

Hindu Demographic Decline In Bengal: Historical And Contemporary Perspectives

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Abstract

The demographic composition of Bengal has undergone noticeable transformations from the decline of the Sena Dynasty (1204 CE). That results in material changes in the relative size and distribution of Bengal's Hindu population. The analysis indicates on historical evolution and contemporary dynamics of Hindu demographic decline in Bengal through an interdisciplinary framework surrounding historical, political, socio-economic, and cultural perspectives. Through census records, historical documents, and secondary sources the research looks into the key factors focusing on demographic change. It also includes the partitions of 1905 and 1947, the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, migration patterns, communal violence, economic conditions, and state policies. Different historical perspectives help explain why the sequence of sustained political deterioration and social instability has influenced population displacement and reshaped the region's demographic situation, the cultural and social impacts of these changes in greater detail. This also encompasses issues such as minority identity, the preservation of heritage, and political representation. Recognizing that demographic transformation is shaped by multiple and interconnected factors.

The available evidence points to competing interpretations and scholarly debates surrounding the causes and consequences of the declining Hindu presence in Bengal. This paper argues that the demographic changes in Bengal cannot be explained by any single factor. Rather, these changes have been brought about by the combined influence of historical events, migration patterns, socio-economic factors, and the political landscape. Looking at these illustrations together provides a clearer understanding of the experiences of Bengal's Hindu communities and the social and political transformation of the region.

Keywords: Bengal, Hindu Demography, Migration, Partition, Demographic decline, Minority Rights, Minority identity, Communal violence, Bangladesh, Sena Dynasty.

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I. Introduction

Bengal is known for its cultural and religious diversity, complex socio-economic and political evolution in history. For centuries upon centuries, this region experiences immense transformations driven by colonial rule, partition, migration, economic shifts, and the emergence of a new nation-state. Historical records and census data indicate that these events have significantly influenced Bengal's demographic structure and shaped the experiences of its diverse religious societies in a different way. Among these changes, the shift in the demographic profile of the Hindu population has drawn significant attention from academic and political circles. Factors that are associated with these changes include the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the Partition of India in 1947, the creation of East Pakistan, the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, patterns of migration, socio-economic transformations, and various incidents of communal tension. The issue is highly significant for understanding matters such as migration, minority rights, identity, political participation, and social harmony. Given the varying interpretations of this subject in academic and political discourse, an evidence-based and interdisciplinary approach is required for its analysis. This type of perspective helps explain how historical events, government policies, economic conditions, and social factors have influenced and shaped demographic trends over time. This study adopts a qualitative historical research approach supported by quantitative demographic data. Primary sources include census reports published by the Governments of India and Bangladesh, while secondary sources consist of scholarly books, journal articles, and archival studies on Bengal's political and demographic history. Historical interpretation is based on a comparative review of differing scholarly perspectives rather than a single explanatory framework. By combining demographic evidence with historical analysis, the study examines long-term population change from the decline of the Sena Dynasty to contemporary Bangladesh and West Bengal.

1204 CE: Bakhtiyar Khalji's Conquest of Nadia and the Beginning of Demographic Change in Bengal

In 1204 CE, the Turkish military commander **Bakhtiyar Khalji** captured **Nadia (Nabadwip)**, which was the capital of the Sena dynasty. Bakhtiyar Khalji's victory was significant not only because it replaced one ruling dynasty with another, but also because it introduced a new political order that connected Bengal more closely with the wider Islamic world. The establishment of Turkish rule created conditions for administrative, economic, and cultural changes that influenced the region over the following centuries. Following the conquest, many parts of Bengal gradually came under the control of rulers connected with the Delhi Sultanate. This marked the beginning of a new phase in Bengal's history, during which Islamic governments became established in the region. Following the conquest, Muslim rule gradually expanded across the region. The establishment of Turkish rule in Bengal marked a significant political transition that reshaped the region's administrative and social structure. Although the conquest did not immediately alter the numerical strength of the Hindu population, it reduced the political influence of Hindu ruling elites and introduced institutions associated with the new Muslim administration. Over the following centuries, these political changes, together with agricultural expansion, migration, religious conversion, and evolving patterns of settlement, influenced Bengal's demographic development. Historians continue to debate the relative importance of each of these factors, suggesting that the changing position of Hindu communities resulted from a combination of political, social, and economic processes rather than a single cause.

