

## **A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN INDIA**

**SONU**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A religious group is an association or community that shares similar beliefs, symbols and religious practices. This study examined the major religious groups in the light of their distribution, growth, sex ratio, literacy, work participation and age structure; and compared them with one another as well as with “All Religious Groups”. The present study has been conducted in India, a country known for one of the oldest civilisations in the world with a kaleidoscopic variety of cultural heritage. The study is based on the data taken from the 2001 Census of India. The district has been employed as the basic unit of the study. The district-wise data has been mapped by choropleth method and the discussion on spatial pattern of the religious groups in context to their population characteristics is mainly based on what emerges on these maps. Thus, areas associated with mass conversion to a religion, place of origin of a religion and the highly urbanized area supported high concentration of a religious group. Conversely, the areas of relatively low concentration of the religious groups displayed conditions opposite to those found in the areas of relatively high concentration. The investigation of spatial patterns of growth of major religious groups of India provides that the inter-census was marked by unprecedented acceleration in the growth of the Jain population. The Sikhs showed the lowest growth rate, while it was the highest in the case of Muslims. The sex composition of the major religious groups varied from one group to another. The Christian community treated its women better as compared to others. Unlike in the case of total sex ratio in which at least one religious group (the

Christians) recorded preponderance of females, in the child sex ratio, none of the six major religious groups recorded sex ratio in favour of the girl child. There were much of variations in the literacy rates of the six major religious groups. The difference in the literacy rates of the religious groups owed much to the level of literacy of their females.

