History of Census in India

A population Census is the process of collecting, compiling, analyzing and disseminating demographic, social, cultural and economic data relating to all persons in the country, at a particular time in ten years interval. Conducting population census in a country like India, with great diversity of physical features, is undisputedly the biggest administrative exercise of peace time. The wealth of information collected through census on houses, amenities available to the households, socio economic and cultural characteristics of the population makes Indian Census the richest and the only source for planners, research scholars, administrators and other data users. The planning and execution of Indian Census is challenging and fascinating.

India is one of the very few countries in the World, which has a proud history of holding Census after every ten years. The Indian Census has a very long history behind it. The earliest literature 'Rig Veda' reveals that some kind of Population count was maintained during 800-600 BC. Kautilya's Arthasastra, written around 321-296 BC, laid stress on Census taking as a measure of State policy for purpose of taxation. During the regime of Mughal king Akbar the Great, the administrative report 'Ain-e-Akbari' included comprehensive data pertaining to population, industry, wealth and many other characteristics. In ancient Rome, too, census was conducted for purpose of taxation. The history of Indian Census can be divided in two parts i.e. Pre Independence era and Post Independence era.

Pre Independence Period

The History of Census began with 1800 when England had begun its Census but the population of dependencies was not known at that time. In its continuation , based on this methodology census was conducted in town of Allahabad in 1824 and in the city of Banaras in the year 1827-28 by James Prinsep. The first complete census of an Indian city was conducted in 1830 by Henry Walter in Dacca. In this Census the statistics of Population with sex and broad age group and also the houses with their amenities were collected. Second Census was conducted in 1836-37 by Fort St.George. In 1849 Government of India ordered Local Government to conduct quinquennial returns of population. As a result a system of periodical stock taking of people was inaugurated in Madras which was continued till the imperial census was ordered. These returns were taken during the official years 1851-52, 1856-57, 186162 and 1866-67 respectively. The Census in North Western provinces took place in 1852, which was regular house to house numbering of all the people in the province at the night of 31st December 1852. The quinquennial Census of 1866-67 was merged in the imperial census of 1871.

The Home Government of Government Of India had desired ,under Statistical Dispatch No.2 of July23, 1856 , that a general census of population might be taken in

1861, which was postponed in 1859 due to the mutinies. However on 10th January,1865 a census by an actual house to house enumeration was undertaken in North western provinces. A similar census was undertaken in November, 1966 in central provinces and in 1867 in Berar. The Census in Punjab territory was taken in January 1855 and 1868 respectively. The Census of *Oudh was taken in 1869*. In the cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta census was taken in 1863, 1864 and 1866 respectively. An experimental census of lower provinces of Bengal was organized in 1869, which was completed by H. Beverley, Registrar General. In 1865 the Government of India and Home Government had agreed upon the principal that a general population census would be taken in 1871. In the year 1866-67 census was undertaken by the actual counting of heads in most of the part of the country, which is known as the **Census of 1872**. This Census did not cover all territories possessed or controlled by the British. In this Census a House Register was canvassed with 17 questions. The information collected pertains to name, age, religion, caste or class, race or nationality, attending school /college and able to read and write. These common questions were asked separately from males and females. A question on occupation was canvassed for males only.

The **Census of 1881** which was undertaken on 17th February, 1881 by W.C. Plowden, Census Commissioner of India was a great step towards a modern synchronous census. Since then, censuses have been undertaken uninterruptedly once every ten years. In this Census, emphasis was laid not only on complete coverage but also on classification of demographic, economic and social characteristics. The census of 1881 took in entire continent of British India (except Kashmir) which also includes feudatory states in political connection with the Government of India. However it did not includes French and Portuguese colonial possessions. However, a census of Portuguese colonial dominions in India was also undertaken at the same time as the British Indian Census. British provinces viz, Bengal, North west Provinces, Madras, Bombay, Punjab, Assam, Baruch, Berar, Coorg and Ajmer besides Native states of Rajputana, Central India, the Nizam's dominions, Mysore, Baroda, Travancore and Cochin were included in the census of 1881.In the Census of 1881 a schedule 'Census Schedule' with 12 questions was canvassed. Deviating from past a question on sex was introduced and practice of canvassing same questions for males and females separately dropped. New question on marital status, mother tongue, place of birth and infirmities were included. The question on education was modified to the extent that for those who are not educated it was ascertained that whether they are able to read and write. From Hindus their caste was ascertained and in other cases information on Sect was obtained.

