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## CENSUS : 1961

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With her first census taken in 1872, India will take her tenth decennial population census in February/March, 1961. This is probably the longest modern census history for any country in Asia, and a tribute must be paid to those pioneers between 1884 and 1901 who slowly but courageously worked out the details of this vast undertaking. Looking back on those first censuses, we find that the preliminary experiments leading up to the first census of 1872 were mainly concerned with the problem of coverage of the entire country and chiefly cartography. This was patiently worked out in 1881, 1891 and 1901. During these censuses, however, the Census Commissioners did not let the grass grow under their feet but skilfully evolved standard questionnaires, table forms and economic classifications. Contrary to uninformed opinion, which seems to imagine that the pre-Independence censuses were little concerned with economic information, it is to be acknowledged today that the economic classification of occupations which can still serve as a model for countries suffering from an insufficiently developed economy and a preponderance of rural skills. In fact, the classification developed in 1901 was unfortunately dominated by the requirements of international comparability in 1911, since which date the Indian census has not been able to make up its mind what to choose between an economic classification suited to its own reality and the obvious temptation of adopting an international classification.

Much has been made of the Indian census's pre-occupation with castes and tribes and cognate anthropological enquiries over the decades. While indeed a very large and valuable body of anthropological literature has grown round the Indian census, it needs to be emphasised that the Indian census has always been primarily concerned with demographic and livelihood tables. One is liable to ignore the fact that in the preparation of age and life tables India has always been fortunate in securing the services of the most eminent actuaries, beginning with Sir George Hardy and this long line of actuarial investigations since 1881 has provided to the world valuable devices for the construction of age and life tables out of inadequate and often very unsatisfactory material. A third important feature of past censuses is also insufficiently appreciated. The Indian census has never been bound hand and foot to cast-iron tradition but has broken new ground at every census without necessarily losing comparability with previous censuses. Thus the Indian census has always paid a great deal of attention to the changing scene and the requirements of Government, while trying to keep pace with the census quests of other advanced countries. In short, it has never rested on its oars.

It is good to take stock of all this on the eve of another great undertaking for a proper perspective. For in this task this alone enables the census-taker to appreciate in which directions the forthcoming census must break new ground in order to be even modestly worthy of its proud tradition.

I am afraid the preamble has been long ; it could not be helped if only out of nervousness for some of the odd weaknesses inherent in an Indian census. The Indian census is a discontinuous organisation. It rises like a phoenix out of its ashes barely a year and a half or two before the census date, winds up by the third year of the decade and then is heard of no more for the next six or seven years. It is only after 1947 that the post of Registrar General has been created in principle although it has never been continuously filled by a whole-time officer. The census is primarily an administrative undertaking in which, for a short while, the energies of the entire administrative machinery are employed and then broken off. This imparts an empiric character to the operation which is not desirably for something that is more than a mere administrative quest. The census is also largely an honorary undertaking to which, by virtue of the Census Act, about a million citizens from all walks of life are drawn in by a fiat of the law and all their devotion and good work over a fairly long period of time go largely unpaid. These are the realities of an Indian census which severely restrict its scope, accuracy and venturesomeness. But there is also the brighter side of the medal. The Indian census is acknowledged as a national undertaking in which it is able to secure the loyalty and devotion of a very large body of officials and non-officials, which probably gives its results greater accuracy and greater coverage than if the census were to be undertaken by hired enumerators. The census is still regarded as a national task in which everybody feels it is his duty to be interested and to help with everything in his power. Over the years the census has won a friend in every citizen and no enemies at all. The enthusiasm, probity and care with which the least little census query is attended to from every corner of India is a matter of which one feels immensely proud, for the census is universally regarded as a standard impartial enquiry which throws up its figures without fear or favour, to be utilised by anybody who likes to do so ; while officers concerned with census-taking have maintained a consistent standard over the last hundred years of fearless analysis no matter whether such analysis embarrasses the prevailing Government. In short, no census officer has felt himself called upon to justify the policies of any particular Government. On their side, Governments also have appreciated this fearlessness and permitted their census officers a degree of freedom ordinarily denied in other walks of administration.

