims and in 1980 about one-third of the couples in the reproductive age group expressed disapproval of it whereas amongst Hindus and 'Other' religious group disapproval was almost half than Muslims. It is, however, heartening to observe that during the period 1970 and 1980 disapproval of family planning has reduced substantially amongst all religious communities including Muslims. However, this reduction was lowest by 14 percent points amongst Muslims and highest 24 percent points amongst Hindus.

Practice of family planning methods in 1980 was found lowest amongst Muslims (23%), and it was comparatively higher (36%) amongst Hindus but it was highest (48%) amongst 'Other*' religious communities. It is, however, again heartening to note that percentage of current users of family planning methods increased amongst all communities during the period 1970 and 1980. Amongst Muslims the increase was by 14 percent points which was of course less than Hindus and 'Other' religious groups by about 8 percent points.

TABLE 2: ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND PRACTICE OF FAMILY PLANNING -1970 & 1980

<i>Attitudes Towards and Practice of Family Planning among eligible couples</i>		<i>Religion</i>					
		<i>Hindus</i>		<i>Muslims</i>		<i>Others</i>	
		<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>
i)	Percentage approving family planning	60	80	53	65	69	85
ii)	Percentage disapproving family planning	40	16	47	33	33	15
iii)	Percentage neutral	-	1	-	2	-	-
iv)	Percentage current users	14	36	9	23	25	48

SOURCE : Operations Research Group, Baroda. *Family Planning Practices in India - Second All India Survey*.

One of the reasons for non-adoption of family planning by some couples amongst Muslims in India is their belief that it is against their religion. In "*Is Islam against Family Planning*"? Khan³ has attempted to critically examine this controversial issue in the light of Koran's teaching and views put forth by several men of religious standing. Some of the conclusions drawn by him regarding the practice of family planning among Muslims are as follows:

- (a) Koran does not forbid family planning.
- (b) A large number of present 'Ulema-e-Islam' of different Islamic countries have issued 'Fatwa*' that from Islamic points of view all temporary methods of family planning for economic or medical reasons are permissible.
- (c) Islam forbids abortion and all permanent family planning methods. However, several ulemas permitted it on grounds of health.

Moreover, in many countries with predominantly Muslim population, the percentage of couples using contraceptives is found very high such as Turkey (63%), Tunisia (50%), Indonesia (48%), Egypt (38%), and Bangla Desh (31%). Most of these countries started family planning much later than India but some have achieved even higher contraceptive practice than India (42%). Thus the belief amongst some Muslims that Islam is against family planning should not be considered as the main barrier in their acceptance of family planning. What is needed is to remove this misconception from their minds by educating them through their own community and religious leaders.

The other main reason for Muslims in India lagging behind than other communities in family planning acceptance seems to be their lower socio-economic status.

Levels and Trends in Fertility by Religion

(i) *Levels.* It could be observed from Table-3 that amongst all the religious communities, Muslims have the highest fertility in both rural and urban areas. General Marital Fertility Rates indicate that for per 1,000 married women in the reproductive age group, Muslim women produce 22 and 26 children more than the Hindus in one year period in rural and urban areas respectively. Similarly, Total Marital Fertility Rates show that on an average at the completion of her reproductive period a Muslim woman produces around half a child more than a Hindu woman in rural as well as urban area.

Primary sterility is highest among Jain women in both rural and urban areas. Rural Hindu women have slightly higher incidence of primary sterility than the Muslim women. However, in urban areas these two communities are equal in this regard.

TABLE 3 : IMPORTANT FERTILITY INDICATORS BY RELIGION—INDIA 1981

Religion	General Marital Fertility Rate (1981)		* Average Number of Children born per woman aged 45-49 yrs.(1981)		Percentage of Ever Married women aged 50 years and above with no live birth (1981)	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
All religions	143	123	5.1	4.7	6.0	6.5
Hindus	141	119	5.0	4.6	6.2	6.6
Muslims	163	145	5.6	5.4	5.1	6.6
Christians	132	117	5.0	4.3	3.9	4.6
Sikhs	153	116	5.4	4.6	5.1	5.6
Budhists	150	130	5.4	4.7	3.0	3.5
Jains	135	111	5.3	4.7	7.3	6.8

SOURCE : Padmanabha, P., Registrar General and Census Commissioner for India. Census of India 1981, Series-I Part-II: Special Reports and Tables Based on 5 per cent Sample Data. * Rounded up to one decimal place.