The second census was conducted from **26th February, 1891** almost on the pattern of 1881 census. In this Census, efforts were made for hundred percent coverage and Upper part of present Burma, Kashmir and Sikkim were also included. During this census, the same schedule was canvassed which contains 14 questions. The question on religion, cast, literacy, occupation etc were further modified. In place of religion, information on main religion was obtained and information on sect was also collected. Questions on caste or race of main religion and sub division of cast or race were also canvassed. The departure from previous census was that in place of Mother Tongue, information on Parental Tongue was obtained.

The third continuous census was started on **1st March, 1901**. In this census Baluchistan, Rajputana, Andaman Nicobar, Burma, Punjab and remote areas of Kashmir were included and in respect of other areas, where detailed survey was not possible, population was estimated on the basis of houses. The census schedule of 1901 census contained 16 questions. The main change was that the provision for house number was made in the Schedule. Other changes were caste of only Hindus and Jains were recorded and in case of other religion name of tribe or race were recorded. In place of foreign language, a new question "Know or does not know English" was included. In place of mother/parental tongue, the question was modified to the extent 'Language ordinarily used'.

The **Census of 1911** was commenced on 10th March, 1911 in all fourteen British Provinces and Native states. In this census, the whole Empire of India i.e. territories administered by the Government of India and mediatized Native states were covered with the exception of a few sparsely inhabited and un administered tracts on the confines of Burma and Assam. The census Schedule canvassed in this census contained same number of 16 questions but their scope was extended. In place of age, the question was asked "Age Completed last Birthday". Along with the question on religion, sect of Christians was also ascertained. The particulars of district, province or country were asked in respect of Birth Place question. In 1901 a question 'know or does not know English' was asked but in 1911 in its place the question was asked "Whether Literate in English".

1921 Census , the fifth census in its continuous series was started on 18th March,1921. In this Census the whole of territory known as the Indian Empire was covered which also includes the territories directly controlled by the Government of India generally known as British India and the Indian States consisting of areas administered by Indian chief in political relation with Central Government or with one or other Provincial Government. Although the Census schedule of 1921 contains the same questions like 1911 but they were canvassed with slight modifications. The sect of Christians which was asked in 1911 was dropped and information on caste, tribe or race was collected from all irrespective of their religion.

The sixth general census of India commenced on **February 26, 1931**. The area covered in this census was approximately identical with that of covered by the census of 1921. The 1931 Census also coincided with a civil disobedience movement. The census Schedule of 1931 Census contains 18 questions instead of 16 questions of 1921 census. The two new questions added were- a) Earner or Dependent and b) Mother Tongue (which was asked only in 1881). For eliciting information on 2nd language the question 'other language in common use' was retained. Again the sect was added with religion and age was ascertained in respect to nearest birth day.

The Census of 1941 started under the adverse conditions of war. Till February 1940, Government was un-decided of whether to have a census or not. With concerted effort, the enumeration was carried out directly into the slips which were later sorted out to generate tables. The idea of one night enumeration was dropped in this census. The major innovation of 1941 census was to use random sample and every 50th slip was marked to list the validity of a sample in census. In place of census Schedule, an

Individual Slip was canvassed which contains 22 questions. The formation of questions was modified to the great extent. Following were the new questions of 1941 census:

i. Number of children born to a married woman and number surviving.
ii. Her age at birth of first child.
iii. Do you employ a) paid assistance b) member of household, if so how many?
iv. Are you in search of employment (for unemployed) and how long have been you in search of it?
v. How far have you read?

Besides, the question of literacy was asked in different way' "Can you both read and write? If so, what script do you write? Can you read only?"