**KEYWORDS:** Religious group, community, Development, India, population characteristics

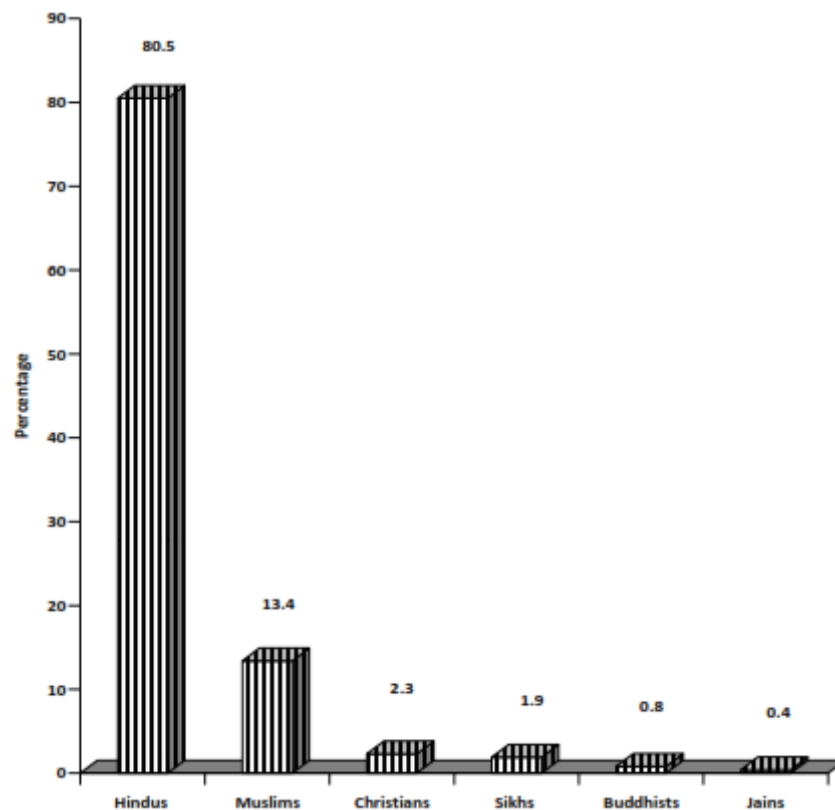
## INTRODUCTION

Religion is one of the oldest basic socio-cultural characteristics associated with the mankind and civilisations created by them over thousands of years of known history (Registrar General of India, 2004). Religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices which is based on the idea of the sacred and which unites believers into a socio-religious community. However, the term „religion“ is not easy to define because it has so many facets. In simple terms, religion may be defined as man’s belief in supernatural, or in what arouses a feeling of awe or piety in him, or in what he considers sacred (Chandna, 2001). Religion produces a distinct attitude towards life and this orientation affects further development of the society. A religious group is an association or community that shares similar beliefs, symbols and religious practices. The population characteristics of religious groups are very important from planning point of view. These need to be studied in order to improve the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving the conditions and well-being of the religious groups. This study aims to examine the major religious groups in the light of their distribution, growth, sex ratio, literacy, work participation and age structure; and compares them with one another as well as with “All Religious Groups”. The study of religious groups is an interdisciplinary venture as it touches many social science disciplines. It is an economic problem when it concerns economic imbalances; it is a political problem when viewed in relation to majority minority syndrome and ethnicity; it is a social problem when it concerns social stratification, conversions and communalism; it is a philosophical problem when it is concerned with the basic tenants of the religious groups and explores these groups in the light of underlying philosophical differences; and it is an anthropological problem when seen in the context of cultural invasion. However, the diffusion and concentration of religious groups and

study of their population. characteristics in the spatial perspective makes it a geographical problem notwithstanding the fact that geographers have not so far played their due role in the comprehension of these groups more so in the third world countries.

Religious profile of the populace is an important socio-cultural and demographic feature noticeable from the first Census in 1872 till now. The data of religions or religious groups for which information was collected had some variations in the pre-Independence period. But after Independence, particularly since 1961 there has been some uniformity in the collection and the generation of the religious data. Besides the six major religions, e.g. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist and Sikh, census also collected data on other religious faiths and denominations. Some of the religious faiths and persuasions are variants or varied manifestation of the major religious groups. In the past information on religion as provided in Census was very limited but in the last Census 2001, a number of cross-tabulations were made available. The data showing distribution of religious groups in 2001 provide is available at State and district levels down to sub-divisions and towns. Cross-tabulation of different religious groups by literacy, classification of workers and non-workers provided new insights. These are additional information compared to those published data of past Censuses.

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 1.1). 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.



**Figure 1.1 Proportions of Major Religious Groups in India**

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 1.1). 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.

**Table 1.1 Per Cent Distribution of Major Religious Groups in India**

India/States/Union Territories	Hindus	Muslims	Christians	Sikhs	Buddhists	Jains
<b>India*</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>States</b>						
Andhra Pradesh	8.20	5.06	4.91	0.16	0.40	0.99
Arunachal Pradesh	0.05	0.02	0.85	0.01	1.80	0.01
Assam	2.09	5.96	4.10	0.12	0.64	0.57
Bihar	8.35	9.93	0.22	0.11	0.24	0.38
Chhattisgarh	2.37	0.30	1.67	0.36	0.82	1.33
Goa	0.11	0.07	1.49	0.01	0.01	0.02
Gujarat	5.46	3.32	1.18	0.24	0.22	12.43
Haryana	2.25	0.89	0.11	6.09	0.09	1.35
Himachal Pradesh	0.70	0.09	0.03	0.38	0.95	0.03
Jammu & Kashmir	0.36	4.92	0.08	1.08	1.43	0.06
Jharkhand	2.23	2.70	4.55	0.43	0.08	0.39
Karnataka	5.36	4.68	3.57	0.08	4.94	9.77
Kerala	2.16	5.69	25.16	0.01	0.03	0.11
Madhya Pradesh	6.65	2.78	0.71	0.79	2.63	12.91
Maharashtra	9.41	7.43	4.40	1.12	73.40	30.81
Manipur	0.12	0.14	3.06	0.01	0.02	0.04
Meghalaya	0.04	0.07	6.77	0.02	0.06	0.02
Mizoram	0.00	0.01	32.10	0.00	0.89	0.00
Nagaland	0.02	0.03	7.44	0.01	0.02	0.05
Orissa	4.19	0.55	3.73	0.09	0.12	0.22
Punjab	1.09	0.28	1.22	75.94	0.52	0.93
Rajasthan	6.06	3.47	0.30	4.26	0.13	15.40
Sikkim	0.04	0.01	0.15	0.01	1.91	0.01
Tamil Nadu	6.64	2.15	1.57	0.05	0.07	1.97
Tripura	0.33	0.18	0.43	0.01	1.24	0.01
Uttaranchal	0.87	0.73	0.11	1.10	0.16	0.22
Uttar Pradesh	16.19	22.25	0.88	3.53	3.80	4.90
West Bengal	7.02	14.65	2.14	0.35	3.06	1.31
<b>Union Territories</b>						
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0.03	0.02	0.32	0.01	0.01	0.00
Chandigarh	0.09	0.03	0.03	0.76	0.02	0.06
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	0.03	0.01	0.30	0.00	0.01	0.02
Daman & Diu	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01
Delhi	1.37	1.18	0.54	2.89	0.30	3.67
Lakshadweep	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	**
Pondicherry	0.10	0.02	0.28	0.00	0.00	0.02