II. Demographic Changes In Bengal During And After The Mughal Period

The Mughal period marked an important stage in the demographic history of Bengal. Before the sixteenth century, population growth in the region was relatively slow, and many parts of eastern Bengal remained covered by forests, wetlands, and uncultivated land. The expansion of agriculture during the Mughal period did more than increase food production. It also encouraged the settlement of previously uncultivated regions, creating new social and economic opportunities. Historians disagree, however, on whether the spread of Islam was driven primarily by state influence or by frontier settlement. Eaton (1993) argues that agricultural expansion played the central role, whereas other scholars emphasize social mobility and the influence of Sufi networks. This suggests that religious change in Bengal cannot be explained by a single factor. One of the main reasons for this transformation was the expansion of farming in eastern Bengal. Fertile soil carried by the rivers created new land suitable for cultivation. With the support of the Mughal administration, forests were gradually cleared and new villages were established. As more land became available for farming, families from different parts of Bengal settled in these newly developed areas, leading to a steady increase in population. The Mughal government also promoted agricultural production by encouraging the cultivation of crops such as cotton, sugarcane, indigo, and opium alongside food crops. Bengal's rivers connected villages with important markets across the empire, making it easier for farmers and traders to sell their products. These economic opportunities attracted more settlers and contributed to the growth of rural communities. Religion also formed part of this process. In many newly settled areas, mosques became important centers of village life. Religious leaders and local settlers often worked together in developing agricultural communities. Over time, some local people accepted Islam for a variety of reasons, including religious influence, social connections, economic opportunities, and participation in newly established settlements. Historians generally agree that these conversions occurred through different processes in different regions rather than from a single cause. Eastern Bengal experienced faster population growth than western Bengal during the Mughal period. The fertile river plains, expanding agriculture, and establishment of new villages attracted large numbers of settlers. By the seventeenth century, eastern Bengal had become one of the fastest-growing regions in the Indian subcontinent. The policies of the Mughal rulers varied from one emperor to another. Many Mughal rulers generally allowed different religious communities to continue practicing their own faiths, which helped maintain social stability in Bengal. However, during the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, some imperial policies became more restrictive. The jizyah tax on non-Muslims was reintroduced across much of the empire, and orders were issued against some newly built Hindu temples.

Historical evidence suggests that these policies were not always enforced in Bengal, where many local officials either applied them only partially or ignored them altogether. During the administration of Murshid Quli Khan, Bengal's revenue system was reorganized to increase state income. Though contemporary accounts describe several restrictions affecting some Hindu landholders and officials but these included limits on certain public privileges and strict revenue collection practices. Although Hindus continued to play an important role in revenue administration because of their experience, some historians argue that these policies created unequal treatment in certain areas. By the end of the Mughal period, Bengal had become one of the most populous and economically productive provinces of the empire. The expansion of agriculture, the creation of new villages, the growth of trade, migration, and religious and social changes together reshaped the demographic composition of the region. These developments had lasting effects on Bengal's society and influenced its demographic patterns in the centuries that followed.

British Colonial Period: Census, Political Changes, and Hindu Demography

The British colonial period brought important changes to the social, political, and demographic history of Bengal. During British rule, modern census surveys were introduced, allowing the government to record the size, distribution, and religious composition of the population. The first systematic census was conducted in 1872, followed by regular censuses in later years. These records became an important source for understanding demographic changes in Bengal. The census data show that Bengal's population changed gradually during the twentieth century. In the early decades, high birth and death rates meant that population growth remained slow.

