

The continuing decline of Hindus in Kerala

Kerala—like Assam, West Bengal, Purnia and Santhal Pargana region of Bihar and Jharkhand, parts of Western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Mewat of Haryana and Rajasthan, and many of the States in the northeast—has seen a drastic change in its religious demography in the Census period, beginning from 1901. The share of Indian Religionists in Kerala, who are almost all Hindus, has declined from nearly 69 percent in 1901 to 55 percent in 2011, marking a loss of 14 percentage points in 11 decades.

Unlike in the other regions mentioned above, in Kerala, both Christians and Muslims have considerable presence and both have gained in their share in this period. Of the loss of 14 percentage points suffered by the Indian Religionists, 9.6 percentage points have accrued to the Muslims and 4.3 to the Christians. Christians had in fact gained 7 percentage points between 1901 and 1961; after that they have lost about 3 percentage points, with the rapid rise in the share of Muslims in the recent decades.

This large rise in share of Muslims has taken place even though they are not behind others in literacy, urbanisation or even prosperity. Notwithstanding the fact that they equal others in these parameters, and their absolute rate of growth is fairly low, the gap between their growth and that of others remains very wide. It is wider than, say, in Haryana, where growth rates are high and literacy levels are low. Kerala, thus, proves that imbalance in growth of different communities does not disappear with rising literacy and lowering growth rates, as is fondly believed by many. During 2001-11, Muslims in Kerala have grown by 12.8 percent, while Hindus have grown by 2.2 and Christians by 1.4 percent. Such is the yawning and persistent gap between the Muslims and others.

Christians and Muslims are concentrated in South and North Kerala, respectively. The share of Muslims has grown in both parts and Indian Religionists have lost in both. However, the decline of the latter has been more pronounced in North Kerala, where their share has fallen from 69.1 percent in 1901 to 50.7 percent in 2011. Of this loss of more than 18 percentage points, 14 have been lost after 1951. Since 1951, Muslims have gained by 12 percentage points, and Christians by more than 2 percentage points.

Religious Demography of Kerala

Population of Kerala in 2011 is 3.34 crores. Of these, 1.83 crore are Hindus, 88.7 lakh Muslims, and 61.4 lakh Christians. Besides these three, the only significant numbers are in the category of 'Religion Not Stated', a total of 88 thousand persons have been counted thus; their number in 2001 was only 25 thousand. The numbers under RNS have

	2001	2011	%GR	%Share
Total	3,18,41,374	3,34,06,061	4.91	100.00
Hindu	1,78,83,449	1,82,82,492	2.23	54.73
Muslim	78,63,842	88,73,472	12.84	26.56
Christian	60,57,427	61,41,269	1.38	18.38
Sikh	2,762	3,814	38.09	0.01
Buddhist	2,027	4,752	134	0.01
Jain	4,528	4,489	-0.86	0.01
ORP	2,256	7,618	238	0.02
RNS	25,083	88,155	251	0.26

increased considerably in all districts of Kerala, but their largest concentration in 2011 is in Thiruvananthapuram; fully one-quarter of the RNS have been counted in this district, and of these, more than 13 thousand are in the capital city.

High Presence of both Muslims and Christians

The religious demography of Kerala is marked by high presence of both Muslims and Christians. The share of Muslims in the State at 26.6 percent is the fourth largest in the country after Jammu & Kashmir (68.3%), Assam (34.2%) and West Bengal (27.0%), if we do not count the tiny Union Territory of Lakshadweep, where Muslims form 96.6 percent of the population. The share of Christians in the State at 18.4% is the highest outside the northeast; about 22 percent of all Christians in the country are in Kerala. Later we shall see that though there was a significant presence of Christians and Muslims in Kerala already in 1901, there has been a large accretion to the share of the former in the pre-Independence period and to that of the latter in the six decades since 1951.