The state-wise distribution of the religious groups provided a picture of spatial variations (Table 1.2). 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.

## **ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN INDIA**

India is characterized by more ethnic and religious groups than most other countries of the world. Aside from the much noted 2000-odd castes, there are eight "major" religions, 15-odd languages spoken in various dialects in 22 states and nine union territories, and a substantial number of tribes and sects. Three ethnic or religious conflicts have stood out of late: two occurred in the states of "Assam and Punjab; another, the more widely known Hindu-Muslim conflict, continues to persist. The Assam problem is primarily ethnic, the Punjab problem is based on both religious and regional conflicts, while the Hindu-Muslim problem is predominantly religious. Of the three conflicts mentioned, Assam has attracted the largest attention of late. Not since the 1947 partition of India have so many people been killed and uprooted as a result of ethnic or communal violence. By most available reports now, mob violence has claimed four thousand lives, rendered about 200,000 homeless, and forced a large number to leave the state for protection elsewhere. The immediate occasion of this bloodshed was the election held in February, though conflict and tension have been present for the last three years. In Assam, three culturally disparate groups have been in collision: the Assamese, the Bengalis (both of which have segments of Hindus and Muslims) and the tribals, which are localized communities.

## **POPULATION GROWTH OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS GROUPS**

There are considerable differences in the social, economic, cultural, political and even ecological aspects within Indian states (Bhat, 1996). As such, the patterns of population growth of the major religious groups were analysed in the light of district-wise data provided by the Census 1991 and 2001. The growth rate was calculated by using the formula:

$$\frac{P_1 - P_0}{P_0} \times 100$$

where, P1 was the population of a religious group in 2001; P0 was the population of a religious group in the base year, i.e., 1991. During the inter-census period 1991-2001 the number of districts increased from 466 to 593. Consequently, the district-wise growth rate of the major religious groups was calculated keeping two things in mind: (a) the districts with unchanged boundaries (Map 3.1) during the inter-census period (1991- 2001), and (b) the districts with changed boundaries during the inter-census period (1991-2001). For the former category of districts the growth rate was simply calculated by using the above mentioned formula but for the latter category of districts the calculation of growth rate was done keeping in consideration the composition of all Indian districts and population weights as given by Kumar and Somanathan (2009). The growth of religious groups in the districts with changed boundaries was calculated considering the share of the 1991 districts in 2001 districts.

The discussion of the spatial patterns of growth of major religious groups was primarily based on Maps. On the basis of the maps the growth rates were shown under six categories.

Growth rates of above 40 per cent.