Improvements in public health, sanitation, and medical services later reduced death rates, leading to a steady increase in population. After India's independence, population growth accelerated for several decades before gradually slowing towards the end of the twentieth century. These trends affected all major communities, including Hindus and Muslims, although the pace of change differed across regions because of migration, fertility patterns, and economic conditions. A major political event during British rule was the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The British government divided the province into two administrative units. The western part contained a larger Hindu population, while the eastern part had a Muslim majority. The British administration argued that the division would improve governance, but many Hindu leaders believed it was an attempt to weaken growing nationalist movements by separating communities. The partition led to widespread protests, especially among Hindus in western Bengal. The Swadeshi movement encouraged people to boycott British goods and demand the reunification of Bengal. At the same time, many Muslims in eastern Bengal initially supported the new province because they expected greater political representation and better economic opportunities. These different responses increased political and social divisions between the two communities. In 1911, the British government cancelled the partition and reunited Bengal.

Although the administrative division ended, the political differences that had emerged during this period continued to shape relations between Hindus and Muslims. Community-based political organizations became more influential, and religious identity increasingly affected public life. The formation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906 gave many Muslims a separate political platform, while Hindu organizations also became more active in representing Hindu interests.

British policies such as separate electorates, which allowed different religious communities to vote for their own representatives, further strengthened politics based on religious identity. Over time, these developments reduced cooperation between communities and contributed to growing political polarization. Although the demographic composition of Bengal did not change dramatically because of the 1905 partition itself, the political divisions created during the colonial period influenced later migration, communal relations, and patterns of settlement. These developments became important factors leading up to the Partition of India in 1947, which brought large-scale population movements and permanently changed the demographic structure of Bengal.

The Great Calcutta Killings and the Noakhali Riots (1946): Their Impact on Hindu Demography

The communal violence that occurred in Bengal during 1946 marked a turning point in the region's history. The Great Calcutta Killings in August and the Noakhali riots that began in October took place only a few months before the Partition of India. These events deepened distrust between Hindu and Muslim communities and created widespread fear, leading many families to leave their homes. Historians often view these riots as an important step in the chain of events that eventually resulted in the Partition of 1947.

The Great Calcutta Killings

On 16 August 1946, the All-India Muslim League observed Direct Action Day to press its demand for the creation of Pakistan. In Calcutta, demonstrations quickly turned into large-scale communal violence. Fighting continued for several days, causing extensive loss of life and property. Historical estimates suggest that between 5,000 and 10,000 people were killed, while thousands more were injured. Entire neighbourhoods were damaged, businesses were destroyed, and many families were forced to flee to safer areas. The All-India Muslim League's decision to launch Direct Action, accompanied by Jinnah's declaration that the League had "forged a pistol, and [was] in a position to use it," intensified political tensions across British India. In Bengal, Chief Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy supported the observance of Direct Action Day and declared 16 August 1946 a public holiday. While historians continue to debate the extent of his administrative responsibility for the ensuing violence, there is broad agreement that the provincial government's response proved inadequate and ineffective to prevent the escalation of communal conflict. *The Statesman*, August 1946 reports described Calcutta as "a city in the grip of unprecedented communal violence," illustrating the rapid collapse of public order. In the end, the riots severely weakened the Hindu community of Calcutta.

The Noakhali Riots

Less than two months later, widespread communal violence broke out in the districts of Noakhali and Tippera in eastern Bengal. The disturbances lasted for several weeks and affected many rural villages. Historians identify several contributing factors, including the tense political atmosphere, the memory of the Calcutta riots, economic hardship following the Bengal Famine of 1943, and growing communal polarization. Hindu villages were among the worst affected.

Many homes, shops, and temples were damaged or destroyed, and numerous Hindu families were forced to leave their villages. Primary sources indicate, incidents of forced religious conversion, killings, and sexual violence. The exact number of victims remains disputed, but there is broad agreement that the riots caused widespread suffering and large-scale displacement. Relief work was carried out by several organizations and volunteers. Mahatma Gandhi personally travelled through many affected villages in an effort to restore peace and encourage reconciliation between communities. But his emphasis on forgiveness and return to affected villages placed a disproportionate moral burden on victims who continued to fear for their safety.