This brief background is perhaps necessary to appreciate the task before the population census of 1961. This year will coincide with the completion of the Second Five Year Plan and the commencement of the Third, for which preparations are already under way. The question whether a country is over-populated or under-populated is largely irrelevant except in the context of whether the rate of growth of national income and national wealth out-paces or is out-paced by the rate of growth of population. A faster pace in the rate of growth of national income will take care of the surplus population born every year and of the increasing survival rate of the population already born. A slower pace will upset the balance and create serious problems which may hamstring all the plans for progress and development. So we need to measure carefully the rate of growth of India's population not only as a whole but for its several States so that the Planning Commission may be equipped with

facts of the relative densities in different parts of the country in order to plan the distribution of future industries and irrigation projects. Further, the changing rate of survival caused by a slow but steady rise in the expectation of life ; presents even more complicated problems in the matter of looking after the population which has already reached the age of 20 by 1961. Changes in the ratios of children and young persons at school and college will dictate an expansion of educational facilities while changes in marital habits and migration will cause greater concern to the Ministries of Health and Works, Housing and Supply. In 1961, migration in the population census will assume great importance not only on account of the unprecedented developments in industrial enterprise in both public and private sectors, but also on account of the fact that even if no such development were strongly noticeable on the surface, more and more people from the rural areas would continue to offer themselves for employment in the wage market. The reason being that once urbanisation gains momentum, it seems to create a vortex in which an ever-widening rural hinterland is inexorably sucked in. Thus in 1961, urbanisation itself will pose questions to census takers in a form quite different from the past, because the total number of people flocking into and around cities, relentlessly forcing slums on them, will be apparently quite out of proportion to the rate of growth of industries, urban services and avenues of employment. Henceforth, for several decades at least, we may well expect a breathless race between persons offering themselves for employment in and around urban areas and the opportunities of employment that these areas will offer. This inter-acting spiral will have momentous consequences on the growth of towns and cities, especially big cities, which will perhaps put to the test all the ingeniousness and skill of town and country planners. The next population census will provide exciting scope for this branch of enquiry. A significant sociological consequence, ancillary, if not direct, may be reflected in changes in the composition of households which engaged the attention of the Indian census for the first time in 1951. The predominantly male sex ratio observed in urban areas will intensify certain social, moral and hygienic issues.

While the investigation of religious and social denominations will be confined to the requirements of our Constitution, the census of 1961 will demand thought on the classification of returns of mother-tongue. Hitherto, that is up to 1951, the working principle has been to return all mother-tongues no matter how small a number of people claimed any one of them. Thus it was not unusual to find mother-tongues spoken by as few as two or three persons or even less. So long the quest has been to explore the utmost linguistic range in this Sub-Continent. This has helped to classify and docket groups of languages of a bewildering variety, sometimes to a point where all distinction between language and dialect is lost. While the unity of India does not by any means insinuate that her tremendous diversity should be lost count of, it will nevertheless be desirable at the forthcoming census carefully to sift and rationalise the families of languages and group dialects under them, for it is high time now to rid the census tables of such apparent frivolities as languages spoken by one or two or even three persons. This is a task which will require much close scrutiny by learned men and the Census office will be very grateful to seek their help.

The census of 1961 will continue to yield comprehensive figures of illiteracy, literacy and measures of educational attainments. It will probably record in a big way the tremendous strides made in the eradication of illiteracy and the advancement of learning. It will also expose the patches of under-developed areas where efforts will need to be intensified for the spread of education.

These will be among the demographic social and cultural enquiries that the census of 1961 will address itself to. But the overwhelming emphasis in the forthcoming census will be on the lines enunciated by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on the eve of 1951 census. These will be the Economic questions.

