

Religion Data of Census 2011: III

Tentative restoration of the balance: the case of Bihar

As we have said earlier there are two major stories emerging from the religion data of Census 2011. The first is the usual story of Muslims considerably improving their share in the population of India, and both Muslims and Christians recording extraordinary growth in specific regions of the country, mostly where they already have significantly high presence. But there is also a second story in the religion data of Census 2011 and it is about an unusual, though yet nascent, recovery of the share of Hindus in parts of India.

The main religious demographic issue in the country still remains the excessively high growth of Muslims and Christians in various regions. If one were to point out the two most significant aspects of the religion data of the latest Census, besides the aggregate increase in the share of Muslims, these shall have to be the unexpected and extraordinary rise of the Muslim share in Assam and the long anticipated, yet unstoppable, expansion of Christianity into Arunachal Pradesh. But, before looking at these issues of obvious national concern, we look at the newer story of the Hindu recovery; and we begin with Bihar, a State that has a fairly high Muslim population, shares borders with Nepal and Bangladesh and has seen a robust rise in the Muslim share for several decades. During 2001-11, Hindus have recorded a higher rate of growth than the Muslims in 15 of the 38 districts and 200 of the 534 sub-districts of the State. This post narrates the story of this tentative restoration of the demographic balance among different communities in Bihar.

Slowing down of the rise in Muslim Share

Muslims have a considerable share of 16.87 percent of the population of Bihar in 2011; but it has increased only by 0.33 percentage points over their share in 2001. During 1991-2001, they registered a much more substantially rise of 0.83 percentage points. The increase was somewhat less during 1981-91 and 1971-81; but in the two decades before that the Muslim share in the State had risen sharply by more than 1 percentage points every decade. The 2011 data thus clearly indicates a sharp slowing down of the process of rise in Muslim share, which has been going on since 1951 and in the course of which the Muslims have added 4.53 percentage points to their proportion in the population.

The process has of course not been reversed, but the slowing down is certainly more significant than what was seen earlier for a couple of decades from 1971 to 1991.

Share of Muslims in Bihar, 1951-2001		
Census Year	Percentage Share	Decadal Increase in Share
1951	12.34	–
1961	13.48	1.14
1971	14.53	1.05
1981	15.09	0.56
1991	15.70	0.61
2001	16.53	0.83
2011	16.87	0.34

Increase in percentage points.

Narrowing of the Growth Gap between Muslims and IR

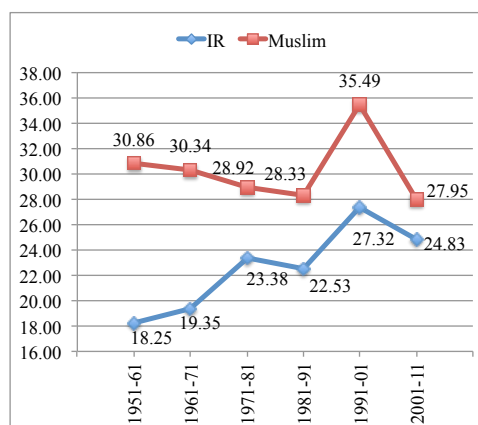
To comprehend the extent of this phenomenon, it is instructive to look at the Growth Rates recorded by Muslims and Indian Religionists (IR, comprising the total population minus Muslims and Christians) in the six decades since Independence. As seen in the Table here, the Normalized Gap between the

Narrowing of the Gap in Growth of IR and Muslims

	IR Growth R (percent)	Muslim Growth R (percent)	GR Gap (Percentage points)	Normalized GR Gap (percent)
1951-61	18.25	30.86	12.61	69.10
1961-71	19.35	30.34	10.99	56.80
1971-81	23.38	28.92	5.54	23.70
1981-91	22.53	28.33	5.80	25.74
1991-01	27.32	35.49	8.17	29.90
2001-11	24.83	27.95	3.12	12.57

growth rate (GR) of Muslims and IR (GR of Muslims minus GR of IR divided by GR of Muslims) was very high in 1951-61 and 1961-71. It declined to around 24 and 26 percent in the next two decades, and rose again to about 30 percent in 1991-2001. In the current decade, the Gap in GR has narrowed to below 13 percent. The decadal Muslim growth has declined sharply from the all time high of 35.5 percent of the previous decade (1991-2001) to about 28 percent in this decade, while the IR rate has declined more moderately from 27.3 to 24.8 percent.

This narrowing of the wide gap between the growth rate of Muslims and Indian Religionists can also be seen in the graph here. In this graph, it is clear that though there was some bridging of the gap during 1971-1991, but it widened again and substantial coming together of the growth rates of the two communities has happened only in this decade. The difference between the average growth rate of Muslims and others in the State is so small that it is natural to expect the Muslim growth to have been slower than others in at least some of the districts. We see below that in as many as 15 of the 38 districts of the State, Muslim share in the population has actually declined, though marginally in most cases, between 2001 and 2011. These are also the districts, where the growth of Hindus has been higher than that of Muslims.