Widening gap between the growth of Muslims and Others

The most remarkable feature of the Religion Data of Census 2011 for Kerala is the extraordinarily wide gap between the growth of Muslims and others. During 2001-11, Hindus and Christians have recorded decadal growth of 2.23 and 1.38 percent respectively, while the Muslims have grown by 12.84 percent. The growth of Muslims has thus been nearly 6 times

Decadal Growth in Percent			
Decade	H	C	M
1951-61	23.23	26.95	27.50
1961-71	23.35	25.28	37.49
1971-81	16.70	16.46	29.96
1981-91	12.62	7.41	25.49
1991-01	7.29	7.75	15.84
2001-11	2.23	1.38	12.84

that of Hindus and more than 9 times that of Christians. As a consequence of this differential growth, the share of Muslims in the state has increased by 1.84 percentage points at the cost of both Hindus and Christians who have lost 1.44 and 0.64 percentage points, respectively, from their share in 2001.

As seen in the Table here, Muslims have always been growing faster than the Hindus and Christians since 1951. But the gap between their growth and that of the other two major communities has been consistently widening. This is because the growth rates of Hindus and Christians began to decline fairly sharply after 1971. Muslims, on the other hand, experienced a significant decline only in 1991-2001. During 2001-11, there has been some decline in their growth, but the decadal growth rate of Hindus and Christians has dropped precipitously, leaving a very wide gap between the Muslims and others.

The growth gap is not related to literacy or urbanisation

Demographic parameters of different communities in Kerala, 2011

	Lit	Lit-M	Lit-F	Ch/100	WPR-M	WPR-F	GR	UR
Hindu	93.49	95.85	91.33	8.93	56.32	23.04	1,077	48.54
Muslim	93.29	95.85	91.08	14.38	44.51	6.76	1,125	52.08
Christian	96.49	97.28	95.75	8.91	53.85	20.82	1,051	38.85

Lit: Literacy ratio in percent; Lit-M: Male Literacy; Lit-F: Female Literacy; Ch/100: 0-6 yr population per 100 of total population; WPR-M: Work Participation Rate for Men, WPR-F: for Women; GR: Gender Ratio, Women per thousand men; UR: Urban Ratio, urban persons per hundred of population.

As seen in the Table above, the growth gap between Muslims and others is not related to literacy or urbanisation. Male and female literacy rates for Muslims are almost exactly equal to those for Hindus; these are slightly higher for Christians. Urbanisation ratio is the highest for Muslims and the lowest for Christians. Yet, the number of children of age 0-6 years per hundred of population is 14.4 for Muslims as compared to 8.9 for both Hindus and Christians. And, notwithstanding the high literacy rate of Muslim women,

their work participation rate is as low as 6.76 percent. These low work participation rates of women and high number of children percent of the population among Muslims seem related to the internal dynamics of the community rather than to any external parameters.

The gap in growth has widened even when absolute growth rates are declining

Kerala is an example of how the gap between the growth rates of different communities can remain high or even widen when the absolute growth rates decline. The decadal growth of Muslims has indeed declined considerably since 1971. But the decline has been far slower than that of the other communities subjected to similar influences of education, modernity and prosperity. Therefore, the gap in growth of Muslims and others has only widened. This gap is likely to remain rather wide even after the population of Kerala stops growing or even begins to decline, which is likely to happen by the next decade.

The gap in growth between Muslims and others in Kerala is wider than in Haryana

In an [earlier post](#) (XIV: Age Pyramids), we have given the age-pyramids of Muslims, Hindus and Christians in Kerala and several other States including Haryana. We indicated there that the pyramids for both Hindus and Christians have a narrow base and wider cohorts in the higher age groups. Both pyramids indicate populations whose growth has been slowing down for several years. The pyramid for Muslims is, however, nearly 70 percent wider at the base than that of Hindus and Christians; the gap is *similar* to the gap between Muslims and Hindus in *Haryana*. Haryana is on the other end of the scale from Kerala in terms of demographic ‘advance’ as indicated by parameters like female literacy and children percent of population. The example of Kerala shows that the stage of advance in these and similar parameters has little effect upon the gap in growth of different communities and upon the evolving demographic imbalance between them.

