

Chapter – VII

CONCLUSION

The present study is a modest attempt to find out fertility differentials by religion and to identify the determinants of such differentials in fertility in the district of Darjeeling.

Findings

The major findings related to the population characteristics of the district are as follows:

1. The district has a population density of 511 persons per km² which is found to be less than the state average i.e. 903 persons per km² but more than national average i.e. 336 persons per km².
2. The district has a decadal (1991-2001) growth rate of 23.79 percent which is higher than both the state as well as the national average.
3. Hindu is the predominant religious group with 76.92 percent population and Muslims are the 4th largest group with only 5.31 percent population.
4. The district has a sex ratio which is favourable to female i.e. 943 females for 1000 of males as compared to state or national average.
5. Of the total workers, around 60 percent are engaged in agricultural sector.
6. Overall literacy of 71.8 percent is well above state and also national overage.

7. Female literacy of 62.9 percent stands quite satisfactory and is higher than the state average of 59.61 percent and also the national average of 53.67.

The general characteristics of fertility and an analysis of socio-economic conditions of the respective religious groups under study have been presented in chapter-iii. The major findings in the chapter are as follows:

1. It is observed that a maximum of 31 percent of the Christian respondents are found to be working. However, in case of Muslims, as much as 9.5 percent of the respondents are found to be workers.
2. Among all the four religious groups, Buddhist respondents have a maximum (68 percent) of their husbands engaged in service sector, both in government and private sectors. The same is the minimum in case of Muslims which is a meager 11 percent.
3. The Buddhists have the highest per capita monthly income of Rs. 3077 where as the Muslims have the lowest monthly per capita income of Rs. 1413.
4. So far as the monthly amount of savings is concerned, Buddhists have got the highest per capita savings of Rs. 1374 and the Muslims have the lowest i.e. Rs. 482 only.
5. The study further reveals that the average number of years of schooling of respondents is 6.35 years. The same varies between as low as 4.56 to 9.73 for Muslims and Buddhists respectively.
6. It is seen that the average number of years of schooling of fathers of the respondents is 4.86 years, the highest being among the Buddhists (5.99) and the lowest among the Christians (3.74).

7. The Buddhist mothers of the respondents have relatively longer duration of schooling i.e. 3.86 years as compared to an average of 2.13 years, for all the religious groups taken together. On the other hand the shortest length of schooling is found to be among the Christian mothers i.e. (0.72 years).
8. The study highlights that Buddhist husbands are found to be the most educated among the religious groups with an average of 10.82 years of education. The Muslim husbands are among the lowest educated in the religious groups under study with 6.24 years of education. The average number of years of education for all the four religious communities is 7.87 years.
9. It is observed that the average number of pregnancies for all the respondents is 2.60.
10. Similarly, the average number of births including still births is found to be 2.35.
11. It is also found that the average number of live births took place to the respondents is 2.25.
12. Consequently, the average number of still births to the respondents of all the religious groups taken together is 0.12.
13. The study shows that the average number of children for all the respondents during enumeration is 2.22.
14. Similarly, the Crude Birth Rate and the Total Fertility Rate calculated for all the religious groups are 40.96 and 3.58 respectively.

15. The average size of the family, taking all the religious group together is 4.82 in the study area.

As has been said earlier, while discussing fertility and religion in the study area, the CBR and the TFR for all the religious groups taken together are 40.96 and 3.58 respectively. However, the religious groups have differential fertility rates. Some of the major findings on number of pregnancies, number of births and also fertility in general are as follows:

1. It is seen that on an average, maximum number pregnancies occurred among Muslims (3.03) and minimum among the Buddhists (1.67).
2. The maximum number of children ever born is found among Muslims (2.62). As far as the Buddhists are concerned the figure is (1.57), which is the lowest among all.
3. On an average, it is seen that maximum number of surviving children till the day of filed work is found among Muslims (2.62) and minimum among the Buddhists (1.57).
4. The study reveals that the CBR is found to be the highest among Christians (51.02) and the lowest figure is calculated to be (26.25) among the Buddhists.
5. The highest TFR is found among Christians (4.89). Similarly, Buddhists have the lowest TFR which is 2.44.
6. It is observed that percentage of respondents to have given birth up to two children is the maximum among the Buddhists (88) and Minimum among the Muslims (51). As a matter of fact a maximum percentage of the Muslims (48) are observed to have given birth to more than two

babies. In case of Buddhist respondents it is seen that as little as 12 percent of them have given birth to more than two children.

