

**ANALYSIS OF SPATIO-TEMPORAL PATTERN OF POPULATION
BY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN WEST BENGAL**

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to highlight the spatio-temporal analysis of religious communities in the state of West Bengal. District level secondary data have been used for Census period 1951-2001. According to Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal religious communities are categorized as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Others and Religion not stated. The predominant religious communities are Hindus and Muslims. Dynamics of these predominant religious communities are analyzed in terms of spatial as well as temporal scale. Apart from these two, others are in negligible portion to total population. An important observation is that Buddhists, Christians, Others and Religion not stated are to some extent concentrated on ecologically harsh conditions such as Darjeeling Himalayas (including Duars), Rarh Plain and Purulia Uplands. On the other hand, Hindus and Muslims occupy the Barind Tract, Moriband and Proper Delta.

KEYWORDS: Religious communities, Spatio-temporal analysis, Physiographic divisions

INTRODUCTION

Religion differs from one place to another, producing variations that can be mapped as culture regions. These spatial variations are produced by cultural diffusion and reflect a complex interplay among religions, environment and other aspects of culture. There are two broad categories of religion. The first includes universalizing religions, those that actively seek new members and have as a goal the conversion of all humankind. Contrasted to universalizing religions are ethnic religions, each of which is identified with some particular ethnic or tribal group and they don't want to be converted. Both functional and formal religious culture regions can be identified (Jordon & Rowntree, 1990: 189-190). In the present study, a religious trait has been that is population by religious communities (persons of different religious faith living in an area).

OBJECTIVE

The paper attempts to highlight the spatio-temporal analysis of religious communities in the state of West Bengal, India.

AREA UNDER STUDY

West Bengal, a state of united India is diversified by ecological settings in general and by physiographic distinctiveness in particular. Latitudinal and longitudinal extension of West Bengal are respectively 21°38' N - 27°10'N and 85°50'E - 89°50'E (approximate). For the purpose of a regionalization, following physiographical subdivision (WB Administrative Atlas, 2001:25-26; Singh, 1992:256-259, 295-298, 652-655) of West Bengal are taken into consideration.

- Darjiling Himalayas including Duars of Jalpaiguri comprise the Submontane Tract (Eastern Himalaya).
- Barind Tract includes older alluvium tract of Northern Plain of Kochbihar, North and South Dinajpur and Maldah

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- Moribund Delta (Nadia and Murshidabad) have a land of dead and decaying Rivers (Bhagairathi-Hoogli).
- Delta Proper includes Active Delta of North and South 24 Parganas where delta building is still active and Mature Delta of Kolkata, Haora, Hoogly and Burdwan, low-lying area where the gradient is rather imperceptible.
- Rarh Plain includes Western margin of delta i.e. Bankura, Birbhum and Medinipur where lateritic alluvial landscape along with coastal scenario at Digha beach has developed.
- Puruliya Uplands includes Chhotanagpur Highlands, where the Gondwanas and Lateritic Alluvium are found.

METHODOLOGY

District level secondary data have been used for Census period 1951-2001. According to Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal (Census of India, 2001) religious communities are categorized as Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Others and Religion not stated. This categorization is continued in the present study. The conceptual framework followed in the study is given in table 1.

TABLE 1: CATEGORIES OF RELIGION

Religions	Religious groups in World*	Persons of different religious faith live in West Bengal**	
Universalizing	Christianity, Islam, Buddhism	Christians, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists	Monotheistic
Ethnic	Judaism, Hinduism, Animism	Hindus	Polytheistic

Source: *Jordon & Rowntree, 1990: 189-190; **Census of India, 2001

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The predominant religious communities are Hindus and Muslims (Table 2). Dynamics of these predominant religious communities are analyzed in terms of spatial as well as temporal scale (Figure 1).

Apart from these two, others are in negligible portion to total population. An important observation is that Buddhists, Christians, Others and Religion not stated are to some extent concentrated on ecologically harsh conditions such as Darjeeling Himalayas (including Duars), Rarh Plain and Puruliya Uplands. On the other hand Hindus and Muslims occupy the Barind Tract, Moribund and Proper Delta.

Domination of followers of Hindu religion compared to followers of Islam is found in the Puruliya Uplands, Darjiling Himalayas including Duars and the Rarh Plain while the opposite trend is seen in the in the Moribund and Proper Delta together with Barind Tract. In the perspective of the ecological dimension of this spatial pattern, it is seen that the ecologically less favourable tracts are dominated by Hindu population while in the ecologically more favourable tracts (fertile alluvial soil, topography and moisture availability), the proportion of the followers of Islam and Hinduism are broadly the same.

One of the factors of this trend could be migration following the partition of India and the Indo Bangladesh war.

However, the proportion of the followers of Islam to that of the followers of Hinduism over the period under consideration remains the same ruling out the role of migration as a determinant of this spatial pattern of distribution. Christians and Buddhists (5 percent and 4 percent of total population respectively) are found in region classified as Darjiling Himalayas including Duars; elsewhere Christians constitute less than 1 percent of the total population.

This could be explained in terms of the influence of Christian Missionaries and the geographical contiguity of the region to the Buddhism dominated country of Tibet. People belonging to the group of 'Other Religions', are found in perceptible numbers in the Rarh Plains and Puruliya Uplands. This could be explained in terms of the domination of tribal population in this area which is geographically contiguous to the tribal state or region of Jharkhand.