Impact on Hindu Demography

The events of 1946 had a lasting effect on the demographic pattern of Bengal. Many Hindus who left areas affected by communal violence did not return to their original homes. Instead, they moved to Calcutta, other parts of western Bengal, Assam, Tripura, or neighbouring regions. Migration continued well beyond 1947. As a result, the Hindu population declined in several parts of eastern Bengal, while the Hindu population in western Bengal grew because of the arrival of refugees. This movement of people changed the religious composition of many districts and created long-term social and economic challenges for both the migrants and the regions that received them. The violence of 1946 also strengthened demands for political separation among many leaders and communities. Growing fear, mistrust, and insecurity made peaceful coexistence increasingly difficult, and these developments contributed to the acceptance of Partition as a political solution. The migration that began during the riots continued for many years after independence, leaving a lasting impact on the demographic history of Bengal. In this way, the Great Calcutta Killings and the Noakhali riots were not only episodes of communal violence but also major turning points that influenced patterns of migration, settlement, and population distribution. Their effects continued well beyond 1946 and played an important role in shaping the demographic landscape of both East and West Bengal.

Hindu Demographic Change During the Pakistan Era in East Bengal (1947–1971)

The Partition of India in 1947 divided Bengal into two parts. West Bengal became part of India, while East Bengal became a province of Pakistan, later known as East Pakistan. This political division brought major changes to the demographic structure of the region. One of the most significant developments was the gradual decline of the Hindu population in East Pakistan over the following two decades. The Partition of India in 1947 triggered one of the largest population movements in South Asian history. Census data from India and Pakistan indicate that millions of people crossed the new international border, with large numbers of Hindus leaving East Bengal for West Bengal and other parts of India (Census of India, 1951; Talbot & Singh, 2009). Chatterji (1994) argues that communal violence, political uncertainty, and concerns over security together encouraged sustained migration beyond the initial years of Partition. Many families moved because of communal violence and insecurity during Partition, while others left later because of concerns about their future, economic opportunities, or family reunification.

Migration occurred in several waves rather than as a single event. The communal riots of 1950 caused another large movement of people across the border. Violence in several districts led many Hindu families to seek safety in India. These events increased the refugee population in West Bengal and further reduced the Hindu share of the population in East Pakistan.

Government policies also influenced migration during this period. Laws relating to abandoned or "enemy" property affected the ownership of land and houses belonging to many Hindus who had left the country or were considered absent. The implementation of these laws created uncertainty over property rights and encouraged additional migration, although the extent of their impact varied across different regions. Political developments also shaped the experiences of minority communities. After Pakistan adopted an Islamic identity, many Hindus felt that their political representation and influence had become more limited. Although Hindus continued to contribute to education, business, agriculture, and public life, many experienced uncertainty about their long-term future. As a result, migration continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and rising political tensions placed additional pressure on cross-border relations. Border restrictions, security concerns, and renewed uncertainty encouraged some Hindu families to migrate to India. By the late 1960s, the Hindu proportion of the population in East Pakistan had declined significantly compared with the years immediately after Partition. The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 created another major humanitarian crisis. Millions of people crossed into India during the conflict, including large numbers of Hindus. Many later returned after Bangladesh became independent, while others settled permanently in India.

The war marked the end of the Pakistan era but also completed another major phase of demographic change in Bengal. Overall, the period from 1947 to 1971 witnessed a continuous decline in the Hindu population of East Pakistan. This change resulted from a combination of migration, communal violence, political developments, property-related policies, economic considerations, and the effects of war. Together, these factors reshaped the demographic composition of the region and had a lasting influence on the social and political history of Bengal.

The Targeting of Hindus During the 1971 Bangladesh (East Bengal) Genocide

During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, the Pakistan Army launched Operation Searchlight and carried out widespread violence across East Pakistan. The Government of Bangladesh states that approximately three million people were killed during the conflict.

