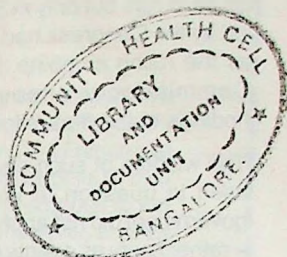


FACTS *against* MYTHS



VIKAS ADHYAYAN KENDRA

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INFORMATION BULLETIN

An Enumerative Tool or a Communal Implement?

The Myths behind Census Data 2001

COMMENT

The British colonial rulers brought many administrative instruments to India. Most of these were to streamline their exploitative mechanisms. Nevertheless, many of these provided the framework for administration and governance for the nation even after Independence. The Census of India was one such instrument. As is well known it is a periodic count of the population – and aggregation of very crucial and relevant data about the population, providing a social and economic profile of the population of the country.

The idea of a Census was of course not unknown to the Indians. Kautilya's Arthashastra written over 2500 years ago prescribed a periodical survey of the population – obviously for the purposes of taxation and for political control. It is not known whether the idea was ever put into practice.

The 'modern' census began in the 19th century under British aegis in 1871.

The major purpose must have been locating the taxable sections. The other obviously was compilation of information on population for the sake of political control.

The British census then had no concept of 'Indian citizen' but sought to break up the native population into varied sub-groups based on religion and caste – obviously to further the strategy of divide and rule!

The government of independent India found this practice not in keeping with its thinking. It saw the residents as citizens of India irrespective of religion or caste. The record of caste was relevant only as far as the special groups were concerned – those who were entitled to enjoy special privileges to overcome centuries and millennia of discrimination and deprivation – namely the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Denotified and Nomadic Tribes, etc. The rest were simply citizens of India – equal in all respects.

This trend and practice was apparently quietly reversed during the BJP rule. Not surprising at all since the BJP and the parent Sangh Parivar have no concept of India or Indian citizens. (The more erudite Sangh Parivar members, for example, did once indulge in a poster campaign that defined 'Indian' as technical citizenship while nationality was defined as Hindu. Thus in 2001, unknown to the others – the citizens of India, the government seems to have reintroduced the religious census.

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The results were not made public during the BJP led NDA rule but only in September 2004. The UPA led by the Congress had by then replaced the NDA as the ruling combine. Nevertheless the Census Commissioner announced these results as findings of the first religious census.

The wisdom of such enumeration and analysis is itself in question. It is also clear that the new government did not apply its mind to the publication – rather hasty as events proved – to the publication of the ‘results’. The mischief however went far beyond. The results declared that the Muslim population was growing at a fast rate and the Hindu population in the country had actually declined as percentage of the total population. The media reported the results with some alarm. The Hindutva leaders expressed their great fears and anxieties immediately.

This Census Report raked up an old controversy viz., the growth rate of Hindu and Muslim populations. Immediate interpretations of the data provided ammunition to groups that abuse demography to instigate communal disturbances. The BJP expressed ‘grave concern’ over the rise of Muslim population, “discovering” a demographic “time bomb”; obsessed by the “population growth rate”. The BJP and RSS were shocked by the report that among the 6 major religious communities, the decadal growth of the Muslims was the highest (36.0 per cent) whereas the growth rate of the Hindu population had declined from 25.1 per cent in 1981-1991 to 20.4 per cent in 1991-2001.

The BJP actually spoke too soon. The data released by the Census Commission was misleading, in fact it was wrong. The interpretations and the rates calculated were not factually correct.

The calculations failed to consider the fact that the population of J&K, a state with 67 per cent Muslim population, had been excluded in the 1991 Census as the census operation could not be held owing to violence prevailing at the time. This crucial information is revealed, as a footnote, on a later page of Census 2001 which says that no census was conducted in Assam in 1981 and in J&K in 1991. Yet, the Census Commissioner had announced the decadal growth in Muslim population, and that too without applying any statistical correctives! The error was soon rectified but not before considerable damage had already been done.

The Hindutva lobby has for years held or propagated a view that the Muslims growing at a

fast rate plan to out-number the Hindus in the country in the foreseeable future. They have always termed this a planned conspiracy. They believe that this would deprive the Hindus of their homeland. They evoke now fears of another partition. The view of the Hindutva lobby is clear. It refuses to view the population of the country in any other terms except those of religious identity. It also holds that Hindus must be in a majority in India and thus India must be a Hindu nation even if not (for tactical reasons) a Hindu State. Further they consider the loyalty of all Muslims to India doubtful. Religious population ratio is thus for them of strategic importance. Representatives of the Hindutva lobby have at different stages advocated the transfers of populations within the country – so that Hindus remain a majority in every district and overwhelmingly so in the border districts.

