

# INFILTRATION OR NATURAL GROWTH OF “MINORITY” POPULATION IN WEST BENGAL (INDIA) : AN EVALUATION

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*The paper try to explore some popular myth regarding rapid Muslim population growth in the state of West Bengal as consequences of the infiltration from neighbouring country and see whether only the Muslim population infiltrates or the Hindus too infiltrating. Census data of 2011 and 2001 is used for analysis. Data is represented in the form of growth rate, size and share of the population change etc.*

*The paper has been presented in four sections. The first section deals with population of border districts and non border districts. Second section tries to explain what matters regarding minority population, its growth, size or share in relation to demographic shift. Third part will explore some determinants of minority population growth. Concluding remark will be made on the basis of the above discussion.*

**Keywords:** *Infiltration, Population Growth, Population Size, Population Share*

## INTRODUCTION

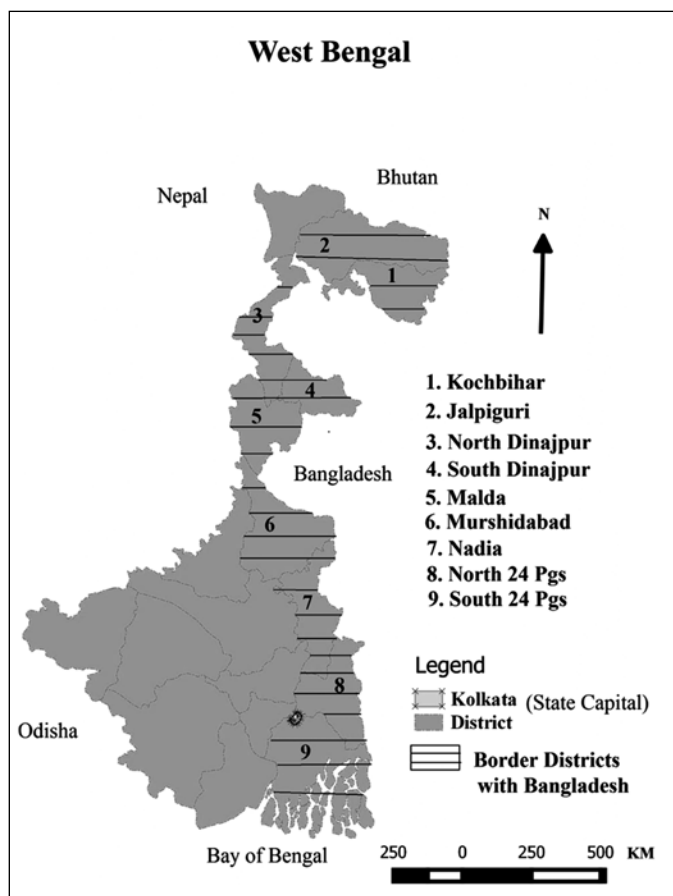
In recent past, data on religious communities for 2011 census has been published. Several news paper reports highlighted the Muslim population growth in the country. Some news paper report highlighted that Hindu population down below 80% for the first time ever while others highlighted that Muslim population growth slows in India others with respect to West Bengal notes that Bengal beats India in Muslim growth rate. West Bengal is one of state in India where percentage Muslim population is 27.01 percentages and it is next to Jammu & Kashmir (68.3%) and Assam (34.2%). Lakshadeep is only Union territory where Muslim population is 96.2 %. Due to partition and later civil war in erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) West Bengal encounter majority of Hindu refugee population. What makes the case of West Bengal is unique in relation to other state is that it is one of the border state of India where Indo-Bangladesh border passes through 2216.7 Km. The entire stretch consists of plain, riverine, jungle and with hardly any natural obstacles. The area is heavily populated, and the cultivation is carried out till the last inch of the border. It should be clarified here that Muslims are not the only religious minority population in West Bengal, Christians, Sikhs and Buddhist are also fall in this category. In fact Muslims are the second largest population in West Bengal. Their higher growth often identified with infiltration from neighbouring country and lack education and weaker financial capacity. This paper will discuss some of the crucial questions i.e Do the Muslim population aggressively increasing in the state and this question very often rises by some political party claimed that lot of infiltration is taking place which is altering the demography of the State. Countering this very statement, the other group claims that no infiltration is taking place at all. Secondly the paper address whether natural growth or infiltration from Bangladesh is pure reason of Muslim population growth. Thirdly mapped the areas of high Muslim population concentration and see whether there is any relation with infiltration or not.

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## MATERIAL & METHODS

Data has been collected mainly from the Census of India between 2001 and 2011 and some previous decades also. To assess the demography of the minority population whole state has been categorized into two groups. These groups include border district and non border districts of the state. Here we are focused on the border district of West Bengal which shares border with Bangladesh. There are 10 border districts and 7 non border districts. Population Growth rate, share and decadal change of population size has been calculated. The variable includes female literacy, female work participation, and border district and dependency ratio are used to see whether they are correlating with higher population growth districts or reflects different aspects.