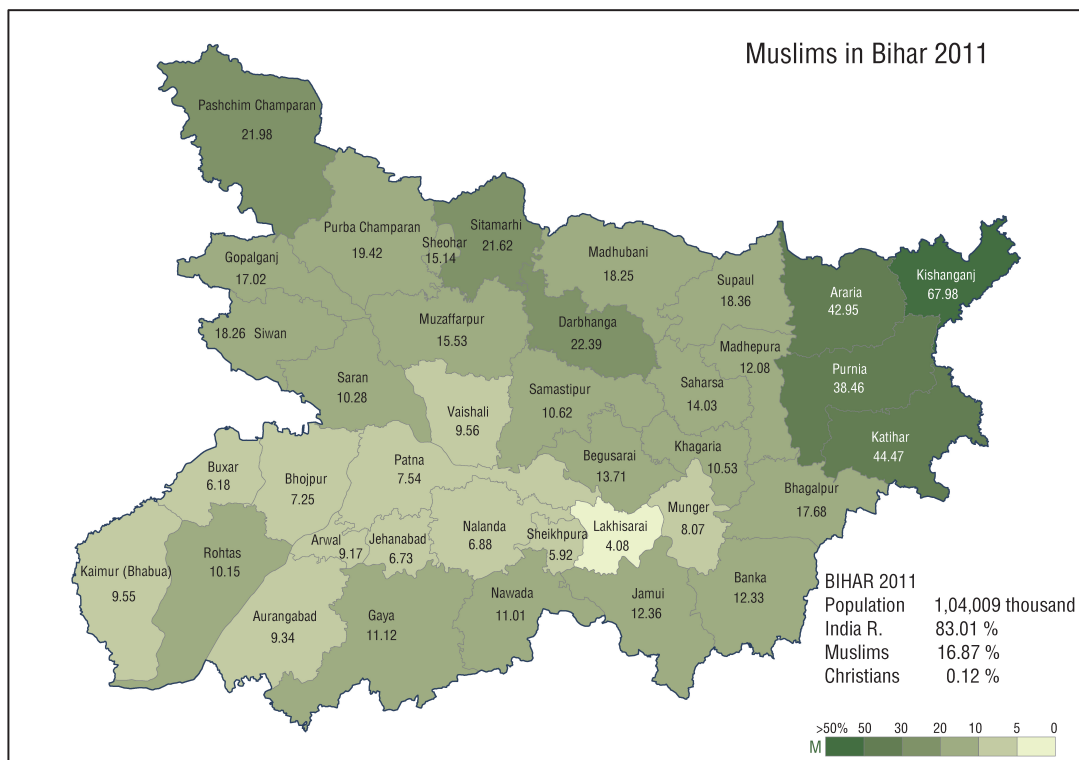
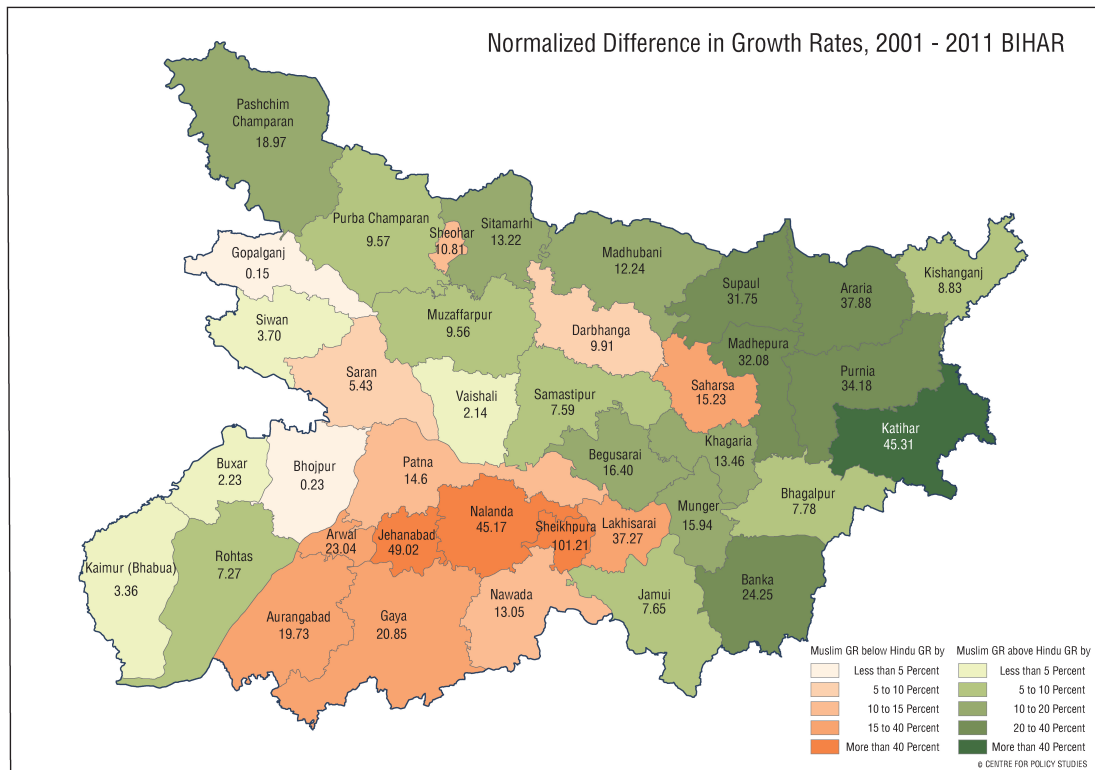


Districts with higher Hindu Growth

We show these 15 districts where Hindus have registered higher growth than the Muslims in Map A. The Map also shows the remaining 23 districts where the Muslim growth has been higher than Hindus and also gives the normalised gap between the Muslim and the Hindu rate of growth for all districts. In Map B, we give the percent share of Muslims in the districts.