The longer term growth of both Christians and Muslims

We have so far looked at the higher growth of Muslims during the last decade and in the relatively recent period of the previous few decades. In the longer term, however, both Christians and Muslims have significantly increased their share in Kerala at the cost of Indian Religionists, nearly all of who are Hindus. In the following, we look at this longer-term picture in some detail.

Christians and Muslims have shared the century between them

In the Table here we have compiled the share of Muslims and Christians in Kerala since 1901. The data shows an interesting pattern. In the first half of the century, in fact up to 1961, the share of Christians in the population kept rising consistently from decade to decade. They had a share of 13.8 percent at the beginning of the century in 1901; it reached 21.2 percent in 1961, marking a rise of more than 7 percentage points in six decades. After 1961, it was the turn of Muslims to rise. Their share had remained nearly stable between 17 and 18 percent till then; in the next five decades it has risen by nearly 9 percentage points to reach 26.6 percent in 2011. In these five

	Share of different Communities		
	%M	%C	%IR
1901	17.28	13.82	68.91
1911	17.68	15.41	66.91
1921	17.43	17.64	64.93
1931	17.08	19.52	63.40
1941	17.08	20.52	62.40
1951	17.53	20.86	61.62
1961	17.91	21.22	60.87
1971	19.50	21.05	59.45
1981	21.25	20.56	58.18
1991	23.33	19.32	57.35
2001	24.70	19.02	56.28
2011	26.56	18.38	55.05

decades, Muslims have added more than 1.75 percentage points to their share in every decade except 1991-2001, when the accretion was of somewhat less than 1.5 percentage points. Christians, meanwhile, have lost about 3 percentage points from their share; they formed 21.2 percent of the population in 1961, their share in 2011 is 18.4 percent.

Indian Religionists have continued to decline throughout this period

Indian Religionists have continued to lose their share of the population throughout this period; they had a share of 68.9 percent in 1901, they form only 55.0 percent now. They have thus lost nearly 14 percentage points from their share in the 11 decades since 1901. There has been no let up in their decline in this whole period. The decline of 1.2 percentage points that they have experienced during the last decade is comparable to the quantum of decline they have experienced in every decade since 1921; in the first two decades of that century, the decline was higher, at about 2 percentage points per decade.

Distribution and Growth of Muslims and Christians in different regions of Kerala

Kerala is historically divided into two distinct regions: North Kerala, known as Malabar, comprising the current districts of Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Malappuram and Palakkad; and, South Kerala, generally known as Travancore-Cochin and comprising Thrissur, Ernakulam, Idukki, Kottayam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram districts. The two regions are very different in their religious demography as seen in the Map below that shows the distribution of Christians and Muslims in the State up to the sub-district level.

Muslims are concentrated in North and Christians in South Kerala

Of the total of 88.7 lakh Muslims in the State in 2011, 63.8 lakh are in North Kerala and only about 25 lakh in South Kerala. On the other hand, of 60.6 lakh Christians in the State, 52.9