**Fig 1 West Bengal: Border and Non Border Districts**

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Population Composition in Border District vs. Non Border District

West Bengal shares border with three country namely Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. Border with the Bangladesh is the longest. Here we are focused on the border district of West Bengal which shares border with Bangladesh. The district which shares the border with Bangladesh is Coachbihar,

Jalpiguri, Darjeeling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Nadia, North 24 Pgs, and South 24 Pgs. Now it is imperative to see which are those border and non border district have a higher population growth rate than the State average. State annual population growth rate from 2001 to 2011 is 1.38% and for Hindus it is 1.20% and for Muslims it is 2.18 %. It is to be noted that Hindu population growth rate is lower than the state average.

**Table 1 Population Growth Rate in Border and Non Border District in West Bengal 2011**

<b>Border Districts</b>	<b>Growth Rate</b>		<b>Border Districts</b>	<b>Growth Rate</b>	
	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>		<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>
Darjeeling	1.04	2.30	Maldah	1.80	2.49
Jalpaiguri	1.14	2.07	Murshidabad	1.19	2.60
Koch Bihar	1.15	1.98	Nadia	0.97	1.81
Uttar Dinajpur	1.74	2.98	North 24 Parganas	0.93	1.94
Dakshin Dinajpur *	1.08	1.43	South 24 Parganas	1.33	2.64
<b>Non Border Districts</b>	<b>Growth Rate</b>		<b>Non Border Districts</b>	<b>Growth Rate</b>	
	<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>		<b>Hindu</b>	<b>Muslim</b>
Birbhum	1.21	2.27	Howrah	1.03	2.16
Burdwan	1.04	1.72	Bankura	1.26	2.11
Hooghly	0.84	1.39	Puruliya	1.21	2.57
-----	-----	-----	Medinipur	1.43	2.52

Source: Census of India 2011, Calculated by author

It is apparent from table 1 that there are three districts where Hindu population growth is higher than the state average population growth rate. On the other hand Muslim population growth rate is above the state average in all the district of the state. It is interesting to note that if we see the growth rate separately on the basis of the religion, it is evident that there 7 districts where Hindu population growth rate is higher than average Hindu population growth rate of the state. While, there are 8 districts (out of which five districts are border districts namely Uttar Dinajpur, Malda, Murshidabad, Darjeeling and South 24 pgs) where Muslim Population growth rate is higher than average Muslim population growth rate of the state. What is noticeable is that there are 3 districts (Malda, Uttar Dinajpur and Medinipur) of the state where both Hindu and Muslim Population growth rate is above the each of their community average growth. Out of these three districts two are border districts. Therefore it is apparent that both Malda and Uttar Ddinajpur district have higher growth of population of both the Hindu and Muslim community and it hints that there might be case of infiltration. Remember both the districts border share a river (very small width) with neighbouring country. It is worthwhile to mention that Muslim population growth rate is comparatively lower in those border districts (Nadia and North 24 Pgs) which are highly urbanized and closer to Kolkata.

## **Growth, Size and Share of Population**

As pointed out earlier that sections of Hindu community believe that there is a fear to be minority from majority population. Addressing this question three prime measure is often used to see whether the particular group of population is belonging to majority or in minority. Growth rate is one such widely used measure where we can see future trend of population.

**Table 2 Decadal Growth Rate of Hindu and Muslim Population**

Year	Decadal Growth of Muslim Population In percentage	Percentage Change	Decadal Growth of Hindu Population In percentage	Percentage Change
1961	36.48	-----	32.63	-----
1971	29.76	-6.72	25.75	-6.88
1981	29.55	-0.21	21.37	-4.38
1991	36.89	7.34	21.09	-0.28
2001	25.91	-10.98	14.23	-6.86
2011	21.80	-4.11	10.80	-3.43

Source: Census of India 1961-2011, calculated by author

Decadal population growth rate shows that change in population growth rate of both communities is fluctuating over the five decades. Hindu population growth rate is falling sharply since 1960 though the rate varies (0.28-6.88) in different decades. While, Muslim Population Growth rate did not fall sharply as Hindus. From 1961 to 1981, Muslim population growth declines. But in 1991 Muslim Population growth rate exceeds the previous decade's growth rate but thereafter their population growth rate falls sharply. What is needed to mention is that population growth rate is highest both Hindu and Muslims in those districts where literacy rate is very low like Uttar Dinajpur (60.13), Malda (62.71), Puruliya (65.38) and Murshidabad (67.53). Apart from states decadal growth if we look at the population growth of both communities in urban area it will reflect different aspects. Urban areas are engine of economic growth and West Bengal is one of urbanized state in India. West Bengal urban population is 31.89 % and which is above the all India figure.