The main feature of the Indian scene is still the preponderance of agriculture and home industries. The number of persons employed in organised industry, that is, in establishments registered under the Factories Act, is still very much below five million against an estimated population of 390. Our foremost Statistician in the country once made a casual but significant observation to me in private conversation that it is hardly worthwhile to deploy all the resources of the Indian census to attempt a detailed enumeration of less than five million people. I have remarked above that it is possible to argue that after 1901 the energies of the Indian census were largely devoted to bringing in line her occupation-cum-industry classification scheme as close as possible to that adopted in Western countries. Thus, much of the valuable classification developed in 1891 and 1901 was allowed to go unattended. Instead the Indian census carved out several self-sufficient and apparently mutually exclusive universes of livelihood classes in which workers and dependents were clubbed together to produce neat concepts. But one should like to think that by 1961 India's economy will have unfolded in such diverse ways that it will be more important to go in for an analysis of actual workers by age, sex and other characteristics in a more searching manner than to have several seemingly neat broad livelihoods in which workers and dependents will be clubbed together to form not very meaningful universes.

One of the tasks of the forthcoming census will be to attempt two separate tables of occupational and industrial classification instead of one omnibus table as has obtained hitherto. This seems to be dictated by the growing needs of the Five Year Plans owing to which a picture of the full range of occupations and industries classified by broad age groups, sex and several educational categories are desirable in order to obtain the range of manpower resources. This is not all. On the occupation side, there needs to be two mutually supporting sub-tables: one setting forth the traditional skills in the rural and urban sectors allied to household industry and small enterprise which may run to about 250 categories, and the other on the modern skills in organized industry, professions and businesses which will more fully correspond to the international occupational classification. Such a two-fold table will fully bring out the difficulties inherent in the problem of conversion of traditional skills to modern ones in organised industry. This already is matter of vital concern to the Planning Commission and the Government who are exercised over the proper utilisation of available manpower. To illustrate this with an example. Hitherto all weavers of

cotton have been shown under one head, no matter whether a weaver works in a super high draft modern cotton mill or on gold and silver brocade or a small pit loom working on cotton above 160 count. The latter worker will find it exceedingly difficult to adapt himself if drafted on to a super high draft cotton mill. He will probably feel utterly miserable and frustrated and unable to work. So for these two categories it would be rather pointless if the Planning Commission found them clubbed under the same digit of available manpower. To take a second example. A very skilled worker on cloisonne, metal filigree or damascene is avowedly a worker on metal. So is another who works on metal alloys for a modern medium or light engineering establishment. But the latter is used to entirely different working conditions and skills from the former. Here again, conversion of skill from the former to the latter might be well-nigh impossible. Yet there would be a temptation to club the two metal workers together, which would be confusing. This is a problem which the USSR faced when she undertook her first plan. The first USSR census of 1926 threw up many traditional skills which were incapable of conversion to modern organised industry and yet these men of long experience and great skill could not be allowed to go uncared for. So the Soviet Union decided to have small sectors of hand industry in which such skills could be utilised and not condemned to die. The handicrafts and household industry sector in India will continue to loom large for quite some time and the Planning Commission and the Government will therefore be called upon to decide how much of the traditional skills can be properly utilised in the old sector or safely displaced towards modern industry.

On the other hand, a comprehensive picture of the widening range of specialised occupations in organised industry needs to be charted and, with this object in view, in order to supplement the information obtained from the economic questions of the forthcoming census, full information on the categories of employment in highly developed modern industrial organisations in India could preferably be obtained from each registered factory.

On the one side of the scale, therefore, so far as household industries are concerned, information can be directly collected from every household at the time of the final count whether the household has any industry and if so, the name of the product, and how many hired labourers in addition to members of the family are employed, while on the slip for every individual, his occupation, industrial grouping, status and place of work can be elicited for classification. There will be a large middle group of establishments which will be beyond the scope of household industries and short of the requirements of the Factories Act. These will be establishments outside the household which employ less than 20 people per shift without power and less than 10 persons per shift with power. It is proposed to take count of these establishments at the houselisting stage under the heads of the name of the product manufactured by the establishment, number of persons employed and whether or not power is used. This houselist form will also give certain minimum information on housing conditions. It is to be hoped that in conjunction with the Ministry of Commerce and Industry a very full frame of household and small industries can be worked out upon



which that Ministry may draw later for further investigations on productivity, capital investment, employment, etc.