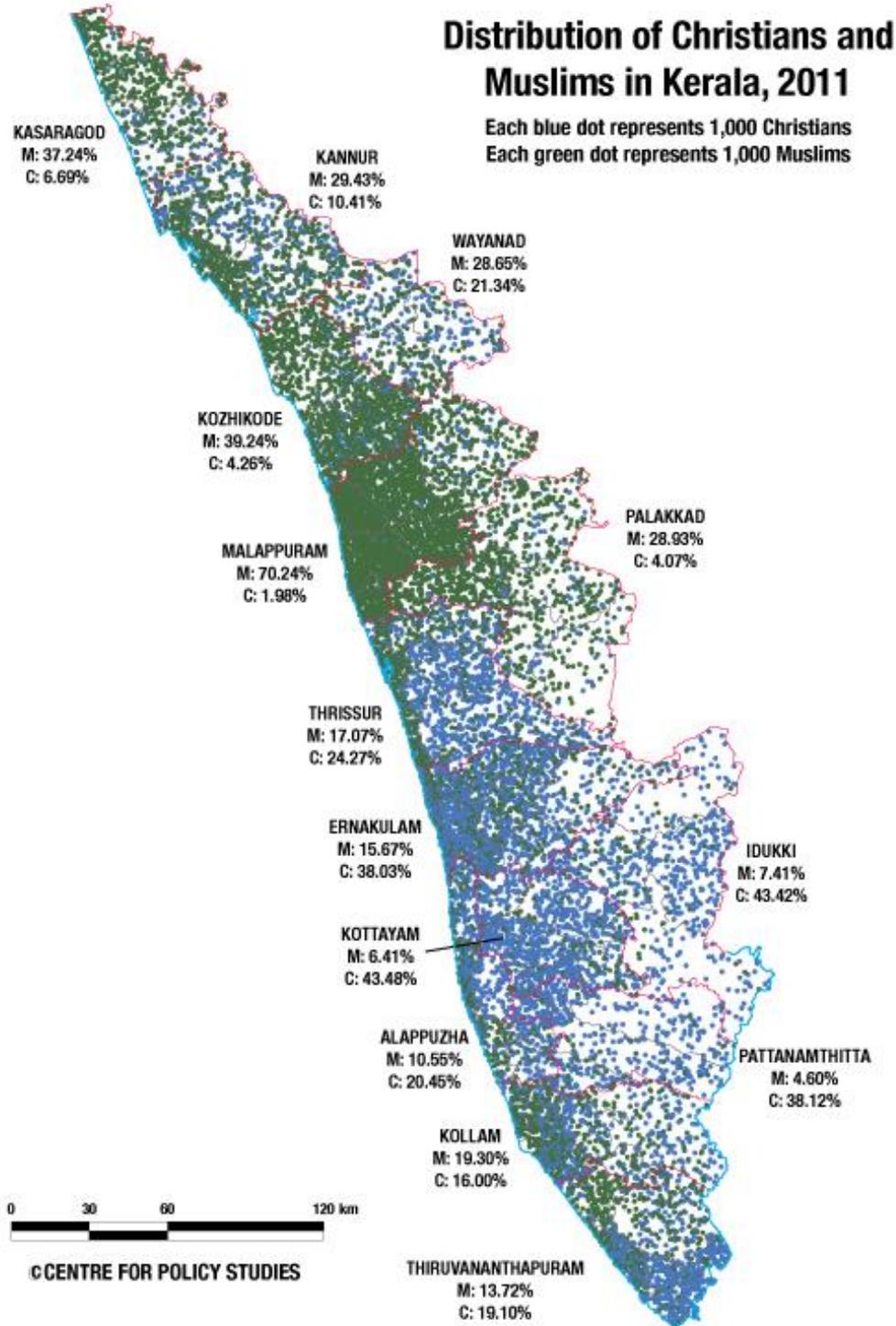
Christians and Muslims in North and South Kerala					
	Muslims	Christians	%M	%C	
Kerala	88,73,472	61,41,269	26.56	18.38	
N. Kerala	63,76,497	8,51,902	43.50	5.81	
S. Kerala	24,96,975	52,89,367	13.32	28.21	

lakh are in South Kerala and only 8.5 lakh are in North Kerala. Muslims form 43.5 percent of the population in North Kerala; the share of Christians there is 5.8 percent. Indian Religionists in this region are now barely above the fifty percent mark. In South Kerala, Christians form 28.2 percent of the population and Muslims have a share of 13.3 percent. Indian Religionists in this region have a somewhat better share of 58.5 percent.