**Table 3 Population Growth Rate in Urban Area of West Bengal 2011**

Border Districts	Growth Rate		Border Districts	Growth Rate	
	Hindu	Muslim		Hindu	Muslim
Darjeeling	3.65	3.95	Maldah	6.16	62.04
Jalpaiguri	6.97	14.71	Murshidabad	4.78	15.00
Koch Bihar	2.52	5.79	Nadia	4.36	11.10
Uttar Dinajpur	1.70	8.74	North 24 Parganas	1.53	4.31
Dakshin Dinajpur *	1.97	3.50	South 24 Parganas	7.35	13.69
Non Border Districts	Growth Rate		Non Border Districts	Growth Rate	
	Hindu	Muslim		Hindu	Muslim
Birbhum	5.61	15.62	Howrah	3.47	6.86
Burdwan	1.92	2.78	Bankura	2.59	5.31
Hooghly	2.30	4.92	Puruliya	3.62	13.06
Medinipur	2.70	7.75			

Source Census of India 2011, Calculated by author

Population growth rate of both the communities is above average growth rate in urban area. Hindu population growth rate remain single digit in both border and non border districts while

there are 7 districts (border districts- Jalpiguri, Maldah, Murshidabad, Nadia and South 24 Pgs, Non border districts- Puruliya and Birbhum) where Muslim population in urban area is growing in double digit. What is noticeable is the abrupt growth of Muslim population in urban areas of Maldah districts i.e. 62.04 %. In 2011 only 24 new census towns emerged in Maldah and these towns are belonging in class IV and V towns and these towns are at the initial stage of transition from agrarian to household industry and service based economy. So this town will not be able to add this huge amount of population. This case specifically suggests that there is a high possibility of infiltration from neighbouring country due to existence of porous border.

**Table 4 Population Growth Rate of Border Town of West Bengal 2011**

<b>Towns</b>	<b>Hindu Population Growth Rate</b>	<b>Muslim Population Growth Rate</b>	<b>Towns</b>	<b>Hindu Population Growth Rate</b>	<b>Muslim Population Growth Rate</b>
Siliguri	7.98	6.55	Balurghat	1.25	0.44
Jalpiguri	0.67	1.91	Old Malda	3.22	3.97
Haldibari	1.14	-0.05	English Bazar	2.52	2.62
Mekhliganj	-2.00	0.72	Dhulian	1.32	3.78
Dinhata	0.46	1.93	Jangipur	1.24	2.23
Tufanganj	0.85	0.85	Ranaghat	0.93	1.29
Mathabhanga	1.21	2.78	Bongaon	0.66	0.14
Kaliaganj	1.25	0.93	Barasat	1.86	2.89
Islampur	0.02	0.93	Basirhat	0.87	1.80
Raiganj	1.09	2.17	Taki	0.22	0.37
Gangarampur	0.46	2.12	Habra	1.51	2.04

Source: Census of India 2011, Calculated by author

Border towns are some of important area where trace of infiltrator can be found very well. There are 22 borders towns of West Bengal which are close to Bangladesh and the size of these towns vary from class I to class VI towns. Town which has the highest population is the Barasat while town which have the lowest population is the Mekhliganj. There are 9 towns whose population is above one lakh and some of them are district headquarters also. There are some towns whose population growth of both Hindu and Muslim community is noticeable like Siliguri. Siliguri is the gateway of North Eastern states of India and a thriving town where hill and plain touches each other. Historically Siliguri town absorbs the refugee population since independence from erstwhile East Pakistan and still continuing to attract the lot of migrants from all the part of country. Old Malda, Dhulian, English Bazar and Barasat are the towns where very high population growth can be noticed.

Apart from growth, another important method to measure the population is the share of population. Highest Hindu population share is found in Jalpiguri (81.51%) district while highest Muslim population share is found in Murshidabad (66.27%). Muslim Population share is lowest in Darjeeling district while Hindu population share is lowest at Murshidabad. There are two districts where both Hindu and Muslim population share are close to each other.

**Table 5 Population Share in Border Districts of West Bengal**

	2011		2001-2011	
	Share of Hindu	Share of Muslim	Share changes in Hindus	Share Changes in Muslims
Darjeeling	74.00	5.69	-2.91	0.38
Jalpaiguri	81.51	11.51	-1.79	0.66
Koch Bihar	74.06	25.54	-1.45	1.30
Uttar Dinajpur	49.31	49.92	-2.41	2.56
Dakshin Dinajpur	73.55	24.63	-0.47	0.61
Maldah	47.99	51.27	-1.29	1.55
Murshidabad	33.21	66.27	-2.71	2.60
Nadia	72.15	26.76	-1.60	1.34
North 24 Pgs	73.46	25.82	-1.78	1.60
South 24 Pgs	63.17	35.57	-2.69	2.33

Source: Census of India 2011, Data Calculated by author

Population share change from 2001 to 2011 shows that in the entire border districts, Hindu population share is decreasing while Muslim population share is increasing. Hindu population share is decreasing highest at the Darjeeling district while lowest at Dakshin Dinajpur. While Population share change for Muslim is highest in Murshidabad district followed by Uttar Dinajpur and South 24 pgs.

