

Original Article

A century of change: analyzing population variations in north 24 parganas, west Bengal (1901–2011)

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The study highlights the trends in the population of north 24 parganas district in west bengal, india, during the period of 1901 to 2011. The study focuses on analyzing the demographic trends, urbanization trends, migration patterns, fertility, mortality, and socioeconomic factors affecting population growth.

Key words: industrialization, fertility rate, mortality rate, social change, rural-to-urban migration

Introduction:

North 24 parganas, which is a district situated in the eastern part of india, occupies the core area of demographic changes witnessed in west bengal throughout the past century. The area has experienced an unprecedented shift, characterized by an exponential growth in population over the 20th and 21st centuries, as a result of migration, urbanization, and socio-economic factors. The historical demographic changes in north 24 parganas provide insights into the general demographic trends in west bengal and india. North 24 parganas witnessed a number of demographic changes owing to a range of socio-political and socio-economic influences, including partitioning of bengal, industrialization, and migration from rural to urban areas. In 1901, the district of north 24 parganas had a relatively stable population, with an agrarian economy and limited urbanization. This period, under british colonial rule, saw relatively low levels of industrial development, with a strong reliance on agriculture. However, despite the relatively slow pace of urbanization, the district was strategically located near kolkata (then calcutta), which influenced the regional economy. The overall socio-economic environment during this time was reflective of colonial policies, which led to economic exploitation, minimal infrastructure development, and poor health care systems. This had a direct impact on the population dynamics, contributing to high mortality rates and relatively low life expectancy. In addition to this, socio-political changes occurred in the area during the early 20th century and played a major role in determining the demographics of the district in later times. While the indian struggle for freedom led to the end of colonial rule in india, it also ushered in a period of political unrest in india. It was the foundation of the broader demographic changes that were to follow in the latter half of the 20th century. However, the demographic character of north 24 parganas district began to change only after the partition of bengal in 1947. While urbanization led to economic progress, other problems such as over population, the emergence of slums, and a huge gap between the rural and urban sectors regarding resource access came to light during this period. Overpopulation in cities further resulted in issues with housing, healthcare, and sanitation, thereby leading to social inequalities which exist even today. Slums emerging at the peripheries of cities like kolkata showed the inability to handle urbanization due to insufficient planning and other related concerns. The 21st century saw north 24 parganas continue its trajectory of growth, but with a shift toward more stable population dynamics. While the fertility rates began to decline, the region's population continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace than in previous decades. Migration, however, remained a defining feature of the district's demographic landscape.



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Although in- migration from neighboring states and countries continued, the primary sources of migration were the surrounding rural areas of west Bengal, which were increasingly seeking better living standards in urban centers. Simultaneously, north 24 parganas experienced the benefits of improved healthcare services, leading to a further decline in mortality rates. The district's literacy rate, particularly among women, also saw a significant improvement, reflecting the broader changes occurring in west Bengal in terms of educational access and gender equality. These improvements contributed to a more educated and healthier population, which was better equipped to participate in the growing economy. However, despite these advancements, the district still faces challenges such as unemployment, North 24 parganas, located in the eastern part of India, and has witnessed significant demographic changes over the past century. The population dynamics of this district offer valuable insights in to broader regional and national trends. This paper aims to analyze the population variations in north 24 parganas, with a focus on the time period from 1901 to 2011. The primary objective is to understand the causes behind population growth, migration trends, and socio-economic transformations that have influenced the demographic structure of this district.

Methodology:

The study utilizes historical population data from official census records (1901-2011) and secondary sources such as government reports, academic journals, and demographic studies. A comparative analysis is conducted, focusing on key variables such as population density, sex ratio, literacy rates, rural-urban migration, and economic factors influencing demographic changes.

The data is categorized into the following segments:

1. **Census data analysis:** examining the official census figures over a century.
2. **Urbanization trends:** analyzing the shift from rural to urban living.
3. **Migration patterns:** investigating the impact of in-migration, particularly from bangladesh, and the implications for local demographics.
4. **Fertility and mortality trends:** understanding the role of healthcare improvements and policies in influencing population growth.

Historical overview of population growth:

1901–1941: early 20th century demographics

In the early part of the 20th century, north 24 parganas had a relatively stable but slow-growing population. The socio-economic conditions were primarily agrarian, with limited urbanization. Population growth during this period was influenced by natural factors such as birth rates and mortality rates, as well as socio- political factors like the british colonial policies and the partition of bengal in 1947. The region faced economic stagnation during the british rule, with minimal industrialization and poor healthcare systems. This resulted in relatively high mortality rates, particularly in rural areas.

1941–1971: post-partition population surge

The period following the partition of bengal in 1947 marked a significant demographic shift in north 24 parganas. The influx of refugees from east pakistan (now bangladesh) contributed to a sharp rise in the population .this migration led to increased pressure on urban centers and rural areas alike, causing significant challenges in terms of housing, healthcare, and employment. The fertility rate is also remained high during this period, and there was limited access to family planning or maternal health care services. The population growth was primarily driven by natural increase, with high birth rates and low life expectancy.

1971–2001: industrialization and urbanization

By the latter half of the 20th century, industrialization began to reshape the demographic landscape of north 24 parganas. The establishment of industries, particularly around the city of kolkata, attracted migrants from rural areas and other part so f india.this led to a sharp rise in the urban population, contributing to rapid urbanization. Additionally,improved health care services and public health in it active led to a decline in mortality rates. The establishment of schools and educational institutions also had a positive impact on literacy rates, particularly among women. However, the district faced challenges with slum development and overcrowding in urban areas, which strained infrastructure and public services.

2001–2011: the contemporary demographic landscape

In the 21st century, the population of north 24 parganas continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace compared to previous decades. The region witnessed a stabilization in fertility rates, which were influenced by increasing awareness of family planning and access to healthcare. The overall literacy rate showed a marked improvement, with a significant rise in female literacy. Urbanization continued to advance, and the district became a hub for economic activities such as trade, commerce, and manufacturing. However, challenges related to migration, unemployment, and the availability of basic services persisted.

Key factors influencing population change:

1 Migration: one of the most significant factors influencing the population dynamics of north 24 parganas has been migration, particularly from bangladesh. The partition of bengal and the subsequent migration of refugees have had long-lasting effects on the population structure of the region.

2 Urbanization: the rapid growth of urban centers such as barasat and habra has significantly altered the socio-economic landscape. This urbanization has been accompanied by challenges such as overcrowding, slum development, and strain on infrastructure.

3 Economic factors: the industrialization and establishment of new economic opportunities in the latter half of the 20th century played a crucial role in shaping population trends. Job opportunities in industries and trade attracted migrants from rural areas and other regions.

4 Healthcare and education: improvements in healthcare, particularly maternal and child health, contributed to a decline in mortality rates. Education, especially female education, had a significant impact on fertility rates and the overall demographic structure.

Discussion

The demographic trends in north 24 parganas reflect broader changes occurring in west Bengal and India. The early part of the 20th century was marked by slow growth, but the post-1947 migration crisis and the industrialization of the region caused rapid population increases. This shift to urbanization created both opportunities and challenges, leading to improved literacy rates and health care, but also exacerbating issues of overcrowding and slum development.

Conclusion

The population variations in north 24 parganas over the past century reflect complex interactions between migration, urbanization, and socio-economic development. While there have been significant improvements in literacy rates, health care, and living standards, the region still faces challenges related to overcrowding, unemployment, and migration pressures. Understanding these demographic shifts is crucial for policymakers aiming to address the needs of a rapidly changing population.

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