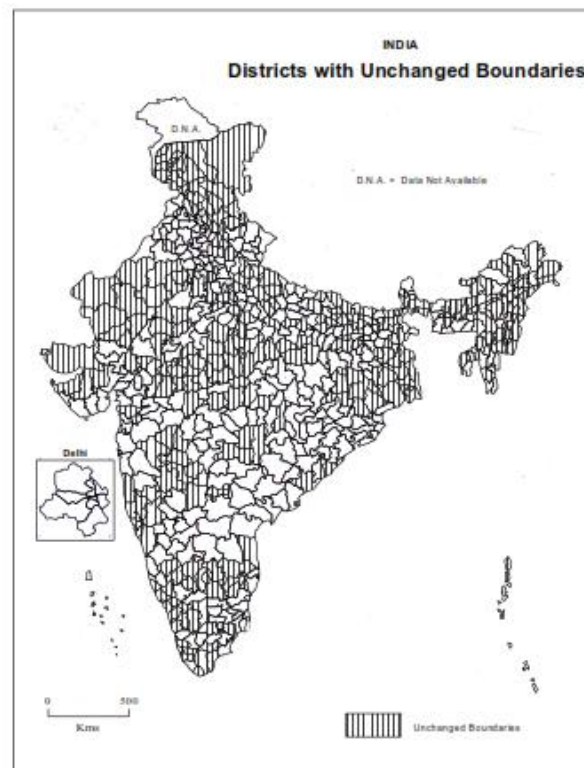
Growth rates of 30-40 per cent.

Growth rates of 20-30 per cent.

iv) Growth rates of 10-20 per cent.

Growth rates of 0-10 per cent.

Growth rates of below 0 per cent.



**MAP- 1**

However, the spatial patterns of growth of the major religious groups were analysed by clubbing the categories of growth rates of 30-40 per cent and above 40 per cent as areas of relatively high rates of growth and by clubbing the categories of growth rates of 0-10 and 10-20 per cent as areas of relatively low rates of growth.

#### **Areas of Relatively High Growth of Population (Above 30 per cent)**

These areas were characterised by either net in-migration or high fertility rates.

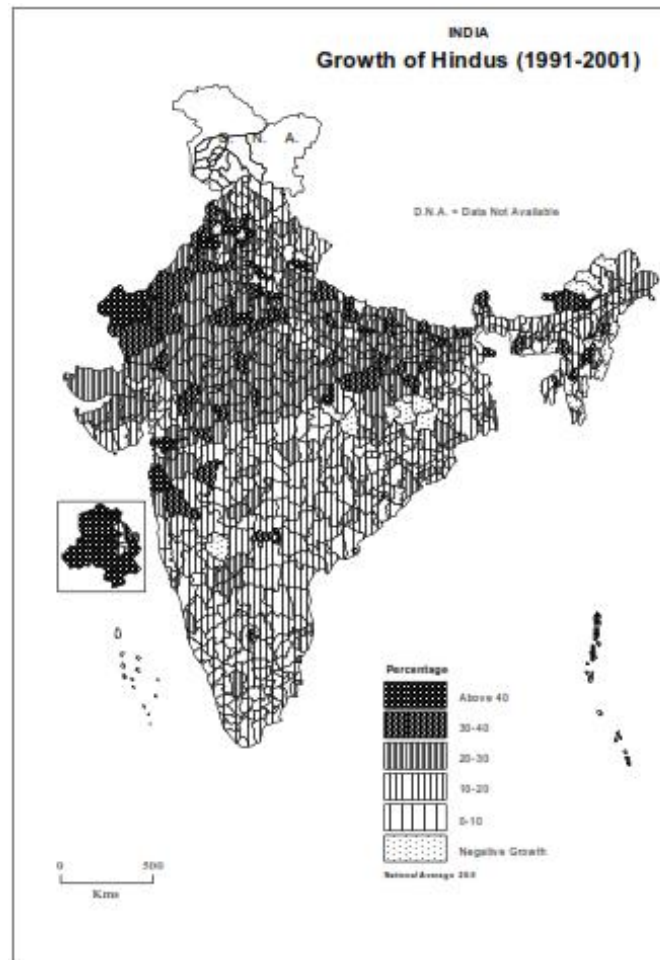
#### **The Hindus**

Relatively high rate of growth of population among the Hindus was recorded in 87 districts; and in 31 districts the growth rates were above 40 per cent, whereas in the remaining 56 districts they were between 30 and 40 per cent. The areas of high Hindu growth rate included: (i) Punjab Plains, (ii) Western Rajasthan, and (iii) Other Areas (Map 2).