**Table 6 Size of the Muslim Population in Different Decades**

Year	Percentage of Muslim Population	Change of Percentage Share	Year	Percentage of Muslim Population	Change of Percentage Share
1951	19.85	----	1991	23.61	2.10
1961	20	0.15	2001	25.25	1.64
1971	20.46	0.46	2011	27.01	1.76
1981	21.51	1.05	2021	----	-----

Source: Census of India, 1951-2011, Data calculated by author

It's imperative to see the size of the Muslim population and its change of share over the years. At the time of independence size of the Muslim population was only 19.85 percent and over 7 decades it increased only 7.16 percentages. Share change is not uniform over the 7 decades. In 1991 share change of Muslim population is more than 2 percent because the growth rate of that particular decade is very high i.e. 3.68. What is remarkable is that Muslim population growth rate is declining but the change in percentage share over the last few decades is not decreasing sharply.

### Some Determinants of Population Growth

Direct cause of population growth is higher fertility and in migration in any area. Higher fertility and low mortality depends on social, economic and even cultural factors. Scholars identified three parallel strategies to promote the transition from high to low fertility. Firstly, emphasize universal

basic education to bring fertility increasingly into the realm of conscious choice. Modern mass media may also exert an important influence. These strategies are also likely to bring about attitudinal and cultural change. Secondly, Pursue changes in socioeconomic variables, which include child labour, female participation in the modern-sector labour force, support in old age, etc. Changes in the 'value' of children also impact on couples' desired family size. Lastly, invest in reproductive health and the availability of family planning services, including maternal and child health programmes that reduce infant mortality. Help women match their desired and actual number of children by focusing on the unmet need for family planning. In West Bengal the second largest minority population is backward compared to the other minority groups like Christian, Buddhist and Sikh. Number of socio-economic variable is important for higher population growth.

**Table 7 Some Indicators and Muslim Population Growth Rate**

Districts	FLR	FWPR	DR	Districts	FLR	FWPR	DR
Darjiling	79.92	22.21	2.61	Nadia	75.58	22.00	2.76
Jalpaiguri	73.79	19.71	2.47	North 24 Pgs	84.95	16.75	2.84
Koch Bihar	75.49	18.12	2.64	Hugli	82.55	17.76	2.83
Uttar Dinajpur	60.13	17.56	3.11	Bankura	70.95	21.00	2.98
Dakshin Dinajpur	73.86	23.39	2.74	Puruliya	65.38	16.91	3.16
Maldah	62.71	29.04	2.92	Haora	83.85	18.06	2.68
Murshidabad	67.53	43.67	2.69	South 24 Pgs	78.57	18.62	2.71
Birbhum	70.9	20.57	2.75	W. Medinipur	79.04	18.60	2.80
Bardhaman	77.15	16.24	2.62	E. Medinipur	87.66	13.81	2.68

Source: Calculated by author

**FLR**-Female Literacy Rate, **FWPR**- Female Work Participation Ratio, **DR**- Dependency Ratio

Some of the popular indicator of population growth is the female literacy rate, female work participation and dependency ratio. It is evident from the table 7 that female literacy is very low in those districts where population growth is very high. Female work participation is very high in the backward districts. It helps to make low dependency ratio in those backward district. It is important to note that these backward districts are not urban in nature so higher number of rural female participating in the work.

## CONCLUSION

The paper basically tries to dissect the reality of Muslim population growth in the state and explore the popular concept of infiltration of Muslim population from neighbouring country Bangladesh. There are some undeniable facts like Muslim population growth rate is higher both in border and non border districts of the state, though border districts growth rate is comparatively higher than non border districts. It is worthwhile to note that Hindu population growth rate is also very high in the border districts. Muslim population growth rate is higher in border towns compare to Hindu population growth rate. Siliguri is a town where both Hindu and Muslim population growth rate is 7.58 and 6.99 respectively. Muslim Populations presence in the urban areas of border and non border districts is high compare to the Hindu majority it is because of their lack of land holding in the rural area. Significantly enough urban areas of Malda districts Muslim population growth rate is more than 62 percent. Such unusual growth in the urban area needs ground verification. In terms

of share, Muslim population is also increasing in all the border districts of the state while share of Hindu population decreases across the entire border district.

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