Hindus were among the communities most heavily targeted. Numerous historical studies, eyewitness accounts, and official reports describe attacks on Hindu villages, mass killings, sexual violence, forced displacement, and the destruction of homes and places of worship. Large numbers of Hindus fled to India during the conflict. During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, approximately ten million refugees sought shelter in India, creating one of the largest refugee crises of the twentieth century (Government of India, 1972; UNHCR, 2000; Sisson & Rose, 1990). Several scholars note that Hindus were disproportionately represented among these refugees because they were specifically targeted in most of the areas during the conflict (Bass, 2013; Rummel, 1997).

The migration due to violence of 1971 significantly affected the demographic composition of both East Pakistan and neighbouring Indian states, particularly West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam. Many Hindu families who left East Pakistan during the war did not return after Bangladesh became independent. As a result, the Hindu share of the population continued to decline in the years following independence, reflecting the combined effects of wartime violence, displacement, and permanent migration.

Hindu Demographic Change in Bangladesh After Independence (1971–Present)

The independence of Bangladesh on **16 December 1971** created hopes for a democratic and secular nation where people of all religions would enjoy equal rights. The Constitution adopted in **1972** declared secularism as one of the fundamental principles of the new state. Many Hindu families who had taken refuge in India during the Liberation War returned to their homes after independence. However, a considerable number chose to remain in India because they had lost family members, property, or livelihoods during the conflict. In the years following independence, the Hindu population continued to decline as a share of Bangladesh's total population. Census data show that Hindus constituted approximately **13.5% of the population in 1974**. In the following decades, this proportion gradually decreased, reaching **around 12.1% in 1981, 10.5% in 1991, about 9.6% in 2001, 8.5% in 2011, and approximately 7.9% in the 2022 Population and Housing Census**. While the total number of Hindus increased in absolute terms because of overall population growth, their percentage of the national population steadily declined. Several historical developments contributed to this demographic change. One important factor was continued migration to India. Families migrated for different reasons, including economic opportunities, education, family reunification, and concerns about security following periods of communal tension. Migration occurred gradually over several decades rather than through a single event. Property-related laws also influenced demographic patterns. The **Enemy Property Act**, introduced during the Pakistan period in **1965**, remained in effect after independence under a different name, the **Vested Property Act**. Many scholars have argued that the implementation of this law resulted in the loss of land and property belonging to numerous Hindu families, encouraging some to migrate permanently. Efforts to return confiscated property began through the **Vested Property Return Act of 2001**, but implementation has varied across different regions. Bangladesh also experienced periods of political change that affected minority communities. In **1975**, the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was followed by years of military rule. During this period, constitutional changes reduced the emphasis on secularism, and **Islam was declared the state religion in 1988**. Although the Constitution continued to guarantee freedom of religion, these political developments influenced public debate regarding the rights and security of religious minorities. Communal violence also occurred at different times after independence. Incidents affecting Hindu communities were reported in several districts following political unrest or events linked to religious tensions. For example, violence against Hindu homes, temples, and businesses was reported after the **1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in India**, during the **2001 general election**, and after attacks on places of worship in **2021**. These incidents led to temporary displacement in some areas and contributed to feelings of insecurity among sections of the Hindu community. The demographic impact was not uniform across Bangladesh. Districts near the Indian border, such as **Khulna, Satkhira, Jessore, Rajshahi**, and parts of **Rangpur**, historically had larger Hindu populations. Over time, many of these districts experienced gradual changes because of migration and broader demographic trends. In contrast, districts such as **Sylhet** and **Chattogram** continued to maintain significant Hindu communities, although their proportion of the local population also changed over time. Despite these

demographic changes, Hindus have continued to play an important role in the cultural, educational, economic, and professional life of Bangladesh. They have contributed to literature, music, medicine, law, education, business, and public service. Hindu festivals such as Durga Puja remain an important part of the country's cultural heritage and are celebrated across Bangladesh. The decline in the Hindu share of Bangladesh's population after 1971 resulted from a combination of historical migration, property-related disputes, changing political conditions, periodic communal violence, and differences in population growth. The demographic transformation occurred gradually over several decades and remains an important subject of historical and demographic research.

