

Blinkered Approach to Demography

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Our attention has been drawn to a review article on our book, *Religious Demography of India*, which has appeared in March 20-26 issue of *EPW*. The authors of the review article accuse us of both naiveté and fraud in projecting the data of the relative population of Indian religionists in India. In Table 1 below, we reproduce the data on which our analysis is based. The second column in the table gives the percentage of Indian religionist in the population of India, which includes Indian Union, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The third column records the decline in the proportion of Indian religionists in percentage points. In the fourth column we give the decadal decline in running tri-decennial averages to smoothen out the effect of vicissitudes of data gathering, etc. Incidentally, as the reviewers would know, such smoothening out is what happens in any regression analysis.

May we now invite the reviewers and the readers to carefully inspect the figures

Table 1: Proportion of Indian Religionists in India and its Decline

1901	77.14		
1911	76.40	0.74	
1921	75.30	1.10	0.80
1931	74.75	0.56	0.86
1941	73.81	0.94	0.74
1951	73.09	0.72	0.92
1961	72.00	1.09	1.11
1971	70.48	1.51	1.15
1981	69.63	0.85	1.32
1991	68.03	1.61	

in the Table 1? The data clearly indicate that from 1901 to 1991 the proportion of Indian religionists in the population of India has declined in every decade, and except for one point, the tri-decennial average decline has increased in every decade compared with the previous decade. It obviously indicates that the trend line is not linear. In fact, any unbiased inspection of the data shall lead one to observe that the decline of 0.8 percentage points per decade of the five decades prior to independence, and of 1.26 percentage points of the four decades since independence, is likely to be substantially surpassed during the next few decades. One does not have to be a social scientist versed in the supposedly difficult art of running SPSS packages to come to this conclusion; one only has to be a prudent reasonable person. The projection we have made attempts to capture this reality.

We may also point out that we are not projecting the growth of a population, but the ratio of one particular group in the total population. Available data indicate that the decline in the ratio of Indian religionists relative to others seems to be a secular trend not dependent upon the various parameters the demographers use to project the growth of populations.

If the reviewers were seriously looking at the data, they would have noticed that a major part of the decline in the proportion of Indian religionists in the population of

Table 2: Growth in the Population of Indian Union, Pakistan and Bangladesh

	1901	1951	1991	2050	91/01	50/01
Pakistan	16.58	40.45	122.40	344.17	7.38	20.75
Bangladesh	28.30	44.17	111.46	265.43	3.94	9.36
Indian Union	283.36	361.09	846.30	1572.06	2.99	5.55

Note: The first four columns give populations in millions. Figures for 2050 are the middle estimates of *World Population Prospects, 2000*. The fourth column gives ratios of the populations of 1991 to that of 1901; the last column gives the ratios of populations of 2050 to that of 1901.

India is explained by the differentials in the relative growth of the populations of Indian Union, Pakistan and Bangladesh. As Table 2 below shows, between 1901 and 1991, the population of Pakistan has grown by a factor of 7.4 and that of Bangladesh by 3.9, while the population of Indian Union during the same period has grown by only about three times. The UN projections indicate that the trend is likely to continue well into the 21st century. Going by these projections, in the one and a half century between 1901 and 2050, the population of Pakistan would have grown by nearly 21 times and that of Bangladesh by more than nine times, while that of Indian Union would have grown by around 5.5 times.

It is this kind of gross difference in growth that leads to the conclusions that we have drawn in our book. It is always possible to make any statistical projection look ridiculous; cool-headed observation,

inspection and appreciation of data alone can impart depth to such analysis.

Incidentally, the projection on which the reviewers have spent so much energy, and the criticism of which has taken almost 10 pages of the journal, occupy less than three pages in our book that runs into 380 pages. We stand by our projection. But, there are no projections in the other hundreds of pages of the book; there are only detailed census data with which it would be difficult to quibble. Those pages and pages of data record with meticulous detail how the proportion of Indian religionists in the border regions of India has been declining precipitously. Your reviewers have chosen to close their eyes to that reality. They are also angry that we have dared to bring these facts to light; but why should they expect every one else to adopt the same posture of blindness to inconvenient facts? **[EW]**