(ii) *Trends.* It is heartening to observe from Table 4 that during the period 1971 -81 there has been decline in fertility levels among all communities in both rural and urban areas. However, Christians and Sikhs have achieved the highest decline in rural and urban areas

respectively. Hindus and Muslims have shown almost equal levels of decline in fertility in both rural as well as urban areas, the former with only a marginally higher. Thus, it is obvious that the trends in fertility amongst Muslims is on the similar lines as amongst other communities, particularly so in comparison with Hindus.

TABLE 4 : TRENDS IN FERTILITY LEVELS DURING 1971-81 BY RELIGION—INDIA

Religion	General Marital Fertility Rate					
	Rural			Urban		
	1971	1981	% decline during 1971-81	1971	1981	% decline during 1971-81
All religions	177	143	19.2	154	123	20.1
Hindus	174	141	20.0	149	119	20.1
Muslims	197	163	17.3	178	145	18.5
Christians	192	132	31.2	159	117	26.4
Sikhs	181	153	15.5	161	116	27.9
Budhists	177	150	15.2	160	130	18.7
Jains	168	135	19.6	146	111	24.0

SOURCE: Padmanabha, P., Registrar General & Census Commissioner for India. Census of India 1981, Series-L Part-II, Special Reports and Tables Based on 5 percent Sample Data.

Population Growth by Religion

Total population of various religious communities and their proportion in total population of country at the time of 1961, 1971 and 1981 census is given in Table 5. It could be seen that percentage of Hindus in our country's population has slightly reduced from 83.45 in 1961 to 82.35 in 1981 whereas the percentage of Muslims has slightly increased from 10.69 to 11.73 during the same period. Proportion of Christians has remained almost same whereas there is only very minimal change in the proportion of Sikhs and others.

Will Muslims Become A Majority Community in India?

The population of the country increased at an annual geometric growth rate of 2.28 per cent during the decade 1971-81 whereas the population of Muslims increased at a higher rate of 2.75 per cent during the same period. Taking into account the total population of the country including projected estimate for Assam, where the census was not taken, Kapoor has observed that even if the population were to continue to grow at these differential rates of 1971-81, Muslims are not likely to become a majority community in near foreseeable

TABLE 5 : NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND PERCENTAGE INCREASE BY RELIGION

Religion	1961		1971		1981		Per cent increase	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	1961-71	1971-81
Hindus	366.53	83.45	453.44	82.72	564.21	82.35	+23.71	+24.42
Muslims	49.94	10.69	61.42	11.20	80.40	11.73	+30.85	30.90
Christians	10.73	2.44	14.23	2.59	16.68	2.43	+32.62	17.22
Sikhs	7.85	1.79	10.38	1.89	13.09	1.91	+32.23	26.11
Others	7.18	1.63	8.69	1.60	10.75	1.58	+21.03	23.71
Total	439.23	100.00	548.16	100.00	685.13	100.00	+24.80	24.99

SOURCE : 1. Table No. 186 of Country Monograph No. 10, *Population of India*, U.N.

2. Paper 4 of 1984 "Household population by religion of head of household", RGI.

Note : Forassam where no census was taken in 1981, the religion-wise population is worked out by using 1971 Census distribution.

future. He has estimated that the proportion of Muslim population 20 years after 1981 i.e., in 2001 will be 12.9%, 50 years after i.e., in 2031 will be 14.8%, 100 years afterwards, i.e., in 2081 will be 18.6% and 200 years afterwards i.e., in 2181 will be 29.4%. At these differential growth rates, Muslims can form majority only in 316 years later i.e., around 2300 A. D. which, of course, is quite unlikely.