On rectification it became clear that between 1991 and 2001, the population of Hindus had declined from 82 per cent to 80.96 per cent (and not 80 per cent as initially misreported); the population of Muslims has risen from 12.12 per cent to 12.90 per cent (and not 13.4 per cent as initially misreported); the number of Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and those of ‘other religions and persuasions’ has risen from 5.88 per cent to 6.14 per cent (and these groups must therefore, presumably, share a part of the blame for edging the Hindus out of the picture by all of 1.04 percentage points); the rate of growth of the Hindu population has declined from 22.77 per cent over 1981-91 to 20.02 per cent over 1991-2001 (and not from 25.1 per cent to 20.4 per cent as initially misreported); and the corresponding rates of growth of the Muslim population have been 32.86 per cent and 29.33 per cent respectively.

Census 2001 did not merely reveal population growth rates but many other crucial trends as well viz.,

- fertility;
- sex ratio especially the ratio of the girl-child
- literacy rate of various communities and
- Economic situation of the particular group.

The most alarming revelation of this Census is the declining child sex ratio in the age group of 0-6 years.

Ironically, even as economic prosperity is rising in several States, the girl child is becoming more vulnerable. The overall sex ratio is also miserable, though better than the girl child sex ratio. Next, is the data on literacy. Of the total Indian population,

Population Growth & Fertility Rate

A crucial determinant of population growth is the fertility rate, the average number of children a woman has during her reproductive span. When fertility began to decline in Europe (France, for instance) during the early 19th century, it caused much fear of shrinkage among the French and led to pro-natalist rhetoric. However, by the late 19th century, fertility began to decline all over Europe, and continued to do so right into the 20th century. By early 60s it had dropped to low levels of 2 children or less among 'white' populations worldwide. That marked, however, another crucial stage in population history, with the numbers in the South growing at unprecedented and uniformly high rates, as a result of high fertility combined with rapidly falling death rates brought about by modern medicine and the spread of health care measures. It appeared that the 'non-white' population would swamp the planet. There emerged politically strong lobbies, supported by intellectual establishments in the US, and in several international bodies including those under the UN, that propagated family planning and population control in the South. Fertility rates, however, have taken their historical course since then even among poor countries. They have been declining everywhere: in China, India and Africa. During the transitional phase growth rates keeping changing, this country or that region recording bigger numbers

The Indian experience of the transition is very well documented. Fertility began to decline in Kerala from the early 1960s. The current fertility rate in Kerala is described as 'below replacement', that is, roughly, less than 2 children to a woman. (Two children are needed to replace parents to keep the numbers stable). The Kerala experience led demographers to identify social advancement, mainly in education and health, as an important factor that can drive fertility change in India. It is only since the 1980s that fertility rates have begun to decline significantly in the country. But the nature of the fertility transition has varied so much from region to region that no generalisation is possible as to when the process would begin and what factors would promote. For example, the remarkable reduction in fertility in Tamil Nadu was not linked with a significant decline in infant mortality, a condition through to be essential one for fewer births. In AP, a dramatic decrease in fertility took place along with a none-too-impressive record in the social sectors. By and large, the Indian experience thus far suggests that the course of fertility transition is somewhat unpredictable, and different sets of factors operate in different regions that can promote or hinder the process. It also shows that once begun, the rates of decline tend to be rapid, by historical yardsticks.

7 years and above, 64.8 per cent are literate. Further, contrary to the high rates of population growth among most communities, Parsis are facing gradual extinction in India. Their population has declined from 76,382 in 1991 to 69,601 in 2001.

With such distorted interpretation of census data even a demographic religious majority can still mentally project itself as an endangered minority. The conversion of the census into a fully-grown and popular communal knowledge, increases its flexibility even more drastically (without losing the authority of statistics) allowing for much bigger effects to dramatise baseless fears. Evidently, such communal interpretation of the census data is aimed at obliterating pluralism of identities, by provoking a fear of the 'other' and constantly propagating the myth of cataclysmic decline in the Hindu population.

In any discussion on India's population growth it is necessary to examine the bigger picture. On the Hindu-Muslim differentials in population growth, for instance, it must be noted that Muslims are spread all over the country: they are subject to different regional environments and experience and varied levels of social and economic backwardness. It is meaningless to discuss Muslim population growth and fertility behaviour, as if it is one monolithic entity. The National Family Health Survey of the International Centre for Population Sciences (Mumbai) shows that all over India, Muslims are increasingly accepting family planning methods.