The fertility and religion in the study have been discussed and analysed in the light of the variables such as educational attainment, income level, occupation, and age at marriage. The results of Correlation and Regression analysis of fertility, in the light of the above variables are as follows:

1. Educational attainment has negative impact on fertility but the extent of influence varies from one religious community to the other as their socio-economic conditions vary.
2. It is observed that the impact of educational attainment of the respondents, among others, seems to be much more effective (strong) than the husbands and the parents as is clear from the correlation coefficients (table-5.41).
3. There is no definite trend of relationship between fertility and different sectors of economic activities in which the respondents are engaged.
4. Working females have relatively less number of children as compared to the housewives but the difference is not significant.
5. There is no significant difference in fertility across religious groups in the same sector of occupation (respondents engaged in occupation in the same sector).
6. Even among the employed respondents, only a few are gainfully employed and therefore, no significant impact of occupation on fertility is observed. Very low income generated from the employment has not

contributed significantly in enhancing the social status of the respondents.

7. There exists a negative relationship between fertility (number of births) and income (per capita monthly income). Income generated has been invested for education, health and nutrition which probably influenced fertility behaviour of the respondents.
8. The income has strong negative relation with fertility among the Christians and weak among the Muslims.
9. The correlation coefficient calculated between the variables fertility (number of births) and income (per capita monthly income) varies between -0.0495 and -0.3236 for different communities.
10. There exists a negative relationship between fertility and age at marriage.
11. The above relationship also holds good in case of pregnancy and births. Enhanced age at marriage means a number of fecund females are out of child producing system, thus it influences fertility negatively.
12. The relation between fertility and age at marriage is negative for all the religions but the magnitude differs across the religious groups.
13. A strongest relationship between the above variables is found among the Buddhists and a weak relationship exists among the Hindus, keeping in view all the religious groups studied.

The following picture emerges from the fertility status in the rural as well as urban areas in the district:

1. The rural-urban difference in birth is the least i.e. 0.03 only among the Buddhist community. The lower level of rural-urban differentials in birth is found among the Muslims. Christians have the highest differentials of 0.87.
2. It is interesting to note that when it comes to the number of children during enumeration the position of Hindus and Muslims inter changes. The rural-urban gap with respect to number of children during enumeration is the lowest among the Hindus (0.67). The Christians are on the top the list with a gap of 0.84, while Buddhists are on the bottom with a gap of 0.12.
3. The study shows that as high as 59.29 percent of the Muslim respondents from rural areas reported having pregnancy more than twice. The figures stand at 55.71 percent, 70.00 percent and 18.33 percent respectively for Hindu, Christian and Buddhist respondents.
4. Among the rural respondents it has been found that the highest proportion i.e. 53.57 percent of Muslim respondents reported themselves having given birth to more than two children. The proportion of Christian respondents belonging to same category is almost identical with that of Muslims i.e. 53.33 percent followed by Hindus 49.29 percent and Buddhists 6.67 percent.
5. The study reveals that Muslims of urban residence have the highest proportion of their respondents having given birth to three or more than three children followed by the Christians (23.33 percent), the Hindus (21.67 percent) and the Buddhists (6.67 percent).

How to Bridge the Gap of Fertility between the Communities?

The present study shows that the socio-economic under development of Muslims is an important reason of having higher fertility among them. Particularly, education and that is female education has strong influence on fertility behaviour and plays an important role in controlling the fertility among religious groups. Therefore, overall socio-economic development of Muslims may be an effective way of tackling high fertility with greater emphasis on education. Along with all round development, policy makers are needed to take appropriate measures to remove the fear psychosis among Muslim minorities that will help adopting family planning services available through government agencies

It has been observed that when the neighbours of one community accept contraceptives, others also follow the same. As a result it is thus found that the region where fertility is low, all the communities have low fertility and vice-versa. As is clear from the study of Jeffery and Jeffery (2000) in Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh, the impact of religion is always overshadowed when there is good delivery system of family limitation services. The good quality and acceptable alternative is also required to be introduced for better result among Muslims. The stereotype preference of sterilization by the health worker has to be done away with which is not acceptable to many Muslims, though they do not mind adopting non-terminal family limiting methods.

Health workers often make sterilization almost synonymous with family planning that may not be acceptable to a particular community, say Muslims.

As has been authenticated by Jeffery and Jeffery (2000), it is found in their study in Bijnor , Uttar Pradesh that “The impact of Islam on the demand for family limitation – if it applies at all – is through resistance to some forms of contraception – specially, sterilization – and is by no means as consistently opposed to family planning as sometimes suggested. But until recently, in much of north India, family planning and sterilization were regarded as synonymous. Through out our research in Bijnor, beginning in 1982, we have confronted by women – Hindu and Muslim alike – asking for alternative methods, and denying that the government family planning staff had anything other than sterilization to offer. In fact some women had Copper-T inserted, and the contraceptive pill was available in some health centres in Bijnor. But family planning workers often refused to provide anything but sterilization to women who expressed an interest in family limitation” (Jeffery and Jeffery, 2000, p. 3257).