TABLE 2: PHYSIOGRAPHIC REGIONS AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Micro Regions*	Name of Districts *	Dominating Religious Communities**			
		First	Second	Third	Forth
Darjiling Himalayas including Duars	Darjiling, Jalpaiguri	Hindus (81%)	Muslims (9%)	Christians (5%)	Buddhists (4%)
Barind Tract	Maldah, Kochbihar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur	Hindus (60%)	Muslims (39%)	Christians (0.47%)	Others (0.35%)
Moribund Delta	Murshidabad, Nadia	Hindus (53%)	Muslims (47%)	Christians (0.41%)	Others (0.07%)
Proper Delta	Burdwan, Haora, Hoogly, Kolkata, South 24 Parganas, North 24 Parganas	Hindus (76%)	Muslims (23%)	Christians (0.38%)	Others (0.27%)
Rarh Plain	Birbhum, Bankura, Medinipur	Hindus (81%)	Muslims (15%)	Others (3.26%)	Christians (0.20%)
Puruliya Uplands	Puruliya	Hindus (83%)	Others (9%)	Muslims (7%)	Christians (0.28%)

Source: *Census of India (2001) & **WB Administrative Atlas (2001)

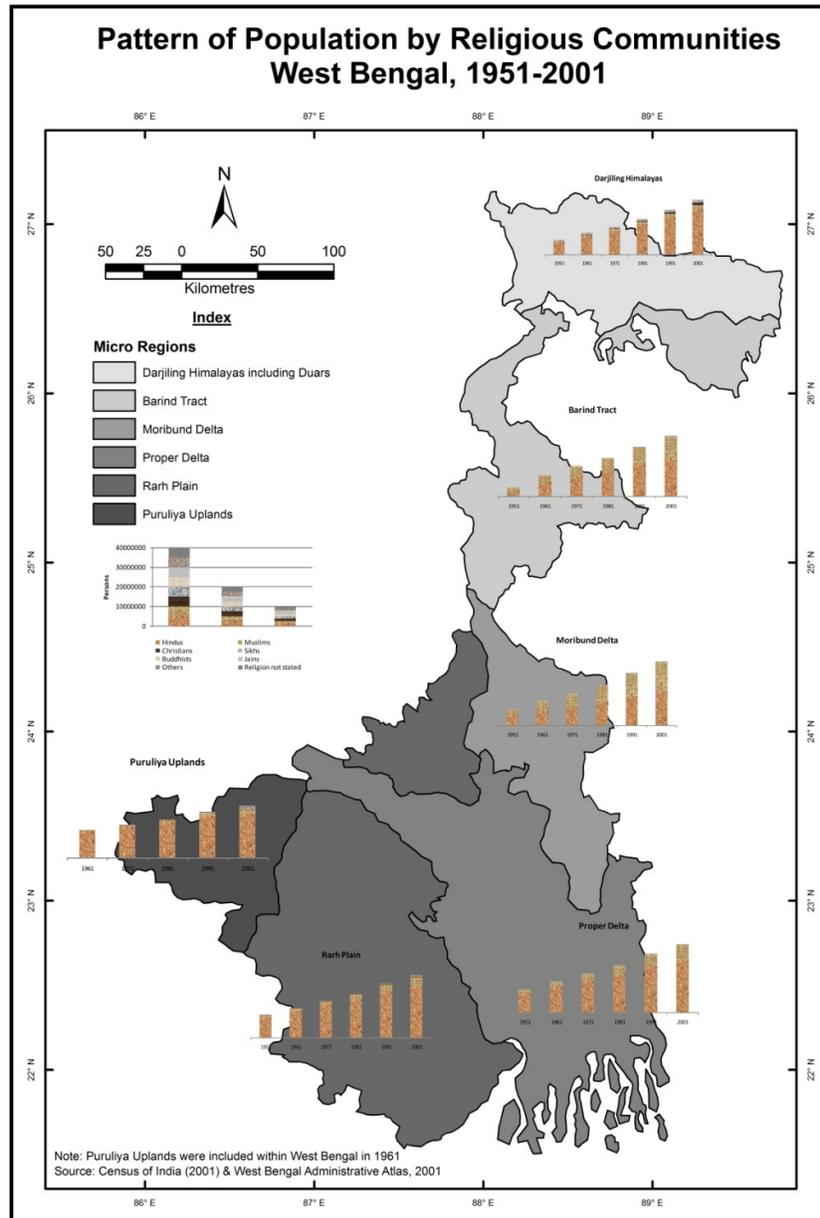


Figure 1

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The spatio-temporal distribution of people belonging to different religious communities reflects the legacy of historical factors. This is particularly evident from the data from Darjiling Himalayas, Moribund and Proper Delta and Barind Tract. These four regions served as the corridor of movement of men and material. The Darjiling Himalayas has been the corridor for movement from the smaller Himalyan kingdoms and buffer states

while the Moribund and Proper Delta and Barind Tract, topographically served as the corridor of movement of men and material to eastern India, came under the influence of Muslim rulers of north-western India who attempted to expand their territories eastward. The indigenous population of the areas (Rarh Plain and Puruliya Uplands) lying beside this corridor remained unaffected by the influence of acculturation by outside forces.

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