An important aspect in this whole controversy is the BJP's warped approach to India's census data; its myopia over India's various communities primarily on religious grounds to the exclusion of other equally important factors. On the one hand, it uses statistical data as a tool to launch attacks

on minorities and on the other to map Hindu communities, to count them, and above all to compare them with the religious minorities. From this emerges its peculiar interpretation of population growth rates viz., Indian Muslims are multiplying like rabbits because of their religion, Islam, and the growth rate of the Hindu majority community has been declining. Related to this is also the common misconception over the prevalence of high fertility rates among the poor resulting in high population growth.

In the light of the above, it becomes important to a) place such hysterical notions over population growth rates in context and b) de-communalise, once again, the myths generated through the communal construct of census reports. This is a major responsibility because demolishing the 'other' is easy but also blatantly dishonest and often brutally consequential for all sides.

MYTH: India's census data shows that Hindus have been declining alarmingly whilst Muslims (who do not observe family planning because of their religion) are multiplying rapidly, outnumbering the dominant Hindu community who will become minorities in their own country by 2050!

FACT: The population of Hindus has not declined! The "decline" emanates from the fact that many communities – classified earlier as Hindu earlier viz.; Jains, Sarnas and Lingayats — are now recognised independently in the 2001 census data! Moreover, some population groups e.g. the Adivasis, previously enumerated as Hindu, are now registered under the category of "other religions". Above all, officials point out that the population of "other religions", under which the category several communities have broken away from the Hindu fold are grouped, has recorded a 103 per cent rise from the last census.

Other factors to be noted as well are widow remarriage. Also, male-female ratio among Muslims is comparatively higher i.e. there are 936 female per 1000 compared to 931 female per 1000 males among Hindus. Quoting an article by S.S.A. Aiyar from the Times of India (12-9-04) Dr. Engineer notes that female infanticide and foeticide reduces population indirectly as well as directly. Even after contraception lowers the total fertility rates (lifetime births per women), population growth can be rapid for two decades because of what demographers called population momentum: future mothers have already been born. But female infanticide and foeticide ensure that future mothers are not born, and so reduce population momentum.

Furthermore, according to the National Family Planning Survey (NFPS) of 1992-93 the birth control rate among illiterate Hindus and Muslims is 35.1 per cent and 21.8 per cent respectively;

- The 1991 census shows that Muslims constitute 12.12 per cent of the Indian population i.e. 10 crore. In 1951 it was 9.91 per cent but in 1991 their number raised to 12.12 per cent i.e. an increase of 2.21 per cent over the last 40 years (1951-91). A further corroboration on this is an article in the Kolkata daily, Ganasakti, which noted: "According to the 1961 and 1981 census reports, the number of Musalmans in comparison to the total population of the country during the last 20 years (1961-81) has increased from 10.7 per cent to 11.4 per cent i.e. 0.7 per cent only; at this rate the Hindus are not likely to become a minority even in 1000 years".
- Hindu and Muslim women who passed high school and above, have high rates of family planning progress i.e. 55.2 per cent and 45 per cent. That is, there is not much difference in population growth among these communities;
- The Indian Institute of Bio-Behavioural Sciences-Kolkatta on birth control among slum dwellers in 160 slums in and around Kolkatta city showed that the "... Muslim women have become conscious and after the birth of 2-3 children are putting pressure on their husbands to take steps against having more children. When husbands refuse, in many cases, they visit family welfare centres and voluntarily get themselves sterilised..."
- A Pune-based demographer, Dr. Malika B. Mistry, in her survey of 800 Muslim households noted that during the period 1994-95, 961 married women in the reproductive age-group of 15-49, 914 of whom were currently married, used contraceptives and that the use of spacing methods were higher than adoption of sterilisation;
- During the period of 1993-94 the Family Welfare Operation Camps in a number of districts of West Bengal noted that a large number of Muslim women were getting operated along with their Hindu counterparts.

- The above evidently makes it clear that Islam in no way impedes its adherents to on whether or not to decide on matters of family planning.

MYTH: The phenomenal growth of the Muslim population in India will adversely affect the population growth of Hindus in the near future viz., by i) reducing them to a minority and ii) driving them into extinction.

FACT: This is a bogey manufactured by misinterpreting the census observation: "The Hindu religion here becomes the Hindu community counted and compared in hard numbers with other communities, particularly Muslims..." This information was perverted to also publish a number of pamphlets e.g.