### **Punjab Plains:**

Relatively high growth rates (above 30 per cent) among the Hindus were registered in nine districts (Amritsar, Jalandhar, Rupnagar, Ludhiana, Firozpur, Muktsar, Faridkot, Bathinda and Patiala) of Punjab. The Hindu growth rate in these districts ranged between 30.2 per cent in Jalandhar and 57 per cent in Muktsar. In fact, above 40 per cent growth rate of the Hindu population was recorded in the districts of Malwa region of Punjab (Ludhiana, Muktsar, Bathinda and Patiala). Interestingly, the growth rate of the Hindus in Punjab was abysmally low at 12.7 per cent during the period 1981-91 but shot up to 28.7 per cent during 1991-2001. This was because the period 1981-91 witnessed net out-migrations of the Hindus from Punjab as a result of political turmoil and with the wiping out of militancy and normalcy the trend was reversed (Awasthi, 2004).



**MAP- 2**

**Western Rajasthan:** This region too recorded relatively high decadal growth rate of the Hindu population. It varied from 30.7 per cent in Sirohi to 48.0 per cent in Jaisalmer. In 1991, Jaisalmer had a Hindu population of 2, 59,009 which increased to 3, 83,638 in 2001. The total fertility rate for the Hindus was very high (Table 2). The region was characterised by low age at marriage, low female literacy and a strong son preference. It was observed that women in Rajasthan irrespective of their religion entered into marital life at a very young age of 15 or younger than that (Acharya, 2010).

**Table 2 Fertility Estimates for Hindus in Western Rajasthan**

Districts	Crude Birth Rate	Total Fertility Rate
Hanumangarh	28.0	3.6
Bikaner	34.0	4.6
Jaisalmer	40.1	5.6
Barmer	39.1	5.4
Jodhpur	32.4	4.3
India	24.9	3.1

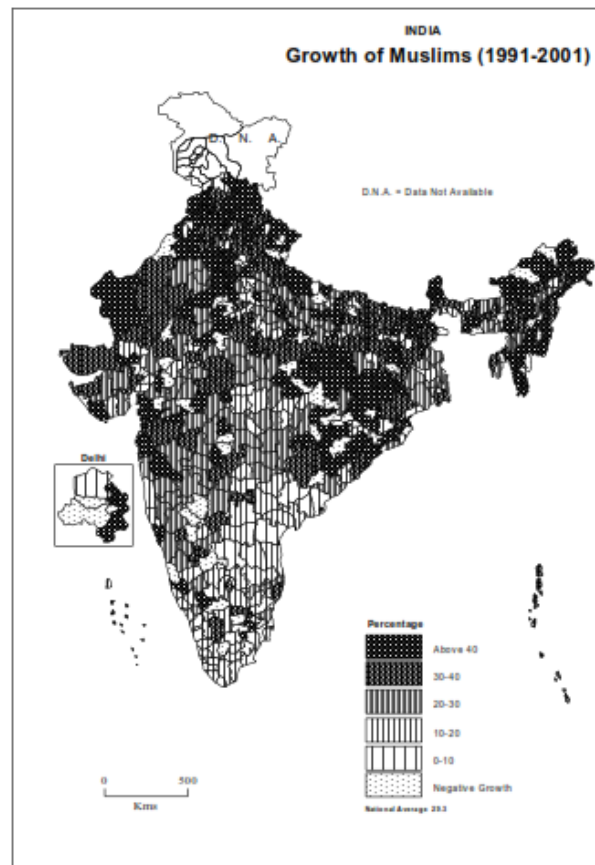
**Other Areas:** This category embraced: (a) some districts of the 'Bimaru States' characterised by high fertility rates such as Banswara, Baran, Dhaulpur, Karauli and Dausa (Rajasthan), Umaria and Barwani (Madhya Pradesh), Kheri, Shrawasti, Gonda, Deoria, Kushinagar, Chandauli, Ambedkar Nagar and Sonbhadra (Uttar Pradesh) and Sheohar, Sitamarhi, Darbhanga and Araria (Bihar); (b) areas marked by in-migration owing to their urban nature and diversified economy such as the national capital and certain state capitals such as Jaipur, Lucknow, Chandigarh, Bangalore, Mumbai and Bhopal; (c) scattered industrial districts such as Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Agra, Indore, Pune and Thane; and (d) trading and commercial districts of the north-eastern states like Tawang, Papum Pare, Dimapur and West Garo Hills.