Presence of Muslims and Christians in the two regions has a historical background

Though some Christians and Muslims have been there in Kerala since several centuries, large-scale conversion to Christianity and Islam has happened in relatively recent period. Large numbers were forcibly converted to Islam by Tipu Sultan, when he invaded and conquered the region in the late eighteenth century. Conversion of South Kerala to Christianity happened even later, in the course of the nineteenth century when Travancore and Cochin States came under British control and benignly allowed the spread of English education and Christianity in their domains.

But both Christianity and Islam have expanded considerably during the twentieth century. The rise in their share of the population in southern and northern regions during this period has been much more precipitous than what is indicated by the rise in their aggregate shares in the whole of Kerala, as we see below.



Growth of Christianity and Islam in South Kerala

Christians form 28 percent of the population of South Kerala

In 1901, about a quarter of the population of South Kerala was Christian; their share reached near 32 percent in 1941. After 1941, the share of Christians in this region began to decline and has fallen to 28.2 percent in 2011.

The rise in their share is mitigated by their migration to North

Initially, this decline in the share of Christians was partly due to the migration of Christians, especially Syrian Christians, from South Kerala to the hill areas of North Kerala to set up farms and plantations in the forests there. This migration began from around 1931, but became significantly large after 1941, leading to a considerable decline in the share of Christians during 1941-51. Their share in North Kerala in this period registered a corresponding rise, as seen in the Table below; and, their share in the whole of Kerala kept rising up to 1961.

Muslims have also gained by 7 percentage points

The decline of Christians in South Kerala is to be attributed partly to the higher growth of Muslims. The rise of in the share of Muslims in 1941-51 was probably because of the out-migration of Christians. But the consistently high rise after 1961 is related, in large part, to their relatively higher growth. From 1961 onwards, the share of Christians begins declining both in South and North Kerala, and that of Muslims begins rising in both. In South Kerala, the share of Muslims has grown from less than 7 percent in 1901 to 13.3 percent in 2011; it was only 9.5 percent in 1951.

Indian Religionists suffer a loss of 10 percentage points in their share

The share of Indian Religionists in South Kerala has declined by more than 10 percentage points in this period, from 68.7 percent in 1901 to 58.5 percent in 2011.

Share of different Communities
in South Kerala

	%C	%M	%IR
1901	24.28	6.98	68.73
1911	26.30	7.61	66.09
1921	29.07	7.58	63.35
1931	30.88	7.74	61.37
1941	31.81	7.89	60.30
1951	31.04	9.49	59.47
1961	30.80	9.40	59.80
1971	30.29	10.48	59.24
1981	29.79	11.32	58.88
1991	28.59	11.98	59.43
2001	28.48	12.60	58.93
2011	28.21	13.32	58.47

Growth of Christianity and Islam in North Kerala

Muslims have gained by 12 percentage points

In North Kerala, there were few Christians in 1901. Muslims at that time formed nearly 30 percent of the population. Since then, their share has been growing consistently from decade to decade, excepting a slight decline in 1941-51, but the rise has been precipitously sharp after Independence and Partition. Muslims now form 43.5 percent of the population of North Kerala; there has been an accretion of nearly 14 percentage points to their share since 1901. Of this, 12 percentage points have been added after 1951.

Share of different Communities
in North Kerala

	%C	%M	%IR
1901	1.14	29.75	69.11
1911	1.33	30.70	67.98
1921	1.35	31.48	67.17
1931	1.45	31.94	66.61
1941	1.33	32.70	65.97
1951	3.25	31.42	65.33
1961	4.36	32.89	62.75
1971	5.68	34.52	59.80
1981	6.42	36.47	57.11
1991	6.29	39.28	54.44
2001	6.21	41.10	52.69
2011	5.81	43.50	50.68

Christians have added 4.7 percentage points to their share

Christians had a share of somewhat above 1 percent in 1901; and remained at less than 1.5 percent up to 1941. After 1941, their share began rising and it reached up to 6.4 percent in 1981; this was because of the migration of Christians from South Kerala as we have mentioned above; the share of Christians in South Kerala began to decline from then onwards. After 1981, the share of Christians in North Kerala also began declining; now it has come down to 5.8 percent from its peak of 6.4 percent in 1981.