This was the last Census of Pre Independence period. Following table depicts the year, reference period, Schedule canvassed and number of questions asked in each census since 1872 to 1941:

Sl. No.	Census Year	Reference Period	No. of question asked	Schedule Canvassed
1	1872	-	17	House Register
2	1881	17th February	12	Census Schedule
3	1891	26th February	14	Census Schedule
4	1901	1st March	16	Census Schedule
5	1911	10th March	16	Census Schedule
6	1921	18th March	16	Census Schedule
7	1931	26th February	18	Census Schedule
8	1941	1st March	22	Individual Slip

Censuses of Post Independence Period

After 1941 Census India got its independence in 1947. The Bhore Committee constituted for making Plans for post war development in the field of health made a comprehensive review of the field of population and recommended that a Registrar General of Vital and Population Statistics at the centre be appointed and at provincial level, a Superintendent may be appointed with a view to improve the quality of population statistics. The Bhore Committee also recommended that "The Population Problem should be the subject of Central study". Accordingly the Census Act came into force in 1948 (Act No.37 of 1948). The censuses of post independence era were conducted as per the provisions of this Act.

The **first census of Independent India** was conducted in **1951,** which was the seventh census in its continuous series. The enumeration period of this Census was from 9th to 28th, February 1951. A three day revisional round from 1st to 3rd March was undertaken to update the data as on sunrise of 1st March, the reference date. An Individual Slip was canvassed which contained 13 questions. The particulars like name, relationship, birth place, sex, age, economic status, principal and subsidiary means of

livelihood were obtained for each individual. The information on religion, mother tongue, literacy was also obtained. Out of 13 questions, 12 questions with its sub parts were common for all states while 1 question with sub parts relating to fertility, unemployment, infirmity, size of family was optional for certain states. In the Census of 1951 the entire Jammu and Kashmir was excluded from Census and its population was estimated on the basis of past census figures.

Census of **1961 started on 10th February** and ended on sunrise of 1st March. The revisional round took place for 5 days instead of 3 days of 1951 Census. However, the reference date remained unchanged. In place of Individual Slip of 1951 Census, following two schedules were canvassed:

a)	Household Schedule	For each Household
b)	Individual Slip	For each Individual

The Household Schedule was divided in A, B & C parts which were further divided in sub parts. Information relating to persons engaged in cultivation and Household industry was collected through this schedule. The Individual Slip consists of 13 questions. The Individual Slips of 1951 and 1961 Censuses differ in following ways;

- In 1961, age at last birthday was asked in place of age.
- A question on civil condition asked in 1951 was dropped in 1961.
- The question on birth place was further sub divided in three parts to elicit information on rural /urban status and duration of residence.
- In 1951, information on economic status with dependency and employment status was obtained whereas in 1961 its scope was enlarged and details of employment in four broad categories of workers with nature of industry, class of workers etc was also obtained.

The **Census of 1971** was 11th census in continuous series and 3rd after independence. The census of 1971 was conducted at different time as compared to previous censuses to avoid clash with mid-term Parliamentary Election. The census of 1971 was conducted between 10th March and 31st March and revisional round was taken from 1st to 3rd April. Deviating from past, the reference date was taken as 1st April, 1971. The Census of 1971 was conducted in following two phases;

i. Houselisting Operations
ii. Actual Enumeration

The first phase was conducted in different part of country at different time between June to September, 1970 by canvassing two schedules viz, Houselist and Establishment Schedule. During the second phase an Individual slip was canvassed which contained 17 questions. The following were the new features of 1971 Individual Slips;

a. A question for getting Information on fertility for currently married women was included.
b. An additional question "Last Residence" was included to get the information on migration aspect in a better way.

c. The scope of economic questions was further enlarged and a new question on secondary work was introduced.

The fourth census of Independent India was conducted from **9th to 28th February, 1981** with a revisional round from 1st to 5th March, 1981.The reference date was again reckoned as sunrise of 1st, March which could not be adhered to in 1971. On the pattern of 1971, this census was again conducted in two phases. In the first phase, a Houselist Schedule was canvassed but the establishment schedule which was canvassed during 1971 was dropped in 1981. Deviating from past census, in 1981 following two schedules were canvassed during 2nd phase;

i. Household Schedule
ii. Individual Slip

The Household schedule consists of two parts. In the first part the particulars of household like religion, SC/ST status, language spoken and also predominant construction materials of wall, roof and floor were collected. The information on amenities like drinking water, electricity, toilet facility available to the Household was also collected in first part of Household schedule. In the second part characteristics of each individual which were identical to Individual slips were collected. Information on first few columns in part II of Household & Individual Slip were recorded in the field simultaneously while in remaining columns of Household schedule the information from Individual slip was transcribed later on. Following changes were incorporated in Individual slip of 1981 Census;