**The Muslims** The Muslims registered a relatively high growth rate in 302 districts of the country. In 180 districts, the growth rate of Muslim population was above 40 per cent. The areas of high growth rates of Muslim population consisted of: (i) Northwestern and North-eastern Hilly Region, (ii) Indo-Gangetic Region, (iii) Large Parts of Thar Desert, (iv) Eastern Parts of Central Tribal Belt, and (v) Other Areas (Map 3).

#### **NORTH-WESTERN AND NORTH-EASTERN HILLY REGION:**

The Muslim growth rate was extremely high in some of the districts of north-western hilly region. The abysmally high growth rates of 482 per cent in Lahul&Spiti, 235 per cent in Kullu and 287 per cent in Kinnaur were indeed misleading, as the actual number of Muslims involved in these areas was very small. For instance, the abysmally high growth rate of the Muslims in

Lahul&Spiti was the result of an increase of the Muslim population from 23 persons in 1991 to 134 persons in 2001. The Muslim population also registered high growth in most of the districts of Uttaranchal (except Rudraprayag, Bageshwar, Champawat and Nainital) due to the same reason. These districts recorded high crude birth rates and total fertility rates of the Muslim population. A large segment of the Muslim population in northwestern Himalayas comprised of the Vangujjar (pastoral nomad), however, a majority of them were quite poor. According to an estimate one-third of a million pastoral MusalmanGujjar lived in parts of the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal.



**MAP- 3**

In the north-eastern hilly region, a distinct growth pattern of the Muslim population was observed. There were many districts in which the Muslim population more than doubled in a

short span of time, viz. the period 1991-2001. The North, West and East districts of Sikkim state; Papum Pare, East Siang and Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh state; Mon, Zunheboto, Wokha and Dimapur districts of Nagaland state; Senapati, Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Imphal East districts of Manipur state; East and West Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya state, and North and West Tripura districts of Tripura state witnessed an extremely high growth rates of Muslim population although these districts supported small base of Muslim population. The high Muslim growth in the north-eastern region was attributable to large scale infiltration of Muslims from across the borders. Illegal immigration was prevalent in the north-east region.

## CONCLUSION

India has the distinction of being the land from where certain important religions of the world, viz. Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism originated. It is one of the most diverse countries in the world in terms of religion with the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the Sikhs, the Buddhists and the Jains constituting the major religious groups. As per 2001 Census, out of the total population of 1028 million, the Hindus were 828 million (i.e., 80.5 per cent of India's population), the Muslims 138 million, the Christians 24 million, the Sikhs 19 million, the Buddhists 8 million and the Jains 4.2 million. Those following „other religions“ including the tribal religions were 6.6 million. Thus, India could rightly be considered the epitome of diversity in the world. Due to their different philosophy of life and community specific religious beliefs, practices and social structure the different religious groups project different population characteristics. Since these religious groups are a part and parcel of Indian population, the characteristics of the population of all major religious groups influence India's population characteristics in particular. Religion is a set of beliefs, symbols and practices which is based on the idea of the sacred and which unites believers into a socio-religious community. It produces a distinct attitude towards life and this orientation affects further development of the society. A religious group is an association or community that shares similar beliefs, symbols and religious practices. From planning point of view, the population characteristics of religious groups need to be studied in order to improve the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving the conditions

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