And Indian Religionists have lost by more than 18 percentage points

In the course of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, the share of Christians in North Kerala has risen by 4.7 and that of Muslims by 13.8 percentage points. Indian Religionists have correspondingly lost 18.4 percentage points from their share in the population of North Kerala. For the mainstream religious community of a region to suffer such a loss in a little more than a century is indeed an alarming historical occurrence. It is worth remarking that more than three-quarters of this loss in the share of Indian Religionists has happened in the period following Independence.

Regions of the highest Muslim Concentration

Malappuram is the heartland of Muslims

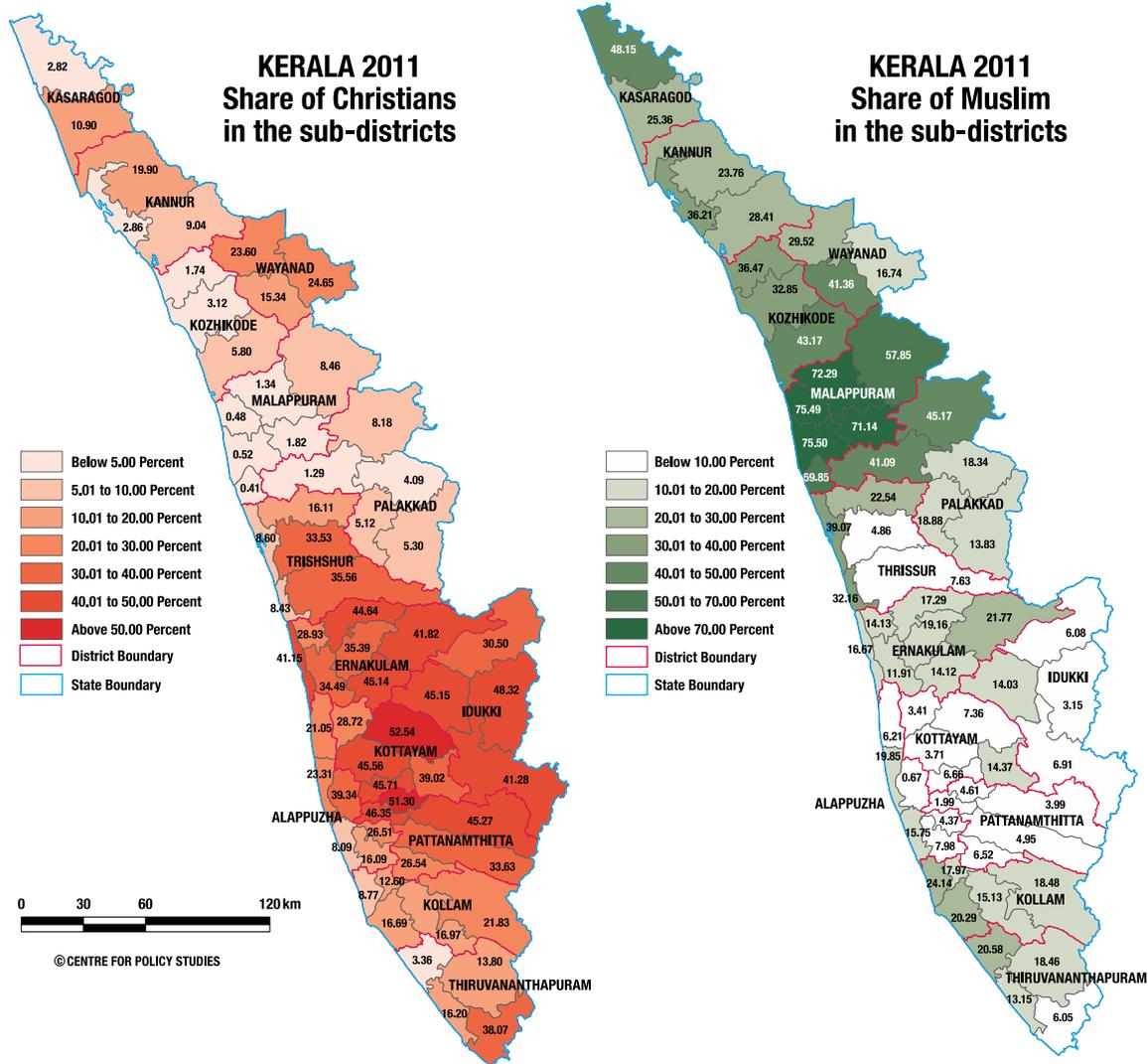
As seen in the Map of the share of Muslims and Christians in Kerala below, Malappuram in North Kerala forms the heartland of Muslims. Of 88.9 lakh Muslims in Kerala, 28.9 lakh are in Malappuram. They form 70 percent of the population of this district, and are in a majority in each of its six sub-districts.