- In 1912, U.N. Mukherjee published a pamphlet, "Hindus: A Dying Race" designed to become a part of the Hindu communal 'common sense';
- In 1925, Swami Shraddhanand declared that he had been seized by the
- Dying out of the Hindu race'. That same year, Jagatguru Shankaracharya in a Mahasabha meeting at Nashik claimed that with such rates it would just take a century for Hindus to vanish completely!
- In 1979, the Hindu Mahasabha issued a publication, "They Count Their Gains, We Calculate Our Losses" raising fears of a growing Muslim population and again fabricated the census data.
- In 1922 a tract entitled "Hinduon ka Sanrakshan aur Atmarakshan" (1922) was published. Yet, another tract, 'Hinduon ke Sath Vishwasghat', saying that from 33 crore, the numbers had now been reduced to a mere 20 crore. Using the statistics from 1911 to 1921 Censuses, it was said that over 10 years, Hindus had been reduced in numbers by 8 lakhs while Muslims had increased by 21 lakhs. If this continued, after some years, no Arya would be found in India. The press and casteist publications too propounded similar myths.
- Bhai Parmanand, a prominent member of the Hindu Mahasabha stated that the main reasons for the Hindu-Muslim conflict was the questions of numbers, where Muslims were constantly increasing and Hindus declining. In such a situation, the main

aim of 'shuddhi' and 'sangathan' was to stop the decline of Hindu numbers. And this also links up with the current conversion issue with implications on gender as well e.g. on widow re-marriage in connection with censuses. The Census Report of 1911 for UP, for example, not only acknowledged that Muslims were more prolific in comparison to Hindus, but also linked this fertility to the status of widows. Hindu propagandists, while highlighting their alleged decline and the simultaneous proliferation of Muslims, said that one of the most important reasons for this was the rising frequency of alliance between Muslim men and Hindu widows.

The latest census data shows that the (adjusted) census data (excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir to make the data comparable), Hindus account for 81.4 percent and Muslims 12.4 per cent of the total population. If Hindus formed 82.3 per cent of the rural and 75.6 per cent of the urban population, the figures for Muslims were 12 per cent and 17.3 per cent. Of the total Hindu population, 74 per cent lies in the rural areas and 26 per cent in the urban areas; the corresponding figures for Muslims are 64 per cent and 36 per cent respectively.

The decadal rise (1991-2001) in population is 20 per cent for Hindus and 29.3 per cent for Muslims. But the growth rate is decelerating, much faster for Muslims (by 3.6 percentage points since 1981-91) than for Hindus (2.8 per cent points). This is in line with the accepted demography theory that population growth will fall with development and ultimately stagnate.

Given these figures, there is not the remotest possibility of Muslims becoming the majority community in India in the foreseeable future. It is only three centuries from today that Muslims can outnumber Hindus and that too if the two communities continue to grow at the same rate as in 1991-2001. In the short term (say) the next 3 decades, Muslims will account for no more than 14 per cent of India's population. (Frontline). Even the projections for three centuries are mathematical, not realistic. For, it is nothing short of the ridiculous to assume that Hindus and Muslims will keep increasing at the same rate as in 1991-2001. In that eventuality, the country's population would be roughly 5,000 times today's numbers.

According to standard demographic theory, the birth rate will decline and the population growth

will eventually stop. Demographers estimate that India will reach this situation in the first half of this next century, even at that time, Muslims will account for around 14 per cent of the population. This is only slightly higher than the percentage (11 to 12) of Muslims in the population all through the past century.

MYTH: Literacy and population growth are inter-linked development related issues best exemplified by the Muslims with highest growth in population with the lowest literacy rates amongst all religious communities in India.

FACT: In terms of development indicators, however, the relationship between literacy and development is not always valid although the literacy rates for all communities do indicate an encouraging trend! For instance,

- Of India's total population, 7 years of age and above, 64.8 per cent are literate. Of this female literacy rate among Jains and Sikhs as compared to other religions is very high. Jains have the highest literacy rate at 94.1 percent and Sikhs at 63.1 per cent. Yet, these two communities have the lowest child sex ratio – 786 girls per 1000 boys for Sikhs and 870 per 1000 for Jains. In terms of work participation rate too Jains rank the lowest at 9.2 per cent. Even Buddhists, with lower female literacy rate, have a much higher child sex ratio than the Jains and the Sikhs – at 942 per thousand.
- Tamil Nadu has succeeded in keeping a check on its fertility rate despite a low literacy rate;
- The lowest literacy rates are among people of 'other religions and persuasions' category – people who do never want to report their religion – at 47 per cent. But they have recorded the highest child sex ratio of 976 per 1000 across the country;
- In Gujarat, Muslims fare much better than Hindus almost on all counts! Female literacy of Muslims (63.5 per cent) is better than that among Hindus (56.7 per cent). Moreover, the overall literacy rate of Muslims (73.5 per cent) is better than that of Hindus (68.3 per cent). Child sex ratio of Muslims is 913 per 1000. That of Hindus: 880 per 1000. However, the real problems facing the State are its abysmal sex ratio and infant mortality rates. At