Demographic Change in West Bengal

The demographic composition of West Bengal has undergone significant changes since its formation in 1947. At the time of the Partition of India, the newly created state became the principal destination for Hindu refugees leaving East Bengal (later East Pakistan and Bangladesh). This large-scale migration reshaped the population, economy, and settlement pattern of West Bengal and continues to influence the state's demographic profile. The first major wave of migration occurred during the Partition of 1947–1950. Communal violence, political uncertainty, and the division of British India forced millions of people to leave their homes. A large number of Hindu families crossed the border into India and settled in districts such as **Kolkata, North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad,**

Hooghly, Howrah, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, and Darjeeling. Many refugee colonies were established around Kolkata and other urban centres, permanently changing the distribution of the state's population. A second major phase of migration followed the communal disturbances in East Pakistan during 1950. Thousands of additional Hindu refugees entered West Bengal and were provided temporary shelter in refugee camps. Many later settled permanently in urban and rural areas, contributing to the expansion of towns and suburban regions. Migration continued throughout the Pakistan period. Political instability, communal violence, and concerns over property rights encouraged many Hindu families to leave East Pakistan during the 1950s and 1960s. Although the number of migrants varied from year to year, the continuous movement of people gradually increased the Hindu population in several border districts of West Bengal. Another significant demographic change occurred during the **Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971.** Millions of refugees crossed into India to escape the conflict. West Bengal received the largest share because of its long international border with Bangladesh. While many refugees returned after Bangladesh became independent, a considerable number remained in India and settled permanently, further increasing the population of the state. According to the **2011 Census of India**, Hindus constituted approximately 70.5% of West Bengal's population, while Muslims accounted for 27%, and other religious communities made up the remaining population. The distribution of communities varies across districts. Districts such as **Purba Medinipur, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Purulia, Hooghly, and Howrah** have large Hindu majorities. In contrast, **Murshidabad, Malda, and Uttar Dinajpur** have substantial Muslim populations, while border districts such as **North 24 Parganas** and **Nadia** reflect the long history of migration from present-day Bangladesh. Urbanization has also influenced demographic change. Kolkata and its surrounding metropolitan region attracted refugees seeking employment, education, and better living conditions. As a result, the city's population expanded rapidly after independence. At the same time, new residential colonies developed around the capital, many of which were established by displaced Hindu families from East Bengal. Economic opportunities have further shaped demographic patterns. Refugees contributed significantly to commerce, education, small industries, and public administration.

Their settlement helped transform several towns into important commercial and industrial centres. Over time, refugee communities became fully integrated into the social, cultural, and economic life of West Bengal while preserving many traditions and customs of their ancestral homeland. In recent decades, demographic change in West Bengal has been influenced by natural population growth, internal migration from other Indian states, urban expansion, and cross-border migration. These factors have affected all religious communities and have produced regional differences across the state. The districts along the international border continue to experience greater demographic change because of their geographical location and historical links with Bangladesh. The demographic history of West Bengal since 1947 has been shaped largely by the movement of refugees, post-Partition settlement, urban growth, and economic development. The arrival of millions of displaced Hindus after Partition and during the Bangladesh Liberation War played a major role in reshaping the state's population and remains one of the most significant demographic developments in modern Bengal's history.

