

# Hindu-Muslim Differentials in Fertility and Population Growth in India : Role of Proximate Variables

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## INTRODUCTION

Religious affiliation has been found to have a significant bearing on fertility in the study of differential fertility by various background variables. First, religion *per se* has considerable social relevance to fertility. According to Westoff (1959, p. 117), "The religious affiliation of the couple connotes a system of values which can affect family via several routes : (a) directly, by imposing sanctions on the practice of birth control of legitimizing the practice of less effective methods only, or; (b) indirectly, by indoctrinating its members with a moral and social philosophy of marriage and family which emphasises the virtues of reproduction".

Second, religious status has yielded substantial fertility differentials in a number of countries. For example, studies done in Australia (Day, 1964 and 1970), USA (Kirk, 1955 and Freedman *et al.*, 1959), and some other Western countries (Jones and Nortman, 1968) have shown that Catholics normally have higher - sometimes substantially higher - fertility than Protestants and Jews, with or without standardization for socio-economic background; this despite the fact that among Catholics themselves, substantial differences in fertility exist according to socio-economic status. Analogously, studies done in a number of Muslim majority and Muslim minority countries have shown significantly higher fertility rates for Muslims than for non-Muslims (Caldwell, 1968; Chamie, 1977 and Mahmood, 1977).

The study of religious differentials in fertility is all the more important and intriguing in the case of India because of its religious heterogeneity, and the fact that followers of different religions are living side by side. According to the 1971 Census, more than four-fifths of the population were Hindus, about 11 per cent were Muslims, almost 3 per cent were Christians, and the rest were distributed among a variety of minority religious communities, such as Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Jews and Parsis.