878:1000 in the 0-6 year's age group, Gujarat has 1 of the 5 worst sex ratios, lower than even Bihar's 938:1000 and has been steadily declining over the years — from 934 in 1991 to 919 in 2001. As against this, the ratio for the rest of India has risen from 927 in 1991 to 933 in 2001. That is, the sex ratio is 14 point higher than the sex ratio

- In the State (most States including Bihar, Rajasthan, Orissa, UP and MP) have all experienced a rise in the sex ratio during the decade). This implies that a rather different method of population control is being used. Infant girls are being eliminated soon after they are born. That is, the cause of this decline in the overall sex ratio is the severe fall in child sex ratio (CSR) in the age-group 0-6. This is a reflection of sexual discrimination rather than as some erroneously maintain, due to migration of the men-folk. The CSR is equally low, having declined from 928 in 1991 to 878 in 2001. Low and declining CSR is noted when a) the female foetus is aborted in term of pregnancy b) female infanticide and c) neglect and discrimination of the girl-child

MYTH: The adverse sex ratio – the number of women to men — in India is a blessing in disguise for women as their short supply automatically enhances their demand vis-à-vis their social worth, status and prestige.

FACT: On the contrary!

The adverse social impact of such an imbalance has already begun to emerge. Women are being married off to men with different cultural background who do not speak their language or eat their food. Census 2001 shows that all over Punjab and Haryana there are fewer women to men with brides being bought and brought from the poorer regions of UP, West Bengal and Assam where there is no shortage of women. According to one study conducted in the 4 districts of Haryana showed that at any point of time there are 300 to 400 men in search of wives

In most parts of the world, including in some of the poorer countries of the South there are more women than men. In India, there are 933 women to men. Again, in most part of the world, there are more girls than boys, because biologically a girl child is sturdier than the boy is. In India, there are 927 girls to 1000 boys. In 5 districts of Haryana, the figure is between 783 and 796. 10 districts of

Though there is data or study that identifies the exact causes for such a poor status of CSAR in Gujarat but some sources do however indicate that foeticide, neglect and discrimination of the girl child are the two leading causes. Gender discrimination is widespread in all the districts of Gujarat with rich districts of Mehsana, Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar, Anand, Kheda and Jamnagar heading the list. With the exception of Jamnagar district all other experienced severe

Apart from Gujarat, Punjab and Haryana are biased against the girl child regardless of religious affiliation. This is similar to the North-South divide over economic and social indicators, which clearly gets reflected in many of the key development indicators. (Economists have long discussed how social service functions much better in South Indian villages as compared to those in the North.) One of the reasons is the poor status of women in the North. Historically, Punjab has reported good economic indicators. In Kerala, the reverse is true.

MYTH: The high population growth rate in some rich states like Gujarat is owing to migration from poor States

FACT: According to a study the high growth rate is not due to in-migration though it has served as a magnet in attracting people from other States. When a closer look is taken at the district-wise growth rates in the Gujarat this point proves to be correct. The districts that have experienced a decadal population growth rate above 25 per cent are Valsad (29.66 per cent), Dangs (29.58 per cent), Dahod (28.35 per cent), Banaskantha (26.31 per cent), Surendranagar (25.34 per cent), Rajkot (28.95 per cent), Ahmedabad (26.61 per cent) and Surat (47.04 per cent). Except the last three districts, which are industrialised, all other districts are the one, which are drought-prone, or

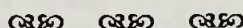
Missing Sikh & Jain Girls!						
	Overall sex ratio*	Child sex ratio (0-6 years)*	Proportion in India's total population**	Overall literacy rate**	Female literacy rate**	Female work participation rate**
Hindus	931	925	81.4	65.1	53.2	27.5
Muslims	936	950	12.4	59.1	50.1	14.1
Jains	940	870	0.4	94.1	90.6	9.2
Sikhs	893	786	1.9	69.4	63.1	20.2
Christians	1,009	964	2.3	80.3	76.2	28.7
Buddhists	953	942	0.8	72.7	61.7	31.7
Others	992	976	0.7	47	33.2	44.2

* as number of females per 1,000 males ** as per cent

Adivasi regions, from where population out-migrates regularly, on permanent or seasonal basis. How can then in-migration explain high population growth rate? National increase is the important factor responsible for the increased population growth rate of the State.

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