i. The slip was divided in two parts I and II. In first part 16 questions were included which were canvassed on Universal basis. The second part contained 6 questions, relating to migration and fertility, which were canvassed on Sample basis. ii. In part I two new questions –a) Attending school/college and b) If non worker seeking /available for work were included.
iii. In part II a question on reason for Migration was also included. iv. In part II age at marriage was asked from 'ever married women 'whereas in 1971 this question was asked from 'currently women 'only.

The Census of 1991 was the fifth Census of independent India and conducted as usual from 9th to 28th February, 2001 to present census data as on sunrise of 1st March.2001, the reference date. The two phases were continued in the same way like previous two censuses.

In the first phase a Houselist was canvassed to collect the information on housing data and also amenities available to the households. The scope of Houselist was enlarged and for the first time a question regarding type of fuel used for cooking was canvassed. In 1981 the question on availability of toilet facility was canvassed for urban areas only, however in 1991 it was canvassed for rural areas also.

During 2nd phase following two schedules were canvassed;

i. Household Schedule
ii. Individual Slip

The special features of the 1991 Census schedule as compared to 1981 census are as follows;

i. The Household Schedule was so designed that the PCA with nine fold industrial category up to village level in rural area and at charge level in urban area and also data relating to religion and mother tongue can be prepared by manual tabulation expeditiously.

ii. A new question on Ex-service man was included. iii. The concept of literacy was changed and children of 7+ age group were considered as literate as compared to 1981 when children up to age group of 4+ were treated as literate.

iv. In 1981 census the question on seeking/available for work was asked from marginal workers and non workers whereas in 1991 this question was asked only from Non workers.

v. In 1991 census a question –"Have you ever worked before" was included for those persons who have reported that they are seeking/available for work.

The Census of India 2001 was the first census of twenty first century and also third census of millennium. As in the past the Census-2001 was also conducted in two phases. During the first phase, the Houselisting Operations was conducted between April to September-2000 in which a houselist was canvassed. During Houselisting, information on a large number of new items such as condition of the building, number of independent sleeping rooms for married couples, type of toilets, availability of drainage with further bifurcation of open or close drainage , bathing and cooking facility within the house was collected. Some of the questions like number of living room and number of married couples, which were canvassed during 2nd phase in 1991 through Household schedule, were canvassed during first phase through Houselist in 2011 census. Besides, information relating to possession of certain assets like cycle, scooter/motor cycle/moped, radio, television, telephone, availing banking facility etc. were also collected.

The second phase 'Population Enumeration' was undertaken between 9th to 28th February with revisional round from 1st march to 5th March,2001.Deviating from past censuses the census movement was 00.00 hours of 1st March, which was otherwise mostly sun rise of 1st March of relevant Census year (except 1971) .In certain snow bound areas of Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal (Now Uttarakhand) and also J&K the enumeration was taken between 11th to 30th September 2000 but in certain districts of J&K it was extended from 1st October to 15th November 2000. In Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh due to flood the enumeration was conducted from 12th to 31st May, 2001.Due to earth quake in Kuchchh district the population enumeration was undertaken during 9th February to 28th February, 2002. In the second phase instead of Household schedule and Individual slip only Household Schedule was canvassed. The questions which were canvassed in Household Schedule and Individual Slips in previous two censuses were put together in one schedule named as Household Schedule. The Household Schedule of 2001 Census designed contain 23 questions which runs into 39 columns printed on both sides of the Schedule. Following were the new features of 2001 Household Schedule;

i. Information regarding age at marriage was collected for males also. ii. For type of educational institutions being attended by a person vocational, other institute and, literacy center were added.

iii. A new question to collect information on total or partial disability was canvassed. In 1981 the question on disability was canvassed in first phase and dropped in 1991.
iv. Question on seeking and available for work was also canvassed for marginal workers and question on secondary work of main workers was dropped.
v. A new question on distance travelled by a person to his/her work place and also mode of travel was canvassed for persons engaged in non agriculture activities.
vi. Sex wise information was collected for the children born alive during last one year.
vii. Net area of land under cultivation/plantation and net area of irrigated land was also collected for those households who were engaged in cultivation/plantation in Part III of Household Schedule. viii. For the first time provision was made in the Household Schedule for taking signature or thumb impression of the respondent.