This very brief account may convey an impression that we are considering an India dominated by money economy and some of us may be wondering what the forthcoming census will do to attempt to unravel the complexities of the overlapping sectors of subsistence and money economies which is the true reality of present-day India. For even now almost 70 per cent of our households produce in order to consume and not to market the product and for them such concepts as enterprise or gainful employment or working for pay or profit are almost entirely inapplicable. This is a matter which has challenged the Indian census from decade to decade and one does by no means feel certain that the forthcoming census will be able to tackle it completely. But it will make an attempt in the form of several questions put directly to the household as a whole and not to individuals. These questions will include how much land, if at all, does the household cultivate, how much of it is from Government, how much from private persons for cash, kind, labour or some other arrangement and how much land has been given out to others, how many members of the family are employed in the household's land and how many hired labourers. The second set of questions to the household will ascertain whether the household has any industry or business located within it, and if so, the name of the product, how many members of the family, apart from hired labourers, are employed in this industry. It will be appreciated that if this information is tabulated along with age, sex and size of the cultivation holding, together with the number of hired labourers employed, it should be possible to obtain a fair picture of how many households are likely to produce for the market on their land and how many produce goods for the market with their household industry and what roughly is the coverage and employment under subsistence economy.

Such an enquiry naturally leads to bringing out to the open the important contribution of the housewife and the family worker in the Indian household who work neither for pay or profit nor for gainful employment nor in any strictly economic enterprise, nor for payment of wages and yet hold their own and make a vital contribution. Although there are many impediments that have worked quite powerfully in the past, seeking to prevent appreciation of the contribution of the housewife or the family worker, a very pointed probe in their search may work not unsatisfactorily in 1961. In addition, it is hoped to bring out the number of persons who cannot be regarded as strictly working, viz., students, retired persons, receivers of agricultural or non-agricultural rent, dividends, interests, etc., beggars, vagrants and persons of unspecified source of income, inmates of penal, mental and charitable institutions and housewives who do no work at all except domestic duties. Furthermore, the next census will endeavour to register the figures of persons offering themselves for employment in the wage market for the first time and persons who have been employed before but are out of employment now. For the last category it would have been desirable, in order to include them in the labour force, to find out how many of these people, employed before but now unemployed, were previously employed in what

occupations. But this may be too complicated to be put through successfully by the average census enumerator and may have to be given up.

A draft schedule-cum-individual questionnaire was evolved in consultation with demographic experts, various Ministries and State Governments. The State Statistical Bureaus and various specialised bodies have very kindly pre-tested them in the field. The results of these pre-tests are now available whereafter draft tabulations have been undertaken centrally in the Registrar General's office. A second draft schedule has been devised, based on the experiences of the first pre-test, which will be tried out by State Superintendents of Census operations. These pre-testing opportunities on a very wide scale have been the first of its kind in the Indian census tradition, through which it is hoped to standardise concepts, definitions and illustrations obtaining for the whole country and to control them strictly through translations in the regional languages. Thus it may be possible to obtain a measure of centralisation of concepts, definitions and methods whereby the forthcoming census may expect to be more of a central operation than a string of State operations each with its own concepts, definitions and methods. It may thus be possible to obtain strictly comparable figures, State by State, which will be a step further towards international comparability, for it is proposed to accept in principle the international classifications of occupations and industries, to be departed from only when local circumstances unavoidably demand such departure. It will be the duty of the Census organisation to report the reasons for such departure to international authorities to keep them thoroughly conversant.

Clearly in such a task the Census organisation considers it its duty to pay the utmost regard to any suggestion or recommendation from whomsoever it may be received, for this is a great national undertaking in which every individual should recognise his own responsibility and come forward to help.

Read in

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