

THE MYSTERY OF MALAPPURAM'S POPULATION BOOM

Relevant for: Geography | Topic: Indian Demography including Tribes

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Malappuram in northern Kerala is the world's fastest-growing city, according to a chart put out by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU). Three Indian cities figure among top ten, and all of them are in Kerala. Malappuram saw its population rise 44% between 2015 and 2020. Kozhikode ranks fourth on the global chart, while Kollam is tenth, with respective population growth figures of 35% and 31%. The EIU has compiled this list on data provided by the United Nations Population Division. In all, six Indian cities figure on the list of 30.

What sets Malappuram apart? Kerala is a state that has a sub-replacement-level fertility rate, as well as high literacy and other impressive socio-economic indicators. The literacy rates in these three cities are higher than the national average, and better off families typically have fewer children. (The semi and illiterate poor, in contrast, are often unaware that the survival chances of their offspring have risen sharply since olden days.) So, what's going on? Some analysts may suspect an answer to the anomaly lies in the city's high proportion of Muslims, who are perceived to have larger families than others. In the absence of city-specific evidence to back faith as a key to the puzzle, however, it's advisable to go by the academic finding that, across India, the size of a family bears a far stronger correlation with its income than with religious belief.

In all this, the factor that could get overlooked is the trend of rural residents moving to cities. In many states, this is what drives urban population growth. And cities that are seen as more habitable tend to attract disproportionate numbers. Might that be a major factor in Malappuram's growth?

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