III. Key Findings And Discussion

The historical evidence examined in this study shows that the demographic change of the Hindu population in Bengal was a gradual process that took place over several centuries. Rather than resulting from a single event, it was shaped by a combination of political developments, migration, economic conditions,

communal conflicts, and changes in state policies. Each historical period contributed in different ways to the transformation of Bengal's demographic structure. During the medieval period, political changes and the expansion of new agricultural settlements altered the population pattern of eastern Bengal. Under Mughal rule, the development of agriculture, the growth of villages, and increased migration encouraged population expansion. These changes influenced the religious composition of several regions, particularly in eastern Bengal. The British colonial period introduced modern census records, making it possible to observe demographic trends more accurately. Colonial administrative policies, the Partition of Bengal in 1905, and the growth of communal politics gradually increased religious divisions. Although these developments did not immediately transform the demographic balance, they created political conditions that later influenced migration and settlement. The communal violence of 1946 and the Partition of India in 1947 marked one of the most significant turning points in Bengal's demographic history. Large numbers of Hindus migrated from East Bengal to West Bengal and other parts of India, while many Muslims moved in the opposite direction. This exchange of population permanently changed the demographic composition of both regions. During the Pakistan period, repeated migration, political instability, communal violence, and disputes over property rights contributed to the continued decline in the proportion of Hindus in East Pakistan. The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 created another large wave of displacement, leading many Hindu families to seek refuge in India. After the independence of Bangladesh, the Hindu share of the country's population continued to decline gradually. Migration, economic opportunities, family reunification, demographic differences, and periodic communal tensions all played a role in this long-term trend. At the same time, West Bengal experienced demographic growth because of refugee settlement, urbanization, and continued migration from across the border.

Collectively, the study demonstrates that the demographic transformation of Bengal cannot be explained by a single historical event or policy. Instead, it was the outcome of multiple historical processes that unfolded over a long period. Examining these developments through historical records, census data, and scholarly research provides a broader understanding of how political decisions, social change, and migration shaped the demographic history of the Hindu community in Bengal. This analysis also focuses on the importance of using reliable historical evidence when studying sensitive issues related to population change and communal relations.

IV. Conclusion

The demographic history of the Hindu community in Bengal reflects a long and complex process shaped by historical events, political change, migration, economic developments, and social transformation. This research demonstrates the demographic composition of Bengal did not change suddenly or because of a single event. Instead, it evolved gradually over several centuries as different historical forces influenced the movement, settlement, and distribution of the population. The decline in the proportion of Hindus in eastern Bengal can be understood only by examining the broader historical context. Political transitions during the medieval period, the expansion of agriculture under the Mughal Empire, British colonial policies, the rise of communal politics, the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the communal violence of 1946, and the Partition of India in 1947 all contributed to changes in the demographic structure of the region.

During the Pakistan period, continued migration, political uncertainty, communal tensions, and property-related disputes encouraged many Hindu families to leave East Pakistan. The Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 created another major wave of displacement, and demographic changes continued after the independence of Bangladesh through migration, natural population growth, and changing social and economic conditions. At the same time, West Bengal experienced a different demographic pattern. The arrival of millions of refugees from East Bengal and later Bangladesh transformed the state's population, economy, and urban landscape. Refugee communities played an important role in the development of education, trade, industry, and public life, while preserving many aspects of Bengal's shared cultural heritage. The findings of this study analyze that demographic change is a multidimensional process. Historical sources that migration, political decisions, economic opportunities, security concerns, and demographic trends all interacted to shape the changing distribution of the Hindu population. No single factor is sufficient to explain these changes, and a balanced understanding requires consideration of multiple historical perspectives and reliable demographic data. This research also highlights the importance of studying demographic history through objective analysis rather than political interpretation. Census records, archival documents, government reports, and scholarly research provide valuable evidence for understanding long-term population change. Such an approach helps explain not only how demographic patterns changed but also why these changes occurred in different historical periods. Understanding the demographic history of Hindus in Bengal contributes to a broader understanding of the region's political, social, and cultural development. It also provides valuable insights into the relationship between migration, identity, state policies, and historical events in South Asia. Future research may further explore district-level demographic changes, patterns of migration, and the experiences of minority communities

using newly available archival materials and census data. Continued scholarly research based on reliable evidence will help deepen our understanding of Bengal's complex demographic history and support informed discussions on one of the region's most significant historical transformations.

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