A quantum leap was also made in the technology front in 2001 Census. The schedules for the phases were scanned through high speed scanners and hand written data from the schedules were converted into digitized form through Intelligent Character Reading (ICR).

The next Census of India will be conducted in 2011. The first phase – Houselisting and Housing Census has already been conducted between April to June, 2010 in different States and UTs. A Schedule was canvassed during this phase to collect information on Housing and amenities available to the households. For the first time each schedule was assigned a serial number to maintain a proper account of each and every form. The major departure was canvassing a National Population Register at the time of Houselisting and Housing Census. The NPR would be a register of usual residents of the country. It will be a comprehensive identity data base that would help in providing the benefits and services under the Government programmes to improve planning and help to strength security of the country. The information collected through NPR will be used for providing a Unique Identity Number after a detailed procedure. The Houselisting and Housing Census of 2011 contains 34 questions with following modifications / additions compared to the same in 2001:

i. Question on number of separate bed room for married couple has been dropped.
ii. A new question on availability of Computer/ Laptop, with or without internet facility was included.
iii. Mobile phone was added with telephone facility. iv. The question on availably of latrine was further divided into two parts- i) Latrine within the premises ii) Type of Latrine.
v. Regarding source of drinking water the tap water was splitted into tap water from treated source and tap water from un treated source. Besides separate codes were given for covered and uncovered well.
vi. In type of latrine separate code for public latrine was included. vii. NPG was included under fuel used for cooking.

The 2nd phase of Census-2011 will be conducted from 9th to 28th February 2011 with 5 days revisional round from 1st to 5th March, 2011 so that the population figures with reference to reference date, i.e., 00.00 hours of 1st March, 2011 can be obtained. During second phase, Household Schedule will be canvassed. Following are the main changes of Household Schedule of 2011 census as compared to 2001 Census;

i. Separate code for 'Other' introduced under sex column.
ii. Instead of one code two separate codes has been given for divorced and separated.
iii. Date of Birth will be recorded in addition to Age.
iv. In 2001 under SC/ST only name of Caste/Tribe was collected in case of those persons who returned themselves as SC/ST. In 2011 Census a filter question has been separately introduced enquiring 'If the person is SC/ST'. If so, then name of the SC/ST is asked.
v. The question on disability was further divided in three sub parts. In type of disability separate code for mental retardation, mental illness and multiple disabilities has been given. In case of multiple disabilities provision has been made for recording maximum 3 types of disability.
vi. Under question 'Status of attendance in educational institution' separate codes has been given for special school for disabled. For those who are not attending any educational institution, provisions has been made for collecting information on those who have either attended any institution before and also for those who have never attended any institution.
vii. For "Rentier" separate code has been given under non workers category.
viii. Under question 'Travel to Place of work' one way distance from residence to place of work will be collected.
ix. Under questions of migration in 2001 Census, only names of district, state and country were collected but in 2011 Census, provision has been made to collect the name of village/ town also.
x. In 2001 Census, for households engaged in cultivation some information regarding net area under cultivation/irrigation was collected in Part III but in 2011 Census this information will not be collected.

The Indian census has not been a mere statistical operation and the data collected is not only properly scrutinized at different levels but also presented with cross classification of various parameters for interpretation and analysis in an interesting manner. It may be seen from the history of Indian Census that how the changes have taken place from one census to other depending upon the need of the time, country and also demand of the data users and development of technology. The Indian census is well recognized for the data it reveals. Problems relating to political, social and cultural reasons also makes it challenging. In spite of all these difficulties, the census in India is being conducted since 1871 uninterruptedly.

The number of questions canvassed during Population Enumeration in Censuses from 1951 to 2011 is listed below:

Census Year	Number of Questions
1951 Census	14 Questions
1961 Census	13 Questions
1971 Census	17 Questions
1981 Census	16 Questions
1991 Census	21 Questions
2001 Census	23 Questions
2011 Census	29 Questions

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