Looking at Map A and Map B together, we find that in general the districts where Muslim growth has been lower are also the districts where the share of Muslims in the population is relatively low. On the other hand, the districts where the Muslim share is high are also the districts where Muslim growth has been considerably higher than that of the Hindus. Thus, where Hindus dominate, there the Hindus have generally

improved their share and where Muslims have a high presence, there has been significant accretion to their share. The latter has been happening always, but the former has happened at any significant level only in this decade.



Of the 15 districts where the Hindus have shown a higher rate of growth than the Muslims, 12 are in the contiguous Saran-Bhojpur-Patna-Gaya-Munger region forming almost the entire western half of the State. These 12 comprise Patna and Nalanda carved out from undivided Patna; Gaya, Nawada, Jehanabad, Arwal and Aurangabad carved out of undivided Gaya; Sheikhpura and Lakhisarai components of undivided Munger; Bhojpur component of undivided Shahbad district; and, Saran and Gopalganj components of undivided Saran district. As seen in the Map, the growth advantage in favour of Muslims in the remaining Kaimur and Buxar components of undivided Shahbad and Siwan of undivided Saran is only marginal. In this whole contiguous western region, it is only in Rohtas component of Shahbad and Jamui of Munger that Muslims growth rate is above the Hindus by more than 5 percentage points. Munger, Begusarai and Khagaria of undivided Munger are outside and towards the east of this region of higher Hindu growth.

Growth in the share of Muslims has been relatively slow in the Patna-Gaya region in the past also; but their share has never declined in any of the component district, except in Nalanda, where the proportion of Muslims had declined from 8.52 percent in 1991 to 7.46 percent in 2001 and has now declined further to 6.88 percent. But in the districts of undivided Saran, Bhojpur and Munger region, the share of Muslims had been rising fairly robustly.

The remaining 3 districts, where Hindus have grown at a rate faster than the Muslims are Sheohar component of undivided Muzaffarpur; Darbhanga component of undivided Darbhanga and Saharasa of undivided Bhagalpur-Saharasa region. In this whole region, the Muslim growth in the past has been much higher than the Hindus. Incidentally, the difference between the Muslim and Hindu growth during 2001-2011 of just about 2 percent in favour of Muslims in Vaishali component of Muzaffarur also. Increase in the share of Muslims in this component was not very high in 1991-2001 also.

Among these 15 districts, the phenomenon of higher growth of Hindus as compared to the Muslims has been the most marked in Jehanabad, Nalanda and Sheikhpura; in Sheikhpura, the share of Hindus has increased by 1 percentage point. It must be remarked that the Hindu share has not necessarily increased in all the 15 districts that have recorded a higher growth than that of Muslims; in some of them the Hindu share has declined, but the decline is less than that suffered by the Muslims; in these cases, it is often there has been a considerable increase in the share of the census category of RNS.

From the above analysis, and the Maps, it is clear that in a very large part of Bihar, comprising nearly the entire western half of the State and also certain districts in the eastern half, the nationwide trend of Muslim growth being almost always higher than that of Hindus has been largely reversed. The phenomenon is widespread, and cannot to be taken to be a mere statistical coincidence.

Muslim growth remains robust in Purnia region

As seen in Map A, difference between the growth of Muslims and Hindus remains high in three of the four districts that formed part of the undivided Purnia district, Araria, Purnia and Katihar; the difference is not significantly high in Kishanganj,

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where the proportion of Muslims is the highest at 67.98 percent. The Muslim growth has also been relatively high in the Supaul and Madhepura, in the immediate neighbourhood of this region. The share of Muslims has increased by more than one percentage point only in Araria, Purnia and Katihar. This region forms a contiguous belt with parts of the Santhal Pargana region of Jharkhand; Dakshin Dinajpur-Murshibad-Malda-Birbhum region of West Bengal; and then passing through Bangladesh, with the Goalpara-Kamrup-Darrang-Nagaon region of Assam. In this whole border belt, Muslim growth remains robust and has been unusually high in West Bengal and Assam parts of it. In the Purnia region of Bihar as a whole, Muslim share has increased by 1.63 percentage points, which is only marginally lower than the accretion of 1.80 percentage points in 1991-2001.

Thus, though there in Bihar, as elsewhere in the country, we see a widespread demographic resurgence of Hindus, the situation in the critical regions of the country, especially along and near the borders, remains unchanged. We shall continue exploring both these phenomenon in some depth.

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