Bhat and Zavier (2005:385-402) have projected population for India. They concluded the differences in fertility between Hindus and Muslims will start diminishing from 2021 and by 2096-2100 the fertility will exactly be equal. As per their population projection, proportion of Muslims to total population would be 18.80 percent by 2101. Hence the fear psychosis created by 'saffron demographers' and their cohort politicians may not continue to exist.

Recommendations

The following suggestion will go a long way in bridging the gap in fertility by religion.

- i) It is essential that health services become more responsible and acceptable to local groups so that the local population is benefited.
- ii) Local and community leaders have to be involved in the family planning programme who can easily win the trust of the village folks to convince them to adopt the family limitation measures.
- iii) Places of community affairs and mass gathering such as Masjid, Mandir, Church, Monastery and also site and occasions of fairs and festivals may effectively be utilized for awareness campaign aimed at reducing fertility rate.
- iv) Panchayat has to take lead role in sensitizing the mass about the drawbacks of large family. Through the Gram Samsad, panchayat may organize awareness camps etc. to sensitize the common mass, particularly rural folks.
- v) Health services, particularly, related to family welfare has to be more users' friendly. The staff should be trained to deal with the rural and illiterate mothers to make them understand the utility of family limitation and usefulness and advantages of smaller family.
- vi) There is a need to build well equipped health centres particularly, in the rural areas and more so in the areas dominated by minorities and other backward communities so that there is an easy access to the family planning services. Improvement of existing health centres will be beneficial towards reducing fertility.

- vii) Educational infrastructure is needed to be improved considerably to cater to the need of target group of children. The quality of education, as it has been seen from the present study would help to reduce fertility among the communities having relatively higher level of fertility.
- viii) Making school more attractive so that families are encouraged to send their wards to school which will pressurize them to keep their families smaller.
- ix) School curriculum must include a syllabus on the causes and consequences of high fertility leading to high growth rate and finally heading towards 'population explosion'.
- x) Employment opportunity has to be broadened so that more and more women are employed. This phenomenon will enhance the income level of the family on one hand and force to opt for smaller family on the other, as we have seen in our study that the working women have less number of children.
- xi) NREGS has to be implemented so that the unemployed persons get at least 100 days of work in a year which will certainly have negative impact on fertility.
- xii) Sense of insecurity has to be removed from both majority and minority communities. In order to do away with this, a balanced police force comprising all religious and linguistic groups should be formed to win the confidence of all sections of the society.
- xiii) Communal harmony is a must to build confidence among the minorities.

- xiv) Age at marriage has to be increased considerably in order to achieve reduced level of fertility. Stringent implementation of rule pertaining to minimum marriageable age is to be ensured. This in turn will control fertility to a desired level.
- xv) Govt. policy should be designed in such a manner as to be ante-natal that may control fertility with a greater degree of efficiency. The spouses having given birth to third child may be deprived of maternity leave. Public arrangement for educational and health services may be limited to only first two children. Couple having more than two children may be barred from contesting election at any level and thus becoming peoples' representatives and executives.
- xvi) Along the above line government may frame policy of incentives to those couples who have restricted themselves to not more than two children. Particularly, providing certain financial support/benefit to first two children with a couple may limit fertility to a certain degree.

Limitation of the Study

Time constraint has always been a great handicap for raising the standard of work to an expected level. More importantly political situation and an environment of uncertainty in the hills (part of field of this research is in the hilly tract of Darjeeling district) proved to be quite expensive for the researcher. 'Bengali-Gorkha' divide also put a serious challenge in the way of completion of this study. Had there been a normal peaceful environment in the hills the work would have been more in depth and the quality of work would have gone up accordingly.

While drawing the sample respondents, the religious groups under study have been considered homogenous which is not the fact prevailing in the field. As for example, among the Muslims, the Bhatias, the Biharis and the local Muslims are very different, so far as their socio-economic condition, social customs and religious practices are concerned.

Scope for Further Study

Though a sincere effort has been made to understand and explain the differentials in fertility by religion in Darjeeling district, yet there have been many weaknesses which need thorough investigation. The effect of income on fertility of Muslims was found to be positive which needs a serious probe as it contradicts established thesis. The study is required be more broad based with larger number of samples drawn from all the religious groups, in the society covering all blocks of the district. Therefore, it may be said that there is a wide scope for further study of fertility with respect to religion in the district.