Malappuram was carved out as a separate district in 1969 from Kozhikode and Palakkad and taking some parts of Thrissur. Fortunately, the Census of 1971 gave the religious breakup of the population of the new districts from 1911-1961. From that data, it seems that the growth in the proportion of Muslims in this district has been spectacular after Independence, and particularly after 1961. In 1951, they had a share of 54.3 percent, which was only 2 percentage points above their share of 52.3 percent in 1911. In 2011, the share of Muslims in this district is 70.2 percent, marking an accretion of 16 percentage points in the six decades since Independence.

Pockets of high Muslim presence outside Malappuram

Muslims form a majority in every sub-district of Malappuram. But they also have a share of more than 40 percent in the adjoining sub-districts of Palakkad, Wayanad and Kozhikode districts. In addition they have a near majority in the northernmost sub-district of Kasargod. In this area, which extends into the high Muslim presence region of coastal Karnataka in the north, the growth of Muslims has been extraordinarily high; in the single decade of 2001-11, the share of Muslims in Kasargod district has gone up from 34.31 to 37.24 percent. In the northern Kasargod sub-district, their share has risen from 44.55 to 48.15 percent. During this decade, Muslims in this sub-district have grown by 19.4 percent, compared to the growth of 3.1 percent of Hindus and 2.6 percent of Muslims.

Muslims also have a significant presence in nearly all of the coastal sub-districts of South Kerala, including in Thrissur, Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram districts. Among the coastal sub-districts, it is only in Cherthala of Alappuzha and Neyyattinkara of Thiruvananthapuram that the presence of Muslims is insignificant.



Kottayam-Idukki-Ernakulam region is the heartland of Christians

As seen in the Map above, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam and parts of Pattanamthitta and Thrissur in South Kerala form the heartland of Christians. Of 61.4 lakh Christians in Kerala, 25.9 lakhs are in Kottayam-Idukki-Ernakulam region. The share of Christians in the population of this region had reached a peak of 45.7 percent in 1931. It began declining after that. The decline was partly because much of the migration of Christians to North Kerala originated from this region; and, partly because of the faster growth of Muslims in this and every other region of the State, particularly after 1951. Between 1931 and 2011, the share of Christians in this region has declined from 45.7 to 40.7 percent and that of Muslims has risen from 6.7 to 11.4 percent.

Christians form a majority of 52.5 percent in Meenachil sub-district of Kottayam and of 51.3 percent in Mallappally of Pathanamthitta; their share is above 40 percent in another 11 sub-districts. The latter include: Kottayam and Changanaserry of Kottayam district, Udumbanchola, Thodupuzha and Peerumade of Idukki; Thiruvalla and Ranni of Pathanamthitta and Aluva, Kochi, Muvattupuzha and Kothamangalam of Ernakulam. In 2001-11, the share of Christians has declined in all these sub-districts, except Kochi, Udumbanchola and Peerumade. In Kochi, there has been a marginal rise in their share. In Udumbanchola and Peerumade of Idukki, there has been a substantial accretion of 1.30 and 2.58 percentage points, respectively, to the share of Christians. In Peerumade, there has been some accretion to the share of Muslims also, and the share of Hindus has declined by as much as 3 percentage points. In this sub-district, the absolute number of Hindus has declined from 1.05 lakh in 2001 to 90.5 thousand in 2011. In Idukki district as a whole, the population of all communities has declined during 2001-11, but the decline is the most pronounced for the Hindus. Therefore, the share of both Muslims and Christians has risen in the district while that of Hindus has declined.