Let us now project Hindu's and Muslim's population with new assumptions. Hindu population increased by 23.71% during the period 1961-71 and by 24.42% during 1971-81, thus recording an increase by 0.71 per cent points. Muslims increased by 30.85% during 1961-71 and 30.90% during 1971-81, thus recording an increase by 0.05 per cent points only, much less than the Hindus. Let us now adopt another assumption i.e., both Hindu and Muslim communities will achieve the same amount of per cent point increase in future as recorded during 1961-71 to 1971-81. In such a situation, 100 years after 1981, i.e., in 2081, Hindus and Muslims will attain a percentage decadal increase rate of 30.71 and 30.55 respectively. Thus by 2081, the growth rate of Hindus will be higher than that of Muslims and hence the question of Muslims becoming a majority community in future will not arise.

However, of course, both the above assumed future growth rates of Hindus as well as Muslims are very very unlikely to occur, as the past trends have shown that among all communities in India, with the passage of the time there is an increase in the acceptance of family planning. Moreover, further improvements in the socio-economic conditions of the people and increased social and economic pressures on couples will in future stimulate further acceptance of family planning amongst all the communities in the country. This may ultimately lead to population stabilization of all the communities after another 100 to 150 years or so.

Summary and Conclusions

An apprehension has been expressed sometimes that in India Muslims will become a majority community as they are growing at a faster rate than the majority community i.e. Hindus. The reasons advocated in support of such an apprehension are, that Muslims have higher fertility as they practice polygyny and that the practice of family planning is much lower among them than among Hindus and other communities.

The review of important nuptiality indicators such as, mean female age at marriage, proportion of currently married women in the reproductive age group 15-49 years and incidence of polygynous marriages brings out that Hindus and Muslims have similar nuptiality patterns. The findings on incidence of polygynous marriage are contrary to the prevailing notion that incidence of such marriages is higher among Muslims than among other communities. Moreover, all communities in India have sex ratio unfavourable to females and in such situation practice of polygyny is likely to result in reducing fertility.

According to an all India survey conducted in 1980 disapproval of family planning is found to be the highest among Muslims than among other communities but still among Muslims 23% eligible couples were found current users of family planning method. The disapproval of family planning has declined and practice of family planning has increased among all communities including Muslims with the passage of time.

Conclusions drawn in the light of several views put forth by men of religious standing bring out that Islam is not against family planning. Current use of family planning methods in countries with predominantly Muslim population is indicative of the fact that Muslims are adopting family planning in a big way. In India also, long back in 1980, 23% eligible Muslim couples were found current users of family planning methods.

One of the reasons for non-acceptance of family planning methods by some Muslim couples in India is their belief that Islam does not allow acceptance of family planning. There is thus urgent need to remove this misconception from their minds by educating them through their own religious and community leaders.

The other main reason for non-acceptance of family planning by Muslims in India seems to be their some economic backwardness which is generally not given due consideration when apprehensions under discussion are expressed.

Trends in fertility during the period 1971-81 have also indicated that there is a decline in fertility levels among all communities and that percentage decline is almost same in case of Muslims and Hindus.

Projections made under assumption that if the annual geometric growth rate for the country's population (2.28%) and for Muslim population (2.75%) recorded during the period 1971-81 continue in future, have brought out that Muslims will be in majority in India sometime by 2,300 A. D.

Similarly, projections made under another assumption that if the percent point increase in their decadal growth rates recorded by the Hindu and Muslim populations during the period 1971-81 i.e. 0.71 and 0.05 respectively continues in future, have brought out that Hindus will attain a decadal growth rate of 30.71% by 2081 which will be higher than the then growth rate of Muslims i.e. 30.55%. Thus the question of Muslims becoming a majority does not arise at all.

However, both the above projections are very very unlikely to occur, as due to expected improvement in socio-economic status of all communities and also due to increased social and economic pressures on couples, the family planning acceptance will increase among all the communities. There is, therefore, likelihood that all the communities in India will attain population stabilization within a period of 100 to 150 years or so. Thus, there are no sound reasons for giving any credibility to such an apprehension that Muslims will become a majority community in India.

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