Conclusion

1. Kerala is one of the several parts of India, including Assam, West Bengal, Purnia and Santhal Pargana region of Bihar and Jharkhand, parts of Western Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, Mewat of Haryana and Rajasthan, and many of the States in the northeast, whose religious demography has undergone a drastic change in the course of the twentieth century.
2. Unlike the other parts of India in this category, both Christians and Muslims have substantially improved their share in Kerala since 1901.
3. The share of Christians in Kerala had increased from 13.8 percent in 1901 to 21.2 percent in 1961; since then, there has been some decline in their share because of the rapid rise of Muslims. Share of Christians in Kerala now is 18.4 percent.
4. The share of Muslims in Kerala has increased from 17.3 percent in 1901 to 26.6 percent in 2011; much of this accretion has occurred after 1961.
5. With the rise in the share of both Muslims and Christians, the share of Indian Religionists has undergone a decline of nearly 14 percentage points, from 68.9 percent in 1901 to 55.0 percent in 2011. Indian religionists are now reduced to a near minority in North Kerala, while they retain a somewhat better share of 58.5 percent in South Kerala.
6. Growth in the share of Muslims has been rather fast after 1961. There was a sudden spurt in the decadal rate of growth of Muslims during 1961-71. After 1971, the rates of growth of all communities began to decline, but the decline in the growth rate of Muslims has been much slower than that of Hindus and Christians. Consequently, the gap between the growth of Muslims and others has been widening.

7. During 2001-11, Muslims have grown by 12.8 percent, while Hindus have grown by only 2.2 and Christians by 1.4 percent. This gap in growth is wider than even in Haryana.

8. Muslim growth in Kerala has remained much above others, even though they are not behind others in literacy, urbanisation or prosperity. Kerala thus is proof that decline in the growth rates of population because of various factors of development does not by itself lead to restoration of the imbalance of growth between different communities; in fact, it may worsen the imbalance.

9. The imbalance of growth that we see in Kerala is even more pronounced in North Kerala, where Muslims have a presence of 43.5 percent and where the share of Indian Religionists has declined by as much as 18.4 percentage points since 1901.

10. Muslims now form a commanding majority of 70.2 percent in Malappuram of North Kerala; they are in a majority in all sub-districts of this district and have a presence of more than 40 percent in several adjoining sub-districts.

11. Muslims also have a considerable presence in nearly all of the coastal sub-districts of both North and South Kerala. Their presence is particularly high in the northernmost Kasargod sub-district in the district of that name. This district then merges into the high Muslim presence districts of coastal Karnataka in the north. Muslims have a high presence along the whole western coast up to Goa.

12. Christians are concentrated in South Kerala and especially in Kottayam, Idukki, Pathanamthitta and Ernakulam districts. They have a presence of more than 40 percent in thirteen sub-districts of this region and they are in a majority in two of these. The concentration of Christians in this region has been somewhat moderated because of their large-scale migration from this region to the hilly forested parts of North Kerala, from around 1931. Christians of this region set up farms and plantations in those parts with the active support of the Church. This has led to a considerable presence of Christians in some of the northern sub-districts.

13. While both Christians and Muslims have improved their share in different parts of Kerala in the course of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, Indian Religionists have continued to yield demographic space throughout this period. The religion data of 2001-11 indicates that the process of the demographic marginalisation of the Hindus in this strategically important coastal State has not yet stopped and is likely to continue unabated for the next several decades.